

# Cranmer's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper in its Gospel Context

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## Introduction

Cranmer was murdered by the Roman Catholic Church and its allies at Court because of his doctrine of the Supper. His trial focused upon his refusal to acknowledge transubstantiation and the propitiatory sacrifice of the priest for the living and the dead. By the time he was brought to trial under Mary Tudor he had become a master of the subject, and it might be fair to say that the Supper had become his area of speciality. He had become convinced that the Roman doctrine was blasphemous in the extreme, and that it seriously undermined the teaching of the Bible and the early Fathers. He had come to believe that the Pope was an antichrist for his preposterous claims of absolute sovereignty over every and any human power and authority, whether secular or religious, thereby exalting himself above Christ's absolute kingship; and that he headed a newly invented religion smuggled into Christianity within the last five hundred years or so.

He is rightly thought by many to be a liturgical genius, even by those who do not by any stretch of the imagination share his faith. The purpose of this article is to show what the theological wellsprings of his eucharistic theology were, and to explain it as he himself understood it. The religion of the Reformation is in many ways a foreign country to modern evangelicals, because it is diametrically opposed to present ideas of orthodoxy on most of the key points. For example, on the doctrine of man, free will and predestination, the sovereignty of God, justification by faith, decisionism, and the efficacy or otherwise of the sacraments, the Reformation took its stand elsewhere.

For this reason, Part 1 of this article deals with the main points of Cranmer's theology, without which his doctrine of the Supper would be almost unintelligible. Having established the theological world within which the Supper is placed, I will then explain the sacrament itself by following the points and thread of his own argument in his *A Defence of the True and Catholick Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ*.

To Cranmer the Catholic Church was the church of the New Testament and the early Patristic period. The true Catholic Church in any age is the church that finds itself in doctrinal agreement with it. The Roman Church had ceased to be a part of that communion through its innovations regarding the papacy and the mass. I have not focussed upon the controversy with the Papacy and the doctrines of transubstantiation and the propitiatory sacrifice of the mass, because the purpose of this paper is primarily to discuss Cranmer's own theology of the Supper. This paper is devoted to the first twenty-eight pages of his book where he sets out the entire doctrine of the Supper, and the reader may at his leisure study the other two hundred and thirty pages that demolish the arguments of his Roman Catholic opponents.

### **Part 1 – The Supper in its Gospel Context**

Cranmer was a thoroughgoing Augustinian. He combined the doctrine of the fall, the absolute sovereignty of God, and a sacramental doctrine of the application of salvation to the chosen – classical Augustinianism – with the Reformation rediscovery that justification is by faith alone apart from works of merit. His service of the Lord's Supper expresses the purpose of God the Father in sending the Son to earth; the purpose of the Lord's incarnation and atoning death upon the cross; and the way that the benefits of the cross are applied to man.

### **The Captivity of Man**

In these days of the overwhelming acceptance within the church of Darwin-like ideas of the extreme age of the earth and the theory of evolution, it is important to recognise that the Reformer's theology was rooted in an historical reading of Genesis. Cranmer believed that the misery of man was a direct result of the sinful act of the first man, Adam, in eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, about four thousand years before the birth of Christ.

He had an holistic understanding of world history, beginning with a six day creation, Adam and his sin, culminating in the obedience of Jesus Christ upon the cross, who came to earth to undo what Adam had done, and establish the kingdom of the age to come. His theology can only make sense within the bounds of this understanding of history. Apart from it Cranmer's theology and liturgy are ripped entirely out of their proper setting within salvation history,

and rendered meaningless. If there was no Adam and no original transgression, then Christ's death was pointless.

Cranmer believed that man is born in a state of total spiritual sinfulness as a result of Adam's rebellion. This does not mean that man is as wicked as he can be, but that he is entirely enslaved by sin to the full extent of his nature. This is, of course, the doctrine of original sin. The consequence is that man's will is by no means free, but entirely under the ruling power of indwelling sin and the devil, having no power or inclination to free itself from its spiritual bondage.

**Article IX:** Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek, *pornea sarkos*, (which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh), is not subject to the Law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized; yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.

How then, is a man freed from the enslaving power of indwelling sin? It is certainly not by 'making a decision for Christ', as a popular modern view of conversion goes, because the unregenerate man has no power within himself to turn towards God or even to prepare himself to turn. In common with Augustine and the Reformers of his day, he denied the doctrine of free will as being contrary to Scripture and experience.

**Article X:** The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith; and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing (going before; preparing) us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

He believed that a man is freed from the ruling power of sin within, and the tyranny of the devil over him externally, by the free grace of God alone, through faith.

### Justification by Faith

The Medieval Church taught that man attained the remission of sins through a combined effort of human free will, good works, and the sacraments of the church. Their position is much more subtle than is commonly realised. It acknowledged that grace is by definition unmerited, so that saving grace is initially mediated through baptism to a sinner without reference to works at all. After that, however, a man bobbed into and out of a state of grace. When he sinned he fell, but then retrieved the state of forgiveness by means of the sacrament of penance, or confession to a priest. This justification consisted only of the remission of sins, but it did not have the power to make a man forensically righteous before God. Righteousness had to be earned by actively co-operating with God's grace by means of good works, indulgences, beads, pilgrimages, the sacraments of the church, and most importantly, by submission to the Bishop of Rome.

All of the means of grace were at the disposal of the Roman Pontiff, without exception, and they could therefore only be had from him and his appointed ministers. Justification was the culmination of a life-long process of works working with grace, and could only be granted to those who had become righteous in themselves. In other words, in order to be declared righteous by God on Judgement Day, you actually had to be righteous, not a sinner. Christ had become the saviour of the righteous, not sinners. This is of course justification by faith and works, with works as the main ingredient.

Men began to see the enormity of the Papacy's pretensions after Martin Luther, a German Augustinian monk and Doctor of the Church, began to read and study the Bible in the original Greek. He found that God grants the remission of sins by faith alone apart from any work of merit whatsoever, whether found in the Law of God or the traditions and commandments of men, the Pope not excluded. Justification is granted by God to all who with a true faith believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. More than that, justification, the remission of sins, is not just a clearing of the charge sheet, leaving a blank page to be filled with works in order to be found righteous on the Last Day. It includes the imputation of righteousness as well as the remission of sins. Remission and the imputation of righteousness are inseparable and always come together, because they are two aspects of the same thing.

The righteousness imputed in justification must not be confused with inward regeneration, the new heart and mind. It is the imputation of a new status before God, no longer being considered a law-breaker, having one's sins and transgressions not being taken into account. In short, justification is a full reconciliation with God that leaves nothing out.

Once this simple fact is grasped, it renders all the pelfry of the medieval church entirely null and utterly void. What need is there then for indulgences, pilgrimages, dispensations from the Pope, and the treasury of saintly merit? By faith one is in full possession of everything needed for peace with God. What need is there then for a Pope to grant remission of sins when God himself has done so in full, for the entirety of one's life, and at no financial cost whatever to oneself? Why buy remission of sins for money when Christ has bought it with his blood?

The Papacy was a huge money-making and money-laundering scam. The Pope had abrogated to himself the powers of God, and in so doing, he had entirely obscured the saving knowledge of the gospel. The Pope had put himself in the seat of Christ by claiming to have the sole power to remit sin, and by charging money for it. He saw it as a sort of exclusive franchise that had been granted to him and him alone.

Justification by faith alone apart from works of merit was a huge breakthrough in the proper understanding of the gospel. It revolutionised Europe because it exposed the papacy for the ignorant, blasphemous, impious, arrogant, and profiteering lie that it was. Thanks to Brother Martin this scriptural knowledge and its contemporary application spread like wild-fire throughout Europe and England, where it found fertile soil.

Cranmer was born into a pre-Reformation, dark, medieval England, in thrall to the superstitious religion of the West. When Luther's teaching reached England it slowly took root in the face of fierce opposition, until it had persuaded the leading men of the realm, and finally, the King, Henry VIII, himself. After Henry broke with the Papacy, and Cranmer became his Archbishop, it was due to his careful and patient teaching that the Monarch was finally brought to a saving faith in Christ through the knowledge of the remission of his sins.

When Henry was dying he did not ask for the sacrament of extreme unction, which he would have done, had he still retained his original religion. Instead, he asked for his friend Cranmer, who by this time was a fervent Protestant. The King was incapable of speech by the time the Archbishop arrived. Cranmer asked him to squeeze his hand if he trusted in Christ alone for his salvation, and the King did so. He died a convinced Protestant.

In 1553 Cranmer brought out his 42 Articles, with a concise definition of justification by faith alone –

**Article XI:** We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort; as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

The question, then, has to do with the necessity and function of the sacraments. If grace is free and justification is free, what role do the sacraments have within the outworking of salvation? This was a point that was pressed hard at the time, and it caused not a little trouble. The Anabaptists thought that they had the answer by relegating Baptism and the Supper to mere memorials. Neither of these two ordinances have any power to convey grace, they said, but they are ‘empty signs’.

This was not the view of the Reformers. They saw in the scriptures that a profession of faith was, in every possible instance, accompanied by baptism in water. Faith and baptism go together. Faith was fulfilled in baptism, being the condition of right reception, and it was in baptism, the sacrament of faith, rightly received, that the benefits of the cross were conferred.

For the modern evangelical to grasp the connection between faith and baptism better, a parallel of sorts can be drawn with an evangelistic outreach as many are run today. After preaching, the evangelist asks the people to ‘make a decision for Christ’ or ‘give your life to Jesus’ or something along those lines. He is not, however, content to leave it at that. Those who have ‘made a decision’ are usually required to confirm it with some other action that will confirm and make visible their commitment. They will be asked to stand up and come to the front of the meeting, where others will pray with them, and

they will be asked to fill in a card of commitment. The inward faith must be expressed in an outward act. They are considered to have been 'born again' from that moment in time.

In the New Testament era the first response of one's new-found faith is baptism. The man who had believed the gospel of Jesus Christ, believing that God had raised him from the dead in the body, thereby appointing him Messiah, the promised World Ruler, would enter into covenant with his new King by the visible means of baptism. In return he would receive the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. That was how the early church required people to 'make a commitment', and that was how Cranmer, in common with all of the other Reformers, understood the relation between faith and baptism.

### Baptism

**Article XXV:** Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed, Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.

Baptism is the sacrament ordained by Christ himself, whereby, as by an instrument, a man is delivered from the power of original sin, receives the promises of forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and regeneration. This is the meaning of a seal. Regeneration begins of a life-long process of being remade in the image of Christ, without denying the possibility of backsliding. In the usual course of events baptism is administered at the earliest possible time, within reason. In other words, infants are the usual beneficiaries of baptism within a Christian Commonwealth, such as England was at that time – 'The Baptism of young Children is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ.'<sup>1</sup>

This wonderfully illustrates the free and unmerited nature of salvation. A child is unable to contribute anything at all to his salvation, being entirely passive at his entrance into the kingdom of God. Cranmer did not accept the 'believers' baptism' view that older children and adults are more capable than infants of

responding to the gospel with faith and obedience. An unregenerate older person is still under the ruling power of indwelling sin and the devil, and as incapable as an infant of turning towards God in faith and repentance, if not more so, through the hardening that comes from deliberate sin.

God answers the faithful prayers of the church for children, for he delights to grant such requests. The application of these truths is found in “The Ministration of Publick Baptism of Infants” in the Book of Common Prayer, which contains these petitions—

Regard, we beseech thee, the supplications of thy Congregation; sanctify this Water to the mystical washing away of sin; and grant that *this Child*, now to be baptised therein, may receive the fullness of thy grace, and ever remain in the number of thy faithful and elect children; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

After the Baptism, the Priest says—

Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that *this Child* is regenerate and grafted into the body Christ’s Church, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits, and with one accord make our prayers unto him, that *this Child* may lead the rest of *his* life according to this beginning.<sup>3</sup>

The priest prays that God will regenerate the child in baptism, baptises it, and then gives thanks to God for hearing the petitions for the same. The prayers proceed on the assumption that the child has been regenerated, though of course the rite itself cannot produce this. Only later, when the child has grown to the point where he or she can make a personal profession of faith, does it become clear whether the promises claimed in baptism have been fulfilled or not.

Ultimately, the final authority for baptising children is the command of Peter at Pentecost, when he said to the distraught Jews—

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

In plain language Peter links baptism to the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, adding that the promise of these things, in baptism, is for our children as well! For this reason, if for no other, baptism could not be withheld

from young children without disobeying a clear command of God and Christ. Cranmer thought of the sacraments as an outward and visible means of conferring and delivering an inward saving grace to all, whether they be infants or older:

**Article XXVII:** Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, **but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace,** and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him.

He differed from the Papacy not on the efficacy and power of the sacrament, but on the issue of whether it saves every time it is administered or not. The papacy's view has been summarised in the phrases *ex opere operato* and *opus operandum*. According to the Pope the sacrament works infallibly to make a man into a Christian, provided that the Roman priest had that intention, used the proper means of water, and said the right words. All the conditions for an effective sacrament were therefore met by the priest, without any reference to the child whatever.

The Reformation's response was to point to the necessity of right reception on the part of the person receiving the sacrament. The sacraments are only effective when they are rightly received, namely, by faith.

The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about, but that we should duly use them. **And in such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect or operation:** but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves damnation, as Saint Paul saith.

Baptism and the Supper are only effective to those who believe and their children.<sup>4</sup>

## Election

The ultimate cause of salvation lies in God. God is all-powerful, and that necessarily means his total and absolute rule over his creation in every way. Cranmer, with the other Reformers, whether English or foreign, believed in predestination, because he found it taught clearly and unambiguously within the pages of the Bible.

**Article XVII:** Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour.

To their way of thinking this did not in any way negate or nullify the guilt of man, or abrogate his responsibility for his actions before God. If God wished to choose some for salvation, and appoint others for destruction, then that was his right, and no man had the moral right to question his sovereign decisions, or to plead that his sin was God's fault. God is God and man is a guilty sinner, and that is that.

In order to understand this better in its historical context, we need to remember that at that time it was the Papacy that defended free-will in the face of the clear teaching of scripture. The only other voice raised in its defence was the extreme left, the various sects of the Anabaptists, who had discredited themselves by their support of the principles of Anarchism.

The first real attack against the doctrines of grace from within the Protestant Churches came a full generation after the Reformation from the followers of Joseph Arminius, who formulated five points of contention, and were eventually answered by the combined Reformed Churches of Europe with the Canons of Dort. These are mis-known today as the five points of Calvinism, although it would be more accurate to call them the five points of European Protestantism. Prior to then these doctrines were at the centre of the fight against Rome, so it would be quite wrong to think, as some do, that they are a post-Reformation development. Cranmer believed in these doctrines with all of his heart, and his liturgy is the pastoral and practical expression of them.

The Reformers wrote and preached against Rome on the one hand, and the Anabaptists on the other. What both of these opponents had in common was a rejection of the doctrine of the Bible in favour of the ideas and opinions of men, their disingenuous claims to the contrary notwithstanding. The free grace of God promised to believers depends entirely upon the election by God of some to salvation – absolutely without regard to their works, wills, or persons in any way.

This means that the saving benefits of the cross are restricted to the elect, and only to the elect. God sent his Son to redeem his elected according to the promises he had made to the fathers, both from among the Jews and the Gentiles '...to preach and give pardon and full remission of sin to all his elected'.<sup>5</sup>

Applying these things to baptism, it is only the elect who are given grace to rightly receive the sacraments, and it is only in their case that the benefits of the cross are conferred. In the normal course of events justification and regeneration were conferred at the time of baptism. There were exceptions to this of course, when baptismal grace was conferred at some other time of God's appointing, but that notwithstanding, baptism was to be considered the normal time for the reception of saving grace, in accordance with the teaching of scripture and the ancient church of the early Fathers.

### Effective Atonement

All of these issues found their centre and unity in the efficacy of the cross. In stark contradiction of the scriptures, Rome taught that the cross was not sufficient to save. Cranmer's own words on the matter portray the depth of his indignation and outrage at this insult to the honour of God and Christ—

But the Romish Antichrist, to deface this great benefit of Christ, hath taught that his sacrifice upon the cross is not sufficient hereunto, without another sacrifice devised by him, and made by the priest, or else without indulgences, beads, pardons, pilgrimages, and other such pelfry, to supply Christ's imperfection: and that Christian people cannot apply to themselves the benefits of Christ's passion, but that the same is in the distribution of the Bishop of Rome, or else that by Christ we have no full remission, but be delivered only from sin, and yet remaineth temporal pain in Purgatory due for the same, to be remitted after this life by the Romish Antichrist and his ministers, who take it upon them to do for us that thing which Christ either would not or could not do. O heinous blasphemy and most detestable injury against Christ! O wicked abomination in the temple of God! O pride intolerable of Antichrist, and most manifest token of the son of perdition, extolling himself above God, and with Lucifer exalting his seat and power above the throne of God! For he that taketh upon him to supply that thing, which he pretendeth to be unperfect in Christ, must needs make himself above Christ, and so very Antichrist. For what is this else, but to be against Christ, and to bring him into contempt, as one that

either for lack of charity would not, or for lack of power he could not, with all his bloodletting and death, clearly deliver his faithful, and give them full remission of their sins, but that the full perfection thereof must be had at the hands of Antichrist of Rome and his ministers!

What man of knowledge and zeal to God's honour can with dry eyes see this injury to Christ, and look upon the state of religion brought in by the papists, perceiving the true sense of God's word subverted by false glosses of man's devising, the true Christian religion turned into certain hypocritical and superstitious sects, ( the various orders of monks and priests), the people praying with their mouths and hearing with their ears they wist not what, and so ignorant in God's word, that they could not discern hypocrisy and superstition from true and sincere religion?<sup>6</sup>

Cranmer understood the cross to be a full and complete propitiation for the sins of the elect, all true believers, so that not only are sins remitted, but also the penalty due to sin, which is death. The cross did not make salvation merely possible, but fully effectual. The cross may not be said to be the first step in justification, with man's response providing the second and completing element. He thought that blasphemous. God does not sacrifice his Son and then await the decision of mankind in full possession of his free will to make a 'decision of faith', and then to co-operate with grace to complete the work of the cross.

The gospel is not something that is offered as a product, like an item in a salesman's catalogue. Rather, it is the announcement and declaration by God, through the Church, of an effectual atonement by God's Son, requiring by Royal Command a response of faith and obedience from those who cannot by nature obey. Nevertheless, through the preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments, sin's slaves are unilaterally freed by God's power and grace to believe and obey.

### **The Context of the Supper Summarized**

Adam sinned against God in the Garden of Eden, and in doing so he plunged the entire human race into the bondage of sin and death. All of his descendants are by nature objects of wrath, from their first moments of life enslaved by sin and the Devil, utterly without power or desire to turn to God.

From out of the mass of the wicked human race, God, the sovereign ruler of the world, has chosen for himself a people to be redeemed by grace. The Father accomplished this by sending his Son to earth, where he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. His mission was to suffer an atoning and propitiatory death upon the cross, thereby infallibly securing the full salvation of the elect. He was raised from the dead in the body, is presently seated at the place of supreme power at the right hand of God, and he will return from there to judge the living and the dead, and to establish God's eternal kingdom.

Through the preaching of this gospel, men are brought to a true and lively faith, and by responding in baptism, they are granted full remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, are spiritually regenerated, and made members of God's kingdom. It is to these people, saved by grace, who by faith enter into the kingdom of God by means of Baptism, that the second sacrament of the Lord's Supper is given, to be an ongoing source of spiritual grace and power, to bring them to eternal life at the resurrection and the age to come.

## Part 2 – Analysis of Cranmer's doctrine of the Lord's Supper

In this section each of Cranmer's arguments is set out first, followed after each point with a commentary.

Cranmer dedicated his *Defence of the True and Catholick Doctrine of the Sacrament* to Edward VI in 1553. The date is important, because it falls between his final Prayer Book of 1552 and his martyrdom in 1556. Here is laid out before us his final doctrine of the Supper in clear and beautiful prose.

His purpose in writing is to correct those who abuse the Supper through ignorance and superstition, as well as those who esteem it lightly, namely, the Romans and the Anabaptists. To put an end to contention, the best way is to '...cleave unto Holy Scripture. Wherein whatsoever is found, must be taken for a most sure ground and an infallible truth; and that whatsoever cannot be grounded upon the same (touching our faith) is man's device, changeable and uncertain'.<sup>7</sup>

In the Gospel according to John, the Lord Jesus taught that he is food sent down from heaven, so that whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood will live forever.<sup>8</sup> But this eating is not like eating other meats, because this food results in immortality – Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal

life.<sup>9</sup> To Cranmer this meant that ‘...to eat that meat and to drink that drink is to dwell in Christ and to have Christ dwelling in him’.<sup>10</sup>

In the evangelists’ accounts of the Last Supper, Jesus likened his body and blood to bread and wine. Yet it was not his purpose that men should think that bread and wine are literally his body, but to signify to us that the cup is a communion of the blood that was shed for us, and that the bread is a communion of his flesh that was crucified for us. By eating it we receive true spiritual food, as a branch receives sustenance from the root.

The truth of Christ’s human body is that it is in heaven, and there he must remain until he returns for the restoration of all things. He cannot be bodily in more than one place at the same time because that is the nature of humanity, and to say that he can, is to obliterate the distinction between his deity and his humanity, which must be maintained at all times. Yet, whoever eats the Supper of the Lord according to Christ’s own ordinance ‘...is assured of Christ’s own promise and testament, that he is a member of his body, and receiveth the benefits of his passion which he suffered upon the cross’.<sup>11</sup>

This is the meaning of Saint Paul, ‘Is not the cup of blessing which we bless, a communion of the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break, a communion of the body of Christ?’<sup>12</sup> To eat and drink Christ is to participate in the benefits of his suffering and death. On the other hand, whoever eats and drinks unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, which is to say that he eats and drinks his own damnation.

This is a summary of all that the Scripture teaches concerning the eating and drinking, both of the body and the blood of Christ, and also of the sacrament of the same. There is a clear distinction between the body and blood and the sacramental elements of bread and wine themselves. Those who rightly receive the signs of bread and wine receive inwardly, and at the same time, the body and blood, but the wicked receive the sacramental elements without the blessing. Indeed, the thing that they receive in addition to the elements is damnation.

All doctrines that are contrary to this doctrine that we have received from Christ in the Bible ‘...be most certainly false and untrue, and of all Christian men to be eschewed, because they be contrary to God’s word’.<sup>13</sup>

*Commentary:* We see from this that Cranmer was a 'fundamentalist';<sup>14</sup> for him the Bible was the oracle of God, and the source of all true spiritual knowledge. Against Rome on the one hand, it can be seen that Jesus did not intend anyone to think that bread and wine are changed into his body, much less that they are a propitiatory sacrifice, but to realise that the signs are signs, not the thing signified.

Against those who, like the Anabaptists, thought that the sacraments were empty of power, he taught that they are certain, sure, and effectual signs that truly convey inwardly the things that are outwardly signified by the bread and wine, upon the condition of right reception, namely, by true faith and genuine repentance.

The key to grasping Cranmer's doctrine of the Supper is to realise that it is a means of union with Christ, which is the communion of his body and blood. It has been said that union with Christ is the central unifying doctrine in the whole system of Reformation theology, because it is here that all the threads of soteriology find their meeting place.

In Romans 5 and 6 Paul explains that a sinner is transferred out of the kingdom of sin and death, and into God's kingdom of life and righteousness, through baptism into Christ. Baptism into Christ is to share in his death, burial, and resurrection. Through the power of God revealed in the cross, and applied by God in Baptism, the old man is transferred from the kingdom of sin and death into Christ's kingdom of life, dies and is buried, and is raised a new man in the likeness of Christ's righteousness, to walk and live according to God's laws and commands.

Union with Christ is to have a share in all of the blessings and benefits of the cross. The sole cause of this transfer from the dominion of sin and death is Christ's obedience in dying upon the cross, according to the Father's wish and command, to effectually save all who truly believe. The point to grasp is that it is these same benefits that are conveyed to the believer in the Supper. The man who has been joined to Christ in Baptism continues to be united to him, and to receive the benefits of the cross, by means of the Supper. This is why the two sacraments of Baptism and the Supper play such an important role in Reformation teaching.

### A Clearer Explanation of the Sacrament

The more clearly it is understood, the more sweetness, fruit, comfort, and edification it bringeth to the godly receivers thereof.<sup>15</sup>

### The Hunger and Thirst of the Soul

The law of God reveals to us that we are guilty before God and deserving of eternal destruction and damnation. When a man realises his terrible danger, and eagerly desires and wishes to find mercy, favour and righteousness from God, he has the hunger and thirst of the soul. Realising the justice of God's great anger and the terror of his vengeance, we are oppressed with heaviness and sorrow, and begin to seek a remedy for our miserable state. This is spiritual hunger. Whoever has this hunger is blessed of God and shall have meat and drink with which to satisfy this great craving, as Christ said, 'Blessed be they that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled full.'<sup>16</sup>

On the other side, those that are not aware of this hunger, God sends away empty. This hunger is not easily understood by the unconverted man, for when he hears God speaking of eating and drinking his thoughts are 'by and by in the kitchen and buttery'. The disciples suffered from this earthly mindset, so the Lord Jesus tried to draw their minds away from carnal meats by saying, 'I have other meat to eat, which ye know not.'<sup>17</sup>

They did not as yet have the fullness of the Holy Spirit, so they did not yet understand about this other eating and drinking. The same intent was behind this saying of the Lord, 'He that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never be thirsty.'<sup>18</sup>

There is no earthly food and drink that can do these things, so the Lord was pointing them to a different kind of meat and drink. 'By these words therefore, he drove the people to understand another kind of eating and drinking, of hungering and thirsting, than that which belongeth only for the preservation of temporal life.'<sup>19</sup>

**Commentary:** With this first point a huge gulf opens between Cranmer and the liberalism of so many of his successors in the Church of England. That perversion of the gospel has little or no place for the reality of God's wrath, let alone the mention of it. God is conceived as being pure love without any

element of anger or fury at all. He loves every single thing that he has made, without exception, and would never dream of punishing human beings. Man is thought to be of infinite worth, and as such, even depraved men are not subject to divine disfavour and displeasure, or even ecclesiastical rebuke! At most there will be a disappointed shake of the heavenly head, and a mild and mannerly rebuke.

That is why so many bishops and priests are unable to provide the nation with a coherent answer when asked why God allows tsunamis, and the utter destruction of entire cities by hurricanes. It cannot be God doing it, they say, because God simply isn't like that, and for God to act in this way interferes with free will! Those who preach and speak this way are unspiritual and fleshly in Cranmer's eyes, without the hunger and thirst of the soul. They do not feel within themselves the displeasure and wrath of a justly outraged divine King, and feel no need of a remedy. They are full already, and cannot be filled.

### **The meat, drink, and food of the soul**

The meat, drink, food, and refreshing of the soul, is our Saviour Christ; as he said himself: *Come to me all you that travail and be laden, and I will refresh you – And if any man be dry, saith he, let him come to me and drink. He that believeth in me, floods of water of life shall flow out of his belly – And I am the bread of life, saith Christ; he that cometh to me shall not be hungry; and he that believeth in me shall never be dry.*<sup>20</sup>

The spiritually hungry soul is fed by the death of Christ's body, and the shedding of his blood. Since food and drink nourish the body, in the same way the body and blood of Christ nourish the soul. Therefore the body and blood are justly called food and drink. As the Saviour himself said, 'My flesh is very meat, and my blood is very drink.'

There is no earthly food that can nourish the soul, but only the death of Christ's body, and the shedding of his blood. The only way for the soul to live is by eating this food – 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you.'<sup>21</sup> This was Paul's meaning when he said, 'That I have life, I have it by faith in the Son of God. And now it is not I that live, but Christ liveth in me.'<sup>22</sup>

*Commentary:* The death of Christ's body is the atoning sacrifice, the propitiation of a justly angry God applying the death penalty as his law demands, a doctrine that liberals have long since cast out. If God is all-loving and without wrath, they say, there is no need for the primitive and backward doctrine of an atoning sacrifice that satisfies the *lex talionis*, the law of vengeance. Such ideas belong to the savage and distant past, we are told, when men were not as civilized and enlightened as they are today. They certainly have no place in the modern world of electricity, the internet, cheap flights, and universal human rights. If the cross does anything practical at all, it simply removes the record of sin, but it is in no way a satisfaction of the divine demand of death for sin.

In what way, then, can Christ be the food and drink of the soul today, in liberal and even much evangelical thought, except as a palliative for an existential headache? A modern Jesus helps us in the struggles of living by improving our marriages, our work-lives, and our relationships. He refreshes us along the way, but he does not give spiritual life to the dead, because everyone is already alive to God in some way through free will! Our souls do not need feeding because they are not hungry for an atoning sacrifice. Indeed, we are taught that man-come-of-age should be repelled by the very thought.

### **Christ far excels all corporal meats and drinks**

Earthly foods, for all their excellence and value, cannot begin our lives. Our parents beget us first, and foods nourish us after that beginning. But our Saviour Christ is both, '...the first beginner of our spiritual life, (who first begetteth us unto God his Father,) and also afterward he is our lively food and nourishment'.<sup>23</sup>

More than this, meat and drink are able to nourish only the body, but Christ is the perfect nourishment of both body and soul. Besides these things, foods preserve us for a little while, but Christ preserves us for ever. 'As he saith unto Martha: I am resurrection and life.<sup>24</sup> He that believeth in me, although he die, yet shall he live. And he that liveth and believeth in me shall not die forever.'<sup>25</sup> Christ is the food that makes us alive to God in this life, as well as giving immortality to our bodies in the next.

*Commentary:* If man is in full possession of a free will, able naturally to turn himself towards God in faith and repentance, then he can only with great

difficulty be said to be spiritually dead. What need is there for Christ to give him life when he is already alive? At most all he can give is help and encouragement, but that is in a different category to regeneration. If original sin is a myth, like the atoning sacrifice and propitiation, then we are the beginning of our life towards God, not Christ.

As for giving us bodily immortality, the idea is today considered ridiculous in the extreme in the highest ranks of the church. We hear bishops saying that the resurrection could not have been photographed, meaning that it was not an historical event, and that it was a conjuring trick with bones. The teaching that two thousand years ago a Jewish man who had been executed by crucifixion awoke from death and walked out of his tomb, never again to suffer mortality, is thought to be a part of the dark superstition that characterized the ages before the Enlightenment.

However, Cranmer believed and taught that Christ is the food that gives life to the spiritually and physically dead, and in that he is in line with the holy Scriptures, and the Christian church of all ages.

### **The true knowledge of these things is the true knowledge of Christ**

Our spiritual birth and nutrition are so obscure to us, that without faith it is impossible to have a true and full knowledge and experience of them, and this faith is only possible through the Holy Scriptures. These things are plainly set out in them, as well as in the two sacraments of Baptism and the Supper, so that by hearing the word, and feeling the water, and tasting the bread and the wine, all of our senses are engaged, thereby putting Christ 'into our eyes, mouths, hands, and all the senses'.

The idea is that as surely as we feel the water of baptism, so we ought firmly to believe that we are born again and washed from sin in it, and engrafted as branches into the stock that is Christ; so that just as the devil has no power against Christ, so he has no power over us as long as we remain engrafted. The washing of Baptism becomes, as it were, an actual touching of Christ with the senses, to the confirmation of our inward faith.

In the same way, the Supper is given to teach us that as our bodies are nourished by bread and wine, so we are spiritually nourished by the body and blood of

Christ. He preserves us from all the devils of hell and from eternal death as long as we are nourished by this food and drink. In Baptism and the Supper we ought to believe that Christ is our spiritual life and the sustenance of our lives with the same certainty that we sense, taste, and touch the sacramental elements.

The purpose of signs that can be touched, felt, and tasted is to strengthen and make more constant our weak and puny faith. The sacraments are a way to present Christ to our physical senses for our spiritual strength and perfection. *Commentary:* The very idea of effectual sacraments is anathema to many evangelicals. There is a failure to see the biblical source of this Patristic and Reformation doctrine, and a refusal to accept it because of a deep suspicion that it is somehow Anglo-Catholic or Roman. It is neither. It is rooted in the Bible, it is the received Anglican faith, it is the faith of the entire Reformation, and it is something that needs revisiting and rediscovery in our day.

**Bread and wine best symbolise the union of the church as well unto Christ, as also amongst themselves**

Bread is made up of a great number of grains of corn, which are ground and baked, and so joined together that they make one loaf; and an infinite number of grapes are pressed into one tub, and that makes wine.

Likewise the whole multitude of true Christian people are joined together with one another, and with Christ, in one faith, one baptism, one Holy Spirit, one knot and bond of love.

*Commentary:* This is as good a reason as any to use a loaf of bread instead of wafers, and to use a single cup instead of trays with small glasses.

**As bread and wine becomes one with our bodies, so we become one with Christ and one another.**

We be one bread and one body, as many as be partakers of one bread and one cup.<sup>26</sup> As food and drink eventually becomes one with our bodies, so Christians are joined together into one body, being one with one another as well as being one with Christ, and so together we are one mystical body of Christ. And as one loaf is given to many to be shared, and one cup is shared among many, so Christ gives himself to all his true members to spiritually feed them and give them continual life.

Dead and broken-off branches neither live, nor do they receive any nourishment from the tree. Likewise ungodly and wicked people are either dead or cut off from Christ's mystical body, and do not feed spiritually upon Christ's body and blood, neither do they have any life, strength, or sustenance from them.

*Commentary:* When we are first joined to Christ in Baptism, we become one with him and with one another. In the Supper the same thing is effected, but in an ongoing way, for those who are already in Christ. There is a continued refreshing of the benefits in the Supper to those who truly believe. This overthrows the Roman idea that even the wicked eat and drink Christ, for it is not possible for dead twigs to receive sap from the root. This is of course the reason that the Supper is forbidden to those who are not yet Christians through Baptism. They are still outside of Christ and classed with the wicked.

### **The Sacrament effectually moves us to brotherly love and peace**

Nothing is more pleasant to God and man than that Christians should live in unity and concord. We are all members of one spiritual body, just as many grains of corn are joined together into one loaf. In this sacrament we are reminded that Christ gave himself for his enemies. Since Christ has died for our fellow believers, we would be more unreasonable than beasts if we do not do good to them as well. Eating and drinking together makes friends and continues friendship. Much more then should the table of Christ move us to do the same. Even wild beasts and birds are made gentle and tamed by being given food and drink. Much more should the heavenly meat of Christ make us tame and gentle.

The sacrament is a means towards kindling love in our hearts toward our neighbours, and putting out of them all envy, hatred, and malice; engraving there instead friendship and concord. Whoever does not do this does not have the spirit of Christ dwelling within him. All of the previous lessons from the nature and purpose of food and drink are taken away by the Papists' doctrine of transubstantiation. For if the bread and wine are imaginary, not being present at all, then our feeding upon Christ must also be imaginary, and we do not in fact feed upon him, '... which sophistry is so devilish and wicked, and so much injurious to Christ, that it could not come from any other person but only from the Devil himself, and from his special minister Antichrist'.<sup>27</sup>

*Commentary:* It is ironic that few things separate Christians as thoroughly as disagreements about the Supper. Perhaps much of the discord is caused by unfamiliarity with the true biblical and Reformation teaching, and a way to greater peace is to recover Cranmer's doctrine. This spiritual food is not received in the mouth, but with a pure heart and a sincere faith.

The true eating and drinking of the said body and blood of Christ, is with a constant and lively faith to believe, that Christ gave his body and shed his blood upon the cross for us and that he doth so join and incorporate himself to us, that he is our head, and we his members, and flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones, having him dwelling in us, and we in him. And herein standeth the whole effect and strength of this sacrament.<sup>28</sup>

God works faith by three means: the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, the hearing by the ears of the word, and feeling with our other senses by eating and drinking the sacrament.

In the sacrament Christ certifies to us that we are truly fed by him, and that we dwell in him and he in us. As he himself said, 'He that eateth me shall live by me.'<sup>29</sup> Since we have everlasting life through it, how can we but highly esteem this sacrament? It is a sure pledge of our salvation, so how can we but embrace it? Seeing these things should fill us with a great desire to come to the Lord's Supper, and to receive it often with the godly.

In the Supper we are reminded of the death of Christ and the whole mystery of our redemption. All men want to have the favour of God, and when they know that they are out of his favour and mercy they are tormented by great fears and anxieties and their consciences are troubled. The whole of creation becomes a vehicle of God's wrath and indignation towards them, and they cannot find any comfort either within or without. God appears as a harsh and unmerciful judge, and the Devil as a most malicious and cruel tormentor.

Scripture teaches them that God can by no other way be reconciled to them than by the death and sacrifice of his beloved Son, whereby he has made perpetual peace and friendship with us, pardons the sins of those who believe in him, makes them children, and gives them to his firstborn Son, Christ, to be united to him, to be saved by him, and to be made heirs of the kingdom with him.

By means of the Supper we are put in mind of all these wonderful things. In this sacrament, if we receive it with a true faith, we are assured that our sins are forgiven, and that the league of peace, and the testament of God, is confirmed between him and us, so that whoever eats Christ's flesh and drinks his blood with a true faith has everlasting life by him. What can be more joyful, pleasant, or comforting than to feel these things in our hearts when we receive the Lord's Supper?

All this is certainly true as shown by the words of the Lord himself when he instituted his holy Supper the night before his death, as St. Paul writes, 'Do this, saith Christ, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.'<sup>30</sup> He also says, 'As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you shall show the Lord's death until he comes.'<sup>31</sup> And again, Christ said, 'This cup is a new covenant in mine own blood, which shall be shed for the remission of sins.'<sup>32</sup> The doctrine recited here is sufficient for everyone who is humble and godly and seeks nothing superfluous, but only what is necessary and profitable.

*Commentary:* Cranmer's teaching in this last point is so clear that it needs no further comment, except perhaps that we should read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it to our great benefit.

## Conclusion

The Supper finds its proper context within the Augustinian system of theology augmented by the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. It has at its base the doctrine of original sin, whereby man is by nature a slave of sin and the Devil, utterly unable to prepare himself for God, or to turn to him with faith and repentance because of his sinful state. Free will is an illusion, not a reality. God is absolutely sovereign over all creation; he has chosen a people for salvation out of all the nations of the earth by free grace, without reference to their persons, works or wills, and predestined them to be forgiven, and resurrected in the likeness of Jesus Christ, namely, with glory, honour and bodily immortality. To secure and guarantee this outcome, the Father sent his Son to earth to become man, and suffer an effective, atoning, and propitiatory death for the sins of his elected ones, so that the cross must be understood to be a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, offering, and satisfaction, for the sins of all men, meaning the elected Jews and Gentiles.

This salvation is received by means of the proclamation of the gospel and the due administration of the sacraments. The gospel is not an offer, but an announcement of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who died for us and is risen to reign forever, combined with a command to believe and repent, to those who cannot by nature respond. By God's power those who are appointed to eternal life believe and are baptized.

Baptism is the means of entry into the kingdom of God. Through this sacrament the benefits of salvation are conveyed to all those who rightly receive it. In it, full justification and the gift of the Holy Spirit are granted and conferred. This forgiveness is full and complete, including remission both of the guilt of sin and its penalty, which is death. This makes the purchase of forgiveness and righteousness from any human agency blasphemous, being an injury to the honour of God and Christ, and a slander upon the power of the cross. It furthermore makes nonsense of the Papacy's claim to be the sole dispenser of salvation on earth. More than that, it exposes his claims to absolute sovereignty over all powers, whether secular or religious, for the nonsense that it is, and a proof that he is the Antichrist, usurping for himself the power of God and Christ to rule, and dispense both salvation and judgement.

The baptised believer is therefore in a state of full justification for the whole of his life, provided that he does not fall away from God and Christ through unbelief, and he is assured of eternal life in the world to come. Having been united to Christ in baptism, the Christian continues to be united and joined to him by means of the sacrament of the Supper. In it he is continually refreshed with the body and blood of Christ, receiving from him, as a branch from a root, all the spiritual sustenance and nourishment that is required to continue in the faith to the end.

The elements of bread and wine are the outward sign of the inward grace of union with Christ, signifying food and drink unto eternal life for the body and soul. They do not change their natures after the words of consecration, but continue to be bread and wine. Christ's body is in heaven and cannot be in more than one place at the same time, or his true humanity is compromised. Much less is the Supper a propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead, because the fullness and sufficiency of the cross means that it cannot be repeated.

However, the inward grace of union with Christ accompanies the Supper, to those who rightly receive it. It is no empty sign, but a powerful means of ongoing grace. Those who eat unworthily receive the bread but not the grace, since dead twigs cannot receive sustenance from the root. Instead, they receive condemnation.

The sacrament of the Supper has been neglected through ignorance of the great benefits to be received in it, and its meaning obscured through unfamiliarity with the scriptural, Reformed teaching on the subject, and an over-reaction to Romanist and Anglo-Catholic sacramental errors. The four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Cranmer's horrific martyrdom is an appropriate time for his heirs to rediscover and defend the true and catholic doctrine of the sacrament.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. Article XXVII; Of Baptism.
2. The Publick Baptism of Infants; BCP.
3. *Ibid.*
4. The issue of infant faith cannot be discussed here. However, it must be said that the Reformers believed that while infants do not have a conscious faith, they do have implicit faith, thus fulfilling the requirement of right reception.
5. Cranmer on the Lord's Supper; *A Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament*; A Preface to the Reader; p. xxii; Focus Christian Ministries Trust; 1987.
6. *A Defence*; A Preface to the Reader; p. xxii.
7. *A Defence*; p. 3.
8. John 6.
9. John 6. All the Scriptures are quoted exactly as Cranmer wrote them.
10. *A Defence*; p. 4.
11. *Ibid.* p. 8.
12. 1 Cor. 10.
13. *A Defence*; p. 10.
14. A theological swearword used by liberals to discredit those who share Cranmer's doctrine of the Bible.
15. *A Defence*; p. 12.
16. Matt. 5.
17. John 4.
18. John 6.

19. *A Defence*; p. 15.
20. *Ibid.*
21. John 6.
22. Gal. 2.
23. *A Defence*; p. 17.
24. Cranmer has properly left out the definite article in the English translation of resurrection and life, unlike some more recent versions. The Greek often includes it for abstract qualities, but it is right to omit it in the English. This version brings out the sense of the saying instead of obscuring it.
25. John 11.
26. 1 Cor. 10.
27. *A Defence*; p. 24.
28. *Ibid.* p. 25.
29. John 6.
30. Luke 22.
31. 1 Cor. 11.
32. Matt. 26; Mark 14; Luke 22.