

# The Lord's Supper in Current Teaching (lii)

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

---

*W.H. Griffith Thomas discusses the complexities and misinterpretations surrounding the Lord's Supper, emphasizing the importance of adhering to Scripture and the Church of England's teachings.*

**Scripture:** John 4:24, John 6:63, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 1 Corinthians 11:24, 1 Corinthians 11:27, Philippians 3:3, Colossians 2:8, Hebrews 13:15, 1 Peter 2:5

**Topics:** "Eucharist Theology", "Christian Worship"

---

## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas delves into the teachings of the Tractarian School, particularly focusing on Eucharistic Adoration and the ambiguity surrounding it. He emphasizes the importance of worshiping our Lord as God during Holy Communion but warns against the dangers of localizing His presence in the elements. Thomas challenges the notion of the Eucharist as the highest act of Christian worship, urging a deeper understanding of worship as surrender, praise, and thanksgiving. He critiques the concept of Sacramental Grace, highlighting the need for a clear interpretation of terms and a Scriptural basis for beliefs surrounding the Holy Communion.

---

## Transcript

Another phrase of the teaching of the Tractarian School is that known as Eucharistic Adoration. The Declaration of the English Church Union says: "Christ our Lord present ... under the form of 'bread and wine' is to be worshipped and adored." Here again we are conscious of ambiguity in the terms. If the phrase "Eucharistic Adoration" means the adoration of our Lord as God at the time of the Holy Communion, it is of course most true and necessary. But this is evidently not the meaning of the Declaration.

The reference is to a form of adoration limited exclusively to the Holy Communion. There is, however, no proof of this in New Testament or Prayer Book. The worship of our Lord at the time of the Lord's Supper is as essential as it is precious, but the worship of our Lord in or under the veils of the elements is erroneous and dangerous. Nothing can prevent it from becoming spiritually harmful, for it tends to localize our Lord's presence and thereby to minister to a refined but very real form of materialism in worship.

To this adoration the "Black Rubric" stands opposed, and it is perhaps hardly surprising that this Rubric should be characterized by Canon Mason as "not the work of careful theologians," and as having "hardly the same authority as other Rubrics." [Mason, Faith of the Gospel. Second Edition, Revised, p. 315.] Notwithstanding the verbal alteration made in this Rubric in 1662 it remains in our Prayer Book as a

distinct stumbling block to all such Eucharistic adoration as we are accustomed to hear of today.

Even if it be said that the Rubric only forbids the adoration of the corporal Presence of Christ's natural flesh and blood, it may be pointed out that a body, even glorified, can only be present as a body "corporally". Yet another aspect of some modern teaching on the Holy Communion is seen in the description of the Eucharist as "the highest act of Christian worship". Would it not be well to enquire carefully what this statement means? Can we really distinguish between "higher" and "lower" in worship?

If we can, in what sense is the Lord's Supper "highest"? Further, what do we mean by worship? Worship is an attitude to God consisting of several elements or acts, such as praise, prayer, thanksgiving, adoration, surrender. The only acts ordained by our Lord are "take," "eat," "drink," "do". Are these in themselves acts of worship? Worship is giving, rendering, "ascribing worth to God," but the acts ordained by Christ in the Lord's Supper imply receiving, appropriating, feasting.

The Lord's Supper is of course the opportunity and occasion of glorious, precious worship, but we must not be afraid to go to the root of things in the face of much vague thought, mere sentiment and erroneous teaching associated with what is called "Eucharistic worship". Just as the Eucharist is not in itself a sacrifice, but symbolizes and pledges our Lord's Sacrifice and gives an opportunity for our own spiritual sacrifices, so also it was not referred to in the institution as strictly an act of worship, but rather as an act of fellowship, though worship is inevitably associated with it, and must of necessity be so as the result of our appropriation of the Lord's atoning Sacrifice.

We must not forget also, that according to the New Testament, followed by the Prayer Book, our Lord is brought before us in the Holy Communion as crucified, i.e., His body is regarded as dead, His blood as shed and therefore separated from His body in the condition of death. It is therefore Christ crucified who is offered to our faith in the Holy Communion, but our worship of Christ is not of Christ as crucified, but as alive for evermore. We worship a living Saviour and Lord, not parts of Christ, His dead body and shed blood.

We adore Him in all the fullness and glory of His Divine life and Godhead. One more phase of current teaching on the Holy Communion requires attention. We often hear and read of "Sacramental Grace". If by this is meant grace received in the due and faithful use of the Lord's Supper it is most assuredly correct, but if it refers to grace which is supposed to reside in, and be received through, the elements, and which cannot be received at any other time, it is necessary to ask for proof of this from Holy Scripture and the Prayer Book.

"There is nothing in Scripture, there is nothing in our service, to lead us to suppose that in Holy Communion we receive a special kind of grace, which can be received then and then alone. But there is every reason to believe, humbly yet trustfully, that times of Holy Communion are times of special opportunity, when we may with clearer faith, and fuller hope, and warmer love, embrace God, as He offers Himself in holy symbol to be embraced by us, and when we may receive 'without measure' the blessed benefits of Christ's body and blood." [Rev.

T. W. Drury, Church and Faith, p. 195.] The truth is that the word "sacramental" and the phrase "in the sacrament," so often used in present-day teaching, are liable to serious confusion. It is well known that the term "sacrament" is used in the Catechism in two slightly different senses. In the answer to the question, "What meanest thou by this word Sacrament?" the term is applied to the outward sign, but in the following answer the word is taken to include both outward sign and inward grace.

Again, in Article XXV sacraments are called "badges," "tokens," "witnesses," "signs," and in Articles XXVIII, XXIX, and XXX, the word "sacrament" is applied to the outward sign or element only. Probably the full meaning of the Church of England is best understood when we include in the idea of "sacrament" the outward sign, the inward grace, and the due use of the elements, so that if "in the sacrament" is understood to mean "in the use of the sacrament," the phrase is clear and correct, but if it is intended to mean, as is undoubtedly often the case, "in the elements," the phrase is inaccurate and untrue.

We believe with all our hearts in the presence of our Lord at the time of the celebration of the Holy Communion, but not that His presence is in the sacramental elements. It is, of course, easy to assert that the presence of Christ to be real must be in the elements, but it is by no means so easy to prove it; so also it is easy to charge those who refuse to acknowledge the presence of Christ in the elements as "Zwinglians," but again the assertion is more easily made than substantiated.

The truth is that those who hold the view that Christ is present in the elements fail to realize one of the first principles of spiritual religion, and lose sight of one of the fundamental elements of that worship which is "in spirit and truth" as opposed to worship connected with a localized presence of the Godhead. The truth of the position for which we contend can easily be proved by the application of a crucial test. In the Service of Communion of the Sick the third Rubric has these very plain words: But if a man, either by reason of extremity of sickness ... or by any other just impediment, do not receive the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, the Curate shall instruct him, that if he do truly repent him of his sins, and steadfastly believe that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed His Blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he hath thereby, and giving him hearty thanks therefore, 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.

This unambiguous declaration, which often fails to receive notice in modern books on the Holy Communion, affords the clearest possible indication of the teaching of the Church of England. It proves beyond question that the presence of our Lord is independent of the elements, and that under the circumstances assumed by the Rubric the eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ is possible entirely apart from the elements. Surely these words would have no meaning if the modern teaching now under consideration be true, namely, that there is a special and unique presence of Christ in the elements, a special and unique adoration of our Lord at the celebration of the Communion, a special and unique sacrifice at that time, and a special and unique gift bestowed on the communicants.

Yet the words of the Rubric stand as an integral part of the teaching of the Church, and they carry their own unequivocal message, and convey an unmistakable condemnation of the novel ideas which are so rife in the Church today. If it were true that we receive some grace in the Holy Communion that is unique in kind or degree it would be an argument for having the celebrations not merely every week, or every day, but almost every hour, for of course our need of grace is so great and constant that we must have all that we can possibly obtain.

The New Testament, however, does not make the Holy Communion the pivot and center of our Christian life. It is a means of grace, a rich and blessed means, but not "the means of grace" as if there were no other, or as if it were the greatest. That which believers do spiritually and in symbol at stated intervals in the Lord's Supper they do spiritually, apart from symbols, at all times; they "feed on Christ in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving." There are several other aspects of this modern teaching expressed in phrases which, like those already dealt with, are doubtless capable of a true and Scriptural interpretation, when

carefully stated and safeguarded, but which as often used are applied in ways that are warranted neither by Scripture nor Church of England teaching.

There is scarcely any greater need in this connection than that of constant and close scrutiny of the terms used in modern teaching on the Holy Communion. "There is an unfortunate ambiguity in many of the terms which are cited in this controversy about the nature of the Eucharist." [Dr. Ince, Letter, ut supra, p. 26.] The counsel of the Bishop of Edinburgh [Bishop of Edinburgh, Address to Synod, Nov. 1900.] to "define your terms" is imperative upon all who would distinguish between truth and error on this subject.

It is only by so doing that we can hope to arrive at any satisfactory conclusions. The Declaration of the English Church Union, already discussed, had appended to it certain notes giving quotations and references from the early Fathers and English Church theologians, in support of its position. The value of the extracts and references may be gauged by one fact among a number of others of like nature. The name of Ridley is actually quoted in proof of the English Church Union doctrine of Eucharistic adoration.

When it is remembered that Ridley suffered at the stake for the denial of a doctrine virtually identical with that now put forward by the English Church Union, the true value of the reference will be at once understood. "That the English Church Union should claim Bishop Ridley in support of their supposed Declaration is disingenuous, not to say dishonest." [The Doctrine of the Real Presence. A Letter by William Ince, D.D., p. 4.] The language of Bishop Dowden and Dr. Ince on these quotations carries its own lesson.

Dr. Ince speaks of "the extreme unfairness" of many of these quotations. He also says that "by mutilation and by entire neglect of the context they misrepresent the meaning of the writers, and in many cases utterly contradict it." And he concludes that "nothing can justify such a wanton and reckless falsification of evidence as is exhibited in the notes." [Dr. Ince, Letter, p. 10.] Bishop Dowden is scarcely less emphatic on this subject [Bishop Dowden, Define your Terms, p. 13.]: "It was indiscreet, to say the least, to attempt to claim in support of the Declaration such well-known and easily accessible writings as those of Bishop Andrewes, Bishop Jeremy Taylor, Bishop Bull, Bishop Thomas Wilson, and Bishop Horsley.

It was only the very ignorant and ill-read among the clergy and laity - forming, it is to be feared, a sufficiently numerous class - who could be long deceived by such scraps, torn from their context, and perverted from their original purport." We cannot do better than sum up the discussion on the English Church Union Declaration than by quoting once more the words of Bishop Dowden [Address to Synod, p. 21.]: "The language of this Declaration finds no countenance in the writings of the Fathers of the Primitive Church.

And it is more obvious, though not more certain, that it finds no countenance either in the authorized standards of the Church's doctrine or in the writings of the great theologians of the English Church, most of whom were deeply read, not only in the Holy Scriptures (the ultimate authority on all questions of doctrine), but also in the literature of Christian antiquity and the Early Fathers. In the light of the foregoing discussion of Tractarian and modern teaching we can see still more clearly the real meaning and force of the Scriptural and Prayer Book views which we have been discussing.

Our Reformers, following Scripture, placed between the Churches of England and Rome a chasm with reference to the Holy Communion, which is impassable except by surrender on one side, and for three centuries, i.e., up to sixty years ago, this insuperable barrier was admitted by all. The modern teaching, however, is scarcely distinguishable from that against which our Prayer Book protests and for opposition

to which our Reformers were burnt at the stake. "The truth is that the Declaration of the English Church Union is at variance with the doctrine maintained by the consensus of all the most eminent theologians of the Church of England since the Reformation, nor can it be reconciled with the natural interpretation of the English Liturgy or the 28th and 29th Articles.

It is a deliberate attempt to undo the work of the Reformation, which delivered our Church and Realm from the tyranny of the many accretions of false doctrine which the Church of Rome had imposed upon Christians as necessary articles of faith, but which the Church of England declared to be unsanctioned by Scripture or by the teaching of the primitive ages of the Church." [Dr. Ince, *ut supra*, p. 28.] That these words are only too true can be proved beyond question from much of the popular teaching today in a certain section of the Church of England.

We have now reviewed the doctrine of our Church as to the meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper. From examination of the Prayer Book in the light of Scripture and of its own history there can be no serious doubt as to its true meaning. As loyal churchmen we are content with the doctrine of our own formularies, and we have no wish to add to, or in any way to modify it from other service books, Roman or Sarum. Nor can we deem it wise even if it were possible to return to the partially reformed book of 1549, valuable though that was when compared with pre-Reformation books.

We take our stand on the Prayer Book as it is, and find in it the complete expression and entire justification of Church of England doctrine. If we will but follow Bible and Prayer Book as they are, we need have no fear of exaggerating or depreciating the Lord's Supper. The safeguard against both errors is to give it its true interpretation, and to refuse to be swayed in one direction by sentiment or prevailing opinion, or in the other by abuse and superstition. We rejoice to think of the Holy Supper as a memorial of our redemption, a pledge of a covenant, a means of grace, a bond of brotherhood, a testimony to the world, a message of hope; and we rejoice to realize that it appeals to our intellect, our heart, our conscience, our imagination, our will, our whole being.

It proclaims to us and others, and also offers for our appropriation by faith, the Lord Jesus Christ in all the fullness of redeeming love and grace; and so we value it, cherish it, safeguard it, and will repel, so far as in us lies, any teaching which would have us understand and use it in any other ways than those which God has taught in His Word, and our Church has received and held for over three centuries. The chief reason why we are specially jealous for Scripture truth on the Lord's Supper is that in connection with it emerge some of the characteristic differences between Romanism and modern Anglo-Catholicism on the one hand, and the true Protestantism and genuine Catholicity of the Church of England on the other.

The doctrines of the real Presence in the elements, of a propitiatory sacrifice in the Eucharist, of the virtual identification of the sign and the thing signified, of the *ex opere operato* theory of the effect of Sacraments; are all so many outstanding and definite marks of difference between us. And these differences with Rome and those who virtually agree with her on this subject are vital and fundamental. If they are right, English churchmen are wrong; if we are right, they are wrong.

There is no doubt, however, on which side the New Testament and Prayer Book teaching falls. The fact is, disguised as it often is, the Christianity of Rome as a system is largely influenced by two characteristics, so congenial to fallen human nature, legalism and materialism. In relation to our justification and sanctification Roman doctrine is essentially legalistic, involving salvation by works; while on the question of Christian life and worship its sacramental system is undoubtedly materialistic, and really opposed to

worship "in spirit and truth".

Against these two errors the Reformation made its strong and victorious protest; against them our Prayer Book is a clear and standing testimony; and against them we too, as churchmen, must not hesitate to wage an earnest and strenuous warfare, because the battle is for the simplicity, the purity, and the integrity of the Gospel of the Grace of God.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/the-lords-supper-in-current-teaching-iii/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**