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Anglicans and Intercommunion

New Thoughts on an Old Problem

J. D. M. STUART

It now appears probable that most or all of the seven Churches in North India and Pakistan which are seeking Union on the basis of the Fourth Edition of the *Plan of Church Union* will come together by 1970, or soon after.

One factor which has helped to make this possible is the closer meeting of minds on the question of the unification of the ministry. The method which was proposed in the Third Edition of the *Plan* did not fully commend itself either to Anglicans or to members of other Churches. In the present edition the service of Unification has been amended, and above all, its meaning has been clarified in such a way as to set at rest most, if not all, of the fears which had been felt.¹

The General Council of the C.I.P.B.C. welcomed the new edition at its first reading, and passed it on to the dioceses to vote on it separately. So far all voting has been in favour, and it appears that Anglicans as a whole look forward confidently to entering the Church of North India/Pakistan. Although they will be only a small proportion of the new Church, they trust that it will include all that is valuable in

¹ It is now realized that the 'unification' does not represent the victory of either view of the ministry over the other, nor is it a patched up compromise, wearily accepted by both sides as a second best. All thoughts of 'supplementary ordination' have now been buried. In the act of unification, as now understood, the newly united Church will offer to God its hitherto separated ministries in a fresh dedication with the prayer that he may endue each and every minister with whatever he may need of grace and authority for his future ministry. Naturally those who are formed by different traditions will have different conceptions of what God in his wisdom will in fact perform. No one is expected to deny his convictions, but no more may he impose them on others. Our differences will be transcended by submitting them to God in pure faith and a simple willingness to receive from him whatever he gives. The Church will then accept its ministry as a united whole without any further doubt or question. No label can be applied to such a service. It is not an 'ordination', since all those taking part are already ministers; still less is it a 're-ordination'. It is frankly something unique—and why not, since we are thereby seeking to undo the wholly anomalous situation in which the ministries of our divided Churches have been set up in separation, if not actual rivalry?

the Anglican heritage, including of course a link with the historic ministry.

In the context of approaching union, which must be so much more than a merely administrative reorganization, it is not enough to await its coming passively. Much depends on seeking now to deepen and strengthen the unity of heart and mind between those who are coming together from different traditions.² This should include a readiness to re-examine those positions which have hitherto been matters of division. There are certain important matters on which Anglicans might invite their partners in union to give new thought. There are others on which Anglicans might re-examine their own positions, for example, the official attitude of the Anglican Communion towards mutual intercommunion with Churches whose ministers are 'non-episcopal' (i.e. with orders which are not derived from the historic succession).

The official position is that, while non-Anglicans may be admitted to communion at an Anglican service, the reverse is not normally permitted. This restriction seems strange when the other Churches are freely recognized as 'real' Churches with 'real' ministries of Word and Sacrament. But it represents something deeply felt by a substantial section of ordinary Anglicans, and bases itself on the view of the ministry found in the Preface to the Ordinal, further strengthened by an outlook derived from the Tractarian Movement. Those who share this viewpoint feel a serious conscientious difficulty at the prospect of receiving communion when the celebrant is not episcopally ordained. Rightly or wrongly, this seems to them an act of disloyalty, in which they cannot take part in good faith.

Further examination of the unwillingness of Anglicans to receive the sacraments from non-episcopal ministries soon leads one to the distinction between 'valid' and 'invalid'. A ministry which is derived from bishops in the historic succession is 'valid'; other ministries are in some sense doubtful. It is somewhat paradoxical that this way of thought should be so influential among Anglicans. Whatever base it may or may not have in Scripture, it is directly derived from a Roman Catholic theology of the sacraments, which lays down the conditions which must be fulfilled if a sacrament is to be regarded as a 'real' means of grace. According to that theology Rome finds that the ministry and sacraments of the Anglican Communion, in common with all Protestant sacraments (baptism excepted), fail to meet the requirements of validity—a particular application which Anglicans naturally contest.

² As a contribution towards this a set of six pamphlets, *Looking Forward to Church Union in North India* (10 p. each), have been jointly published by Lucknow Publishing House and I.S.P.C.K. A study guide to the Plan, called *Forward to Union*, will be ready early in 1968 (Re.1.00).

There are various indications that the time is now ripe for a reconsideration of the whole question. For instance, it is reported that Anglican dioceses in Central and West Africa have authorized mutual intercommunion with those Churches with whom they have covenanted to unite. It will be interesting to learn the theological grounds for this break with tradition, which are no doubt being studied by the Commission in the Church of England which is shortly to report.

Meanwhile it is worth drawing attention to new insights on the whole question of ministry and sacraments which are beginning to appear in post-Conciliar Roman Catholic thought. For instance, the (American) *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (Winter 1966) contains an article by Fr. F. J. van Beeck, S.J., Director of Studies of the Dutch Jesuit Province, called 'Towards an Ecumenical Understanding of the Sacraments'. What follows is an attempt, not so much to summarize his closely reasoned thesis, as to show the direction of his thought as it might apply to relations between Anglicans and other Churches with whom they hope to unite.

* * *

(1) What is the meaning of the terms 'valid' and 'invalid'? Fr. van Beeck points out that a 'valid sacrament' is no more and no less than one which has 'a juridical claim to ecclesiastical recognition'. Rome with its customary precision defines the conditions which must be fulfilled if the Roman Church is to give this recognition. The essential conditions are (a) that the sacrament is celebrated as the act of an assembly of Christ's Church; and (b) that it is the expression of a recognizably orthodox faith, celebrating our redemption by God in Christ (*see* section 2 below). One further condition, which is normally necessary, though not strictly essential, is that the sacrament should be celebrated by a 'competent' minister (*see* section 3 below). These conditions would be admitted in principle as necessary by all Christian Churches; they differ only on the application (e.g. what is the orthodox faith, what minister is competent?).

To describe a sacrament as valid, however, tells us very little about what it actually is. Positively understood a sacrament is a share in the Communion of the Holy Spirit as the Mystical Body worships the Father in union with its Head; it is the celebration by a Christian congregation of its salvation in Christ, as it performs acts which signify and convey the grace of God, according to Christ's appointment (in the case of Baptism and the Eucharist). A sacrament is, therefore, very much more than an act which can legally claim ecclesiastical recognition. In fact, when a congregation is engaged in celebrating a sacrament, the thought of its validity does not normally enter anyone's mind.

When does the question of 'valid or invalid' arise? Only in abnormal, paradoxical situations; for instance, when the minister or recipient is acting with a wrong intention, or is a notorious sinner, or when the congregation has deliberately separated itself from the body of Christ's people, either through adopting heretical doctrines or simply through breaking the bond of charity. In such cases it may be important to decide whether the sacrament is valid or not. The classical example is that of heretical baptism: Is a person who has received baptism from a heretic a member of the Church or not? In the early Church, as still in Eastern Christendom, such a baptism was not accepted; but since Augustine the Western Church has accepted as valid any baptism which is administered with water in the name of the Trinity, even though given outside and in opposition to the Church.

In the normal celebration of a sacrament its validity is only something marginal, a finishing touch which establishes that all is as it should be. In the paradoxical case of a sacrament which is celebrated 'in bad faith', it may be recognized as objectively 'valid', but this only means that it is formally a sacrament, though it may not otherwise benefit the recipients, perhaps even the reverse (1 Cor. 11:29, 30).

How does this apply to our present situation? It can be said that when any of the separated Churches celebrates a sacrament, it is acting in the obedience of faith, and its sacrament fulfils the positive definition of a sacrament given above. In our mutual divisions, real though they are, there is no element at all of 'bad faith', least of all in a context when we are seeking to overcome our divisions. What, therefore, prevents our mutual recognition of each other's sacraments? In the circumstances of the North India/Pakistan Scheme of Union this is, of course, already the case with most of the negotiating Churches; only the Anglican Church hesitates to recognize the ministry and sacraments of the others. If, however, they can be seen to possess the necessary conditions of 'validity', then the Anglican Church need hesitate no longer. In what follows it will be argued (applying Fr. Beck's suggestions) that such action could be taken in advance of Church Union.

(2) In this section we shall see how the two *essential* conditions for the recognition of a sacrament apply to the present situation.

(a) 'that the sacraments are celebrated as the act of an assembly of Christ's Church'. There is obviously no question that Anglicans accept the other negotiating Churches in North India as truly belonging to the Body of Christ. Anglicans as a whole have never questioned the churchly status of the Reformed Churches of the European Continent and Scotland. It was different with regard to the new denominations which separated themselves from the Church of England since the

Reformation, as was only natural. But this has been transcended in the climate of the ecumenical movement. There is, therefore, no difficulty in connection with the first condition.

(b) 'that the sacraments are the expression of a recognizably orthodox faith, celebrating our redemption by God in Christ'. There are no doubt considerable differences between the Churches in their faith as expressed in their doctrine and liturgy. But here a valuable distinction is put forward by Fr. van Beeck between the fundamental faith of those who take part in a sacrament and their doctrinal formulation of that faith. Doctrinal formulations will always be necessary, because the Church cannot exist without expressing its faith in concrete forms (Creeds, Sacraments, Order), and it is inconceivable that the Church in history as a divine-human organism could ever be without such standards. But the faith and its orthodox formulation stand on two levels of importance with respect to the sacraments. The essential matter is to share the fundamental faith of the Church; to make an orthodox statement of that faith and to use an orthodox rite in celebrating the sacrament may be a test whether the fundamental faith is held, but, however desirable, it cannot be made a *sine qua non*.

We are in a better position to appreciate this distinction, now that Christians (including the Church of Rome) are learning in the ecumenical movement that the actual Churches at any given time are 'pilgrim' Churches; all are *in via*, seeking the final perfection which only Christ can give at the Last Day. Even the treasures which we hold in trust have always something provisional about them, and need particular scrutiny when there are matters of division between the separated portions of the Body.

We can, therefore, admit that all our doctrinal formulations, and no less their expression in liturgy, are to some extent historically conditioned (e.g. they reflect the prevailing philosophy and social conditions of the period in which they took shape). They must, therefore, never be allowed to become exclusive, immutable objects of faith in themselves, as has often happened in the past.

Moreover, doctrinal formulations and definitions have often been called forth by the need to combat some particular heresy or one-sided expression of a Christian truth. In such circumstances they tend themselves to be one-sided and to be expressed antithetically and polemically. This especially applies to the different sacramental doctrines inherited by the separated Churches, which were hammered out in the heat of sixteenth-century controversies. Thus we cannot regard any of the traditional formulations, whether Catholic or Protestant, with regard to the Eucharist as an exclusive statement of the truth for all time. When our forefathers made their definitions, they did their best to be true to the fundamental faith implied by the sacraments. With the same motive we in our day must refer

our inherited traditions to the fundamental Scriptural faith which underlies them. The same loyalty will inspire us to seek for more adequate expressions of that faith, which may ultimately find a real agreement at a deeper level.

How does this apply to the situation under consideration? It cannot be denied that Anglicans (or a significant section of them) have felt doubts about the orthodoxy of the sacramental beliefs of other Protestant Churches (and the same is true *vice versa*). And there is no doubt that the Eucharist plays a very different part in the devotional life, say, of the average Anglican and the average Baptist. But now that the negotiating Churches are preparing to subscribe to the doctrine of the sacrament which is implied in the *Plan* (Chapter VI), should it not be recognized that all share at least the fundamental faith which we seek to discern in each other?

If this is sound, then it could be claimed that the second essential condition for recognizing each other's sacraments as valid is fulfilled; though one important proviso (following Fr. van Beek) should be added. This is that we should all be prepared to 'regauge' our inherited doctrinal traditions (e.g. the *Statements of Faith*), especially where they conflict, or appear to conflict, with the ultimate objective of reaching a fuller, more inclusive, but still provisional, expression of our fundamental faith. This is surely of great importance, both to provide our united theological colleges and seminaries with a secure basis for their preparation of ordinands, and also as a background to the coming efforts to draw up new forms of worship for the United Church. As an earnest of this intention, should not the uniting Churches even now engage so far as is possible on a sincere dialogue at all levels, using the new insights of Biblical theology which are now available? In this way we could hope to gain an existential, as opposed to merely theoretical, appreciation of each other's fundamental faith, and to convert what might be a merely 'legal' recognition into a glad and hearty acceptance.

(3) We now turn to another traditional condition for the recognition of a sacrament as 'valid', namely, that it is celebrated by a 'competent', i.e. fully authorized, minister. This condition, however, does not stand on the same level as the other two, and cannot be regarded as in all circumstances essential. This is proved by the fact that in emergencies the Church has had recourse to 'extraordinary' ministers, i.e. to ministers other than those who are normally authorized to perform this service for the faithful.³

³ Fr. van Beek notes with regret that Catholic theologians have tended to write off Protestant sacraments without more ado, on the sole ground that their ministers did not derive their orders from the Apostolic Succession; and in a footnote he commends seventeenth-century Anglicans who, though convinced episcopalians, did not take this line with regard to the other Reformed Churches who were deprived of bishops by the

History suggests that in the matter of ministerial competence there was considerable flexibility in the early Church. What eventually came to be legally fixed in Catholic Church order was merely that which had long been a matter of normal custom. In normal circumstances the question of competence scarcely ever arises. The law remains in the background as an implicit test of good faith. It only comes into action in the paradoxical event of someone presuming to act without due authorization when there is no need to do so, as this implies that he is deliberately setting himself up against the Church. But in exceptional circumstances of emergency (e.g. a group of Christians marooned on a desert island) it can be argued that the law does not apply at all. In any case the relation of law to the life of the Church is purely regulative, not creative. In emergencies, therefore, the community of the faithful, in virtue of Christ's presence, is surely competent to celebrate sacramentally its salvation in Christ as best it can, using the ministry of whatever leaders are available in its particular circumstances. The basis of this competence can be said to be the grace of baptism, which takes a special form within the Church in those who serve as its ministers.

Thus, though this brief summary risks distortion, Fr. van Beeck argues that even within the terms of Roman Catholic church order the ministry of Word and Sacraments as exercised by Protestant ministers could be recognized as an extraordinary ministry and so validated. In view of the historical precedents it goes without saying that such a course is no less open for the Churches of the Anglican Communion.

(4) The argument cannot, however, stop here. Although the sacraments celebrated by non-episcopally ordained ministers might on this basis be recognized as 'valid', this recognition would carry the unfortunate implication that such ministers are laymen exercising an 'extraordinary' ministry in a situation of emergency caused by the division of the Church. However, Fr. van Beeck goes on to suggest that where a Church is celebrating the sacraments in good faith according to a church order which 'meets the requirements of the episcopal structure of the ministry', then its ministry, too, could be regarded as sacramental, even though outside the historic Apostolic Succession.

The argument can only briefly be summarized here. It starts from the renewed understanding of the place of ministry in the Church, which in different ways showed itself both at the Vatican Council and also in the Montreal Conference of the W.C.C. on Faith and Order. Clergy and laity are not totally distinct from each other, but are organically related in the Body. The New Testament shows the apostolic office existing

force of circumstances. On the other hand, he contrasts the attitude of modern Anglicans, who concentrate excessively on the question of valid Orders in their relations with other Churches, more especially since 1896, when the Pope 'condemned' the Orders of the Church of England.

in (*not* over against) the Church, rendering an authoritative *diakonia* (service, ministry) to and in the community itself. What defines the Apostles is their *diakonia* in the Church (e.g. Acts 1:22), and the authority which they wield is essentially ministerial (2 Cor. 10, esp. verse 8). The Apostolic ministry is Christ's gift to the Church so that the Church through its ministers may continually renew its consecration to the Father in the Spirit by its incorporation into Christ.

From the beginning the Church has existed as the community which responds in faith to the Word of God in Christ. At first this Word, the *Kerygma*, was safeguarded by the witness of the Apostles, who as members of the Church were themselves also under the Word. In process of time the *kerygma* was concretized in the N.T. Scriptures. At the same time (about A.D. 200) the Apostolic ministry was similarly concretized in the episcopal church order, as the guardian and servant of the Word to the community. Thus, Scripture and the episcopal church order became the norm of all later developments of faith and order. The essential continuity of the ministry, therefore, consists in its continuation of the Apostolic Tradition in the Church, because this is the *diakonia* which it exists to render. This, of course, does not mean that ministers are merely the Church's delegates; the New Testament shows that the ministry is empowered to shape and order the Church with an authority received from Christ, but it does this always in organic relation to the Church.

Thus the essential element in the Apostolic Succession consists in the faithful continuation of the original Apostolic *diakonia* within the Church. Although the Succession became historically concretized in the episcopal church order, in which authority is regularly handed down through the chain of episcopal consecrations, this is only its legal codification and cannot be absolutized. The essential continuity is of those who perform the pastoral function of teaching, feeding and ordering the Church in the place of the Apostles; but the episcopal church order by which this function is passed on, although normal (and for all practical purposes, unchangeably so), might nevertheless admit of exceptions in emergencies. It means that in the first two centuries of the Church succession in the *diakonia* took place in various ways.

Can the Anglican Church discern in its Protestant sister-Churches the existence of a church order in being which 'meets the requirements of the episcopal structure of the ministry'—not merely in the obvious sense in which the M.C.S.A. is 'episcopal', but also in the sense that the U.C.N.I. expresses *episcopate* within its Presbyterian order? If it can, should it not proceed to acknowledge these ministries in advance of Church Union?

(5) Among the 'Practical Steps in Co-operation' recommended by the Negotiating Committee at Pachmarhi in March

1965, one was the holding of 'Joint Communion Services'. Hitherto this has not been possible for Anglicans, just as they have not normally received communion from non-episcopally ordained ministers. (In fact permission to do this has on special occasions and in certain circumstances been given by the Episcopal Synod of C.I.P.B.C. and by individual bishops; but the theological grounds for such permission do not appear to have been stated.) If, however, the above line of thought were to commend itself to the Anglican Church, then it would place the question of intercommunion in a new light, as the main reason for conscientious objection to it would have been removed.

Another widely held Anglican conviction with regard to intercommunion is that there is an element of unreality in it if it takes place between members of separated Churches, and that 'intercommunion should rather be looked forward to as the fruit of union'. Fr. van Beeck's attitude to this is interesting. As opposed to the traditional Roman Catholic discipline which allowed it only in certain very narrowly defined cases, he suggests that in the new ecumenical situation where Churches are actively seeking unity, intercommunion is a positive duty, provided certain conditions are observed which are necessary for such acts to be honest and fruitful. In fact he stands wholeheartedly with those who look upon intercommunion between separated Christians as a symbol of and means towards the unity which Christ wills.

The necessary conditions are these. On the one hand, those who take part should not in so doing deliberately throw over the faith or order of their own Churches, nor should they risk causing scandal to members of their own Churches. On the other hand, a necessary positive condition is that the Churches concerned should be engaged in dialogue; that is while recognizing in each other's sacraments the fundamental faith of the Gospel, they should be seeking to transcend the differences in their doctrinal traditions concerning both sacraments and church order, as suggested above. In the absence of such conditions intercommunion is in danger of expressing mere impatience or emotionalism, and so failing to be truly 'churchly'.

(6) Conclusion. To many the above argument may appear a somewhat ponderous and roundabout method of coming to an obvious conclusion. What it has sought to do is to show how traditional Anglican positions might be positively developed in the radically changed circumstances of approaching Church Union. Such a development would do much to remove the reproach of legalism which others have often noted in Anglican teaching on church order. It is also reasonable to hope that it would clear the air for a more open dialogue on fundamental questions about ministry and sacraments. This, in India at least, is a crying need as a part of our deeper preparation for Church Union.