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A STUMBLING-BLOCK TO THE REUNION OF CHRISTENDOM

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THE Church of England is busy with reform. Reform connotes clearing the way for progress. In no direction is progress so vitally necessary as along the path to the reunion of all Christians in the one Body of Christ. "That they all may be one . . . that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me" (St. John xvii. 21). We are expecting the world to believe that Jesus is the Christ, sent by the Father, when we are not fulfilling the condition laid down by our Lord. Our Lord prayed that His disciples might be a united Society, not, indeed, uniform, but joined in a visible unity observed by all the world. Apart from our Lord's words, it is obvious what a striking appeal to the whole world would be made if the six hundred millions of Christians were one. Wars between nations, civil wars, class wars, labour and employer wars: how we long for peace and a spiritual home where war is impossible! How it would draw all men to Christ if peace and brotherhood were found in a united Christendom! Our missionary work is stultified by our divisions. We are not a "city set on a hill that cannot be hid," nor are we the "light of the world" (St. Matt. v. 14). We Christians live in cities on a hundred hills of varying heights—many strongly fortified against other little cities. There is no one clear white light of radiance so pure and penetrating that all the dark places of the earth are shown up. A hundred or more flickering torches of varying intensity, partly illuminate and partly mislead the wayfarer. We wonder why the Kingdom is so long in coming in fullness, why men everywhere do not accept the "good news," yet the blame for the delay is, chiefly, with ourselves. When we are one, then, and not before, may we expect the world to believe that God sent His Son because He so loved the world and would have all come to Him and be saved.

Now, we of the Church of England, seem marked out as the Church of the Reconciliation. We have never ceased to be Catholic, yet we shed many accretions which disfigured the Catholic Church at the Reformation. No doubt, we cast off some things, too, which

it would have been better to retain. But it cannot be gainsaid that we are in touch with other branches of the Catholic Church, as well as with our Nonconformist brethren. It is on behalf of the latter, however, that I plead for a more cautious use of terms when speaking of the Holy Communion. I venture to say that a real stumbling-block is being placed on the path to reunion with our fellow-Christians in this country, and in the United States of America, by the careless and uncatholic terminology of many clergymen of our community. Words are the coins of thought. If a monetary transaction is being carried out, and a pound is treated as twenty shillings by one party, but only as 17s. 6d. or 10s. by the other, there is bound to be dispute. "Define your terms" is a sound precept; and when this is done we deprecate such remarks as "we cannot be bothered with theological niceties"; "terminological exactitude is tedious and belittling," etc.

Now, misuse of terms arises chiefly in connexion with two points of Eucharistic doctrine, viz., the Presence of Christ and the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

I. *The Presence of Christ in the Holy Communion.* There are two of the thirty-nine Articles which are germane to the consideration of Our Lord's presence in the Sacrament. (Italics are ours.) Article I says: "There is one living and true God . . . *without body, parts or passions.*" Article IV says: "Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again His body, with flesh, bones and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature; wherewith He ascended into Heaven, and *there sitteth, until He return to judge* all men at the last day." In view of these statements, ought we not to avoid such teaching as this, "Christ is present under the forms of bread and wine just as He was present in His human body, when He trod this earth in Palestine?" Is it not misleading to say that "after the words of Consecration, the Presence is on the Altar"? or, to talk of "A Presence of our Lord in the consecrated elements, quite apart from the act of communicating"? I quote other passages:

"A local spiritual Presence in the consecrated elements."

"He left a special presence of His Body and His blood on the Altar to be the food of our souls."

"Christ is truly present in the Bread and Wine."

"My Body and my Blood will be truly there . . . that Body in which you will see Me ascend to My Father."

“ If the Sacramental veil of Bread and Wine were lifted you would not see the natural body as it hung upon the Cross, but that *same* body in its supernatural glory as it is now at the right hand of God.”

These quotations are taken from sermons, writings, articles, pamphlets of leading clergymen (including a Bishop) whose names need not be given. It is difficult to know exactly what such terms are intended to convey. One writer says “ no human mind can grasp it,” and we readily acquiesce! Contradictions are, indeed, beyond our power of comprehension!

The Real Presence. This term was, at one period, used to signify a corporal presence; while, at a later date, the same expression was used by those who were prominent in denying a corporal or material presence. Even now “ real ” conveys quite different meanings to different people. “ Real ” to most people signifies material: if you asked them whether a ghost, a spirit is real; they would reply “ certainly not.” On the other hand, to some of us the spiritual is the real, it is that which is not subject to change and decay; the spiritual is the lasting, the permanent and, therefore, the true reality. If this term “ Real Presence ” be used, it is most important to point out this ambiguity. It may, however, be stated that this term is not found in any of the Anglican formularies; and it is unknown earlier than the Middle Ages. We sympathize with those who wish to avoid the belittling of the Sacrament and, no doubt, the term “ Real Presence ” is used to prevent this disparagement. May we not also sympathize with those who can only see in it and kindred terms a suggestion of idolatry—of a refined and subtle form—but none the less dangerous? The attitude of an intelligent educated heathen to his idol is given by Mosheim in his *Ecclesiastical History* (Vol. I. p. 27), and it may be quoted as quite pertinent to the subject. Mosheim is referring to the various heathen deities and their worship. He says: “ The statues or representations of the gods were placed in the temples and supposed to be animated in an incomprehensible manner. For the votaries of these fictitious deities, however destitute they might be of reason in other respects, avoid carefully the imputation of worshipping inanimate beings such as brass, wood and stone and therefore pretended that the divinity, represented by the statue was really present in it, if the dedication was duly and properly made.” This

seems to be the doctrine of a local presence after proper consecration. One wonders whether some of the terms already referred to may not have originated owing to this craving for a tangible, visible vehicle which does not simply convey God, but also is that in which He dwells here upon earth. As regards the "Real Presence" in the sense of a *local* presence, a purely spiritual presence may be non-spatial, as we conceive space; it is a gross mistake to conceive of Our Lord's presence in the Sacrament as localized or circumscribed by limits in any way. But, consider Articles I and IV (quoted on pages 3 and 4), God is "without body," and, therefore, our Lord cannot be present as God. "Christ . . . took again His body . . . and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into Heaven and there sitteth, until He return to judge all men at the last day." How can it be said, then, that if the sacramental veil of Bread and Wine were lifted you would not see the natural body as it hung upon the Cross, but that *same* body in its supernatural glory as it is now at the right hand of God?

Transubstantiation. The philosophers of the Middle Ages thought that things consisted of substance and accidents. The accidents are what can be perceived by the senses (colour, shape, taste, chemical properties, etc.). The substance is a something which is supposed to remain when all the accidents are taken away and which yet makes the thing to be what it is. Hence arose the doctrine of Transubstantiation, i.e. that after due consecration of the elements of bread and wine the accidents remain, but the substance is changed into the substance of Christ's Body and Blood. The modern theory of matter is that it consists of minute centres of electricity; the (so-called) atom is a little universe of electrons, or units of negative electricity circulating round a positive centre. The doctrine of transubstantiation, therefore, breaks down. It was based on error, and its history ought to be a warning to those who will persist in defining in cases where a reverent silence is the better attitude. (See Gore's, *The Body of Christ*, pp. 118-120.)

But, it will be useful to quote the words of authoritative teachers and scholars of various schools of thought.

Bishop Dowden in *Define your Terms*, an address on the Eucharistic controversy, said: "One thing is absolutely certain—it is no part of the doctrine of our Church that there is an adorable

presence of Our Lord's Body and Blood in or under the forms of bread and wine. Such language is undiscoverable in the doctrinal standards of our Church, and wholly unknown to the Church of the early Fathers."

Bishop Westcott (Life and Letters, Vol. II. p. 351) writes: "It seems to me vital to guard against the thoughts of the presence of the Lord in or under the form of bread and wine. From this the greatest practical errors follow."

Bishop Herbert Pakenham-Walsh, in Altar and Table, p. 41, writes: "It seems clear that the early Church believed in a sacramental presence of Christ, which was both real and spiritual and such that, while not discernible to the senses, it did not depend upon the faith of the individual, though it was revealed to faith. It was a presence so connected with the Bread and Wine that they hesitated not to call the Bread and Wine the Body and Blood of Christ, and yet they showed clearly that they did not regard the presence as material, as *localized, as a presence after the manner of a body.*"

Bishop Gore (quoted in the foregoing book, p. 42) says: "It is to be remembered that the Greek Fathers, when they use the words 'in' or 'under' the forms of bread and wine, are not thinking of space at all, as if they meant that the Body and Blood were included in the elements. They meant after the manner of a Sacrament. They would have shrunk from any formulated teaching of 'Christ made present on the Altar under the forms of bread and wine.'" (And see, *The Body of Christ*, pp. 90, 91.)

The Bishop of Norwich (in a letter) wrote: "There is no scriptural warrant for localizing the Presence, and the Presence is not independent of the service and of the use made of the Bread and Wine in the service."

Fr. Vernon Staley, The Catholic Religion, p. 255, wrote: "Our Blessed Lord is locally present in heaven, He is spiritually present in the Blessed Sacrament."

Those who desire to pursue the subject further should read *Papers on the Doctrine of the English Church concerning the Eucharistic Presence*, published by the Church of England Book Society; or, *Waterland, on the Eucharist.*

We have dwelt at some length on this first point, because erroneous views of the Real Presence underlie the demand for the services of Benediction and Exposition of the Sacrament. Reservation of

the elements is desired by some so that in cases of serious sickness the Holy Communion may be administered without loss of time. But, no doubt, Reservation is misused by others for the purpose of adoration. As Bishop Westcott said, the thoughts of the presence in or under the form of bread and wine lead to "the greatest practical errors."

II. *The Eucharistic Sacrifice.* In St. Luke xxii. 20 we read: "This do in remembrance of Me," an accurate translation of *τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν*. In the Septuagint, *ποιέω* is sometimes used to mean "sacrifice," but *only* if the *context demands it*. In the New Testament *ποιέω* is translated more than fifty ways and yet it never means "offer." In no translation of the New Testament, not even in the Roman Catholic Douay Version, is it ever translated in any other way in this passage except as "do." "Offer" is rejected by Roman Catholic Commentators, e.g. Aquinas, Cajetan and Estius, and English Catholics, such as Gore, Mason and Plummer agree. *Ἀνάμνησις* means "remembrance," not "memorial," for which we find *μνημόσυνον*. A memorial is something external which can be perceived by the senses; a remembrance is a mental state. Now, this passage ought not to be paraphrased incorrectly; it is misleading to say that it is equivalent to "offer this as a sacrifice, as a memorial of Me." And what shall we say to the following: "That morning they had accomplished one of the most stupendous actions of which man is capable; by Divine permission, by the aid of the Holy Ghost and by the interposition of the risen Saviour, they had offered before angels and men the sacrifice of the death and passion of the Redeemer" (from a sermon by a well-known preacher).

There is no need for other quotations. One comes across expressions which convey the notion that the Eucharistic Sacrifice is a necessary addition to the offering of Christ upon the Cross; they imply that the redemption, propitiation and satisfaction made by our Lord is perfected by the sacrifice of "Masses." Against this error, we will quote from one who is a Churchman of a most advanced type: In Maude's *History of the Book of Common Prayer*, p. 131, "The Eucharist is a sacrifice because it is the means appointed by Christ Himself in order that the Church may plead the Sacrifice of Christ." Professor Burkitt, in *Eucharist and Sacrifice*, p. 22, says: "The congregation having confessed, been shriven, having

assisted at a due consecration of the bread and wine, and finally, having received their own portion, do then and there offer unto God themselves, their souls and bodies to be a reasonable sacrifice." We may speak of the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, our alms, oblations or offerings, but to refer to the Holy Communion as a sacrifice, re-offering Christ to the Father in a way at all resembling, or continuing the Sacrifice on the Cross is surely placing a stumbling-block in the path of many of our own people and upsetting, to a great degree, to our dissenting brethren.

A learned divine once said that allowances must be made for the extravagances of devotional utterances; true, but dare we ignore the teaching of history? Words spontaneously bursting forth from the lips of one who passionately loves Our Lord may be passed over, no matter how much they savour of hyperbole. We are not referring to these, but to the terms used in sermons, pamphlets and articles by preachers and teachers. The lamentable results of such or similar language were common in mediæval days, and because they lived in the midst of it and realized the source of the trouble, Cranmer and countless others perished by the most cruel torture rather than continue the use of this misleading terminology. Can such terms be used now without any practical errors following? All history is against such a complacent view. We are not thinking of the danger to our own people so much as the stumbling-block set in the way of reunion by terms which must be offensive to millions of Christians of other Communion. I wish to state clearly that I have the utmost sympathy with those who aim to teach our people to come to Church to make an offering of worship; I hold no brief for those who would treat the Sacrament as a mere form. The reality of spiritual things is a vital doctrine, especially nowadays. But when we endeavour to give sound teaching on these points, is it not a pity to use terms ambiguous, often misleading and certain to be a hindrance to reunion?

We are a favoured people, and in the forefront of our great blessings we should put the high calling to be the Church of Reconciliation. Our branch of the Catholic Church offers a common standing-ground for Christians of many kinds. It would be lamentable if, owing to the extravagant utterances and practices of some of our clergy, we should fail to achieve the very purpose for which, perhaps, our Church has been so long spared.