

EDITORIAL

It is interesting to compare the alternative Communion invitations in the three Orders offered in the 1979 Book of Common Order. The first is given "in the words of holy scripture". "Come unto me, all ye that labour etc.....; I am the bread of life etc.....; Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst etc...." The second begins: "The table of our Lord Jesus Christ is open to all who are in communion with the Church universal. We therefore invite members of any branch thereof who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, to join with us in this holy fellowship" , and then proceeds in the same scriptural words. The third simply says: "Our Saviour invites those who trust him to share the feast he has prepared."

Do the first and third orders presuppose the presence of pickets stationed at each entrance to the sanctuary to ensure that only those "qualified" are admitted? Many a parish minister will survey the assembled congregation on Communion Sunday and spot, here and there, "unqualified" individuals who have slipped through the net. What is he to do about this, especially when he sees them being offered and receiving the elements? Perhaps if he recognizes them to be faithful souls who regularly worship in the congregation but who, for a variety of reasons, are not yet "members" in the formal sense, he may have a quiet smile to himself as he imagines how a few of his more legalistic elders might react if only they knew how inefficient the picketing is!

Has the time not come to eliminate the hypocrisy whereby nominal members who care scarcely a fig for Christ and his Church nevertheless turn out to Communion to earn their "tick", while others who have manifestly demonstrated their love for and trust in the Lord are excluded because their names are to be found only in the "Lamb's book of life", a copy of which does not happen to be in the Roll Keeper's possession? Why don't we declare the truth of the third order's invitation to be the whole truth, and open the Lord's Table to all who desire to partake? The only defensible alternative would be a much tighter congregational discipline which would purge all the nominal from the Roll, but this would be impossible in practice and a denial of Christ's gracious way with sinners who seek him.

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