

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## EUCCHARISTIC DOCTRINE : THE TRUE ROAD TO HARMONY.

BY THE REV. A. R. WHATELY, D.D.

THAT the Sacrament of unity should have been for so long one of the chief occasions of division is a tragic anomaly that has impressed many minds. And often an intended eirenicon only gives occasion for new forms of difference. It is much easier to slur the rival formulas than to transcend them. A recent example of these attempts is to be found in an article by the Rev. E. G. Swann,<sup>1</sup> which will perhaps afford a basis for constructive criticism of some current cross-purpose reasoning. With certain things in the article we should almost all agree ; but I wish to suggest that his general view is defective, both as a conception of the nature of Christian thought and as a diagnosis of the real meaning of our sacramental differences.

### I

Mr. Swann regards the various conflicting essays at doctrinal formulation, at least on this special subject, as efforts to express, with differences of detail and emphasis, essentially the same thing. This is so, in his view, at least where the presented result is strongly positive and emotionally rich. "The natural and proper language of religion is poetry, and especially must this be so in regard to such elusive and ineffable mysteries as we are here concerned with." About these "our language must be either misty or untrue. . . . Of course there is no mistiness," he adds, "in our apprehension of the fundamental fact, the objective presence and the objective gift." He has already given, earlier in the article, instances of how, in the mood of devotion, divines of different schools seem to think almost exactly alike.

If the true language of religion is poetry, then those of us who are not poetical seem to be in a bad way. And even those who are have different susceptibilities. But, without pressing this particular saying too hard, there is a real issue upon the relation of "mistiness" to mystery. Henry Drummond, in a brief but memorable passage, says that true mystery casts no shadows : that its edge, though irregular, is sharp. This, I think, is profoundly true. We are apt to think otherwise, because we rightly feel how impervious the higher mysteries are to "abstract metaphysical speculations," and yet feel impelled to grope a little way. But, when we have ruled out speculation altogether, we still find ourselves confronted by the demands of an exacting philosophy of another sort, the critical analysis of our own ideas. If we think

<sup>1</sup> *The Review of the Churches*. July, 1930.

at all, we cannot escape the responsibility for lucid and coherent thinking. We cannot merely, as it were, think to music.

Now in the first place, it is not enough to show that in the language of devotion men of different schools largely agree. Even if we disregard the amount of disagreement, it does not follow, because they agree in devotion and differ in theory, that the different theories are only superficially different, or that theory is unimportant. And we must not assume that the ideas are as similar as the language. Mr. Swann alludes to the well-known suggestion of Bishop Moule of Durham, to the effect that if our eyes were opened, we should see Christ as the true Consecrator in the Holy Communion, and to Lord Halifax's approval of it. It happens that, in the days when thoughts about the Holy Communion from Moule's pen were appearing from time to time, I used to read them with interest, because I was always looking for something in them that I did not find. It seemed to me that, unconsciously, he always missed any real conception of Christ as objectively self-imparted in the Sacrament, quite apart from his rejection of what is technically known as the Real Presence. The sign and the thing signified were parallel to the end: they did not interlock. I am therefore inclined to think that neither Lord Halifax nor Mr. Swann have properly understood his meaning. The latent subjectivism of his sacramental teaching was considerably veiled by the spiritual fervour of a very saintly man, and by his somewhat emotional and exuberant style. But, after all, if *theological* harmony needs to be exhibited by translating it out of the language of devotion into that of precise thought—and how else can it be done?—the moral is rather that we should, in the given cases, revise the theory than that we should despise theory as such. It is quite right to insist on this unity in devotion; but devotion is devotion and theology is theology. Many very spiritual men have been strong dogmatists, like Bernard of Clairvaux, or hard thinkers, like Anselm. It may be unfortunate that we are not as united in thinking as we are (sometimes) in worship; but it does not follow from this fact that we ought to compel ourselves to think in terms of worship, or restrict our thinking to the direct needs of worship.

Far be it from us to disparage the place of intuition in religious—and indeed in all—thought. And it is partly because reason itself and as such is, to my mind, so involved in it that I have a greater respect for hard thinking than Mr. Swann appears to have, and am less willing to skim lightly over the differences inseparable from it. But this is too large a subject to be pursued here. That intuition may often let itself go, as in poetry, worship, and some forms of meditation, must also be freely admitted. Like him, I would not for a moment confuse contemplation and science, but I draw the line, not—in this context—between Religion and Science, but between religious contemplation and the Science of Religion.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The ultimate reference of our ideas to the bed-rock of Revelation is throughout this article pre-supposed.

## II

All through his discussion, Mr. Swann treats the doctrine of Holy Communion as isolable from the general range of religious ideas. Of course he does not mean that it has no connections except with those main truths of the faith that it directly presupposes. But his plea would have been of a different character if he had adequately realized the interdependence of idea upon idea.

On page 386 a paragraph begins which contains a reference to a "total view of religion." If anyone, sharing the standpoint of the present writer, were to catch sight of this paragraph, with the reference, in advance of reading it, he would welcome the prospect of an enlargement of the too narrow stream of the argument. He would be glad to see that the Evangelical point of view as a whole is after all to be taken into some account. And then he would be grievously let down. All that is said about this total view is that it "tends to narrow down its scope and outlook to an over-severe view, whose severity is always in danger of becoming utterly harsh and repellent," with a little more to the same effect. Surely it is fatal even in theological *controversy*—to say nothing of theological arbitration—to employ only a negative conception of any type of thought. Frankly, this feature of the article has alienated much of the sympathy that I should have felt with it, in spite of differences of opinion. This lack of any attempt at sympathetic understanding is a serious disqualification for its task. If we seek sympathy, we must show it.

But it is the failure to appreciate the influence of total views of religion—positively regarded, epithets apart—upon particular religious views that is here so evident. The question may be approached from the side of spiritual experience and from the side of logical coherence.

Can it possibly be maintained in cold blood that Evangelicalism has as such no positive *motif*, no meaning as a spiritual phenomenon, no determining idea that, however elusive, controls the orbit of its teaching? Why is it there at all? Is it an enemy that hath done this? Mr. Swann would hardly subscribe to these negations, but there is little in his article that might not have been written by one who did.

Closely connected with this is his failure, noted above, to take proper account of the interconnection of religious ideas; and with this his disparagement of close thinking. Logic in itself certainly cannot build up constructive systems, but it is vitally necessary to prevent us from feeding our souls upon ambiguities. It *reveals* the internal harmony of experience. But the experience of each finds expression not only in thoughts that agree with those of others, but in thoughts that differ. It is a commonplace to say that we cannot all see the whole truth, and that we are complementary one to another. But we have failed to attain to the full meaning of this commonplace if we are satisfied to concentrate only on what we share.

We had better frankly face the fact that experience often clashes with experience (not, indeed, in its pure character as spiritual revelation from on high : but in that character it cannot enter the arena of controversy at all), and that thought, which is potentially at least controversial, is necessary to the very life of experience. It is not always that worship itself is so hospitable in its appeal as in the instances that Mr. Swann gives. But a still more important point is this : that such special utterances as those he quotes, however they may express unity among different types, do not express the unity of each type within itself, and therefore yield very imperfect evidence of the limits of their mutual difference. What we have to consider, when we approach these types on the side of experience, is their *general* feeling-tone, the essential nature of the faith that strives to find expression in them. Certainly it is the ideas that disclose this : ideas so regarded ever tend to over-top logic, yet it is not to logic alone that they owe their mutual incompatibilities : logic could never create these. All this is overlooked in his eirenicon, and that is a fatal defect.

The difference between the real Evangelical and the "Catholic" is, fundamentally, a difference in *centre of gravity*. When the Evangelical is called upon to say what is his special contribution as such to the fulness of truth, it is not easy to give an answer that does not call forth the reply : "Well, but that is what we always teach ; and not only teach but emphasize." For if, on the other hand, the answer to the enquiry is controversial, it will not be accepted as a "contribution." The primary contribution that each type makes is just itself. We all may and must learn from one another ; but the patient waiting for "that which is perfect" is better than mere eclecticism. The Divine purpose that makes for the Divine unity may work itself out by revealing differences as well as harmonies.

In short, the experiential, or intuitional, character of religious thought and knowledge is *not* to be understood in relation to particular doctrines—such as that of the Holy Communion—considered by themselves. It is related to "total views of religion" ; and the totality is to be grasped by sympathetic insight on the one hand and logical analysis on the other. To disparage dissentients will neither make friends of them nor keep them off the path. We may now offer a very brief and slight application of the above remarks to the question of Eucharistic doctrine.

### III

Mr. Swann, as one would expect, objects to close definitions of the nature of Christ's Presence in the Sacrament. In a sense, I certainly agree ; but, though we cannot speculatively interpret it, yet we must understand the implications of the words we use to formulate our belief. Otherwise, instead of making language subservient to intuition, we may only make ourselves the dupes of language. In referring to the "change" in the elements, he is inclined to recommend the phrase "a higher spiritual status," and

adds " this is practically equivalent to Latimer's statement, ' The change is not in the nature but in the dignity.' Perhaps it is wisest to confine ourselves to such statements as these " (p. 383). He would probably apply to his view the term Transvaluation, which he uses elsewhere, and regrets that it is itself tending to be speculatively elaborated.

Now the attribute of value, thus used, (and the same applies to status, dignity, and the like), affords, to my mind, not so much an unambitious and mediating answer to the question as the delusive appearance of an answer. To say that a thing undergoes the change of being made valuable is meaningless. To explain the value of the elements on the ground that value is added to them takes us nowhere. More pronounced theories of the Real Presence have at least the advantage here. Such a view as this, however, has been adduced in support of the *epiclesis* in the New Prayer Book. It has been said that a change of this kind must *ex hypothesi* take place, and therefore why not invoke it? One would have thought that the natural question would have been, therefore why invoke it?

The fact is, that, from another point of view, this theory *has* its significance, but not what the author thinks. It affirms—while trying to avoid entangling itself in liabilities—that the mediation of Christ's Presence in the Sacrament is effected primarily by the elements and not by the rite. The issue is between two directions of thought, implying two starting-points. Value, therefore, which we all agree in attributing to the Sacrament, is made to play the rôle of a quality conferred antecedently upon the elements in order to make the reception to be what (in consistency) it would not otherwise be, the covenantal act intended by Christ. This view is not, except in a superficial sense, an eirenicon at all. It just indicates, with a minimum of complications, the real dividing-line between two types of thought.

Let me endeavour to adumbrate, by means of an illustration, a very different conception of sacramental grace, in which also the objectivity of the gift is quite essential. Think of a stretch of rocky and irregular coast-line, along which the tide is coming in. Think of the sea as, in itself, regular and even in its advance along this particular line. None the less it advances further at some points than at others. It takes the outline of the various inlets and caves. It has many a " special presence," but all are to be understood in terms of the broad fact of the incoming sea, taken together with the configuration of the shore upon which it advances. Let the flowing tide represent the grace of God as issuing directly from the supreme inclusive Event of Redemption. Let the shore represent the human race, or human nature, in every form of its possible receptivity. Some particular inlet will stand for the Holy Communion. The presence of the sea when it has entered that inlet is certainly a real presence. It is not subjective to the inlet. It is the very definite result of what the sea does and is. It is also a unique presence, for the inlet *is* an inlet, and is not just like the

other inlets. The differentiation is on the side of the shore ; but the sea could not refuse to fill the inlet without a modification of the *general* fact of what it is doing, a special absence.

To this view, the Sacrament occupies an essential, but not a central, place in the theology that thus conceives it. And, *just for this reason*, it speaks, not only of the completeness of Redemption, but of "the beauty of the earth, the glory of the skies." The universal sacrament of nature circulates through it,—without, as it were, a special licence—neither checked nor drained.

It is well to affirm, directly and firmly, that, for the genuine Evangelical, faith and thought find their centre of gravity in the super-sacramental Christ. Spirit uses matter for its instrument : but, after all, material objects are limited by place, time, and occasion. Their instrumentality is circumscribed. Catholicism has its hardnesses and narrownesses—yes, and its negations—as truly as Protestantism. Either is apt to be cold and repellent to the other. And the Evangelical at least need not trouble if outsiders think his sacramentalism in itself "thin." To him what it loses in "richness" it gains both in loftiness and in intimacy. The plain glass window reveals "the beauty of the earth, the glory of the skies."

One important point must be noted. "There is a curious antagonism," says Mr. Swann, "on the part of nearly all Evangelicals, even of those most anxious to describe themselves as 'Liberal,' to any bringing in of our Lord's glorified humanity in connection with the Eucharist" (p. 385). Any opinion is curious if regarded as a rock in the sky. The complaint, too, is a little vague. But, if true at all to fact, it must surely refer to the definition of the *res sacramenti*—the Gift as such—in terms of the glorified humanity, not to the resultant deepening of our union with the glorified *Person*. If so, this antagonism—or *non possumus*, as I should say—belongs, whether conscious or intuitive, to the very meaning of the positive conception of the Eucharist to which it belongs. This is a wide subject, and a slight indication must suffice. The Incarnation, for us who take this standpoint, is interpreted in and through its inclusion in the comprehensive fact of Redemption. We may regard Redemption specially on this particular side when the context of our thought demands it, just as we may from the other sides. But we can find no room for anything covered by the phrase "extension of the Incarnation." The Church and the Eucharist are no extension of it, but presuppose and are involved in it. We are certainly not committed by this to the view that the redemptive events are *merely* temporal, as ordinary events are : but their time-order must surely mean something ; and we, for ourselves, cannot view the Incarnation as "extended" on this side of the Death and Ascension. The institution of the Eucharist is the consecration of all succeeding celebrations, and *therefore* of the elements employed. What, then, is given ? Clearly the fruit of the completed work as such, the Divine grace and life that realizes under time conditions the victory of the glorified Lord through union with His Person.

The motive of the doctrine of a divine-*human* life imparted in the Sacrament seems rather a response to the demand of the sacramental ideal and instinct than a necessity of thought leading up to the Sacrament. For it is obvious that we *have* human nature already. The two terms that need to be united are "human" and "divine," not "human" and "divine-human." So put, the redundancy is obvious. We do not water our gardens with wet earth, but with water. At least, there *is* an Evangelical philosophy.

One more brief quotation. "The liturgy," says Mr. Swann, "just before the culminating point of the whole action, warns us 'Lift up your hearts!' We must not think to 'bring the Lord Christ down,' so as to make Him, in effect, the object of sense. Rather we are to think of the congregation as being caught up to 'sit with Christ in the heavenlies,' and of the heavenly world as thrown open to our soul's gaze, through all the accompaniments of the action, but especially through the holy bread and the blessed cup." This thought, in its main purport, any Evangelical might, I think, gladly accept. Indeed, it seems, on one side at least, more consonant with the theology that denies that Christ is "present on our altars" than with that which affirms it. But I quote it because I do not want to dwell only on differences.

In conclusion, the true way to harmony lies, not in skipping our differences, but in probing them. Unity through differentiation runs through God's works. All but flat contradiction may be reconciled: all but the core of the Gospel may split apart. There are doctrines that, like some plants, must be nurtured under glass before they can contribute to the united beauty of the garden. A passionate devotion to that which our own experience reveals, even where it is inevitably distinctive rather than universal, is the true ground of sympathy with all genuine conviction as such. And even where spiritual insight is really distorted by prejudice, who shall say where the one ends and the other begins? There are those who are kept within the pastures not by reason or conscious discrimination, but simply by this—that they know not the voice of strangers.

---

COME UP THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM. By Eleanor Vellacott Wood.  
*London: Oliphants, Ltd., 21 Paternoster Square, E.C. 1s. net.*

It is quite in accordance with the fitness of things that Mrs. Wood, who is sister-in-law to the Brothers Frederick and Arthur Wood, of the National Young Life Campaign, should be engaged in writing books that make a strong appeal to young people. In this attractive booklet the story of Bethlehem is told again. We are called up the road (1) to see, (2) to offer, and (3) to come down the road from Bethlehem "to make it known." The brief concluding message is entitled, "Concerning the road." This pleasing little gift-book will certainly find a cordial welcome.