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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## ART. V.—EVENING COMMUNION.

THE practice of administering the Holy Communion in the evening is now becoming more and more general every year in all our large towns and thickly populated parishes. In London, for instance, which we may take as the centre of Church life, as it is of population, there were in the year 1879, according to Mackeson's "Guide," 262 churches in which there is Evening Communion, for 65 in which it was the practice in the year 1869. Thus, in the metropolis alone, within ten years, there has been an increase of about 200 churches where the practice is observed. We can only regard it as an outcome of the great revival of religious life which has gradually been going forward in the Church of England. Many of the most devoted of our parochial clergy find, as they struggle on to bring the ministrations of the Church home to the masses, that with numbers, who in days gone by would have been altogether neglected, the only hope of leading them to the Holy Communion is to have it at the later hour. But the great question is, whether they are doing right or wrong in thus administering in the evening?—whether it is to be regarded as a serious innovation, or only as a return of the Church to the original institution and practice required by the circumstances of the times? To this question we desire to have a clear and decided answer. We are satisfied that, with those who have adopted the Evening Communion, it will be found there is no attempt at will-worship, or disobedience to lawful authority, but simply a desire to bring the masses of our people into the full communion of the Church. We are not aware that in any case has the practice been authoritatively forbidden. But, while some have written against it and sought to discourage it, others have denounced it in such extraordinary language that we feel it to be of the highest importance to satisfy the minds of Churchmen on the subject. We propose, therefore, to inquire, as far as the limits of this article will allow, what we may gather from the teaching of Holy Scripture; what light is thrown upon it from the practice of the Church in the first four centuries; and what we may fairly take to be the rule of the Church of England as laid down in the Book of Common Prayer.

Before, however, we proceed to an examination of these points, it may be well to consider what has been laid down as to the practice of Evening Communion, by members of the Episcopal Bench, and those whose opinions would have weight in the Church. We are not aware that the attention of Convocation has been specially directed to the subject, or that any

suggestion has been made by that important body for the guidance of our Church. Some few of the prelates, however, have expressed themselves more or less strongly. In a Charge delivered in 1860, the late Bishop Wilberforce is the first to raise any grave objection to the practice. He thus sums up the grounds of his objection :—

That it is contrary to the usage of the whole Church, certainly from very early, and *most probably from Apostolic times* ; that it involves an *unlawful use of our Liturgy* ; and that it *directly tends to the desecration of the highest rite of our holy religion.*

We wish that our space permitted us to give the passage in full, if only to show the superficial manner in which it is sought to establish these points. But his Lordship goes so far as to say :—

This question being one of the legal construction of our offices, I have thought it my duty to consult the very learned Chancellor of our Diocese, and I am fortified by his opinion that any clergyman violating herein the monition of his bishop would subject himself to the penalty of suspension.

Again, in his Charge of 1866, he warns his clergy solemnly against Evening Communion. He says :—

That he believes such a celebration is contrary to the law of our Church, and that he feels himself bound to enforce obedience to that law, and to resist, by all means in his power, the introduction of this greatest of innovations.

None have spoken so strongly as this against the practice of Evening Communion. Bishop Wilberforce distinctly pronounces it to be illegal, tending to desecration, and bringing upon the clergy the penalty of suspension. But, of course, if this were really the case, it would be the bounden duty of the bishops to stop it.

The Bishop of Ely, at his primary visitation in 1877, thus expresses himself on the subject :—

I have been asked by several clergymen my opinion as to afternoon and evening communions. I have had but one answer, when consulted on the point—viz., that I shall deeply regret to see the practice increase. I recognize fully the love of souls which has led many to adopt it, under the hope of winning to the table of the Lord some who might never otherwise approach it. But my own experience does not allow me to admit the impossibility of any class of persons attending an early or midday celebration, if they have indeed an earnest desire to communicate ; and I do not think that the divesting attendance of all necessity for exertion and self-denial is in itself desirable ; or that it can be a sufficient ground for varying by our own individual will, from the usage through many centuries of the universal Church. Moreover, neither in our towns or villages are the surroundings of an

evening service such as to conduce to that quiet thoughtfulness and sustained seriousness which should both precede and follow the act of receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. On these grounds, and also because I observe distinct signs of the practice ceasing to be a right-minded effort to facilitate the access of certain classes to the Holy Communion, and *becoming a badge of party*, I am unable to give my approval to it. I must needs deprecate the introduction of yet another controversy amongst us, and that in connection with what should be, above all things, a witness and bond of unity.

But why should Evening Communion be considered the badge of a party any more than the early celebration? Both, if it comes to that, are a variation from the old-established usage of midday Communion in the Church of England; but both are regarded as showing an increasing desire on the part of the clergy to meet the altered circumstances of our times, and to give an opportunity to all classes to enter into the full communion of our Church. Why it need be a matter of controversy we are at a loss to understand. If a clergyman finds that he is able to meet the wants of a large number of his parishioners by having Communion in the evening, why should his brother clergymen find fault with him, and often in most unbrotherly language, because it may suit his own views, or the circumstances of his parish, to have it at the earlier hour? For our own part, we regard the time of Communion as of little importance compared with the frequency and reverence of administration. It has certainly been our experience in large towns that, with servants, artisans, and others of the labouring class, the evening hour was the most convenient; in fact, that in many cases it was impossible for them to attend at any other time. And this is confirmed by the census which has recently been made of Church attendance in Liverpool, Bristol, Wolverhampton, and other great centres of population, from which it appears that the numbers attending the Evening Service are greatly in excess of those who go to church in the morning. It is needless to inquire into the causes of this. We have only to deal with the fact. And shall we be fulfilling our duty to these people, or can we hope that the Church will gain a hold upon the masses of the population, if she refuses to give them the Holy Communion at the very time when the sacred ordinance was instituted by Christ Himself, and when they find it most convenient to attend? We cannot say what may be the surroundings of an Evening Service in the Diocese of Ely; but we have always considered that the calm and quiet of the day's close were most conducive to thoughtfulness and sustained seriousness.

“ It happened on a solemn eventide,  
 Soon after He that was our Surety died,

Two bosom friends, each pensively inclined,  
 The scene of all those sorrows left behind,  
 Sought their own village, busied as they went  
 In musings worthy of the great Event ;  
 They spake of Him they loved, of Him whose life,  
 Though blameless, had incurred perpetual strife ;  
 Whose deeds had left, in spite of hostile arts,  
 A deep Memorial graven on their hearts.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

The new acquaintance soon became a guest,  
 And made so welcome at their simple feast ;  
 He blessed the bread, but vanished at the word,  
 And left them both exclaiming, "Twas the Lord !  
 Did not our hearts feel all he deigned to say ?  
 Did they not burn within us by the way ?"

Thus it was in days gone by, and thus we believe it is with most of us still.

The Bishop of Chichester, in his Charge delivered at the Visitation of 1878, makes brief but decided mention of the subject :—

Early Communions [his Lordship says] for the benefit of those who cannot attend the Mid-day Service are greatly to be commended.

Evening Communions [however, he adds] are a novel introduction : discountenanced by the uniform practice of the Church ; repugnant, as I think, also to the general feeling of the more pious and devout of our people, and open to many serious objections.

What those objections are the Bishop does not state ; but we would appeal to our readers who are at all acquainted with Brighton, the largest centre in the Diocese of Chichester, as to which of the churches there have been most successful in supplying recruits to apostate Rome—whether those who are most diligent in early celebrations, or those who allow the people the privilege of an Evening Communion ? We consider that this would be the best mode, perhaps, of ascertaining "the general feeling of the more pious and devout of our people."

The Bishop of Lichfield, in his Primary Charge, 1879-80, is one of the latest who have expressed their opinion to the clergy on the subject of Evening Communion, and, as he gives some very strong reasons for objecting to the practice, we quote the passage at length. His Lordship says :—

I am glad to find that in a large number of cases there are celebrations at an early hour of the day ; I observe with less satisfaction the prevalence, especially in large towns, of Evening Communions. I am by no means prepared to speak of this arrangement in the strong terms of condemnation which are sometimes employed with respect to it, but nevertheless I deeply regret it. I do not indeed regard it as in itself inherently wrong. *That which was, for however short a time*

*tolerated in Apostolic days, cannot have in it the nature of sin ; but, on the other hand, I certainly feel that it is contrary to the mind of the Church, guided as we profess to believe by the promised help of the Holy Spirit.* The practices of primitive days were in many instances necessary or permissible, under the exceptional circumstances of a time when the Church had only imperfectly developed its discipline and its order, but in all later times the custom of Evening Communion has been almost universally unknown. *We may well believe that just as the observance of the Jewish Sabbath continued for a considerable time after the foundation of the Christian Church, but gradually gave place to the festival of the Lord's Day ; so the evening Communion, instituted though it was at the time of the evening meal connected with the Passover, was gradually abandoned for the early celebration, of which mention is made by more than one writer within the first century after the day of Pentecost.* Further, *it can scarcely be denied that in the history of the Reformed Church of England such a practice has been unknown until within recent days.* I am aware of the argument that is often used on behalf of the late hour, that it is impossible for certain classes of our parishioners to come either at midday or in the morning ; but my own experience as a parish priest leads me to believe that this is not so. I have known an evening Communion discontinued, with the substitution of sufficiently early hours on the Sunday morning, and the addition of a forenoon service on one of the other days of the week, without the loss, so far as I could ascertain after careful inquiry, of a single communicant who had formerly attended the evening service. I believe that a similar result would follow if the same course were adopted in other parishes, and I earnestly trust that the experiment may be tried. I would only add that to leave to the closing hours of the Lord's Day, after all its necessary demands upon the spiritual powers of the worshippers, that special and only service the observance of which is commanded by our blessed Lord Himself, seems to me likely to foster, even if it does not indicate, a somewhat imperfect and languid condition of spiritual life, the very reverse of that which is likely to be quickened and sustained by the dedication of the earliest hours of the day to "these holy mysteries."

We have ourselves placed certain portions of this statement in italics, as calling for remark. The Bishop, we notice, omits to mention, perhaps as too well known, the fact that Christ instituted the Lord's Supper in the evening. But does he really wish us to believe that the example of our Lord in the original institution was only for a short time *tolerated* in Apostolic times, and that it was given up afterwards as contrary to the mind of the Church guided by the Holy Spirit ? This is what his Lordship's words convey, and if we apprehend his meaning aright it is certainly startling. What he says about some of the practices of primitive days may be the case ; but it is certainly not true in reference to the institution of the Lord's Supper. That bears no analogy whatever to the institution of the Lord's

Day, as superseding the Jewish Sabbath. The time, the facts, and all the circumstances of the one have been plainly recorded in the Inspired Volume, together with the express command of our blessed Lord attached to it; but of the other we are told nothing more than that it became an observance in the Church from the Resurrection day. We are at a loss to know who the writers can be within the first century after the day of Pentecost who mention the abandonment of the Evening Communion for the earlier celebration. If his Lordship alludes to the well-known letter of Pliny, the heathen writer, perhaps he will explain the passage; but he must do so from a heathen, not a theological point of view. We are not aware that any Christian writer before Tertullian, not even Justin Martyr, who goes into all the details of Holy Communion, makes mention of an early celebration. And as to the practice being unknown until recent days in the history of the Reformed Church of England, no sensible person would think of denying the fact, as it is only within recent days that there has been Evening Service at all in the Church of England, as we have it now. Morning and Afternoon Services were the general, if not the universal, practice. But what is more to the point, and it can scarcely be denied, is, that in the history of the Reformed Church of England, such a practice as early celebrations at 5.30, 6.30, 7.30, and 8 A.M. has been unknown until within recent days.

These, we believe, are the only, or at all events the most important, statements of our Bishops against the practice of Evening Communion. We have been careful to quote them, as far as possible, at length, and to call attention to every argument adduced, in order that nothing of their force and authority should be lost. But it remains for us to quote the weighty opinion of one other Prelate upon this subject, a Bishop whose premature loss the Church of England cannot cease to lament. Dr. Jeune, the late Bishop of Peterborough, was only spared to deliver one Charge; but in that valuable address his Lordship thus refers to Evening Communion:—

Our Church has not limited the celebration of the Holy Communion to any special hour of the day. The ordinary time of administration is at the close of the first hour of evening. But at any time of the day or night we are authorized to transport the Church to the bedside, and there to commemorate and to communicate to a departing or languishing brother the benefits of the precious death of Christ. In some of our churches early Communion has been adopted with great advantage, and without any idea of thus gradually bringing in what is called Low Mass in the Romish Church. In one church, where the Holy Communion is administered at three different hours on successive Sundays, the alms at the several services have varied in the proportion of six, four, and two; a fact showing how well the arrangement

suits different classes of the faithful. In some cases the Eucharist has been administered in the evening of the day of confirmation to all, or all but a few, of the catechumens from the parish. Results however beneficial would, of course, not tempt a worthy pastor to introduce, or the Bishop to sanction, the use of the liberty allowed by our Church, if Scriptural, or even reasonable, objections against its use could be made good. But warrant ample there surely is for Evening Communion in the institution of His Supper by the Lord, and in the practice of Apostolic and after-times. "While they were eating, He took the bread, and, after supper, He took the cup." Surely our Church does well when she bids us in "these matters to cleave to the first beginning, hold fast the Lord's tradition, do that in the Lord's commemoration which He Himself did, He Himself commanded, and His Apostles confirmed." The rule seems eminently safe; yet what a havoc of error and superstitions would it make, if observed! Even as to the circumstances of place and time, in themselves indifferent, it is from those who vary from His institution, not from those who accord with it, that apology is due. But I have heard it said that the administration of the Eucharist in the evening by the Lord Himself is not an example to be followed; that it is a mere exception, in no case to be a precedent. This is bold; but I read something bolder still. I read that Evening Communion is a profanation. If so, the reproach cast upon them falls on Christ and His Apostles; for His Apostles, too, broke the bread at the evening meal: or rather it shows that in the minds of those who utter it, there are theories which were not in the minds of our Lord or His Apostles.

We should have been content with these quotations from Episcopal Charges as fully stating all that could be said upon the subject by those in authority. But it may be as well to add, for the further satisfaction of our readers, what has been written by others in the Church whose opinion may have weight. We shall mention two. The late Canon Ashwell, a few years ago, in a pamphlet dedicated to the Lord Bishop of Chichester, put forward all the arguments to be advanced against Evening Communion. The Dean of Norwich has also made reference to the subject, in the appendix to a recent edition of his valuable book on the Communion Office. The former of these writings, which is hardly worthy of a theologian of Canon Ashwell's standing, has, we believe, been fully answered in another pamphlet of much ability by the Rev. A. C. Pittar, formerly Vicar of Ashton Hayes, Chester. The Canon commences by assuming that the only two grounds for the practice of Evening Communion are to be found in the argument of expediency, and the example of our Lord in the original institution. He then proceeds to give, according to his own views, the authority of Scripture and the early Church as against the practice; and concludes with what he calls "moral and religious objections" to the Church in the nineteenth century doing exactly what her

Lord and Master did at the earliest Communion. We thus briefly allude to Canon Ashwell's pamphlet, as we hope later on to deal with his authorities and arguments under the heads which we proposed at the outset. Dr. Goulbourn's remarks, however, require to be given *in extenso*. He states the case with perfect fairness; and, while he does not hesitate to say that "he has a strong instinct against them, which can hardly be justified on grounds of reason," he frankly admits that "no exception whatever can be taken against Evening Communion, either from the Holy Scriptures, or from the Book of Common Prayer, or from the Constitutions and Canons of the Church of England." The passage is as follows:—

It is somewhat noticeable that at the very time when some ecclesiastics in our Church are seeking to re-establish fasting Communion and insisting upon its observance, others of an opposite school are introducing into their churches evening celebrations, not indeed as at all essential or obligatory, but as the only way, in their view, of providing opportunities of communicating for certain classes whose engagements do not admit of attendance in the forenoon. Perhaps this is one of the numerous instances of which one extreme of sentiment and practice in the Church begets another—in which the pendulum of thought, having swung in one direction, not only comes back again to the perpendicular position, but swings equally far in the direction opposite. I must be doubly cautious what I say on this subject of Evening Communion, as having personally and for myself a strong instinct against them, which can hardly, I fear, be justified on grounds of reason. It must be admitted that no exception whatever can be taken against Evening Communion, either from the Holy Scriptures, or from the Book of Common Prayer, or from the Constitutions and Canons of the Church of England. Nothing, as I believe, can be alleged against them but a very ancient and prevailing custom of the Church, such as is quoted in favour of fasting Communion, worthy of respect, no doubt, as being very ancient and prevailing, but by no means to be erected into a law of conscience, and capable in its very nature of modification or alteration to meet new circumstances of the Church and new phases of society. And if I personally happen to feel (as I do, and many with me) that for myself Communion late in the evening, when the wear and worry of the day has sensibly told upon the freshness of my mind, is unedifying, I will not on any account make my conscience a law for my brothers, but will fully believe that he may and does find edification in a different view of the subject, or at all events that he thinks (surely a good and noble sentiment) that his own private edification is to be postponed to that of his flock. Only then, if I entirely abstain from judging him, I shall expect that, in that reciprocity of charity which the Apostle enjoins, he shall abstain from "despising" me, and not call me party-names or think me narrow and scrupulous, because his novel practice does not approve itself to my feelings.

Having thus endeavoured to place before our readers, at greater length perhaps than some might think necessary, what has been said upon the subject by persons of weight in the Church at the present time, we are now in a position to examine for ourselves the different authorities on which these statements and arguments are founded in reference to the evening Communion.

We turn, in the first instance, to the Holy Scriptures, and we trust that in doing so we shall be kept free from all the unhappy bias and prejudice which seem in a most remarkable manner to influence good men when they write upon this subject. There are three questions which naturally suggest themselves—What inference is to be drawn from the original institution of the Lord's Supper? Is there any light thrown upon the subject from the early history of the Church in the Book of the Acts? What instruction do the Epistles give us in connection with the Holy Communion? The fact, of course, is not disputed that our Blessed Lord instituted the Sacred Ordinance in the evening. The Gospel narrative is clear upon this point. "Now, when the even was come He sat down with the twelve." And why was this? It was the time originally appointed for the Feast of the Passover. "The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening." "Ye shall let nothing remain of it until the morning." Thus the Lord's Supper, the Memorial Feast of Christ our Passover being sacrificed for us, was instituted in the evening. And what is the only inference that we can fairly draw from this circumstance? Surely that, in the absence of any direct command upon the subject, the time which our Blessed Lord Himself chose for the Institution is the fittest for celebration, or, at all events, the time which should be least open to objection. But what does Canon Ashwell say in reference to this?—

We ask, Was there any special reason for our Lord instituting it in the evening which does not apply to later cases? And we soon see that there was. For what is the Eucharist? It is a developed Passover, and being thus the Passover's successor, it was absolutely necessary for its institution to be at the Passover hour, which was in the evening. There was a reason, then, for His instituting it at this particular hour; but to make this example binding without further authority, when the Passover with its hour had passed away, and with the universal practice of the primitive Church against you, is, to say the least, a dangerous proposal.

But no one has ever sought, at least in our day, to make the example binding. The strongest advocates of Evening Communion have only asked for liberty to celebrate at the original time of institution. And so far from the universal practice of the Primitive Church being against them, we shall presently

show that it was quite the other way. But Canon Ashwell says further:—

Add to this that, as the Passover was itself a commemorative hour, so it is only natural that the Communion hour should also be a commemorative hour, and that as the Passover at evening commemorated the evening of deliverance from Egypt, so the Communion at early morning commemorated the victory of Him who, at early morning, rose again for our deliverance from Satan.

Now, this may have been Canon Ashwell's view of the Lord's Supper, and it may be the view of many others; but we have no hesitation in saying that it is not the object and meaning of the ordinance as taught in Scripture and by the Church of England. We agree with him that as the Passover hour was a commemorative hour, so it is only natural that the Communion hour should also be a commemorative hour. But of what is the Lord's Supper a commemoration? Is it a memorial of His Resurrection? We should then certainly expect to have the feast observed "very early in the morning, on the first day of the week." But this is not what our Church and Holy Scripture teach as the meaning of the rite. It is a commemoration of *Christ's death*, which took place in the afternoon, or at even. For this reason the Holy Supper was instituted at the evening hour; and we believe that there would be much less danger of the true meaning of the ordinance being overlooked if the later hour were more generally observed. Our Church says, "Why was the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper ordained? For a continual remembrance of *the sacrifice of the death of Christ*, and of the benefits which we receive thereby." The word of Scripture is equally explicit, "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do so show *the Lord's death* till He come."

Passing from the institution, as recorded in the Gospels, to the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, we shall find that the evening hour, no doubt on the grounds we have stated, was the time observed by the immediate followers of our Lord. Such a thing as early Communion is not once mentioned in the New Testament. But the account of St. Paul's sojourn at Troas, in Acts xx., should satisfy any unprejudiced mind as to the matter of Evening Communion in the early Church. Why Canon Ashwell should not refer to this we cannot say, except that he had asserted that the universal practice of the Primitive Church was against us. We shall simply content ourselves by quoting the valuable remarks of Bishop Wordsworth upon the passage:—

It appears probable that this meeting for breaking of bread took place on the evening of Sunday. It appears, then, that this was a stated day and hour for Christian assemblies; not, perhaps, without

some reference to the fact mentioned by St. John concerning the first Lord's day of the Christian Church: "The same day at evening, being the first day of the week, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, 'Peace be unto you.'" The Holy Supper was instituted on an evening, and it was towards evening when our Lord took bread and blessed it, and gave it to the two disciples at Emmaus. Observe the intimation given that the primitive Christians assembled specially on the Lord's Day for the reception of the Eucharist, and for hearing the Word.

Having thus noticed the original institution, and the reference to the practice of the Early Church, it remains for us to consider any instructions on the subject which may be found in the Epistles. Here, again, we must refer to Canon Ashwell. He writes:—

Once, and once only, is Evening Communion discussed in the New Testament, and then it is where St. Paul has to repress the scandal accompanying it with such exceeding sternness. Prone to laxity, luxury, and party-spirit, it does not speak well for the practice of Evening Communion that it was in the Corinthian Church alone that we find it prominent.

Such a statement from such a theologian is most unfair, and certainly misleading as to the real facts of the case. It is true that there is but the one Epistle which refers to the Evening Communion, but it is the only Epistle in which there is any reference whatever to the Lord's Supper. The candid reader will see at once, on reading 1 Cor. xi., that the *Evening* Communion is not the subject of discussion, but the abuses which had arisen at the Lord's Supper from the Agapæ, or Love feasts, which preceded the celebration. We are thankful, however, for the reference to the Evening Communion, even in an incidental manner, as the Apostle therein confirms on the very highest authority all that we have been endeavouring to place before our readers. He received of the Lord Himself in special revelation all that he declares upon the subject; and two things are plain—one that the institution was at night, and the other that the object of the institution was to show Christ's death. And what is further so very remarkable in connection with this passage, is that, if the time of celebration was the real cause of these evils in the Corinthian Church, the inspired Apostle who had received direct communications from the Lord upon the subject, does not at once change the hour to the morning as was necessary, it is said, in the churches at a subsequent period. Canon Ashwell boldly says that this was what the Apostle actually did, as indicated by the words, "The rest will I set in order when I come." But this we shall be able to show was not the case, as we proceed to examine the practice of the Church in the first four centuries. We feel that up to the present point in our

consideration of the subject, it is conclusive that if we had nothing but the Scriptures to guide us, from the original institution, from the practice of the Early Church, and from the teaching of the Apostle, we have the highest authority for Evening Communions.

But while there can be no doubt from Scripture that in the Apostolic age the administration of the Lord's Supper took place in the evening, after the pattern of its original institution, and as a memorial of Christ's death, it is at the same time certain that within the four succeeding centuries this practice was very generally changed. The Evening Communion was gradually superseded by the early celebration, until at the Council of Carthage, in 393, we find it decreed as one of the Canons, "The Sacrament of the Altar shall always be celebrated fasting, except on the anniversary of its institution, *Cæna Domini* (Maundy Thursday)." It was not, however, till far later on in the history of the Church, as may be gathered from scattered notices of the practice, that Evening Communion was altogether forbidden, if it was ever completely suppressed. But the important question for us is, how and by what authority was this change brought about in the time of celebration? Was it, as some would have us believe, by the direction of the Holy Spirit, guiding the Church according to the promise of her Divine Master? Or, was it from the circumstances of the time, and the persecutions which beset the Church, that the Christians were compelled to abandon the evening hour, and assemble in the early morning, and that thus in many respects the whole character of the ordinance was altered? Tertullian, who flourished about the beginning of the third century, is the first to make mention of the Early Communion. In the "*De Coronâ*," he says,—

The Sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord hath commanded to be eaten at meal-times, and enjoined to be taken by all, we take *also* at the assemblies before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents.

From which we gather that at this time the early celebration had begun, though the Evening Communion was still the general practice, as may be inferred from two other passages by the same writer. In the "*Ad Uxorem*,"—

Who finally will without anxiety endure her absence all the night long at the Paschal Solemnities? Who will, without some suspicion of his own, let her go to that Lord's Supper which they defame?

And, again, in the "*Apologeticus*," he says that the Christians are described as doing all kinds of wickedness after the Communion when the lights had been extinguished. Subsequent writers might be quoted, as Cyprian, in his Epistle lxii. to Cæcilius, on the subject of the Mixed Cup; Gregory Nazianzen,

Orat. xlv., in "Sanctum Pascha;" Augustine, in his Letter 118, to Januarius, and others of a later date, to show that while undoubtedly the Early Communion was becoming the general practice of the Church, the Evening Communion was gradually, but by no means at once, falling into disuse. But it will be sufficient to give the following passage from Bingham's "Antiquities" (Bk. xv. ch. vii. sec. 9), which, in condensing the quotation from Cyprian, furnishes at the same time a very fair account of the whole matter:—

All he [Cyprian] pleads for upon this point, is only this, that the general custom of the Church to celebrate the Eucharist in the morning only, was not against the rule of Christ, though he gave it in the evening after supper; because Christ had a particular reason for what He did, which He did not intend should oblige the Church. Christ offered in the evening to signify the evening or end of the world; *but we offer in the morning to celebrate our Saviour's resurrection.* And he gives another reason why they did not celebrate in the evening generally, as in the morning, *because the people could not as well all come together in the evening as in the morning;* by which it is plain, in Cyprian's time there was no absolute rule to forbid communicating after supper, though the practice began generally to be disused, and the common custom was to receive fasting and at morning service.

We have placed certain words in italics to point out two things which are specially worthy of the attention of our readers—first, how completely the object of the Lord's Supper was altered by the change to the early celebration, "We offer in the morning *to celebrate our Saviour's resurrection.*" Though, strangely enough, it would be shown how Cyprian contradicts himself, if we had quoted directly from his own writings and had given the continuation of the letter:—

And because we make mention of his Passion [he says] in all sacrifices (for the Lord's Passion is the sacrifice which we offer) *we ought to do nothing else than what He did.* For Scripture says, "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till He come."

And, secondly, it is important to notice how Cyprian, at the time the change was taking place, argues in the very same way for the Early Communion then, as so many are arguing for the Evening Communion now. *It was a time most convenient for the people.* But under what circumstances, or by what authority, was the alteration made in the hour of celebration? Was it by the direct guidance and superintendence of the Holy Spirit in the Church? We surely cannot say this. It is true that Augustine says about fasting Communion,—

So it pleased the Holy Ghost that, for the honour of so great a Sacrament, the Lord's Body should enter into the mouth of a Christian

before any other food, and therefore this custom is observed by the whole world.

But this only shows what error had arisen on the subject of the Lord's Supper. The change of hour was not the result of any general council making a decree. And we can hardly suppose that the time of institution by Christ, which was closely followed in Apostolic times, and not altered by St. Paul when dealing with the abuses in the Church of Corinth, was set aside by the Holy Spirit, whose work in the Church is to bring the things of Christ to our remembrance. No, we believe that an impartial study of Church history in the first few centuries will lead us to the conclusion that, owing to persecution, the Christians were obliged to meet early in the morning, before day, to celebrate the Eucharist in their religious assemblies. Thus, the early hour came to be regarded as the proper time for celebration, and the Evening Communion fell gradually into disuse, except in those churches and districts unvisited by persecution. But whether this was for the good of the Church, or not, the after history of the Church will show. We believe ourselves that it led to a complete change in the object and purpose of the Sacrament; that it introduced fasting Communion and all the many superstitions which culminated finally in the errors of Paschasius. This, however, is not our business at present. We have only endeavoured to show in its true light in the first four centuries the practice of Evening Communion.

But it remains for us to inquire, and it will be only necessary to do so very briefly, what may fairly be taken to be the rule of the Church of England, as gathered from the Book of Common Prayer. We have already intimated that we have no desire in this argument to set up the Evening Communion as against the Early Celebration. For our own part we consider the time as quite immaterial. Our great desire is to give every opportunity to the masses of the people to enjoy the blessings and privileges of the Holy Communion, and so we have been led thus earnestly to contend for the evening celebration. But if it really comes to a question as to which is the more in accordance with the rule of our Church, the earlier or later hour, there cannot be a doubt from the Communion Office as to which is the more orthodox. The truth is, that our Church has wisely fixed upon no particular hour, leaving it an open matter for the benefit of her children. But she has made it very distinct and clear that in the service the Holy Communion *shall follow the sermon and mattins*—and, in fact, there is an old canon which expressly forbids the celebration of the Holy Communion before mattins. We hope that many of our friends who pride them-

selves on their strict attention to the letter of the law, and are so bitter in their opposition to the advocates of Evening Communion, will at least lay this point seriously to heart. If it comes to a matter of Church rule, it is clear where the right is. But, as we have said, we have no desire in the least to press a point of this kind. Our object has been, by examining all authorities, to show those who are advocates of the Evening administration, with a view to bringing the people into the full Communion of the Church, that they are perfectly right, and are justified in doing so. We must adapt the services of our Church to meet all the changes and exigencies of the times. If she is to retain her high position as the National Church, it will only be as she thus meets the religious wants of the nation. It is clear from the manner in which our churches are crowded in the evening, as compared with the earlier services, that the evening service is that which the masses are best able to attend. On this ground, therefore, although we ourselves may prefer the midday celebration, we strongly recommend the practice of administering the Holy Communion in the evening.

PRESBYTER.

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## Reviews.

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*Memoir of Henry Venn, B.D.* By WILLIAM KNIGHT, M.A., Rector of Pitt Portion, Tiverton, and Chaplain to his Grace the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury; formerly Secretary of the Church Missionary Society. A New Edition. With Portrait and Appendix. Pp. 515. Seeley, Jackson, & Halliday.

IN the *CHURCHMAN* of June, 1880, in reviewing the "Memoir of the Rev. H. Venn," published in May, we gave a sketch of Mr. Venn's career down to the year 1841. The *CHURCHMAN* of November contained an article, written by one who well knew Henry Venn, dealing with the second portion of the biography, that portion which relates to the last thirty of the fifty years of Mr. Venn's ministerial life—1841-1872—during which he was the honorary secretary of the Church Missionary Society. The volume which was published in May, 1880, contained, as our readers may remember, "The Missionary Secretariat," written by Mr. Knight, and a "Biographical Sketch," by Mr. Venn's sons. We have now before us a new edition of this work, a revised and compressed Memoir, prepared, as the Preface tells us, "at the instance of many friends, who hoped that such a life and such a character might be more widely studied if presented in a less costly form." For the book as it now appears Mr. Knight is solely responsible. He has adopted "the valuable Biographical Sketch almost without change," endeavouring to carry forward, as far as the materials at his command enabled, a record of the latter and more important years of his life. The additional matter to which Mr. Knight has had access will be found full of interest and highly characteristic.