

Communion Realities

An Easter and Ascension Exploration 2020

Emil Bock says the real purpose of Christian devotion is “to cherish community with the Risen Christ.” This community, at the heart of which is sacramental communion, is sustained by the fact that Christ is to be found not in some “beyond”, but in the immediate present; “He is near to us in this world in which we live” (*The Three Years*, p. 233), and will be “in [our] midst all the days until the completion of earthly time” (Matthew 28, v.20).

As we reach the culmination of this extraordinary Easter time and move into the 10 days of Ascension I would like to share some thoughts that will hopefully be helpful as we grapple this year with how to come to terms with the reality of abnormal times for religious worship. These thoughts should serve to deepen a little more our insights into how we can make the receiving of Holy Communion ever more real. This is partly for the remaining weeks of closed churches, and especially for the time when we be able to come to church again, but, for a while, without receiving physical communion. I shall explore ways in which we can all participate more powerfully in the reality of *Christ in us*, receiving His Body and Blood as medicine that makes whole.

In a sacrament, the working of the divine world is made manifest in earthly physical reality. An unceasing ritual is being performed in the world of the hierarchies, as we can know from the Revelation to St John. Every Sunday and Thursday in Edinburgh, in principle every day, we can join in this never-ending stream of healing medicine. At Christmas we can even experience it three times in one day!

So, we used to come to church! Some came to every service, some once a week, some from time to time. Most of us are feeling a great gap, a loss. We have perhaps resolved to attend as often as we can once the restrictions are lifted. But when will that be? And once things ease up, and places of public worship are opened with the requirement to practise distancing, etc, will numbers be limited? How will we decide who comes when? To begin with it is unfortunately scarcely possible to imagine that communion will be shared out. (We pray for the day when that will happen again.) But how will it be to sit there, without being allowed to come forward to receive Holy Communion?

For as long as it takes I shall speak in the sermons about how the unseen communion can be experienced in ways still more real than in recent months when we have been at home and connected in thought (special as that is proving to be for many). In the actual moment we will perhaps be able to feel and experience new realities. I shall explore some of these realities now, so that, already in these last Easter days, we can reflect further on the different aspects of receiving communion.

In the Transubstantiation, the third part of the Act of Consecration, what we have offered up gradually becomes permeated by Christ`s powerful Presence.

The Revelation of Christ

We draw the possibility and authority to celebrate the Service *out of the revelation of Christ*. This is an Ascension reality! When, according to the Acts of the Apostles, Christ was taken up into the realm of the clouds, into the life sphere around the earth, it was proclaimed how He would reappear, reveal Himself, again out of this sphere. He would

return, come. (Thus Advent is a closely related festival.) This can tell us that from that time on this *realm of the clouds* (Ascension Epistle) became His dwelling place. It has not ceased so to be from then until now and this will continue into the future. We live in an everlasting and ongoing time of Ascension! It is the ongoing time of the *revelation of Christ*. "Parousia", usually translated "coming" (as in Second Coming), primarily means "presence", even "substantial" presence - *ousia* is the Greek word for 'substance', 'being', 'essence'. *Para* means 'beside', 'near'.

Every Easter we are struck by the words of the *airy regions of the earth* and the *breath of the earth...in...the power of the sun*. We realise anew how, since Golgotha, Easter power flows and has not ceased. It has kept the earth alive and will do for all cycles of time to come. At Ascension that which had dwelt 'locally' with the disciples expanded to fill and be present in the whole earth. Over centuries, and in particular in the last nearly a hundred years, there have been many who have experienced this Presence revealing Himself in quite perceptible ways. We can find that the most sure way of approaching this Presence is in every celebration of the Act of Consecration, *out of the revelation of Christ* and out of His desire to concentrate His Being into a real, tangible, substantial presence wherever conditions are suitable: when we pray, where two or three are gathered, where the devout congregation assembles around the specially prepared altar space, complete with the vestments, substances, words of the renewed sacrament and Christ-open intention of all present. Thus we can connect with the heavenly ritual, and out of the presence and power of the Ascended and Reappearing Christ the Service can be worthily fulfilled.

Transubstantiation

So we come to the Transubstantiation. As these prayers unfold, we can know that a gradual drawing near of the Christ-Presence is happening. *We unite for this offering*. We pray: *May He be in us*. We pray the words *Christ in us* - which are remarkable in Christian liturgical history. At this point, the priest holds his or her hand, open, across the heart. Twice. Then we pray: *Let live ... in this Christ-offering the Body and the Blood of God's Son*, whose Being is pure love. This Christ-offering might be understood to refer not only to the bread and juice of the vine, but to us too, as individuals who have opened a space within in readiness.

The Words of Institution, at the genuflecting of the priest, are another stage in the drawing near of the Risen and Ascended One. *He took...and looked up...* We remember words spoken by Christ shortly before His passing, noting particularly how He united His soul with bread and wine. The exhortation that we *take this into [our] thinking*, that we allow His Presence to become real in our thoughts and memory at this moment are a further intensification. The words of *His revelation through all ages of the earth to come* at this point speak again of the Ascension stage of human history: from then, through now, unto the end of time. (Passiontide and Easter are referred to by the words: *His suffering and death, His resurrection*.)

Then comes the penultimate big step: *May Christ hold sway*. May He wield and work powerfully into bread and wine. In the very act of praying it happens. A short while later the elements are lifted: *Let [it] be*. This is for the bread and wine. Tom Ravetz has spoken recently about this moment. The forces streaming in at the heart of the Transubstantiation moment break into our fallen world from a "future reality, one where the whole earth and the whole of human experience have been lifted up to the spirit again". The words "let...be" are a prayer, which require our participation and

recognition to become full reality. Tom suggests we come close to understanding if this is real or not by imagining ourselves answering the question, "Are they body and blood?" with full conviction: "Yes, *let them be* body and blood!" There is faith on earth, in human hearts and minds. Thus we as congregation are absolutely necessary for the full reality to come about; and, having been an integral part of the process, we are now closely involved in the further steps of Christianising the earth.

Already with the accomplishing of the moment when Christ unites with the substances of earth, the words are spoken of how *Christ is in us*. His Presence becomes ever more intensified and substantial as we go through the Act of Consecration of Man.

Think of that name for a moment:

The **Act** ...

of **Consecration** ...

of our humanity, of the human being, of **Man** ...

... As we go through the service, we continue with an evolving, a becoming, a growing towards our ultimate purpose, a restoring and spiritualising of all parts of our human being. There are deep mysteries here; we come a bit closer to understanding a little more of this journey that we are on: we are spiritual beings on a human journey towards a new spirituality.

Then, following the Lord`s Prayer we reach the fourth part, the sharing of the communion.

How can the communion be received this summer?

As you will have read in Tom`s letter of 12 May, we are hoping that in early July places of worship will be allowed to open again. This will be with some physical distancing and without the possibility of normal communion for a time.

I offer some thoughts and suggestions that I hope might help make communion more real in this time.

First some words from the communion prayers that can be pondered on:

There is the wish to join with Christ *in thinking and willing*. By taking the process up into our understanding and mind we can connect to Him. In going out into the world we remain united with Him.

There is the very moving hope that each of us *live evermore with Him*. How might we picture this? He can be in our midst, in us. He is willing and eager to be alongside us, walking with us as He walked to Emmaus with the two. We can take His aims and impulses into our will and work with Him, for Him. We might ask: What would He have us do at this time, in such and such situation? We have the prospect of being with Him *for eternity* (Creed).

There is the mention of communion as *healing medicine*. How does that make us feel? If the healing stream of the sacrament washes over us and permeates our whole being - body, soul and spirit - what effect could that have? Could it act to protect us, immunise us against illnesses, viruses, even vaccines and toxins? Are the words of the Risen One in Mark 16, verse 18 relevant here? (Look them up and we`ll talk about that

one day!) Might we feel that our immune system is mightily strengthened not only by exercising well, drawing in sunlight through our skin, eating well and drinking pure water, sleeping sufficiently, nurturing a positive attitude - but also by receiving the sun-power of Christ into our body and blood? Perhaps to begin with into the "etheric" of our blood...

But still the burning question: How can we make real the receiving of communion when we actually can't?!

Communion for the eyes

When I was at the seminary one of the lecturers once mentioned something that I have often thought about. He spoke of "ocular communion", communion that the eyes take in, at the elevation of the host and chalice. He said this was a reality for people in mediaeval times. Apparently from the thirteenth century visual experience of the sacred played an important role in religious worship. This we also know of in the dramatic enactments of biblical stories, in the exhibition of relics and cultic objects, but it seems from what I can discover that the "need to see" at a time when actual physical communion was rarely received became very important. The art historian Hans Belting believes that the "possibility of beholding Christ" was part of an experience that "reality attains to full existence and is proven only in visibility". This can give us much "food for thought" (if you will pardon the rather apposite pun!). It helps us understand that our human witnessing to a ritual having its origins in the divine world (as was stated above) is of enormous significance in the fullness of the event, even to the extent of some kind of proof. More than that, perhaps, for our present question, is that there can be a real and fulfilling receiving of something through sight of it. (This may go some way towards explaining the importance through the ages of the appearance of saints in visions, also all the beautiful paintings and statues in churches, as well as icons and Gothic architecture in previous centuries when the level of education among the laity was largely very low, and the pre-Consciousness Soul stage of human development was not yet ready for the kinds of spiritual concepts appropriate for our age. That is a theme in itself.)

The mediaeval possibility of finding soul nourishment through seeing the raised communion may well prove to be of help to us in this remarkable year of the 21st century when, for the first time in Christian history, it has become almost impossible to receive the Eucharist on a world-wide level.

Communion without Bread and Wine

Another illuminating thought comes to us from a short conversation our founding priest, Friedrich Rittelmeyer, had with Rudolf Steiner. You can read of the exchange in Rittelmeyer's book *Rudolf Steiner Enters my Life*, on pages 138f. I shall quote the paragraph:

It had dawned on me in meditation that Christ can actually be received into the very body and blood, without the Bread and the Wine. A personal characteristic which for decades had caused me great difficulties, namely, that impressions from the spirit and soul invariably worked very strongly on the body, was now explained in a most wonderful way, giving one an inkling of how the destinies of human beings are guided. That was the preparation which enabled me to realise so vividly that if His Presence is real, Christ works down into body and

blood, giving man out of Himself a new body and new blood, and to know and experience this is the actual, essential conquest of the materialism of the age. In this conversation with Rudolf Steiner I asked: "Is it not possible to receive the Body and Blood of Christ without the Bread and the Wine, purely in meditation?" He answered: "It is possible. From the back of the tongue onwards it is exactly the same."

Rittelmeyer mentions how the concreteness of the reply startled him, but he came to see that there was much in it to occupy his thoughts for a long time. He also goes on to write about the difference between The Christian Community and the Anthroposophical Society, the importance of renewed worship for our time and the needs of different people. He relays Steiner`s word about anthroposophy bringing knowledge and The Christian Community addressing "man`s need for resurrection and bring[ing] Christ."

However, our interest here is in the receiving of communion. The short conversation above touches on a very lofty theme of what can be called "spiritual (or cosmic) communion", which refers to something Rudolf Steiner spoke about: in the future it will be possible, more and more, for individuals through meditation to unite with a reality in the realm of ideas and knowledge that is akin to the receiving of communion as we know it. This has to do with a path of spiritual training and discipline (certainly not an easy one) that would initially be taken by a person devoted to Spiritual Science, but it can cause us to ponder upon whether, through the severe regulations we are now contending with, all of us are being offered an opportunity to try out this way, see if we can make a start. It is really the way of thought, and we know that thoughts are real - both the good and the bad ones - and indeed our sitting at home connecting to the Service remotely through the power of thinking and mindfulness has already shown us that there is great reality in this. Bringing this kind of focus and discipline into play when sitting in church again can yield rich fruits - and help make the invisible receiving of the communion more real.

It should be added at this point that some Christian Community members feel the wish or even task of (in normal times) not going forward for communion every time. They have for years been practising, as it were, taking physical bread and wine on a particular day, and then for a period of perhaps some weeks remaining seated at that point, seeing how long the effects can last, only receiving it invisibly and etherically in those weeks. This is a very individual thing, and some members feel this is an important path to be on. It leads towards the future I mentioned above.

Our body as "spiritual structure"

Martin Luther, catholic priest, protestant, reformer, and herald of a less substantial understanding of communion nonetheless spoke of the "real presence", the sacramental union of a close uniting of Christ with bread and wine. Rudolf Frieling describes how Luther`s sense of the Eucharist being "something more" was "indistinct", but still closer to a perception of the Presence, whereas "the Reformers broadly speaking regarded the Eucharist as merely symbolic". Frieling in a precious little booklet called *The Eucharist*, writes this about the Transubstantiation:

In our days, anthroposophy can offer a new approach, a modern way of grasping that `body` and `blood` are not only material substances. It is certainly due to the physical matter within it that we have a body that is visible, but the body as such is

a spiritual structure, a field of formative forces. The spiritual organism that permeated the body of Jesus, and which manifested itself to the disciples after the Resurrection, can be transferred, mystically, to those who bring their inner life into harmonious relationship with the living Christ. Similarly, his blood can be transferred to us, not as material substance, but as the streaming power of burning spiritual love which permeated the blood of Jesus. The body and blood of Christ are not material substances, but neither are they mere symbols. They are real supersensory forces which are needed in the development of the inner nature of man; and they are within our reach.

Frieling goes on to speak about the exceptionally appropriate nature of wheat bread and juice of the grape vine as communion substance, as bearers of these higher forces, and I really recommend his little booklet for study. In terms of our theme here, I just add to the wonderful paragraph quoted the thought that if we humans have bodies that are essentially spiritual structures, then it is not such a far stretch to recognise that subtle streams and influences emanating from the altar will have profound effects. (Rather as is the case with homeopathic remedies, different kinds of body massage and body-energy treatment, tissue (biochemic) salts, Bach remedies, etc, which are so real and effective.) And when I say "subtle" that does not mean weak; on the contrary, powerful beyond imagination, but on another level: Christ`s 40 days in the desert enabled Him to ensure the cosmic force of His presence would not overwhelm those around Him, yet this enabled Him to heal and perform miracles. It is the perfect divine balance that has been found for us as free human beings to experience the spiritual in the right way. This is another theme in itself!

Formative power of thought as seen in water

One further factor regarding the power of thought is to consider for a moment the results of the work of Masaru Emoto, the Japanese doctor and water researcher, who photographed water crystals and demonstrated the subtle effect of words and intentions on water particles. Beautiful words produce beautiful forms, ugly words ugly forms. If we take up this thought in connection with the receiving of communion, how real could it be to sit in the chapel attending the service, even if physical communion cannot for a while longer be distributed? The effect of the ritual words on our bodily fluid (we are some 80% water!), on our blood, is real. The words of the sacrament and gesture of the priest`s arms and hands, also at the *Christ in you*, constitute a substantial stream of spiritual blessing and healing that flows right into our human constitution. In this regard, think of the power of the turning of water into wine at Cana (John 2): the "radiating [sun-]power of his being" (verse 11) imbued the water with Christ`s healing force. It can be rather like that for us in the coming months, who are gathered before the altar, in the same room.

- Please remember this is largely written for those times when a congregation will again assemble in our chapel. For the weeks until this is possible, I encourage you to ponder on these things, and thereby make the experience at home even more real than hitherto. A thought shared with me by Rev Roger Druitt is that insofar as we practise this thinking from afar to connect with the altar, and also with other people in prayer, we are `practising` being angels, beginning to do angel-type work that will in some far distant future time be how we will operate. Angel consciousness is wide and deep, and it works on the level of conscious thought. We humans know that we can be sitting in the UK and in our mind`s eye picture San Francisco or a friend in Cape Town. Thoughts are fast, wide-ranging

and real. This same reality we can experience in connection with partaking in the Act of Consecration of Man - it is consecrating us further towards our future aim, which will be an angel stage of our development.

Further contemplation of the Communion prayers

As we approach the conclusion of this essay, let us return to the prayers at Communion. As the priest prepares to take the Bread on behalf of all, the prayer speaks of how the *dwelling into which Thou enterest [is] sick*. How might Christ enter at this moment? How open is each one of us at this point? We have acknowledged in the Offertory our weaknesses and failings; now we can believe that Christ's loving, healing power wants to enter us.

My soul becomes whole through the *Word* of Christ. We can really ponder on what it might mean that the word spoken by Christ, the Word that *is* Christ, enters us at that moment... Healing happens: my soul becomes whole (German: *gesund: healthy*.)

As the priest prepares for the Wine we hear the words: *I confess unto* what is revealed through Christ, and He takes from me (us) *the might of Man's adversary*. To confess to Him can mean to stand for Him in the world, to stand with Him as His representative here. Something is certainly asked of us here; perhaps courage is needed, certainly self-confidence and self-esteem, both of which might be connected to our immune system, might help build it up. Here the (invisible but real) receiving of communion will be of great help. And then, whatever the world throws at us, whatever the adversary confronts us with to try to throw us off our human path and journey and distract us from our God-given destiny, can be repelled through the power of Christ within us.

Now imagine the power that can flow through from the altar space, the *table where He sits* (Ordination Service), at that very moment when the priest then speaks the words *Christ in you* and, facing the congregation, hands outstretched, allows the Risen One to enter deeply into your very body and blood, your very constitution!

The words that are spoken there about that which we have received becoming *spirit in my soul* are the words corresponding to *The Peace be with you* when the temple is touched. Again, we must wait a few months for that touch... let us ponder on the deep need of human touch generally, and the touch at that moment in the Service.

The Peace blessing has to do with a transforming of our soul forces; it is our inner spirit-work to allow deep Goodness, Kindness and Love as well as firm discipline and formative forces to grow within us, which also connects to the standing-for-Christ in the world that we spoke of, to that *standing at peace with the world* that Christ grants us. It can bestow upon us gracious help in facing troubling times.

May this Peace with the world fill us as we live in a confusing and confused world, and yet one that offers great openness just in these months!

With the words after the Wine, our mouth will, of course, not have received the elements. (*What my mouth has received...*) We can think again of the indications above arising out Rittelmeyer's question. It might also be interesting to note that it has often been observed that members of a congregation will inadvertently swallow at the time when the priest does. It is an unconscious reflex, but we can perhaps make it a little more conscious! With an intensity of feeling at this juncture, a certain reality can be achieved. If we think it and say it is so, it can become real for us.

A certain *quicken*ing or enlivening, a *penetrating* or permeating of our whole being can be experienced as we allow a feeling of deep warmth and peace to spread within us. That particular *Christ in you* can, as mentioned above, have a very particular power and intimacy just there. - It could be valuable to just **feel** that for a moment...

So, in conclusion, when we gather at some as yet unknown point this summer once again in our chapel, but not yet able to take physical communion, we can know that there is a deep reality in hearing the ritual words, seeing the whole altar space before us including the bread and wine whence blessings flow and seeing through an inner focus of imagination the aura around the elements. The spirit-sun will bathe us in its light, as the people at Cana were bathed, in the Presence of Christ. We can be convinced that an extra Grace will be there to compensate for what is not yet complete. Perhaps this grace echoes the Christmas grace at the dawn service when we hear how - somehow, and we can't quite say how - the Creator's streaming power *may touch* our lips and warm our blood.

* * *

I offer these contemplations at this time. If they are of help, perhaps print this, keep the essay somewhere safe and look at it from time to time, especially once we are able to return to church.

I do not imagine for a moment that all the ideas put forward can be brought to mind as you sit in the Service, but perhaps each time to carry one or two of them might help deepen the experience.

With warmest wishes for the summer Festivals,

Peter

15 May 2020