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The Major Shift: Doctrine in *The Alternative Service Book 1980*

Dennis Peterson

The Archbishop of York said to the General Synod in November 1985, ‘...we did not face openly enough the major shift in doctrinal emphasis in the new services’. *The Alternative Service Book 1980 (ASB)* is moving towards the end of its life and revision is now in hand. It is therefore even more appropriate now to ‘face openly enough the major shift in doctrinal emphasis’, to consider what it was and what is its significance.

During the last few decades what might be called the ‘Old Anglican’ position (analogous to Old Catholic), that of *The Book of Common Prayer*, seems to have been largely untaught and increasingly unknown. A young ordinand told me he had never taken part in a 1662 Communion Service. It would be a grave dereliction of responsibility to ignore this major element in our Anglican heritage when considering further revision.

Communion, a Sacrament of the Gospel

There is a precise definition of the Gospel in Scripture, ‘...the Gospel... wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved... that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ...and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures’ (1 Cor 15:1-4). The word ‘stand’ indicates continuing acceptance and favour with God. This standing before God is because ‘Christ died for our sins’, ‘by whom also we have access by *faith* into this grace wherein we stand’ (Rom 5:2). It is by faith in the death of Christ, not by receiving the sacrament, that we stand in continuing acceptance before God. To be ‘saved’ is to be totally and permanently forgiven for ‘there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, (Rom 8:1). Again, this is not through a sacrament, for ‘...being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom 5:1).

The function and purpose of the Lord’s Supper (to use the scriptural title of the sacrament), indeed the *only* explanation given in Scripture, is that ‘...as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come’ (1 Cor 11:26). The word translated ‘shew’ (καταγγέλλετε) is a common word for ‘preach’. It is used in Acts 4:2, ‘...and preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead’. (See also

13:5, 38; 15:36; 16:17, 21; 17:3, 13, 23; 26:23; Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 2:1; 9:14; Phil 1:16, 18; Col 1:28.) Sixteen times in the New Testament it is used to express the concept of preaching and only that.

The Greek word is from *κατά* indicating 'down' and *ἀγγέλλειν* meaning 'to announce'. So in our eating the bread and drinking the cup God announces down to us that Christ died for us personally, making a communion or fellowship with those with whom we share the sacrament. The use of *κατά* precludes completely any idea that the communion is Godward, and that it is primarily a 'Eucharist' or thanksgiving. The very term 'Eucharist' at least tends to divert attention from the preaching of the death of Christ to our response. It introduces the complex but speculative theology associated with the term 'Eucharist', a title never used in *The Book of Common Prayer*.¹

There is another Greek word, *ἀναγγέλλειν*, from *ἀνά* 'up' and *ἀγγέλλειν* 'to announce'. Although used often to mean simply conveying a message, its basic meaning is to speak to a superior, eg 'they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything' (Acts 15:4 NIV). If the communion were meant to be Godward, this surely is the word which would have been used.

The Gospel is 'that Christ died for our sins'; as the Lord's Supper preaches the Lord's death, it is then a sacrament of the Gospel.

A Gospel of the Sacrament

If I am to preach the death of Christ, I do not focus attention upon myself, nor offer myself, nor claim myself to hold the benefits of Christ's death nor the ability to bestow them. The theological emphasis upon which the *ASB* is based directs the receiver's attention, not to the death of Christ, but to the bread and wine as the instrument of God's blessings. The attention of participants in Rites A and B of the *ASB* is directed towards the Prayer of Consecration as effecting a change in the bread and wine so that after consecration the bread and wine are the direct means of receiving God's blessings.

a In Rite A para 33 there is an unprecedented rubric giving the president the opportunity to use unspecified prayers but with a specified response:

The president may praise God for his gifts in appropriate words to which all respond

Blessed be God for ever.

¹ See discussion in *The Tutorial Prayer Book* Neil and Willoughby (The Harrison Trust 1912) p 287.

In this place in the Roman Mass there are two prayers with exactly that response which would have been extremely difficult to reconcile with Anglican formularies, for they not only assert a change in the bread and wine, but also that the change is transubstantiation: '...it will become for us the bread of life'. The Lord Jesus said, 'I am that bread of life' (John 6:48), so the only possible inference is that the bread actually becomes Jesus. Similarly the prayer said over the cup is: 'It will become our spiritual drink'. Jesus said: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink' (John 7:37). Compare also '...for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ' (1 Cor 10:4). What else can the prayer mean but that the wine becomes Christ? The Roman Catholic composers of these prayers intended, of course, that they should teach transubstantiation, for that is the Roman doctrine.

If these prayers had been suggested openly, it would have been difficult to reconcile them with the Anglican position that: 'Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy Writ; but it is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions' (Article XXVIII). Needless to say, from the cue of this rubric, prayers from the Roman Mass are frequently interpolated, and I know of no other prayers which are used here. Thus the apparent freedom implied by 'in appropriate words' is surely nothing but sophistry.

For many these prayers may signify not much more than some mystical attributes ascribed to the bread and wine, which is sad enough and misleading, but for those so inclined, it is the opportunity to infer the full Roman position of a miraculous change of the 'substance' of the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ. By the device of this strange, unique and devious rubric Anglicans are being accustomed to a doctrine which was most unlikely to be accepted, had it been presented openly. Was it in the hope that by the next revision it would have become familiar enough to be accepted?

b The change in the Prayer of Consecration, from a prayer for the recipients, as in *The Book of Common Prayer*, to a prayer for the Holy Spirit to act upon the bread and wine, implies that the Prayer of Consecration by the action of the Holy Spirit effects a change in the bread and wine. Thus Gardiner said of these words in the 1549 Prayer Book that they taught 'that Christ's most precious body is made present to us by conversion of the substance of bread into His precious body'.² For that reason they were omitted in the final revision of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

2 C S Carter *The English Church and the Reformation* (Longmans, Green and Co 1925) p 147

c The introduction of the words 'celebrate' and 'memorial' into the Eucharistic Prayers, though innocuous to the uninitiated, has a technical history, and they were omitted from the reformed Prayer Book for good reason. In the first attempt at making the Communion Service scriptural in 1549, the words used were: '...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 us to make'. The Catholic opponents of scriptural reform claimed that in these words they could intend the offering of the sacrifice of Christ, that is, the Mass. For that reason the Reformers omitted the words from the final revision.

d The inclusion in the Prayer of Consecration of references to the Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ goes beyond Scripture which tells us that in the sacrament we proclaim the Lord's death. It is at first sight attractive to add these thoughts, but it takes attention away from the great issue between God and man, our sin and God's grace in dealing with it. Further, these inclusions not only dilute the theme of the sacrament, but prepare people instead to concentrate upon the risen and ascended Lord's alleged presence in the bread and wine rather than his death. A desire to praise God for Christ's Resurrection and Ascension is laudable, but the Prayer of Consecration in the Lord's Supper is an entirely inappropriate place for it.

e The Prayer of Consecration rehearses the Lord's words over the bread and wine, 'Take eat... Drink ye all of this...'. These are words of administration and should immediately be followed by the receiving of the bread and wine as in *The Book of Common Prayer*. The insertion of the Lord's Prayer, other prayers and anthems separates the Lord's words of administration from the act of receiving. By thus isolating the Prayer of Consecration from the eating and drinking the impression is strengthened that the Prayer of Consecration is a self-contained element which makes the bread and wine the sacrament rather than the eating and drinking to preach the Lord's death.

f The Prayer Book of 1549 was a step away from mediaeval error towards scriptural worship, but it contained ambiguities which the Catholic party claimed could imply the Mass, so it proved to be a half-way step to reform. The re-introduction of the features mentioned above, coupled with explicit teaching often linked with them, make the *ASB* a step back from scriptural reform to what Old Anglicans believe are the very errors which brought about the Reformation. This is a step which has been taken without openly considering any alteration in the Anglican formularies to justify the liturgical changes. One cannot help surmising that the liturgical changes have been introduced as a preliminary to doctrinal changes, surely putting the cart before the horse. The omission from the *ASB* of the

Articles by which such changes could be judged is unfortunate, if not suspicious!

One current Companion to the *ASB* says that at the Prayer of Consecration Christ becomes 'present', another gives the meaning of communion as that in eating the bread and drinking the wine 'we receive Christ's life'. Why is it that such Companions, meant to educate lay people, make no mention of the sacrament as preaching the death of Christ? It cannot be denied that in many Anglican churches the congregation is pointed to the consecrated bread and wine of communion as effecting the Lord's special presence and as the source of the blessings which God wishes to bestow. It is quite emphatically the sacrament which is offered as God's Good News, not the death of Christ. Instead of the communion being a sacrament of the Gospel the congregation is offered a Gospel of the sacrament.

The Underlying Doctrines

a The Lord's Presence

The Lord's presence was particularly and specifically promised by him in Matthew 18:20 and 28:19-20; there was no mention of the bread and wine. The promise was firstly 'where two or three are gathered in my name', and secondly to those who go out making disciples, baptising and teaching them. The presence of God is in the believer: 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?' (1 Cor 3:16). (Compare 'That he would grant you... that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith' Eph 3:16-17). With such promises of Christ's presence actually in the believer and among the fellowship it is difficult to see any point in a presence in or under the consecrated bread and wine. The importance given to a presence through the Prayer of Consecration demands some mention somewhere in Scripture. The total absence of such a mention led Hooker to affirm that: 'The real presence of Christ's most blessed body and blood is not therefore to be sought for in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of the sacrament'.³

b The Life and the Blood

The view that the communion imparts the life of Christ ('like a blood transfusion' it is sometimes said) seems to originate with Westcott's Additional Note to his comment on 1 John 1:7, where he said, 'The Blood always includes the thought of the life preserved and active beyond death'.⁴ James Denney in his monumental work *The Death of Christ* wrote of '...the strange caprice which fascinated Westcott', and '...a more

3 Hooker *Ecclesiastical Polity* V lxii 6

4 B F Westcott *The Epistles of St John* p 34 ff 1883, also *Epistle to the Hebrews* p 293 ff

groundless fancy never haunted and troubled the interpretation of any part of Scripture'.⁵ Nevertheless, prominent men have taken up this 'strange caprice' and developed it, transforming the doctrines of death, atonement and Holy Communion as taught in Scripture.

Westcott took the three texts, Leviticus 17:11 ('the life of the flesh is in the blood') together with Genesis 9:4 and Deuteronomy 12:23, linked them with the ways in which the blood of a sacrificial victim was applied by sprinkling on the horns of the altar and the mercy seat, for instance, and then deduced that the shed blood was 'this life made available for another end'. Alan Stibbs has provided a different interpretation:

These Scriptures say not that the 'blood' is the 'life' in isolation, but that the blood is the life of the flesh. This means that, if the blood is separated from the flesh, the present physical life in the flesh will come to an end. Bloodshed stands therefore, not for the release of life from the burden of the flesh, but for the bringing to an end the life of the flesh.⁶

Westcott's deduction equates the blood with the soul, an equation for which no scriptural support has been forthcoming.

Genesis 4:10 is sometimes invoked to strengthen Westcott's view that the blood is alive after the death of the body: '...the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground'. Are we to deduce that wisdom (Prov 8:1), the gate and the city (Is 14:31), stones (Luke 19:40) and wages (James 5:4) all have some mystical, sentient life because they are said to cry out? The words 'cry out' are simply and obviously a metaphor of strong evidence. There are other references to the word 'blood' in Scripture, about 160 in the Pentateuch alone! Interpreting Scripture by Scripture gives a different picture from Westcott's speculation. A violent death is usually accompanied by the visible shedding of blood, so that 'blood' is universally a metaphor of violent death. Thus Matthew 27:24-5 says: 'Pilate ...washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children'. (Cf also Matt 23:35 'That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias'.) And of course, there are many, many other Scriptures. They do not convey that the life is 'released', but most clearly destroyed; hence the term 'bloodguiltiness' (Ps 51:14).

5 James Denney *The Death of Christ* R V G Tasker ed (Tyndale Press 1951) p 149

6 A M Stibbs *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' in Scripture* (Tyndale Press 1962) p 11

The SPCK *New Commentary* on Hebrews expresses a view similar to Westcott's: 'So sacrifice consisted of two elements: death the symbol of supreme self-surrender, followed by the dedication to God (which is what offering means) of that which had been surrendered, the victim's body and the life (= blood) belonging to it'.⁷ But in Scripture death is not primarily 'the symbol of self-surrender'. Death is 'the wages of sin' (Rom 6:23) for 'in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die' (Gen 2:17). Likewise, 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die' (Ezek 18:4), and 'Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned' (Rom 5:12) etc.

The death of the victim of a biblical sacrifice is a substitute for the death of one who through sin is under sentence of death. The Gospel is 'that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures'. Prominent among the Scriptures referred to by the Lord and his apostles is Isaiah 53 (the New Testament refers to eight of its twelve verses). There we are told ten times that the death of God's servant is a death that is as a proxy punishment for condemned sinners, eg 'He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken'.

The application of the blood after a sacrifice, sprinkling it upon people or objects, is taken as a pattern of the ministry of the risen Christ presenting his blood-life to the Father.⁸ Hence the fundamental teaching about the Eucharist is that it is the participation of the church in this ministry of the risen Christ to the Father, followed by the bestowal of life to the communicants as they receive the blood-life under the consecrated wine. There is a view that is simpler and more in accord with the Scripture: death occurs in time, and there are situations after the time of death where there needs to be proof or assurance that the death has taken place and that the price has been paid (1 Pet 1:18-19). The purpose of the application of the blood of a sacrifice is evidence that the required death has, in fact, been exacted and by sprinkling the benefits of that death applied to a specific need. On the night of the Passover every first-born was under sentence of death. A lamb was to be slain as a substitute for the condemned first born and its blood sprinkled over the door. God then said 'When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you' (Ex 12:13). Every use ascribed to the blood of a sacrifice is satisfactorily explained by the blood being used as evidence that the required death has taken place and the associated guilt purged.

When Christ died, his life was not released '...so that this life became

⁷ *A New Commentary on The Holy Scriptures Including The Apocrypha* Charles Gore, Leighton Gouge and Alfred Guillaume edd (SPCK 1955) p 599

⁸ Bicknell *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England* (Longmans, Green and Co 1936) p 498

available for another end' (Westcott). Christ was dead. He said 'I lay my life down', not 'I release my life'. As the Creed puts it '[He] Was crucified, dead, and buried'. It took a special act of the Father to bring him to life again in the Resurrection: '...whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day' (Acts 10:39-40); 'I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore' (Rev 1:18).

c A Perpetual Offering

Westcott's doctrine of the 'life released' is an embellishment of the much older teaching that when, in Hebrews 7:25, the writer says, 'He ever liveth to make intercession for them', that intercession is the continual offering of himself in which we join through the communion. A J Tait traces this to the Vulgate where Jerome, in several instances, erroneously translated the Greek aorist tense (simple past) by the Latin present participle.⁹ Completed towards the end of the fourth century, the Vulgate was 'for more than a thousand years the parent of every version of the Scriptures in Western Europe'.¹⁰

Tait gives several misinterpretations based on the Vulgate:

We may notice Lanfranc's exposition of Heb 1:3 (*exhibendo humanitatem quam assumpsit pro nobis*), which confuses the completed propitiation with the perpetual intercession. See also the translation of Heb 1:3 in the Douay Bible: "...making purgation of sins, sitteth on the right hand..." and Heb 10:12: "...but this man, offering one sacrifice for sins, for ever sitteth on the right hand". Such renderings would have been impossible if the version had been a translation of the Old Latin. (p 107)

Modern attempts to combine the theology emanating from the Vulgate with correct translations of the Greek are rather tortuous. For instance, the SPCK *New Commentary* (p 613) gives:

'Once for all' stands in opposition to 'daily', ie repeatedly. It is consistent with *perpetual* offering in the heavenly shrine.

Most lay people could explain the difference between a 'once for all' payment and a 'perpetual' payment, especially any with contact with the Child Support Agency!

When Christ died, he cried 'It is finished'. Our salvation is given as a complete and finished gift '...that whosoever believeth in him should not

9 A J Tait *The Heavenly Session of Our Lord* (Robert Scott 1912) p 107

10 J Paterson Smyth *How We Got Our Bible* (Sampson Low, Marston and Co Ltd undated) p 32

perish, but have everlasting life' (John 3:16). See also: 'He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation' (5:24); 'And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life' (6:40); 'I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved' (10:9); 'My sheep hear my voice ... and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish' (10:27-8); 'Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins' (Acts 10:43); 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God' (Rom 5:1); 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8:1) and so on.

This life-transforming assurance is because 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures', but it is weakened and undermined by the doctrine that the communion imparts the life of Christ as a continuing process from communion to communion. Assurance seems to be pledged only as far as the last communion. Theologians may be able to explain it away, but that is how many lay people understand and receive it.

The thinking which leads to this can be seen, for example, in the comment: 'It would seem to him [the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews] quite natural that our Lord should enter upon the priestly part of his work at the ascension, and that this ministry should consist in the offering of Himself'.¹¹ Further, Bicknell goes so far as to imply that the death of Christ does not effect our atonement but is only a preliminary to it:

We are saved by the life of Christ that was surrendered to God in death, and thus set free to be the means of our atonement. Christ's redeeming work did not end on the Cross. It was consummated when as our High-priest he entered into heaven to present his life to the Father.¹²

But Scripture says in 1 Peter 2:24 that '...his own self bare our sins in his own body *on the tree*', not in heaven, and that he took our trespasses and the handwriting of ordinances that was against us 'out of the way, nailing it to his cross' (Col 2:14).

What then does the Lord's cry 'It is finished' mean? How can we know we are finally and completely saved by faith in the death of Christ as Scripture affirms, if Christ's redeeming work is a 'perpetual offering' never to be finished? This doctrine can come only from a changed Gospel, not that *Christ died for our sins*, but *Christ is a perpetual offering for our*

11 *A New Commentary on The Holy Scriptures Including The Apocrypha* Charles Gore, Leighton Gouge and Alfred Guillaume edd (SPCK 1955) p 599

12 Bicknell *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England* (Longmans, Green and Co 1936) p 113

sins. This is a 'major shift' from: 'Who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world' (*The Book of Common Prayer*).

Hebrews could not be more clear that Christ's saving work is complete and our salvation is complete: '...when he had by himself purged our sins, [he] sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high' (1:3). See also 'For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his' (4:10); 'Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself' (7:27); 'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who...offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?' (9:14); 'So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many' (9:28); 'By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (10:10); 'But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God' (10:12).

Not only did Jesus cry, 'It is finished', not only is the Gospel '...that Christ died [Greek tense: aorist indicative, ie simple past] for our sins', but that he '...died for our sins according to the Scriptures'. In Isaiah 53, the death of the Servant for the sin of others is a past and finished work: 'But he *was* pierced for our transgressions, he *was* crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace *was* upon him, and by his wounds we are healed... the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all... for the transgression of my people he *was* stricken... he poured out his life unto death, and *was* numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many' (NIV). (Exceptions are found in verses 10-11, but the text here is said to be difficult, eg Yahweh is spoken of in the first, second and third person.) The Lord's Supper preaches the Lord's death, the bread and wine received in emphatic separation touch the worshippers, preaching to them personally the Lord's death and pledging that their salvation is complete: 'It is finished'. There is nothing more for a desperate, lost sinner to do than to 'believe on him whom the Father sent'.

d John 6

John 6:44-65 is often cited as referring to the communion: 'A difficulty is removed if the issue was intended to lie not between the Jews' literal interpretation of His words and a final explanation that eating our Lord's flesh meant receiving His teaching, but between that literal interpretation and the sacramental explanation which the eucharist afforded'.¹³ The mind of the compilers of the *ASB* is revealed by the use of John 6:53-8 as the Gospel for the Thanksgiving for the Holy Communion on the Thursday of

13 *Essays Catholic and Critical* E G Selwyn ed (SPCK 1929) p 432

Trinity week. This juxtaposition strongly conveys the idea that John 6 is directly referring to the communion. John 6:49-59 can only be a direct reference to faith in the death of Christ. Jesus said, 'Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day' (v 54). Out of context this might be taken to be the communion, but in the same passage Jesus had just said 'He that *believeth* on me hath everlasting life' (v 47). So he is referring to an exercise of faith, not to literal and physical eating and drinking. In verse 51 Jesus said, 'The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world'. He gave his flesh for the life of the world when he was crucified, so the bread he gives is his death. As our bodies receive life from the bread we eat, so our souls receive life by exercising faith in the death of Christ.

When the Philippian jailer cried out, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' Paul did not say, 'Receive the consecrated bread and wine and you will receive eternal life and be raised up at the last day'. In all the sermons in Acts, and the teaching of the Epistles, not once are we enjoined to eat and drink the consecrated bread and wine to receive eternal life and to be raised up at the last day. Times without number we are enjoined to repent and believe on the death of Christ for these benefits. That is the message of the sacrament. It preaches Christ's death with a view to our exercising faith in that death. As our bodies receive life from bread and drink, so our souls receive life from Christ's death. Both John 6 and the Lord's Supper point to the work of Christ on Calvary as the food for our souls.

The answer to 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' is: 'The words [not the bread and wine] that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life' (John 6:63). As Cranmer said:

The spiritual eating of his flesh, and drinking of his blood by faith, by digesting his death in our minds, as our only price, ransom, and redemption from eternal damnation, is the cause wherefore Christ said: 'That if we eat not his flesh, and drink not his blood, we have not life in us; and if we eat his flesh, and drink his blood, we have ever-lasting life.' And if Christ had never ordained the sacrament, yet should we have eaten his flesh, and drunken his blood, and have had thereby everlasting life; as all the faithful did before the sacrament was ordained, and do daily when they receive not the sacrament.¹⁴

The Gospel of John has no mention of the communion to clarify and apply the words of chapter 6. The institution of the sacrament in John is replaced by the foot washing which has the same message as the sacrament: 'He that is washed [ie forgiven by faith in the death of Christ]

¹⁴ *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer relative to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* J E Cox ed (Parker Society 1844) p 25 cited *Churchman* vol 104/2 1990 p 112

needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit' (John 13:10). Nowhere does the Bible teach 'Except ye eat the consecrated bread and drink the consecrated wine, ye have no life in you'. Cranmer once more:

Christ in that place of John spake not of the material and sacramental bread, nor of the sacramental eating, (for that was spoken two or three years before the sacrament was first ordained,) but he spake of spiritual bread, ...and of spiritual eating by faith, after which sort he was at the same present time eaten of as many as believed on him...¹⁵

Two Messages

a The significance and weight currently given to the Prayer of Consecration cannot be sustained from Scripture. The Lord said 'Take, eat, this is my body', not 'This is my body, take, eat it', a crucial difference that Hooker pointed out:

...first, 'take, eat,' then 'this is my body which was broken for you'; first 'drink ye all of this'; then followeth 'this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins.' I see not which way it should be gathered by the words of Christ, when and where the bread is his body or the cup his blood, but only in the very heart and soul of him which receiveth them. As for the sacraments, they really exhibit, but for aught we can gather out of that which is written of them, they are not really nor do really contain in themselves that grace which with them or by them it pleaseth God to bestow.¹⁶

Thus Paul's explanation can mean only that it is the eating and drinking of the bread and wine to preach Christ's death which makes them a sacrament: 'As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death' not 'as often as ye consecrate this bread and this cup'. By the Lord's teaching the bread and wine are not sacraments except in the act of eating and drinking. So the Anglican formularies assert that 'The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped' (Article XXVIII).

b 'Consecration is the separation of any thing from a profane and worldly use unto a spiritual and godly use' (Cranmer).¹⁷ The consecration of ground or of a banner or building does not effect a change in their nature

15 *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer relative to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* J E Cox ed (Parker Society 1844) p 307 cited *Churchman* vol 104/2 1990 p 112

16 Hooker *Ecclesiastical Polity* V lxii 6

17 *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer relative to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* J E Cox ed (Parker Society 1844) p 177

but simply in their use. The consecration of the bread and wine does not signify a change in their nature but in their use, 'from a profane and worldly use unto a spiritual and godly use'.

If I preach the death of Christ, I do not focus attention upon myself nor offer myself nor claim myself to be the means of conveying the blessings God wishes to bestow; I point away from myself to the Lord's death. If attention is focused on the consecrated bread and wine, or if the bread and wine are offered as the source of the blessings God wishes to bestow, the sacrament is not preaching the Lord's death but itself. All Christians, of course, hold the death of Christ in great reverence, but it is often not realised that to offer benefits actually in the bread and wine is to steal those benefits from the Cross. Accordingly, Scripture teaching about the Cross is confused, and in practice almost ignored, and the death of Christ is robbed of much of its glory.

In the theology which the *ASB* expresses the death of Christ is reduced to being the means by which the 'real' source of blessing is made available, namely, the consecrated bread and wine. This, in fact, is what has actually been taught: 'Christ's redeeming work did not end on the Cross'.¹⁸ Again, 'The death was not the climax but rather the means through which the life was set free'.¹⁹ The celebration of the Eucharist is often accompanied by such distinctive dress of the minister, elaboration of ceremonial and instruction of the laity as to stress that the consecrated bread and wine are, above all, the means of grace, and little regular mention is made of the Cross. Yet in the New Testament there are at least one hundred and fifty references to the death of Christ and its consequences, but only two to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that it preaches Christ's death and is a fellowship or communion in his death.

We have then two messages. Either we receive life through repentance and faith alone in the death of Christ; or we receive life through eating and drinking consecrated bread and wine. This is confusing, because both cannot at the same time be true; in practice the death of Christ recedes behind the prominence given to the sacrament.

A Serious Departure

a These issues are not just academic niceties. Justification by faith in the death of Christ is not merely an abstract doctrine, but an experience of reconciliation to the Father through the Son implemented by the Holy Spirit.

18 B F Westcott *The Epistles of St John* p 34 ff 1883, also *Epistle to the Hebrews* p 113

19 Westcott p 256

In practice, a Gospel of the Sacrament is part of a system whereby people understand that if they have been baptised, confirmed and receive communion, they are complete Christians. Not necessarily so! They have been made members of the visible church, as were Ananias and Sapphira, Simon Magus and others, but what about membership of the invisible church, the Bride of Christ for eternity? Under such teaching church members are rarely challenged to seek the experience of an encounter with the Cross, total repentance and the inner experience of being born again which are externally taught by baptism and confirmation but need to be inwardly realised.

We are meant to experience the peace with God which is part of being justified by faith (Rom 5:1); we are meant to experience his Spirit witnessing with our spirits that we are children of God (Rom 8:16); we are meant to experience the love of God shed abroad in our hearts (Rom 5:5). Thus John Wesley was not only baptised and confirmed but was an ordained Anglican clergyman for many years before he could say: 'I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, in Christ alone for salvation: and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even mine'.

b People are taught to wonder at a miracle taking place on the altar, but they seem rarely to be taught to seek one in their own hearts. Being taught that the real presence is in the sacrament, they are not taught that it is rather to be sought 'in the worthy receiver of the sacrament'. This inner assurance is often discouraged by those who teach the unreformed position. In spite of the promises of Scripture one is told, 'It is presumptuous to say you are saved or going to heaven'.

Of course, under God's grace, many do come through to an experience of salvation and the assurance of eternal life in spite of the teachings which undermine that faith, but why make it so difficult when the Gospel is so simple and its effects so real? If our liturgy does not aim at presenting people with the Gospel, not many will be struck by the Gospel.

c If the things ascribed to the Eucharist have no scriptural authority, detract from the Cross by transferring attention and faith to the consecrated bread and wine, and if such teaching results in the preaching of an unfinished salvation, it must be seriously considered whether a Gospel of the sacrament is 'another gospel' in the sense of Galatians 1:8: 'Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed'. The 'other gospel' Paul fought was, in fact, a gospel of a sacrament: that God's blessings were bestowed through the sacrament of circumcision rather than faith only in the death of Christ.

Conclusion

The almost incredible boldness of the 'major shift' does not seem to have been widely appreciated. The 1980 *ASB* presents as the 'normal' Service of Holy Communion a liturgy which takes its shape and doctrine from the mediaeval theology of the Roman Catholic Mass. The historic Anglican liturgy has been given a clumsy face-lift, but sidelined to a place where its use is impossible without creating confusion in a congregation trying to find the pages. Surely Anglican integrity demands that it is the historic Anglican Service of Holy Communion, solidly based on the Anglican Articles and with its clear New Testament Gospel of salvation only through repentance and faith in the death of Christ, which should have been the pattern for the revisers.

It seems that the attraction of the modern language of the *ASB* and the 'happy' inclusion of the Peace so sugar-coated the pill that 'Old Anglicans' did not realise what they were swallowing. As the *ASB* comes under scrutiny for revision we should make sure that we *do* 'face openly enough the major shift in doctrinal emphasis in the new services'.

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