

# The Lord's Supper in Current Teaching (I)

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

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*The speaker argues that the doctrine of a real presence in the Lord's Supper is not taught in the Church of England's formularies and is contrary to the plain teaching of the New Testament and Prayer Book.*

**Scripture:** Luke 22:19, John 4:24, John 6:53, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 1 Corinthians 11:23

**Topics:** "Lord's Supper", "Sacramental Theology"

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## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas delves into the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, addressing the shifts in understanding that have occurred over the years within the Church of England. He emphasizes the importance of discerning the true essence of the doctrine as expressed in the Church's formularies and the Word of God. The sermon challenges the notion of a real objective Presence of Christ's glorified Body in the elements after consecration, highlighting the discrepancies between this belief and the teachings of the New Testament and the Prayer Book. It underscores the spiritual reality of Christ's presence in the Sacrament, distinct from a physical presence in the elements, and the significance of faith in appropriating the blessings of the Lord's Supper.

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## Transcript

The doctrine of the Lord's Supper has acquired fresh prominence during the last sixty years by reason of certain movements within the pale of the Church of England. About that time a new turn was given to the consideration of the doctrine by the rise of the Tractarian Movement. The treatment of the subject in Tract XC, in the work of Archdeacon Robert Wilberforce on the Eucharist, and in the writings of Dr. Pusey, was certainly a novelty in the Church of England. No one can legitimately call it a development of the old Church of England doctrine of three centuries; rather was it a new deposit, the introduction of a fresh germ, which has since been growing side by side with the old doctrine until its manifestation may be said to have culminated in 1900 in the declaration of the English Church Union, which stated a doctrine of the Holy Communion in the following terms: "In the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the Bread and Wine through the operation of the Holy Ghost, become, in and by consecration, according to our Lord's institution, verily and indeed the Body and Blood of Christ, and that Christ our Lord, present in the same Most Holy Sacrament of the altar under the form of Bread and Wine, is in it to be worshipped and adored."

The statements of certain members of the Fulham Round Table Conference in 1900 revealed an identical attitude. Yet more recently in a book by Rev. Darwell Stone, Librarian of Pusey House, Oxford, forming part of a series intended to supply "some carefully considered teaching on matters of religion to that large

body of devout laymen who desire instruction," we find the following unmistakable statement: "At the present time, whatever differences in detail and in inference may exist, and however differently certain terms may be defined, there is agreement among Eastern Christians, Roman Catholics, and the successors of the Tractarians in the Church of England as to that central part of the doctrine of the Eucharist, the expression of which by the English Church Union in 1900 may be cited as a convenient illustration." [Rev.

D. Stone, *The Holy Communion*, p. 186.] Under these circumstances we have to show that this doctrine is in no sense the legitimate doctrine of the Church of England as expressed in her formularies and as confessedly based on the Word of God. The first question is as to the doctrine of a real Presence. Not, be it noted, of a real Presence to and in the faithful communicant, but the doctrine of a real objective Presence of Christ's glorified Body in or under the elements after consecration, apart from any presence in the faithful recipient.

Does the Church of England teach this? It is to be noted that the phrase "real Presence" is not found in any of our formularies, and is ambiguous and misleading. The phrase is not known earlier than the Middle Ages, and our Reformers objected to its novelty and ambiguity. What Canon Trevor [*Canon Trevor, Catholic Doctrine of Eucharist*, p. 82 f.] says of the term "real objective Presence" is rightly applied by Vogan [*Vogan, True Doctrine of the Eucharist*, p. 91.] to the older term "real Presence": - "New and unauthorized words imply new and unauthorized conceptions."

All presence of Christ must be real, and a spiritual presence is not less real, because it is spiritual. But the usual application of the term is undoubted, and refers to Christ in His glorified human nature, which is said to be present in or under the elements by virtue of consecration. We hold that such a doctrine is not only not found in the New Testament and Prayer Book, but is contrary to the plain teaching of both. The tendency of those who uphold the doctrine of an objective Presence in the elements is to take the four words only, "This is my body," and on the strength of these alone to argue for a real objective Presence in the elements of our Lord's glorified body.

But our Lord said more than this, and we must consider His full statement: "This is my body which is given for you." This is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for you." It was, therefore, to the body as given and the blood as shed that our Lord referred. He said not a word about the glorified body. Neither did St. Paul, whose references to the "body and blood," are to the body and blood, "ut in cruce, non in caelo." How could the allusion to "blood shed" have any reference to the glorified body?

Our Lord could not have given His glorified body at the time of the original institution, and, as we have already seen in an earlier chapter, there is no warrant for supposing that subsequent Eucharists have differed in character or meaning from the first. Nor is there anything in the Church of England formularies to support the doctrine of a presence in or under these elements, or the idea of a difference of gift or reception now as compared with the original institution. In the Communion Service, and also in the more precise language of the Article we find that the body of Christ is not only taken and eaten, but first of all "given," "after a heavenly and spiritual manner."

The fallacy of the doctrine is, as Vogan points out, [*Vogan, True Doctrine of the Eucharist*, Chaps. 17 and 18.] that a thing must be present in order to be received. The local presence of a thing is not necessary to its possession and use by us. Property or money may be ours in very truth and reality without being actually and visibly present with us. So also in regard to the Lord's Supper, the possession by us of our

Lord in all His efficacy and power is not dependent on His local presence at any given spot 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 present. Yet they are given to faith, given in spiritual force and blessing. The Atonement of Calvary is not, and cannot be present now, and yet we partake continually of its vital efficacy and preciousness. And for this no special mode of the Presence is necessary. The Lord's presence is the same in essence at all times and in all ordinances, the difference on each occasion lies in the purpose of His presence.

At one time He is present for this, at another time for that special purpose, but the fact of the presence is the same throughout. Scripture will be searched in vain for any indication of a peculiar and special presence of our Lord at the institution of the Lord's Supper, which was not found at other times of fellowship and communion with His disciples. It is very significant and serious to note how the latter part of the institution is practically minimized by the teaching of this modern school on the Eucharist.

It is a distinct deviation from Scripture language and order on the subject. Vogan says [Vogan, ut supra, p. 100.] that the proposition "This is my blood ... which was shed for you" has no real place in the doctrine of a real objective Presence, the whole doctrine being virtually deduced from the four words only, "This is my body." In a recent popular Manual [Bishop Gore, The Creed of a Christian, p. 85.] we read, "The priest invokes the power of the Spirit on the bread and wine, and they become ... the body and blood of the glorified Jesus."

Now to say nothing of the fact that our Prayer Book has no such invocation of the Spirit (it was omitted in 1552 and never restored), what part can "blood" have in this idea of the glorified body, in what the author calls "the human and Divine life of the glorified Jesus?" It surely has no place. Yet the idea of "blood" is an essential part of the teaching on the Lord's Supper. We find the same view in another well-known book: "It is instinctively assumed that the Sacrament of the Lord's Body is the chief thing, and the Sacrament of the Precious Blood takes a secondary place.

If men had never fallen and yet the Word had become flesh, we can see that something like the Sacrament of the Body might have been given, but not the Sacrament of the Blood. So the two parts stand related to each other as the Incarnation and the Atonement." [Canon Mason, The Faith of the Gospel, pp. 320, 324.] But the New Testament speaks of the body given "for" us, and not "to" us, and the words of administration in our service speak of the body "which was given for," not "which is given to" us.

The two parts of the Sacrament cannot refer, according to the institution, to the Incarnation and the Atonement (which are never regarded in the New Testament as separate in interest), but emphasize the constituent elements of our Lord's sacrifice in His body broken and blood shed. The separation of these two parts in the ordinance is its own silent testimony to the fact of death, and that only. We hold, therefore, that this doctrine while it seems to demand the literal interpretation of our Lord's words, does not really adhere to them, but takes only a portion, and thereby puts an entirely novel and erroneous gloss on them.

It imports into the simplicity and clearness of Scripture what is not found there. Our Lord referred to His body as given for us and His blood as shed, and neither of these terms can refer to His glorified body. Moreover, if there be a real objective Presence in the elements, what becomes of that Presence in the case of unworthy recipients? If, for instance, the Sacrament is administered to three persons in succession, of whom the second is unfaithful; what, on this theory, is given and what does he receive different from the others?

If Christ be present in the elements independently of the use and reception, it surely follows that all who receive the elements receive Christ. "Yes," says the modern teaching, "all receive Christ but not the benefits of Christ." Archdeacon Denison and the Rev. W. J. E. Bennett, of Frome, both taught that the body and blood of Christ are received by the wicked as well as the good. They drew the distinction between receiving the inward part or thing signified (*res sacramenti*) and the grace of the Sacrament (*virtus sacramenti*), but is it possible to receive the thing without its efficacy?

Is it conceivable that anyone can receive the body and blood of Christ without receiving Christ in His grace and power? Can a man really receive Christ without His benefits? And on this view what is the meaning of Article XXIX? The title of the Article is, "Of the wicked which eat not the body of Christ in the use of the Lord's Supper," and the statement of the Article is, "The wicked, and such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth (as Saint Augustine saith) the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ" (*nullo modo*).

Could language be clearer or stronger? Yet in the face of this, Bishop Forbes can actually say of the wicked that "they must in some sense receive Christ, the inward part of the Sacrament." [Bishop Forbes, *Explanation of the Thirty-nine Articles*, p. 576.] It is impossible to speak, as several writers of this school do, of the sin referred to by St. Paul of being "guilty of the body and blood" of Christ, as though the phrase must necessarily mean the presence of the body and blood in the elements.

The guilt would be equally great in any form of unworthy reception and profanation. In the book already quoted in other connections, [Bishop Gore, *The Body of Christ*, pp. 72-73.] which on the whole seems to be identified with this modern school, we read of the elements "becoming" the body and blood of Christ; of the body and blood being "in some way attached to these elements"; and of the elements becoming "sacramentally identified with the body and blood of Christ." But we do not get any clear definition of "becoming," or "attached," or "sacramentally identified".

The author rightly sees that we can believe in an objective Presence and grace without any such attachment or identification, for indeed all Divine grace must be at the outset objective to the recipient. ["Whether the grace of the Holy Eucharist come to our souls by and through the elements or no, alike it is objective, as coming to us from without ourselves, and having existence independently of our own thoughts." - Bishop Moberly.] But he fails to prove that there is any further sense in which "objective presence" can be applied exclusively to the Lord's Supper.

The Scriptures teach that God in Christ is objective to the believer at all times, and can be appropriated by faith in every ordinance and by every means afforded us. To say that the "body and blood of Christ are made present" under the forms of "bread and wine, or in some real, though undefined, way identified with them," is to assert what is incapable of proof from Scripture or Prayer Book. The view of the New Testament followed by the Church of England is that our Lord is present in spiritual power and blessing in the Sacrament, that is, in the due observance of the ordinance; but "in the Sacrament" is not to be confused with "in the elements".

Article XXV makes no distinction between the two Sacraments as to the fact and method of spiritual blessing. In both, as in all ordinances and means of grace, God is really (and of course objectively) present, ready for our appropriation by faith: "Faith is not imagination, and faith has no creative power. Faith believes only what is true - objectively true. Faith can only realize that which is objectively real, and faith can receive only what is given - truly and objectively given." [Dimock, *Two Lectures*, p. 45.]

See also Andrewes' Responsio ad Bellarm, p. 13.] To our faith Christ is ever present whether in or out of the Sacraments. His Atonement is our salvation and life, and His Intercession our warrant for approach to the throne of grace. This is all made real to us by the Holy Ghost, the "other Comforter," whose office it is to glorify Christ to us. Where true views are held concerning the Holy Spirit's application to us of the "innumerable benefits" of our Lord's person and work, there will never be any question as to spiritual Presence or spiritual Reality.

In the Order of the Holy Communion the consecration of the elements involves no change of nature and substance, for the Consecration Prayer speaks of our "receiving these Thy creatures of bread and wine." The consecration implies and involves only a change of use and purpose, the bread and wine being thus separated from ordinary use for the purpose of being signs and pledges of our Lord's body and blood. It is this sacred and symbolical use that rightly warrants the consumption of the consecrated bread and wine at the close of the service.

There is nothing in the Prayer Book which gives any authority for the idea that at the moment of consecration the Lord comes in a way that He has not come before. The consecration attaches to the elements, as the late Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Temple, said in his primary charge (1899), "not a presence but a promise." [Cf. Augustine's *Accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum*.] We may illustrate this by the familiar comparison of a deed or conveyance. The title deeds of an estate "convey" that estate to the person named in the deed, and he that possesses the deed possesses and owns the estate; but the deeds are not the estate, and the heir does not hold the property in his hand, though by his possession of the deeds he may be said to possess the property.

The property is there, but it is not locally attached to the deed. So in the Lord's Supper, the presence of Christ is there, pledged and sealed to the faithful believer, but it is not locally attached to the elements. The elements are means of grace in the sense that they are signs, seals, pledges, proofs, witnesses, and not that they are vehicles or channels. [Cf. Rev. T. W. Drury, *Church and Faith*, p. 196 f.] The relation between the sign and the thing signified is thus one of concurrence, not identity.

In the Sacrament there are two givers, the Lord and the minister; two gifts, grace and the elements; two receptions, into the soul and into the body; two modes, faith and the mouth. These are distinct and never identical, but, to the faithful recipients, they are always concurrent. We believe that this view alone is deducible from the pages of Holy Writ, and that in it we obtain all that is necessary of spiritual life and blessing. We hold, too, that it is the only and true view of the Church of England.

In this connection the language of the book just quoted (*The Body of Christ*) is very significant. Its author speaks of his own view of the objective presence in the elements as "at least allowed" and "at least suggested" by our formularies. [Bishop Gore, *The Body of Christ*, p. 231.] This is surely very inadequate, especially in view of three centuries of acute controversy. On the other hand the author is constrained to admit that in the Declaration on Kneeling, and "what is more important, in the form of consecration," the doctrine of the objective Presence in the elements is "plainly evaded and not asserted."

Is not this surprising if true? Is it possible that the author's own special view, the only right one, in his judgment, is "plainly evaded"? We believe that the truth would be rather expressed by saying "plainly avoided". The Edwardian and Elizabethan Reformers were hardly the men to "evade" a question of this kind, and the changes of 1552 (after 1549), including the omission of the invocation of the Holy Spirit on the elements, are proof positive, not of evasion but of avoidance.

"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." [Vogan, True Doctrine of the Eucharist, p. 254.] We believe that the body and blood of Christ are not communicated to the elements, but to the faithful recipient of the elements; and that neither in Bible or in Prayer Book have we any warrant for a "real objective Presence" in, with, or under the forms or veils of the bread and wine.

Bishop Dowden effectually and convincingly shows how Bishop Andrewes repudiated with scorn the idea of a real Presence "in or under" the form or species of bread and wine. Dr. Dowden then closes his discussion of the point in the following terms, which convey their own meaning and lesson as to Bible and Church truth on this subject [Bishop Dowden, Define Your Terms. An address to his Diocesan Synod, 1900, p. 21.]: "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."

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