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Non-communicating Attendance: ¹

IS IT A PRIMITIVE CUSTOM ?

ONE of the greatest historical scholars of his day, Bishop Creighton, in a charge delivered to the London clergy on February 1, 1900, laid down as one of the cardinal points of the Reformation in England, "The restoration of the primitive conception of Holy Communion for the mediæval conception of the Mass,"² and he declared that "the object of 'turning the Mass into a Communion' was avowedly pursued by our Reformers in the later years of Henry VIII. When the first Prayer Book of Edward VI was issued, it was at once felt that this was its aim."³

Now this assertion of the Bishop's is doubtless correct. Yet it is a fact that "the mediæval conception" of which he speaks found no support whatever in the mediæval office books. They know nothing of that which constitutes the essence of "the mediæval conception," namely, the possibility of worshipping without communicating, of receiving grace from hearing the service without receiving the holy Food. Actually there is more support in the first English Prayer Book than in them, for this conception. It is true that it is extremely slight, but as it has been used a good many times in support of the reintroduction of non-communicating attendance, it is as well to cite it. In the 1549 book *apparently* those who were not going to communicate were allowed to remain in the nave, although they were ordered to depart out of "the quire." But "the ministers and clerks," if, even, they did not intend to communicate, were allowed to remain in "the quire."⁴ This rubric was omitted in 1552, and in the exhortation to be read in case of neglect, "gazers and lookers on them that do communicate" are solemnly bidden to depart.⁵ Thus it was not until 1552 that the English Prayer Book was made to breathe the spirit, in this particular, of the mediæval services.

For it is the spirit of the Liturgical Books of the pre-Reformation

¹ A Paper read to a meeting of Evangelical incumbents at Birmingham.

² "The Church and the Nation" (Longmans), p. 300 (and cf. Staley's "The Catholic Religion," 4th ed., p. 253).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁴ "The Two Liturgies, etc." (Parker Society), p. 85 (and cf. Blunt's Annotated B.C.P., p. 382).

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 272-3.

period. A careful reading of the ordinary of the Mass in the Use of Sarum shows very clearly that the Service is for those who communicate, and for them alone.

For instance, in the Sarum Canon, which is identical with the Roman, the Priest prays that these gifts may "be borne by the hands of Thy holy angel to Thy altar on high, in the presence of Thy divine majesty, that as many of us as shall by partaking at this Altar receive the most sacred body and blood of Thy Son may be fulfilled with all heavenly benediction and grace."¹ It will be noticed that the plea for the acceptance of the Eucharistic Sacrifice is urged that those who partake may indeed receive the holy Gift. For those who do not partake, there is no petition made.

Turning to the proper services of the Sarum rite, the evidence is clearer still. Collects, secretæ, post-communions, all go to swell the evidence as to the intention of the service. Quoting at random in illustration of this, take Post-Communion, St. Anne's day (July 26), "As we receive, O Lord, the longed-for sacrament of the heavenly table, etc,"² or, Post-Communion, St. Sampson's day (July 28), "O God, who hast satisfied us with Thy holy gifts, etc."³ Or, Secret, St. Romanus' day (Aug. 9), "Cleanse us by these heavenly mysteries."⁴ Or, Post-Communion, St. Edward the Confessor's day (Oct. 13), "Having been filled with the banquet of life-giving food, etc."⁵ Or, Post-Communion on St. Linus' day (Nov. 26), "We have received, O Lord, this heavenly sacrament, etc."⁶ Perhaps the most striking example is to be found in the office for St. Thomas of Canterbury (Dec. 29). In the Secret "the gift of the saving offering" is recalled, while in the Post-Communion the plea is urged "through these holy gifts which we have received."⁷ I call this striking in view of the period when it was compiled, namely after 1170 A.D.

But does the Use of Sarum represent correctly the primitive idea of the Church as shown in her earliest liturgies? Bishop Gore declares that it does. He says, "With one consent the Church in her prayers of consecration has prayed that the elements of

¹ Canon F. E. Warren's "The Sarum Missal in English," p. 47 of Part I.

² *Ibid.*, pt. ii, p. 426.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 587.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pt. 1, p. 114.

bread and wine may by the power of God be made or declared Christ's body and blood *for a certain purpose, viz.,* 'in order that those receiving them may be confirmed to holiness; may obtain remission of sins and . . . eternal life,' 'for the remission of sins and eternal life to them that receive,' . . . 'that it may be a legitimate eucharist for all those who receive it.' The same restricted intention is constantly and almost without exception illustrated in the language of the fathers."¹ If we accept the Rev. Vernon Staley's declaration that, "the early Liturgies possess an authority second only to the Holy Scriptures"² then the conclusion is plain that non-communicating attendance is outside, and must be outside the toleration of the Christian Church. For what right have people to be present who take no part, and can take no part in the prayers of the Service. And it is established that the Eucharistic prayers are only for those communicating. The old divisions of the Service bear their testimony to this. There were "the Mass of the Catechumens" and "the Mass of the Faithful." St. Ambrose in a letter to his sister told her how the soldiers came to prepare the seat of Theodosius in Milan Cathedral just after the Bishop had dismissed the catechumens.^{3 4}

In the compilation of about the same period⁵ known as "The Apostolic Constitutions" there is embedded what is called "The Clementine Liturgy." This is claimed to possess "the main features and order of the Christian Liturgy in the earliest complete form in which it has come down to us."⁶ This Liturgy has the two divisions named above. At the close of the first all but the faithful were dismissed, each class, beginning with the Catechumens and ending with the penitents, having their special prayer of dismissal. Deacons then guard the doors. In the second part, what in later terminology is called "the Canon," we meet the same fact as in the Sarum and Roman. There is no prayer for any present who are not going to communicate. The blessing is asked for those "who partake thereof."⁷ While what we should call a Rubric prescribes that after the ministers, deaconesses, virgins, widows, children, *all* the people

¹ "The Body of Christ," 1st ed., p. 135.

² "The Catholic Religion," 4th ed., p. 213.

³ Dean Luckcock's "The Divine Liturgy," p. 25.

⁴ 388 A.D.

⁵ F. E. Warren's "Ante-Nicene Liturgy," p. 255.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

are to receive. And when "all, both men and women, have received" the Deacons are to take up what remains and bear it to the sacristy.¹

But there are three additional sources from which arguments may be drawn.

I. There are numbers of small things which point to the practice of the Church. One is her care in sending to those absent through sickness, or some urgent cause, portions of the Consecrated Elements. Justin Martyn in the First Apology, *cap.* lxvii. speaks of this custom.² Can we suppose that with an anxiety that each member absent should receive the Sacrament, there should be a toleration of members present not receiving? Another is the custom on the Station Days (Wednesday and Friday) of postponing the Eucharist until the ninth hour, when the fast was over.³ The reason was that as Canon Warren in his "Liturgy of Ante-Nicene Church" shows from an incident connected with Tertullian, it was thought that receiving the Eucharist broke the fast.⁴ Although Dean Luckock in his "The Divine Liturgy" states that the 3 p.m. Celebrations on such days were "to avoid anything so festal till the day was far advanced"⁵ yet the Dean's gloss is hardly tenable. The reason given by Canon Warren rests on too secure a foundation. And the conclusion is obvious that *Celebrations were for Communion*. Tertullian actually advised scrupulous folks who did not wish to eat because of the fast, to reserve their portion of the Consecrated Elements for reception at home.⁶ He says, "Thus by receiving and reserving the Lord's Body both ends are secured, the participation in the sacrifice and the fulfilment of your service."⁷ Surely his words are conclusive. Only those who receive participate in the Sacrifice.

We have not time to indicate more of these small things, but must turn to the second additional source.

II. Attempts to prevent the rise of the practice. It appears, so far as one can judge, and the evidence serves, that the practice of non-communicating attendance began in the fourth century. In the year 341 A.D. a Council of Antioch decreed against it.⁸ While

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴ P. 126.

⁵ Footnote on p. 14.

⁶ Warren, p. 126.

⁷ Gore, "The Body of Christ," p. 307.

⁸ Waterland on The Eucharist, Oxford ed., 1880, p. 375.

St. Chrysostom at a later date sharply reproved those guilty of such a practice, at Constantinople. "In vain," he said, "stand we at the altar, none come to receive. I speak not barely to persuade you to receive, but to make yourselves worthy. You are not worthy [you will say] of the sacrifice, or not fit to receive? Then neither are you worthy of the prayer: do you not hear the Deacon, when he stands up and proclaims, As many among you as are under penance, withdraw? All that do not communicate are supposed to be under penance. If you are of the number of the penitents, you must not receive: for he that does not receive is under penance. Why does [the Deacon] say, All ye that cannot pray, depart? And why do you, after that, impudently stay? You are not one of those, you will say, but of those who may receive . . . Every one that does not partake of the mysteries is shameless and impudent to stand by all the while."¹ This homily of St. Chrysostom's surely proves two things: (1) That there was an innovation in the practice he was attacking. (2) That there was the same care in excluding from the Christian assembly at the time of Communion all not entitled to communicate as we find at a much earlier date. We cannot imagine that the patriarch was denouncing a primitive and accepted custom of the church. The importance of the saint's words is clearly felt when we read Bishop Gore's "The Body of Christ." More than once the Bishop refers to them—although he only actually quotes one short sentence from them—and while he seems to attempt to limit their application somewhat, at the same time he concedes the doctrinal reason for their enforcement. He says, "We can never allow ourselves to use language which implies that those who do not communicate can really take part in the sacrifice, or that 'non-communicating attendance' is the *normal* Christian act, without giving currency to a view of sacrifice which is less than Christian. That the sacrifice is completed in communion is the effective witness of all the liturgies."² Or again, the Bishop says, "It cannot be said too strongly that any practice which divorces eucharistic worship and sacrifice from communion, or which rests content at the 'high service' with the communion of the priest alone, really represents a seriously defective theology"³

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 379-80. Cf. Gore's "The Body of Christ," pp. 196-7, 307, 202-3.

² Gore, p. 203.

³ Gore, p. 276.

III. The direction of the early Church's intention. In the Western Church, side by side with non-communicating attendance, has grown up a worship of our Blessed Lord as objectively present in the Holy Eucharist, under the forms of bread and wine. A Flemish preacher preaching on Corpus Christi day thus put it, "We must distinguish in this white species which the priest reaches out to us the great God, who has drawn heaven and earth out of nothing . . . we must acknowledge in this holy Host the only begotten Son of God."¹ No wonder is it that he also says, "We should esteem it a holy duty to adore Jesus in His Blessed Sacrament . . . especially when He is exposed in His Blessed Sacrament on the altar,"² i.e. at the Celebration. Now of this worship the Eastern Church knows nothing unto this day. That it is set forth as *the* thing which a person present but not communicating at a Celebration is to do, I need not labour to prove. We may well hesitate concerning it when we note that it is unknown in the conservative East. But we have another reason for hesitating. Dr. Liddon said quite truly, "Certainly, in the greatest public act of Christian worship, the Eucharist, the rule was, as defined at Carthage, to address prayer to the Father . . . The rule did not govern ancient Christian practice in respect of non-Eucharistic prayer."³ In speaking of the Eucharistic collects in our present Prayer Book, Bishop Barry said, "The collect is rarely addressed to our Lord; mostly, *after the ancient practice*, to God the Father through Him."⁴ And Bishop Gore is still more explicit. He says, "In modern books of popular devotion, such as proceed from circles in which the doctrine of the real presence is accepted, a prominent feature is the stress laid on the worship of Christ, as, in virtue of consecration, made present upon the altar, as upon a throne. Thus going to the eucharist (apart from the question of communion) is spoken of as going to meet Jesus. He is said to be 'coming' in the earlier part of the service; after consecration He has 'come,' and the faithful must devoutly adore Him. . . . Now it is an admitted fact that this worship of Jesus in the sacrament is absent from the liturgies, almost entirely. Where it exists, and so far as it exists, (1) it certainly represents no original feature; (2) it generally does

¹ "Sermons from the Flemish," *vol. Latria*, p. 306.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 332-3.

³ Liddon's "The Divinity of our Lord," 18th ed., p. 539.

⁴ Barry's "The Teacher's Prayer Book," p. 576. |

not correspond to the requirement of modern sacramental worship. . . . In the liturgies . . . we have the highest expression of Christian worship—the worship of the thrice holy, Father, Son and Spirit, one God, and the worship of the Father, through the Son by the Spirit. . . . But there is no separate worship of the incarnate Christ as specially present on the altar in virtue of consecration. The idea of Jesus coming to be amongst us on His altar throne and of our coming to meet Him (otherwise than in receiving Him) is conspicuously absent. The mind of the ancient church in general is represented in the canon of the African Council, ‘When we stand at the altar, let the prayer always be directed to the Father.’”¹

Yet another and very significant authority may be quoted to show that the early Church knew nothing of this worship of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

Dr. Rock had claimed that the ancient liturgies were for Eucharistic adoration of the Body and Blood of Christ.² But other liturgical scholars had resisted the claim. Mr. Keble in his book “Eucharistic Adoration” is forced to join them. He says, “The only plausible objection that I know of to the foregoing statement arises from the omission of the subject in the primitive liturgies, which are almost or altogether silent as to any worship of Christ’s Body and Blood after consecration. We find in them neither any form of prayer addressed in special to His holy humanity so present, nor any rubric enjoining adoration inward or outward.”³

Now I think that we can truly say, in conclusion—

1. The Celebration of the Eucharist in the primitive Church was for those communicating alone.
2. Non-communicating attendance is something foreign altogether to the early conception of the Service.
3. The early Church knew nothing of the worship of Jesus in the Sacrament which is defined as the object of non-communicating attendance in the Western Church.
4. It is impossible “to put aside subsidiary questions such as ‘non-communicating attendance’ . . . and consider only the one

¹ Gore, pp. 99, 100, 102-3.

² Cf. Dr. Rock’s “Hierurgia,” p. 92 (2nd ed.), quoted in Mr. Dimock’s “On Eucharistic Worship” (1876), p. 225.

³ “Eucharistic Adoration,” p. 126, Oxford, 1867, quoted in Mr. Dimock’s “On Eucharistic Worship,” p. 225.

thing, 'that the Eucharist should be made the central Sunday service.'" For "non-communicating attendance" involves such a revolution in the nature of the Service as to put it amongst those things which, to use Bishop Gore's words, "ought to raise in all minds a deep questioning of the authority of the Church to innovate so freely upon [Christ's] intention."¹

There I leave the question.

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¹ Gore, p. 139.

