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The Place and Meaning of the Lord's Supper

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remedy is in your own hands; *increase your personal members.*" As he was speaking with inside knowledge are we to conclude that the Vice-President is elected virtually by this *bloc* of individuals instead of by the churches? If so, this business of conferring privilege for a consideration is, as I have said, more than a regrettable capitulation to expediency, it is a surrender of principle by which we have disarmed ourselves of our historic witness. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth."

Detailed figures of voting are of course only in possession of the Church House. If my calculations are materially inaccurate, and if there are convincing answers to the points raised, none will be gladder than I that the implications are not, as I think, fundamentally serious, but are only conclusions to be drawn from the face value of statistics and overcrowded Assemblies.

Two things are undeniably true, that the rights of delegates can be purchased, and that there is considerable criticism and uneasiness.

G. W. HARTE,
(Beckenham, Kent).

THE PLACE AND MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

OUR view as to the place and meaning of the Lord's Supper obviously depends upon our view as to the place and meaning of the Church. Does the Church and her worship matter, and, if so, how much? What is the function of the Church? John Calvin expressed it for Protestants in memorable words:—

"The Church exists for the faithful preaching of the Word, for the administration of the seals, and for the exercise of godly discipline."

It is concerning the second of these, "The administration of the seals," that I have to speak.

High Churchmanship means, in part, an emphasis on the value of worship. Therefore the Lord's Supper ought to have a central place in our Church life. Our people need above all else to see the vision of God, and, to me, the Lord's Supper is *the* service where Free Churchmen may worship in reality.

Worship is the inter-action of God and man, each as it were answering the other. It is God saying to Man, "Thou

art My son"; it is Man saying to God, "Thou art my Father." We would testify that it is in the Communion Service that we can with absolute reality hear and answer thus. The Lord's Supper is the inner shrine and Holy of Holies of the soul's fellowship with God.

What is the Meaning of this Sacrament for Protestants and Free Churchmen? Fundamentally it is a way of finding and then maintaining vital contact with God in Christ. It is a Communion Service.

There are many ways of attaining and then preserving fellowship with God. I mention three which are relevant to this discussion. We can by our own act remember God—though it might be truer to say that God causes us to remember. But over and above this act of remembrance, God takes the initiative, through the Sacrament, making it an act of His Grace, and then using it to mediate to men His Constant Presence. The Lord's Supper is, then, first of all man's Act of Remembrance. At this service we try by an act of memory and faith to enter with Jesus and the apostles into the Upper Room.

We remember the historic facts; that moving scene where Christ shared a meal with His friends and at the close used bread and wine as symbols of His broken body and shed blood. And, as we remember, His voice travels across the centuries saying to us, even to us, "This is my body broken for you"; "This is my blood which was shed for you."

But we remember more. We remember His incomparable life lived for us, and for all men. We remember that "Being in the form of God . . . . He took upon Himself the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death." We realise afresh "The Grace of the Lord Jesus, that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor that we, through His poverty, might be rich." We see again the Meaning of His death, that "Christ suffered the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God," and we remember that "We who were sometime in darkness, have been translated into the Kingdom of God's dear Son."

His death and our life; His obedience and our waywardness; His suffering and our salvation are all symbolised in the Bread and the Wine.

The Lord's Supper is thus an acted sermon—a dramatic representation of the drama of Christ's passion, and since it is unstudied, unconscious acting, it is all the more effective. Its value lies in the fact that it expresses what words can never say, and where words are forgotten the dramatic representation and its meaning is remembered.

The Lord's Supper is also a means of Grace. As a Sacrament it does not merely suggest and symbolise spiritual realities, it is also a positive channel of God's goodness and blessing.

It is not merely a picture of reality, it provides an experience of reality. It is not simply an acted parable, but a means of Grace, and its importance lies not only in its meaning but also in its effects.

We do not hold, of course, that God's Grace is mediated through the bread and wine. It is mediated in the special quality of the fellowship; the intensity of the memory which is produced by this service and its symbolic elements. The bread and wine are "outward and visible signs of an inward invisible Grace."

There is something unique in taking the Lord's Supper, which, for me, comes from three things.

First, through a vivid realisation of Christ's death, God mediates His Grace to me. May I share with you my method of using the quiet moments of the Communion Service? When I shut my eyes I can see a picture of a Cross set on a hill. It is a symbolic hill and a symbolic Cross. Then, with that picture in my mind's eye, I repeat to myself a hymn which I have previously chosen as my meditation:—

"O Sacred Head now wounded
With grief and shame bowed down."

"Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly."

In this way I am able to realise the suffering of our Saviour's death, and something at least of what it means to me, and that is a channel of blessing, a means of Grace.

Then, too, there is a channel of Grace in the fact that, in this way, from the first century, our fathers in the faith have found God. Here we are linked with all Christians, to what-

ever section of the Church they may belong. This is an experience which Luther shared with Augustine, and Bunyan with Bernard of Clairvaux. The glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, the noble army of Martyrs, all took of this Bread and drank of this Cup.

That, to me, is a most impressive thing, and here in the Sacrament I find transcending all differences of interpretation a communion of saints. When, as I take the elements, I realise that my Christian heroes did what I am now doing, I am not merely thrilled, but truly blessed, and God uses my hero-worship as a means of grace.

Thirdly, it is in the Communion Service that I realise, as nowhere else, the fellowship of my own people among whom I work and live. I think I realised this best one afternoon as we closed the Lord's Supper with a hymn. I looked round the congregation, and saw all those people; a woman in trouble with whom I had prayed that week; young people with whom I had played tennis the day before, and, as it happened, I could see every one of the dozen or so boys and girls that had been baptised during my ministry. We had shared the bread and the wine; we were all one in singing "Rock of Ages"—and, in that experience which is often repeated, God has mediated His Grace to me.

Of course, many other things may also be used by God as channels of His Grace. Probably many of our people are most truly blest in this service when they remember their conversion, Baptism and first communion. It is worth while to remind them of it sometimes.

I have no desire to rationalise all this; to put it into a neat formula. If there is no magic in the sacrament, there is certainly miracle. God uses these various channels that He may work in us the miracle of Grace. The blessing we receive through the Sacrament is the work of the Holy Spirit.

You may object that all this could happen at any other service. I agree, and yet I hold that there is a special quality, a uniqueness about the experience we receive at the Lord's Supper.

This leads me to discuss the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament. Free Churchmen are shy of the term, because of one theory concerning the Real Presence—namely, the dogma of Transubstantiation.

Yet if there be no Real Presence when we meet for this service, we simply remember an absentee Christ.

We may say at once that the Real Presence is not bodily, but spiritual; it is not in the elements, whether consecrated or not, but in the heart of the believing worshipper.

But is it a special Presence, or just a special apprehension of it on our part? I believe there is something unique in the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament.

There is a sense in which, for the Believer, every meal is sacramental, and every act of ordinary life a manifestation of Christ's Presence. "We are to make an altar of our workshop, and a Eucharist of our daily bread," said Dean Inge. All outward things partly hide and partly reveal the secret life of the Universe. Christ is with us in all our work, and His Presence is real in all we do.

Nevertheless, there is a special quality about the Real Presence offered to us in the Communion Service. Special occasions have the power of imparting a new element to our experience, and, in the Sacrament, the veil which hides that other world from ours is withdrawn farther than at other times.

In conclusion may I make one or two practical suggestions? In the majority of our Baptist Churches the Communion Service is no more than a postscript to the evening service, held when we are weary, unable to concentrate and longing to sing, "Now the day is over." It is the very worst time that could be chosen. I think the best time is at 6 o'clock on Sunday evening, in place of the ordinary preaching service. Failing this, the custom of old-fashioned churches like my own is best. We meet on Sunday afternoon, once a month, for an hour set apart for the service.

May I plead for a fixed and stereotyped order of service? I do not mean one published by the Baptist Union. I mean that each minister should work out from various sources an order which meets the devotional needs of his people, and adhere to it strictly except in very special circumstances. The service should "flow over" the worshipper, and he should know what is coming next. Any novelty or violent change, especially any intrusion of the Minister's personality, tends to hinder rather than to help devotion. The effort to adjust the mind to something unfamiliar, is apt to disturb the concentration of the worshipper.

May I plead also for a more general use of a portable Communion Set? I find mine invaluable in pastoral work. There are bedridden members who find renewed hope and comfort as they take the Sacrament, month by month, in their own room.

Every minister, I suppose, feels that one of the greatest privileges he has is to preside at the Communion Service in his own church. The symbols of bread and wine which he distributes mean so much to the weary and fainting souls who receive them. It is unnecessary for me to say more than that we should make the fullest preparation of mind and spirit before we take the service. Only those who have had an audience with the King can lead others to the Throne.

I never go to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper without remembering the words of Bishop Wilson, Bishop of Sodor and Man in the 18th century:—

"May I never offer the prayers of the faithful with polluted lips, nor distribute the bread of life with unclean hands."

R. C. WALTON.

THE MINISTER'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL WORK

The Sunday School is the most promising part of the Church Organisation, and Ministers as well as Teachers and Officers should do everything possible to make their work for the children effective.

One of the best ways of doing this is to read "The New Chronicle of Christian Education," the only weekly journal devoted to Sunday School work. It is indispensable to the progressive worker. Send a list of the names and addresses of your staff to the Editor at 57 & 59, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4, and free specimen copies will be sent to each of them.

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