

tire sympathy with the purpose and desire which has prompted some to begin or to adopt this custom; I know that it has arisen from a tender longing to meet the difficulties of classes of our people, to whose presence at the mid-day Celebrations our social habits present a formidable difficulty; but I cannot allow that any difficulties warrant this innovation, and I believe that our difficulties may be otherwise and unobjectionably met. It is right that I should place before you the grounds of my objection to the practice. They are briefly these: 1. That it is contrary to the usage of the whole Church, certainly from very early, and most probably from Apostolic times; 2. That it involves an unlawful use of our Liturgy; and 3. That it directly tends to the desecration of the highest Rite of our holy religion. Very few words, I think, will suffice to establish the truth of each of these propositions.

#### EVENING COMMUNION CONTRARY TO THE CUSTOM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

It has pleased God that, in the well-known letter of Pliny to Trajan at as early a date as 104 years after Christ, we have direct evidence upon the first point. "They affirmed," he reports to his imperial master of those whom he had put to the torture and to death for their religion, "that this was the sum of their fault or error,—that they were accustomed to assemble on a fixed day before light, to say responsively a hymn to Christ as God, and to bind themselves *sacramento*, not to any wickedness, but not to commit theft, robbery, or adultery, or breach of faith."\* Can there be any reasonable doubt what the *sacramentum* against sin was, wherewith these early confessors said that they bound themselves "very early" on the Resurrection morning, even "whilst it was yet dark," and did but "begin to dawn towards the day"? Was it ever known in the Church of Christ that men should be allowed to take an oath that they would not commit sin? Certainly to the early Church such a notion must have been most strange. They knew full well that not in any vow but in closest communing with their risen Lord was their strength against iniquity; and speaking to a heathen, to whom the secrets of their faith could not be revealed, they would most naturally apply the word *sacramentum* to the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Doubtless it was for its Celebration that they thus assembled themselves before light. And from this time downward we have an unbroken chain of proof as to the practice of the Church. The words of Tertullian†, in the second century, are plainly to the point; so are those of S. Cyprian‡ in the third; and in the fourth we have S. Augustine's reference to the practice of Celebrating on one evening in the week, namely on the anniversary of the Institution of the Lord's Supper, in words § which prove the universality of the rule to which this was a special exception. Thus we trace up an unbroken custom condemning late Communion to within the period when the voice of the beloved Apostle must have been instructing the Christian Church in the Lesser Asia.

That the custom of early Communion should have begun so soon suggests, for other reasons than its mere antiquity,

that it rested upon Apostolical authority. For the Divine Institution and the first Celebration were after the evening paschal meal. How within so short a period could such a change have been possible had it rested upon any lower authority? For every argument from the convenience of evening Celebrations with which we are familiar must have applied with far more force to them. The social difficulties of servants in Christian households must be nothing compared with those of Christian slaves in heathen families; or, indeed, with those of the whole body in times of persecution. Yet, as it seems, these perils were not esteemed sufficient, even in the bloody Decian persecution, to warrant such a custom. The probability, then, is strong, that the inspired Apostles themselves altered the time of Celebration from the hour of the paschal feast to that of the Resurrection of the Lord. And no careful student of the New Testament will doubt that, in the abuses which had crept into the Corinthian Church touching the Holy Eucharist, and in St. Paul's treatment of them, they find the occasion and the time of the alteration.

First, then, I could not see these late Communion because they are a violation of the custom of the universal Church, which may be traced to the very first century, and which rests, most probably, on an Apostolical ordinance framed to guard the holy Rite from abuse.

#### EVENING COMMUNIONS A VIOLATION OF THE LITURGY OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH.

Further, our own Communion Office, in my judgment, embodies this rule. It is not indeed anywhere expressly said that the Communion Office is a part of Morning Prayer; the reason of the omission evidently being that when our Offices were compiled no Christian man thought of any other time for the public Celebration of the Holy Communion. But though not expressly asserted, this is clearly implied in the very letter of the Office. It may be traced throughout: in the rubric, *e.g.*, which orders that "the Collect appointed for every Sunday, or for any Holy-day that hath a vigil or eve, shall be said at the *evening Service next before*"; which evidently treats the Communion Office as a part of the next day's Morning Prayer; and less explicitly is the same implied in the order that "so many as intend to be partakers of the Holy Communion shall signify their names to the Curate, at least some time the day before": and yet more plainly in the rubric before the Offertory, which orders, "Then shall follow THE Sermon," &c. For THE Sermon was then an essential part of the Morning Prayer, and of it alone.

This question being one of the legal construction of our Offices, I have thought it my duty to consult the very learned Chancellor of our Diocese; and I am fortified by his opinion that any Clergyman violating herein the monition of his Bishop would subject himself to the penalty of suspension.

#### EVENING COMMUNIONS TEND TO DESECRATION OF THE ORDINANCE.

Further, I am persuaded that if this usage became common it would greatly tend to the desecration of this Holy