

Thomas Cranmer's figural reading of Scripture and the Eucharist

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Bio

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556)

Archbishop of Canterbury 1533-1555



Scripture

Claim: Figural reading of Scripture is to find ourselves in Scripture by finding Scripture in ourselves.

Figure as "shape"

A prayer before his death:

O Father of Heaven: O Son of God, Redeemer of the world; O Holy Ghost, proceeding from the both, three persons and one God,	
have mercy upon me most wretched caitiff, and miserable sinner	But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' (Luke 18:13)

I, who have offended both Heaven and earth,	And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ (Luke 15:21)
And more grievously than any tongue can express, whither then may I go, or whither should I fly for succor?	Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? (Psalm 139:7)
To Heaven I may be ashamed to lift up mine eyes;	“O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.” (Ezra 9:6)
And in earth I find no refuge.	there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul. (Psalm 142:4)
What shall I then do?	Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37)
Shall I despair? God forbid. O good God, Thou art merciful, and refuseth non that come unto Thee for succor.	Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)
To Thee therefore do I run	Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord! I have fled to you for refuge. (Psalm 143:9)

The shapes of Scripture, shaping our lives
Daily Office and Sunday Lectionaries

Collect for the second Sunday of Advent:

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Digesting” is to assimilate into one’s self

Figuring the Eucharist

A Cranmerian Model of the Eucharist

Blood is a figure of the life. So is the bread a sign of the body. But *this Cup is my blood* must needs be *figuratè*.

What is it that he calleth bread and wine? First it is called bread and after the consecration *significat Corpus Christi*. But the bread is the figure. For the bread is the Sacrament.

Hoc est Corpus meum, id est figura Corporis. Thus sayeth the old fathers.

For Christ when he bids us eat his body it is *figurative*.

“There be *two things* [in the Sacrament], to eat the Sacrament and to eat the body of Christ. The eating of the body is to dwell in Christ, and this may be though a man never taste the Sacrament. All men eat not the body in the Sacrament.”

- A. the physical reality of a human eating a piece of bread and drinking some wine,
- B. the spiritual reality of the soul/mind/heart of the faithful being directly connected to the body and blood of Christ.

as...so...

“...*as* outwardly we eat the bread and drink the wine with our mouths, *so* inwardly by faith we spiritually eat the very flesh and drink the very blood of Christ.”

“And *as* every man is carnally fed and nourished in his body by meat and drink, even *so* is every good Christian man spiritually fed and nourished in his soul by the flesh and blood of our Saviour Christ.”

“How often do I teach and repeat again and again, that *as* corporally with our mouths we eat and drink the sacramental bread and wine, *so* spiritually with our hearts, by faith, do we eat Christ’s very flesh and drink his very blood, and do both feed and live spiritually by him, although corporally he be absent from us, and sitteth in heaven at his Father’s right hand.”

Arcadi: The physical reality (A) (‘*as* corporally with our mouths we eat and drink the sacramental bread and wine’) parallels the spiritual reality (B) (‘*so* spiritually with our hearts, by faith, do we eat Christ’s very flesh and drink his very blood’)

“we lift up our hearts unto heaven, and with our faith we see Christ crucified with our spiritual eyes; and eat his flesh, thrust through with a spear, and drink his blood springing out of his side, with our spiritual mouths of our faith.”

“Faithful Christian people, such as be Christ’s true disciples, continually from time to time record in their minds the beneficial death of our Saviour Christ, chawing it by faith in the cud of their spirit, and digesting it in their hearts, feeding and comforting themselves with that heavenly meat, although they daily receive not the sacrament thereof, and so they eat Christ’s body spiritually, although not the sacrament thereof. But when such men for their more comfort and confirmation of eternal life, given unto them by Christ’s death, come unto the Lord’s holy table, then, as before they fed spiritually upon Christ, so now they feed corporally also upon the sacramental bread. By which sacramental feeding in Christ’s promises their former spiritual feeding is increased, and they grow and wax continually more strong in Christ, until at the last they shall come to the full measure and perfection in Christ.”

The Eucharist is the shape of the whole Christian life: being connected to Christ and his work.



See also: James M. Arcadi, “Discerning the Body of Christ: A Retrieval of Thomas Cranmer’s Eucharistic Theology by Way of the Spiritual Senses,” *Journal of Anglican Studies* 17.2 (2019): 183-97.