

Spiritual Intercommunion

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MY DEAR FATHER GILLETT,

Will you allow me to express my heartfelt appreciation of your article on Intercommunion in the September number of *Sobornost'*? In this article you elucidate both your own attitude to this burning issue in present day Christianity and to its particular application in the life of our Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius.

About three years ago on my own personal responsibility and in obedience to an inner commanding voice, I raised this issue of Intercommunion at our First Fellowship Conference (the Seventh Anglo-Russian Conference). I put this problem to our general consciousness as one which inevitably emerges from our common fellowship in prayer, on which we; had already embarked. The question raised met with response and its consideration evoked searching and responsible thought, which was evident in a series of private discussions in Russian and English groups, and at subsequent Conferences. Opinion was sharply divided, but I would say that, on the whole conviction prevailed (a conviction which sprang not so much from the voice of a loving heart, as from the arguments of «sober» reason!) that the time was not yet ripe for my suggestion. Nevertheless it was admitted that it deserved consideration, further investigation, and study. It was actually agreed that «further steps should be taken not only to increase the element of common prayer, but also to *elucidate* the theology implicit in it.»

My present letter is a step in this direction. It would have been extremely lamentable if the only result of all this discussion of my «proposal» had led to its rejection, to its being interpreted as a hasty and rash step which was, perhaps, according to- its very nature un-Catholic (not of the Church), though indeed the latter opinion did find direct and indirect expression in discussion.

Through God's mercy, however, all this discussion resulted in a quickening and a deepening of our understanding to an awareness of the miracles which the Spirit of God is working in us

through our life of fellowship. This is undoubtedly one of the positive results. We may even find that this achievement will be of greater importance and value than any actual acceptance of my original «proposal» At our last Conference when my «proposal» was once again rejected, the Senior Group without any hesitation adopted a resolution which to my mind is really more significant than the «proposal» itself. This resolu-

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tion *was suggested by you*, was readily welcomed by the senior members of the Conference, and was included in the general resolutions carried by the Conference. It was not expressed directly, but as a general postulate. This has now received further development in your letter, especially in its application to one particular question. The idea is that though we are deprived of *communio in sacris*, we are, nevertheless, *already in a state of Spiritual Communion* (or Intercommunion).

If we accept this sincerely and logically, it not only serves to illuminate: with a true light our Eucharistic fellowship, established within our own Fellowship and even outside it (when Orthodox services and even the Divine Liturgy are celebrated in Anglican Churches and for Anglican congregations, which is already a form of co-celebration), but at the same time expresses a much more general principle than actual Intercommunion in a special, limited, and small group. You have admirably developed this idea in its particular form of application and I am in complete sympathy with you when you say, «My own tentative suggestion was that our liturgiologists should draw up some form of Penitential Service to be conducted jointly by Orthodox and Anglican officiants and attended by members of both Communion». It follows, of course, that we should not delay on both sides the liturgical working out of this idea.

The principle of *Spiritual Intercommunion* which has now been born in our fellowship and which gives expression to its nature is certainly novel from a dogmatic point of view. It originates at this particular «historical hour» in the development of the «Ecumenical» Movement. It represents an inevitable attempt to appraise the worth of a new religious experience closely associated with this movement. In this experience confessional limitations are overcome: in spite of the walls which separate the confessions from one another. One feels and discerns a true life, a «standing before the face of God», a unity in Christ, which simply cannot be overcome by confessional divisions.

I should now like to make a brief sketch of the dogmatic issue involved. What is it that is implied by «Spiritual Intercommunion» outside the limits of a particular confession? (in this case Orthodoxy-Catholicism-Anglicanism). It is obvious of course that within each one of these confessions such Eucharistic fellowship takes place. What are the conditions which make such Intercommunion possible, and what are the circumstances which exclude such a possibility?

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On more than one occasion already I have been led to express the general opinion that *the one common Eucharistic Cup*, the Eucharistic Christ Himself, actively *unites* confessions which are at present in a state of division. The only way of evading such a conclusion is by denying the efficacy of this Cup outside the limits of our own confession, and indeed even now one meets such a point of view in certain circles. But contemporary dogmatic consciousness can no longer defend this attitude, especially in view of the fact of œcumenical fellowship. (Such a statement would be true even to a greater extent for our Fellowship. If we actually admit the former view, how can we possibly interpret our common prayer and our attendance at the Orthodox Liturgy and at the Anglican Mass?).

We must, nevertheless, strictly distinguish here between the objectively possible and the objectively impossible — even though the latter may be subjectively desirable. We should, for instance, clearly differentiate between spiritual fellowship through our faith in Christ and our love of Him («when two or three are gathered together in My Name there am I in the midst of them») and Eucharistic fellowship (even when this is spiritual). The first kind of spiritual fellowship takes place within the whole of the Ecumenical movement. For Protestant denominations this is

frequently combined with Intercommunion in which, however, members of Episcopal Churches who remain true to their own life in Christ, cannot, and should not, participate. Eucharistic fellowship takes for granted the existence of those conditions which are essential for a full and valid celebration of the Divine Eucharist. We shall not discuss what our Protestant brethren have in their Communion. With them also we are in a kind of spiritual fellowship, but in our eyes their Eucharist is not the same Eucharist which was appointed by Our Lord for the purpose of a full and complete union with Him, and through Him between ourselves. The so-called «Apostolic Succession» combined with a faith in the true Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament, represents an objective condition, independent of our will, for making Eucharistic fellowship possible or impossible.

In the relationships between the Eastern and the Roman Churches there exists no doubt as to the validity of one another's Eucharistic fellowship. In relation to Anglicanism the practicability of such Eucharistic fellowship presupposes a sincere recognition of the validity of Anglican orders, and therefore the efficacy of the Sacrament celebrated by the Anglican priesthood. The Roman Church denies this validity. One of the great

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achievements of our Fellowship lies in the fact that the Orthodox members of the Fellowship have actually recognized the validity of Anglican orders not only in theory but in actual life*. The importance and the novelty of this principle of Spiritual Intercommunion is expressed by the fact that in our own particular case the actual Eucharistic unity which exists in theory is transferred from theory to real life. It is actualized in life, in conditions of mutual love and dogmatic unanimity which exist among the members of our Fellowship. Such an experience opens up unlimited possibilities for Eucharistic fellowship of a similar nature: we are now only canonically divided when we partake of the One Cup, but actually we are one in the Body and Blood of Christ. Our consciousness of this fact and our actual experience are further developed and strengthened along parallel lines, on the one hand, by canonical rapprochement, Church diplomacy, and official dogmatic agreement, by a new canonical legalism; on the other hand, by the actual realization of that without which any hierarchical agreement alone would be powerless and would remain suspended in mid-air.

Our union with Roman Catholics in a spiritual Eucharistic fellowship has been so far thwarted by the spirit of proselytism and imperialism which characterizes the Roman Church. Meanwhile such fellowship between Catholics and Orthodox at least would seem, easy and natural. Actually at the present time our Anglo-Russian Fellowship along the paths of its own development provides us with an experience of the possibility and inevitability of such Eucharistic fellowship. This is another contribution and represents a further achievement which our Fellowship makes to the whole Ecumenical Movement. We are confronted with a unique instance of Eucharistic education in a spirit of unity within the limits of a comparatively small (though clearly defined) group of members who belong to two Churches which even now lead a separate life. What we actually observe is already an accomplished fact, so that this achievement can be never taken from us. It represents an anticipated spiritual basis and a primary condition for full and actual Intercommunion (*de facto*).

My «proposal» was an intuition and a first step — perhaps indeed it was a premature beginning, and it has been given to Fr. Gillett to express it adequately. We must dogmatically deepen

* When the idea of a «sacramental blessing» was included in my «proposal» one of its indirect aims was the object of expressing, expounding and making real this validity. Though in this instance it would, have only applied to a particular case there is no doubt that this would have had also a general significance.

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and develop further the implications and the significance of the whole idea. If on the other hand' we are convinced that such Eucharistic unity does not exist between us; if our experience of

Spiritual Intercommunion does not support this conviction, then Intercommunion can never be established by any form of dogmatic agreement, even though there be canonical and dogmatic agreement, and unanimity, for *ex nihilo nil fit!*

Yours sincerely,
Sergius Bulgakov.