

Review Article

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Christopher J. Cocksorth, *Evangelical Eucharistic Thought in the Church of England*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, xiv + 283 pp, £35.00.

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Over the last thirty years there has been a significant change in evangelical Anglican identity. Central to that change has been a growing appreciation of eucharistic worship and theology. This major study contains an historical survey of evangelical eucharistic theology beginning with the 'The Reformers' Bequest' and continuing to the end of the nineteenth century. A second section considers in close detail the part that Evangelicals have played in twentieth-century Church of England liturgical revision and sketches the development of contemporary evangelical eucharistic spirituality. A final section of 'theological analysis' sketches a eucharistic theology for today in three chapters: 'The Eucharist as Sacrament', 'The Eucharist as Presence', 'The Eucharist as Sacrifice'. Cocksorth, 'an Evangelical Christian who has known the presence of the redeeming Lord in the most Holy Supper' (xii), argues that if Evangelicals are Gospel people and Bible people, they must be also, in some sense, Eucharist people' (9). His study sets out to show why this has not always been the case and to promote a renewed flourishing of 'the sacramental instinct within Evangelicalism'.

There are a number of major strengths: this is a bold project which guides the reader carefully through a great deal of material, presenting a history of sustained and coherent theological engagement with the eucharist on the part of Evangelicals. It pays generous tribute to the leadership given the Evangelical Liturgical Movement by Colin Buchanan. It attempts to bring together in a creative manner liturgy and doctrine, and to identify ways forward for Evangelicals in the Church of England. In several respects, however, the book disappoints. I will deal with the issues as Cocksorth raises them (though not in his order) in his three final chapters.

1. Cocksorth's discussion of eucharistic presence is seriously weakened by his account of Cranmer. He seems to place Cranmer's eucharistic theology firmly in the 'real absence' tradition, in which the elements are thought of as visual aids to remind the believer of what Christ has done, moving the believer by their 'affective' force to deeper faith in Christ. According to this view, reception of the elements is an aid to faith (it has 'affective force') but is not a vital action within the Christian life. Cocksorth writes that for Cranmer 'the bread helps a job to be done'; 'the function of the Sacrament lay in its affective rather than effective character'; 'the effective potential of the

Sacrament was a product of its affective force' (29). For Hooker, however, 'The elements do not just help a job to be done, as with Cranmer, but — given certain conditions — they are actually used by God to do a job' (36). He finds in Hooker the emergence of a more creative 'participatory' tradition, which he welcomes. Could he not claim the Cranmer of the 1552 Book of Common Prayer for that way of thinking? A growing consensus that reception of the elements is vital for Cranmer has helped to modify evangelical Anglican understanding of the eucharist and, if accepted, would only have strengthened the case that Cocksworth wishes to make.

Until a generation ago Evangelicals were characterised as 'Prayer Book men'. The Prayer Book was seen as the living memorial of Cranmer's doctrine. The received idea of Cranmer's receptionism was, precisely, that the elements 'helped a job to be done': they nourished the believer's faith. Since it is faith by which the believer is justified, the eucharist, though important, is not central to Christian life and worship. Colin Buchanan, however, argued strongly for the importance to Cranmer of actually eating the bread and drinking the wine: '(Cranmer) is clear that eating is believing.... The whole comparison with baptism [a point Cocksworth overlooks] entailed a communicating of grace by the Spirit to the recipients. The whole locus for this communicating was the point of reception, but a true communicating it was.'¹ Peter Newman Brooks' careful study of *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of the Eucharist* accords with this line: 'The Archbishop envisages a kind of two-level eating: just as bread and wine consumed on earth provide the faithful with bodily nourishment, so likewise their souls simultaneously enjoy a heavenly communion as, by faith, they feed on the body and blood of Christ.'² Moreover, both Buchanan and Brooks stress the importance for Cranmer of the present *locus* of Christ's body, which is in heaven, so that in eating and drinking our hearts are lifted up to feed on him there. The background for this in Bucer³ and Calvin,⁴ which is vital for a coherent presentation of Cranmer's receptionism, is passed over by Cocksworth in silence.

This is not just a squabble about past and present interpretations of Cranmer. Cocksworth's constructive presentation of 'the eucharist as presence' is seriously weakened by his attenuated presentation of receptionism. He quotes the infamous and fantastic words of Dix, that for Cranmer 'the bread had nothing to do with the body',⁵ granting far too readily 'the

1 C. O. Buchanan, *What Did Cranmer Think He Was Doing?*, Grove Liturgical Study 7, Grove Books, Bramcote 1976, pp 4-5.

2 P. N. Brooks, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of the Eucharist* (2nd edn), Macmillan, London 1992, p 100.

3 See, e.g., 'Confessio M. Bucer de Eucharistia' (1550) in *Scripta Anglicana* (Basel 1577), where Bucer speaks of a presence of Christ in both Word and sacrament 'not of place, sense, reason or earth; but of spirit, faith, the heavens' and so, he says, we 'apprehend and lay hold of' (*apprehendimus et complectimur*) Christ 'in his heavenly majesty'. There is a marginal reference to Eph. 2. More accessible is E. C. Whittaker, ed., *Martin Bucer and the Book of Common Prayer* (Alcuin Club Collections 59, Mayhew-McCrimmon, Great Wakering 1974), in which the *Censura* of 1551 is edited and translated. See esp. p 74.

4 *Institutes* (1559), IV.xvii.31.

5 G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (2nd edn), Dacre/A. & C. Black, London 1945, p 674.

penetration of Dix's critique', when he should, following Buchanan,⁶ have exposed Dix's misrepresentation. Cocksworth is exactly right when he argues that 'The role of the elements is not just to affect the individual's faith, it is to effect a union with him by communicating the gift of Christ's saving presence. They do not merely help the participant to meditate on the life-giving significance of the Cross, they actually mediate that reality to him' (199). It would have strengthened his case that Evangelicals should reclaim this truth if he had recognised that this is exactly what Cranmer thought and what the 1552 Book of Common Prayer teaches (e.g. in the Exhortations at Holy Communion).

2. Cocksworth concludes his book with a chapter that guardedly accepts the notion of eucharistic sacrifice. He identifies two 'sacrificial moments' in the eucharist: 'The one is a sacrifice of identification, or... a sacrifice of proclamation, in which we acknowledge that Christ's death was died for us. The other is a sacrifice of participation in which we give up our claims to independent self-existence and ask that we may share more fully in the life of Christ within his Church' (221).

As an interpretation of 'eucharistic sacrifice', this leaves major questions unanswered. Elsewhere (217), Cocksworth unexceptionably identifies a 'sacrifice of proclamation' as Kenneth Stevenson uses the term with 'a sacrifice of thanksgiving... for the completeness of the Atonement'. The account he gives of the 'sacrifice of participation', however, falls short of full-blooded participation and so reduces the meaning of sacrifice that it would fail to meet almost all traditional Catholic concerns. Unless one can in some sense say 'we offer', it seems to me the metaphor of sacrifice is dead and there is little point in devising new, but weakened, uses of the term. If, however, one is to say 'we offer' it can only be in the context of a vigorous theology of 'in-Christness' which does justice to the 'once-for-all' self-offering of Christ on the cross. The problem for a reconstructed theology of eucharistic sacrifice has been not the 'once-for-all' event of Calvary, but the way in which medieval western theology construed participation in terms of propitiation (Christ's action then) and merit (the effect both then and now). Evangelicals have tended to argue that a stress on the fullness of Christ's propitiatory offering at Calvary was a perfect safeguard against the preaching of propitiatory merit which could be earned today; hence the investment in the notion of propitiation by Evangelicals and suspicion of sacrifice as a dynamic within the eucharist. Any renewal of evangelical eucharistic theology, though it may reject the language of propitiation and merit, must meet traditional concerns in this area.

It is astonishing, then, to find no discussion of propitiation in a book which aims 'to concentrate on the classic areas of theological dispute' (222) and to find that when using the Revised Standard Version Cocksworth accepts without comment 'expiation' for *hilasterion* at Rom. 3:23 (211) and also for *hilasmos* at 1 John 2:2 (213) — the source of the Book of Common Prayer and ASB Comfortable Words, which speak of Christ as 'the *propitiation* for our sins'. Propitiation simply drops below the horizon, not even to be replaced by a clear theology of expiation.

6 Buchanan, op. cit., p 5. I must record my thanks to Bishop Colin Buchanan for his willingness to discuss these points further with me by letter.

In discussing participation, Cocksworth draws upon Barth (218) to suggest that 'there is a very real difference between our involvement with Christ's death and our involvement with his ascended life' (219). The first he describes as involvement 'by way of identification'; the second as involvement 'by way of participation'. To be identified is 'to receive and accept his representation for us through Baptism and by faith' (221). He goes on to say, 'We are involved in *the effects* of his death by way of a participation in his ascended life' (my italics). Cocksworth strikingly stops short of the claim which is the real challenge to old-style evangelical atonement theology: that we participate in the death of Christ in just the same way as we participate in his ascended life. He barely discusses the NT texts (e.g. Rom. 6:3-8; Gal. 2:20, Phil. 3:10, Col. 3:3) which give rise to such a claim nor does he discuss the link between such a claim and participation in the sacraments. Rom. 5:19-6:8, the most important text in the NT for establishing baptism as a true participation in the death of Christ, is mentioned (218) but without discussion of baptism. 1 Cor. 10:16, the prime text for a participatory understanding of the eucharist, is not discussed at all. It has been a strange aberration of much evangelicalism, perhaps the product of understandable fears about compromising the 'once-for-all-ness' or a substitutionary understanding of Christ's death, to have rejected the clear suggestion of Pauline theology that participation in baptism or eucharist is participation in the death of Christ. It is an even stranger aberration of Cocksworth's to argue that participation in the eucharist is participation in the ascended life of Christ, but only 'identification' with his death, and that there is 'a very real difference' between the two.

Cocksworth's distinction, as far as I can see, has no basis in Barth's theology and is parallel to the case ('imputed participation', 'imparted righteousness' (39)) that he makes with respect to Hooker. What Hooker says is, 'We participate Christ partly by imputation, as when those things which he did and suffered for us are imputed unto us for righteousness; partly by habitual and real infusion, as when grace is inwardly bestowed while we are on earth, and afterwards more fully both our souls and bodies made like unto his in glory.'⁷ The point Cocksworth misses by his inaccurate distinction is Hooker's central concern: by God's grace we truly 'participate Christ'. Only within that participation does Hooker distinguish between what is 'imputed' and what is 'imparted'. Cocksworth's distinction between a participation that is imputed and a righteousness which is imparted dissipates the central thrust of Hooker's integrated, participatory theology, and weakens the possibilities of enlisting Hooker's aid in renewing understanding of 'The Eucharist as Sacrifice'.

The material Cocksworth needs to make his case on eucharistic sacrifice lies to hand but is not exploited. He draws attention to language in the Reformers, the Puritans and the Wesleys which talks of offering Christ to the Father (211), but then fails to discuss or develop the notion of our offering Christ, or Christ offering us, to the Father, the Father offering Christ or Christ offering us, to the world, though there could be possibilities in all of these.⁸

7 *Ecclesiastical Polity* v. lvi.11.

8 See F. Hildebrandt, *I Offered Christ*, Epworth, London 1967, e.g., pp 60-65.

The most promising line to appeal to Evangelicals, I would have thought, would be that of Christ offering us, the first-fruits of his passion and death, to the Father, and at the same time to the world as Spirit-filled believers who will participate in the project of sacrificial obedience and witness that begins at Acts 1:8 (compare Rom. 15:16, Phil. 2:16-17 for the language of sacrifice related to evangelism). What is needed for a development of such theology is a thoroughly participative trinitarian theology, such as that offered by Barth. Cockswoth is clearly attracted by this, but pulls back from accepting it in full, and so loses the chance to rework a theology of eucharistic sacrifice that might, because it is securely grounded in the sufficiency of the cross, make sense of our participation in Christ's self-offering (even of Col. 1:24) for Evangelicals.

3. The case that Cockswoth has to make on 'The Eucharist as Sacrament' is altogether simpler. 'The challenge to Evangelical sacramental theology', he says, 'is to identify the real value of the Eucharist over and against that of hearing and believing the Word' (175). This is absolutely correct, but the way Cockswoth argues his case comes as a surprise: his major authorities are Schillebeeckx, Rahner and Torrance, and his conclusion bears out a motif in his theology which I find questionable:

I am not therefore claiming that the Eucharist provides an exclusive ontological reality but rather suggesting that it is given a unique functional force and, thereby, a level of ontological intensity not ordinarily to be found in the other moments of Christ's activity in the Church. (190)

This is, in another form, the 'affective/effective' distinction, which distorts Cockswoth's account of Cranmer. If 'a unique functional force' suggests a peculiar 'level of ontological intensity', it also suggests that ontology may be *reduced* to 'functional force'. The term 'ontology', used with some frequency by Cockswoth, is so slippery that I do not want to discuss its possible meanings here, but I would suggest that language of 'being' (ontology) has most often been used in theology to indicate the 'real' as a way of holding the line against all forms of reductive subjectivism. The notion of 'ontological intensity' ('more or less "realness"') is in this sense a confusion of categories. Further, if we were to say to ourselves, 'the less functional force, the less "realness"', this would have serious consequences for the doctrine of assurance. To put the issue pastorally, supposing that, unlike Cockswoth, but with many Evangelicals, I do not find that the eucharist has for me 'a unique functional force', does that mean that the presence of Christ is less 'real' when I partake of the sacrament than when others do? If the answer is 'yes' would the same thing apply with respect to Bible or gospel if I had a 'dry' period during which I found the Bible boring and the gospel dull? Does not the doctrine of assurance teach 'gospel', 'Bible' and 'eucharist' people that in each of these means of grace God is in some sense active regardless of the individual's subjective disposition?

Cockswoth has a section, entitled '*Lex Orandi* and *Lex Credendi*' in which he suggests that 'the authentic evangelical criterion by which we may judge whether a religious experience is a genuinely Christian one may be defined as the extent to which it coheres with the fundamental apostolic experience

of the Gospel — which itself is grounded in the recognition that it is “by grace you have been saved through faith” (179). This he develops with respect to experience of the eucharist. The experiential emphasis strikes me as characteristic of Evangelicalism, but the appeal to the Word, which is also characteristically evangelical, seems to have been subsumed under the appeal to experience. I do not myself see how one experience can be judged to ‘cohere’ with another, though I can see how linguistic accounts of experience may be said to ‘cohere’; I can also see the formative role of classic linguistic accounts of experience. In each case the medium is language. Cocksworth, it seems to me, is not sceptical enough about ‘experience’, nor careful enough about language. When doubts come about the presence of Christ in experience, could he respond like Luther with a resounding ‘*Baptizatus sum*’, or even by simply participating in the eucharist? For the Evangelical, the virtue and consolation of the sacraments is that they are, as Augustine puts it, ‘visible words’. They are the physical promise of an incarnational religion, and the fundamental reason for celebrating the eucharist is nothing to do with experience: it is simple obedience to the Lord’s command.

Cocksworth’s book leaves me with serious questions. I applaud and share his concern to see the eucharist at the centre of the Christian life. I share with him the perception that this has been a sad lack in evangelical spirituality, but that much has changed in the last thirty years. It is good to see his vigorous attempt to chart and promote this change. I do not, however, think that his theology will command the assent of Evangelicals and may well mislead others about evangelical thinking today. Though Cocksworth breaks new ground for evangelical readers, he is remarkably cavalier about some traditional evangelical concerns and his own presuppositions remain largely unexamined. Characteristically, he is prepared to argue from the ‘affective’ to the ‘effective’, where Evangelicals, with their concern for assurance regardless of feelings, have more often moved in the opposite direction. Evangelicals, it seems to me, have founded their conviction that the eucharist is effective, and so ‘affective’, not upon experience, but upon Scripture. The experience of Christ in the eucharist is clearly ‘affective’ for Cocksworth. To the extent that he is prepared to ground his eucharistic theology on experience, he is very much an Evangelical of a new generation, confident of his place in the Church of England and open to dialogue in a way that would have been impossible thirty years ago.

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