

# The Lord's Supper in the Prayer Books of 1562 and 1571

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

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*The Elizabethan Reformation resulted in the creation of the Prayer Book that we use today, with a doctrine of the Holy Communion that is distinct from Lutheran doctrine.*

**Scripture:** Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 11:23, Ephesians 4:14, Colossians 2:8, 1 Timothy 4:16, 2 Timothy 2:15, Hebrews 13:8, 1 Peter 5:8, Jude 1:3

**Topics:** "Holy Communion", "Church History"

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## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas delves into the historical context of the Elizabethan revision of the Prayer Book, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the doctrinal position of the Prayer Book of 1552 amidst the extreme views of the Reformers. The sermon explores the subtle changes made in the Prayer Book and Articles during Queen Elizabeth's reign, particularly focusing on the doctrine of the Holy Communion in the Church of England and the influence of various bishops in shaping the revisions. The sermon highlights the careful considerations and controversies surrounding the doctrinal positions, ultimately affirming the Church of England's stance on the Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

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## Transcript

The third stage of the history of the Prayer Book with which we are now concerned is the revision in Queen Elizabeth's reign. After the reign of Mary a fresh start was made in the work of the English Reformation, and it is necessary for us to consider the relation of the Elizabethan Reformation to that of Edward's reign. We may sum up the position in the words of the late Bishop Stubbs [Visitation Charges, p. 100.]: "The great importance of the third Prayer Book, that is, the one introduced by the Act of Uniformity of Queen Elizabeth, which to almost all intents and purposes is that which we now use, is that it was a distinct enunciation that the tide of innovation should proceed no further.

The changes introduced into it from the second Prayer Book are very few; but, as few as they are, they indicate a return to, rather than a departure from, the first Prayer Book." The tone and character of the revision may best be seen from two facts: 1. The blending of the two earlier forms of Words of Administration into one, our present form. 2. The omission of the "Black Rubric." On the latter point it ought to be said that the Act of Uniformity specifying the alterations to be made does not mention this omission.

It seems to have happened simply because the Act had omitted to make special mention of the Royal proclamation of 1552. "If therefore the Rubric had been strictly a part of the Prayer Book as established by law in King Edward's reign (which constitutionally it was not), it would have been strictly a part of the Prayer Book as established by law in Queen Elizabeth's reign." [Dimock, Vox. Lit. Angl., 63, note.] In any case, we are told that in 1567 the teaching of the Black Rubric was "most diligently declared, published, and impressed upon the people." [Grindal and Horn to Bellinger, Zurich Letters, i. 180.]

But the fact to be noted and ever kept in mind is that the basis of the Elizabethan revision was not the Prayer Book of 1549, but that of 1552. It was felt necessary to put a check on the extreme views then held by many Reformers (intensified as a result of the Marian persecution, and their own sojourn abroad), who would doubtless have soon made very drastic changes. The fact remains, however, that the Elizabethan Prayer Book, based on the second Prayer Book of Edward VI, is to "almost all intents and purposes" (Dr.

Stubbs) our Prayer Book today. Whatever may be our own predilections, we are here confronted with a historical fact which rules the situation. This is the more significant because there is evidence that the choice of the 1552 Prayer Book was the result of deliberation. [Dugdale, Life of Geste, pp. 143, 146-147.] The changes made in the Prayer Book in the Elizabethan revision, even making allowance for the two facts noted above, are so slight that it can be said without any question that the essential doctrinal position of the Prayer Book of 1552 was undoubtedly maintained.

In connection, however, with the revision of Queen Elizabeth's reign, we have to consider the bearing of the Articles on the doctrine of the Holy Communion in the Church of England. The forty-two Articles framed by Cranmer and issued by Royal authority in 1552 were abrogated the same year by the accession of Mary. On Elizabeth's accession the Articles remained in abeyance for some time. In 1563 Convocation sanctioned a revision containing thirty-eight Articles, but subscription could not be enforced, because of the absence of Royal authority.

In 1571 the Queen sanctioned another revision which was accepted by Convocation and passed that year. This revision added one Article (Article XXIX), and these Articles have since remained without alteration. In reference to our present subject we have to consider Articles XXVIII and XXIX. A comparison of the existing Article XXVIII with the corresponding Article XXIX of 1552 shows the following differences: 1. A few verbal differences in the first part and in the last clause. 2.

In the second paragraph the words "overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament" were added. 3. The third section, "The Body of Christ ... is faith," replaced a longer clause stating the impossibility of Christ's body being in many places at one time, and that because Christ had ascended into heaven and remains there, "a faithful man ought not either to believe or openly to confess the real and bodily presence (as they term it) of Christ's flesh and blood in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper."

On this arises the question whether the alteration betokened any change from the "Reformed" doctrine (as distinct from Lutheran) of the 1552 Prayer Book and Article. It must be carefully remembered that the possible change does not involve Roman doctrine as such. The Elizabethan Reformers had no idea of crossing that gulf. The only question is as to an approximation to the Lutheran aspects of Protestant doctrine. It is at least suggestive that this paragraph should be omitted and the "Black Rubric" on the same topic should (from whatever cause) find no place in the Elizabethan Prayer Book.

The matter must be considered in connection with the addition in Elizabeth's reign of our present Article XXIX which was not included in the Forty-two Articles of 1552. There is historical proof that one of the

Elizabethan Bishops (Cheney, of Gloucester) held distinct Lutheran views on the Lord's Supper. He was supported generally by Bishop Geste, who was the author of the new paragraph of the Article about "The body of Christ". Our present Article XXIX was the work of Archbishop Parker, a great admirer of Cranmer and a decided Protestant.

Through him this Article (XXIX) was included in the revision by Convocation in 1563, though it did not appear in any of the printed copies. We may fairly attribute this to the influence of those who favoured a policy of comprehension, and the avoidance of offence to any and all who could see their way to accept a general Protestant position. The matter was thus a subject of controversy, as contemporary evidence shows. Parker was certainly not Lutheran in views, and he opposed Bishops Cheney and Geste.

Cheney could not accept the word "only" in the new paragraph; "The body of Christ is given ... only after a heavenly and spiritual manner," and in order to meet his scruples Geste wished the word omitted, though he himself justified it as simply intended to guard against "the grossness and sensibleness in receiving" Christ's body. Geste also proposed the insertion of the word "profitably" after "received and eaten". Archbishop Parker evidently realized that Article XXVIII would be insufficient as a safeguard against Lutheran doctrine and that something more was needed.

In 1573 he carried his point and our present Article XXIX was added. Geste now admitted the insuperable difference between Lutheran and Church of England doctrine. His testimony is conclusive as to the facts of the case. Instead of gaining his point by the insertion of the word "profitably" in Article XXVIII, the matter was decided against him by the addition of Article XXIX. In view of prevalent misconceptions about Bishop Geste it ought to be added that he was in other respects by no means the type of churchman that some modern writers suggest, and on certain points, such as Adoration, was unmistakably Protestant. [Dugdale, Life of Geste, pp. 116, 147-148.]

The word "given" in the new clause of Article XXVIII is sometimes asserted to prove Lutheran doctrine, but it seems to be forgotten that the explanation "only after a heavenly and spiritual manner" covers the whole phrase "given, taken and eaten". The "gift" must therefore surely be from our Lord Himself, and the reception and eating by means of our faith. The word "given" is thus applied to our Lord not only by Cranmer and Jewel, but also even by men who held the "Reformed" views like Calvin. [Dimock, Eucharistic Presence, p. 732.]

Further, the very phrase of the Article is found in Nowell's smaller Catechism, of whose doctrinal character and position there is no question. "The body and blood of Christ, which in the Lord's Supper are given to the faithful and are by them taken, eaten and drunken, only in a heavenly and spiritual manner, but yet in truth." This is surely conclusive considering the authority of Nowell's two Catechisms (see Canon 79). It has been well pointed out [Dimock, ut supra, p. 740.] that the words "given, taken and eaten" are, and possibly were intended to be, in close agreement with the words of institution in the New Testament; and in opposing Lutheran views the Reformers were not making the gift in the Sacrament less real or efficacious, or the eating and drinking less real or blessed.

Another and weighty proof of the true position of the Church of England on the doctrine of the Presence in the Lord's Supper is the recognition and authority given to Bishop Jewel's Apology (Canon 30 of 1604). The teaching of that work is unmistakable in its difference from the Lutheran position. Is it to be supposed that the Church of England would give its sanction to documents teaching doctrines diametrically opposite? We conclude, therefore, that there was no divergence of view as to the Presence of Christ in the

Holy Communion between the Prayer Book of 1552 and the Articles of 1563 and 1571.

There was no trace whatever of what is called Zwinglianism in the book of 1552, while the doctrine of a spiritual Presence in the whole ordinance was clear and unmistakable. This doctrine was not altered in any respect by the revision of the Prayer Book or Articles in Elizabeth's reign, while the doctrinal position of 1552 as against both Rome and Lutheranism remained untouched. The teaching of the two Articles combined forms a complete whole: 1. The nature of the Lord's Supper - Article XXVIII. (paragraphs 1 and 2). 2.

The method of partaking of the body and blood of Christ - Article XXVIII (paragraph 3). 3. The human instrument - Article XXVIII (paragraph 3). 4. The effect on those who have no faith - Article XXIX.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/the-lords-supper-in-the-prayer-books-of-1562-and-1571/>

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