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Is open communion consistent with Anglicanism ?

BY J. P. HICKINBOTHAM

OPEN communion is the right relationship between divided churches, until full reunion becomes possible. This is the principle we have affirmed. But is it a principle consistent with Anglicanism? And if it is, can the Church of England put it unreservedly into effect without jeopardizing our Anglican inheritance of faith and order? To these questions we now turn.

The Anglican Communion has in recent times committed itself to the principle of open communion with churches of different traditions, both by official statements and by official actions.

The principle is stated in the Bonn Agreement of 1931 establishing intercommunion between the Church of England and the old Catholic Church. It reads :

" 1. Each Communion recognizes the catholicity and independence of the other and maintains its own.

" 2. Each Communion agrees to admit members of the other Communion to participate in the sacraments.

" 3. Intercommunion does not require from either Communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion, or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian Faith."

One could not have a clearer expression of the principle that churches which differ in doctrine and worship may recognize each other as holding the fundamentals of the Faith and therefore as being parts (though perhaps imperfect parts) of the Church Universal ; and that if they do so they should admit each other's members to holy communion. The Agreement has been adhered to by most of the churches of the Anglican Communion as well as the Convocations of Canterbury and York, and is widely regarded in Anglican circles as a model of what inter-church agreements should be.

The Bonn Agreement, though it uses the word " intercommunion ", defines it in the exact sense in which we have used the more precise phrase " open communion ". Exactly the same relationship has been more recently established between the Church of England and the Church of South India. In 1955 the Convocations resolved, *inter alia*, that : " Members of the Church of South India who are communicants in that Church may, when in England, receive holy communion in the Church of England ", and that " members of the Church of England who visit the territory of the Church of South India may accept the hospitality of that church for receiving holy communion within it ".

A similar relationship has been established with the Lutheran Church of Sweden by the resolution passed by the Convocations in 1954 and 1955 "that members of the Church of Sweden qualified to receive the sacrament in their own church should be admitted to holy communion in ours". The Church of Sweden had already for many years welcomed members of the Church of England to holy communion there, and no special resolution about it seems to have been thought necessary, presumably because it was already a well-established custom.

Thus the Church of England (and also other churches of the Anglican Communion) have established open communion (in the sense of unrestricted mutual admission of each other's members to holy communion as guests) with churches representing the "catholic" tradition in the case of the Old Catholics, the European Protestant tradition in the case of the Swedish Church, and the English Free Church tradition in its missionary outreach in the case of the Church of South India, though of course this last church also includes a very large and important Anglican element. All these relationships have been established with something near to unanimity in the Convocations, and these official actions combine with the principles officially set forth in the Bonn Agreement to show that the Church of England wholeheartedly accepts the principle of open communion with churches from whom we are separated both by their complete autonomy of government and membership and also by their doctrinal and other denominational traditions which are radically different from ours.

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The question is not whether the principle is right, but how widely it can in practice be applied. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches exclude themselves by their own exclusive attitude, and it would be only of theoretical value to discuss whether we have sufficient doctrinal agreement with them to make it legitimate from the Anglican standpoint. The practical issue is whether we can have open communion with the main Protestant churches, both those in the tradition of the European Lutheran and Reformed Churches and those in the tradition of the English Free Churches.

It is clear that in regard to the sufficiency of our general doctrinal agreement with them no difficulty arises. We already have open communion with a typical Lutheran Church, that of Sweden. We allowed Anglican dioceses to unite corporately with a Methodist Church and a church made up of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, to form together the Church of South India, with which we now have open communion. We already admit to communion in certain circumstances members of the Church of Scotland, a typical Presbyterian or Reformed Church under resolutions of the Convocations passed in 1952; and in our current negotiations for reunion with the Methodist Church no difficulties about orthodoxy have arisen.

But all three churches with which open communion has been formally and officially recognized differ from the majority of Protestant churches in that they possess the historic episcopate and their ministers are episcopally ordained. They also have confirmation,

though it is optional in the Church of South India, and in the Church of Sweden it is administered by presbyters instead of bishops. The urgent practical question is whether the lack of episcopacy in the historic succession and of confirmation on the part of the main Protestant churches ought or ought not to prevent the open communion with them which is right in principle, and for which there is sufficient general doctrinal agreement. To this question the historic tradition of the Church of England gives a clear and unambiguous answer.

It has been shown that from the sixteenth century the Church of England recognized the European Protestant churches as true parts of the Church of Christ, and though the high church party considered their lack of episcopacy as a defect they were emphatic that it was not a fatal defect. These churches might lack the "integrity" of a church, but they possessed its "essence".

They therefore took it for granted that members of these churches should be welcomed to holy communion with us as fellow-members of the Church of Christ, although they were members of parts of that Church from whom we were divided on some important matters. No formal action was needed to authorize this. The sacraments had always been open to all members of the Church Universal, wherever they might be; and they were so still. This was a basic catholic principle and historic practice which they took for granted. Official action was needed to exclude members of the Church Universal from the sacraments, not to give them access. Failing a positive act of excommunication their right of access was assumed.

Hence from the sixteenth century until Victorian times members of foreign Protestant churches were admitted to communion with us as a matter of course, without argument or controversy, as something plainly and obviously right. It began with foreigners like Bucer and Peter Martyr who came over at Cranmer's invitation to help reform the English Church. It continued with a steady stream of visitors and refugees. "We assemble with the English in their churches," wrote the French Protestant Peter du Moulin, Bishop Andrewes' correspondent and friend, "we participate together in the Holy Supper of the Lord"¹; and it was from Bishop Andrewes that another Frenchman, Isaac Casaubon, received the sacrament on his death bed². The evidence for the custom is, in the words of the great church historian the late Dr. Norman Sykes, "clear and copious"³, and not least for that part of the seventeenth century when the influence of the Caroline high church divines was predominant. This is particularly significant because here if anywhere one would have expected to find hesitations; and we do not find them. A typical statement is that of Bishop Davenant, who wrote of the foreign Protestant churches: "although we consent not with them in all points and titles of controversial divinity, yet we acknowledge them brethren in Christ, and protest ourselves to have a brotherly and holy communion with them"⁴. Similarly Herbert Thorndike, one of the strongest champions of episcopacy, wrote of "the communion which hath always been used between this church and the reformed churches"⁵. Bishop Cosin declared that when he was in France "many of their people . . . have frequented our public prayers with great reverence, and I have

delivered the holy communion to them according to our own order, which they observed religiously "6.

The same custom obtained after the Restoration and continued through the eighteenth century and beyond. Archbishop Wake expressed the general attitude when he wrote concerning the lack of episcopacy on the part of these churches : " Far be it from me that I should be so iron-hearted as to believe that on account of such a defect (let me be permitted without offence to call it so) any of them ought to be cut off from our communion "7.

The converse custom of Anglicans receiving holy communion from the foreign Protestant churches when abroad was practised by many Anglicans and championed by (amongst others) some notable high churchmen. As early as Mary's reign the English exiles who were to become the leaders of the Elizabethan church were being welcomed at the Lord's supper by Swiss and German churches. In the next century even so strict an episcopalian as Jeremy Taylor approved of the custom in principle on the ground that " to make the way to heaven straiter than God made it, or to deny to communicate with those with whom God will vouchsafe to be united, and to refuse our charity to those who have the same faith, because they have not all our opinions, and believe not everything necessary which we over-value, is impious and schismatical "8. Bishop Cosin, high churchman though he was, advised in favour of this custom, which he himself followed when in France : " considering there is no prohibition of our church against it (as there is against our communicating with the papists, and that well-grounded upon Scripture and the will of God) I do not see but that you and others with you, may (either in case of necessity, when you cannot have the sacrament among yourselves, or in regard of declaring your unity in professing the same religion, which you and they do) go otherwhiles to communicate reverently with them of the French church "9. In the next century the custom was championed both by broad churchmen like Bishop Burnet and high churchmen like Archbishop Sharp.

Yet there was not the same unanimity about this custom as there was about welcoming foreign Protestants to communion with us. There were some who scrupled to communicate with the foreign Protestant churches because of their lack of an episcopally ordered ministry. Archbishop Wake represented this view when he wrote : " Our case as to full satisfaction of communion with the foreign churches is in my opinion very different from theirs with respect to us. They cannot except against our ministry, nor the validity of the ordinances which may be supposed to depend upon it. Our clergy are certainly duly ordained, whatever theirs are who want episcopal ordination "10. But two things are to be noted about Wake and those who held a similar view. First, their criticism of the non-episcopal ministries of those churches did not lead them to deny that they were true churches. On the contrary this was generally agreed. Wake himself devoted much time and energy to cementing the fellowship between the Church of England and these churches and he welcomed their members, including their ministers, to holy communion in the Church of England. Secondly, though they might scruple themselves about communicating in non-

episcopal churches, they did not claim that their scruples bound others whose conscience directed otherwise. It was a matter which the church left the individual free to decide for himself. Bishop Cosin was right in his statement that "there is no prohibition of our church against it".

Towards the English Non-conformist churches a different attitude was taken. As has been shown, they were regarded not as sister-churches but as "conventicles" of dissident members of the Church of England whose failure to conform was an unjustifiable breach of fellowship with the church of this land. Therefore Anglicans could not communicate in their "conventicles". But Dissenters were not normally prevented from receiving communion in the Church of England if they were willing to do so. Indeed they were often actively encouraged.

After 1662, when Nonconformity first became a major factor in English life, many leading Dissenters like Richard Baxter used to receive holy communion at regular intervals in their parish church, though otherwise worshipping (and if ministers ministering) in their Nonconformist congregations, as a "healing custom" designed to express their continuing spirit of charity and fellowship towards the Church from whom they felt bound in conscience to stand apart but to which they would gladly return if it ceased to demand of them things that in conscience they could not assent to. This custom of "occasional conformity" was warmly approved by many leading churchmen, such as Bishop Burnet and Archbishop Sharp. It only came under attack when some less reputable Dissenters began to receive the sacrament occasionally in the Church of England for a quite different and wholly irreligious reason, to qualify for public office under the Test Act. It was against this that the short-lived Occasional Conformity Act (1711-18) was passed, an Act which did not forbid Dissenters to come to holy communion but which penalized any who obtained public office by coming to communion and then went back to their conventicles. But this Act was soon repealed; and it was all along supposed by churchmen who valued the religious use of occasional conformity by Nonconformists as a mark of continuing fellowship with the Church of England. It was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Tenison, who told the House of Lords in 1704: "I think the practice of occasional conformity, as used by the Dissenters, is so far from deserving the title of vile hypocrisy, that it is the duty of all moderate Dissenters, upon their own principles, to do it"¹¹. The custom received a new access of strength at the end of the eighteenth century when it was adopted by many members of the newly formed Methodist churches.

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It is thus clear that the lack of episcopacy and of confirmation on the part of other churches was not regarded by the Church of England as a barrier against their members receiving communion with us, or ours with them. The foreign reformed churches had not (with rare exceptions) episcopacy; nor was admission to communicant status always by laying on of hands—even less often was it by laying on of episcopal hands. Yet their members were always welcomed to

communion with us, and members of the Church of England were free to communicate with them. Some Anglicans scrupled to use this latter liberty and of course no one was compelled to do so. But the liberty was there; many used it, and none was liable to censure for doing so. English Nonconformists, although the vast majority were not confirmed, were usually welcomed to communion. When they were not, it was not on the ground that they lacked confirmation but either because they were doing so for political and not religious reasons or (less often) because it was felt to be illogical that if they came occasionally they should not come always. Likewise, the absence of the reciprocal practice was due to the supposedly schismatic character of the Nonconformist churches and not to their lack of episcopacy.

This did not mean that episcopacy and confirmation were undervalued. While all held that episcopacy was a good and allowable form of ministry, most held that in view of its continuity from the apostles' time it was the best form of ministry, as the Preface to the Ordinal implies; and some held that it is the only right form, the one intended by God for His Church. But the Prayer Book and Ordinal refrain from passing adverse judgments about other forms of ministry, and churchmen were not prepared to deny that God can and does use and bless other forms when episcopacy has (whether through necessity or through error) been lost. Therefore they could recognize that churches could exist with episcopacy, and as a corollary that the holy communion in some churches, though administered by non-episcopally ordained ministers was in essentials the sacrament ordained by Christ, the supper of the Lord. To deny this would, indeed, have involved affirming that the non-episcopal churches had not the means of grace and therefore that they were not parts of the Church of Christ. This no one would do.

Confirmation was highly valued as the rite in which the fulness of God's blessing is sealed to those who, having been baptized, have now made their personal profession of faith. It was therefore the proper prelude to admission to holy communion, as is declared in the rubric at the end of the Confirmation Service: "and there shall none be admitted to the holy communion until such time as he be confirmed or be ready and desirous to be confirmed".

But this needs qualifying. First, the Catechism and the Articles of Religion distinguished sharply between the two sacraments of the Gospel and other rites, including confirmation, which are not ordained by Christ and are not "generally necessary to salvation". Confirmation was therefore not theologically indispensable for the Christian life. Nor could it be theologically indispensable for admission to holy communion; for if it were it would itself become generally necessary to salvation, because without it no one could receive the "generally necessary to salvation" sacrament of holy communion. Thus the rubric itself allowed those who are "ready and desirous to be confirmed" to receive holy communion. In practice, in the Church of England itself until the nineteenth century opportunities of confirmation were so rare that it appears certain that large numbers of people communicated before confirmation, often for lengthy periods, as being "ready and desirous to be confirmed". This made it easy to recognize

the baptized communicant members of other churches as full members of the Body of Christ and in principle eligible to receive holy communion as visitors in our church.

But though theologically they were qualified in principle to be admitted, there was still the purely legal question whether the law of the Church of England allowed them to be admitted since they were neither confirmed nor ready and desirous to be confirmed, and they therefore did not fulfil the requirements of the rubric.

The answer is, of course, that the Prayer Book is the Church of England's directory of public worship, laying down how her own people shall worship. It is concerned with worship, not with regularities about inter-church relations; and like any church's book of public worship it has its own members, the people for whom the services are drawn up and who are the normal users of them, in mind. The preface "Of Ceremonies" states this explicitly, and the Prayer Book services and their rubrics are to be interpreted in the light of the principles and aims laid down in the prefaces. "In these our doings we condemn no other nations, nor prescribe anything but to our own people only." Further, the rubric (with the exception of the clause "or ready and desirous to be confirmed" which was added in 1662) goes back to 1549, at which time (as for over a century afterwards) there were no Dissenters or virtually none. It therefore cannot have had them in mind, and it would be fantastic to suppose that it was framed in order to deal with the small number of foreign visitors who might be expected to present themselves in English churches. The Prayer Book rubrics were much more carefully observed in earlier centuries than they are now; yet the custom of admitting unconfirmed foreigners was general; it was championed by bishops; and its legality was never challenged even by the strictest churchmen. It is clear that the Church of England interpreted this particular rubric in the light of the principle laid down by the Prayer Book itself that in its liturgical directions it does not seek to "prescribe anything but to our own people only".

In the last hundred years the situation has changed in three ways. First, the charge of schism against the English Free Churches has been tacitly abandoned. We treat them as sister churches, and seek reunion with them on the basis, not of re-absorbing them in our church, but of coming together with them on an equal footing, each enriching and correcting the other. Like ourselves, they are real though imperfect parts of the Body of Christ. This change of attitude has been hastened by the missionary movement and its effects. In many lands Anglicanism has arrived later than the Free Churches, and if any church were to be regarded as the national church it would be one of them and not the Anglican Church. The writer found it salutary when working in Ghana to experience as an Anglican what it feels like to be a member of a small and comparatively recently established Christian body, which could easily be regarded by the great Presbyterian and Methodist Churches there as an intrusive dissenting schism—were it not that Christian charity prevails. Unless we are content to be treated as schismatics in Ghana we cannot very well treat the Free Churches as schismatics in England. It is, in fact, wholly unrealistic to claim exclusive rights for particular denominations in particular places;

and we must recognize the equal churchly status of all branches of a denomination (our own included) in whatever part of the world it exists.

This has destroyed the reason which prevailed until the nineteenth century for merely admitting Free Churchmen to holy communion with us, while abstaining from the reciprocal practice. The only consistent thing to do now is to treat them in the same way as the foreign Protestant churches, and to make reciprocal open communion the custom. This, at least, is correct if we adhere to the theological principles of historic Anglicanism, and practise open communion with all churches whom we can recognize as genuine, even if imperfect, parts of the Body of Christ. Accordingly, a widespread custom of reciprocal open communion with the Free Churches has sprung up in the last century and a half. In England many individual Anglicans receive holy communion from time to time at the hands of Free Church ministers ; and the liberty of Anglicans to do so on special occasions such as at meetings to promote Christian unity is recognized by the generality of the Church's leaders and is exercised personally by some of them. In some Anglican churches overseas reciprocal open communion with non-episcopal churches is the general custom, and is a regular feature (for example) in united theological colleges.

The second change has been the "unchurching" of all non-episcopal churches by some Tractarians who regarded them as having neither a true ministry nor true sacraments and as therefore not being parts of Christ's Church. Any interchange of communicants in either direction was therefore in their view totally wrong ; and as the matter was more regulated by custom than by law they were able to practise their views, and, if ordained, to forbid members of other churches to receive holy communion in their parishes. Thus there has grown up a diversity of practice in the Church of England ; and in some Anglican churches overseas open communion is almost unknown.

The extreme Tractarian position has never commended itself to the Church of England as a whole ; and even at the height of the Oxford Movement the traditional liberties were championed by the church's leaders. Thus, in reply to a protest against the open communion arranged by Dean Stanley in Westminster Abbey for those engaged in producing the Revised Version of the Bible, Archbishop Tait, after deprecating on doctrinal grounds the admission of a Unitarian, gave his judgment as follows : " But some of the memorialists are indignant at the admission of any Dissenters, however orthodox, to the holy communion in our Church. I confess that I have no sympathy with such objections. I consider that the interpretation which these memorialists put upon the rubric to which they appeal, at the end of the Communion service, is quite untenable. As at present advised I believe this rubric to apply solely to our own people, and not to those members of foreign or dissenting bodies who occasionally conform. All who have studied the history of our church, and especially the reign of Queen Anne, when this question was earnestly debated, must know how it has been contended that the Church of England places no bar against occasional conformity "12. Similar views were expressed later by the great ecclesiastical historian and Bishop of London, Mandell

Creighton, by Archbishops Benson and Frederick Temple.¹³ by that other great historian-ecclesiastic Bishop Stubbs¹⁴, and many others of the church's most eminent leaders and men of learning. Thus the historic custom, though challenged and disliked by some Anglicans, was vindicated, continued to be approved and practised, and was gradually extended to include the occasional reception of holy communion in the English Free Churches.

Nevertheless the Tractarian influence was strong enough to create in the minds of many Anglicans, who did not subscribe to the rigid unchurching of the non-episcopal churches, the mistaken impression that the Church of England stood for closed communion rather than for open communion; and that although (contrary to the strict Tractarians' teaching) Christian charity made relaxations in the exclusive rule right and necessary in certain circumstances, such relaxations must be carefully limited and be seen to be departures from the norm.

This has affected the influence of the third change in the situation—the ecumenical movement, with its combination of longing for a greater unity with determination not to compromise confessional loyalties.

The result has been a series of semi-official pronouncements by Lambeth Conferences and by the Convocations which have recognized the rightness of admitting baptized communicants of non-episcopal churches to communion in certain circumstances, but which have often been phrased so as to imply that this is an exceptional thing requiring special episcopal permission. Even more guarded was the recognition by the Lambeth Conference of 1930 that in special areas where Anglican ministrations are not available over long periods it may be right for Anglicans to communicate in non-episcopal churches; and this very guarded recognition was coupled with support for the view that as a general principle intercommunion should follow rather than be a means to union and that Anglicans should receive holy communion only from ministers of their own church.

Lambeth Conferences do not bind the church, and the Convocation resolutions are carefully phrased so as to approve certain forms of intercommunion without implying disapproval of others, still less that others are unlawful. They are to be taken not as the maximum allowed by the church but as the area of general agreement in the church. What lies beyond them is left to custom, and to individual judgment. Thus, for example, the right of Anglicans to communicate in services conducted by non-episcopal churches has been authoritatively upheld in a fairly recent debate in the Church Assembly; and Anglican bishops, priests, and laymen continue from time to time to exercise this liberty without any liability to censure. Indeed, they exercise it in the presence of fellow Anglicans, who attend such services without communicating, with no sense of breach of fellowship with them.

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What conclusion is to be drawn from this survey? First, open communion is the principle which is clearly the basis of recent Anglican official actions and statements, most notably those concerned with establishing open communion with the Old Catholic, Swedish, and

South Indian Churches, but also that considerable range of actions and statements recognizing lesser degrees of intercommunion with other churches, mostly non-episcopal.

Secondly, open communion was for centuries the normal practice of the Church of England in relation to the Protestant churches overseas and (though one-sidedly only) with the English Nonconformists. This historic custom still remains a widespread and recognized practice, and is extended by many Anglicans to include reciprocity with the Free Churches.

Thirdly, the contrary belief and practice sprang from the negative judgment of some Tractarians of the non-episcopal churches and their sacraments, a judgment which is inconsistent with the historic Anglican tradition and attitude towards those churches. It is also inconsistent with the general consensus of Anglican belief in the present century about the standing of these churches, a consensus which is expressed not only in statements like the Lambeth Appeal of 1920 but in the whole tenor of Anglican policy which treats the non-episcopal churches as partners with us in the Christian enterprise, recognizes God's blessing on and presence in their fellowship, worship, ministry, and sacraments, acknowledges that they participate in the life of the Body of Christ as we do, and seeks reunion with them on the basis of coming together on an equal footing, each giving to and receiving from the other. The influence of the Tractarian idea has misled many Anglicans into assuming that as Anglicans we must start from the principle of closed rather than open communion ; but there are few who do not recognize the need for at least some modifications of the exclusive position ; and the growing number and range of the modifications commended by successive Lambeth Conferences and by the Convocations testifies to a steadily growing conviction on the part of the great body of Anglican opinion that the exclusive policy is neither theologically nor spiritually consistent with the realities of church life in an ecumenical era.

To sum up. Recent Anglican policy and historic Anglican practice alike show that the principle of open communion is deeply harmonious with the Anglican standpoint and tradition ; and that it can be and for centuries has been applied without qualification to churches which do not have episcopacy or confirmation, without endangering our own loyalty to these things or our power to commend them to others. This does not mean that all Anglicans have always accepted the principle of open communion or that we have always practised it unrestrictedly with all the non-episcopal churches, or that we do so now. It does, however, bring to a head the question whether it is not our bounden duty to do this.

Open communion is the right relationship between separated parts of Christ's Church ; if history and theology alike show that we can practise it with non-episcopal churches and preserve the full integrity of our heritage ; if these churches wish to have open communion with us, as in fact they do, is it morally and spiritually tolerable for us to continue to take up an uncertain and ambiguous attitude to this issue as we have done ever since the Oxford Movement ? Is it not time for a clear-cut decision ? And are there not signs that, once open com-

munion is seen to be the truly catholic and churchly and Anglican principle, the great body of Anglican churchmen will be ready to discard the sectarianism of closed communion, and the theological confusion of semi-closed semi-open communion, and to embrace with relief the more excellent way of whole-hearted mutual hospitality at the Lord's table with our fellow-members of the Body of Christ ?

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Open communion with all parts of the Church Universal which will accept communion with us : this is the catholic, the churchly, the Anglican principle of inter-church fellowship until full reunion takes place. Anglican opinion is moving steadily and strongly in the ecumenical direction. Now is the time for decisive action to bring the Anglican Communion to full acceptance of this way, to which its history, its theology, and its spiritual responsibilities alike point as the right way. What can we do to bring this about ? Each Anglican province has its own problems and situation. What is suggested here is written more particularly with the Church of England situation in view.

First, let us use the liberty we have, champion it when it is attacked or denied, and show that in the Church of England there already exists the liberty of open communion for all who care to practise it, without fear of censure or condemnation. Let us welcome baptized communicant members of other churches, including the non-episcopal churches, to communion in our churches as guests of the Church of England ; and let us from time to time accept the hospitality of other churches, including the non-episcopal churches in this country and abroad, by receiving Holy Communion with them as their guests.

Secondly, let us teach our fellow-Anglicans the Anglican tradition of open communion ; let us show them its catholic and churchly character ; let us encourage them to practise it ; and let us explain to members of other churches that this is the true Anglican tradition, and that the exclusive attitude is a departure from the norm which is tolerated within the Church of England but is alien both to its true spirit and to its history. To most of the objections we shall meet, the answers have already been given. One further practical one will be raised. " If we admit unconfirmed members of the Free Churches to communion," it is often said, " we shall make it difficult to insist on confirmation for our own people." To this the answer is, first, that the Free Churches all have courses of preparation for admission to communicant status quite as long and exacting as our preparation for confirmation, leading to a service as solemn and demanding as our confirmation. Free Churchmen do not have in any sense an " easy option " compared with our own people. Secondly, what sort of Anglican young people are these who apparently regard confirmation as an irksome requirement to be got out of if possible ? And what kind of clergy are giving them this impression of it ? Confirmation is not a pill to be swallowed ; it is a high privilege, and those who come forward for it should regard it as such. Those who do not want it are motivated not by dislike of confirmation as such but by the degree of commitment which it, and preparation for it, demand—a demand

made equally by the Free Church system which they would equally shirk. We do not want candidates who do not regard confirmation as a joy and a privilege. If any should be deterred because Free Churchmen are admitted as guests to the communion with us without it, they are candidates we are better without.

Thirdly, a proposed new canon (B15) explicitly designed to regulate inter-church relations proposes to enact the words of the rubric that none shall be admitted to holy communion except he be confirmed or ready and desirous to be confirmed ; and then to add certain exceptions to be allowed to this rule. This canon is vicious and must be opposed. By re-enacting the rubric in this new context it would turn a liturgical direction about our own people at worship into a regulation about inter-church relations. Thus for the first time it would set up an exclusive rule as the primary law governing our relations with other churches. It would be mitigated by the exceptions allowed, but it would found our relations with other churches upon the wrong basis of closed communion.

The proposed canon is often supported on the ground that the rubric already applies to members of other churches, and allows no exceptions. The proposed canon provides for exceptions and is thus claimed as a liberalizing measure. This will not do. The legal issue has never been tested in the courts. But the following points must be noted.

To start with, the plain interpretation of the rubric, in its context in a Book of Common Prayer according to the use of the Church of England, and in the light of the Preface which disclaims any intention of making rules for members of other Churches, is that it is a direction for our own people at worship and is not a regulation about the treatment of members of other churches. Then again, there has been an unbroken custom of admitting unconfirmed members of other churches to communion ever since the Reformation. Are we to say that this has been a flagrant piece of lawlessness from first to last ? that archbishops and bishops and divines who have championed it, men like Cranmer, Andrewes, Jeremy Taylor, Cosin, Wake, to say nothing of more recent divines and prelates like Stubbs and Creighton, Tait, Benson, and Frederick Temple, have been rebels against Anglican law and principle ? that all the recent resolutions of the Convocations sanctioning admission of members of other churches to communion with us are acts of defiance against the law ? Further, the fact that the matter has never been tested in the courts is itself significant. If the rubric forbids this practice, why has no one challenged it in four centuries of Church of England history ? Is it not because men of judgment have seen clearly enough that this interpretation of the rubric is one which neither should nor would be upheld by any responsible court of law ? Finally, if there should be any lingering doubt, let it be set at rest not by surrendering to a false principle but by the simple step of passing through the Church Assembly a single-clause measure laying down that the rubric shall not be construed to apply to baptized communicant members of other churches.

Fourthly, let a new canon be devised to regulate inter-church relationships. Let it state the principle that the Church of England welcomes to communion as visitors all baptized members of the

Church of Christ who are communicants in good standing in their own churches ; and welcomes reciprocal hospitality for its own members. Let it add that if members of other churches wish to receive holy communion in the Church of England otherwise than as guests, they must become members of that church and be confirmed. Then let it indicate that amongst the churches whose members we welcome on this basis are all those which are members of the World Council of Churches. Where one draws the line in such recognition is bound to be somewhat arbitrary or at least pragmatic ; there are no perfect tests. But the recognition ought positively to include all the churches which we habitually treat in other connections as fellow-members of the Body of Christ, joint-heirs of his grace, and partners in the service of his Gospel and kingdom. This certainly applies to our associates in the World Council of Churches. They need not exhaust the list. Therefore let the statement not exclude others. But let it at least positively include these ; and if cases arise involving members of other churches they can be decided on their merits.

Four simple things : but if effectively carried out they would bring pastoral help to many individuals in need of spiritual hospitality at the Lord's table. They would deepen and strengthen the fellowship between our church and other parts of the universal Church of Christ. They would take us a long step out of sectarianism and denomination-ism, and a long step nearer to the biblical, patristic, catholic pattern of the Church. And they would thus prepare the way for that full reunion of the Church of Christ which is the goal towards which we pray and work.

¹ C. S. Carter, *Reformation and Reunion*, p. 154.

² G. E. Duffield, *Admission to Holy Communion*, p. 11.

³ *Theology Occasional Papers*, No. 11, p. 28.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁶ N. Sykes, *Old Priest and New Presbyter*, p. 144.

⁷ cf. Sykes, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁸ Cited by N. Sykes, *Theology Occasional Papers*, No. 11, p. 30.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹¹ G. E. Duffield, *Admission to Holy Communion*, p. 17.

¹² *Life of Archibald Campbell Tait*, by Randall Davidson, Vol. II, p. 71.

¹³ *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*, Vol II, pp. 275ff.

¹⁴ *Letters*, pp. 331f.