

Intercommunion and the Ministry

BY GERVASE DUFFIELD

THE subject of intercommunion has been much before the public in the last year or two. It has evoked many books and booklets; it has been examined from numerous pulpits; it has been discussed on the radio, in the church press, and in local church study groups. It has even been considered so important an issue as to dominate the correspondence columns of the national press following the publication two years ago of the Open Letter to the two Archbishops. Yet despite all this publicity many are still not sure what the problem really is. They may know that it is the regular practice of denominations like the Free Churches to invite all who love the Lord to join in their Communion services. An Evangelical's mind may go back to some such gathering as the Keswick Convention with its banner "All one in Christ" and its united Communion service. Receiving Communion together seems all right there, and so he is genuinely puzzled as to what the difficulty is. The *explanation* of this puzzle is, I think, implied in the title of this paper, though we may find that the *answer* lies elsewhere.

In the last hundred years or so a new doctrine of the ministry has appeared within the Church of England as a result of the Tractarian movement. In fact it is not really new so much as an adaption of the Roman view, but it was novel in the Protestant Church of England. According to this view the validity of the sacrament of Holy Communion is made to depend on the validity of the celebrant's ordination. Only a priest ordained by a bishop in apostolic succession could offer a valid eucharist, because only such a person could impart to him the essence of sacrificing priesthood. Those who take this view usually hold that only those episcopally confirmed are normally qualified to receive communion in the Church of England.

It follows that there must be something seriously lacking in the Communion services of those churches which do not have the historic episcopate. Some of the early Tractarians simply committed these non-episcopalians to the "uncovenanted mercies" of God, but in our more eirenic age they are usually said to lack the fulness of Christ, or something similar. And because non-episcopal churches lack this fulness, a Tractarian believes it wrong to have any intercommunion between them and the Church of England until the deficiency is remedied by their "taking episcopacy into their system" in the famous phrase of Archbishop Lord Fisher. Until this happens, these people maintain that intercommunion is artificial, and indeed worse than that, since it is deliberately papering over the cracks that divide. Many would add that such intercommunion in fact hinders ultimate unity. On this view the decisive question is the validity of the orders of a church. To recognize the validity of a church's orders not only is doctrinal agreement required, but also unbroken apostolic succession through episcopal ordination.

Thus in the last century A. W. Haddan could write in *Apostolical Succession in the Church of England* (p. 14) : " Without Bishops, no Presbyters ; without Bishops and Presbyters, no legitimate certainty of sacraments, no certain union with the mystical Body of Christ . . . without this, no certain union with Christ ; without that union no salvation ". More recently an editor of *The Church Times*, the late Sidney Dark, wrote : " The English Church . . . must possess an Apostolic Ministry, the claims of the Church depend on its possession of a divinely authorized and divinely commissioned ministry, inheriting the ghostly privileges entrusted by our Lord to His Apostles. Without such a Ministry there can be no Eucharist. Without such a Ministry there can be no Church." (Cited in C. Hoare : *The Edwardine Ordinal*, p. 3.)

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If the above is the view which is currently dominating official Anglicanism, we must now turn to church history to see what happened before the Tractarians.

Faced with a doctrine very similar to the one outlined above, our Reformers abolished the mass and a sacrificing priesthood. They kept the offices of bishops, priests or presbyters, and deacons, though they knew that in the New Testament bishop and presbyter were synonymous. They kept the threefold ministry as being ancient and venerable in its pedigree, and having quite as good a claim to antiquity as any other form. But we should note that all sacerdotal language is carefully excluded from the Ordinal. " The Anglican priest is a presbyter, not a sacrificing priest " (Dr. E. W. Harrison : *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 123. Also H. Henson : *Anglicanism*, p. 155).

When persecution came with Queen Mary, many of the British Reformers took refuge on the Continent. They went to various centres, some Lutheran and some Calvinist, and they took communion at the local church. There were troubles and disputes at Frankfurt about using the Prayer Book, but never do we find any disputes about admission to the Communion Table. At that time certainly no Protestant ever thought of connecting it with a particular type of church government.

Communion was received gratefully from their Continental hosts, because both sides knew they shared a common belief about the Gospel and the sacraments. Similarly earlier when Continental Protestant leaders like Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr had been invited over to England, they took communion in the parish church. The Zürich Letters make it plain that English and Continental Reformers regarded themselves as one. Thus when Archdeacon Philpot was examined before the Papist authorities and accused of being a Genevan, he replied : " I allow the Church of Geneva and the doctrine of the same ; for it is *una, catholica, et apostolica*, and doth follow the doctrine that the apostles did preach ; and the doctrine taught and preached in King Edward's days was also according to the same " (*Works*, p. 153).

In 1559 Bishop Jewel wrote to Peter Martyr : " We have exhibited to the Queen all our articles of religion and doctrine, and have not departed in the slightest degree from the confession of Zürich "

(*Zürich Letters*, I, p. 21). Seven years later Bishop Grindal wrote to Bullinger: "The pure doctrine of the Gospel remained in all its integrity and freedom, in which, even to this day (notwithstanding the attempts of many to the contrary) we most fully agree with your churches and with the confession you have lately set forth" (*Zürich Letters*, I, p. 169).

The English Reformers maintained a position of intercommunion with their Continental counterparts because they agreed on all essential doctrines, and they further agreed that the precise type of ministry was a secondary matter on which individual churches were free to decide for themselves, as the question had not been decided by Scripture. Article XXXIV sets out the principle: "Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying". It is true that there were doctrinal disputes on the Continent, especially over the sacrament of Holy Communion. England was spared such sacramental disputes, and so was unaffected by this problem. The challenge in England came with the Puritan Thomas Cartwright, who claimed that only a Presbyterian system of church government could be found in the Bible. Archbishop Whitgift did not reply that on the contrary the episcopal system was the only one (John Keble clearly wished he had; see his Preface to Hooker's *Works*, p. 77), but rather that there was no clear pattern in Scripture. "The substance and matter of government must indeed be taken out of the Word of God," he declared, "and consisteth in these points, that the word be truly taught, the sacraments rightly administered, virtue furthered, vice repressed, and the Church kept in quietness and order. The offices in the Church, whereby this government is wrought, be not namely and particularly expressed in the Scriptures, but in some points left to the discretion and liberty of the Church, to be disposed of according to the state of the times, places and persons" (*Works*, I, p. 6).

Here Whitgift is standing by the principle of Article XXXIV where rites and ceremonies not clear in the Bible are left to the church to determine. Richard Hooker continues the same distinction. Both stand by episcopacy but refuse to defend it as the only possible form of church government. Neither imagines the precise type of church polity to be among the essentials of the faith.

We summarize the sixteenth century position by saying that there is intercommunion between the national Protestant churches because of agreement on the doctrinal essentials, such as are set out in Article XIX where the true marks of a church are the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. Neither episcopacy nor any form of church order comes into it, since all agree that polity is a secondary matter which individual churches may determine for themselves.

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The early seventeenth century saw a reaction away from the Reformation. Laud and the Caroline high churchmen began to elevate the fathers and tradition instead of subordinating them carefully to the Bible as Cranmer and Jewel had done. We may

notice the second generation hardening of Lutheranism seen in men like Westphal. The same had happened in Switzerland and France where the strict Presbyterianism of Beza had replaced the Reformation theology of Calvin. It would have happened in 16th century England if men like Cartwright had had their way. The beginnings of denominationalism were starting to appear, and the greatness of the early leaders was being lost.

The Canons of 1604 excommunicated any who advocated the Cartwright positions and sought to overthrow the present order. When the Puritans came to power, a number of the Carolines fled abroad. Among them was John Cosin, a distinguished scholar who later became Bishop of Durham. He distinguishes between the Papists who "alter the *credenda*, the vitals of religion" and members of the Reformed churches "that meddle only with the *agenda* and rules of religion". Accordingly, because he did not consider the French Church had any major deficiency, he communicated regularly with it when he was chaplain to the Anglican Royalists in Paris.

Conversely we find a French Reformed pastor like Pierre du Moulin visiting London and taking communion there. He writes: "We assemble with the Englishmen in their churches, we participate together in the Holy Supper of our Lord, the doctrine of their confessions is most agreeable unto ours" (G. J. Slosser, *Christian Unity*, p. 86). Here we have intercommunion between members of national Protestant churches, when they visit each other's countries, and these examples are certainly not isolated.

Archbishop Ussher spoke of the non-episcopal churches in the Low Countries and France "which I do love and honour as true members of the Church universal. I do profess that with like affection I should receive the Blessed Sacrament at the hands of Dutch ministers if I were in Holland, as I should do at the hands of French ministers if I were in Charenton" (Sykes, *Theology Occasional Paper* No. 11, p. 31).

Again, Cosin answers a query about communicating with the French Reformed Church: "Considering there is no prohibition of our church against it (as there is against our communicating with the papists, and that well grounded on scripture and the will of God), I do not see but that both you and others that are with you may (either in case of necessity, when you cannot have the sacrament among yourselves, or in regard of declaring your unity in professing the same religion, which you and they do) go otherwhiles to communicate reverently with them of the French church" (*Works*, IV, p. 407).

I stress again that Cosin was a high churchman, who excused the lack of episcopacy through circumstances, though he clearly thought it was of the *bene esse* of a church. But even Jeremy Taylor, another high churchman, who expressed doubts about the historical tenability of the excuse, refused to condemn or unchurch the Reformed churches. "As for particular churches," he writes, "they are bound to allow communion to all those that profess the same faith upon which the apostles did give communion. . . . To make the way to heaven straighter than God made it, or to deny to communicate with those with whom God will vouchsafe to be united, and to refuse our charity to those who have the same faith, because they have not all our

opinions, and believe not everything necessary which we overvalue, is impious and schismatical" (*Works*, V, pp. 601f.).

Despite the hardening attitude on episcopacy and the longings of many Carolines that the non-episcopal churches should have episcopacy, intercommunion between national Protestant churches continued. It could take place when a Christian was cut off by distance from his own church's service, or on occasions to manifest the unity of the Reformed churches. The question of a lack of episcopacy was not raised in connection with intercommunion. The basis for it was given by Bishop Joseph Hall: "Blessed be God," he exclaims, "there is no difference in any essential matter betwixt the Church of England and her sisters of the Reformation. We accord in every point of Christian doctrine without the least variation; their public confessions and ours are sufficient convictions to the world of our full and absolute agreement. The only difference is in the form of outward administration; wherein also we are so far agreed, as that we all profess this form not to be essential to the being of a church, though much importing the well or better being of it, according to our several apprehensions thereof" (*Works*, VII, p. 58, cited in Sykes, p. 23).

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The turbulence of the Commonwealth era and the rough handling of some episcopalian clergy by certain Puritans provoked the inevitable reaction, human nature being what it is. After the Restoration the stubbornness of the bishops at the Savoy Conference where they treated the Puritans with haughty condescension and the intransigence of the Cavalier Parliament combined to demolish effectively all hopes of a comprehensive national church such as Richard Baxter and other Puritan moderates hoped for. The result was the great ejection of 1662, and the departure of about two thousand ministers into dissent—roughly one fifth of the clergy, and described by Bishop Hensley Henson as "unquestionably the most earnest and successful among the clergy of the Church of England".

After 1662 the Church required all its ministers to be episcopally ordained, whereas previously a number had been beneficed who had been ordained by presbyteries. It is important that we realize what this change meant. It was emphatically not aimed at non-episcopal churches in general, for relations with other national Protestant churches remained unaltered. The change represented a desire to bring order out of the chaos of the Commonwealth. The Puritan problem was a matter of internal discipline. In the words of Norman Sykes, the change "implied no verdict upon the validity of their [ministers not episcopally ordained] former ordination. It was the requirement of the National Church in accordance with the accepted principle of the right of Protestant churches to differ in matters of polity; and moreover it represented the will of the godly prince in England" (p. 25).

The moderate Baxter who had a strong belief in a national church and was prepared to accept bishops, noted: "I am past doubt but that Richard Hooker, Bishop Bilson, Archbishop Ussher, and such others, were they now alive, would be Nonconformists". We may

think this a little optimistic, but it shows how sad Baxter was to find himself forced into dissent.

Certain Anglo-Catholic apologists have made so much of the change in 1662, asserting that its significance was doctrinal rather than a matter of internal discipline that we must summon some more evidence to refute the charge. M. Claude Groteste de la Mothe, minister of the French Church of the Savoy, asserted that episcopal ordination was only "en vertu d'une loi civile", and that this was the way the great majority of Anglican theologians interpreted it. Some years later Archbishop William Wake wrote to the embassy chaplain in Paris instructing him to assure the Dutch embassy chaplain that "though our constitution suffers no man to minister the sacrament of the Lord's Supper who is not in priest's orders, nor otherwise to officiate in the church who has not the order of deacon by episcopal ordination; yet no one when he receives these orders, renounces his own which he had before taken either in the foreign churches abroad, or even by our own dissenting ministrations at home. Nay, till the last act of uniformity, Casaubon, Vossius and many other foreign divines were actually preferred in our church, and had no other besides their own orders" (Sykes, p. 26).

The "reordination" was justified on the grounds of Presbyterian practice. In the previous century Whitgift had replied to Travers' complaint that he could not be reordained since he had received Presbyterian ordination in Holland already: "Yet the French churches practise otherwise, neither will they admit any of our ministers, ordained according to the laws of this church, to exercise his function among them without a new kind of calling according to their platform" (Strype, *Whitgift*, III, p. 183). Similarly Jeremy Taylor had written of "their constant and resolved practice, in France at least, that if any returns to them, they will reordain him by their presbyters, though he had before episcopal ordination".

Finally the learned Joseph Bingham justified the change in 1662 because there is "nothing in it contrary to the principles or practice of Geneva, nor perhaps of the whole French church; for at Geneva it is their common practice, whenever they remove a minister from one church to another, to give him a new and solemn ordination by imposition of hands and prayer" (*Works*, IX, p. 296. See also the articles on the Ordinal in *The Churchman*, March, 1962).

I have cited this evidence at some length because I believe it to be important that we do not get taken in by those who tell us that 1662 was merely excluding a few irregularities and at the same time establishing that episcopacy is of the *esse* of the Church. If the "reordination" is justified on the grounds of a Presbyterian practice, it ought to be hardly necessary to add that it is certainly not a bestowing of priesthood on those who previously lacked it.

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Although there were no changes in the Anglican doctrine of the ministry in 1662 nor in our relationship with other Protestant churches, the fact of dissent did create a new problem. Among the ejected ministers there were some wild men who had not time at all for the

national church, but they were a small minority. The majority of the ejected men were presbyterians who wished to remain in the national church. After that sad St. Bartholomew's day they still cherished hopes that a comprehensive church might be achieved, and so they determined to show their solidarity with the Church of England on essential matters by conforming from time to time and receiving communion in the parish church. This practice became known as Occasional Conformity.

The history of Occasional Conformity has been much misunderstood, and it is important that we grasp that what became a practice indulged in for material gain started as a purely religious one. Thus the dissenting leader, Edmund Calamy, writes of a conversation he and his friends had with Bishop Gilbert Burnet in 1702: "We told his lordship, that communicating with the Church of England was no new practice among the Dissenters, nor of a late date, but had been used by some of the most eminent of our ministers ever since 1662, with a design to show their charity towards that church, notwithstanding they apprehended themselves bound in conscience ordinarily to separate from it; and it had also been practised by a number of the most understanding people among them, before the so doing was necessary to qualify for a place. We reminded him that Mr. Baxter and Dr. Bates had done it all along" (Sykes, *From Sheldon to Secker*, p. 96).

Qualifying for a place refers to the Test Act which was passed in 1673 and required all those who held office under the Crown to have received communion in the Church of England at least once in the year before their election. The Act was aimed at keeping key offices in the hands of members of the national church. It was aimed against dissent of all kinds, and required an oath against transubstantiation to exclude papists.

Though this Act remained on the statute books till the early nineteenth century, most today would regret it. Whether or not we believe Crown officers ought ever to have been exclusively confined to Anglicans, I imagine we all agree that it was regrettable that an Act put pressure on a man to attend communion simply to get a job. The quotation from Calamy, however, should make it clear that the practice of occasional conformity was established long before the Test Act, and thus could not have sprung from it, as some mistakenly think today.

Calamy's testimony is confirmed by that of another dissenter, John Howe, who wrote: "Though to that former sort of communion there hath been for many years bypast superadded the accidental consideration of a place or office attainable hereby, no man can allow himself to think that what he before counted lawful is by this supervening consideration become unlawful" (*Ibid.*, p. 97. See also the fuller discussion in Henry Rogers, *The Life and Character of John Howe*, ch. 10).

Early in the eighteenth century a High Church reaction occurred in the reign of Queen Anne. In 1711 the Tories got the Occasional Conformity Act through Parliament. The Act represented a determined attempt to exclude dissenters from Crown offices. Anyone who conformed to qualify for a post and then returned to a Conventicle was to be fined £40, and became ineligible for the post again until he

had conformed for a year and received communion three times during that year without going to a conventicle. Such an Act is an admission that a fair number were conforming for political reasons, though we know from the pamphlet warfare that flared up among the dissenters themselves—largely between Howe and Daniel Defoe—that there were still a number who conformed for the earlier religious reasons.

The bill which gave effect to the above Act was strenuously opposed not merely by Whig politicians but by many churchmen. Bishop Simon Patrick regarded it "as making a manifest breach upon the act of indulgence, which had made great peace, quiet, and love among us. For it struck at the very best of the Nonconformists, who, looking upon us as good Christians that had nothing sinful in our worship, thought they ought upon occasion to communicate with us; but imagining they had something better in their way of worship, could not leave it, but adhere to their dissenting ministers. This I took not to be an argument of their hypocrisy, as many called it, but of their conscientious sincerity; and therefore they ought to be tolerated in this practice, which might in time bring them over to us, as I know it had done some worthy persons" (*Ibid.*, p. 99).

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Some people today argue that all non-episcopalians are excluded from receiving communion in the Church of England by the Confirmation rubric: "There shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed". To answer this we have to look at the history of the rubric.

The Provincial Constitution of Archbishop Peckham in the thirteenth century read: "Item nullus debet admitti ad sacramentum corporis christi iesu extra mortis articulum, nisi fuerit confirmatus vel a receptione sacramenti confirmationis fuerit rationabiliter impeditus". Here we can see that even in medieval times confirmation is not an absolute *sine qua non* for communion.

The 1549 rubric read: "And there shall none be admitted to the holy communion; until such time as he be confirmed". Between this and the 1552 Book of Common Prayer Cranmer asked Bucer his views, and received the reply that children ought not to be admitted before they show by life and lip that they intend to live as Christians. Mere catechism recitation is not enough; they must show the fruits of the Spirit. Accordingly 1552 read: "There shall none be admitted to the holy communion until such time as he can say the Catechism and be confirmed"—a small change but one in keeping with the Reformation stress away from formalism to the underlying spiritual reality.

The Puritans continued making objections up to 1662. They claimed the rubric would admit a child of three or four, and that it contradicted the rubric at the end of the catechism which said that Confirmation was for those of "perfect age". The Canons of 1604 (Nos. 60 and 61) had sought to ensure regular confirmations and that the ministers prepared the children properly. At the Savoy Conference the Bishops thought the canons adequate, but in 1662 "perfect age" was changed to "a competent age", and the other rubric became: "And there

shall none be admitted to the holy communion, until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed ”.

The rubric thus puts the stress on spiritual preparedness for receiving communion rather than simply going through a ceremony. It is also important to remember that this rubric, like the rest of the Prayer Book, was and is for members of the Church of England only, and stated the church's domestic practice. The rubric could not possibly refer to any dissenters since there were none when the final draft was written. Professor H. M. Gwatkin, in his essay *The Confirmation Rubric: Whom does it bind?* writes (p. 10): “ It seems historically clear that the rubric was never seriously understood as excluding nonconformists till long after the rise of Tractarianism. It was then a new interpretation, and it was rejected by great churchmen of all schools ”.

Archbishop Tait delivered a clear judgment in 1870 after receiving a protest following the corporate Communion in Westminster Abbey with which the revisers of the New Testament section of the Authorized Version began their work. Tait replied thus to the memorial of protest: “ Some of the memorialists are indignant at the admission of any dissenters, however orthodox, to Holy Communion in our church. I confess I have no sympathy with such objections. I consider that the interpretation these memorialists put on the rubric to which they appeal at the end of the Confirmation service is quite untenable. As at present advised, I believe this rubric to apply solely to our own people, and not to those members of foreign or dissenting bodies who occasionally conform. All who have studied the history of our church, and especially the reign of Queen Anne, when the question was earnestly debated, must know how it has been contended that the Church of England places no bar against occasional conformity ”.

I hope from this it will be clear how novel is that interpretation of the rubric which seeks to exclude all non-episcopalians. Such novelty is unfortunately the basis of the proposed draft canon B 15, a canon which, if passed, would undo four centuries of Anglican history and bar the Holy Table in the parish church against fellow Christians of undisputed orthodoxy. The reformed Church of England has always maintained an open table, and at the same time—very properly—left to individual Anglican consciences decisions as to receiving communion in other churches. Reciprocal intercommunion, such as was advocated in the Open Letter of the Thirty-two Theologians, may or may not be the next step forward, but while this is under consideration, it would be nothing short of disaster for the Church of England to abandon the open table in her parish churches.
