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1552 And All That

(or how twentieth century revisions have eroded the insights of the Reformers in the Communion services of the Church of England)

David Wheaton

All Saints Day this year sees the 450th anniversary of the implementation of the Second Prayer Book of King Edward the Sixth as the standard liturgy of the Church of England. As far as this writer knows, there has been little concern in official circles to commemorate the occasion, possibly as the liturgical position it adopted (which remained largely unchanged and unchallenged by either the Elizabethan settlement of 1559 or the Restoration settlement of 1662) is not one which finds widespread favour in the Church of England today. This is sad in a day when so many clergy would claim to be evangelical and therefore should be underlining rather than undermining the theology which lies behind this book.

Cranmer had introduced his first revision of the Communion liturgy three years previously with the First Prayer Book of King Edward the Sixth. While this had been a big step forward in making the liturgy comprehensible to the masses (being entirely in English following the interpolation of an English section into the Latin mass the previous year), its theology was still mainly unreformed. As a result it had met with criticism both from Bishop Gardiner of Winchester, who saw little difference from the old forms, and Cranmer's fellow reformer Martin Bucer, who pointed out the many ways in which it fell short of expressing a clearly reformed position.¹

For the purposes of this study it is best to simplify the issues by focusing on two main points which were highlighted in the 1552 revision. They are the question of what the minister should pray for when setting apart the bread and wine for their special use, and in what sense and on whose part there is a sacrifice in the service. The first relates to the role of the Holy Spirit in the communion service, and the second to the very nature of a sacrament—does it signify God's grace reaching down to sinful man, or is it a human effort to offer something to God?

To take the second question first, unreformed Roman theology had taught that

the Mass was a sacrifice which the priest could offer to God on behalf of the living and the dead, and modern revisions of the Roman liturgy maintain the idea that in the Communion service the priest is offering something to God. In their ordination service following the laying-on of hands the bishop anoints each candidate on the hands saying ‘...May Jesus preserve you to sanctify the Christian people and to offer sacrifice to God’. Later in the service the bishop hands a paten and chalice to each of the newly-ordained with the words ‘Accept from the holy people of God the gifts to be offered to him’.² Since the days of the Oxford Movement in the nineteenth century there have been those within our church who have sought to bring our own church into line with such a theology.

On this issue Cranmer had made it plain that the only sacrifice being offered in the Lord’s Supper is one of praise and thanksgiving, and that we respond to all that God has done for us through the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross by offering ourselves again to him as Paul suggests in Romans 12:1. The prayer expressing this response ‘here we offer and present unto thee ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice’ was in 1549 included in the prayer before the partaking of communion (generally known as the Prayer of Consecration, though this title dates from Archbishop Laud’s Scottish Prayer Book of 1637), but in 1552 Cranmer deliberately placed it after people have received the communion in order to underline that theologically (as well as psychologically) such a response can only come after we have received the vivid reminder of the work of the Cross and sought God’s invisible working in us to ‘...quicken...strengthen and confirm our Faith in him’.³ This reflects his statement in his *Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ* that—

One kind of sacrifice there is which is called a propitiatory or merciful sacrifice, that is to say, such a sacrifice as pacifieth God’s wrath and indignation, and obtaineth mercy and forgiveness for all our sins, and is the ransom for our redemption from everlasting damnation. And although in the old testament there were certain sacrifices called by that name, yet in very deed there is but one such sacrifice whereby our sins be pardoned and God’s mercy and favour obtained, which is the death of the Son of God our Lord Jesus Christ; nor ever was any other sacrifice propitiatory at any time, nor ever shall be.

This is the honour and glory of this our High Priest, wherein he admitteth neither partner nor successor. For by his one oblation he satisfied his Father for all men's sins, and reconciled mankind unto his grace and favour....

Another kind of sacrifice there is, which doth not reconcile us to God, but is made of them that be reconciled by Christ, to testify our duties unto God, and to show ourselves thankful unto him; and therefore they be called sacrifices of laud, praise and thanksgiving.

The first kind of sacrifice Christ offered unto God for us; the second kind we ourselves offer to God by Christ.

And by the first kind of sacrifice Christ offered also us unto his Father; and by the second we offer ourselves and all that we have unto him and his Father.⁴

When the debate took place in the 1920s leading to the Deposited Book of 1928 it was proposed to move the so-called Prayer of Oblation back to be incorporated in the Prayer of Consecration. This was strongly contested by evangelicals,⁵ who generally refused to use the book both on doctrinal grounds and because it had not been authorised by Parliament.

However, the last four decades of the twentieth century have seen the biggest changes to the liturgy of the Church of England since 1662, and it is disappointing to note how the opposition from those of more distinctly protestant views appears to have withered away during these years. Whereas there was a wide outcry from many laity as well as clergy who saw quite rightly that developments in 1928 and the 1960s were a betrayal of the Church's Reformation heritage, more recent changes appear to have met with little challenge.

It was during the first half of the twentieth century that the Liturgical Movement's teachings⁶ spread in the Roman Catholic church. When introduced into the Church of England in the middle of that century, they had a twofold emphasis: seeking to bring the members of the laity into a greater involvement in the action of the communion service, and widening the focus of the service to include an emphasis on creation and the incarnation as well as the Cross. This was demonstrated by the introduction of the offertory procession, in which members of the congregation would bring up the bread and wine for

use in the communion at the point of the offertory: it was criticised by no less a person than Michael Ramsey,⁷ who described it as ‘a shallow and romantic form of semi-Pelagianism’. Readers will probably know that Pelagius⁸ was a British theologian who held that we can take the initial and fundamental steps towards our salvation by our own efforts, and this is a heresy to which Anglicans seem especially prone. Such action appears to draw unnecessary attention to the elements, and this is compounded when those presiding use such prayers as are now provided as options in *Common Worship*:

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation:
 through your goodness we have this bread to set before you,
 which earth has given and human hands have made.
 It will become for us the bread of life.

and

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation:
 through your goodness we have this wine to set before you,
 fruit of the vine and work of human hands.
 It will become for us the cup of salvation.

To both of these there is the response from the congregation: ‘Blessed be God for ever’.

Even more misleading, as, although its sentiments are Biblical ones, in the context it could suggest that the offering is located in the elements, is another set of optional words which it is suggested may be spoken by children instead of the president:

Blessed be God,
 by whose grace creation is renewed,
 by whose love heaven is opened,
 by whose mercy we offer our sacrifice of praise.

To which again comes the response: Blessed be God for ever.

In an age which stresses the ‘feel-good’ factor both of these developments serve to give members of the congregation opportunity to feel that they are in some way enabled to contribute something towards their salvation. Such emphasis on God’s provision in creation, valuable and biblical as it is, is out of place when we have been instructed to ‘Do this in remembrance of me’, and Jesus taught that the bread and wine are to represent, not the work of our hands, but the finished work when His body was to be broken and His blood shed on the Cross to make a once-for-all atonement for our sins.

It was at the Lambeth Conference of 1958 that some of these new ideas began to receive official consideration in the Anglican Communion. Whereas in 1549 Cranmer had referred to the Communion elements as ‘these thy gyftes and creatures of bread and wyne’ [sic] and in 1552 omitted the words ‘gyftes and’, there was a desire expressed by the Lambeth bishops to change the wording to ‘these our gifts’. This proposal for change was stoutly resisted by the late Alan Stibbs in his *Sacrifice, Sacrament and Eucharist*,⁹ a book which is well overdue for revision and re-publication. It is significant that in *Common Worship Order Two* in its contemporary form refers to ‘these gifts of your creation’, and this phrase is also used in prayers C, F and G of Order One, but prayers A, B, and D prefer the studied ambiguity, beloved of so many fellow-churchmen, of ‘these gifts’. In the context of the other prayers it could be argued that the stress is still on God’s giving to us, but where the preliminaries cited above have taken place most communicants are likely to assume that the reference is to the bread and wine as our gifts to God.

Those who recall the debates in the Church Assembly during the 1960s when the Series Two service was being tabled will recall the doughty opposition led by Colin Buchanan to the introduction of any words suggesting that the bread and wine were being brought forward in the service as in any sense an offering to God. Proposals for alternative prayers to satisfy those with different theologies (‘we offer thee this bread and this cup’, or ‘we give thanks to thee over this bread and this cup’) were abandoned in favour of the phrase ‘with this bread and this cup we make the memorial of his saving passion...’. When Series Three introduced contemporary English for the first time the parallel phrase was made less contentious and more Biblical—‘with this bread and this cup we do this in remembrance of him’.

However, the issues at stake in those debates seem now largely to have been forgotten, and modern revisers have gradually eroded the principles on which Cranmer carried out his 1552 revision. Even Series Two could not prevent the re-introduction of the request for the acceptance of ‘this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving’ to be included in the prayer before the sharing of communion, and so in *Common Worship* the phrase is included in the same prayer in prayers A, B, C, and H. Prayers E and G, by contrast, introduce an even more questionable interpretation of the Lord’s achievements on the Cross. Both of these prayers switch the sacrificial emphasis back to the Lord Jesus and His work for us, but do so in the words ‘we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross’. While this could appear a great gain in terms of making the sacrificial focus once again back to Christ’s unique work on the Cross, it does bring in a Pelagian suggestion that we still need to do something about it—by pleading his sacrifice before the Father.

This idea has been made popular by those who interpret some phrases in the letter to the Hebrews as suggesting that in heaven our glorified Lord is still pleading His sacrifice before the Father’s throne: however, the main thrust of the imagery of that book, and especially the closely-reasoned argument of chapters 8–10, is that the fact that the Lord Jesus is now seated on His throne at the right hand of the Father is sufficient assurance that His finished work has been accepted.¹⁰ In the Lord’s Supper our role is to come thankfully receiving the effective symbols of ‘the remission of our sins, and all other benefits of His Passion’.¹¹ In no way do we have to enter into a continual pleading of His sacrifice, for it is a finished work.¹² For this reason the present writer, being in retirement and often called on to conduct Communion services in parishes where they have already printed out forms of service using prayers E or G, finds it best, having explained his reservations to the churchwardens concerned, to amend the words ‘plead with confidence’ to ‘recall with thanksgiving’. No doubt this would be frowned on in official liturgical circles, though experience suggests that, with the wide variety of permutations and combinations available, the Church of England is now in the situation of the days of the Judges in Israel, when every one did what was right in his/her own eyes!

So we return to the other point at issue highlighted in Cranmer’s revision: the role of the Holy Spirit in the service. It is not surprising, in view of the scant

evidence in the New Testament as to how the church celebrated the Lord's Supper in apostolic days, that there is no reference there to the Spirit's place in the Holy Communion. In fact the first trace we have of an invocation of the Holy Spirit (technically called an *epiclesis* from the Greek word meaning 'a calling upon') is in the so-called Apostolic Tradition ascribed to Hippolytus, and generally attributed to the third century AD. Here the anonymous writer describes the liturgy in use in his day and region and quotes the following prayer, 'and we ask that you would send your Holy Spirit upon the offering of your holy Church; that, gathering her into one, you would grant to all who receive the holy things (to receive) for the fullness of the Holy Spirit for the strengthening of faith in truth; that we may praise and glorify you through your child Jesus Christ'.¹³ From this beginning the development of the idea of transubstantiation led to the petition being that the Holy Spirit would effect the change of the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ.

Such a prayer can be questioned on biblical grounds. Apart from the Holy Spirit's part in the Trinitarian work of creation,¹⁴ the Bible teaches that the Spirit works in persons and not on inanimate objects. Interestingly, in the Sarum Missal, the English precursor of Cranmer's 1549 Prayer Book, there is no invocation of the Holy Spirit, but the prayer asks that the 'oblation (of the bread and wine) do thou, God Almighty, we beseech thee, deem worthy to make in all things bless+ed,¹⁵ ap+proved, rati+fied, reasonable, acceptable, that for us it may be made the Bo+dy and Bl+ood of thy most beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ'. However, in 1549 Cranmer, perhaps being mindful of the point made above, and the fact that during Jesus's earthly ministry it was His Word that was effective upon inanimate objects,¹⁶ introduced the petition, 'with thy holy Spirit and word vouchsafe to bl+ess and sanc+tify 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'.

Here he removes any suggestion that the prayer should effect a change in the elements to one asking God to help the communicants to receive them fruitfully, and this thought is made even more explicit in our 1552/1662 service. Here the wording 'hear us, O merciful Father, we (most humbly 1662) beseech thee, and grant that we, receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed

body and blood...’ removes the requirement for any signing with the cross over the elements, makes plain that the elements are still God’s creatures of bread and wine, and takes a clearly receptionist position, that the benefit is to be gained from receiving in faith. This again reflects Cranmer’s statement in his work quoted above that ‘the true use of the Lord’s Supper is...wherein godly people assembled together may receive the sacrament every man for himself, to declare that he remembereth what benefit he hath received by the death of Christ, and to testify that he is a member of Christ’s body, fed with his flesh, and drinking his blood spiritually’.¹⁷ Subsequent Anglican revision has taken care to safeguard that position by the use of the two words ‘to us’ in every similar prayer, as, *e g* in prayer A of *Common Worship Order One* which asks ‘grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit these gifts of bread and wine may be to us his body and his blood’ (author’s italics). Perhaps one of the better prayers from this angle in *Common Worship* is Prayer D in *Order One* which asks ‘Send your Spirit on us now that by these gifts we may feed on Christ with opened eyes and hearts on fire’.

When such a prayer is interpreted in the light of biblical teaching on the Holy Spirit, it can be seen that it should be understood that the Spirit’s working will not be objectively on the elements on the Lord’s Table, but on the recipients in the pews (or more likely chairs in these days!). Perhaps it was for that reason that when Cranmer removed the reference to the Holy Spirit in the 1552 prayer he regarded the prayer for the Spirit’s working in the Collect for Purity at the beginning of the service as the appropriate epiclesis on the people. Certainly, as the intention is that those receiving should be Christian people already possessing and possessed by the Spirit, it would be misleading to suggest that they needed again to receive the Holy Spirit, but that the Spirit of Jesus already within them would exercise afresh His ministry of cleansing and stirring to further heights of commitment and consecration as they approach the Lord’s Table.

From the above it will be seen that while modern revisions of the Communion service in the Church of England reflect much theology that should be questioned in the light of Biblical teaching, all is not lost, especially in the preservation of the insights of 1552 and 1662 in *Order Two*. However, it is regrettable that in the interests of economy a lot of churches have either only the booklet containing *Order One*, or only the prayers which their minister has chosen for them to use, and this makes it difficult to introduce the

congregation to their full liturgical heritage. It was the Anglo-Catholic liturgist Dom Gregory Dix who wrote of Cranmer's 1552 Communion service that 'as a piece of liturgical craftsmanship it is in the first rank—once its intention is understood. It is *not* a disordered attempt at a catholic rite, but the only effective attempt ever made to give liturgical expression to the doctrine of "justification by faith alone".¹⁸ We are told that from now on liturgical revision will be an ongoing process, and those of us who value that emphasis of the Reformers must be prepared to contend for the retention, and, where necessary, reintroduction of these truths for which Cranmer and his friends were prepared to sacrifice their lives.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 A good summary of these objections can be found on p 32 of C O Buchanan, *What did Cranmer think he was doing?* (Bramcote, Notts: Grove Books 1976). See also E C Whitaker, *Martin Bucer and the Book of Common Prayer* (Great Wakering: Mayhew-McCrimmon 1974).
- 2 In the contemporary Roman Missal this emphasis is found in all four variations of the eucharistic prayer, but most notably in the fourth which states, 'we offer you his body and blood, the acceptable sacrifice which brings salvation to the whole world'.
- 3 From Article XXV of *The Thirty-Nine Articles*.
- 4 From Cranmer's work quoted book V, ch 3
- 5 For a good discussion of this debate see G J Cumming *A History of Anglican Liturgy* (London: Macmillan 1969) ch 10
- 6 There is a good outline of this movement by H Ellsworth Chandler in J G Davies (ed) *A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London: SCM 1972)
- 7 In his *Durham Essays and Addresses* (London: SPCK 1957) p 18
- 8 See the article on 'Pelagianism' in F L Cross and E A Livingstone (eds) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: University Press 2nd edn reprinted 1988)
- 9 London: Tyndale Press 1961
- 10 This point is developed in section 2 of the video study-guide *Be Thankful* published by Church Society.
- 11 From the prayer of oblation following communion in the Book of Common Prayer.

- 12 See John 19:30; Heb 1:3. There is a fuller discussion in A M Stibbs *Sacrament, Sacrifice and Eucharist* ch v, and J I Packer (ed) *Here We Stand* (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1986) ch 8
- 13 Quotation taken from R C D Jasper and G J Cuming (eds) *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company 1987), 3rd revised edn. The editors state that the original Latin here is almost untranslatable.
- 14 See Gen 1:2, the first person plural in Gen 1:26 and John 1:3. The only example of the Spirit's working on inanimate objects could appear to be in Ezekiel 36:6, 9, 10. Here the activity of the breath of God (the same word is used for 'Spirit' in v 14) in bringing life to dry bones is a re-enactment of what He did in Gen 2:7, and so is in fact operating on human beings.
- 15 The symbol + was inserted into liturgical texts to indicate the point at which the minister should make the sign of the cross over the elements.
- 16 See *e g* Mark 4:39; Matt 21:19
- 17 Book V, ch 9.
- 18 G Dix *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press 1945) p 672