

The Lord's Supper in the Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

W.H. Griffith Thomas explores the historical and theological evolution of the Lord's Supper as articulated in the Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552, emphasizing the Church of England's break from Roman Catholic doctrine.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23, Ephesians 4:14, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 13:8, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Lord's Supper", "Church History"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas delves into the history of the Church of England doctrine as reflected in the Prayer Book, emphasizing its roots in the English Reformation and the clear opposition to Roman Catholic doctrine, particularly regarding the Lord's Supper. The sermon explores the distinct stages of Prayer Book revision, highlighting the shift towards Protestant views and the deliberate removal of elements that could imply a local Presence in the consecrated elements. It underscores the importance of understanding the historical context and doctrinal evolution of the Church of England in relation to foreign Protestantism.

Transcript

Hitherto we have considered the doctrine of the Church of England as it stands recorded in the Prayer Book and Articles. For the purpose of ascertaining their proper meaning and interpretation it is now necessary to go a step further, and to consider the Church of England doctrine as illustrated by the history of the Prayer Book. It must be remembered that the doctrine contained in the Prayer Book professes to be the explanation and amplification of Holy Scripture, as understood by those who compiled and revised the Prayer Book.

It was then accepted by the English Church as a whole in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Prayer Book and Articles were composed and compiled in the face of varying and opposing views, and they can only be properly understood in the light of the history of the times. It is not wholly unnecessary for us to be reminded that the Prayer Book as it stands, with its statements of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, dates in form from the 16th century (though in spirit it is much older), and is an embodiment of the movement called the English Reformation.

It was intended to express, and it does express, among other things, the mind of the compilers and of the Reformed Church as they stood in direct opposition to the medieval doctrine of the Roman Church. Any statement of "plain reasons against joining the Church of Rome" which ignores this fact, ignores the

plainest reason of all. If there is one thing clearer than another, it is that our Reformers were burnt at the stake for denying the Roman doctrine of the Lord's Supper. And there are two other things equally clear; first, that our Prayer Book and Articles were drawn up to express the Reformers' doctrines; and, second, that no Roman Catholic would think of accepting the statements of the Prayer Book as equivalent to the doctrine of his Church.

Attempts have from time to time been made to prove that there is no real difference between the Churches of England and Rome on this subject, and that our differences only concern certain medieval accretions, which do not touch the essence of the doctrine. But none of these attempts have proved successful or even satisfactory. No glosses such as those of Santa Clara, no explanations such as those which can be found in Bishop Forbes' work on the Articles, no statements such as those of Tract XC, or the Eirenicon by Dr.

Pusey, or The Kiss of Peace by Mr. Cobb, have bridged the gulf, or are likely to do so. It is impossible to invalidate the clear historical basis on which the statements of the Prayer Book and Articles rest. At present, at any rate, there is between the Churches of England and Rome, on the question of the Holy Communion, "a great gulf fixed," both from the historical and theological points of view. Nor is it pertinent to say that the Roman doctrine of Transubstantiation is now only of academic interest, because it is based on an exploded philosophy.

They are not Roman Catholics who say this, and we may believe it only when Rome herself gives up the doctrine which is based on that ancient philosophy. We have now to trace carefully the history of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the Church of England in the light of Reformation history, and in relation both to foreign Protestantism, and also to successive revisions of the Prayer Book. The present doctrine of the Holy Communion is the result of five distinct though connected stages of Prayer Book revision, and it is important to consider each of these separately and in their connection, in order to discover the full force of the statement of doctrine in our present book.

The earliest of the stages is marked by what is known as the first Prayer Book of Edward VI, that of 1549. This was the first complete Service Book of the Church of England associated with the Reformation. As such, it can only be properly understood in the light of the past and of the changes made. It is necessary to look back as well as forward if we would fully realize what its doctrine of the Lord's Supper meant. Up to the close of the reign of Henry the Eighth there were no doctrinal changes made in the services of the Church, and even the opening days of the reign of Edward the Sixth only saw changes of a moderate and mediating nature: "The Communion Order of 1548 was a typical act of policy: with one hand it continued the old Ritual of the Mass, with the other it introduced the new Ritual of Communion in both kinds.

It marks the nearest point of agreement - almost, one might say, of equilibrium - between the new and the old schools in the Church." [Bishop Stubbs, Visitation Charges, p. 99.] But in the next year came the complete Prayer Book of 1549, which was undoubtedly a landmark in the history of the Reformation and a decided break with the past order of things. The name of "The Mass" remained, though only as the term by which the Holy Communion was "commonly called" (vulgo dicebatur: cf. subtitle of Christmas Day; Article XXV and Article XXXI).

But the distinctive Roman doctrines of Transubstantiation and the Sacrifice of the Mass were not found. There had been a deliberate rejection of Roman Catholic and mediaeval doctrine. The book was clearly anti-Roman, and its Protestant position was unmistakable. It is necessary, however, to enquire more

definitely as to this Protestant teaching. Continental Protestantism was, unfortunately, already divided on the Lord's Supper. On the question of the Real Presence, Luther taught a doctrine to which the term Consubstantiation has been given, a doctrine which as far as the mode of the Presence in the reception of the Sacrament is concerned did not materially differ from that of Rome.

It must, however, be clearly understood that this Presence with the elements was not connected by Lutherans with the act of consecration, but with that of reception. It is imparted by Christ only when the elements are being consumed by the communicant. Further, they held that "outside the use ... the body of Christ is not present." Moreover, there is no Eucharistic Sacrifice, or Adoration, or Reservation in the Roman sense among the Lutherans. [Formula Concord, pars. i., cap. vii.; De Coena Domini, iii.]

The other section of the Continental Churches known as the "Reformed" held that the Real Presence was related to and appropriated by the faith of the recipient and that this was ample for spiritual communion with our Lord. To which of these views did the Prayer Book of 1549 lean? It is a matter of historical fact that Archbishop Cranmer had been in contact with, and influenced by Lutheran leaders such as Archbishop Hermann, Luther, and Melancthon, and the marks of this influence may be seen to this day in words and phrases in our Articles (e.g., Article XIX).

Several phrases in the Prayer Book of 1549 were certainly open to Lutheran interpretation on the subject of the Presence of Christ in relation to the elements; e.g.: (a) A Rubric at the end of the Communion Service ordering larger and thicker wafers than had been formerly used, so that they could more easily be broken and distributed. In this Rubric we read: "Men must not think less to be received in part, than in the whole, but in each of them the whole body of our Saviour Jesus Christ."

The sentence quoted is for the purpose of reassuring any who might feel the blessing was somewhat lacking by reason of the wafer bread being broken. (b) The Prayer of Consecration: "Hear us (O merciful Father), we beseech Thee; and with Thy Holy Spirit and Word vouchsafe to bless and sanctify these Thy gifts and creatures of bread and wine, that they may be unto us the body and blood of Thy most dearly beloved Son, Jesus Christ." (c) The Prayer of Consecration: "We Thy humble servants do celebrate, and make here before Thy Divine Majesty, with these Thy holy gifts, the memorial which Thy Son hath willed to make." (d) The Prayer after Administration: "We most heartily thank Thee, for that Thou hast vouchsafed to feed us in these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of Thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, and hast assured us (duly receiving the same) of Thy favour and goodness towards us."

Two or three illustrations of the character of the book derived from the Rubrics will further show its general position on the Lord's Supper. The Priest is to stand "humbly afore the midst of the Altar," and yet the Consecration Prayer is to be said "without any elevation or showing the Sacrament to the people." The Rubric before the Administration is: "And when he delivereth the Sacrament of the body of Christ he shall say to everyone these words." And the actual words were the first sentence of our present form, with its clear emphasis on the body which "was given" and the blood "which was shed", referring to the atoning death of the Cross.

It would not be surprising in the light of the well-known development of opinion on the Holy Communion on the part of Ridley and Cranmer, if traces of Lutheran influence were found in this Prayer Book. On the other hand it certainly did not teach any distinctive Lutheran doctrine, and it must be borne in mind that Cranmer himself by this time had already accepted a doctrine of the Lord's Supper akin to that of the

"Reformed" Churches. [Original Letters, Parker Society, p. 323; Gasquet's Edward VI. pp. 434, 440, 441.]

The book was not definitely anti-Lutheran, and quite as obviously, it was not definitely anti-"Reformed". It was as far as possible inclusive and comprehensive of both views, being definitely Protestant as opposed to Rome. Its repudiation of Roman doctrine was pretty evident to most people, even though Gardiner, making as much as possible of its ambiguities, said it "was not far removed from Catholic doctrine." [Gasquet, Edward VI, p. 284; Cranmer, On the Lord's Supper, pp. 62, 92.

Parker Society.] The book as a whole was a marvelous advance on the past, and was truly "epoch-making" in relation both to that which preceded and that which followed. In 1552 the second Prayer Book of Edward VI was put forth. This was an entire and in many ways drastic revision of the earlier book. Into the reasons for a revision it is not to our present purpose to enter. The fact of the revision is all we need consider, and this is only too evident. A comparison of the two books clearly reveals very marked differences.

Every phrase capable of a Lutheran interpretation was omitted, and it has rightly been said that if the Prayer Book of 1549 was against Rome, that of 1552 was against any form of Corporal Presence in or under the elements. [Dimock, *Vox Liturgiae Anglicanae*, p. 48 f.] At the same time it was also still more definitely anti-Roman. The following facts will prove this: 1. The name "Mass" was omitted from the title. 2. The word "Altar" and the usual sacerdotal vestments were omitted. 3.

The structure of the Office for Holy Communion was altered by breaking up the long Consecration Prayer into three, answering to our present Church Militant Prayer, Consecration Prayer and first post-Communion Collect. 4. The allusion to "making a memorial before God" was omitted. 5. The Invocation of the Holy Spirit on the Elements, and the prayer that "they may be to us the body and blood of Christ," were omitted. 6. The Rubric before the Administration ran: "And when he delivereth the bread he shall say." 7.

The Words of Administration were omitted, and a new form prescribed. This was the second sentence of our present form. 8. A new Rubric was inserted at the end of the service (called the "Black Rubric"), stating that the posture of kneeling to receive the Sacrament signified thankful and humble acknowledgment of Christ's benefits, and that no adoration was intended either of the elements or of any "real and essential Presence of Christ's natural flesh and blood." The elements are stated to remain in their natural substance, and the natural body and blood of Christ to be in heaven and not here.

These changes are unmistakable in character and purpose. They represent the further growth of Protestant views on the part of Ridley and Cranmer, and the facts of this revision clearly point to a deliberate purpose of removing everything that might be construed into a doctrine of a local Presence in or under the consecrated elements. It must, however, be clearly and constantly remembered that "Reformed" doctrine did not mean, and must never be supposed to mean, what is often called "Zwinglianism".

Zwinglius is usually associated with the "Figurative" view, which regards the elements as bare signs of grace, but it is certainly open to question whether he himself ever held the extreme views popularly attributed to him. [See *Expositor*, 5th Series, Vol. III, p. 161 ff. Bishop Moule (*The Supper of the Lord*, p. 50, note) says: "The great Swiss Reformer, Zwingli, or Zwingel (who died 1531), is commonly credited with having been a mere 'commemorationist'. The charge is baseless.

He held substantially the doctrine taught in the English Article (XXVIII). But writing early in the history of the controversy on the Eucharist, he expressed himself sometimes incautiously."] At any rate, Calvin and the other leading Swiss Reformers certainly never held this view, for they regarded the Holy Communion as associated with a very definite Spiritual Presence of Christ, revealed to and bestowed through the faith of the believer. It was to this general position that Ridley and Cranmer had come, and though they were undoubtedly influenced by the views of foreign Reformers their opinions were the result of their own personal convictions.

It is a great mistake to suppose that the revision of the Prayer Book of 1549 was due to foreign interference. The Church of England most wonderfully, wisely, and successfully avoided connecting herself with any names, however great. She took her own independent line, apart from foreign control or even guidance. Whatever the second Prayer Book was, it represented the views of its revisers, and of the Church of that day. The doctrinal standpoint of those who revised it is a simple matter of historical fact, and whatever ambiguities there were in the Prayer Book of 1549, it does not seem too much to say that there were none in that of 1552.

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