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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

WHAT DID OUR LORD MEAN ?

BY THE REV. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

[The substance of this paper appeared in 1911 as a booklet which was compiled at the request of several influential and representative Canadian Churchmen who wished to have in brief form a statement of the main teaching of the New Testament and Prayer Book on the Lord's Supper, with special reference to a Canadian publication for Sunday School teachers in which some erroneous teaching had appeared. It is now reissued, because the problems are just as rife to-day as they were eight years ago, and because the truth of Scripture and our Prayer Book needs constant presentation.]

WHEN the Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper He used these (among other) words : " This do in remembrance of Me." And St. Paul in giving his account of the Institution added : " As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come." What do these words really mean ?

A Sunday School Canadian paper¹ for Teachers gave its readers this explanation :

" St. Luke and St. Paul tell us that our Lord said, ' Do this (make this offering) in remembrance of Me.' "

" Our Lord is in heaven ; His Church is on earth. Because of His words in the Upper Room the Church does here what Christ is doing in heaven. He pleads before God the Father, the offering of Himself as the Lamb. . . . What Christ is doing in heaven the Church does on earth in Holy Communion ; we plead the Lamb of God, Jesus our Lord, when as He commanded we do ' this.' "

Now the question is whether this interpretation of our Lord's words is correct.

How can we test it ? Only by the highest and best Greek scholarship, and by the clearest and most accurate New Testament teaching.

Several points call for attention.

I. DOES " DO THIS " MEAN " MAKE THIS OFFERING " ?

1. The Greek word for " do " occurs in the New Testament more than 550 times, and is translated in more than fifty different ways, and yet not once is it found translated by the word " offer."

2. In no translation of the New Testament, not even the Roman Catholic Douay Version, has it ever been translated by any other word than " do " in the words of Institution.

¹ *The Teachers' Assistant*. Edited by the late Rev. T. W. Powell. S.S. Institute Publications, Eglinton, Ont., Canada, Nov. 1910, p. 426.

3. Wherever the Greek word translated "do" is found in the Greek Version of the Old Testament it is the equivalent of the Hebrew word "make" or "do," and it is only when the context is perfectly clear that the word is rendered in the Greek Old Testament by "offer," or "sacrifice." Everywhere else the ordinary meaning of "do" is found.

4. If the word means "offer" in connection with the Holy Communion, then 1 Corinthians xi. 25 must read "*Offer* this as oft as ye *drink* it." Surely this would be an utterly impossible rendering of the verse.

5. This rendering of "offer" is rejected by Roman Catholic commentators like Aquinas, Cajetan, Estius, and others.

6. Dr. Ince (late Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford) says: "Not one English Greek scholar sanctions the translation, *e.g.*, Thirlwall, Christopher Wordsworth, Ellicott, Alford, Westcott." To these can be added Bishop Gore, Canon Mason, and Dr. Plummer. It will be useful to have the very words of some of these authorities. Bishop Ellicott says: "To render the words 'Sacrifice this' is to violate the regular use of the word 'do' in the New Testament, and to import polemical considerations into words which do not in any degree involve or suggest them."¹ Dr. Plummer remarks: "The proposal to give these words a sacrificial meaning, and translate them 'Offer this,' 'Sacrifice this,' 'Offer this sacrifice,' cannot be maintained."² Canon Mason states that: "The rendering 'Offer this' has against it the fact that it is of recent origin."³ Bishop Gore concludes: "On the whole, then, there is not sufficient evidence to entitle us to say that 'do' bears the sacrificial sense in the New Testament."⁴ Bishop Westcott writes: "In the context in which the words occur I have not the least doubt that 'Do this' can only mean 'Do this act' (including the whole action of hands and lips), and not 'Sacrifice this.'"⁵

Dr. Darwell Stone admits that the writers of the Early Church and the compilers of the Liturgies understood the words to mean "Perform this action."⁶

¹ Bishop Ellicott on 1 Cor. xi. 25.

² Plummer, "St. Luke," International Critical Commentary, p. 497 (abbreviated).

³ Mason, *Faith of the Gospel*. Second Edition, p. 328, note.

⁴ Gore, *The Body of Christ*. First Edition, p. 315.

⁵ Westcott's *Life and Letters*, Vol. II., p. 353.

⁶ *History of the Doctrine of the Eucharist*, p. 9.

II. DOES "REMEMBRANCE" MEAN "MEMORIAL"?

1. The Greek words for "remembrance" and "memorial" are quite different and are never confused or identified. "A 'memorial' is something *exterior* to the person, which can generally be perceived by the senses; whereas the word translated 'remembrance' is a *mental act*, performed in, or by, or upon the mind. A 'memorial' may produce a 'remembrance,' but it is certainly *not* the mental effect or act itself." ¹

2. The best Greek scholarship bears out this distinction and does not interpret "in remembrance" as "for a memorial." "There is not sufficient evidence to entitle us to say that 'do' bears the sacrificial sense in the New Testament. The matter stands similarly with 'remembrance.'" ²

III. DOES "SHEW" MEAN "PLEAD" OR "OFFER"?

1. The Greek word means "announce," "proclaim," and has nothing sacrificial about it.

2. The object of the verb is always man and never God. It means to announce to man and not to God.

3. No Greek scholarship would allow it to be interpreted to mean "exhibit before God."

IV. IS IT TRUE TO SAY THAT—"BECAUSE OF HIS WORDS IN THE UPPER ROOM THE CHURCH DOES HERE WHAT CHRIST IS DOING IN HEAVEN"? ³

1. Nothing whatever in the New Testament shows that He is "pleading" or "offering" His sacrifice. On the contrary, He is "seated" at God's right hand after His "one oblation of Himself once offered."—Hebrews i. 3; viii. 1; x. 10; x. 12. Westcott says: "The modern conception of Christ pleading in heaven His passion, 'offering His blood,' on behalf of man, has no foundation in this epistle." ⁴ Hort remarks similarly: "The words, 'Still . . . His prevailing death He pleads,' have no apostolic warrant and cannot even be reconciled with apostolic doctrine." ⁵

2. Nothing in the Prayer Book teaches or even suggests "plead-

¹ Soames, *The Priesthood of the New Covenant*, p. 28.

² Gore, *The Body of Christ*. First Edition, p. 315.

³ See above, p. 249.

⁴ Westcott, *Hebrews*, p. 230.

⁵ *Life and Letters of F. J. A. Hort*, Vol. II., p. 213.

ing" or "offering." "We look at our time-honoured creeds—it is not there. We turn to the grand anthem, which has come down to us from remote antiquity—the 'Te Deum'; not a word. We examine our Eucharistic Service—it is not there. We find a Proper Preface for the day of our Lord's Ascension into heaven—it is not there. In the obsecrations of our Litany we find mention of all the prominent points in our blessed Lord's work for our salvation, but no word of any offering of propitiatory sacrifice in heaven. We look at the Articles of Religion. It certainly is not there."¹ The Sunday School paper already referred to has the following statements:—

"That we thus may be able to feed upon Him, He has given to His Church authority to consecrate, by the power of His Holy Spirit, bread and wine to become for our souls His Body and Blood. When we receive the bread and wine thus consecrated, we verily and indeed receive His sacred Flesh and Blood according to His Divine method."

"This is what is known as the doctrine of the Real Presence. The term 'Real Presence' signifies the presence of a Reality. This reality is the Body and Blood of Christ present in the Sacrament under the form of bread and wine."

"We should never speak of receiving bread and wine in the Sacrament, but rather of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ which are hidden beneath the bread and wine."²

Whether these words truly and properly represent New Testament teaching may be tested by the following considerations.

1. Where may we find the warrant for the statement that "He has given to His Church authority to consecrate"? There is some confusion of thought here, for our Lord's words at the time of the first Institution of the Communion were not words of consecration at all, but words of *administration*. He did not consecrate, He administered, using certain words and actions at the moment of doing so. Of course we to-day in using our Lord's words and reproducing His actions may rightly be said to consecrate the elements by setting them apart for the sacred purpose of the Lord's Supper. But this is very different from saying that "He has given to His Church authority to consecrate." It is never safe to make a general statement involving matters of great importance without being able to support it by proper authority.

2. "To consecrate, by the power of His Holy Spirit." Here

¹ Adapted and abbreviated from Dimock, *The Christian Doctrine of Sacerdotium*, p. 13 f.

² See above.

again, we naturally ask for proof of the statement. No reference to the Holy Spirit appears in the New Testament in connection with the institution of the Lord's Supper. No reference to the Holy Spirit is found in the prayer of Consecration in the Communion Office. An Invocation of the Holy Spirit on the elements was found in the Prayer Book of 1549, but was omitted from the Prayer Book of 1552, and has never been restored. Would it not have been more accurate and fair, either to state these facts, or else to have omitted any reference to the Holy Spirit in connection with the consecration of the elements?

3. "Bread and wine become for our souls His Body and Blood." Again, there is an entire absence of authority from New Testament or Prayer Book for this word "*become*." How can bread and wine "become" our Lord's Body and Blood? The elements of bread and wine and the Body and Blood of Christ are always kept distinct in connection with the Holy Communion, and are not to be identified in any way whatever. There is a constant and beautiful parallelism between them at every point, but the one never "becomes" the other.

4. "We verily and indeed receive His Sacred Flesh and Blood." But our Lord spoke of His "Body," not His "Flesh," and as the Lord's Supper is always associated with the Lord's Death, and never with His glorified life in heaven, it is impossible to speak of receiving His "Blood" except in the sense of the spiritual efficacy of the Atonement on Calvary. Bishop Westcott's testimony is to the point here: "One grave point I am utterly unable to understand—how the Body broken and the Blood shed can be identified with the Person of the Lord. I find no warrant in our Prayer Book, or ancient authorities, for such an identification. . . . The circumstances of the institution are, we may say, spiritually reproduced. The Lord Himself offers His Body given and His Blood shed, but these gifts are not either separately (as the Council of Trent) or in combination Himself."¹

5. "The Doctrine of the Real Presence." The phrase, "Real Presence" is not found in any of the Anglican formularies. It is unknown earlier than the Middle Ages, and the compilers of our Prayer Book objected to its novelty and ambiguity. All presence of Christ must be real, and a spiritual presence is not less real because

¹ Westcott, *Life and Letters*, Vol. II., p. 351.

it is spiritual, but it is altogether inaccurate to say that the only "real presence" can be a presence in the elements by virtue of consecration. The reception by us of the spiritual efficacy and power of Christ's Atonement is independent of His local presence at any given place or time. The Body as "given" for us and the Blood as "shed" did not exist at the time of "the Institution, and do not exist now, and therefore cannot be locally present. Yet they are "given" by God in spiritual force and blessing through faith. The Atonement of Calvary is not and cannot be present now, and yet we continually partake of its vital efficacy and blessing. But for this no special mode of the presence is necessary. Scripture and the Prayer Book will be searched in vain for any indication that the presence of our Lord in the Lord's Supper means a presence attached to, or identified with, the elements.

6. "This Reality is the Body and Blood of Christ present in the Sacrament under the form of bread and wine." Once more we ask for the Scriptural and Anglican authority for any presence "under the form of bread and wine." Bishop Andrewes repudiated this idea with scorn, as the late Bishop of Edinburgh (Dr. Dowden) has convincingly shown, and Dr. Dowden himself, one of our greatest liturgical authorities, writes as follows: "One thing is absolutely certain: It is no part of the doctrine of our Church that there is an adorable presence of our Lord's body and blood *in* or *under* the forms of bread and wine. Such language is undiscoverable in the doctrinal standards of our Church, and wholly unknown to the Church of the early Fathers."¹ Bishop Westcott uses similar language: "It seems to me vital to guard against the thought of the presence of the Lord in or under the form of bread and wine. From this the greatest practical errors follow. The elements represent the human nature, as He lived and died for us under the conditions of earthly life."²

7. The Bishop of Oxford (Dr. Gore) says that in the Declaration on Kneeling, and, "what is more important, in the form of consecration," the doctrine of a presence in the elements is "plainly evaded, and not asserted."³ Is not this a surprising and significant admis-

¹ Bishop Dowden, *Define Your Terms*. An Address to his Diocesan Synod, 1900, p. 21.

² Westcott, *Life and Letters*, Vol. II., p. 351.

³ Gore, *The Body of Christ*, p. 321.

sion? We believe that the truth would be better expressed by saying "plainly avoided," for the compilers of our Communion Office were not the men to "evade" a question of this kind, and the changes made in the Prayer Book of 1552, including the omission of the Invocation of the Holy Spirit on the elements are positive proofs, not of "evasions," but of "avoidances." As Vogan in his able and unanswered book well says: "It will, perhaps, be said that the Church of England does not deny 'the Real Presence'; but this is nothing to the purpose. She does not teach it: and if it were her belief she would not have left a doctrine of such moment to be inferred by a very doubtful process from statements which at best do not necessarily mean it."¹

8. The extract given above from the Sunday School paper says that "we should never speak of receiving bread and wine in the Sacrament, but rather receiving the Body and Blood of Christ which are hidden beneath the bread and wine." It is difficult, not to say impossible, to reconcile these words with those used by every clergyman at the consecration of the elements: "Grant that we, receiving these Thy creatures of bread and wine." This, with the phrase immediately following, "may be partakers, etc.," and also the Words of Administration to each communicant, show clearly the careful way in which the Church of England keeps separate and distinguishes between the elements of bread and wine and the spiritual efficacy of the ordinance. The two parts of the Sacrament are never confused or identified in the accurate, scriptural, theological language of our formularies.

9. There is one supreme test of the accuracy of the teaching now being considered. If there be a presence of Christ "in" or "under" the elements, what becomes of that presence in the case of unworthy recipients? If the elements are administered to two persons in succession, one of whom is not a Christian, what, on this theory, is given, and what does the unfaithful one receive different from the other? If Christ be present in the elements independent of use and reception, it surely follows that all who receive the elements receive Christ. But is it possible to receive the Body and Blood of Christ without receiving Christ in His Grace and power? And what is the meaning of Article XXIX., which teaches that "the wicked . . . although they do

¹ Vogan, *True Doctrine of the Eucharist*, p. 254.

carnally and visibly press with their teeth the Sacrament yet IN NO WISE (*nullo modo*) are they partakers of Christ " ? Could language be clearer or stronger ? There is no " evasion " here.

All the statements of the articles in the Sunday School publication in question have now been considered, and it is believed that no vital point has been overlooked. What, then, is the conclusion to be drawn ? First, in the face of these facts is it fair to tell Sunday School teachers (who do not know Greek and cannot test statements for themselves) what is found in the extracts quoted above ? And second, is it right ? Truth is the one great requirement. It is no question of differing theological interpretations ; it is a question of what words and phrases actually mean. Let us have truth at any cost, and let us follow it whithersoever it leads. Let us not teach our teachers and children anything that cannot stand the test of the most rigid inquiry by the finest scholarship.

That only is true Christianity which is loyal to New Testament teaching. And that only is true Churchmanship which, based on New Testament teaching, is loyal both to the utterances and the silences of the Prayer Book. " To the law and to the testimony ; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them " (Isa. viii. 20).

