

The Word Made Flesh: Encountering Christ in Bread and Wine
 Lecture 1, Wednesday, December 5, 2018, St. James Cathedral, Toronto

“Like Eagles in this Life”
Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) and the
Creation of the Prayer Book Holy Communion

Jesse D. Billett, Faculty of Divinity, Trinity College, Toronto
 jesse.billett@utoronto.ca

✠ The burnyng of the Archbishop of Caunterbury Doctor Thomas
 Cranmer, in the Towneditch at Oxforde, with his hand first thrust into the fire, wherewith
 he subscribed before.



1. Anglican monk Dom Gregory Dix imagines Cranmer’s walk to the stake

Zwinglian and papist, he had burned them both at different times, along with miscellaneous Arians and Eutychians and Anabaptists, for their creeds—reluctantly (for he was by nature gentle) but persistently enough. ... And now he was coming to join them himself. One wonders if the thought of them all passed through the old man’s mind as he hurried of his own accord out of S. Mary’s along the Turl to where the stake stood in the Broad outside Balliol—They had all died, almost every one he had ever known—and thousands more unknown—and many others still to die—in these quarrels about the bread and the Body—that could never have blazed so fiercely in England or spread so far but for his work. ... (Here was the stake at last)—This was what it all came to in the end—The bread had nothing to do with the Body—That was what he was dying for.

The Shape of the Liturgy, 2nd ed. (London: Dacre, 1945), 673–74.

2. Cranmer’s eight positive teachings on the Eucharist (1550)

1. As our bodies hunger and thirst for food and drink, so our souls are taught to hunger and thirst for God’s mercy, favour, righteousness, and everlasting salvation.
2. The food and drink that satisfy the soul are the death of Christ, his body and blood, which give us spiritual nourishment.
3. Christ’s body and blood far exceed natural food and drink, for they preserve us forever.
4. The Eucharist makes this invisible spiritual truth evident to our bodily senses, so that “the eating and drinking of this sacramental bread and wine is, as it were, a showing of Christ before our eyes, a smelling of him with our noses, a feeling and groping of him with our

hands, and an eating, chewing, digesting, and feeding upon him to our spiritual strength and perfection.”

5. Christ ordained bread and wine for this sacrament because they aptly represent the spiritual union of all faithful people, as individual grains are joined together in bread and individual grapes in wine.
6. As the bread and wine are digested and made into our flesh and blood, so are all the faithful made one body with Christ.
7. Feeding together at the Lord’s table is the best possible means to kindle love for our neighbours, since in the sacrament we are reminded that Christ gave his life for his enemies.
8. The spiritual food of Christ’s body and blood is not received in the mouth and digested in the stomach, but it is received with a pure heart and a sincere faith.

“What thing then can be more comfortable to us, than to eat this meat and drink this drink? Whereby Christ certifieth us, that we be spiritually and truly fed and nourished by him, and that we dwell in him and he in us. Can this be showed unto us more plainly than when he saith himself, *He that eateth me shall live by me*” [John 6:57].

Summarized from *A Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ* 1.9–16, ed. Charles H. H. Wright (London: Thynne, 1907), 12–27.

3. Cranmer responds to a critic, Dr. Richard Smith (1551)

He belieth me in two things. ... The one is, that I deny the sacrifice of the mass, which in my book have most plainly set out the sacrifice of christian people in the holy communion or mass, ... and yet I have denied that it is a sacrifice propitiatory for sin, or that the priest alone maketh any sacrifice there. For it is the sacrifice of all christian people to remember Christ’s death, to laud and thank him for it, and to publish it and shew it abroad unto other, to his honour and glory. The controversy is not, whether in the holy communion be made a sacrifice or not, ... but whether it be a propitiatory sacrifice or not, and whether only the priest make the said sacrifice.

The other thing wherein Doctor Smith belieth me is this: he saith, that I “deny that we receive in the sacrament that flesh which is adjoined to God’s own Son.” I marvel not a little what eyes Doctor Smith had, when he read over my book. It is like that he had some privy spectacles within his head, wherewith whensoever he looketh, he seeth but what he listeth. For in my book I have written in more than an hundred places, that we receive the self-same body of Christ that was born of the virgin Mary, that was crucified and buried, that rose again, ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty: and the contention is only in the manner and form how we receive it. For I say (as the old holy fathers and martyrs used to say), that we receive Christ spiritually by faith with our minds, eating his flesh and drinking his blood: But this lying papist saith, that we eat his natural body corporally with our mouths; which neither the council Ephesine [AD 431], nor any other ancient council or doctor ever said or thought.

Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer ... Relative to the Lord’s Supper, ed. John Edmund Cox, Parker Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 369–70.

4. The spectrum of belief about the Eucharist in the sixteenth century

<p>Council of Trent <i>Transubstantiation</i></p>	<p>Because that Christ, our Redeemer, declared that which He offered under the species of bread to be truly His own body, therefore has it ever been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy Synod doth now declare it anew, that, by the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood; which conversion is, by the holy Catholic Church, suitably and properly called Transubstantiation.</p>
<p>Martin Luther <i>Objective Ubiquity</i></p>	<p>Why could not Christ confine his body within the substance of bread, just as in the accidents? Fire and iron are two substances; yet they are so mingled in red-hot iron that any part is at once iron and fire. What prevents the glorious body of Christ from being in every part of the substance of the bread?</p> <p>When you hear the word “is,” then do not doubt. ... Christ does not found his sacrament upon our use of it. What he says or ordains remains, no matter whether one uses it rightly or wrongly. The sacrament is the body and blood, as the words say, whether it is received by one who is worthy or unworthy.</p>
<p>John Calvin <i>Symbolic Instrumentalism</i></p>	<p>That sacred communication of his own flesh and blood by which Christ pours his life into us, just as if he were to penetrate into the marrow of our bones, he witnesses and attests in the Supper. And that he does not by putting before us a vain or empty sign, but offering there the efficacy of his Spirit, by which he fulfils his promise. And in truth he offers and displays the thing there signified to all who share that spiritual feast; though only by the faithful is it perceived and its fruits enjoyed. ... If it is true that the visible sign is offered to us to attest the granting of the invisible reality, then, on receiving the symbol of the body, we may be confident that the body is no less given to us.</p>
<p>Heinrich Bullinger <i>Symbolic Parallelism</i></p>	<p>Therefore the signs acquire the names of things because they are mystical signs of sacred things, and because the signs and the things signified are sacramentally joined together; ... For the water, bread, and wine are not common, but holy signs. And ... he who commanded the bread to be eaten and the wine to be drunk in the supper did not want the faithful to receive only bread and wine without any mystery as they eat bread in their homes; but that they should spiritually partake of the things signified, and by faith be truly cleansed from their sins, and partake of Christ.</p>
<p>Huldrych Zwingli <i>Symbolic Memorialism</i></p>	<p>We maintain that everything depends on one syllable, namely on this word “is,” which does not always, we know, have the meaning “to be,” but sometimes ‘to signify’. ... The meaning is then as follows: “Take and eat; what I now ask you to do will signify to you, or remind you of my body which is given for you.” ... The meaning of the words of Christ will then be clearly revealed. This supper signifies or is a sign, through which you are reminded that the body of the Son of God, your Lord and Master, was given for you.</p>

5. Transubstantiation: three possible meanings of “substance” (St. Thomas Aquinas)

1. the form, i.e., the quiddity, “whatness,” the principle of definition of anything.
2. the matter, i.e., the stuff of which anything is made.
3. the unity of form and matter, the concrete entity.

Summarized in an unpublished note written in 2010 by the late Fr. Robert D. Crouse.

6. Cranmer against a “carnal” presence of Christ (Debate in the Lords, Dec. 14–18, 1548)

They [the wicked] are not fed because they dwell not in him. It was ordained to be eaten of them that have everlasting life. But [for those who believe in a “carnal” presence] ... it is also comfortless while it is his body, for, as soon as you tear the bread with your teeth (they say) the body flies to heaven, for it may suffer no such wrong. And while it is in the bread we have no comfort; (some others say) the body tarrieth in the bread till it come to the stomach, and then ascends into heaven, for it may suffer no wrong of digestion. The body that the just receive continueth still. Our faith is not to believe him to be in the bread and wine, but that he is in heaven; this is proven by Scripture and Doctors, till the Bishop of Rome’s usurped power came in. Then no man drinketh Christ or eateth him, except he dwell in Christ and Christ in him. . . .

The bread we break is his body even as the cup is his blood. . . . It was natural bread, but now no common bread for it is separated to another use. Because of the use it may be called bread of life. That which you see is bread and wine. But that which you believe is the body of Christ. We must believe that there is bread and the body.

Francis Aidan Gasquet and Edmund Bishop, *Edward VI and the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Hodges, 1890), 400–401, 442.

7. Cranmer on three manners of Christ’s presence (1550)

Although Christ in his human nature substantially, really, corporally, naturally and sensibly, be present with his Father in heaven, yet sacramentally and spiritually he is here present. For in water, bread, and wine, he is present as in signs and sacraments, but he is indeed spiritually in the faithful Christian people, which according to Christ’s ordinance be baptized, or receive the holy communion, or unfeignedly believe in him.

Defence 1.17, ed. Wright, 32.

8. Cranmer on the “mutation” of the bread and wine (1550)

This mutation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, is a spiritual mutation, and that outwardly nothing is changed. But as outwardly we eat the bread and drink the wine with our mouths, so inwardly by faith we spiritually eat the very flesh and drink the very blood of Christ.

Defence 2.5, ed. Wright, 51.

9. The bread and wine are not bare signs: approach them worthily!

Do I say in my book that, that those which come to the Lord’s table do “eat nothing else but bare bread made of corn, nor drink nothing but mere wine made of grapes?” how often do I teach and repeat again and again, that as corporally with our mouths we eat and drink the sacramental bread and wine, so spiritually with our hearts, by faith, do we eat Christ’s very flesh, and drink

his very blood, and do both feed and live at his Father's right hand! ...

Wherefore "every man," as St Paul saith, "must examine himself," when he shall approach to that holy table, and not come to God's board as he would do to common feasts and banquets; but we must consider that it is a mystical table, wherein we be taught that we spiritually feed upon Christ, eating him and drinking him, and as it were sucking out of his side the blood of our redemption and food of eternal salvation, although he be in heaven at his Father's right hand. And whosoever cometh unto this heavenly table, not having regard to Christ's flesh and blood, who should be there our spiritual food, but cometh thereto without faith, fear, humility, and reverence, as it were to carnal feeding, he doth not there feed upon Christ, but the devil doth feed upon him, and devoureth him, as he did Judas.

Writings and Disputations, ed. Cox, 373.

10. Cranmer's Last Word on the Sacrament (Disputation at Oxford, April 16, 1554)

We should consider, not what they [the bread and wine] be in their own nature, but what they import to us and signify; and should understand the sacrament, not carnally, but spiritually; and should attend, not to the visible nature of the sacraments, neither have respect only to the outward bread and cup, thinking to see there with our eyes no other things but only bread and wine; but that, lifting up our minds, we should look up to the blood of Christ with our faith, should touch him with our mind, and receive him with our inward man; and that, **being like eagles in this life, we should fly up to heaven in our hearts, where the Lamb is resident at the right hand of the Father**, which taketh away the sins of the world; by whose stripes we are made whole; by whose passion we are filled at his table; and whose blood we receiving out of his holy side, do live for ever; being made the guests of Christ, having him dwelling in us through the grace of his true nature, and through the virtue and efficacy of his whole passion; being no less assured and certified that we are fed spiritually unto eternal life by Christ's flesh crucified, and by his blood shed, the true food of our minds, than our bodies be fed with meat and drink in this life: and hereof this said mystical bread on the table of Christ, and the mystical wine, being administered and received after the institution of Christ, be to us a memorial, a pledge, a token, a sacrament, and a seal. And thereof is it that Christ saith not thus, "This is my body; eat ye:" but after he had bidden them eat, then he said, "This is my body which shall be given for you." Which is to mean, as though he should say, "In eating of this bread, consider you that this bread is no common thing, but a mystical matter; neither do you attend that which is set before your bodily eyes, but what feedeth you within. Consider and behold my body crucified for you; that eat and digest in your minds. Chaw you upon my passion, be fed with my death. This is the true meat, this is the drink that moisteneth, wherewith you being truly fed and inebriate shall live for ever. The bread and the wine which be set before your eyes are only declarations of me, but I myself am the eternal food. Wherefore, whensoever at this my table you shall behold the sacraments, have not regard so much to them, as consider ye what I promise to you by them, which is myself, to be meat for you of eternal life."

Writings and Disputations, ed. Cox, 398–99.

11. Development of the Prayer Book Holy Communion

1548 Order of Communion	1549 BCP	1552 BCP
<p>[Whole of Sarum Mass to after Priest's Communion]</p> <p>Exhortation Warning to depart</p> <p>Invitation Confession Absolution Comfortable Words Prayer of Humble Access Administration ("The body/blood")</p> <p>Blessing</p>	<p>Exhortation</p> <p>Offertory Sentences Preface and Sanctus/Benedictus Eucharistic Prayer <i>*Intercession for the living</i> <i>*"Consecration"</i> <i>*"Oblation"</i></p> <p>Lord's Prayer Christ our Paschal Lamb Invitation Confession Absolution Comfortable Words Prayer of Humble Access Administration ("The body/blood") Agnus Dei Postcommunion Sentences <i>*Thanksgiving</i></p> <p>Blessing</p>	<p>Offertory sentences <i>*Intercession for the Living</i> Exhortation</p> <p>Invitation Confession Absolution Comfortable Words</p> <p>Preface and Sanctus Prayer of Humble Access <i>*"Consecration"</i> Administration ("Take and eat")</p> <p>Lord's Prayer <i>*"Oblation" or</i> <i>*Thanksgiving</i></p> <p>Glory be to God on High Blessing</p>

12. Words of Administration

1549 The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.

1552 Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thin heart by faith with thanksgiving.

Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for thee, and be thankful.

13. Scriptural sources of the “Prayer of Consecration” (1552)

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, which of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ	God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son (John 3:16)
to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption;	That Christ should suffer (Acts 3:18). Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). Having made peace through the blood of his cross (Col. 1:20). In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7)
who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered)	Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin (Isa. 53:10). Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many (Heb. 9:28). We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:10)
a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction,	This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God (Heb. 10:12). For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are being sanctified (Heb. 10:14).
for the sins of the whole world;	He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).
and did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory	This do in remembrance of me (Luke 22:19).
of that his precious death, until his coming again:	For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord’s death till he come (1 Cor. 11:26).
Hear us, O merciful Father, we 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,	Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me . This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me (1 Cor. 11:24–25)
may be partakers of his most blessed Body and Blood:	The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? the bread which we break [<i>NB: it’s still bread!</i>], is it not the communion of the body of Christ? for we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread (1 Cor. 10:16–17).
who, in the same night that he was betrayed . . .	The Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed . . . (1 Cor. 11:23).

14. Structure of the 1552/1662 Holy Communion: A “Reformation” Reading

I. General Preparation for Communion

<i>Repentance/Guilt</i>	Commandments to Collect
<i>Faith/Grace</i>	Epistle, Gospel, Creed
<i>Charity/Gratitude</i>	Offertory, General Intercession

II. Immediate Preparation for Communion

<i>Repentance/Guilt</i>	Exhortation, Confession
<i>Faith/Grace</i>	Absolution, Comfortable Words
<i>Charity/Gratitude</i>	“Lift up your hearts,” Preface, “Holy, holy, holy”

III. Celebration of Communion

<i>Repentance/Guilt</i>	Prayer of Humble Access
<i>Faith/Grace</i>	Consecration, Reception
<i>Charity/Gratitude</i>	Lord’s Prayer, Self-oblation/Thanksgiving, “Glory be”

Summarized from: Gavin Dunbar, “Like Eagles in This Life: A Theological Reflection on ‘The Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion’ in the Prayer Books of 1559 and 1662,” in *The Book of Common Prayer, Past Present and Future: A 350th Anniversary Celebration*, ed. Prudence Dailey (London: Continuum, 2011), 85–105.