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### **CRANMER AND THE LORD'S SUPPER**

Revd David Phillips

Through his liturgy Thomas Cranmer sought to reform the Church under the Word of God. He did not abandon all that had gone before but endeavoured to take what had become corrupted and transform it in accordance with the plain teaching of scripture. In some places this meant small changes, in others dramatic.

The key features of the 1552 Communion Service (in effect the Book of Common Prayer and the backbone of Common Worship Order 2 in Contemporary Language) were all derived from the teaching of scripture.

#### **A meal for the people of God.**

At the last supper Jesus reclined and ate with His disciples. He was close to them, He talked with them, they shared together in the meal, passing around a common cup.

In the pre-Reformation church the laity were largely spectators at an event, the mass, which took place at the top of the Church, often hidden from their view. In Cranmer's liturgy (and in the BCP) the Lord's Table was to be placed in the main body of the Church where the people were. The minister and people would therefore be standing together (no seats in those days) around the table. What was about to take place was not some remote ritual, but a simple meal for the people of God as they join with Christ at His table. The minister is there in effect to serve the meal.

#### **In the Lord's Supper we are remembering Jesus.**

He said to his disciples - *'do this in remembrance of me'*.

It is easy to let our minds wander at the Lord's table, to things we have to do, to those around us, to past events. We should remember Christ. The first disciples had shared with Jesus in a great deal, not least in some strange and wonderful meals (fish on the beach, in the house of sinners, on a mountain with no food and 5,000+ guests). An important part of the Lord's Supper is the reading of the Gospel, remembering the earthly ministry and teaching of Jesus.

Supremely at the Lord's Supper, however, we are to remember the love of Christ in His death for us. In his great exhortation Cranmer speaks of the bread and wine as 'pledges of his love' which are for 'a continual remembrance of his death'.

#### **Therefore, in this service we proclaim the Lord's death.**

The Apostle Paul could write to the Christians in Corinth: *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes.*

The Lord's death should be the key focus of the Lord's Supper. In Cranmer's Communion prayer (if we can call it that – there was no 'amen' in his original), the death of Jesus is central. Moreover it is not just stated, it is spelt out. Sadly in many modern liturgies the focus has shifted to themes such as creation and liberation. These are fine themes, but the focus of the Lord's Supper should be proclaiming the Lord's death; His blood shed for us, his body broken for us.

In the Communion prayer Cranmer was eager to ensure that no-one could misunderstand or deliberately distort the meaning. He piled up term upon term. Jesus' death was a redemption (He bought us back, paying the price for our sins), an oblation (an offering, Christ himself being the offering and the one making the offering), a sacrifice (forgiveness through the shedding of blood) that was full and perfect (nothing was lacking, it is finished, complete, once for all time), a satisfaction (the justice of God was satisfied and as a consequence His holy wrath against sin turned back).

If you believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, then this is the meaning of his death for you. He died that you might live, that your sins might be forgiven, that God's wrath might be turned back, that you might have new life now in Christ, and for eternity. If you do not believe and trust in Christ then you have no means of forgiveness and God's wrath remains on you.

**Therefore, fourthly at the Lord's Supper we should beware.**

The Apostle Paul in first Corinthians issues strong warnings about receiving the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Therefore it is important, and very much stressed in this service that we should examine ourselves and repent of our sins.

Paul particularly laid emphasis on two things; that we should grasp the significance of Christ's death for us and that this meal should be shared in genuine fellowship. If there are divisions and dissensions in a Church, then the Lord's supper is meaningless. Paul stresses the danger. He uses strong words.

For this reason in the reformed tradition people must have proper instruction before coming to communion. It is why young children are not admitted until they are old enough to grasp all this. We are not coming before some petty god, but an awesome God who is the creator and judge of all the world. In most modern liturgies the warnings are lacking and the wrath of God against sin is forgotten. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

If there are dangers in coming to the Lord's table, then the service also makes it plain that there are rich blessings.

**The Lord's Supper is a means by which God works in us.**

This service and the articles of religion of the Church of England explain that when we receive the bread and wine in faith, then God really and genuinely works in us. He strengthens us in faith, he quickens us (makes us spiritually alive) and also confirms our faith, giving us a deep assurance of his love and mercy to us. These are the rich blessings that are ours in sharing in this meal together.

We are not to think that the bread and wine have any magical property, or that they change in substance. Rather as we receive them in faith and obedience, God is pleased to work in us.

Cranmer's service therefore builds up to a point of climax. In most other liturgies the climax is upon some point at which there is erroneously believed to be a change in the bread and wine. In Cranmer's service the climax is when the people, having gathered at the Lord's table receive the bread and wine in obedience to the Lord's command.

Of course, underlying all of that and flowing out from it the believer cannot but be filled with thanksgiving. Therefore in the great exhortation the minister is to tell the people:

*above all things ye are to:*

***give most humble and hearty thanks to God.***

Thanksgiving is our supreme response to God's grace in Christ. In the service there is opportunity for our thanks to find expression on our lips, but it should also permeate our lives. It is not necessary to pile up words and phrases in order to be thankful, but nor should our thanks be just cold words. Genuine thanksgiving will come from the heart, it will be both humble and hearty.

**Ready to serve.**

Finally there is in Cranmer's service a constant looking forward to our everyday lives. True spiritual worship and thanksgiving are to be lived out in lives of obedience and service.

This is an important feature of Reformed liturgy, worship is not so much what we do when we meet together as how we live in the everyday world. At the Lord's Supper we are encouraged to serve, equipped to serve and sent out to serve.