

'Here we offer you a spiritual sacrifice' - an estimate

The new prayer book recently approved by General Synod contains several alternative prayers of consecration, in one of which, with the elements of bread and wine before him, the priest prays:

here we offer you a spiritual sacrifice.

Further, prior to this the prayer contains an epiclesis or invocation (a calling down of the Holy Spirit onto the elements):

by the power of your Word and Holy Spirit, sanctify this bread and wine, that we who share in this holy sacrament may be partakers of Christ's body and blood.

Finally, the prayer sees the rite as being both a petition for salvation and actually conferring saving benefits. The Preface states:

it is . . . our salvation, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks [offer eucharist] to you, . . .;

and after the offering of the sacrifice:

In your grace and mercy, bring us to the joy of your eternal kingdom with all the company of the redeemed.

What estimate may we make of this, new, and already controversial inclusion in the prayer book?

It is necessary to preface my paper by saying that my estimate of the meaning of this prayer of consecration is not in any way intended to reflect adversely on those who made the decision to include it in APBA. Courses of action taken at a national level in a denomination such as ours inevitably spring from a multiplicity of important factors. It seems to me that examination of these is better done when distance and time allow a greater degree of impartiality. Suffer the historians at a later date to assign praise or blame according to their own lights!

This paper is written with three assumptions. First, because Christian liturgy is for edification (1 Cor 14 - which Cranmer appeals to in his *Preface*), it ought of divine necessity be a clear exposition of the teaching of the Bible. It is therefore the duty of those involved in writing and publishing liturgy to show that it is a clear exposition of the gospel; this by the nature of the case may neither be assumed or asserted, but ought be demonstrated. Secondly, it is assumed that because liturgy is a public document within the Christian Church, it is not good enough to place private interpretations on it; any fair interpretation must be against the community of ideas which distinguish the long and recent histories of Christian liturgy and against the commonsense canons of English grammar and syntax, and against commonsense interpretations of the meaning of symbolic actions. Thirdly, compelled by Christian love, we ought take responsibility for fellow Christians who read liturgy in ways which cloud the teaching of the Bible. For the spiritual good of that brother or sister we ought strive actively to exclude those interpretations. If at the end of that process our brothers continue to interpret liturgy in a way which clouds the gospel, then because it is a matter of his or her perverse interpretation it is no longer our responsibility.

For reasons explored below, on the matter of the new prayer I have come to a gloomy conclusion. Immediate context, wording and the long history of liturgical practice we exist in as Anglicans make it unambiguously a return to the pre-Reformation notion of the Lord's Supper or Eucharist as a sacrifice, a true re-presentation, a true re-offering of Christ's sacrifice which he offered, once and for all on our behalf to the Father, on the first Good Friday.

Six observations have lead me to this conclusion. After outlining these observations, I will urge that Cranmer's evangelical arguments against the notion of a re-offering of Christ are still true and relevant.

May I suggest that access to a copy of the disputed prayer of consecration, entitled, Holy Communion Second Order Proposed Additional Great Thanksgiving, and to the prayer of consecration in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer would be useful. The prayer in 1662 is exactly that of the reformed Prayer Book of Thomas Cranmer of 1552.

1. Eucharistic sacrifice in the early and medieval Church

From the 3rd century to the Reformation period, the sacrificial re-offering of Christ was the normal way of understanding the rite of Holy Communion or Eucharist. Cyprian (d.258), Cyril of Jerusalem (315-86) and Chrysostom (347-407) are early and influential exponents of this view. They speak quite clearly of the Eucharist being: a re-offering of 'Christ as victim', 'the holy and most awful sacrifice, a 'sacrifice of propitiation' identical with the one the Lord himself offered at the Last Supper and on the cross, and for the salvation of the living and the dead.

Chrysostom makes it clear that the whole action of the Eucharist takes place in the heavenly, the spiritual sphere. In the philosophical world Chrysostom inhabited, he does not mean that eucharistic sacrifice is a metaphor, but that it is *really* happening.

2. The Book of Common Prayer and 'eucharistic sacrifice'

The English and Continental Reformers, responsible for our 39 Articles and Book of Common Prayer, without ambiguity repudiated any notion of sacrificial re-offering of Christ as a denial of the New Testament's teaching of the once and for all nature of Christ's death on the cross. They called it a blasphemy. Hence, they relentlessly removed *all* sacrificial language from the prayer of consecration in the Eucharist with respect to what *we* do, and reserved it to describe Christ's once and for all, unrepeatable sacrifice on the cross. Therefore, to reinsert sacrificial language back into the prayer of consecration, as APBA has done, is to clearly signal an affirmation of what the Reformers denied.

A Church which is in historical continuity with the main stream Churches, as the Anglican Church is, does not write its liturgies in a vacuum but against a tradition which gives meaning to what we write. We cannot in good faith ignore that meaning and still claim we belong to a community of ideas.

3. Does 'spiritual' add anything to 'sacrifice'?

Does the use of 'spiritual' to qualify 'sacrifice' change or significantly modify the nature of eucharistic sacrifice as a re-immolation? 'Re-immolation' is the technical term for the re-sacrificing of Christ as a real victim in the Eucharist. No, the Church has always asserted that the re-immolation of Christ is spiritual. Thus Cyril also calls it 'the spiritual sacrifice, the unbloody service'. In contrast to the sacrificial activity of the Old Testament priesthood, Chrysostom calls Jesus death 'the spiritual sacrifice'. If 'spiritual' is applicable to the altar of the cross, so then to altar in the Church. In his epiclesis asking for the bread to become 'the precious body of Christ', Chrysostom refers to the Eucharist as 'this spiritual and unbloody worship.' Nearly 1200 years later the Roman Catholic Council of Trent makes the same point about the Mass being spiritual using the traditional language of 'unbloody': Christ is 'immolated in an unbloody manner'.

In the history of the notion of eucharistic sacrifice then, 'spiritual' has two meanings. It means, against any crude notions of physicality, 'not-material' (even though 'real', 'true', 'substantial'), and 'properly acceptable to God'.

4. A reference to 'spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving'?

Against our long history of liturgical theory and practice, the word 'spiritual' in the prayer of consecration cannot be a reference to the idea of a Christian's spiritual sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving and penitence that we find in 1 Peter 2:5, Hebrews 13:8-16 and Psalm 51:15-17. These we make in response to a salvation already accomplished and freely given on the cross.

To avoid any confusion with Christ's own sacrifice at Golgotha, the writers of the Book of Common Prayer always clearly spelt out the content of a Christian's spiritual sacrifices: ones of praise, thanksgiving and penitence. Further, they placed the prayers containing such explicit descriptions of a Christian's spiritual sacrifices *after* the prayer of consecration.

Against the history of liturgy, if we wish to invoke the meaning Cranmer gives to 'spiritual sacrifice' in the Book of Common Prayer, then we need to do what he did: remove all notions of eucharistic sacrifice from the prayer of consecration, and explicate what we mean by spiritual sacrifice (as the offering of praise, etc), and place it outside the prayer of consecration and in a position which makes it only responsive to that grace of God which was accomplished once and for all on the first Good Friday. The disputed prayer of consecration in APBA does none of this.

5. Are we offering 'ourselves as spiritual sacrifices'?

Neither, as some have already claimed, can 'spiritual sacrifice' be a veiled reference to a Christian's self-offering as a 'spiritual (or more literally 'reasonable') sacrifice' of Romans 12:1 and 1 Peter 2:5. As well as the history of liturgy not allowing it, English grammar and syntax will not allow it.

'To offer' is a transitive verb; for it to be used reflexively it needs to be qualified by a reflexive pronoun, as in 'we offer ourselves'. Further, 'offer' as a reflexive requires the same number for subject and (reflexive) object; as in, 'he offers himself', 'they offer themselves'. The prayer of consecration in APBA, as well as not having a reflexive pronoun, has a plural subject, 'we', and a singular object, 'a sacrifice'.

6. The supporting notion of 'real presence'

The Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation does not need to be in a liturgy for it to teach the eucharistic re-sacrifice of Christ.

However, eucharistic liturgies teaching re-sacrifice have, as far as I can trace them, always come out of theological cultures which believe that Christ is 'really and substantially' present in the Eucharistic rite, especially at or after the prayer of consecration. Notions of real presence give logical force to notions of re-sacrifice, although the idea of re-sacrifice may stand alone.

Cranmer, and the majority of the Reformers with the interesting exception of Luther, denied outright that Christ was 'really and substantially' present, but only 'truly and spiritually'.

Liturgies teaching the re-sacrifice of Christ signalled a doctrine of real presence in a number of ways - from the rite as a whole, how it is performed, to particular elements in it. Amongst the latter, three of these are present in APBA - the words of administration, *The body (or blood) of Christ keep you in eternal life*; after the prayer of consecration singing the ancient hymn, *Oh lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us*; and the epiclesis or invocation in the prayer of consecration itself.

All of these were deliberately excluded by Cranmer, but have been brought back by the Second Order of Holy Communion in APBA, and in that reappearance, give the same logical force to the notion of objective sacrifice as do the ancient liturgies.

Hence, the reintroduction by APBA of an epiclesis further makes the reference to 'sacrifice' unambiguous. Because as a Church of Historical Christendom we live in a matrix of signs and meanings created and nurtured by our liturgical traditions, a return to that which the Reformation settlement rejected is to also embrace the pre-Reformation theological understanding of the rejected items.

Cranmer's evangelical arguments against 'eucharistic sacrifice'

The 1662 Book of Common Prayer is, with only a few changes, (and none in the prayer of consecration) the prayer book of 1552 which was carefully crafted by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer to as accurately as possible reflect evangelical teachings. This did not come without great struggle! Between the abortive first attempt at a Book of Common Prayer in 1549, which suffered so much at the hands of a committee, and the definitive reformed prayer book of 1552, Cranmer wrote his *Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament* (1550). The immediate opponent Cranmer answers is the Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner, who so learnedly attacked Cranmer's evangelical teachings on the Lord's Supper and defended the traditional catholic doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice.

In his *Defence*, Cranmer stands in line with the humanist and Reformation approach to theological problems through a simple exegesis of the text of scripture. In this simple biblicist way, Cranmer points out that the Bible does not say what traditional church teachings say about the Lord's Supper and the death of Christ, and that those same traditional teachings deny what the Bible actually says. Thus Cranmer is in the main stream of Reformation thought when he advances four major reasons for rejecting any notion of objective sacrifice properly belonging in the Lord's Supper:

- i. the sufficiency for all history of God's action through the cross in history
- ii. the sufficiency of faith, in the light of the sufficiency of the cross, as the only proper response to the cross which embraces all the benefits of that cross
- iii. as well as by passing the sufficiency of the cross and of faith, the re-sacrificing of Christ is a crude and monstrous fiction in itself
- iv. the sufficiency of Christ's perfect priesthood terminates all propitiatory priesthood or ministry, and leaves us only with a desacralised ministry in which as 'common servants' the ministers assist their fellow Christians in all-of-us together offering exactly the same spiritual sacrifices that the New Testament enjoins: praise, thanksgiving, penitence

The depth and warmth of Cranmer's evangelical theology is evident as he explains his objections, and if you can get your hands on a copy, the fifth section of *Defence* is worth reading in full. Towards the end of his objections, Cranmer breaks into an impassioned prayer, which demonstrates the centrality of 'justification by faith alone' in his rebuttal of the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice:

Almighty God, the Father of light and truth, banish all such darkness and error out of his church, with the authors and teachers thereof, or else convert their hearts unto him, and give this light of faith to every man, that he may trust to have remission of his sins, and be delivered from eternal death and hell, by the merit only of the death and blood of Christ; and that by his own faith every man may apply the same unto himself, and not take it at the appointment of popish priests, by the merit of sacrifices and oblations!

If we be indeed, as we profess, christian men, we may ascribe this honour and glory to no man, but to Christ alone. Wherefore let us give the whole laud and praise hereof unto him; let us fly only to him for succour; let us hold him fast and hang upon him, and give ourselves wholly to him. . .

Cranmer insists on holding to these evangelical teachings even if the Church Fathers can be shown to have denied them by some aspects of their understanding of the Eucharist. 'I do not fully allow Lombard's judgments in all matters', he wrote. Why? The larger reasons for this I will return to after looking at the modern Anglican context.

Modern Anglican Context

It may be objected that this is all very interesting historically speaking, but some 400 years have passed since the Reformation. However, the history of Anglican liturgy in the 20th century shows that a catholic interpretation of the disputed prayer is not just dependent on debates and ways of thinking long gone. In sum, the Anglican communion has been moving back apace to catholic notions of eucharistic sacrifice.

In Colin Buchanan's series of three books tracing changes in Anglican liturgies from 1958 to 1984, can be seen a sweeping move towards notions of eucharistic sacrifice, ie. in the real and objective sense.¹ For purposes of expressing eucharistic sacrifice, a subcommittee of Lambeth 1958 had recommended the phrase: 'we offer our praise and thanksgiving for Christ's sacrifice for us *and so present it again*, and ourselves in him, before the Father [emphasis mine].'² Buchanan's interest was in the effect on liturgy of this recommendation. He notes that in the period 1958-68 only three totally new rites introduced oblations - in Africa, Wales and New Zealand. Anglican Churches in the United States of America, Brazil, Hong Kong, and Scotland all conserved inherited oblations.²

'Oblation' is a synonym for 'offering'. What is being offered? Various things are proposed: the bread and wine, ourselves and the Church. How are they being offered? They are being offered in and with Christ's original and continued offering to the Father, and in the representation of Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharist.

As we have seen with Cranmer, the Protestant Reformers denied the legitimacy of describing the Eucharist, and especially the elements of bread and wine, as an oblation, on the ground that to do so detracted from the uniqueness of Christ's offering. The death of Christ, and the sacrament of that death, is a movement from above down; God offers himself to us, not we too God; Christ sacrifices himself to the Father, not us to the Father. Our responses, which are responses to this act of sheer grace, lie on the other side this great act, lie on this side of Pentecost. More recent argument has made the same point. In the extensive discussions which followed Lambeth 1958, leading English evangelicals quite rightly pointed out that the New Testament does not at all depict Christ in his heavenly session continuously re-offering himself to the Father for our sins, but praying for us. In fact, Hebrews emphasises that Christ's self-offering at Golgotha was not only unique, but also a decisively *completed* action. Earlier, in the 1940's, the leading Anglo-catholic liturgiologist, Dom Gregory Dix, quite rightly exhorted his fellow Anglo-catholics *not* to incorporate any of our offerings in the eucharistic re-presentation of Christ's death, that is, in the eucharistic sacrifice, because to mix our offerings with Christ's was semi-pelagianism. In regard to the relationship in liturgy of our oblations and Christ's, it is a commonplace in liturgical scholarship to point out that Cranmer would only countenance three sacrifices: of the once and for all sacrifice of Christ, of our praise and thanksgiving, and of ourselves; and he strove to keep the first distinct from the latter two. Returning to Lambeth and its aftermath, the use of forms from 1549, and the emergence of the new emphases placed on *anamnesis* (see below), these oblations in new Anglican liturgies re-present Christ's sacrifice.

Anamnesis is a Greek word which can be translated as 'memorial'. It has become a technical term to refer to that part of the prayer of consecration in which we 'remember' the events of the first Lord's Supper. Modern liturgical writings in the catholic tradition have emphasised that 'to remember' does not mean to recall a past and absent deed or person, but to make that past event or person objectively present. When this understanding of 'remembrance' is deliberately linked with a concept of 'offering' in the Eucharist, then *anamnesis* very much strengthens the notion that in the Eucharist we are objectively re-offering or re-presenting the death of Christ at Golgotha.

In the period 1968 to 1975, Buchanan notes further moves towards oblations in new liturgies in England, Scotland, Canada, South Africa, North and South India, South East Asia, Korea, and

¹ *Modern Anglican Liturgies, 1958-1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); *Further Anglican Liturgies 1968-1975* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1975); and *Latest Anglican Liturgies, 1976-1984* (London: SPCK/Alcuin Club, 1985). The later is supplemented by his, *Anglican Eucharistic Liturgy, 1975-1985* (Bramcote: Grove, 1985).

² *1958-1968*, 19-20.

Melanesia.³ Of course, some of these are following liturgical traditions which predate the 1960's. Further, more overtly objective notions of sacrifice are confined to new liturgies in Canada,⁴ the United States,⁵ South Africa,⁶ Scotland,⁷ Korea⁸ and Melanesia.⁹ The latter two he estimates, 'reflect an older (and quite undefensive) catholicism'.¹⁰ Given Buchanan's reluctance in these books to make doctrinal judgments, and silence from this point on, his estimate of Korea and Melanesia is significant. Finally, from 1976 to 1984, England,¹¹ the West Indies,¹² and Nigeria,¹³ all move to objective oblations. Standing outside this trend are notably, the relatively diminutive Church of Ireland, and the sizeable Anglican Church of Australia.¹⁴ The alternative prayer of consecration approved in Australia in 1995 thus marks, on my reading and that of its more catholic proponents in General Synod, a paradigmatic shift away from the outlook of the reformed Prayer Book of Thomas Cranmer. This effectively marks the end of a process in the Anglican Communion which in its modern dress dates from 1958.

Does it matter in Australia in the present day?

Why, for all his admiration of and appeal to them, was Cranmer prepared to distance himself from the Church fathers in matters of liturgy?

Behind the biblicism of the catch-cry, 'Bible alone', lay a whole new world. The evangelical Reformation grasped from the teaching of the New Testament, that God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit works *directly* and *personally* in the world through his word of promise, the gospel, and the response which God demands to that is faith, 'faith alone', in which faith we are united to Christ and receive all his benefits.

In contrast to this, for a number of philosophical reasons most of the earlier Church believed that grace is indirect, and must be mediated through things. Grace flows down from God, through Christ to the earthly Church via the priestly performance of sacraments.

The genius of the Reformers was to see that this older view (and still important in much contemporary thinking) had of pressing necessity to give way to the promise of God that he works directly and personally amongst us by his word of the Gospel and his accompanying Spirit. The earlier Church's understanding of Christ's work, as faithful to Holy Scripture as it was, could no longer be accommodated to a sacramental and hierarchical philosophy. The reverse had to happen, our understanding of the sacramental had to conform to the way the New Testament gospel described God's work, that is, to justification by faith alone.

And the same central truth of the Christian gospel is at stake today as it was in Cranmer's day: justification by faith alone. We do not participate in the one, unique offering of Christ on Golgotha by sacramental action, but by faith alone. To pursue the former idea is monstrous, as Cranmer saw. Sacramental actions must unambiguously be subordinated to the truth of justification by faith alone, or witness to another Christ, and another way he has promised to work in the world other than by Word and Spirit.

³ 1968-75, 20-22.

⁴ Refer, 1968-75, 116-117.

⁵ 1968-75, 146-7.

⁶ 1968-75, 209, 223.

⁷ 1968-75, 71-78.

⁸ 1968-75, 307-311.

⁹ 1968-75, 385-6.

¹⁰ 1968-75, 22.

¹¹ 1976-1984, 10-13, 41-2.

¹² 1976-1984, 171-3.

¹³ 1976-1984, 200-201.

¹⁴ In the way he marshals evidence, Buchanan knows that he is drawing a long-bow by reading Second Series in *An Australian Prayer Book* (1978) in terms of it having an epiclesis and an objective oblation. Refer, *Eucharistic Liturgies*, 20-1; 1976-1984, 208.

What we have in the disputed prayer of consecration in APBA is the same clash between two rival views of spiritual reality. If we believe that the Bible teaches what Cranmer thought it teaches, then that prayer is not acceptable in an evangelical context, because, at best, it clouds the teaching of the Bible, and at worst, denies it. Clear biblical exposition of gospel is the first and determinative duty of Christian liturgy.

(The full version of this paper is called: Expressing the Heart of the Gospel)

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