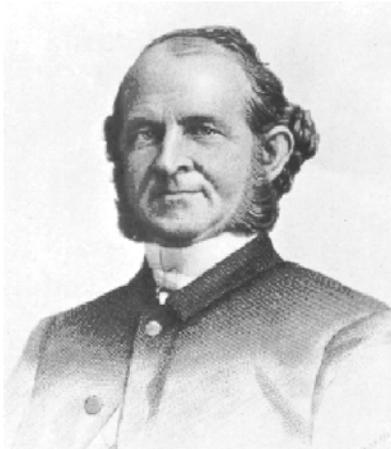


# The Lord's Table, and not the Altar



Bishop George David Cummins, D.D.

First Bishop  
of the  
Reformed Episcopal Church

## The Lord's Table, and not the Altar

On the seventeenth day of June, 1533, Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, writing to his friend Hawkins, ambassador to Germany, adds this postscript:

“Other news we have none notable, but that on Frith, which was in the Tower in prison, was appointed by the King's Grace to be examined before me, my Lord of Winchester, my Lord of London, my Lord of Suffolk, my Lord Chancellor, and my Lord of Wiltshire, whose opinion was so notably erroneous that we could not dispatch him, but were fain to leave him to the determination of his Ordinary the Bishop of London. His said opinion is of such nature that he thought it not necessary to be believed as an article of our faith that there is the very corporeal presence of Christ within the host and sacrament of the altar. And surely I myself sent for him three or four times to persuade him to leave that imagination. But for all that we could do therein he would not apply to counsel. Nevertheless, he is now at a final end with all examination; for my Lord of London hath given sentence, and delivered him to the secular power, and he looketh every day to go unto the fire. And there is also condemned with him on Andrew, a tailor, for the selfsame opinion, and thus fare you well.”

“These victims,” says England's latest historian, “went as they were sentenced, dismissed to their martyr crowns at Smithfield. Twenty years later another fire was burning under the walls of Oxford, and the hand which was now writing these light lines was blacking in the flames of it, paying there the penalty for the same ‘imagination’ for which Frith and the poor London tailor were condemned.

“It is affecting to know that Frith's writings were the instrument of Cramner's conversion; and the fathers of the Anglican Church have left a monument of their sorrow for the shedding of this innocent blood, in the order for the Communion Service, which closes with the very words on the Primate, with his brother Bishops, had sat in judgment.”

That rubric in the Communion Service reads thus: "The natural body and blood of our Savior, Christ, are in heaven and not here, it being against the truth of Christ's natural body to be at one time in more places than one."

And yet in this year of grace, 1874, more than three centuries after the fires of Oxford and Smithfield, the terrible error which these martyrs of England's Church died to cast out of the Reformed Church, is revived throughout the Anglican Communion, is zealously taught in the pulpit and by the press, and is symbolized in a thousand churches by the ceremonies befitting such a doctrine.

This false Gospel may be thus fairly set forth: that all spiritual life is communicated to the soul through physical media; that for this purpose the sacraments have been ordained as channels to convey grace to the soul through the organs of the body; that in the Sacrament of the Lord's supper, after the utterance of the words of the consecration by the priest, our Lord Himself is present on the altar under the forms of bread and wine, His real spiritual body and blood under the veil of the elements; that these are received onto the mouth; and thus by some mysterious, ineffable mode, convey grace, life, healing to the soul; that thus Christ is perpetually incarnate in this Sacrament, which becomes the exclusive channel by which we are made partakers of His life; that as thus the Lord's Supper becomes the central act of all worship—the very heart of Christianity - to be celebrated with all the accessories becoming a sacrifice, mystical and unbloody, yet real - a feast in which He veils all the glory of His Godhead under the simple elements of bread and wine.

1. In testing this system, our first and final appeal is to Scripture. "To the Law and the Testimony; if they speak not according to this, there is no truth in them." Has this teaching any warrant in God's Holy Word? Is it in harmony with the analogy of the faith, with the Scriptural proportion of truth?

That there is such an analogy St. Paul teaches when he says, "If any man prophecy, let him prophecy according to the proportion of the faith." There is a beautiful and harmonious

symmetry in which all the great and vital truths of salvation are grouped in relation to each other, as the different parts of a graceful and majestic building are combined in one grand whole. And as in a building some portions are vastly more important than others, such as the cornerstone, and the key-stone of an arch, so in the Gospel there are great foundations—stones and pillars and arches, upon which all the beautiful fabric reposes, all built upon the same foundation, the precious and tried corner-stone, Jesus Christ.

Now, if this teaching be one of the very central truths of Christianity, if the Eucharist be the exclusive channel of spiritual life, if at that precious feast in remembrance of His passion and death the real body and blood of the Son of God are dispensed under the forms of bread and wine, and impart thus ineffably life to the soul; if the simple sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as administered first by the Master himself, was designed to be celebrated with all the rites and ceremonies to do honor to the Sacred Presence; if the table of the Lord was to become an altar, the simple feast a tremendous though unbloody sacrifice - if all this be true, how can we account for the utter absence of any teaching in the New Testament to indicate it? Nay, more, how are we to explain the fact of the exceedingly scant allusions to the Lord's Supper by the inspired writers?

The Gospel of St. John does not even contain an account of its institution. In the Book of Acts there is no allusion to it in all the records of the early Church, except it be the one statement that "disciples continued in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and prayers." In the Epistle to the Romans, that most masterly and exhaustive statement and defense of the great doctrines of grace and salvation, there is no allusion to the Lord's Supper. In the second Epistle to the Corinthians there is none. In the Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Phillipians, Colossians and Thessalonians, there is none. In the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, none. In the Epistles of St. James, St. Jude, St. Peter, and St. John, none. In the Epistle to the Hebrews there is none; for the word, "we have an altar," says

Bishop Hall, mean “we have a spiritual and living altar and sacrifice, even Christ Jesus Himself, of which they cannot partake that are addicted to the ceremonies of the abrogated law.”

Only in one of the eighteen Epistles of the New Testament is there any notice of this Sacrament, or even any allusion to it; and this is the first Epistle to the Corinthians. There it is twice noticed; once as an illustration of another topic, and once for the correction of certain practical abuses that had crept into the mode of its observance.

Now, be it remembered that the Epistles of St. Paul, especially, contain the fullest and most elaborate exhibition of the truths necessary to salvation; that in them every cardinal and vital truth has its position in due proportion according to the analogy of the faith; and then how significant is the fact in condemnation of this system that it finds no utterance to uphold it in all his inspired teachings! If this theory had held the position in his estimation that it holds in the teachings of men among us now; if it stood as if true it ought to stand, side by side with the blessed truth of the Godhead of Christ and His Incarnation, Redemption by His vicarious sacrifice, justification by Faith in His perfect righteousness, renewal by the Holy Ghost, the union of the believer with Christ by faith—would it not have received from the great apostle, guided by the Holy Ghost, the place it deserved to hold in the great system of Divine truth? If St. Paul had held that the real body and blood of Christ were present on the altars of the churches under forms of bread and wine, that thus Christ was to be received as the soul’s food, who can doubt that his writings would have been full of truth? But never does he urge the Christians to whom he wrote to the reception of such teachings; nay, in but one Epistle does he allude to the Supper of the Lord, and then how utterly different is the position he assigns to it from the theory we are now opposing.

His heart and mind are all of the reality and blessedness of the believer’s union with Christ; but how is that union effected? Harken to that wondrous prayer that seems to burst from a heart filled with all the fullness of God, as he invokes for the

Christians of Ephesus this blessing: “I bow my knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and in earth is named, that he would grant unto you according to the riches of His grace to be strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man—that Christ might dwell in your hearts by faith!”

This is St. Paul’s Exposition of the mode of our union with Christ; not by receiving His real body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, but a reception of Christ into the heart by faith—a spiritual union. How wondrous is the harmony of this utterance with the words our Church directs her ministers to speak to the devout partaker of the Lord’s Supper: “Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thine heart by faith with thanksgiving.”

## **2. Does this theory receive any support from the words of our Lord at the institution of the Sacrament - “This is my body; this is my blood?”**

The interpretation given by the advocates of this theory, is that when our Lord took the bread into his hand it was really bread and bread only, but that after He had uttered the words “this is my body,” it became His real substantial body under the form of bread. But what does this admission involve? Nothing less than that there existed at the same moment two complete and separate bodies of Christ. Then one body of Christ was eaten by the disciples whilst He sat in their midst. And if our Lord Himself partook of the bread, as we have the right to suppose that He did, what an abhorrent inference follows!

Moreover, if these words are to be taken literally, so must the other utterances on the same occasion. St. Luke and St. Paul both unite in declaring that as our Lord took the cup, He said, “This cup is the New Testament in my blood which is shed for you.”

And then, by the rigidly literal interpretation, we are compelled to believe that He meant to affirm that the cup itself was the covenant or Testament; but against such an idea common sense revolts.

So, also, must we give the same rigid interpretation to the words, “this is my body broken for you:” if the first part of the

sentence “this is my body” be literally taken, so must the last, and we must interpret our Lord as saying that His body was already broken, that is slain, when He was not yet crucified. What insuperable difficulties rise up if we are bound to the literal interpretation! And how do they all disappear when we understand our Lord using the same figurative language in which He was accustomed to clothe spiritual truth, as when He called himself a “shepherd,” a “door,” a “vine,” “bread” for the hungry, “water” for the thirsty and famishing soul.

3. What then, of our Lord’s discourse at Capernaum! Did He mean to teach this theory by the strong expressions there used? Let us hear them again, for they are precious to every soul taught of the Spirit: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.”

It is well nigh forty years ago since the key to the true interpretation of this discourse was so admirably and unanswerably given by the beloved and revered Professor Turner, of the General Theological Seminary. Following the evangelical interpretation of all ages, and especially of the Divines of the Reformation, he has left to us this precious legacy as the testimony of a great scholar and teacher. Following him chiefly, we maintain of this memorable Discourse of our Lord:

1. That it could have had no reference to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, because that sacrament had not yet been instituted. Nay, not the slightest intimation had been given of any intention of instituting it. What mockery would it have been then to have used language which could have conveyed no meaning to the hearers! And surely this would have been the case if the reference had been to the Lord’s Supper.

2. So far from referring to the Eucharist, the language of our Lord

refers to the precious truth which Eucharist symbolizes. Both set forth the same glorious doctrine—Christ crucified the life of the soul—one in figurative language, the other by expressive symbols. When our Lord says, “the bread which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world,” He means giving His body to be crucified on the cross “as a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.” Through His flesh thus only is there found life for the world.

3. To sustain this figurative meaning of His words, how striking is the resemblance to His discourse to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well! Substitute “water” and “thirst” in the one, for “bread” and “hunger” in the other, and the meaning is the same. But if “flesh and blood” are to be taken literally in one, why not “water” in the other? Why is not the water that Christ promises to give to the thirsty soul, to be regarded really as water and not a symbol of His grace and mercy?

4. Moreover, Christ Himself, in this same discourse at Capernaum, interprets the eating and drinking as spiritual acts: “He that cometh to me shall never hunger: he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” Coming to Christ is eating His flesh, believing on Christ is drinking His blood.

5. Once more: If this were not enough, one utterance of the Saviour in the very midst of this strong figurative language, decides definitely the meaning of this “eating” and “drinking.” “As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.” The mode by which Jesus lived by the Father is the type of the mode of our living by Him. How then did the Divine Son live by the Father? Only by a spiritual participation of the life of the Father. Even so the believer lives by the Son, by Christ dwelling in his heart by faith.

The Jews at Capernaum did give to His words a most gross interpretation. "How," they asked, "can this man give us His flesh to eat?" Jesus strove to correct their misapprehension. He said, "It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

The terms "flesh" and "spirit" here, are to be taken in their generic sense, the one denoting that which is spiritual, the other that which is material. Then our Lord means to teach that material causes cannot directly affect the soul; it is the spiritual and not the material feeding upon Himself that giveth life. His own illustration that nothing that entereth into the mouth can defile the heart may be applied here—that nothing that entereth into the mouth can purify the soul. And still our argument upon this discourse is incomplete. The advocates of the theory we are opposing, while contending for a real, objective, substantial presence in the Lord's Supper, deny that it is a carnal fleshly presence, but only a spiritual body that is eaten. How then, can they claim any sanction for their theory in the discourse at Capernaum? If the words of Jesus are to be taken literally, they must refer to the eating and drinking of His fleshly body and blood. There is no standing point between this gross view and the figurative, spiritual meaning of His words.

I. We have made our appeal to Scripture to test this new doctrine, which is now sought to be forced upon us. To us this is the ultimate appeal, and the result is that we can find no trace of such a dogma in God's word: let us now see what evils arise from this gross error. It is, indeed, the fruitful source of the errors that now defile and desolate so large a portion of the visible church of Christ. It is the point of divergence, where the pure gospel separates from that which is "another gospel."

1. Following most logically this teaching is the doctrine of a sacrifice in the Lord's Supper. For is His body and blood be really, substantially present on the altars of our churches under the forms of bread and wine, then it is a real oblation, and offering up to God anew of the offering of

Calvary, a re-presentation as Blunt calls it; a presenting again to God of the sacrifice of Christ.

2. But if there be a sacrifice there must be a priesthood to offer it. So this theory converts the ministry from its great office of teaching the Word and thus feeding the flock of Christ, into a priesthood gifted with supernatural powers, divinely commissioned to renew or reproduce the Sacrifice of Christ, working perpetual miracles at each utterance of the words of consecration in the office of the Lord's Supper, empowered to receive confessions and to forgive sins.

3. So also, logically and consistently, springs from this theory the whole system of a sensuous and idolatrous Ritualism. It is developed as naturally as the flower unfolds from the bud. Ritualism is only the fitting drapery in which such a dogma clothes itself.

Try for a moment to realize all that this theory involves. The priest is standing before the altar to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Before him are the simple elements of bread and wine; up to a certain moment they are only bread and wine. But the moment in which he pronounces the words of consecration, "this is my body, this is my blood," all is changed. Christ is there, really, objectively under those forms. GOD IS THERE—God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God! Tremendous thought! He, before whom angels veil their faces, and seraphim and cherubim cry "Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Hosts!" is on the altar.

What reverence is fitting to receive him! What adoration is too profound to acknowledge Him! If Moses trembled at the burning bush and feared to look upon God, even so may the priest veil his face before his Creator and Redeemer. Oh! if my Saviour is shrouded there under those forms, let me worship Him! Bend the head and bow the knee to the earth, put on the gorgeous vestments and swing the censor—GOD IS THERE.

If this dogma be true, all Ritualism is a duty. But if it be a false dogma, unknown to God's Word, then Ritualism is idolatry foul and

offensive to God, and we are to shun it as the Israelites feared to touch the polluted censurs of Korah, Dathan and Abriam.

II. What, then, is the Scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper? This question is now the great question of our epoch; it will be the great question of the closing years of this century. Deprecate controversy around this precious feast of a Saviour's love as we may, we cannot escape the responsibility of the discussion. We must set forth clearly and strongly the true nature of the Lord's Supper, as set forth in Scripture, as maintained by the reformers of our mother Church; teach it from the pulpit and by the press, in Bible classes and in Sunday school, so that the minds of our people shall be fortified against the entrance of this grievous error.

Does the Evangelical view, then, of the Lord's Supper disparage its true value and preciousness? Because we refuse to elevate it into a sacrifice, and to acknowledge a Sacred Presence under the elements to be adored, do we therefore depreciate its worth? Far from it. Unspeakably more precious and sacred is the Reformed theory of the Communion than the theory of the mass of pre-Reformation times.

1. The Lord's Supper is then first of all a commemoration of our Great High Priest, who hath "passed into the heavens" to appear in the presence of God for us. As it was expedient for Him to go away that the Comforter might come, as His bodily presence could not remain with His flock, he instituted this Sacred Feast first of all to keep His memory fresh in our hearts. "Do this in remembrance of me." Whatever else He meant this Sacrament to be, this was one great design, and this the only injunction he gave in instituting it.

And so our Church sets forth—"for a continual remembrance of His death,"—"to the end that we should always remember the exceeding great love of our Master and only Saviour, Jesus Christ,"—"having in remembrance His blessed passion and precious death,"—these are the words

put into the mouths at the celebration of the Feast.

And who shall tell the influence upon all past ages of Christendom of this Sacrament in this preaching Christ, and in the days of darkness when Christ was not proclaimed except by this perpetual commemoration of His cross and passion? If the Lord's Supper had only served to fill this blessed office, it would not have been instituted in vain.

2. But it is more than this. It is a confession of Faith, "for as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup," said St. Paul, "ye do show the Lord's death till He come." And in this one mighty sentence is condensed the true Confession of Christ. It is "the Lord's death" we commemorate; the death of the God-man, the Lamb of God. Then His death to us is a sacrifice by which He offered Himself to God a propitiation for our sins, "bearing our sins in His own body upon the tree,"—dying "the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God,"—"tasting death for every man." This faith we confess as often as we partake of the Lord's Supper—"Redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

So, likewise, we avow our faith in His second coming—"till He come" is the inspiring hope ever on our lips when we draw nigh to this ordinance. We look for the Lord Jesus to return and fulfill His promise to drink of the fruit of the vine with us in the kingdom of His father. Nor are we yet weary of His waiting. We take up the grand old cry of Milton, "Come forth from thy royal chamber, O thou prince of the kings of the earth, put on thy robes of majesty and take up the sceptre given to thee of the Father, for the voice of thy bride calleth to thee and all creation groaneth to be released from its bondage."

3. And yet more, the Lord's Supper is a precious means of grace to the believer, in which Christ hath

ordained the elements of bread and wine to be signs and seals of His favor, "pledges of His love to our exceeding great and endless comfort."

Christ's presence at the Supper is a presence not in the elements, not on the altar, not received in the hand and by mouth. It is a presence manifested to the soul, received by faith alone. Thus alone we partake of His body and blood, that is, receive the benefits flowing from his death by faith, feed on Him in our hearts by faith. For, says the 28th Article, "the means by which the body of Christ is received and eaten is by faith;" and if it be by faith it cannot be by the mouth.

On the other hand the symbols of Christ's body and blood may be received where there is no real feeding on Christ. And so Christ's body and blood are eaten as the soul's food continually where the Sacrament is not received. Wherever there is a penitent heart and lively faith, there Christ becomes the soul's food, there the believer feeds on Christ, Christ dwells in him and he in Christ.

I heartily adopt the language of the Bishop of Cork as expressing most admirably the true Scriptural view of the Supper of our Lord. He is uttering an earnest protest against the erroneous teaching of a manual of devotion which had been the means of stirring up much strife in the Church of Ireland. "In return for all this trouble," says the Bishop, "we have a book that is misty in its language and muddy in its doctrine, a book that is in part of it a compound of piety and poison. It gives erroneous views of the Holy Communion, teaching that in it we are made one with Christ, as if we could not be one with Christ without it: whereas we have no right to come to the Holy Communion until we are one with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, and by faith; teaching that the Holy Communion was appointed by our Saviour to be the means by which He comes to live in us; whereas we have no right or fitness to come to the Communion until He comes to us first and lives in us, and until we

come to Him and have life in Him; teaching that by it He forgives us our sins and sets us free from their guilt; whereas all this is done and must be done before we can rightly come to the Communion at all. We come to Christ for life and to the Communion with life; we come to Christ for forgiveness and to the Communion with forgiveness; if we come to it aright we come for the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the body and blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the bread and wine; but food and strength are for the living and not the dead. A dead body cannot receive strength and refreshment; it must first have life. The sinner, by faith, gets life in Christ, and from Christ, and has Christ for his life, and in this blessed Sacrament obtains by the same grace from Christ, and not from the Sacrament; strength and refreshment for the soul."

"The crisis," says an able writer, in the London Quarterly Review, "the crisis at which we have now arrived is indeed a strange one. Forty years ago, or even more recently than that, there was probably not one member of the Church of England who would have affirmed that the consecration of the elements in the Eucharist was the means of bringing before us on the altar an object of worship; now this dogma is the very cornerstone of a system widely and rapidly spreading. The dogma is not to be found in Scripture, in ancient Liturgies, in the Liturgy of the Church of England, or in the works of the Anglican Fathers. A generation back no one would have doubted for an instant that a man who held the doctrine that the presence of Christ in the elements was such as to be adored, must at once leave the Church of England and join that of Rome."

Alas! what a change have we lived to witness. Now this very doctrine is adjudged to be the doctrine of the Reformers, and the number of its adherents is daily augmenting, and the silent leaven of its influence is making itself felt everywhere. The pulpit and the press continually advocate it. It moulds the ceremonies in the numberless churches, and breaks forth continually in the offensive displays of Ritualistic idolatries. To us it is the very surrender of the citadel of our faith to the foe. It is undoing all the work of the Reformation, putting back the shadow on the

dial-plate three centuries. In vain the struggles and wrestling of mighty men of the sixteenth century; in vain the prayers and tears of the witnesses in sackcloth. In vain the fires of a thousand martyrdoms, in vain the blood poured out as water to deliver God's church from idolatry. Venerable fathers and saintly martyrs of our mother church, ye died in vain; ye were fighting against God, contending against His truth! Frith, and Andrew, London's poor tailor, ye were burned for an "imagination." Latimer and Ridley, Bradford and Hooper, ye were sacrificed for a delusion. The formularies of faith that ye left us are substantially one with those of your persecutors. The altars ye broke down we are rebuilding. The idolatrous rites ye swept away we are restoring. The gaudy and meretricious ornaments of a sacrificing priesthood that ye cast off, we are again putting on. We have outgrown the delusions of your age, and the nineteenth century restores the status destroyed by the sixteenth.

Alas for the change that has come over the Episcopal Church of England and of the United States in the lifetime of a single generation. There was a day when every altar was thrown down and cast out of England's Churches as an abomination. And in the memory of men now living there was scarcely an altar to be seen in a Protestant Episcopal Church in this land. Now, where one simple communion table is to be found, there are scores of altars. Every new church edifice, with rare exceptions, restores the altar until silently and almost without protest the whole Episcopal Communion is leavened by the false doctrine symbolized by it.

From this treason to Christ the REFORMED EPISCOPAL CHURCH frees us. No longer are we compelled to worship in the presence of that which robs the Redeemer of the honor belonging to him alone. We acknowledge but one altar, the Cross of Calvary. We know but one Priest, even the "Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." We restore the simple table of the Lord. We proclaim the elements of bread and wine to be only symbols, tokens, "pledges of His love." We commemorate the one perfect, finished sacrifice. We adore Him with unmeasured love. We feed on Him only in our hearts by

faith. And with unutterable gratitude we thank God for an Episcopal Church, Reformed, Scriptural and Free.