

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021

## Communing

**“Commune with your own heart.”**

*Bible, Psalm 4:4*

The hymn *The Church's One Foundation* was written in 1866 by Samuel John Stone as a response to a schism within the Church of South Africa. John William Colenso, first Bishop of Natal, had denounced much of the Bible as fictitious. When the bishop was deposed, he appealed to the higher ecclesiastical authorities in England, and Samuel Stone, a priest and poet, became involved in the debate. It inspired him to write a set of hymns headed *Lyra Fidelium: Twelve Hymns on the Twelve Articles of the Apostles' Creed*, with "The Church's One Foundation" included under the ninth article, *The Holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints*.

There isn't space to include the full version of the hymn here, but it's worthwhile looking at all the verses – including those not normally included in our modern hymnaries – to get the full context and specific references to the controversy, in words such as "schisms", "false sons", "foe", "traitor", "heresies", "rent asunder" ... Strong stuff indeed!

But controversies notwithstanding, one line (slightly altered in the current version of my hymnary) stood out when I sang this hymn recently:

*Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One,  
and mystical communion with those whose rest is won.*

This is *not* the season of All Saints, nor a specific time of remembrance. But I was struck once again of the importance of that "mystical communion" with those who have gone before us. In all the things that exercise our minds – including controversies, schisms, beliefs, creeds, and the like – isn't it important sometimes to put these aside and "commune" in true fellowship with one another and, perhaps more importantly, with those "whose rest is won"? It's what the *Westminster Confession of Faith* calls "The Church Visible" and "The Church Invisible", with Stone's "mystical communion" binding them as one.

"Commune with your own heart", the Psalmist suggests. If we do, we might even be in communion with something beyond ourselves, more mystical and lasting than controversies that take up our time and energy.

### **A prayer for today**

*Mystical communion? Just what I need to help me make sense of things. Amen*