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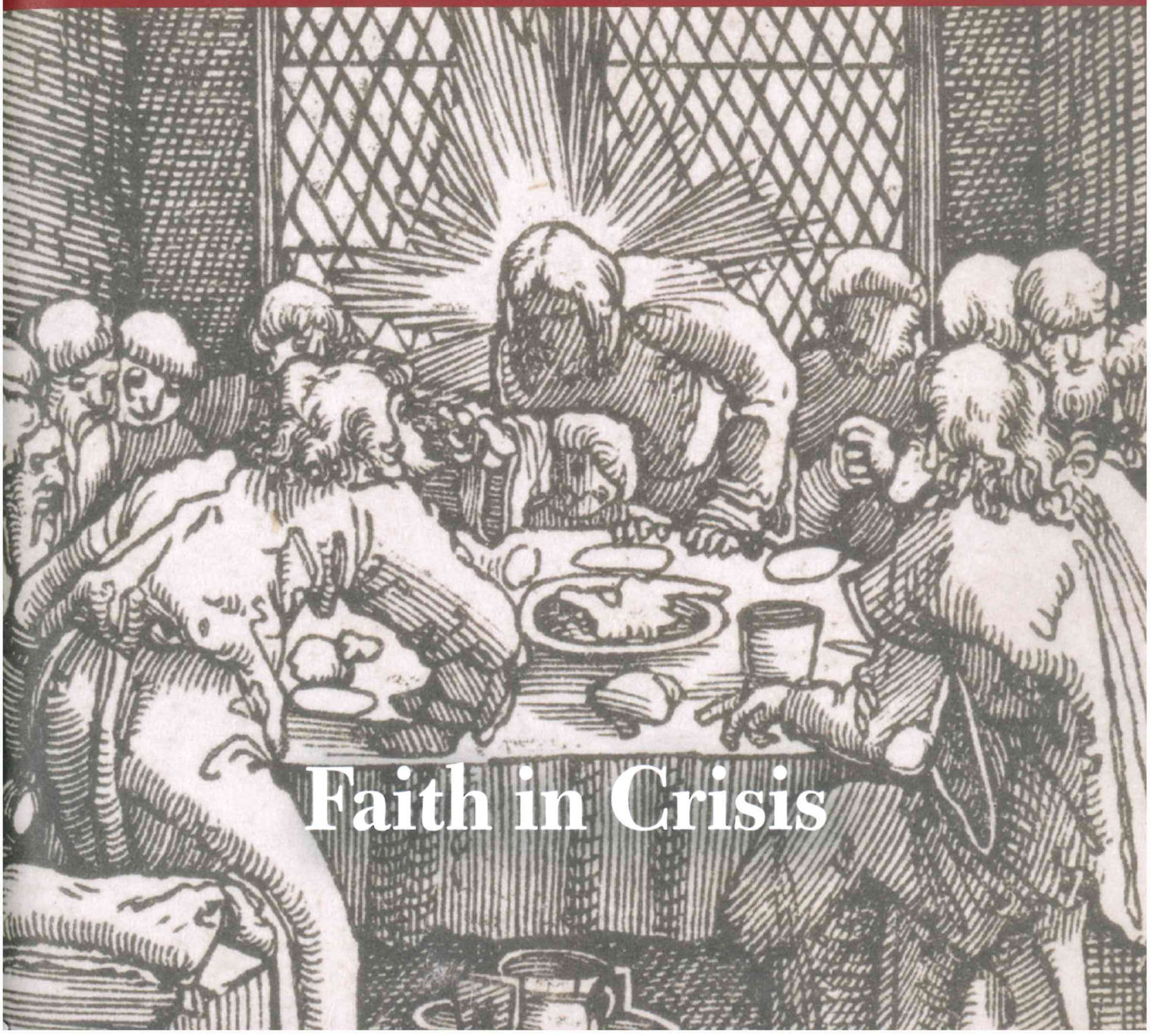

Faith in Crisis

THE ANGLICAN WAY

AS THE CHURCH SAYS *or* AS THE BISHOPS DO?

THE PROHIBITION *of the* EUCHARIST

IN ONTARIO DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

by

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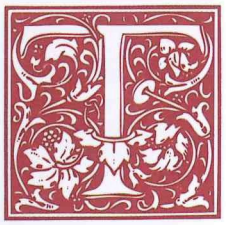
Anglicans have often prided themselves on the theological comprehensiveness of their Church, a comprehensiveness rooted in shared practice rather than agreed doctrine. Anglican unity, it is claimed, depends on no infallible magisterium, no uniquely inspired teacher, no exhaustive sectarian system. It flows instead from the liturgy, which is both Catholic and Reformed, and which supplies the only framework in which the inexhaustible meaning of the scriptures and the creeds can be rightly perceived and embraced. On this view, to discover what Anglicans believe, one must not only to listen to what they *say*, but also observe carefully what they *do*.



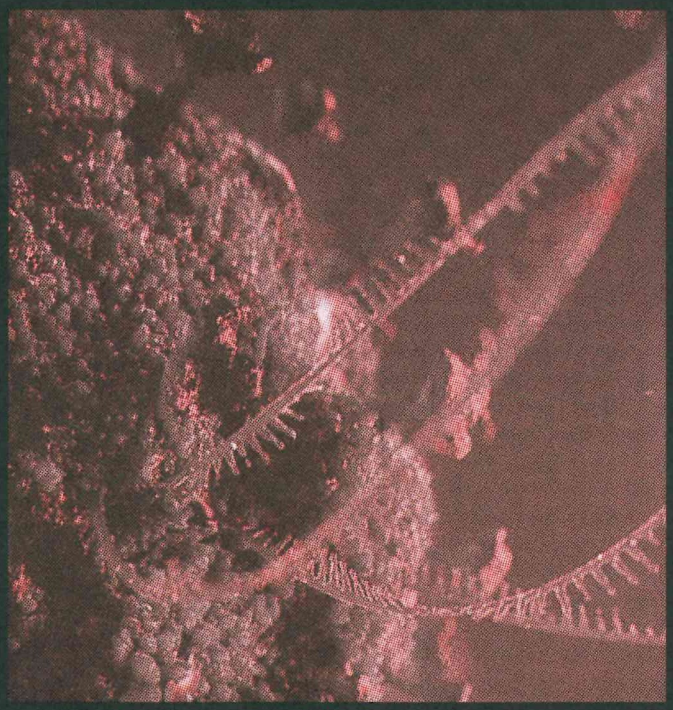
HIS PRINCIPLE ACQUIRES PARTICULAR importance when one tries to evaluate the response in Anglican jurisdictions around the world to the COVID-19 pandemic, in which public health regulations made it difficult or even impossible for people to gather for the liturgy. Bishops and clergy were forced to decide how to adapt their liturgical practices to these new conditions, particularly with regard to the Eucharist. Their choices were informed by theological views that, under normal conditions, would never find practical expression. What the bishops *did* revealed more than they had ever *said*.

The present article examines the response of the bishops in just one Anglican jurisdiction, the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario, made up of the dioceses of Algoma, Huron, Moosonee, Niagara, Ontario, Ottawa, and Toronto. This may be only a tiny segment of the Anglican world, but the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario accounts for 50% of average Sunday attendance in the Anglican Church of Canada, and the Ontario bishops' decisions about Eucharistic practice under COVID-19 may well reflect the theological views of a larger number of Anglican clergy—views that are, as I shall argue, both at odds with Anglican principles and damaging to the Church and to individual souls.

On Friday, March 13, 2020, in response to the accelerating spread of COVID-19, Ontario's civil Ministry of Health recommended "the immediate suspension of all large events and public gatherings of over 250 people," the first step towards what would become, within a fortnight, a complete lockdown of all "non-essential" businesses and activities, including churches. On the same day, the Ontario Provincial House of Bishops announced that all public worship services in the province should be suspended immediately. In a pastoral letter, the Metropolitan, Archbishop Anne Germond, wrote, "Gathering as a people of faith is important, but God also summons us to seek the welfare of the cities in which we live and move and have our being." (We must let pass this quotation of Acts 17:28 in which "cities" was substituted for "God.") She went on to say that plans were in place to make "online prayer and worship resources" available.

But after two Sundays of "online prayer and worship," the bishops decided that further guidance was necessary, particularly with regard to how (or whether) the Eucharist could be celebrated under lockdown. Meeting virtually on Monday, March 23, the bishops crafted a joint statement on "virtual worship," which was published in pastoral letters to individual dioceses and given force in liturgical directives to the clergy.

It was certainly necessary that the bishops should explain why "online Communion" was not an option. Voices from within Anglicanism were beginning to be heard arguing that the Eucharist could be celebrated by people consuming bread and wine in their homes while watching a priest celebrating the liturgy on a screen, which had already been approved in some Presbyterian and Methodist denominations. Just days after the Ontario bishops met,



A computer-generated rendering of COVID-19

Christianity Today published a piece by a member of the Anglican Church in North America entitled "Online Communion Can Still Be Sacramental: The Bread and the Cup Zoomed for You" (March 27). On March 30, the Archbishop of Sydney, Australia, Glenn Davies, wrote to say that, "since we are now live-streaming our services," he could "see no reason" why people should not consume the Eucharistic elements while "following the service on screen." "Their fellowship with the body of Christ," Archbishop Davies said, "would be no less spiritual and no less real. We must not fall into the erroneous mindset of thinking that consecration of the elements is only valid for us if we are physically present to consume them, as if there were magic in the hands of the minister."

This theory was put into practice in a parish of the Church of England on Easter Day, with the team vicar of Blockley (Gloucester) explaining in the *Church Times* (April 14) that she had chosen to defy her bishop rather than refuse online Communion to her people, which would have been, she said, "exclusive and excluding" and a "clericalism" that ought to be "anathema." This practice even received formal authorization and encouragement from the bishop of the Diocese of West Louisiana in The Episcopal Church (USA)—though this authorization was withdrawn after a swift intervention by the Presiding Bishop.

The problem facing the Ontario bishops was how to explain why Anglicans should not countenance "virtual Communion." Most essays arguing against "online Eucharists" have focused on the "materiality" that is essential to sacraments, but without adequately explaining to advocates of online Communion why the "materials" must in the same room. Surprisingly, none seem to have seen the liturgical rubrics governing the Offertory as a sufficient explanation. The Canadian Book of Common Prayer (1962) says:

"The Priest shall also at the time of the Offertory present and place on the Lord's Table so much Bread and Wine as he shall think sufficient, the same being brought to him, if so desired, by the Churchwardens or other representatives of the people."

As an influential Canadian liturgical manual puts it, "It is important that all the bread and wine to be consecrated for distribution be placed *upon* the altar during the preparation of the gifts." To do otherwise, it says, "seriously mars the sign of the whole assembly gathered to share in one holy food from the one table."[1]

This should be put still more strongly. At the Last Supper, Christ "took" the bread and the cup. If the bread and wine are not "taken" by the presiding priest or bishop, Christ's command to "do this" is disobeyed, and there can be no Eucharist. If, instead of being "presented and placed," they are retained as personal possessions by a prospective communicant, they will become signs of individual independence, not of the communicant's self-surrender to be incorporated in the self-offering of Christ's divine humanity.

But the Ontario Provincial House of Bishops argued from a different premise:

"The bishops of our province have agreed together that our virtual worship through Holy Week and the season of Easter, or until such time that we can gather in community together, will not include the liturgy of the Eucharist. Sacramental celebrations are the work of the whole People of God and require a gathering of people who can be physically present to one another. That is impossible for most of us at this time. The Great Three Days of Easter, and through the 50 days of the season, we will be fasting from the Eucharist but feasting on the Word."

The bishops also commended a short paper entitled "On this Eucharistic Fast," which, they said, "puts this time in context." That paper was written by the Rev. Dr. Eileen Scully in her capacity as Director of Faith, Worship, and Ministry for the Anglican Church of Canada, and it was posted on the national Church website, where it was widely noticed. Dr. Scully expanded on the bishops' statement by differentiating the Eucharistic assembly from the audience at a musical performances:

"The Eucharist is not about performance by one for the many, and cannot move into that mode. The sacrament is made such in and through the gathering of people with a presider, in a place and time, in the physical presence of what we can touch and taste, together, as well as hear and see. ... [O]ur sacramental theology ... is deeply about the physical-and-spiritual together."

She went on to attempt to comfort people who would lack access to sacramental Communion under the lockdown by recalling the Church's history:

"Consonant with the most ancient Christian traditions is the practice of a *eucharistic fast*. In some contexts a fast from receiving communion is a choice—the very early church instructed catechumens (those undergoing formation in the faith prior to baptism) to fast from partaking of the eucharist. ... Though we didn't choose this, it is a time to embrace an intentional eucharistic fast in order to become catechumens again and through that process reflect on and deepen our faith."

This, then, is what the bishops *said*. And what they said ostensibly referred only to broadcasting Eucharistic liturgies online. What they subsequently *did*, however, revealed a theological position far beyond the seeming import of their words.

The bishops of all but one of the dioceses of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario forbade their clergy to celebrate the Eucharist, not just "on camera," but in *all* circumstances. (Some allowed a possible exception for "a last Eucharistic meal for the dying".) The lone hold-out was the diocese of Toronto, where the clergy were asked to "abstain from video or live stream celebrations of the Eucharist," with any Eucharistic liturgies to be conducted "cloistered from view" (pastoral letter, March 25). Thus, throughout most of the province, the Eucharist was banned; in Toronto, it was to be hidden.

How did the statement of the bishops, backed by Dr. Scully's paper, justify such an action? Why did it necessarily follow from what they had said about "virtual liturgies" that the Eucharist had to be prohibited, or at least celebrated in secret?

When we read these texts afresh, knowing the actions they were made to justify, it becomes clear that they reflect two profoundly erroneous theological opinions. First, the bishops believed that, during the lockdown, it would be impossible to assemble the "quorum" of people necessary for a valid celebration of the Eucharist. Second, the bishops believed that it would be wrong and hurtful for the Eucharist to be celebrated when most people would be unable to attend and receive Communion. The first opinion is based on a shallow understanding of Anglican sacramental theology; the second, on a fatal ignorance of liturgical history as well.

Is there a "quorum" for the Eucharist?

When the bishops said, "Sacramental celebrations are the work of the whole People of God and require a gathering of people who can be physically present to one another," they were asserting one of the central insights of the twentieth-century Liturgical Movement, namely, that the liturgy is the work of the whole Christ, both Head and members.[2] The liturgy of the early Church was marked by a deliberate diversity of roles: every Christian had his or her *leitourgia*. As an influential liturgical scholar of the last generation observed, "The eucharist is the act of the *whole* Church and cannot be usurped by a priest or even by a bishop."[3]

On this view, modern liturgical scholars have deprecated developments in the medieval liturgy whereby the laity became "no longer in the old sense participants in the mystery, but spectators of a ritual performed in the sanctuary by the clergy and ministers. ... The eucharist was no longer exhibited as the common offering of the members of the Body in union with the Head, but was perforce interpreted as the act of the priest celebrating Christ's Sacrifice."[4] A Eucharistic liturgy in which a presbyter is the main actor has thus been condemned as "the icon of a clerically dominated church in which lay people are expected to be passive spectators, or at best active supporters, of hierarchical leadership."[5]

The recovery of this corporate and ecclesiological understanding of the Eucharist has been a great gain. The Liturgical Movement established a new normative model to which all celebrations should approximate as far as possible. As one Canadian liturgical manual puts it, "It is not the Mediaeval Low Mass, the said service, that should be our model, but the Solemn Eucharist as it was celebrated in the Early Church by the Bishop assisted by his presbyters, deacons and other ministers."[6] But it would be a mistake to imagine that the typical Sunday liturgy of an urban Christian community in the first four centuries is the only acceptable pattern for an Anglican Eucharist today. Otherwise, it would be logically necessary that in any diocese there could be only one celebration of the Eucharist, presided over by the bishop with the whole college of presbyters, assisted by all the deacons, and attended by all the laity. Even the most fervent Anglican adherent of the Liturgical Movement will allow, for example,

that the parish is the usual liturgical unit and that a presbyter may preside at the Eucharist even in the absence of a deacon.

Nevertheless, if the Eucharist is indeed "the work of the whole People of God," must a certain number of people take part in the celebration to represent that "whole"? A superficial knowledge of Anglican sacramental theology could lead one to think that the answer was "yes."

There are passages in the Anglican formularies that seem to insist on a Eucharistic quorum. But these are matters of law and discipline that have no bearing on sacramental theology—and even their legal force is probably nil today.

The English Reformers rejected the medieval custom of Masses in which the priest received Communion alone in front of an uncomprehending congregation, and they abhorred the solitary Masses that priests were paid to recite for the relief of souls in Purgatory. The 1549 Book of Common Prayer therefore decreed that "there shall be no celebration of the Lord's Supper, except there be some to communicate with the priest." The 1552 Prayer Book (followed by the 1662 book still in force in the Church of England) specified an absolute minimum: even in a tiny parish, there were to be "four, or three at the least." And the priest could know if a sufficient number of communicants would be present for the Eucharist to be celebrated, because those who intended to communicate were required to signify their intent in advance. This discipline was established to promote edification and to prevent abuses, but it did not mean that the Eucharist could *never* be celebrated without at least three communicants besides the priest. In times of contagious sickness, the Prayer Book permitted the priest to celebrate the Eucharist in a private home with just one sick person.

But it has been plausibly argued that, so far as the law is concerned, a priest may also lawfully celebrate the Eucharist even when there is no other communicant present. In the Church of England, the 1662 rubric requiring communicants to "signify their names to the curate at least some time the day before" has been ignored for decades, and a priest is not expected to conduct a poll of the congregation to see if any are indeed intending to communicate. English clergy may also justly consider that the revised code of canon law, which requires them to "celebrate the Holy Communion, or be present thereat on all Sundays and other principal feast days" (Canon C26) with no reference to a minimum number of fellow communicants, has rendered the disciplinary rubric in the Prayer Book obsolete. Furthermore, Canon B12.2 and the rubrics of the new liturgies in *Common Worship* specify only that the presiding priest must receive the sacrament in the Eucharistic celebration; if it were mandatory that others should receive, it might have been expected that this canon and the rubrics would have said so.[7]

The Anglican Church of Canada has a much less comprehensive body of canon law: with some exceptions, liturgical practice is governed solely by the rubrics in the authorized liturgical books. The

At the Last Supper, Christ "took" the bread and the cup. If the bread and wine are not "taken" by the presiding priest or bishop, Christ's command to "do this" is disobeyed, and there can be no Eucharist.

1985 *Book of Alternative Services* says nothing at all on this subject. The 1962 Canadian revision of the Book of Common Prayer, which remains the official doctrinal and liturgical standard, reduced the number of required communicants: "There shall be no Celebration of the Lord's Supper, except there be at least one person present to communicate with the Priest." But at the same time, the rubric requiring communicants to give advance notice to the priest was deleted. Therefore, if it happens—and it *has* happened—that a priest celebrating the Eucharist for a tiny weekday congregation should turn to administer the Sacrament to the people and find that, for whatever reason, no one has come to the rail to receive, no liturgical law will have been broken, even though the Eucharist will have been celebrated with the priest alone communicating.

Considered purely in terms of Anglican law and discipline, a Eucharist at which the presiding priest alone communicates is legal and permissible. But is such a practice justifiable in terms of Anglican sacramental theology? Yes, it is.

To be sure, the early twentieth-century practice common among advanced Anglo-Catholics of making the principal Sunday service a choral Eucharist at which the people were not invited to communicate has been rightly condemned as "the great blunder of the Anglo-Catholic movement."[8] But there are circumstances in which sound theological principles will justify private celebrations of the Eucharist. The case was put with characteristic clarity by the Anglo-Catholic theologian Eric Lionel Mascall:

> "Although in a secondary and descriptive sense we may rightly describe each celebration of the Holy Eucharist as 'a mass', in the primary and ultimate sense there is only one Mass, offered by the great High Priest, Jesus Christ, at the Last Supper, on Calvary and in Heaven. ... In this ultimate sense we do not celebrate *masses* or attend *masses*; we celebrate *mass* and attend *mass*. For every earthly mass is simply the Church's participation in the one heavenly Mass. We human beings ... live by our very nature in the extendedness and scatteredness of space and time, and the Eucharist makes accessible to us, at our different points of space and moments of time, the one extra-spatial and supra-temporal redemptive activity of Christ, 'who ever liveth to make intercession for us'. The question with which we are concerned, then, is this: how [when celebration with a congregation is not possible] can a priest best associate himself with, and take part in, this activity?"[9]

Acknowledging that erroneous theologies have sometimes been attached to private Eucharistic celebrations, Mascall nevertheless argues for the legitimacy of the practice in itself:

> If ... our Eucharistic theology is sound and it is realised that the different priests saying their different masses at their different altars are not doing *different* things but the *same* thing, [*Mascall adds elsewhere:* 'the same essentially, the same numerically—not just a lot of different things of the same kind, but the very same identical thing'] that they are all taking part in the one eternal Liturgy whose cele

brant is Christ and that their priesthood is only a participation in his, then the multiplication of masses emphasises the real unity of the mass and the true nature of the Church's corporate character."

Mascall goes on to warn of an error that could arise from the insights of the Liturgical Movement, as welcome and necessary as those insights might be:

"There is a very serious danger in certain circles which have been superficially affected by the liturgical movement, of a complete misunderstanding as to what the corporate nature of the Church and of the Eucharist is. Where all the emphasis is placed upon the desirability of the whole communicant body being present and communicating at the same mass, and when not only private masses but any masses in excess of the bare minimum required in order to give communion to the faithful are denounced as an individualistic abuse, the impression is only too easily produced that what makes the mass one and corporate is simply the fact that a lot of people are together in the same place at the same time."

Such a view is erroneous, Mascall contends, because the corporate unity of the Eucharist is not to be sought in the human assembly bound by limitations of time and space:

"The very purpose of the mass is that the one redemptive act of Christ should be made accessible to us who are scattered about in space and time, so why should we be afraid of multiplicity, since multiplicity is the condition under which, by our nature, we bodily creatures live? What makes the mass *one* and *corporate* is not the fact that a lot of people are together at the same service, but the fact that it is the act of the *one* Christ in his Body (*corpus*) the Church."

Mascall concludes:

"I have spoken of the mass as making the redemptive act of Christ accessible to us in different places and at different times; and in saying this I have described it as it appears to us. But what the mass really does, of course, is to gather those different places and times into the one redemptive act. It does not scatter Christ over the various altars; it draws the various altars into the one Christ. It does not divide Christ up among the individual communicants; it builds them into him. We do not really receive him; he receives us. The mass is the sacrament of unity, not of division or dispersion."[10]

When the Ontario bishops felt it necessary to ban the Eucharist because, as they said, "sacramental celebrations ... require a gathering of people who can be physically present to one another," they fell into the error against which Mascall had warned over seventy years earlier: they believed "that what makes the mass one and corporate is simply the fact that a lot of people are together in the same place at the same time."

Dr. Scully's contention that "the sacrament is made such in and through the gathering of people with a presider" was in fact profoundly contrary to what she called "our" sacramental theology. It implied

that the Eucharist was something produced "from the ground up" by the Eucharistic assembly, as if Christians needed to work their way up to God through a kind of ritual magic, as would a pagan *pontifex* ("bridge-builder") in Antiquity. On such a view, the sacramental "power" that the medieval Church attributed to the priest alone is simply vested in several persons instead of one.

To understand the Eucharist as something "made" by human agents—it makes no difference whether it is the presider alone or the whole assembly—is to fall into Pelagianism ("of all heresies spiritually the most pernicious," said William Temple), which originally arose from a failure to extend the reality and logic of the Hypostatic Union of two natures in the Person of God the Son to the salvation of individual souls. Pelagianism does away with the distinction between the orders of Nature and Grace, implying that the infinite distance between humanity and God can be overcome through the actions of human nature alone.

In sum, Anglican sacramental theology, properly understood, did not require the Ontario bishops to ban the Eucharist during the COVID-19 lockdown. Some might understandably argue that a Eucharist celebrated by a solitary priest or bishop will fall well short of the desired liturgical norm. But to argue that it could not be a *real* Eucharist—that it could not be "the work of the whole People of God"—because not enough people were present, is more than just an error or a legitimate minority viewpoint. It is a denial of the one priesthood of Christ and of the necessity of salvific grace.

Is it wrong to celebrate the Eucharist when few or none can attend?

We have seen that a Eucharist celebrated by a tiny assembly—or even by a priest alone—is valid and licit for Anglicans. But that something *may* be done does not mean that it *should* be done if it will harm fellow Christians (1 Cor. 8–10).

When the Ontario bishops said that the Eucharist required "a gathering of people who can be physically present to one another," they immediately added, "That is impossible for most of us at this time." It was not, of course, impossible for the bishops themselves, or for their clergy. Government regulations during the lockdown, even at their most stringent, always permitted public gatherings of up to five people. The bishops could have celebrated the Eucharist with groups of that size, or even just with their own households. Nevertheless, the bishops declared that, "until such time that we can gather in community together," they would be "fasting from the Eucharist but feasting on the Word."

The only plausible explanation for this decision is that the bishops felt that it would be uncharitable—perhaps even selfish—for them to continue to receive the sacrament when "most of" their people were prevented from doing so. This sentiment came out most clearly in a March 25 pastoral letter to the diocese of Toronto (the one diocese in which the Eucharist was still at least implicitly permitted), which said that the Toronto college of

bishops would abstain from participation in live-streamed Eucharists "in solidarity with the rest of the Provincial House of Bishops and with the overwhelming majority of Anglicans who—to their great sorrow—are not able to receive at this time." Even if, in Toronto, the Eucharist might continue to be celebrated, less fortunate Anglicans were not to have their noses rubbed in it.

We may admire the Ontario bishops' sensitivity. Historically and doctrinally, their high-sounding "Eucharistic fast" was dangerous nonsense.

The term "Eucharistic fast" has never been used to mean "abstention from receiving Communion." It refers, rather, to the ancient Christian discipline, attested since the second century, of abstaining from food and drink for a certain amount of time *before* receiving the sacrament. This is still a canonical obligation for the vast majority of Christians in the world today. The post-Reformation formularies of the Church of England did not mention the Eucharistic fast (probably because it was simply taken for granted), and it had largely died out in Anglicanism by the nineteenth century before it was enthusiastically rediscovered in the Anglo-Catholic revival.

But whatever name is given to it, was there merit in Dr. Scully's assertion that abstinence from the Eucharist is among "the most ancient Christian traditions"?

She offered only one example, that of catechumens in the early Church, who, she said, were "instructed ... to fast from partaking of the the eucharist," a fast that she characterized as a "choice." Dr. Scully seems to have imagined that catechumens in the early Church were normally allowed to receive the sacrament, but that they were asked to refrain from doing so for a period immediately before they were baptized. This is baffling. In the early Church, an unbaptized person could not so much as say the Lord's Prayer in the company of the baptized, let alone receive Communion.

The exclusion of catechumens had nothing to do with "fasting" from the Eucharist. To "fast" is to abstain from something that one could have chosen to enjoy, and an unbaptized person could not choose to take Communion. And Dr. Scully's suggestion that the lockdown could be "a time to embrace an intentional eucharistic fast in order to become catechumens again" unhelpfully implied that the believer's once-for-all incorporation into Christ could somehow be temporarily reversed.

It is no wonder that Dr. Scully could find no better examples of voluntary abstention from the Eucharist. When we study the early Church, we are likely to be struck instead by how, even in times of persecution when it was perilous to celebrate the Eucharist, it never occurred to Christians that they might abstain from doing so. We do occasionally read of Christians whose state of life kept them from sacramental Communion for long periods. (For example, after a dramatic conversion, St. Mary of Egypt spent forty-seven years in repentance in the desert, and it was only thanks to a providential encounter with a priest, the only human being she met during all that time, that she was able to receive Communion

before she died.) But this was not voluntary "fasting" from the Eucharist. On the contrary, St. John Chrysostom said that to abstain from Communion when it was available was a tacit admission of a sin that deserved excommunication!

The empty claim that there was historical precedent for "fasting from the Eucharist" was probably a careless afterthought, designed to clothe a decision based on emotion in the borrowed robes of ancient piety.

Leaving aside any pretended "fast," the bishops' concern about unfairness and hurt feelings suggests that they could see the Eucharist as, at most, a means whereby individuals receive measured doses of grace. If that were true, it would indeed be unfair for the clergy to keep getting "more" of it while laypeople were forced to stay home. But such a belief goes wrong in two ways.

First, while there is a sense in which we can say that "more Communions" yield "more grace," this is true only in the way that praying for twenty minutes is "better" than praying for ten. "Grace" is nothing more or less than the communication of Christ's very self to the Christian incorporated into his Body. It cannot be divided or multiplied; still less can it be selfishly hoarded by piecemeal additions.

Second, the Eucharist is a "means of grace" only through its higher activity, which is the worship of God in and through Christ. The purpose of Christ's redemptive work is to draw the whole world into the perfect worship of the Father that he offers in his divine humanity: "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him" (John 4:23). Persecuted Christians in the early Church kept celebrating the Eucharist, not because they feared to lose the "benefit" of receiving Communion (which they nevertheless held to be inestimable), but because this act of worship was the reason for the Church's existence:

"Literally scores of ... illustrations from contemporary documents of unimpeachable historical authority are available of the fact that it was not so much the personal reception of holy communion as the corporate eucharistic action as a whole (which included communion) which was then regarded as the very essence of the life of the church, and through that of the individual christian soul. In this corporate action alone each christian could fulfil for himself or herself the "appointed liturgy" of his order, and so fulfil his redeemed being as a member of Christ. ...

"What brought [the Christian] to the eucharist week by week, despite all dangers and inconveniences, was ... an intense belief that in the eucharistic action of the Body of Christ, as in no other way, he himself took part in that act of sacrificial obedience to the will of God which was consummated on Calvary and which had redeemed the world, including himself. What brought him was the conviction that there rested on each of the redeemed an absolute necessity so to take his own part in the self-offering of Christ, a necessity more binding even than the instinct of self-preservation."[11]

Because every Eucharist is the action of Christ in his Body the Church—so that the whole Christ is simultaneously the "offerer" and "what is offered"—no celebration of the Eucharist ever concerns merely those persons who happen to be present. Even a Eucharistic assembly that included every Christian in a diocese would still be celebrating the Eucharist vicariously on behalf of the whole Church.

The Anglican Church of Canada's own liturgical texts make it clear that the Eucharist involves God's people "of every language, race, and nation"; that it further involves "all [God's] whole Church" (the living and the dead); and that it is offered not just for the Church, but so that "all the world may gather in joy at the table of [God's] kingdom."

This is the proper meaning of Eucharistic "solidarity": an awareness that, although the gathered community may be tiny, it is offering worship to God in communion with and on behalf of the whole Body.

The same belief that led persecuted Christians in the early Church never to fail to celebrate the Eucharist—"so that every single spot where we were afflicted became for us a place of festive assembly, field, desert, ship, inn, prison"[12] —has been found among persecuted Christians closer to our own time. In the Soviet Gulags, for example, where one could be punished for doing anything that even looked "religious," and where the whole of each day was taken up with forced manual labour, imprisoned clergy continued to celebrate the Eucharist as often as possible. In barracks, in forests, in mineshafts, with carefully rationed bread and wine (the latter made with raisins, when necessary), they celebrated the Eucharist at least every Sunday and holy day, urgently aware of their responsibility to enter into and offer Christ's perfect worship on behalf of the whole Church. This duty was well expressed by the Exarch of Russian Catholics, Leonid Feodorov (1879–1935), who would say to his fellow prisoners, "Our Liturgy may be the only Catholic Liturgy offered today in all of Russia."[13]

No one would wish to minimize the pain of being unable to join in the celebration of the Eucharist. But the privation forced on "most of us" by the COVID-19 lockdown was the same as what is endured all the time by those kept from the Eucharist—sometimes for years—by frailty, illness, or disability. The Church has always expressed its "solidarity" with these people by remembering them in prayer in corporate worship, and it has tried to include them in that worship to the greatest extent possible, especially by bringing them Communion whenever possible (a ministry made impossible during the lockdown).

It might be objected that the early Church's passionate urge to celebrate the Eucharist has not been characteristic of Anglicanism. If that is true, it is a matter for repentance, not an excuse for laxity. It cannot be denied that, until a century ago, the Eucharist was not a central part of Anglican parish worship. An especially conscientious priest might invite his people to Communion once a month; the more complacent, just four times a year.

But the English Reformers had much higher aspira-

tions. The 1549 Prayer Book assumed that the Eucharist would be celebrated daily in all cathedrals, and even in some parishes. The laity, accustomed to communicating just once a year at Easter, proved stubbornly resistant to that ideal, and eventually the 1662 Prayer Book insisted that the laity receive Communion just three times a year. But in cathedrals and collegiate churches, where the "congregation" consisted of "many Priests and Deacons," the clergy were expected to receive Communion "every Sunday *at the least*." While it would be inappropriate to force the laity to take Communion when they might not have the requisite repentance and faith, the clergy had a duty to have at all times the disposition necessary to celebrate the Eucharist. The larger clerical foundations thus maintained a continual round of Eucharistic worship on behalf of the whole Church.

In times of stress or danger, this duty of Eucharistic worship was not reduced but increased. For example, when a "contagious sickness" was ravaging England in 1563, Queen Elizabeth I ordered extra celebrations of the Eucharist on Wednesdays.[14]

It is clear, then, that historic Anglicanism has always aspired to the Eucharistic fervour of the early Church and that, when the laity have not been willing to play their part, the joy and duty of continual Eucharistic worship has been maintained vicariously by communities of clergy.

But is this not cold comfort to devout laity under lockdown, who have been barred from the Eucharist by public health restrictions? Indeed, will such laypeople not justly take offence at being told that the clergy are "taking care of it" on their behalf, as if their involvement were not needed or wanted? Again, the Anglican tradition is not without resources to address such questions.

Anglican sacramental theology has always held that Christians who are, through no fault of their own, unable to receive the Communion physically are nevertheless able to feed truly and really on the Body and Blood of Christ and to receive all the benefits of his Passion. This practice, usually called Spiritual Communion, has its roots in the theology of Augustine of Hippo, who was the first theologian to make the necessary distinction between the physical elements of bread and wine and the spiritual grace of Communion, which is received in the soul through faith. Centuries of reflection on Augustine's insight led to the mature medieval teaching that "the effect of the sacrament is able to be received, if someone has the sacrament in desire, although it is not received in fact" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, 80, 1). In medieval rites for ministry to the sick, a patient whose condition made reception of Communion impossible would be told by the priest (using the words of Augustine), "Brother, in this case, it is sufficient for you to have a true faith and a good desire: only believe, and you have eaten."[15]

At the Reformation, Anglicanism did not forget or reject this Patristic and medieval doctrine of Spiritual Communion. It was clearly stated in the concluding rubric of the rite for the Communion of

the Sick in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, which was retained in the 1962 Canadian Prayer Book (p. 584). A sick person may not be able to consume the Eucharistic elements, but as long as he has repentance, faith, and thanksgiving, "he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul's health, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth." The same teaching is found in more recent revised liturgical books from across the Anglican Communion.

Spiritual Communion has never been restricted only to those who, if the sacrament were available, would be too ill or disabled to consume it. Among Anglicans, the best example of its use is the celebrated English diarist John Evelyn (1620–1706). Evelyn deeply yearned for traditional catholic worship ordered by the Book of Common Prayer, which the civil war Parliament had made illegal in 1645. His diary notes that he sometimes had to go to London, "where some of the orthodox sequestered Divines did privately use the Common Prayer, sacraments, etc." This could be dangerous. On Christmas Day in 1657, Evelyn was arrested at gunpoint during an illegal celebration of the Prayer Book Communion service.

For times when the Eucharist was simply unavailable, Evelyn composed a rite of "Mental Communion" that adapted the Prayer Book Communion service for solitary recitation and added supplementary devotions. A couple of short extracts will adequately illustrate the continuity between medieval and Anglican thought on Spiritual Communion. The following is from his prayer in place of the priestly Exhortation before Communion:

"Accept, I beseech thee the humble Desires of a soule breathing after thee this day. ... O let these Endeavours of mine render me even at this time, a 'meet partaker of thy Holy Mysteries' and that I may be accepted, Communicating in the Spirit, and desire of my Soule, to all Effects of Grace with those Faithfull ones of thine, who do more sensibly Participate of the Outward Elements, wheresoever they are this day consecrated & Received by them! ... Assist, O assist me by a Lively Faith, to 'draw neere' unto thee at this time, and to Receive the 'Comforts' of thy Holy Sacrament in Spiritual Communion with thy Church (tho absent in body)."[16]

At the point where he would have received the consecrated Bread, he utters the following impassioned prayer:

"Come, o come Holy Jesus! ... My Heart is ready (yet, ah, who is sufficient for these things?). Thou delight of thy Father, The Love and admiration of Angels; the desire of Nations. Enter ... and take possession of what thou hast so dearly purchas'd, and which I have endeavour'd to prepare for Thy Reception. Come, o come Thou Thirst of my soule; thou amiable of Ten Thousand: I turn with longing to Receive & Enjoy thee—That thou mayst dwell with me, and I in thee, for ever. Unite me now more firmly than ever to thy glorious Body; and by that Mystical accession which I cannot comprehend, nor express, Let me grow up, and be made a living Temple, Consecrated to Receive Thee, Thy Holy Spirit,

In times of stress or danger, this duty of Eucharistic worship was not reduced but increased. For example, when a "contagious sickness" was ravaging England in 1563, Queen Elizabeth I ordered extra celebrations of the Eucharist on Wednesdays.

and all the Benefits of thy Meritorious, All-Saving passion."[17]

Spiritual Communion was commended for those legitimately prevented from receiving the sacrament by such classical Anglican divines as Jeremy Taylor (1613–67) and Thomas Wilson (1663–1755), and more recently by the Episcopalian writer Shirley Carter Hughson, OHC (1867–1949), and by a reviser of the 1962 Canadian Prayer Book, Roland F. Palmer, SSJE (1891–1985). During the lockdown, it was even recommended on the national website of the Anglican Church of Canada, which advertised a form of Spiritual Communion from the (Episcopalian) *Saint Augustine's Prayer Book*, which includes the following "Act of Reception":

"In union, blessed Jesus, with the faithful gathered at every altar of your Church where your blessed Body and Blood are offered this day, *(and remembering particularly my own parish and those worshiping there)* I long to offer you praise and thanksgiving, for creation and all the blessings of this life, for the redemption won for us by your life, death, and resurrection, for the means of grace and the hope of glory."

This prayer is entirely in harmony with John Evelyn's form for "Mental Communion" in emphasizing the *corporate* character of the Eucharist, not just the believer's individual communion with Christ. It is grotesquely ironic that, with such a prayer having been commended for use by Canadian Anglicans, the Ontario bishops—in supposed defence of the "corporate" character of the Eucharist—should have made it impossible for their people to pray it in communion with *their own priests* offering the Christ's Body and Blood on the altars of *their own parish churches*.

No properly catechized Anglican could be offended by clergy who continued to celebrate the Eucharist when it was dangerous or illegal for most people to attend it in person. On the contrary, such perseverance would be a source of joy and encouragement. That the Ontario bishops thought it necessary to ban or hide the Eucharist for fear of causing offence or pain simply shows that they themselves were never properly catechized. (Were he old enough to have taught them, the present writer, as a professor in a Canadian Anglican theological college, would have had to accept no small share of the blame for this sad reality.)

The belief that the Eucharist is "made" by a "gathering of people," which, as we have seen, is rooted ultimately in the Pelagian heresy, is bad. But the belief that the Church should willingly abandon the "source and summit" of its life in the Eucharist to avoid hurting people's feelings is worse. *Sine dominico non possumus*, said the martyrs of Abitinae. "Without the Eucharist, we cannot exist."
A Church that has ceased to desire to offer itself as the Body of Christ in union with its Head is not just heretical. It is apostate.

We may be grateful that this practical apostasy of the Ontario Provincial House of Bishops did not reflect the faith of the churches that they lead. If

anything good comes out of this fiasco, it will be that Anglicans questioning what their bishops have *done* will be led to discover afresh what the faith of the Church still *says*. ✠

Endnotes

1 David Holeton, Catherine Hall, and Gregory Kerr-Wilson, *Let Us Give Thanks: A Presider's Manual for the BAS Eucharist* (Toronto: The Hoskin Group, 1991), p. 34.
2 A. G. Hebert, *Liturgy and Society: The Function of the Church in the Modern World* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), p. 75. 1 Clement 40. 5 and 41. 1, ed. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 1: *S. Clement of Rome*, 2nd edn, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1890) II, p. 124 and n. 4. See also Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 2nd edn (London: Dacre Press, 1945), pp. 1–2.
3 Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing: A Theological Commentary on the "Book of Common Prayer"* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1985), p. 130.
4 Hebert, *Liturgy and Society*, p. 82.
5 Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing*, p. 130.
6 Roland F. Palmer and John W. Hawkins, *Readiness and Decency: A Simple Method of Celebrating the Holy Eucharist and Other Services*, rev. and enlarged edn (Bracebridge, ON: Society of St John the Evangelist, 1961), p. 42.
7 Russell Dewhurst, "Table for One: The Lawfulness of of Holy Communion Celebrated without a Congregation," *All Things Lawful and Honest* (blog), ed. Richard Bastable, Imogen Black, Stephen Stavrou, and Peter Anthony, June 20, 2020, https://allthingslawfulandhonest.wordpress.com/2020/06/02/table-for-one/.
8 Hebert, *Liturgy and Society*, p. 210.
9 E. L. Mascall, *Corpus Christi: Essays on the Church and the Eucharist* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1953), p. 160.
10 Mascall, *Corpus Christi*, pp. 163–65.
11 Dix, *Shape of the Liturgy*, p. 153.
12 Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (d. c.264), in letter describing the sufferings of the Church at Alexandria from war, famine, a plague of infectious disease, and persecution (c.250), quoted in Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260–c.340), *Historia ecclesiastica* 7. 22. 4, text of E. Schwartz, trans. H. J. Lawlor and J. E. L. Oulton, *Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History*, II: *Books 6–10*, Loeb Classical Library 265 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), pp. 184–85.
13 Christopher Lawrence Zugger, *The Forgotten: Catholics of the Soviet Empire from Lenin through Stalin* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), p. 201.
14 *Liturgies and Occasional Forms of Prayer set forth in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. William Keatinge Clay, Parker Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1847), pp. 478–90.
15 *Manuale et processionale ad usum insignis ecclesiae Eboracensis*, ed. W. G. Henderson, Surtees Society 63 (Durham: Andrews, 1875), p. 50*: "Frater, in hoc casu sufficit tibi vera fides, et bona voluntas: tantum crede, et manducasti."
16 *A Devotionarie Book of John Evelyn of Wotton, 1620–1706*, ed. Walter Howard Frere (London: John Murray, 1936), pp. 22–23.
17 Ibid., pp. 27–28.