Eucharistic Reformation

A short study of the development of Eucharistic liturgy from the Catholic Mass to the two Edwardine Prayer Books.

Introduction

The Holy Eucharist is one of a number of titles given to the principal sacrament of the Christian church. Eucharistic liturgy encompasses all the movements, actions, ceremonies and prayers contained within its corporate worship, both clerical and lay. In the Early Church, forms of public worship were largely unwritten; there is little if any evidence of a documented liturgy before that attributed to Pope Leo I (440–461). By the late sixth century and the Pontificate of Gregory I (540–604) the structural liturgy of the Mass was established: it would remain essentially unchanged until the Council of Trent. From as early as the fourteenth century perceived abuses in the church, particularly in its Eucharistic worship, were under discussion and much heated debate took place in centres of education across the whole of what is now called Europe.

Early Eucharistic history

This central service of Christian worship had developed in part from Jewish sources. The Liturgy of the Word, the first section of the order, survives from the Sabbath morning, synagogue service. This comprised two scriptural lessons with an interposed psalm. The essential structure of the Eucharistic prayer is derived in part from the hymn of praise and thanksgiving which concluded the ritual celebrations of the Jewish family meal. Hellenistic influences were added to these components, many of them being of a ceremonial nature. At the core of this worship was an enactment of the procedures that Jesus rehearsed with his disciples on the eve of crucifixion. Over ensuing centuries the Mass attracted to itself numerous ceremonies. These varied from the very simple, such as the praying postures of standing, sitting or kneeling, through making and using the sign of the cross (by both clergy and laity) to the introduction of the asperges and incense. Some of these ceremonial elaborations developed from as early as the fourth century, a time when the Eucharist was transformed from a private into a fully public offering of worship. Each innovation was

deliberately symbolic and designed to address the spiritual sensitivity of the increasing numbers of regular worshippers, reminding them that solemnity was a necessary part of the church's care for its members. From the second century the church adopted a policy of communion in one kind, in that the communicant only received the consecrated host. Doctrinal accretions were added to the Eucharist over time. Among the most important of these, especially insofar as it affected Reformation thinking, was the dogma associated with transubstantiation.

Eucharistic thinking of the principal Reformers

Reformed Eucharistic theories can be broadly divided into those promoted by Martin Luther (1483–1546), Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) and John Calvin (1509– 1564).

Luther's thoughts on the Lord's Supper changed over time. In a sermon preached in 1519 he said that, 'the bread is changed into Christ's true natural body'. In the following year he adopted a view offered by William of Occam (*c*1288–*c*1348) that the substance of the bread and wine remain, but that, at the same time, the Body and Blood of Christ are offered and received. Luther's original Eucharistic thinking was entirely based on the Catholic acceptance of the real presence and transubstantiation but within a year he had changed to Occam's position on consubstantiation. After initially defending the withholding of the chalice from the laity he later accepted that the Words of Institution indicated that all who participate in the service should receive both kinds. Luther also changed his view on the soteriological efficacy of the sacrament, from it being merely a fellowship of believers to seeing it as the foundation for the forgiveness of sins. In his later years he taught that there was a sacramental presence (often called a real presence) in the Eucharist. In this context he coined the phrase 'sacramental union'. Within this 'union' the Body of Christ is 'in, with and under' the bread. Luther now condemned the doctrine of transubstantiation, wherein the Mass was celebrated as a sacrifice in which Christ was offered to the Father. He also spoke against the practice of non-communicating services where church members were present to adore the elevated host. He felt it important that congregations should cease to be non-participating spectators and become active worshippers. Yet despite this development Luther believed that none should be admitted to the sacrament indiscriminately. Names of those wishing to communicate should be given to the pastor so that he could examine them in terms of their faith, life, conduct and belief. Finally, Luther was careful to advise church members against 'communing' with Protestants who denied his doctrine of the sacramental union. It has been

suggested that the pre-Reformation Luther would have been an advocate of communion in one kind. Luther had argued that, under one form, the communicant receives the 'substance'; under two forms only the 'shadow' is received.

Zwingli had early taken a humanist stance against church corruption. In his studies he found himself less able to reconcile the church's doctrine and rituals with his scriptural readings. Zwingli is often ignored in the roll of Reformation leaders because of the simplicity of his theology. This was based on the uncomplicated principle that if the Bible did not say something explicitly and literally, then no Christian should believe or practice it. In his view the words of the Bible would no longer be mysterious, difficult or allegorical: they became, in his mind, something like statutes. Words meant what they said, without obscurity or ambiguity. This shift in the reading of the scriptures had profound application. Henceforth not only would practices, beliefs, and rules not contained in scripture be shunned, but those that were contained in the literal meaning of the Bible were to be adhered to, absolutely and uncritically. These reforms in Zurich resulted in a vernacular service to replace the Mass, in which the Lord's Supper was celebrated as a memorial meal. Zwingli taught that, in his view of the 'real presence', the presence of Christ was only to be found in the hearts of the worshippers, not in any physical attribute. While Luther, like the Catholic Church, believed that the bread and wine of the Eucharist were spiritually transformed into the body and blood of Christ, Zwingli believed that the Eucharist only symbolized that body and blood. He appears to have had an almost Docetist view of Christ and those Protestant churches that are his spiritual inheritors overwhelmingly stress Christ's divine nature: any insistence on human characteristics represents, in their view, an incorrect reading of history.

Calvin sat mid-way between Luther and Zwingli in his interpretation of Eucharistic doctrine and clearly disassociated himself from Zwingli's understanding of the Words of Institution. He went so far as to use the word 'substance' in his assertion about the true presence. He preferred the word 'true' to 'real' because the latter term was often associated with Lutheran and Roman Catholic arguments for Christ's localized presence. Calvin readily asserted that his disagreement was not over the actuality of Christ's flesh and blood, 'but only the mode of reception'. Calvin's conceptualization of the Eucharist was determined by his different personal circumstances, *vis-à-vis* Luther. Whereas Luther lived and died close to his place of birth, Calvin was an exile. His profoundest polemic was articulated in his publication, 'A Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper'. In this he repudiated the thinking of Zwingli and Oecolampadius. Calvin's *magnum opus* was his *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, which was fi rst published in 1536. In it he confronted a multitude of

comprehensions, in the many 'reformed' churches, of the meanings of the Words of Institution: 'this', 'my body', 'this do' and 'remembrance'; aware always of the plethora of misunderstandings (in his view) that they bespoke.

All the Reformers seem to have 'forgotten' that the Eucharistic Prayer had traditionally been a recital of the whole history of salvation, preferring to concentrate on the Words of Institution as their warrant for celebrating the sacrament. The Reformers, angry at contemporary abuses, led them to eliminate many things of genuine value. Among these were the disappearances of the calendar with its memorials of the saints. It has also been argued that the eschatological expectations contained with the Eucharist were ignored by the Reformers, who concentrated instead on memorializing the Passion of Calvary, a unique event in human history.

English Eucharistic thinking

The name that springs fi rst to mind in this area of study is that of Thomas Cranmer (1489–1566), yet among the leading theologians of the day, Cranmer was seriously outranked. His principal concerns were ecclesiastical and political, and not overtly theological; but among matters that did exercise him were Holy Scripture, Justifi cation and the Sacrament of the Altar. In this latter respect, the drafting of creedal statements, the formation of liturgies and their resultant orders of public worship were of the greatest importance to him. Cranmer was a theological student in Germany in 1531 and 1532 and responded positively to many ideas from the Reformers. Chief among Cranmer's mentors was Andreas Osiander (1489–1552), whose niece he married in 1532. In common with all reformers, Cranmer insisted on the principle of *sola scriptura*. This doctrine led naturally to his solifidian stance, within which he insisted upon a 'lively faith' and whereby his followers would not fall into antinomian errors. Although determined on a course of liturgical reformation, Cranmer was inhibited by Henry VIII's Act of Six Articles (1539) which, among other provisions for the maintenance of the Catholic *status quo*, was perhaps more exacting in its doctrinal statement on the Eucharist than the Fourth Lateran Council. Despite the Act of Supremacy, which clearly took the Church of England away from the authority of Rome, Henry had little time for Protestantism or reformation and remained essentially 'Catholic' to his death. Thus it was not until the accession of Edward VI that serious changes in Christian worship could be considered.

At this time little difference existed between the religion of the clergy and upper echelons of the nobility, and the common people. Of absolute importance were the seasonal, religious cycle of fast and festival, of ritual observance and symbolic gesture. It may be assumed that the general populace of England would largely have been illiterate; they would have no knowledge of Latin, the language of the liturgy, and no ability to read Holy Scripture, even after the Bible became available in the vernacular language. It was against this background that Cranmer and his supporters attempted to introduce liturgical amendments and a new theological understanding, especially of the Mass. Post-Henrician changes were brought into effect. Visitations of dioceses by state officials to determine their conformance with religious legislation ceased soon after Henry's death. Suggestions were rife that the government was planning changes to the church's religion and ceremonies: a Proclamation of 24 May 1548 denounced rumour-mongering. The evangelical establishment was eager to pursue its programme of reforms and Cranmer's First Book of Homilies was published in 1547. While these did assert that the central pillar of reform was *sola fide*, there was an embarrassing silence about the nature of the Eucharist. Despite the intolerance to change implicit in the Act of the Six Articles, the key figures in the Reformation movement (Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer) had all abandoned a belief in a corporeal presence in the consecrated elements of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist in the First Edwardine Prayer Book of 1549

There is no *de facto* evidence that Cranmer was the sole architect of this Prayer Book. The Holy Communion order was clearly the work of a committee and was derived from several sources, primary among which was the English Sarum Rite. There was also input from the Roman Breviary of the Spanish Cardinal Quiñones and a book on doctrine and liturgy by Hermann von Wied, Archbishop of Cologne. Into a translated, yet, essentially unaltered, Latin Mass were inserted: a Collect for the King; an Exhortation; a Confession and Absolution; the Comfortable Words; the Prayer of Humble Access and the Words of Administration. The resulting rite was theologically ambiguous. The service was designed to authorize the administration of both kinds and to ensure proper preparation on the part of the communicants. Evidence that this rite contained few serious doctrinal changes from the Roman Mass is indicated by the title of the service – 'The Supper of the Lorde and the Holy Communion commonly called The Masse'. The rubrics still required the celebrant, 'to be fully vested in alb and a vestment or cope and that assisting clergy shall wear albs and

tunicles'. The Roman idea that the Mass is a sacrifice, in which the celebrating priest offers Christ to the Father, was removed from this service, but there were suggestions that the real presence was still understood and accepted. Most of the saints were removed from the Kalendar (*sic*): just twenty-three days were retained, mostly associated with Christ and his apostles. Feasts for the Purification and Annunciation of the BVM were preserved. Also removed from the Sarum rite were: references to incense and censing (at various points in the order); the Alleluia and Sequence (or Tract) that followed the Gradual; the *Dominus Vobiscum* and *Oremus* (after the sermon); prayers at the Commixing; the *Pax* and a post-Communion Collect.

The Eucharist in the Second Edwardine Prayer Book of 1552

Changes in Eucharistic doctrine and praxis are so comprehensive in this book that it seems not unreasonable to suppose that revision of the 1549 book began almost before its printing was completed. Further developments to evangelical principles and new innovations stemmed in part from Continental Reformers who visited these shores. In April 1549 Martin Bucer (1491–1551) arrived in England and later that year moved to Cambridge where he taught candidates for the priesthood. Many of his students would later exercise great influence in the church. Bucer was directed to examine the 1549 Prayer Book and in so doing he exposed much episcopal opposition to further changes. He and the other Reformers used theological principles of the Fathers: they either neutralized these when they did not match evangelical doctrine or appropriated them when they did. Peter Martyr (Vermigli) (1499–1562) had, perhaps, more influence on Cranmer in this period than anyone else, yet Cranmer's revised views of the Eucharist came about through complex paths after he was exposed to a wide diversity of influences.

In May 1550, in preparation for the new Prayer Book, Bishop Ridley of London demanded the removal of all altars from his churches and their replacement with wooden tables. By Order of the Council this policy became nation-wide in November. A 'royal circular' to the bishops ordered the destruction of all Latin service books. A second Act of Uniformity in 1552 changed the nature of the Eucharist in the English church more substantially than ever before. In this new order the Canon of the Mass was divided into three sections and the language was altered considerably. The Prayer of Intercession was placed earlier, immediately after the Offertory and the introduction now included the words, 'militant here in earth'. The central section retained the Prayer of Consecration but the

epiclesis was removed. The 1549 text included a cruciform symbol (✠) within the words 'blesse' and 'sactifie' to signify the epicletic component: these were not printed in the 1552 edition. This prayer ended with the Words of Institution and led directly to the administration, thus removing any possibility of time for Eucharistic adoration or worship. The words of administration were radically changed. The new order removed all references to Christ's resurrection, ascension and heavenly priesthood. The Lord's Prayer and the Prayer of Oblation were removed to a position after the Communion. Other changes included: the introduction of the Decalogue close to the start of the order and the transfer of the Gloria in Excelsis to the end of the service. The Kyries were removed and the reference the 'The Masse' in the title was expunged. Mediaeval Eucharistic rites had contained a collect for the Holy Catholic Church which included the names of the Pope, Bishop and Sovereign. This was altered in 1549 to include only the king and it was interposed between the collect for the day and the epistle. In 1552 this collect order was reversed. A new feature of the Edwardine Prayer Books was the inclusion of exhortations. To the two contained in the 1549 order was added in 1552 a third, composed by Martyr at the insistence of Bucer. The significance of this addition within the Reformed Eucharistic doctrine was strictly in relation to the concept of *sola fi de*. The so-called black rubric, attributed to John Knox, was added. This rubric called 'The Declaration on Kneeling' indicated that, while kneeling was the correct posture to adopt when receiving the sacrament, this was not to be construed as an act of adoration or devotion to the consecrated elements. The fourth introductory rubric, which had hitherto concerned itself with priestly vesture, now directed the placing of the Communion Table in the chancel.

Conclusion

This paper gives little more than a thumbnail sketch of the doctrinal changes that occurred in this period of history, and cannot begin to explore the many reforming characters who made their individual contributions to Eucharistic thinking and praxis. It is equally diffi cult to survey the many changes of opinion that affected individual reformers or to analyse their complex interactions with the churches they claimed to serve. It is not unreasonable to accept that Archbishop Thomas Cranmer changed the Church of England for ever. Although he is declared to be the principal architect of the two Edwardine Books of Common Prayer, he sought and received inspiration from leading evangelical Protestants, both at home and across the European continent. It is impracticable at this distance to try to determine which of many, sometimes conflicting, views proved significant in the resulting manuscripts. The Book of

Common Prayer has uniquely remained the one book 'by law appointed' within the Church of England, albeit the later revision of 1662.

Since the middle of the twentieth century there have been many attempts to offer the church a prayer book adapted to its perceived, modern needs. A set of relatively minor revisions by Convocation led to the 1928 Prayer Book, (the so-called Deposited Book) but this was rejected by parliament (who could not debate its content, but only vote on its acceptance as a lawful replacement for the 1662 Book). *Common Worship* is the latest in this line of experiments in the Church of England.

This author is firmly of the opinion that, upon accepting that some doctrinal and liturgical revision was needed to the pre-Tridentine Roman Mass and that a text in the vernacular language was necessary, the 1549 Prayer Book adequately fulfilled both of those roles.

David Fuller