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THE LORD'S SUPPER

A BAPTIST STATEMENT

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FOREWORD

IN March, 1949, the General Purposes and Finance Committee of the Baptist Union requested the Principals' Conference to "draw up a Statement concerning the Communion Service, what it means to us, what principles are involved, and its proper observance, in order that our churches may have some guidance on this very important matter."

The Principals' Conference is usually attended also by the Tutors of the eight Baptist Theological Colleges in the United Kingdom. The Conference was therefore able to entrust the task of preparing the desired Statement to a Sub-Committee fully representative of the College Staffs, and under the Chairmanship of the late Dr. P. W. Evans.

The following Statement is in the main the work of that Committee. But it has been subjected in draft to the criticism of all the members of the Principals' Conference and, with the exception of one member, who dissents from the Statement in so far as it defends the Open Communion position, it is sent forward with their united approval. A second member of the Conference does not share the opinion expressed in the Statement that the Communion Service should not be broadcast.

The original intention had been to include in the Statement some suggestions for devotional reading and prayers. On further reflection, however, it was felt that the addition of this material would add seriously to the length of the Statement, and it has therefore been

thought advisable to postpone the issue of anything of this kind until a further opportunity arises.

The members of the Principals' Conference are very conscious of the responsibility which has rested upon them in preparing this Statement, and they have endeavoured to treat this important subject with the care which it deserves. They trust that, whatever the faults of the Statement may be, it will be found serviceable for the purpose for which it was desired, and that, by the Grace of God, it may help towards a better appreciation and observance of the Lord's Supper in our Baptist churches.

On behalf of the Principals' Conference,

R. L. CHILD,
Secretary.

JUNE, 1951.

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A BAPTIST STATEMENT

“God is dishonoured when His Word and Sacraments, etc. are unreverently used.”

John Smyth, *A Paterne of true Prayer.*

I. INTRODUCTION

THE service of Holy Communion, or—to use the term more familiar to Baptists—the Lord's Supper, is the crowning act of worship of the Christian Church. It focusses as no other does in one comprehensive activity the gracious approach of the Crucified and Risen Lord to His people, and their united and adoring response to Him in penitence and faith. It proclaims and makes effective to faith those central realities of the Gospel by which all Christians live. In spite, therefore, of widely different interpretations of its meaning, the Communion Service forms a bond of unity between Christians of immeasurable importance.

At the same time, however, it must be recognized that this rite is also the chief symbol of the disunity of Christians, for history shows that no tensions are harder to resolve than those which are centred in the Communion Service. Therefore the following pages have a double purpose. They are intended on the one hand to speak unambiguously about Baptists and to Baptists in their observance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But they envisage Baptist life in the wider setting of the Church Universal, and aim also at promoting under-

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standing and fellowship amongst Christians generally, to whatever part of the Church of Christ they belong.

As in the case of other Christian communions, Baptists are governed in their attitude to the Lord's Supper by their general conception of the nature of the Church. Their views upon this subject were expounded at length in a published statement approved by the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in March, 1948, and some paragraphs from that document will serve a useful introductory purpose.

Par. 2. "Although Baptists have for so long held a position separate from that of other communions, they have always claimed to be part of the one holy catholic Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. They believe in the catholic Church as the holy society of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, which He founded, of which He is the only Head, and in which He dwells by His Spirit, so that though manifested in many communions, organised in various modes, and scattered throughout the world, it is yet one in Him."

Par. 3*a*. "It is in membership of a local church in one place that the fellowship of the one holy catholic Church becomes significant. Indeed, such gathered companies of believers are the local manifestation of the one Church of God on earth and in heaven. . . . The vital relationship to Christ which is implied in full communicant membership in a local church carries with it membership in the Church which is both in time and in eternity, both militant and triumphant. To worship and serve in such a local Christian community is, for Baptists, of the essence of Churchmanship."

With these passages should also be read the following extracts from the later section dealing with the Sacraments:—

Par. 5. "We recognise the two sacraments of Believers' Baptism and the Lord's Supper as being of the Lord's

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ordaining. We hold that both are 'means of grace' to those who receive them in faith, and that Christ is really and truly present, not in the material elements, but in the heart and mind and soul of the believer and in the Christian community which observes the sacrament. Our confidence in this rests upon the promises of Christ and not upon any power bestowed on the celebrant in virtue of ordination or succession in ministry. We believe it is important not to isolate the sacraments from the whole action of divine grace, but to see them always in the context of the total activity of the worshipping, believing and serving fellowship of the church. . . .

The Lord's Supper is celebrated regularly in our churches. The form of service, which is 'congregational' and in which laymen have a part, preserves the New Testament conception of the Supper as an act of fellowship, a community meal. Yet as baptism is more than a dramatic representation of the facts of our redemption, so the Communion Service is more than a commemoration of the Last Supper and a showing forth 'of the Lord's death until He come.' Here the grace of God is offered and is received in faith; here the real presence of Christ is manifest in the joy and peace both of the believing soul and of the community; here we are in communion, not only with our fellow-members in the church, not only with the Church militant on earth and triumphant in heaven, but also with our risen and glorified Lord."

The following Statement may be regarded as an elaboration of the above sentences, in which we shall attempt to indicate the factors, both historical and theological, which have governed, and should govern, Baptist practice in the observance of the Communion Service.

II. BAPTIST PRACTICE

FOR the sake mainly of Christians who are not of our own tradition we will begin by describing briefly the way in which the Lord's Supper is observed today in

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Baptist churches in Great Britain. In both English and Welsh churches the service normally takes place on the first Sunday evening of the month at the close of the ordinary service of Public Worship. This practice is, however, by no means invariable. For example, for the benefit largely of aged members unable to attend evening worship, many churches observe the Lord's Supper also after morning worship on the third Sunday in the month. (In some churches the morning observance is the chief one.) A very few churches still maintain an old custom of holding once a year a special Communion Service in the afternoon. In Scotland (where Baptists are relatively few in number) most Baptist churches observe the Lord's Supper every Sunday morning, and this practice has recently been adopted also by some English churches. As we have said, however, the general Baptist practice is to observe the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday evening of each month, and it is usual then for a substantial proportion of the members of the church as well as other persons to be present. The attendance of church members is customarily recorded by means of communion cards, and frequent absence from the service normally leads to enquiry by the Minister and church officers.

A difference of practice exists among Baptists in Britain concerning those who are regarded as qualified to share in the Communion service, and more will be said about this later (see pages 30 ff.). Generally speaking, only those persons who are to partake of the Supper remain to the service. But a few Baptist churches have continued the tradition that the service is also intended to be a proclamation of the Gospel to others. (Cp. 1 Cor. xi, 26: "As often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He

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come").¹ Where this view is taken, those who are not yet professed disciples or members of the church may be encouraged to witness the service, although they do not receive the elements. In Strict Baptist churches and those which maintain a "closed Table", none but baptised believers are allowed to participate, and persons present from other churches wishing to take Communion may be asked for an assurance that they have been baptised and are in membership with a Baptist church. In other churches, the Table is regarded as "open" to all believers in Christ, and a public invitation to share in the observance is given to them in some such phrase as: "We invite 'all who love our Lord Jesus Christ' (or, 'members of other Christian churches') to join with us in this Service."

The Service is usually presided over by the pastor of the church. In his absence, or should there be no pastor, it is customary for the church to invite the person who has conducted public worship to preside also at the Lord's Table. In some cases this will be a layman. The significance of this will be discussed later (see page 44), but it should be remarked here that Baptist practice in this respect is not uniform. A number of churches still follow an early tradition according to which only an ordained minister conducts the Communion Service.² Generally speaking, however, Baptists believe that the church concerned has freedom, under Christ, to choose whom it will to officiate.

¹ See note on page 44.

² That this was the usual practice of General Baptists in the 17th and 18th centuries is evidenced by the following remarks of Andrew Fuller concerning a letter which he wrote in 1805 to a Baptist church in Edinburgh: "I told them that probably there were few of my brethren who might be of my mind; but I had

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The presiding minister sits at the Table with the deacons or elders of the church facing the congregation. The service begins with a hymn, or perhaps with prayer and introductory sentences. If there are any persons who have been accepted for church membership during the preceding month, the pastor will at this point welcome them by giving to them the right hand of fellowship (see page 48). He will also make reference to any church member who may recently have died. The Words of Institution are read, usually from 1 Corinthians xi, but sometimes from one of the accounts of the Last Supper in the gospels. They may be preceded or accompanied by other scriptural passages. Should the observance follow a session of public worship with a sermon, there will usually be no address. Prayers of confession, thanksgiving and consecration are offered, after which the minister hands the bread and wine to the deacons, who distribute them to the congregation, seated in their pews. (Nowadays, instead of the older common cup there are usually trays of small individual communion-glasses). After a period of silent prayer

long been of opinion that there was no scriptural authority for confining the administration of the Lord's Supper to a minister. I had no doubt but that the primitive pastors *did* preside at the Lord's Table, as well as in the reception and exclusion of members, and in short in all the proceedings of the church; and that, where there was a pastor, it was proper that he should continue to do so. But that when a pastor died, or was removed, the church was not obliged to desist from commemorating the Lord's death, any more than from receiving or excluding members; and that it was as lawful for them to appoint a deacon, or any senior member, to preside in the one case as in the other . . . Finally, I told them that it was not the practice of our English churches; that they, many of them, would send for the pastors of other churches to perform this office; and that I for one had often complied with such requests. I could wish, however, it were otherwise, and that every church, when destitute of a pastor, would attend to the Lord's supper *among themselves*." (*Works*, V. p. 285).

there will follow prayers for the Church Universal and for the communion of saints, an offering for the Poor Fund of the church, and perhaps some references by the pastor to events affecting the families or lives of the church-members (see page 49). The service ends with a hymn and the benediction.

III. INTERPRETATION

IN their interpretation of the Lord's Supper Baptists have, in general, followed the tradition of Reformed Christianity. But they have expressed that tradition historically in a variety of forms, partly because of practical reasons and the close relationship existing between doctrine and life, but even more because of the deep-rooted Baptist conviction that the truths of the Gospel can never be finally stereotyped in one form, but must be constantly construed afresh under the pressure of living experience, and the guidance of the Spirit of Truth. Consequently no description of Baptist doctrine as simply "Zwinglian" or "Calvinist" (to use the technical terms) would do justice to the facts. Our fathers differed from one another as we do now. And perhaps the best way to introduce a statement of the Baptist position today will be through a brief review of some characteristic statements from earlier years.

John Smyth, for example, in his last Confession (about 1610) writes as follows:—

"That in the outward supper which only baptised persons must partake there is presented and figured before the eyes of the penitent and faithful, that spiritual supper, which Christ maketh of His flesh and blood which is crucified and shed for the remission of sins (as the bread is broken and the wine poured forth), and which is eaten and drunken (as is the bread and wine bodily) only by those

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which are flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone; in the communion of the same spirit." (Par. 72.)

"That the outward baptism and supper do not confer and convey grace and regeneration to the participants or communicants; but as the word is preached, they serve only to support and stir up the repentance and faith of the communicants till Christ come, till the day dawn, and the day-star arise in their hearts." (Par. 73.)¹

A somewhat similar position is represented in the Particular Baptist Confession of 1677:—

"Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible Elements in this Ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of his death: the Body and Blood of *Christ*, being then not corporally, or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of Believers, in that Ordinance, as the Elements themselves are to their outward senses." (Chap. xxx, par. 7.)²

On the other hand to John Sutcliff, of Olney, (c. 1800), also a Particular Baptist, the Lord's Supper is "a standing memorial of Christ. When you see the table spread and are about to partake of the bread and wine, think you hear Christ saying 'Remember me.' Remember who he is. . . . Again: Remember what he has done. . . . Once more: Remember where he is and what he is doing. . . . As the great high priest over the house of God, he represents the persons of all his people, and presents their services, perfumed with much incense. . . . Especially in this ordinance there is a representation of the death of Christ."³

¹ *Vide E. A. Payne, Fellowship of Believers, page 52.*

It is interesting to observe that Smyth did not hesitate to use the term "Sacrament" in relation both to Baptism and to the Lord's Supper. He was followed in this by the General Baptists, but Particular Baptists early preferred the term "Ordinance".

² *Payne, op. cit. page 100.*

³ *ibid. page 56.*

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A purely memorialist view was, however, repudiated by Robert Hall, of Cambridge, who maintained (in 1815) that to consider the Lord's Supper as a mere commemoration

"is to entertain a very inadequate view of it. If we credit St. Paul it is also a *federal rite* in which, in token of our reconciliation with God, we eat and drink in his presence : it is a feast upon a sacrifice, by which we become partakers at the altar, not less really though in a manner more elevated and spiritual, than those who under the ancient economy presented their offerings in the temple. In this ordinance, the cup is a spiritual participation of the blood, the bread of the body of the crucified Saviour."

"It is first a feast upon a sacrifice, in which we are actual partakers by faith of the body and blood of the Redeemer offered upon the Cross. Considered in this view it is a *federal rite*, in which we receive the pledge of reconciliation, while we avouch the Lord to be our God, and surround his table as a part of his family. In its secondary import, it is intended as a solemn recognition of each other as members of Christ, and consequently in the language of St. Paul, 'as one body and one bread'."⁴

A Baptist leader of a later day, Dr. A. Maclaren, of Manchester, returned to the memorialist position by declaring, in 1884 :

"All our theories about the meaning and value of this Communion Service must be found within the four corners of that word . . . a memorial rite, and as far as I know, nothing more whatsoever."⁵

We conclude this brief historical survey with two interpretations of the Lord's Supper given by C. H. Spurgeon. The first is found in a sermon entitled *A Remembrance of Jesus*, preached in 1888, in which he

⁴ Payne, *op. cit.* page 57.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 58.

asserts that, in contrast to all Romanizing interpretations, Christians should observe the rite quite simply as a feast of the friends of Jesus who come together to remember Him.

“The pith and essence of your business at His Table is, ‘This do in remembrance of *me*’.” Yet more than historical recollection is involved. “Do not merely contemplate him as an historical personage who was once before men, and has now passed from off the canvas of history. . . . No; He ever liveth, and abideth an actual, ever-energetic force and power among men of every age. Jesus is of that divine nature which dwells perpetually in the present tense. . . .” Hence, Christians are to remember Christ at the Supper: with gratitude as their Saviour; with reverence as their living example and Lord; with confidence as their Strength; as their great Representative before the Throne of God; and lastly as soon to come. In all this “the chief point of remembrance is our Lord Jesus in his death. . . . His blood, his redemption, his atonement, his substitutionary sacrifice are always to be kept to the front.”⁶

In a subsequent sermon entitled *A Question for Communicants*, Spurgeon reiterates this view of the Supper as commemorative.

“Jesus has gone away. He who loved us better than any other ever loved us has left us for a while. . . . You come to the Communion Table then to remember your *absent Friend*.” But absence does not imply indifference. “He is doing you more good where he has gone than he could have done if he had stayed here. . . . He is pleading the causes of your soul.” And further: “You have to remember a Friend who will return very soon.”

Yet this too is only part of the truth. Through the broken bread and the poured wine the Supper is also an “exhibition” of the lifegiving sacrifice of Jesus. It is a “communion” with Christ so real that “we not only eat of his bread, but symbolically *we feast upon him*. . . . I believe in

⁶ vide *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, XXXIV, 2038.

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the real presence of Christ; I do not believe in the carnal presence of the Romanist. I believe in the real presence to the believer; but that reality is none the less real because it is spiritual." Finally, it should be noted, that communion also means that we are one with each other. "I cannot shake off from myself the idea that this makes up a large part of the meaning of the Lord's Supper, the communion of the saints with each other as well as the communion of the saints with Christ."⁷

The above statements are a fair illustration of the variety which has characterised Baptist interpretations of the Lord's Supper in the past. They could be paralleled today. With all their variety they confirm the fact that, along with the great majority of their Christian brethren, Baptists have always held the Lord's Supper to be an abiding privilege and obligation of the Church, and they still believe that its regular, reverent and orderly observance is required of us by our obedience to Christ.

As to its meaning for us today, we may summarily say that we view the ordinance as a solemn yet glad commemoration of our Lord's Passion and Victory—a commemoration which is not the less a festal occasion for being at the same time expressive of the bitter cost of our redemption. The unusual character of this Memorial Feast derives, not from any single feature of it taken alone, but from the presence within the service of a number of different elements which are inseparably conjoined to form a unity. The foundation of the whole is "the finished work of Christ", that is, the perfect sacrificial offering for the sin of man made once for all by the Son of God upon the Tree. The sufficiency of His offering for our redemption was attested by God in the Resurrection of Jesus, and in His enthronement

⁷ vide *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, XXXVIII, 2268.

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as Lord (Cp. Phil. ii, 6ff.) It will be finally demonstrated at the Last Day (Cp. Luke xxii, 16). This is our Gospel—a Gospel which is preached afresh with all its gracious power wherever the Lord's Supper is observed. To the continual re-proclamation of the Gospel through the Supper we believe we are committed by the command of our Master Himself ("This do in remembrance of me", 1 Corinthians xi, 24); and in so doing we rest in the assurance of His Living Presence ("Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them", Matthew xviii, 20). Finally, through the lively faith and obedience of God's assembled people, the Holy Spirit who inspires their worship takes the things of Christ and makes them their possession. ("He shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine and shall declare it unto you", John xvi, 14).

These are the spiritual realities presupposed in the observance of the Supper. But there are joined with them also a number of other elements which, although of lesser import, are nevertheless extremely significant. These are (1) the symbolism inherent in the characteristic actions of the Supper, i.e. the breaking of the bread, the pouring of the wine, the distribution of the elements to the seated congregation, and the offering of their gifts; (2) the existence of an historical link with the Church of all the ages, and with the Last Supper in the Upper Room (Mark xiv, 17f.); and (3) the wealth of associations, past and present, which are connected with the rite, and which lend to it an ever-increasing worth and meaning for persons who regularly share in it. To these must be added, finally, the fact that the relative infrequency with which (as we have seen) most Baptist churches observe the Sacrament has in practice the

effect of focussing attention upon it, and thus of heightening the importance and solemnity of the occasion.

This Act of solemn remembrance cannot therefore in our judgment be dismissed as "bare memorialism". Baptists reject entirely the notion that any change of substance takes place in the bread and wine as the result of consecration. The elements remain what they were, and are not "transubstantiated" into the Body and Blood of our Lord. Nor do we believe that the Body and Blood of Christ are conjoined to, or present in, or associated with the elements in such a way that he who receives the bread and the wine thereby necessarily receives also the very Body and Blood of the Redeemer. The need for protesting against such erroneous ideas has no doubt been responsible in part for the recurrent Baptist view which we have already noted, that the service is primarily a "memorial". But in associating ourselves with this protest, we express our emphatic dissent from any interpretation which would make the Communion service simply a token and memorial of our Lord's Passion and Death.⁸ These are most certainly commemorated. But they are set forth in this service after such a manner and in such a context as make the Supper to the believing recipient not only commemorative but

⁸ According to Dr. Wheeler Robinson it is a mistake to suppose that such a view was wholly characteristic even of Zwingli: "there was a recognition of mystical union with Christ in Zwingli's teaching which did not find full expression in his controversies" (*Life and Faith of the Baptists*, p. 118n.). Compare the following passage in Zwingli's Confession addressed to King Francis: "We believe that Christ is truly present in the Lord's Supper; yea, that there is no communion without such presence . . . We believe that the true body of Christ is eaten in the Communion, not in a gross and carnal manner, but in a spiritual and sacramental manner, by the religious believing and pious heart."

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also communicative. For we believe that Jesus Christ Himself is really present. He takes the service into His hands, and makes it the medium through which He communes with His people, and gives Himself afresh to them (Cp. Luke xxiv, 30). The Supper is thus truly a means of grace—a special means of grace, but not, be it noted, a means of special grace. The grace is that of our Lord Jesus Christ, and differs in no respect from that which is given through the preaching of the Word, or in prayer, or in other ways. The peculiar efficacy of the Communion service lies rather, as we have already said, in its unique combination of many different factors which, being conjoined by the power of the Holy Spirit, endow this occasion with special potency in the life of the Church and its members.

The position summarised above may perhaps be better grasped if we now set out in more detail the various aspects of truth which are embodied in the service. But it should be understood in advance that no interpretation can exhaust the meaning of the Lord's Supper. There are undertones and overtones in the service which are beyond the power of words to convey, although not beyond the capacity of faith to apprehend. And if we are to understand in any measure the secret of its power we must seek it not in any rational exposition, nor in an exclusive emphasis upon any one feature—not even the bread and wine—but rather in the whole service taken as a living unity, and forming a unique "sacramental occasion" within the context of the Church of Christ. It is the complex of ideas and memories, of associations, emotions and traditions—above all, of significant words and actions—which provides, along with the bread and the wine, the "elements" of the service, and it is as

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these are fused into a living whole and consecrated by the Holy Spirit that they become to believing participants a special medium for the disclosure and apprehension of the Living Christ.

First, the Lord's Supper is a service of Remembrance. It calls to mind Him who "in the night in which he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he brake it and said, This is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians xi, 23f.). Gethsemane and Calvary are brought again to view, and their all-important events impressed afresh upon the mind of the believer. Yet now in a different setting. For the Communion service brings us as worshippers face to face with our Lord, not as belonging only to the distant past, but as One who through suffering and death triumphed over all the forces of evil, and "ever liveth to make intercession" for us (Hebrews vii, 25). As the familiar Communion hymn says:

Around a table, not a tomb,
He willed our gathering-place to be.

The Head of the Church is Himself present as Host to welcome the members of the household of faith. The Supper with its traditional symbols is of the Lord's appointing. It speaks of the Saviour. And as we participate in it, we are put once more in remembrance of Him whose love first spread this feast, and now gathers us to it in holy fellowship.

Such remembrance embodies also a Proclamation. In the act of breaking the bread and pouring the wine, we are confronted afresh with the glorious yet infinitely costly fact of our redemption in the Person of Jesus. Here is set forth again to the eye of faith the agony and bloody sweat, the scourging and the nails. The instru-

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ment of our salvation was—and is—a Cross. And in the Supper of the Lord we behold the Saviour crucified both in time and in eternity. We proclaim anew the eternal reality of His suffering and redeeming love.

If these are the spiritual facts which confront us as worshippers when we present ourselves at the Lord's Table, they demand from us a characteristic response. The Communion service is not a spectacle. It is a drama in which the people of Christ severally and corporately are inescapably involved. So the Lord's Supper must be a service of self-examination and repentance, of confession and of judgment. This is the time when, sorrowfully remembering our offences against one another and against God, we should lay our lives unreservedly open to the judgment of Christ, and seek anew His pardon and His peace. Our aim must be not merely to commemorate the death of Christ as a past fact, but so to identify ourselves by faith with our Lord in His death that at all costs we come to share His present mind about our sin, and are reconciled by Him afresh to God. This is the prior and indispensable condition of worthy participation, and it is also the pledge of God's forgiveness and blessing (1 Corinthians xi, 27f.; cp. 1 John i, 8f.).

When approached in this spirit, the service is truly a "sacrament", for then its actions and words become to us "the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace"—even the grace of Christ given and received through costly personal encounter with Him. As to the mode in which this happens, we must frankly confess that at this point language breaks down. Yet although faith trembles at such words as those which St.

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John uses about "eating the flesh" and "drinking the blood" of the Son of Man (John vi, 53f.), in reality no other language but this will serve. For the sober truth is that, in the Communion service, we do feed upon Christ. We have communion with Him as the Fount of our new life. Further, we are enjoined by Scripture to believe that we also have communion with one another as the Lord's people. Christians have been baptised by one Spirit into one Body (1 Corinthians xii, 13). And as we commemorate together the Saviour's dying love, and share in the communion of His Body and Blood, His Spirit draws us together more deeply into the fellowship of His Life. (Cp. 1 Corinthians x, 17).

In this connection there is much help to be gained from the idea of Sacrifice, when used with due care. Baptists repudiate any notion of repeating, or adding to, the one perfect and all-sufficient offering for the sins of mankind made by our Saviour upon the Cross. But this does not blind us to the fact that, in remembering at the Lord's Table the eternal self-offering of Christ to God on our behalf, we are truly proclaiming anew His sacrifice for the sin of the world. We plead afresh the merits of Him "Who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God" (Hebrews ix, 14). So we rejoice still to sing with Isaac Watts :

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain :

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our guilt away;
A sacrifice of nobler name,
And richer blood than they.

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Such language, moreover, points beyond itself to a further deeply impressive thought. As has already been said, in receiving the bread and the wine we should be seeking to be united with Christ both in His death to sin, and in the perfection of that higher Manhood which He achieved through His death. Yet, to say that, means that we are called to make of our lives such an offering to God as Jesus made of His (Cp. Romans xii, 1). We cannot do this by our own power or in our own right. But the Communion service shows us the way, and gives us the necessary help. For as we remember there the perfect sacrifice and offering made eternally by our Lord, we are allowed, if we will, so to identify ourselves by faith with Him in what He does on our behalf that even our imperfect offering is transformed, and being taken up into the perfection of His, is made acceptable and well-pleasing to God. Is not this indeed what our Communion Offerings should proclaim? They are not simply monetary contributions to the work of the church. They are "dedicated" gifts, that is to say, they are, or should be, the vehicle of our praise and gratitude to God,—a gratitude which finds a fitting mode of expression in this way, yet which in the end can stop short of nothing less than the dedication of our whole life to the service of God.

All that has so far been said lends support to the view that the Lord's Supper is a "Covenant-rite". There is good ground in the New Testament for believing that the Last Supper was such (Matthew xxvi, 28; 1 Corinthians xi, 25). And Baptists believe that in the recurring observance of the Communion service there is a perpetual renewing of the Lord's covenant with His people, and so of our covenant with Him and with one

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another. Some of our Baptist churches have the good custom of periodically renewing at the Lord's Table a written Church Covenant. Yet even where this is not done, the character of the service calls upon us to renew our vows to our Lord, and pledges us to love and serve and pray for one another as members of His Body. The service is indeed the "Sacrament of Reconciliation" (to use Bishop Wilson's words) reconstituting the flock of Christ in covenant-relationship with its Head.

Finally, the Lord's Supper is not seen in its true significance except in the setting both of Time and of Eternity. Of Time, because the service commemorates Him who suffered under Pontius Pilate, and who rose again to become the Head of the Church of God on earth. But also of Eternity, because our fellowship is not only with the Church on earth, but also with the "general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Hebrews xii, 23). At the Lord's Table, therefore, remembering the Saviour's Presence, we should strive to realise our oneness with those who sit with us there, ridding our hearts of all resentment and bitterness, and seeking opportunity actively to strengthen our fellowship with them. But we should also recall the bond that unites us in Christ with all the people of God, and not least with those who are sundered from us by distance or by ecclesiastical divisions. We should pray both for our friends and for our enemies. And, remembering those who have "fallen asleep in Christ", we should affirm afresh that God is not the God of the dead but of the living, and that all live unto Him. In this way the service will become a true "communion of saints", ever more fully charged with the spirit of solemn gladness and hope. For while we rejoice now in every

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remembrance of the riches of Christ, we shall learn increasingly to see in the earthly celebration the faint reflection and foretaste of that great Day of the Lord when all powers shall be subject to Him, and the People of Christ will feast with Him at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation xix, 9).

It is with such thoughts as these that we as Baptists would seek to approach and observe the Communion of the Lord's Supper. In so doing we know ourselves to be at one with the Church Universal in a supreme act of Worship, and are constrained to join with all the saints in the ancient eucharistic hymn—

“With angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious Name, evermore praising Thee and saying: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, Heaven and earth are full of Thy Glory. Glory be to Thee, O Lord, Most High.”

IV. SOME PRACTICAL ISSUES

TURNING now to some of the practical questions which arise in connection with the Lord's Supper, we would affirm at the outset that it is fundamental to recognise that the Christian Church is the trustee of the Supper, and not its possessor. We inherit a sacred rite which goes back, we believe, to our Lord Himself. It was He who, in the Upper Room, on the night in which He was betrayed, broke bread and gave it to His disciples. And as today we remember Him in this appointed way, we gladly acknowledge His authority, and yield ourselves afresh to His will. Consequently, no mode of observing the Lord's Supper can be justified to the Christian conscience which is out of harmony with the mind of

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Christ. It is the more essential to remember this because, when we search the New Testament to discover the mind of Christ about the Communion service, we are perplexed by some insoluble questions. The main fact is, we believe, clear. Jesus enjoined the observance of the Supper as a memorial feast. But He seems to have been content to leave unsaid much that now deeply concerns us, preferring instead to give us the all-sufficient assurance that He would be with His people to the end. The importance of this will be evident if we ask ourselves the simple question: "To whom did Jesus entrust the duty of observing the Supper?" Most Christians would unhesitatingly answer: "To His Church". But today there are many churches; and if we accept that answer, it can only be on the assumption that we are using the word "Church" in its largest and most inclusive sense, i.e. as meaning the fellowship of "all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity". Any other interpretation is really intolerable, for we cannot simply mean that Jesus gave His Supper to our own particular church, or to "the kind of church we believe in". To say that, would involve us in the impossible conclusion that other churches have no right to use the Communion service at all. Therefore we are obliged to say that Jesus left the Supper as a trust to all His disciples in every age. The proper discharge of that trust obliges individual churches to make certain rules governing its observance. But such rules can never be purely arbitrary. They are subject to the overriding consideration that the Supper is and remains the Supper of the Lord. It belongs to all the Churches and to all Christians—but only in so far as they are seeking to live in fellowship with Him and with one another. To

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suppose otherwise would be a contradiction of all that the Supper itself stands for.

With these considerations in mind, we shall now discuss some of the issues that are involved in the use made by Baptists of the Lord's Supper.

(1) *The relation of the Lord's Supper to Church Membership*

Since the observance of Holy Communion is, ultimately, as we have already said, the responsibility of the Church (however that may be organised), anything that tends to weaken its connection with church-membership must be viewed with grave concern. Regular attendance is of vital importance, and we urge ministers to instruct their people as to the sacred claims of the Lord's Supper upon them, and to encourage them to see in the Communion service a festal gathering of Jesus Christ and His people of such compelling authority that no member should be absent without adequate cause. Whether or not a register of attendance be kept, based upon the use of Communion cards, the aim should be to inculcate such a spirit of loyalty to Christ and to the Church as will constrain regular and willing attendance.

In some "Open Communion"¹ Baptist churches the practice has grown up of placing on a special "Communicants Roll" the names of persons who, while not members of the church, are nevertheless permitted on various grounds to attend regularly at the Lord's Table. This is a custom which we do not feel called upon to discuss in detail now, as this would carry us too far from our main purpose. But we wish to say that, in so far as a Communicants Roll of this kind witnesses to the

¹ See explanation of this term on page 30.

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truth upon which we have already insisted, namely, that the Lord's Supper is not the private possession of any one church, but is a privilege enjoyed by all Christians, there seems to us to be a measure of justification for the practice. But its value is at best very limited, and we think it definitely undesirable that registration on a Communicants Roll should come to be regarded as a permanent substitute for a place on the Church Roll, and indeed as virtually equivalent to it. In short, the effort should not lightly be abandoned to persuade (or to enable) all communicants to take their place within the membership of the Church.

As far as young people are concerned, we think that they should rarely be permitted to present themselves at the Lord's Table before they have joined the Church. There are exceptions, and we shall speak later of certain special occasions upon which young people who are not yet members of any church may perhaps be invited to attend a Communion service. But the Church's regular Communion service should normally be regarded as a privilege reserved for avowed Christians. Participation in it ought not on any account to be taken for granted. And if young people are taught to look forward to their first Communion as crowning their reception into full membership of the Church, we think that they will be more likely to value the privilege aright than if they had been encouraged to attend prematurely.

It is not customary among Baptists to "fence" the Lord's Table in any formal manner against unworthy participation, although it should be mentioned that the Welsh churches generally hold a preparatory service during the week preceding the Communion Sunday, at which matters of discipline figure. Otherwise, reliance

is placed rather upon the effect of the solemn exhortations and warnings which follow the words of institution of the Supper, and are frequently read with them. (Cp. 1 Corinthians xi, 27-29: "Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself . . ."). Yet there are times when, a church member having been found guilty of a grave fault, unusual disciplinary action is called for. In such circumstances it is right that the church should consider whether or not the person concerned should be excluded for a period from the Lord's Table. The subject is one which space does not allow us to pursue further here. But we would remark that such a step is so serious that it should not be taken without the authority of the Church Meeting, and only after most prayerful preliminary consideration.

(2) "Open" and "Close" Communion

These terms relate to a difference of conviction and practice among Baptists which has a long history. The point at issue should not be confused with the question of "Open" and "Close" Church Membership, although this, too, is often, directly or indirectly, involved. The Communion issue turns upon the question whether a particular church is ready to give an "open" invitation to all Christians to partake of the Lord's Supper, or whether it "closes" the Table to any persons other than those who have been baptised on profession of faith. The question was discussed with admirable candour and sympathy in the report of the special Committee appointed by the Baptist Union on

the question of Reunion between Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians, which was published in 1937, and we refer those who wish for fuller information to that document. For our present purpose it will suffice to quote the statements made in that Report on behalf of Baptists representing the two different points of view. Those in favour of "Open Communion", after referring to the obligation under which some of them felt to restrict Church membership to persons baptised on confession of faith, went on to say: "We do not conceive ourselves to be at liberty to lay down any such requirements as a condition of access to the Holy Communion when it is observed by us. For our invitation, nay our duty (as we think) to admit our fellow-believers to the Table of our Lord, is based upon and presupposes not oneness of membership in one visible organisation, but oneness of membership in Christ, and we do not think ourselves at liberty to assert that another is not in Christ merely because he has not been baptised either at all or according to our understanding of the rite. We should feel guilty of an exclusiveness contrary to our understanding of the Gospel if we refused to welcome another believer to the Lord's Table, because our action could only be justified upon the assumption that we were not prepared to treat him as belonging to the true or universal Church, i.e., to the Body of Christ." (p. 20).

On the other hand, the advocates of "Close Communion" regarded the question of admittance to the Lord's Table as inseparable from the Church status of the persons concerned. "To us Holy Communion is a Church ordinance to be partaken of by Church members. We see no evidence in the New Testament

of any being admitted to Holy Communion who were not Church members and baptised as believers. We consider it our duty to abide by the correct practice and pure doctrine of those who learnt directly of the Master. Other Churches also restrict Membership and Communion to those they deem baptised persons, and this is our practice, and so, holding that baptism of believers is the New Testament baptism, we cannot admit to Membership or to Communion any but those who have been baptised on profession of belief. This to us is not a matter of choice, but a fixed and unshakable conviction that has cost us dearly. We know that to some it has the appearance of intolerance or narrow-mindedness, but we believe that we are simply carrying out and obeying the instructions, example and laws of Christ, and that we are honouring both ordinances by observing them in the place and order that He Himself gave them. We deny the right of any person or institution to cancel what Christ established. Whatever feelings or opinions we may have as to personal friends, neighbours, relatives according to the flesh and members of other Christian Churches, we dare not set these feelings and opinions against the wisdom and authority of Jesus Christ. To us Open Communion and Open Membership are in principle the same, and are serious departures from the practice of the primitive Church." (pp. 22ff.).

These statements speak for themselves. We record them as expressing that liberty of conscience which we believe to be one of the most precious gifts of the Gospel, and we conclude that as no uniformity exists among Baptists in this matter, so neither should any attempt be made to impose it upon them. They are finally answerable not to one another but to their Master. Neverthe-

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less, there are two comments which we feel compelled to make. The first is, that so long as we Baptists are divided thus among ourselves upon this question, we have no right to criticise other Christian Denominations which are not able to authorise immediate intercommunion among all Christians. In this, as in other matters affecting the life of the Church, closer unity is an achievement of slow growth. We must be patient with one another as brethren in Christ, for any attempt to ignore or override honest conviction would be wrong, and bound in the long run to defeat the end in view.

Secondly, we are constrained to raise the question whether the maintenance of a "closed Table" is not fundamentally incompatible with the general position regarding the Lord's Supper which we have outlined above. We believe that, although there is no statement on the point in the New Testament, our brethren who belong to "Close Communion" churches are undoubtedly right in maintaining that membership of the Christian Church (and therefore presumably participation in the Lord's Supper), seems in the earliest days to have been confined to persons who were baptised upon profession of faith. We honour the sincerity and earnestness of those who have contended for this aspect of the truth, sometimes under very great difficulties. We believe the Church of Christ today would be infinitely poorer had it not been for their witness.

But that is not the issue before us now. The urgent question today is: How are we to treat those Christians who differ from us on this matter, yet who plainly love our Lord Jesus Christ and seek to extend His Kingdom? After 1900 years of Christian history it is impossible to maintain that God has owned and blessed only one

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particular type of Church order, or one particular form of ministry. We know that that is not so, and that multitudes of Christian men and women who have not received believers' baptism but were christened in infancy have yet manifested in their lives those fruits of the Spirit which our Lord has told us are the real test of Christian discipleship. (Matthew vii, 15-20). We already work with such as Christian brethren, and we cannot but believe that God has accepted them as true members of the Church of Christ. What right therefore have we to deny them access to the Table of the Lord? God has placed us, in fact, in a situation not unlike that in which St. Peter was placed by the—to him—disturbing discovery that God was bringing into the Church persons whom he had been taught to regard as unfit (Acts 10). He hesitated at first as to what he should do. Yet he was constrained at length to recognise a leading of the Spirit of God which he could not but obey, and so to welcome those whom God had called. Surely he was right. And ought not we similarly to say now, first, that the Lord's Table belongs to Christ alone, and secondly that we therefore welcome to it in His Name all who sincerely love Him, no matter to what branch of His Church they may belong?

We fully recognise that many of our brethren would find this decision a very difficult one to make. But we ask them to believe that we speak in love, and we plead that they will prayerfully review this important issue afresh in the light of the facts to which we have called attention. In any case, we invite those who continue conscientiously to maintain a "closed Table" to consider whether, in the case of persons who might otherwise be unprovided for, they could not make an exception, and

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waive their rule in order that such might be given an opportunity of sharing in the fellowship of the Lord's Table.

(3) *Occasional Observances*

The normal practice of most of our Baptist churches is, as we have seen, to hold a Communion service at fortnightly or monthly intervals as part of their regular worship. But it is doubtful whether the observance of the Lord's Supper amongst Baptists has ever been exclusively confined to such occasions, and it is certainly not so confined today. There are many other occasions besides those mentioned at which it is becoming a frequent practice for a special Communion service to be held. It will suffice to cite the following examples: An eight o'clock service on Easter Day; at the ordination of a new Minister; at Association meetings; in connection with the Baptist Union Assembly; at Conferences, Summer Schools, Camps, and the like, as well as in Colleges, Student Societies and some Public Schools. (In addition, our people not infrequently take part in joint Communion services such as those arranged by a Free Church Council). These occasional observances of the Lord's Supper may be roughly classified according to the degree of their connection with a church. Thus an Easter Morning Communion service arranged by a particular church, or one intended specially for its Sunday School teachers, obviously stands in a different category from a service in connection with the Baptist Union, or an Association Assembly, where those taking part will be members of many different churches. It will differ still more from one arranged in connection

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with a Conference, where perhaps some of those present may not be members of any church.

At first glance therefore, it might seem that the circumstances in which occasional observances take place are so varied as to offer little hope of discovering any general principles governing them. Yet we believe that that is not so, and that in fact the right line of approach to most, if not all, of the issues involved has already been indicated in the recognition given above to the wealth of meaning hidden in the word "Church". This cannot be exhausted by any single interpretation of the word. From what has been said earlier about the Baptist conception of the Church it will be obvious that Baptists could not possibly accept the notion that the name is applicable only to Christian societies which are organised on an episcopal model. Yet neither would they fly to the other extreme, and apply the term "Church" to any and every assembly of Christians. Their own "Gathered churches" are not mere ad hoc collections of individuals. They are stable Christian communities, organised for the regular preaching of the Word, and the due administration of the Sacraments and discipline of the Gospel. Thus they have a measure of continuity and permanence which is not possessed by other Christian groups which meet only from time to time, and have no continuing identity. They stand on their own feet, and are to be distinguished both from the Baptist Denomination as a whole, and from such intermittent gatherings as an Association Assembly, a Baptist Summer School, or the Baptist Union Council. Admittedly, these other groups also meet together in Christ's name, and in the interests of the Master's work. We believe that they too, have His promised presence

in their midst. But we do not think that in the New Testament sense they can be described as *churches*. Nor should they be treated as such.

The question may therefore quite properly be asked: "What justification have such occasional assemblies as those we have mentioned for observing the Lord's Supper?" If the Communion service was indeed entrusted, as we have already contended, to the care of the Church, is it right that Christian gatherings which are not churches should make use of it? This is a very important question not only for us, but also for our sister Churches, since there is a real danger lest, in seeking greater freedom in the use of the Sacrament of the Supper, we should end by abusing it. In fact, a justifiable concern on this score is not the least weighty of the reasons which constrain some branches of the Christian Church to refuse to countenance joint services of Holy Communion at interdenominational conferences.

Nevertheless, while fully recognising that there are dangers involved, we cannot bring ourselves to believe that, granted the fulfilment of conditions which we shall shortly define, the holding of occasional Communion services of the kind referred to is to be condemned out of hand. It is true that a Christian assembly may not constitute "a church" in the full sense of the word. Yet in so far as it is meeting in the name of Christ, and for the furtherance of His Kingdom amongst men, it has what may be called a "churchly" character. Its authority derives from Him Who said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them". Such a gathering represents a real manifestation of "The Church" in the large general sense which we have already recognised. It is a "fellow-

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ship of the Spirit", to use Paul's phrase, of the kind which he associated with the presence and grace of Christ (Phil. ii, 1; cp. 2 Cor. 13, 14).

If this be granted, then there seems to us to be not merely no objection in principle to such a Christian assembly observing the Lord's Supper, but every reason why, in certain circumstances, it should take liberty to do so. The Lord Jesus Christ appears to have appointed the Supper in order that through it He might draw the members of His Church into fuller communion with Himself, and consequently into closer relationship with one another. We know of no warrant in Scripture for forbidding the use of the Supper for this purpose in settings other than that of a particular local church, and we regard it as of the essence of Christian freedom to insist upon this. At the same time, it is extremely important to guard against abuse. And therefore we would now call special attention to certain qualifying conditions which in our judgment ought to be observed :

(a) The proposed gathering should be of a kind that makes it specially fitting that those present should profess their Christian faith and obedience in an act of corporate worship at the Lord's Table, thus sealing their fellowship with one another in Christ.

(b) Any occasion upon which it is desired to hold a special Communion service should possess in its own right a certain solemn and festal character, to the celebration of which the Lord's Supper is plainly appropriate. It does not necessarily follow that such an occasion will recur only at very rare intervals. But the festal character attaching to the service is most likely to be preserved if too frequent repetition of it is avoided.

(c) No individual as such ought to assume as of right the task of arranging or conducting a Communion service.

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That is primarily a matter for the church to decide. In the absence of church authorisation, it is fitting that someone occupying a representative position in the church should take the initiative.

(d) However inclusive may be the invitation given to participate in the Communion service, it presupposes in those who come an attitude of repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who propose to attend should therefore be affectionately but seriously warned that without such earnest preparation they have no right of access to the Lord's Table, and that participation in the service would be for them a sin.

Bearing the foregoing considerations in mind, it seems to us that the holding of a special Communion service is clearly justified on the occasion, for example, of an Association Assembly. We believe the same would also be true in the case of the Baptist Union Assembly, provided it were possible to secure the conditions necessary for a reverent administration of the rite.² In the case of a particular section of workers within a church (such as Sunday School teachers), there may occasionally be good reasons for holding a special Communion service for them. But it ought to be pointed out that, if sectional observances of this kind were to become general, their effect would be to impair rather than to foster the unity of the church within which they were held. For this reason we doubt whether such observances should be encouraged as a general policy. Finally, the holding of a Communion service at Boarding Schools, Young People's Conferences, Summer

² We are not, however, satisfied that there is the same justification for holding a separate Communion service prior to, but apart from, the Baptist Union Meetings, since that does not seem to us to fulfil the conditions laid down above. (The same objection could not be raised against a Communion service for the members of the Baptist Union Council, if such were desired).

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Schools and the like, should never be taken for granted, but should be regarded as a matter of high policy which ought to be reviewed from time to time in the light of experience, and at the most responsible level.³

The case of conferences and assemblies such as those connected with the World Council of Churches and other interdenominational bodies raises greater difficulties than any of those already cited, since it involves other branches of the Christian Church besides our own. Any general solution must obviously depend upon mutual agreement, and we have no wish here to anticipate the results of the discussions on inter-communion evoked by the recent Report, *Church Relations in England*, or the Report on *Inter-Communion* now being prepared by the Faith and Order Department of the World Council of Churches. We can only reiterate the conviction expressed above that the Lord's Supper does not belong to any one church or denomination, nor to all of them taken together. It belongs first of all to Christ, and then, under Him, it belongs to the whole company of His people. Therefore, we cannot but think it right that His Table should be open to all who sincerely love Him. And, subject to the conditions we have already indicated, we see no reason why Christians of all branches of His Church should not sit down together at the Lord's Table.

We conclude that it is impossible to furnish hard and fast rules by which to determine the legitimacy or otherwise of holding a Communion service in any and every instance. The Church's final authority in such matters

³ We are glad to hear that it is customary at the B.M.S. Summer Schools to "fence" the Table in the way described above, and also to advise young people attending for the first time to tell their own minister about it immediately upon their return home.

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does not lie in rules, but in the mind of Christ, from Whom those concerned must seek guidance. But we hope that the considerations we have advanced will serve to emphasize the need for due care, and also supply criteria which may be of assistance in arriving at a right decision in circumstances such as those referred to above.

(4) *Communion for the Sick*

The case of invalids and other persons who are prevented by sickness or age from sharing in the sacraments of the Church falls into a category of its own, and is universally recognised as calling for special consideration. In not a few instances churches and their ministers make provision for the needs of such persons by arranging for the Lord's Supper to be observed in their homes. The theological justification for this is not quite on all fours with that which we have advanced in the case of occasional observances in general. It might indeed be rightly contended that since a group of Christians meeting for prayer in a sick room are assured of the Presence of Christ in their midst, they would therefore be at liberty, within the general limits we have laid down, to observe the Lord's Supper. But the special purpose of a House Communion for the sick or aged is in order that they may have sacramental communion with Christ within the fellowship of the church of which they are members. We think, therefore, that such services should be viewed as in the nature of an extension of the Church communion service rather than as isolated observances. The pastor himself, or, in his absence, some duly appointed person, should conduct the service, and two or three church officers or members should also be present, representing the church fellowship.

(5) *Broadcasting the Communion Service*

The question whether a Baptist church should give permission for the broadcasting of its Communion service (either for audition or for television), raises an entirely different set of considerations from the cases already discussed. The proposal is calculated to evoke initial interest and sympathy on the part of many Christians, inasmuch as both the nature of the Gospel and the duty of a Christian seem to rebuke any reluctance on the part of a church to give the widest publicity to her services of worship. Nor ought we willingly to withhold from persons confined to their homes any consolation and strength that might legitimately be made available for them in this way. Nevertheless, we cannot bring ourselves to believe that the broadcasting of the Communion service should be encouraged. Even if one were prepared to accept the contention that, for the purposes of a Broadcast service, the congregation should be regarded as consisting not only of those present in church, but also of believing listeners wherever they may be, that would not carry us very far. For although it might then be held that Christ is present in the whole body of worshippers, visible and invisible, yet the specific character of the Lord's Supper lies in the fact that the worshippers *eat and drink together* in the manner appointed by Christ. No complete participation in the Lord's Supper is therefore possible without an actual sharing of the Bread and Wine. The effort to communicate this experience by wireless to absent listeners may achieve a very high level of technical efficiency.⁴ Yet the attempt must fail, just as a printed

⁴ The difficulty of broadcasting a prolonged period of silence still remains.

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account of the service must fail, and for the same reason, namely, because the medium of communication cannot carry the load placed upon it. No transmitter can ever admit listeners or viewers to a share in the all-important actions of the Supper.

It is not in our judgment an adequate answer to this criticism to say that in spite of this difficulty the effort should still be made, in order that those interested may at least, by these means, get such spiritual edification as is possible. For experience shows that this cannot be done in broadcasting without affecting the character of the central service itself in a way that we regard as indefensible. The actual process of broadcasting always introduces into a religious service a distracting element which, however innocent in itself, is not conducive to worship. This is inevitable; and if a church decides nevertheless to have its public services broadcast, the justification lies in the greater range of influence which broadcasting always confers. But the Communion service stands on a different footing. The Lord's Supper is not a public service of worship. It is, as we have seen, a covenant-rite of the Church, the aim of which is to exalt Christ, and to bring Christians into communion with their Crucified and Risen Saviour through sharing in the bread and wine which set Him forth. Visitors may attend. But they would certainly not be permitted to do so if they ventured in any way to intrude upon the solemn character of the service. And since the apparatus of broadcasting can never—in this setting—be other than an intrusion, it stands self-condemned. In short, we cannot think it right to sacrifice the primary purpose of the Communion service in the interests of persons who are not present. The

Church would be wiser to try and provide for their needs in other and more appropriate ways.⁵

(6) *The place of Laymen in the administration of the Lord's Supper*

The question, what part laymen should play in the conduct of the Lord's Supper commonly arises in Baptist churches today in one of two ways. First, many small churches are without pastoral oversight, and necessarily depend greatly upon the services of laymen for the conduct of public worship and the administration of the sacraments. Secondly, there is the fact that, although the tradition is not now as strong as it used to be, many Baptist churches have long been accustomed to ask a layman (generally, though not invariably, a deacon), to assist the minister by offering one of the prayers at the Communion Table. Both practices are apt, for various reasons, to come under criticism today, and we desire therefore to say something about them.

In the first place, we wish to make it absolutely clear that, granted the truth of the Baptist doctrine of the Church to which we find ourselves continually driven back, there can be no objection whatever on grounds of principle to a layman taking precisely the same part as a minister in the conduct of the Lord's Supper. That point is fundamental to our position, and is not in question. The real issue is, not whether the person who conducts the Lord's Supper or offers prayer is a minister

⁵ Appeal is sometimes made to 1 Corinthians xi, 26, in an endeavour to prove that St. Paul thought of the Lord's Supper as essentially a preaching service. But this is surely to strain the meaning of the verb *katangellein* in this passage. The analogy of the Passover (cp. Exod. 13-8) suggests rather that it is those sharing in the service who are to be put in mind of its true significance.

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or a layman, but whether he has been authorised to do this by the church concerned. The pastor possesses that authorisation by virtue of his office, and when he is present the responsibility of leadership is upon his shoulders. But where there is no pastor, or when he is absent, then we believe that the church is free under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to appoint whom it will to act temporarily as its minister. In such circumstances, the person appointed—whether he be a deacon, a church member, or a visiting minister—becomes for the time being a minister of Christ to that church, and enjoys the necessary authority to act on His behalf.

In practice, however, the position is not quite as straightforward as this suggests. The Lord's Supper is a service of worship of quite exceptional importance to all concerned. It requires a correspondingly high standard in its administration. And experience proves that the reverent and fitting conduct of a Communion service, and the offering of public prayer, call for a combination of qualities of mind and character which are not by any means common. Therefore, we need not be altogether surprised if churches sometimes express a preference for a trained minister to conduct their Communion service, even though they may welcome lay help for other purposes. Certainly no good purpose can be served by denying their right to do so.

Nevertheless, the matter should not be allowed simply to rest there. Churches may come to lean too heavily upon their pastor, and forget that the service of Christ in His Church is not limited to the regular ministry. In most churches there are persons who will probably never become trained ministers in the technical sense of the term, yet who possess spiritual gifts of a high order which

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could be of great profit to the cause of Christ if rightly used. It is of the utmost importance that such people should not be overlooked, but that they should be stimulated to exercise their gifts in appropriate ways. We therefore urge upon ministers and church officers the duty of seeking them out, and encouraging and helping them to train themselves for service. In that way we believe that the lay ministry will take its rightful place alongside the regular ministry, and both contribute more effectively to the worship of the Church and the glory of God.

V. THE ADMINISTRATION

(1) *The Theme*

THE foregoing paragraphs have attempted to set forth something of the high and sacred meaning of the Communion service. We shall now indicate how we think this may best be translated into the observance itself. The key to this lies in the realization that the service is composed of a series of commemorative actions in which the Church seeks to follow as closely as possible a Scriptural pattern. The relevant passages will be found in the following texts: Mark xiv, 17-26, Matthew xxvi, 20-30, Luke xxii, 14-20 and 1 Corinthians xi, 23-29. (With these should be compared the material in John 6). The governing idea throughout is not so much "Thus saith the Lord" as "Thus did the Lord". That is to say, whether we describe the Communion service as a memorial rite, or a parable in action, or a piece of divine symbolism, or in any other way, the emphasis must lie on what is done, even more than on what is said. So, just as, in speaking, gestures should be limited and

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appropriate lest they overshadow the words, in the Communion service words should be few and relevant lest they enervate the action.

What is the theme which the actions of the service are intended to exhibit? It is none other than the Gospel of redeeming grace. The Lord's Supper proclaims the good news of Christ's sacrificial and victorious Death, and His abiding presence with His people as the source of their new life. All the actions used, as well as the hymns, scripture passages, and prayers, have their meaning in relation to this theme and must be controlled by it, so that nothing is allowed to intrude which is out of harmony with it.

(2) *The Setting*

This is very important. The utmost care must be paid to every detail of the service, including the preparation of the Table, which should be fittingly furnished with a white cloth, without flowers or other decorations upon it. The arrangements regarding seating, distribution, etc., must be settled in advance. All church members should endeavour to be present at Communion. The service should never be regarded as merely an addendum to another service, but rather as the climax of the church's worship.¹ Where the Lord's Supper is observed monthly, churches with pastors would be well advised to hold it on the first Sunday evening in the month, while those without pastors should choose some other Sunday in preference to the first. In this way both ministers and laymen will be set free to conduct Communion services elsewhere, if required, without

¹ For this reason we deprecate the practice followed in a few churches of using a "Vesper" at the close of the first service.

thereby missing their own service. This is particularly desirable in the case of lay preachers who are also deacons, and who should therefore be present at Communion in their own church. (It is a wise proceeding for those who are called upon regularly to preside at the Lord's Table to be present from time to time at a Communion service in which they are simply members of the congregation). At the service itself all the deacons, and not only those who will be acting as servers, should if possible sit with the minister at the Communion table, facing the congregation. The members of the congregation should be so seated as to be easily accessible to the servers.

(3) *The Church Fellowship*

Since one purpose of the Lord's Supper is to express and strengthen the corporate relationship of believers with Christ, it is appropriate that at the monthly Communion service some matters concerning the membership of the church should find a place.

(a) *The reception of new members.* At the beginning of the service the presiding minister should welcome at the Lord's Table any persons whom the Church Meeting has accepted for membership, and, while the congregation stands, he should offer them on behalf of the church the right hand of fellowship, in the name of Christ or of the Holy Trinity. This act crowns and completes their admission to Church membership.² A brief prayer may then

² Where any written Church-covenant exists, this ought to be verbally accepted by the new members (who will have familiarised themselves beforehand with its contents). In the absence of any such covenant, their attention may fittingly be directed to the obligations implicit in church fellowship such as: regular attendance at worship; loyal financial support; discretion regarding the church's private business, and finally, willingness to accept admonition.

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be offered for the new members. The custom of giving them an appropriate text to mark their admission is generally appreciated. So also is that whereby the minister himself serves new members at their first Communion.

(b) *The announcement of deaths.* After the reception of new members (if any) the minister should refer briefly to any Church members who may have died since the last Communion service, and he should ask the congregation to rise in sympathetic remembrance and silent prayer. This act may fittingly be concluded by the reading of Revelation xiv, 13. ("Blessed are the dead. . .")

(c) *Notices.* Before the closing hymn it is permissible for the minister to mention also any matters of note, whether joyous or sorrowful, which affect the fellowship of the church; but such references should be very brief, and chosen with a care appropriate to the occasion.

(4) *The Prayers*

The prayers offered either by the minister or by others should not be diffuse or irrelevant, but direct, brief and heartfelt. They should not be stereotyped in any way, but as the service proceeds the notes of humble penitence and confession, of thanksgiving, of consecration, and of intercession for the Church Universal and the Communion of Saints should be heard. Opportunity should also be given for silent prayer.

It should be noted that the Thanksgiving (or "Grace") preceding the bread and wine is not to be understood as a general prayer, nor as a "blessing" of the elements, but is intended to be an act of thanksgiving to God as our Father, with particular reference to His gift of salvation in Christ, of which the bread and the wine are the tokens. It is probable that the grace used by Jesus in the Upper Room followed some such familiar pattern as the following: "Blessed art Thou, our Father

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in Heaven, who bringest forth bread from the earth." The prayer (or prayers) used with the bread and wine at our Communion services need not be as short as this, but their theme should similarly be one of humble thanksgiving and praise.

(5) *The Communion*

As the central point of the service is approached, the notes of simplicity and of reality are above all others those that need to be stressed. The words of Scripture are our best guide here, and, in commemorating the actions of Jesus in the Upper Room, use ought always to be made of the record in either 1 Cor. xi, or the Gospels (see the passages quoted above). It is appropriate also to use other well-loved scriptural passages such as: "Come unto me all ye that labour . . ." (Matthew xi, 28f.), "Behold, I stand at the door and knock . . ." (Rev. iii, 20), "God so loved the world . . ." (John iii, 16), "God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world . . ." (John iii, 17), and "God was in Christ . . ." (2 Cor. v, 19). In general, a reverent silence, together with the acted symbolism of the service, is more eloquent than words.

In the distribution of the elements the following points deserve attention:—

(a) *The Bread.* Of recent years a custom has developed of cutting up the bread beforehand in such a way that it appears on the communion plates in the form of small cubes. This method is no doubt convenient, but its effect is to destroy completely the beautiful symbolism of the "one loaf" referred to by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians x, 17. (Particularly is this the case where the unfortunate practice has been introduced of providing worshippers with

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little plates, each with its isolated piece of bread.) We strongly urge, therefore, that even if the method of using one loaf and breaking pieces from it be not preserved, as it still is in some parts of Wales, there should at least be on the table a sizeable portion of the loaf from which the prepared pieces have been cut. At the right moment, the minister should take this portion in his hands and, recalling the actions and words of Jesus (1 Corinthians xi, 23f.), should break it into smaller pieces, and place these with the rest on the plates for distribution to the congregation.

(b) *The Wine.* Here again the use of individual communion cups, while more convenient and hygienic than the one chalice, grievously obscures the symbolism of the common cup (Mark xiv, 23). So we suggest that if possible there should be a large cup or chalice on the communion table which, at the appropriate point in the service, may be to the minister's hand as he recalls the words and actions of Jesus, before giving the trays with their cups to the servers for distribution. At this point the use of Psalm cxvi, 12f. ("What shall I render unto the Lord . . . ?") is often helpful.

In distributing the bread and wine, we believe that it is well to have a recognised order. The following is perhaps the best: First, the presiding minister is served by one of the deacons; then the congregation is served by the deacons; and afterwards the deacons are served by the minister. (Alternatively, the minister may be served last). In any case, we regard it as important that the act of distribution should follow upon the words of institution spoken by the minister, and we deprecate as destructive of the symbolism of the rite the practice of distributing the elements at the beginning of the service. For a similar reason, care should be taken to see that no one in the congregation is compelled to help himself, but that each person takes the bread and wine from the hand of another.

(6) *The Offering*

As has already been pointed out, the offering of gifts plays an important part in the Communion service, and although these may in fact be taken up at the end of the service, their significance should not for that reason be underrated. The usual Baptist custom is to set apart the Communion offerings for certain specific purposes, such as the relief of distress among the members of the church, or the support of the widows and orphans of missionaries. We think that this tradition is a good one, though it need not be regarded as unalterable. It has the merit of linking many congregations in a common purpose. Where Communion cards are used, these may conveniently be collected at the same time as the offerings.

(7) *Music*

The music played or sung should be in harmony with the central theme of the service, and should relate to the Passion and Victory of Christ. It is helpful at times for the instrumental music to follow a particular motif throughout the service. For example, the theme "He shall feed his flock" is well-known, and may be effectively used with variations not only as a prelude, but also during the distribution of the elements, and finally while the offering is being taken up. Complete silence should be kept during the acts of communion. Any opening hymn should be one devoted to some aspect of the death of Christ, and is preferably sung with the congregation seated. The closing hymn on the other hand should express the note of triumph or of dedication, and should be sung standing. The final voluntary

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should be attuned to the spirit of quiet thanksgiving and solemn gladness.

Note: In what has been said above it has been assumed that the necessary announcement as to who may participate has been made prior to the service itself. But intimacy must not be confused with secrecy. Both children and their elders should know that they are welcome to be present during the Communion service if they wish, provided they share reverently in its intention and spirit, even though they may not actually be eligible to participate.

VI. EPILOGUE

THE Communion Service is the climax and crown of the devotional life of the Christian Church. "The Christian realises at the Table all that his life is meant to be, and all the forces which are ready to help him." What this statement means we must seek to grasp not only in thought but also in living experience. For one thing, the bread and wine, the symbols of our Lord's broken body and shed blood, bring home to us the message of that Cross which stands at the very centre of Christian thought and life. The significance of the Cross of Christ is many-sided. It is the place of judgment—God's judgment upon sin—wrought out in our stead and on our behalf in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is the pledge that no sin of ours can ever destroy God's love for us, or put us—being penitent—beyond the reach of His redeeming grace and power. "God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans v, 8). The Cross is a reminder, too, that the mightiest and most real power is somehow always and everywhere indissolubly joined with self-sacrifice, and that the greatest victories always rise phoenix-like out of the ashes of suffering and failure.

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“Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit” (John xii, 24). Certain it is, in our Lord's case, that without His Cross and Passion, even if He were still dimly remembered as a great Teacher of long ago, He would never have become the Saviour of the world. His redeeming power sprang out of His utter self-giving. After recounting the facts of His humiliation and obedience, St. Paul adds—“WHEREFORE also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name” (Phil. ii, 9). The Cross also proclaims our Lord's perfect obedience, obedience unto death, ay, death on a cross; and we can be His followers only as we seek by the grace of God to live, as far as may be, in the spirit in which He died, the spirit of absolute obedience to our Heavenly Father's will, and unquenchable love towards all our fellow-men, whatever the cost.

Again, the central feature of the Christian life is symbolically set forth by our partaking of the bread and wine, for it is only as we feed on Christ, nourish our souls on Him, that there is any chance at all of our being able to live truly Christian lives. Our Lord regarded it as His mission to establish a New Covenant, i.e., a new relationship between God and man, the covenant described by Jeremiah in the words: “I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (xxxix, 33). Jesus conceived of that new covenant as being ratified by His blood. Hence, to be a Christian in the classical sense of the term is to be one who knows the will of God, not through a code inscribed on tables of stone, but because he has all “the commands of the

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Lord Himself, even Jesus Christ, graven on his heart". When we devoutly eat the bread and drink the cup, we open our hearts to the Spirit of Christ, Who thus becomes our inward Monitor and Guide, and the unseen Master of our souls. Only so is there any possibility of our rising to the heights of the Christian obedience and service.

And once more. The fact that we partake of the Supper of the Lord with fellow-Christians is symbolic of the bonds that bind Christians together in fellowship. One of the most remarkable features of the early Church was the warmth of its fellowship. The words, "See how these Christians love one another", were originally not a bitter satirical taunt hurled at a quarrelsome and divided community, but a spontaneous tribute by the pagan world to the glowing warmth of Christian comradeship and fellowship. That fellowship was most realised at the Lord's Table, which became the great obliterator of all distinctions—racial, national, social, and cultural. There, master and slave sat side by side, Perpetua the mistress with Felicitas the maid. There, Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, learned and unlettered men and women, forgot the superficial differences that divided them, and thought only of that deeper relationship to Christ in which they had been made one. The Supper of the Lord was thus truly the Feast of Brotherly Love. Admittedly, such fellowship is hard to achieve. When people gather at the Lord's Table they bring with them much human frailty and sin. And if they suffer themselves still to cherish in their hearts racial hatred, class prejudices, and personal antagonisms, it is—as St. Paul said—not possible for them to eat the supper of the Lord. They exclude themselves from participation, and

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eat and drink only to their own condemnation (see 1 Cor. xi, 17ff.). Yet that fact does but throw into greater relief the deep underlying significance of the Supper as a sacrament of fellowship, and we cannot doubt that the hearts of most participants will be responsive to this note.

In these ways the Communion Service brings vividly before us the central facts of the Christian faith and the outstanding features of the Christian life, while, at the same time, providing the means whereby that faith may be more fully appropriated, and those features may increasingly adorn our lives. So, finally, as has been truly said : "The Lord's Supper means that a man in loving fellowship with his brother Christians is pledged loyally to try to embody the personality of Christ. The Master is to come first in his life, to dominate it. The Master's work is to be his work. The Master's spirit is to be his spirit. Forgiven himself, he is to forgive others. Loved himself, he is to love all men. Strengthened himself, he is to strengthen his brethren. As Jesus suffered for him, he is to suffer for others. In so far as in him lies, and in co-operation with all other men who love the Master, he is to try to reproduce the life of Christ. And in so far as he really tries, Jesus Christ helps him and strengthens him with His Spirit."