

**AN ENQUIRY AS TO THE
CATHOLICITY OF THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND, IN REGARD TO THE
DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY
EUCHARIST**

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An enquiry as to the catholicity of the Church of England, in regard to the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist by A. H. Hosmer

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AS TO THE
Catholicity of the Church of England,
IN REGARD TO THE DOCTRINE OF
THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

BY THE
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AN ENQUIRY, &c.

It may fairly be acknowledged that had we nothing to guide us in the interpretation of the Prayer Book, considerable difficulty might arise in fully and clearly stating its doctrine concerning the Holy Eucharist ; and this, owing to omissions, or to the subdued statements and mere allusions which it contains, or to the arrangement, or rather strange disarrangement of the Liturgy itself. Nevertheless, I think good reasons may be alleged in proof that the Primitive and Catholic doctrine concerning the Holy Eucharist is also the doctrine of the Church of England.

Now by the Catholic doctrine, I mean of course that, which whether we consult Fathers or Liturgies, we find universally held in every age as unquestionable truth ; and this may, I think, be stated under the following heads :

1. That there is a Sacrifice in the Holy Eucharist, which is propitiatory, and wherein the Sacrifice of the death of Christ is set forth and pleaded with thanksgiving before the Father ;

2. That Therewith the Church pleads in behalf both of the living and the dead ;

3. That there is really and truly present after consecration in a heavenly, and spritual, and sacramental manner the very Body and Blood of our LORD JESUS CHRIST ;

4. That the Body and Blood of Christ are received in the Sacrament by the unworthy to their condemnation ;

5. That the Body and Blood of Christ are received in the Sacrament by the faithful to the remission of sins, and everlasting life ;

6. That the consecration is effected by the Words of Institution pronounced by a duly ordained Priest, through the operation of the HOLY GHOST.

One great source of the differences and errors into which persons so generally fall relative to the doctrine, or discipline, or ritual, of the English Church appears to be this,—that they interpret the language of the Church in her formularies, canons, and rubrics, as they would the language of any ordinary book, according to the customary use of words and phrases, evidently forgetting two points ; 1, that when those formularies, &c., were composed and sanctioned, many words and phrases had a meaning which is now become secondary or obsolete, but which is of course the meaning to be attached to them if we would interpret them aright ; 2, that the canonical ritual, or doctrinal language, of the Church is, and must be, like any scientific language, to a certain extent, technical, and invested with a peculiar meaning ;

which technical meaning must be duly regarded in interpretation.

I will refer also at once to another source of mistake ; viz., that very commonly one hears an argument drawn, and a meaning deduced, simply from the known or supposed wishes and tendencies of the leading Reformers, or other writers, of the Church ; indeed, one sometimes hears persons speak as though these were the authorities and guides to whom our obedience is due, instead of the Church herself. Now nothing will perhaps more clearly shew the absurdity of this than taking a parallel instance in temporal matters. What would be thought of a judge, or any executive officer, who should interpret a law of the land not by its general tenour and spirit, and other usual rules, but by the opinions and wishes of the individual statesman, or statesmen, who were most loud or prominent in bringing about its existence ? And it is quite as absurd to seek the interpretation of the Prayer Book, and the doctrine of the Church, from the known tendencies or wishes of the individual Reformers, instead of from the authorised documents and statements of the Church ; it is a mode both false in principle and uncertain in application, tending only to confusion and to the unbounded license of individual opinion. Moreover, if any should in good faith seek to guide themselves by such a rule, it would lead them to great perplexity. Should they follow the extreme or moderate Reformers ? and how would they decide when finding them expressing opinions at variance with each other, nay, sometimes varying from

and inconsistent with themselves; and sometimes not easily reconcilable with the statements of the Church herself? It is true that the writings of the Reformers have their value, and may be usefully appealed to; but even as individuals they have less of value and authority than later writers; partly because they lived in an age of unsettled opinions and distracted ideas, whereas later writers were brought up in and expressed the more settled tone of the Church herself; and partly because the latest law and latest settlement is ever of chief authority, and therefore those who were *then* most prominent and most influential, must be regarded as the more correct exponents of the Church's present mind, than those of an earlier age. Whatever deference therefore may be due to the opinions of the Divines of Edward and Elizabeth, must be due in a greater measure to those of the succeeding reigns, more especially those of the time of Charles II. when the Liturgy was for the last time revised and settled. Nay, as regards these last there is another all important reason for regarding their opinions and statements with additional respect, viz., that it was only in that reign, in 1662, that the Liturgy, which had been in use for 100 or more years, received for the first time the formal sanction and authorization of the Church in Convocation. But after all it must be remembered, that the opinions and statements of any individual writers are not authoritative, although useful in aiding us to an interpretation of doubtful formularies.

This much being premised I will first briefly allude to what may be called the presumptive evidence of the Church's teaching; and this of three kinds.

I. The opinions of those who at the reformation and subsequent important periods were of influence and note in the Church, such as Cranmer, Ridley, Jewel, Hooker, Andrews, Laud, Overall, Cosin, and others. As I have already said, it is difficult to gather with precision the opinions of the early Reformers. Men's minds were then in a state of convulsion, tossed to and fro, and their statements are accordingly variable and indistinct. Two points, however, they seem to place distinctly forward; viz., that in the Holy Eucharist we celebrate the memory of Christ's death, and are verily and indeed, when worthy, made partakers of His body and blood. Perhaps we might state their teaching thus: The Holy Eucharist is a commemoration before God of Christ's death; *i. e.* a thankful eucharistic festive celebration or commemoration; and made by outward signs and actions appointed by Christ himself; these signs and actions being—breaking bread, blessing, giving thanks, and communicating,—all making one inseparable act or ceremony for those who would celebrate it duly and reap the fruits of it.* Now

* Liguori in his Commentary on the Canons of Trent, (I write from memory) argues in favour of the Romish custom of solitary masses, that amongst the Jews there were some sacrifices, of which the Priest alone partook, but which were equally efficacious to their end. But his argument would prove too much, as there were also sacrifices of which not even the priest partook; and Roman Ritualists would acknowledge communion to be inseparable from the sacrifice of the Eucharist. But it might be answered, he appears not to take into account, that the Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving, or (like the Passover) a sacrificial feast of commemoration; in all which kind of sacrifices the people also were partakers; so that the true nature of the Eucharist being considered, the analogy would make

this is straightforward and intelligible enough, but then we are met by the perplexing statements that it is a memory (*i. e.* a commemoration or memorial) not a sacrifice, that it is not a propitiatory sacrifice, &c. It is not easy to see how it can be a commemoration before God and not propitiatory: if indeed they spoke of it as merely a commemoration or profession in the sight of men, or a mean for awakening in *ourselves* more vivid recollections and warmer feelings, this might then well be; but they speak of it as a commemoration *before God*; and every allusion before God to Christ's Sacrifice and Merits, must, not for its own sake but through those Merits, be propitiatory or move God to be propitious, *i. e.* awaken God's mercy for Christ's sake toward those, who thus in faith allude to His Death, appeal to it, and celebrate it; much more then when they do so in this manner, the chiefest of all. Thus prayer through Christ or His merits is a propitiatory commemoration; much more, then, when we commemorate what He hath done, according to His own last solemn institution. In the *primary* sense, as the one propitiation, His one Offering is alone propitiatory; but in the secondary sense every appeal to It is by It propitiatory. In the same way also the Eucharist must be a Sacrifice; not in a primary

against the Romish view. The Reformed Liturgy of 1549 seems to embrace the whole idea, and to couple the notions of sacrifice and feasting as forming the one full idea of the commemoration; on the one hand offering the Bread and the Cup; on the other hand exclaiming, "Let us keep a holy and joyful feast with the Lord." Deut. xii. 7, 12, 18, xvi. 11.