

*SACRAMENTALISM THE TRUE REMEDY FOR
SACERDOTALISM.*

I.

IF it were asked how non-sacerdotalists regard the Communion rite, the first answer of many, if not most, would tend to replace the word Communion altogether by the term Commemoration, just as for the word Baptism many would substitute a term like Dedication. The result in each case is to avoid magical interpretation by emptying the rite of all mystic value; and the protest against superstition is effected by parting with all spiritual intimacy and profundity not realisable by the plain good man in the street. To some, indeed, a Sacrament is no more than an object lesson or spectacle, exhibiting certain truths in a condensed form, and clothing them with more or less impressiveness—and mostly less.

Let us come to closer quarters with our facts and truths, and assay what gold there is in this white stone ruddy-veined which we have inherited with our spiritual estate.

Let it be first observed that the Communion is an *act*. It is not simply a feeling nor a contemplation. So far it may be described as an *opus operatum*. "Do this," is the word, not, "consider this." The Saviour in that hour certainly did not think of Himself æsthetically, as an object of contemplation. Nor is it simply "remember Me." The reminiscence is subordinated to the act enjoined. It is more than a reminiscence; it is at least a reminiscent act. The very variations in the form of instituting words only direct attention on the centre of the occasion as an act. Something is done. It is the worship of bowed wills even more than of changed hearts. And its expression is less the streaming eye of emotion than the bent head of obedience and obeisance.

Moreover, it is an act of *the Church* more than of the individual. It was not to a group of individuals that the command was given, but to a body already implicitly organised into a unity by the life and purpose standing in their midst. They were not united to each other except in so far as each was united to Him. What was done was not the act of so many units in combination. It was the act first of Christ, and then of a living community capable by a common soul of a unitary act. These disciples, forming the first Church, were not a faggot, but a tree; not a basket of summer fruit, but a cluster on the true vine.

Further, it is a *responsive* act, not merely reminiscent but reverberant. Its quality is fixed by the act it answers. It is a response in kind to the central, unique, eternal act which makes the Church, viz., the death of Christ, as something once done and ever doing. Its nature is not met by sitting round a table or kneeling at the altar, partaking of the elements, and calling the history before our moved minds. That might commemorate the Last Supper, but it would not re-echo, it would not show forth, the Lord's death. The true response to such an act must be another act more after its own kind. A history may be commemorated by a feast, but it is really followed up by acts done in its own nature. The Last Supper itself stood for something else; and it is that something else which has its own note returned in the Communion rite.

The Communion, then, is more than either contemplation or commemoration. "Do this" makes it an act and not a meditation. It gives a moral value to its spiritual quality. "In remembrance of Me" seems indeed to stamp a mere commemoration-sense upon the rite—till the longer word in the phrase shrink to its true place for us behind the mightier and the less. "In remembrance of ME." Everything about the remembrance turns on the Personality to be recalled, and the action in which that whole Personality

took complete effect. "*Accedit verbum ad elementum et fit Sacramentum.*" But the word is really Christ, and Christ as God's organ of grace and redemption—Christ in His eternal redeeming act of the Cross. The precept therefore sounds, Do this in remembrance of Him who first did this, who gave Himself to begin with (for God asks no sacrifice which He cannot inspire and has not outdone), and who put His whole self into this act and gift. Do it remembering Him who is with you always; always, therefore, doing this, giving Himself in an eternal act which utters His whole self, ever crucified, ever broken, ever poured, ever rising, ever gathering, by His Spirit and Kingdom, all things into the immortal, infrangible unity of His own infinite Person. Do this, therefore (we are carried on), in remembrance of Him who, continuous in our repeated act, offers Himself to both Church and world as its broken Redeemer, ever living, ever acting Himself out, ever renewing in time the indelible nature of His eternal, crucial act, because ever present and prolonged in this responsive act of ours which His work stirred and inspires. If the Communion is inspired by the continuous Cross, it must be an energy, a function, of that Cross. And as the Cross means the Crucified, it is a function, not merely a memory, of the Lamb slain. There is an act of the Lord Himself in our Communion—not merely a visitation, a presence, but an act. The Cross is not merely remembered, but re-enacted. Not indeed in any sense in which the sacrifice is offered afresh to God. That is one of the many ways that lead to Rome. But the sacrifice, offered once for all, functions afresh (if I must use a disagreeable phrase). It presents itself afresh. It writes itself large in the history of the Eucharist. Christ presents Himself as the crucified, intuitively on Calvary, discursively in the Sacrament. But He presents Himself in the latter less to God than to man. Not to God, for the sacrifice once in time offered to the

Eternal was eternally offered, and once for all and for ever so far as Christ's action was concerned ; nor *for* man, which is the precious finished thing in the fontal act ; but *to* man, which is the nature of its repeated manifestations through the historic Church and *its* action. We must recognise more than a real presence of Christ in the Sacrament, namely, a real act. If He is there (and we believe He is there), He is not inert. He can never be inert where His Cross takes effect. *He* is in action, His death is in action, and not a mere influence from Him. He in His death is acting through His Church upon men. His determining¹ action upon God was not, and is not, through His Church ; but His action on men is. And in a central spiritual act like Communion He is especially acting so. It is a great practical evangelical sermon, practical in the great sense (so desirable in more sermons) of *being* a real act, and not simply leading to acts. In Communion it is not simply that we offer ourselves through the Eternal Spirit to God in grateful response to the offering of Christ, but Christ actually and historically offers Himself as crucified to us and to the world. If the world to-day can crucify Him afresh, surely He can offer Himself afresh in the midst of it. He does so in the continuity of His body, the Church.

There is a deep distinction between this and other acts of worship like prayer or praise. In these we chiefly go to God, but in Communion God chiefly comes to us, and speaks to us and through us. In Communion there is more that is akin to preaching than there is in prayer. It is the *enacted* word of the Gospel. Christ in our act, (which is His more than ours,) offers Himself, offers His great offering, to the Church and to the world. The very commemoration of a Christ *who is our life* is worlds more than

¹ It will be pointed out later that in the Sacrament there is an offering of Christ to God by the Church, and so an action upon God in a guarded sense.

commemoration. It must be an act in the completed life of such a Christ Himself. And if so, it is in some sense the action of His death. For His own remembrance of His death must be, to Him whose thoughts are acts, in some sense a re-enacting of His death. And not the less so because it may take place in our communal experience, however inadequately conscious we may be individually of all we do.

At any rate, to realise our Christ as also our life, in any form of Christianity which holds to Sacraments at all, is fatal to the bare, hard, Swiss, burgher Zwinglianism,¹ the soul-sterilising, and Church-destroying memorialism which starves and palters with the rite without the courage either of taking it in earnest or of letting it go. Such paltering is mere ritualism. It clings to a rite which has become little more than a rite, and is slowly ceasing to be either a pledge, a seal, or a power. It has neither the mystic depths of Luther nor the real insight of Calvin. It is simplicity of the wrong and thin order, like Theism, dwarfed to meet the individual, pietist or rationalist, instead of rich to meet a Church, or full to fit a Revelation of grace. It is salvation debased to common sense, faith dropped to the bathos of the plain man, piety desiccated and blanched by mere polemical intelligence and attenuated by excessive protest. And it lowers the whole pitch of piety and worship in any community where it becomes the key-note. It prepares the ground for the priest by stirring a need of the soul which the priest at least recognises and attempts to fill. And so it makes sacerdotalists by the soulless vigour and rigour of its protest against Sacerdotalism. It is not possible for any Church which has its experienced life in Christ crucified to go on thus teaching the Sacrament as a mere souvenir. A mere commemorative Sacrament is but the relic of a dead Christ, and the badge of a dying Church.

The tendency to make little of this act is one which

¹ More Zwinglian than Zwingli.

exists even among many whose piety is unquestioned, but it is usually associated with but slight regard for the Christian life as life in a Church. Some, who are drawn to Christianity chiefly by its ethical and philanthropic side, tend to reduce the practical act of Communion to somewhat low dimensions in order to enhance the superior sacrament of Christian conduct, and to express its independence of specific forms of worship. But this tendency is after all only one aspect of the alarming baldness and poverty which have overspread much of our services, taking the rapt soul out of our prayers, and the warm worship out of our praise. And it is in great measure the cause of this declension. It is because our associations with Communion are neither solemn nor rich enough that our other worship has been so often flat and poor, our services casual, familiar, or humdrum. And in the efforts we do make to purify and enhance Communion we have sometimes gone the wrong way to work. We have tried to secure purity by testing the communicants, and the purity we get is neither complete, nor is it imposing. We have sifted the participants instead of subliming the rite and Presence. Give it its true value, its most solemn interpretation, hedge it with no fictitious rigour of precaution, but transfigure it with a real solemnity of meaning, and it will become a self-acting test. It will exert its native affinities, and do its own spiritual selection. And its own severe glory will warn off the unconsecrate in heart and soul, as from the death-dawn in the face of Christ the soldiers fell back who would have lifted up on Him unholy hands.

Again, something like a true Sacramentalism as distinct from a pious reminiscence might help to cure that Sentimentalism which is so ineffective in the humaner developments of Christianity. The worst weakness of Liberal Christianity is not that it is negative or destructive, for it is neither ; nor that it is untrue, for it exists by the Spirit

to release the truth and undo the falsehoods of the past. It is the instinct of self-preservation in Christianity, and the habit of self-examination, which is a grace of the Spirit. But one of its great weaknesses is that it is, in so many of its more popular advocates, sentimental, feminine, and subjective. A more masculine and commanding faith would follow an increased emphasis upon the objective side of the Sacrament. *For mere commemoration must always be subjective and individualist in the main.* The reminiscence by the worshipping subject will always be more prominent than the object itself, which is not real because not present but only fetched from the ghostly past by the affection of the hour. In a true Sacrament we have an act rather than a sentiment, and an objective presence more real than any subjective state of ours.

It may be objected that what closes the door to Sentimentalism opens it to Sacerdotalism. To which the reply is, only if a magical instead of an ethically-spiritual transaction is believed to take place; only if we lose the evangelical view of the Cross as the active ethical centre, and Redemption as the permanent ethical principle of the race, and its moral soul. The safeguard against priestism is not the attenuation of the Sacraments but their true interpretation. Our error often is to starve the idea till it lose its strange power over a whole side of the human soul, and so we drive to the priest all who need food for the spiritual imagination and are fascinated by the saddest solemnities, the most hushed pieties, and the darkest beauties of the cross and its unearthly strain.

To venture a little way into explanation, we have three pairs of terms :—

- (1) The body of Christ, and the material world.
- (2) The Act of Christ in His death, and the act of the human will in Christian devotion.
- (3) The person of Christ, and the person of the Christian.

The truth in the Sacrament consists in the true relation among these terms.

(1) Taking the first pair, the body of Christ and the material world (bread and wine). It is here that the magical theory chiefly operates. So long as men attempt to set up in the Sacrament a real relation between this pair of terms it must issue in magic with the priest for the wizard. *Hoc est corpus*, becomes hocus-pocus. What we must say is, that with our possible knowledge we can set up no relation between these terms. About the body of Christ in this sense we know nothing. A local and spacial heaven is a representation now valuable chiefly for pædagogic purposes. That on the one hand. And on the other, we know too little about the ultimate constitution of matter. We have no knowledge which will enable us to bring a heavenly body of Christ and the material world into valid relation, or to give Transubstantiation any meaning for thought. Calvin even, who was the truest of all the Reformers on the Sacrament, seems, in his views, to have suffered much from the local and material theories of his time about the future state and the world unseen. Even he took the body of Christ and its ubiquity too literally. And it was largely due to the error, popular then as now, which understands by Spirit only highly rarefied substance and by a Spirit a ghost.

(2) Taking the second pair of terms—the sacrificial act of Christ and the sacrificial act of Christian men. The Catholic theory here is that the human act in the Sacrament (the priest's act in the Mass), is a *duplicate* of Christ's act upon the cross; especially in this, that it is a sacrifice offered to God by man rather than a sacrifice proffered to man by God. I do not say that the Catholics would admit the statement baldly made, but I mean that their doctrine amounts to this in effect (particularly with their view of the Church as Christ Himself in a permanent incarna-

tion). And I refer to the distinction between an act which simply repeats another, and one which is a constituent part and organic factor of that other, extending and actualising it. In Catholicism the two terms of the relation have an excessive and fatal independence of each other. The Mass repeats the Cross. The act of the priest has a direct action and effect in the invisible world (as when Masses release a soul from purgatory)—a directness at least so great as to compromise the mediation of Christ and aggrandise the officiating priesthood. The Protestant theory on the contrary relates the two terms in no such parallel and irreverent way. It relates them as the body is related to its members, not by way of repetition but by way of functional contribution. The human act is to Christ's act as a living cell is to the living organism. Our act of sacrifice is a vital factor, infinitesimal in its own value, but infinite in its worth as organised into that eternal life of sacrifice which is the redemptive spirit of the world. And our devotion, whether in rite or conduct, is an ethical thing, a part of our moral and spiritual constitution in Jesus Christ. It is through Christ as our Mediator—as Mediator of Universal Humanity, not as any mere individual intermediary—it is through Him (meaning *in* Him), and not directly as individuals, that we pray and act into the unseen. It is through Him that our human cross with its devotions and renunciations has any action upon the world of spirit. It is the completeness of His Sacrifice that at once requires ours and gives ours validity. He only is the one priest, and it is the Son of Man's sole and sufficient priesthood that requires that we should be priests to be men. Just as because He lives we live also. It is one of the functions which go to constitute His life, and are by that life made possible. If Christ be not our life, but only our teacher, our example, or even our ideal, then it is but metaphorical to hold speech of this sort.

In no real sense is our act His act. Nor do we in our cross reproduce an Eternal Cross from within, but only imitate from without and afar a historic martyr. Our act in that case has but an external and accidental connexion with His—a historic connexion, if you will, but not any connexion organic, or, in a real sense, spiritual. In the *real* sense it is not spiritual. It may proceed from a spiritual temper and affection, but not consciously from the ultimate spiritual ground. For religion it may be spiritual, for the deeper considerations of positive faith it is not. But if Christ be our life then our act is His act, our life as practical is one with His as practical. And we are not only at one, but we are one. We not only commemorate His act, or even imitate it, but we *do His works*. And so strong an expression is only justifiable on the ground that it is not we who live, but Christ that liveth in us.

(3) This brings us to the third pair of terms, and to the relation between the person of Christ and the person of the Christian.

It is in this region that the real union and transubstantiation takes place. The body of Christ really and finally means the person of Christ. Bread and wine are symbols of the flesh and blood in which matter is raised to an organism. But flesh and blood are themselves but symbols of an organism higher still, the organised personality, the Spirit. "They two shall be one flesh," means one spiritual personality, slaying the spirit of individualism. And we are reminded of the saying that in Christ is neither male nor female, because He is both, because He is the universal personality in whom all individuals are saved, and gain their individuality by losing their individualism. That is to say, in simpler words but more enigmatical phrase, they gain their souls by losing them.

The essence of the Christian life is personal union with the person of Christ. There are Christians who suspect

such phrases as these of mysticism, who dislike mysticism, and who accordingly explain the phrases away, or simply ignore them. But they will not be ignored. And fortunately the sole alternative is not mysticism. If common sense, with its rough methods, thinks not of union but merely of attachment, the mystic is apt to err in the other direction, and think not really of union but of fusion, which is a very different and more dangerous thing. The mystic is often a pantheist without knowing it; he loses his self without finding it, and merges in the general soul. His piety loses both measure, modesty, and virility. The word of the cross, however, is Reconciliation, and its end is a Union which subsists upon the ethical conditions of fixed personality, and upon an intimacy of communion and being far profounder than is possible by any crude ideas of mystic fusion or personal erasure. "Christ liveth in me" may be the word of the Christian mystic. But the word of the Christian saint and apostle of Reconciliation is, "*I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.*" The life of Christ is the ground of the Christian life, not its substitute, nor its mere material. This phrase of Paul's is the key-note of the Christian's experience. The real objective ground in true Christian life is the person of Christ. This is the Real Presence, substantial but not corporal, spiritual but truly objective. We have a communion not of act only, nor of work, but of life and being; and Redemption and Faith are, so to speak, but the two poles in one completed spiritual sphere.

The person of Christ is our true objective. But the key to the person of Christ is in the cross; for the cross is the principle of God's Revelation, no less than of our Redemption. The cross is the bond of all bonds, the unity of all unities. It consummates the internal unity of God. It consummates the internal unity of man. It consummates the unity between God and man. The grand bond be-

tween person and person, heart and heart, is the cross with its renunciation, its sorrow, its holy, atoning power. Just as between husband and wife, for example, no common joy deepens the bond like the loss of a child, or the danger of losing each other. The key to the depths of our personal union with Christ is the cross and the fellowship of His death.

Hence the rite of the cross has a special and unique significance in Christian culture, in the working out of the union set before us.

But is there a special presence of Christ in this rite? The expression, special presence, like special providence, is if not self-contradictory, at least unhappy. It is always the same unchanging Christ, who never leaves us nor forsakes us. It is the same Christ in our prostrate worship as in the minor awe of our reflection, and in the sobriety of our walk and conversation. But to the question so put it is more true to answer yes than no. It seems at least a different presence—the same Christ in a different presence. Perhaps a better expression would be the more immediate presence. But is Christ more immediately present in this rite than in the depths of our solitary communion with Him? Yes, the whole, the divinest Christ, is—the Redeemer of the world and not of our single soul. The speciality of the presence in the Sacrament is the *community* of so near a *Redeemer*. It is the universal Saviour, the common Christ, that we worshipfully realise, not the individual's. And Communion differs from other acts of common worship in this—in the solemn immediacy of His common presence as Redeemer. He is as immediate as in private worship, and as universal as in public. Hence the Sacrament is the blessed mean and meeting-point of public and private prayer. In private worship we are apt to be self-grossed. In public we are too dependent on the leader of the devotion, or the preacher who strives to kindle the

common flame. In the Communion (especially if it be to any extent liturgical), the leader sinks away, becomes but the voice, becomes the echo of a voice, whose echoes have been multiplied in every age, the channel (although the living channel) of the voice of Jesus walking in calm light upon the world's wild waves, "Come unto Me." As a community we are then in the immediate presence of the Universal Redeemer, the real presence, as Calvin says, and yet not the local presence, as Zwingle truly against Luther declares. And the elements, while they are *signa*, are no more *nuda signa*, or bare suggestions, but *signa mystica*, not indeed changed into what they signify, but lost and irradiated in a halo or corona of spirit, visible only to the eye assisted by faith.

But if this be so, then the true doctrine of the real and immediate presence of Christ in the Sacrament, so far from opening the door to priestism, is of all doctrines that which makes priestism impossible. For it is there we realise most the immediate universality of Christ in the Church as Saviour. We have each our equal ground in His sufficiency, and because He is complete we are, each one of us, alike indispensable. We realise there especially the unity of men in His Redemption, His immediacy to each soul in the common presence, and the consequent impossibility of a privileged Sacerdotal caste with a magical prerogative or a historic commission to mediate between Him and us.

Finally, we shall thus preserve the real and powerful objectivity which is the truth whereon priestly superstition builds; we shall give our doctrine that air of positive actuality which meets a realistic age; and, on the other hand, we shall exert more influence than we have done upon the beautiful night-side of the spirit, we shall feed the starving spiritual imagination, and stir the trembling praise from the shadiest coverts of the wounded soul.

P. T. FORSYTH.

(To be continued.)