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Tracts on Church Doctrine. No. 97.

What is Holy Communion?

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"This is My Body . . . This is My Blood."

It would be well if we could do as Christian people did for some centuries after the death of CHRIST. They simply accepted the truth of His words about the Blessed Sacrament: "This is My Body . . . This is My Blood." They did not enquire as to the nature of the presence, but nevertheless they did not doubt that what He said was true. But, unfortunately, there is much discussion on the subject in the present day, and much false doctrine is taught and believed about the great Sacrament of Holy Communion. The Romanists teach a doctrine which is called "Transubstantiation." Many English Churchmen believe that our LORD's presence is only in the hearts of worthy communicants, and not in the Sacrament itself by reason of the consecration; and others, again, look upon the Sacrament as if it were a mere memorial of CHRIST, and *entirely deny* the presence of our SAVIOUR therein. In this Tract it is our desire to state as clearly as possible what the Church of England teaches about Holy Communion, and to show that her doctrine is also the teaching of the Bible.

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH.

I. First, we shall do well to consider what a "Sacrament" is, according to the teaching of the Prayer Book. In answer to the question: "What meanest thou by this word 'Sacrament?'" The Church Catechism replies:

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Not figurative but Real

"I mean an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us." Hence we see that a Sacrament has always two parts. One that is outward and visible; another that is inward and spiritual. So in the Sacrament of Baptism there is the outward and visible sign of water, and there is the inward and spiritual grace conferred by the HOLY SPIRIT. Anyone may see the water "wherein the person is baptized." But no one can see the working of the HOLY SPIRIT, Who regenerates the infant soul. We *ought* to remember the Apostle's words: "We walk by faith, not by sight." But too many forget them, and refuse to believe what they cannot *see*. They do not understand that many of the mysteries of religion cannot be seen or understood, by means of our natural senses, and yet they are as real and true as if they were *seen*. We do not *see* our souls, and yet we *have* souls. We do not *see* heaven or hell, and yet they do exist. And so it is with the Sacraments of the Church. We cannot see the inward part of them, and yet it is truly there. We must, then, keep in mind throughout, that a Sacrament has always the two parts; the outward and the inward. Therefore, in considering what Holy Communion is, we cannot accept the Roman doctrine, which, at least as popularly understood, does away with the outward part, after the consecration; neither can we believe those who deny the presence, and so would rob the Sacrament of the "inward and spiritual grace given unto us." Now all Christians know that the *outward* part of the Holy Communion is "Bread and Wine, which the LORD hath commanded to be received." Hence we have only to consider what is "the inward part, or thing signified."

II. The Catechism states that the inward part is "the Body and Blood of CHRIST, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the LORD's Supper." Here we are clearly taught that our LORD's presence in the Sacrament is not *figurative*; that is to say, we do not receive bread and wine to remind us that He is *absent* from us in heaven, or that He *will* be present with us if we believe and feel that He is so. But the faith of the Church is that He is "verily and indeed" present whenever the Blessed Sacrament is celebrated by duly ordained

Ministers. Again we are taught that His presence does not depend on the goodness, faith, or love of those who come to the Holy Communion; but He is "*taken* and received by the faithful* in the LORD's Supper." This means that He gives His presence when the Priest performs the act of consecration, and not only when *good* people receive the consecrated elements rightly. Of course it is true that those who do not receive rightly fail to be *benefited* by that presence: but nevertheless the fact of His coming does not depend on the "goodness" of the communicants. He is there to bless His true disciples by His presence: He is there to the peril of those who come so near to Him without penitence and faith. Thus we see that the Catechism answers the question—"What is the inward part of the Holy Communion?" by replying: "It is the Body and Blood of CHRIST."

III. Let us next look at the Office for Holy Communion in the Prayer Book. Just before the consecration, the Priest and people kneeling together offer to God the FATHER a most solemn and beautiful prayer, in which are the words: "Grant us therefore, gracious LORD, so to *eat the Flesh of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink His Blood*, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by His Body, and our souls washed through His most precious Blood." So that here, again, we are clearly taught that we are not about merely to receive bread and wine, in memory of His death; but that we are going to receive that which we speak of as His Body and His Blood; and we pray that we may not receive it unworthily, but to the cleansing of body and soul, and to our eternal good.

Once more in the "Prayer of Consecration" we ask: "Grant that we, receiving these Thy creatures of bread and wine . . . *may be partakers of His most blessed Body and Blood*." We surely need not quote further from the Prayer Book in order to prove that the Church believes in the presence of CHRIST in this Sacrament. Anyone who will carefully read the Communion Service, will be able to see that this is the case, whether he is able to believe it himself or not.

* The word "faithful" is here used of those who hold "the Faith;" that is, of Church-people.

THE TEACHING OF THE BIBLE.

I. The outward part of Holy Communion is foreshadowed very early in Holy Scripture, when it is said of Melchizedek, King of Salem, that he "brought forth bread and wine; and he was the Priest of the most high God" (Gen. xiv. 18). Now Melchizedek is a type of CHRIST (see Heb. vii. 17), and therefore he is represented as bringing forth the elements of the *Christian* sacrifice, in which there is no shedding of blood, but in which portions of the Jewish Sacrifices remain, namely, the bread and wine.

And here we may remark that it is not our present purpose to discuss the *Sacrificial* aspect of the Sacrament. It will be enough to remind our readers that just as the Jew looked *forward* to the coming of the SAVIOUR when he offered the lamb, so do we look *back* to His Sacrifice on the Cross when we celebrate the Eucharist. The Jew did not think that the future offering of CHRIST was made, as often as he offered the lamb; neither does the Christian Priest imagine that he repeats the offering of CHRIST on the Cross, when he offers the Christian sacrifice. He does as a *memorial*, what the Jew did in anticipation; each of them pleading the *one* sacrifice which was completed when the SAVIOUR died:—

"One offering, single and complete,
With lips and heart we say;
But what He never can repeat
He shows forth day by day."

II. We have now to consider what the Gospel teaches us about the Sacrament as regards His presence therein. And first we must notice His words when He spoke of it for the first time. These are recorded in the 6th chapter of S. John's Gospel. We are there told that after He had fed the multitude by means of a miracle, they continued to follow Him; and He, turning to them, said, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth; but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (v. 27); and when they murmured at this, and did not understand Him, He repeated His words yet more fully, and said, "I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever: and the Bread that

I will give is *My Flesh*, which I will give for the life of the world" (v. 51). And again, "Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you" (v. 53). Now it was no wonder His hearers were unable to understand or to believe what He said. It was no wonder that they exclaimed, "How *can* this man give us His Flesh to eat?" (v. 52). They thought He was speaking of His Flesh as it was then visible to them: they knew nothing of what that flesh would become after He had risen from the dead. Our LORD did not explain the difficulty then. He reserved the explanation for a future time, and it was not until the night before He died that He revealed His meaning to the disciples. Then, when He had taken and blessed the bread and wine, and declared concerning them, "*This is My Body*," and "*This is My Blood*;" then the Apostles must have remembered His former words, and begun to understand that He had spoken of a spiritual (though no less real) partaking of His Flesh and Blood.

III. And now let us look briefly at the teaching of S. Paul on this subject. Writing to the Corinthians, he teaches very plainly the doctrine of the presence of CHRIST in His Sacrament: "The Cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion (that is *partaking*) of the Blood of CHRIST? The Bread which we break, is it not the communion (partaking) of the Body of CHRIST?" (1 Cor. x. 16). Again, in the next chapter he tells them that he had received a special revelation concerning our LORD's institution of the Sacrament. (1 Cor. xi. 23, 24, 25). He then goes on to warn them of the danger of receiving unworthily, and declares to them the *reason* why they had thus wrongly received; namely, that they did not "discern the LORD's Body" (v. 29); that is to say, they had received the Sacrament as if it had been only common bread and wine, and had forgotten the presence of CHRIST therein.

A STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE.

Having now considered what is contained in the Bible and the Prayer Book, with reference to Holy Communion, we conclude that they agree in teaching:—

1. That this Sacrament is not *only* a memorial of the death of CHRIST.

2. That there is in the Sacrament, by reason of the consecration, a presence of the SAVIOUR.

3. That this presence is a *real* presence, and not an *imaginary* one.

4. That, although this presence is "spiritual," it is no less real. For, just as God and the angels are *spiritual* beings, and yet their existence is as real as our own, so CHRIST, being present in the Sacrament, "after a heavenly and spiritual manner," is yet as really present as if He were visible as of old, in the substance of our flesh.

OBJECTIONS TO THE DOCTRINE.

It only remains for us to notice some of the objections which are brought against this doctrine, through ignorance or want of faith.

I. "*It is nothing more than Bread and Wine.*"

This is simply a denial of the doctrine just stated. It is sometimes made by those who have no religion at all. But we fear there are many really religious people who thus express their want of faith. To such we would say, consider carefully what is written in this Tract; compare its statements with the teaching of the Bible and the Prayer Book, and ask God to show you what is truth. But we would also remind such persons that some among them are very inconsistent in their conduct: for they say of the Sacrament that "it is a very solemn thing," and for this reason they are not communicants. But how *can* it be so very solemn an act to receive the Sacrament if it is only bread and wine? It is very true, indeed, that the altar should only be approached with careful reverence; but this is chiefly so because JESUS is present in the Sacrament.

II. "*It is only a Memorial.*"

Those who think this, do so because they remember some of the words of Holy Scripture on the subject, and are forgetful of others. They remember that the SAVIOUR said, "Do this in remembrance of Me;" but they forget

that He also said, "This is My Body," and "This is My Blood." Of course we know very well that these words are supposed by some persons to mean *something else*; but we feel that we are safer when we follow the teaching of the Church, and we have seen that this teaching is that we not *only* commemorate the SAVIOUR's death, but are also "partakers of His most blessed Body and Blood."

III. "*He was speaking figuratively.*"

This is said chiefly with reference to His words in S. John vi. But we know that the objection is not true, for several reasons. In the first place, those who heard Him would not have been "offended," or unable to believe Him. When He said, "I am the door of the sheep;" or "I am the true Vine," there was not the same difficulty, because they knew that He *was* speaking figuratively on those occasions. But it was quite different when He spoke of Himself as the "Living Bread which came down from heaven;" and because they were aware He was using no mere figure of speech, they were perplexed and offended. Again, we may be sure that He *intended* them to attach a more real meaning to His words, because He would otherwise have *explained that they were mistaken*. He did so on another occasion, and one of much less importance (see S. Matt. xvi. 11, 12); and He certainly would have explained Himself if He had not meant what He said when He foretold that He would become our spiritual food in Holy Communion. Once more, we cannot doubt that the Evangelists would have corrected the mistake, if one had been made. When JESUS speaks of destroying the temple, and raising it again, S. John is careful to explain, "But He spake of the temple of His Body" (S. John ii. 21). So, with reference to Holy Communion, if He had *meant* to speak "figuratively," one of the Evangelists would surely have explained that He did so. They have *not* told us so, simply because our LORD intended us to believe Him when He said, "This is My Body . . . This is My Blood."

IV. "*You can see it is only Bread and Wine.*"

This is the very same difficulty which was felt by those who listened to our LORD Himself. They made *two* mis-

takes : they judged by what they *saw*, and they understood the words of JESUS in a *carnal* sense. Because they judged by what they saw they very naturally exclaimed, "Is not this JESUS, the Son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know ; how is it then that He saith, I came down from heaven?" (S. John vi. 42). It was indeed quite true that He was the Son of the Virgin, whom they knew ; but it was also true that He came down from heaven. And so of Holy Communion, it is true that the outward part is Bread and Wine ; and yet it is *also* true that the inward part is the Body and Blood of CHRIST. Again, we have noticed that they took a *carnal* view of His teaching. Hence they asked with astonishment, "How *can* this man give us His Flesh to eat?" (S. John vi. 52). Our SAVIOUR partly explained their mistake when He said, "Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before? It is the *Spirit* that quickeneth : the *Flesh* profiteth nothing" (S. John vi. 61-63). And do not these same words of His help us to understand that we must not think of His presence in human flesh, as when He was visible on earth? But we must remember that the same glorified Body which was able to ascend to heaven, is now capable of being really (although not visibly) present on the altar in the Blessed Sacrament.

We are well aware that there are other objections which are sometimes made, and which, for want of space, we cannot notice here. But we hope that what has been written may at least help some to see more plainly what the truth is, and to discern with clearer faith, and greater love, the presence of the SAVIOUR in this great Sacrament.

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