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Discerning the Body of Christ: A Retrieval of Thomas Cranmer's Eucharistic Theology by Way of the Spiritual Senses

James M. Arcadi¹ 

Email: jmarcadi@tiu.edu

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Abstract

Thomas Cranmer's Eucharistic theology has been the source of no small amount of scholarship and dispute. I argue that these disputes are in part due to the fact that Cranmer wavers between describing two distinct realities and that these realities are not necessarily coincidental. There is the reality of the consecrated elements, which he understands figuratively as being the body and blood of Christ. But Cranmer also describes a second reality, which is the direct connection between the soul of the recipient and the actual body and blood of Christ. I highlight the latter reality by recourse to recent work on the notion of the spiritual senses in the Christian theological tradition.

Keywords: Anglican Eucharistic theology, Eucharist, Eucharistic parallelism, Eucharistic realism, spiritual senses, Thomas Cranmer

‘... 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.’²

The Eucharistic theology of Thomas Cranmer has been a locus of much controversy in the history of theological reflection. As one of Cranmer's biographers puts it:

Few characters in history have aroused as much controversy as Thomas Cranmer. For four hundred years he has been bitterly attacked and ardently defended by biographers and historians as if the righteousness of the English Reformation and the justification of the Church of England depended on the moral probity of the man who was its first Archbishop.³

¹James M. Arcadi is Assistant Professor in Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, USA.

²Thomas Cranmer and Henry Jenkyns, *The Remains of Thomas Cranmer*, vol. II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1833), p. 324.

³Jasper Godwin Ridley, *Thomas Cranmer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 1.

Certainly the Anglican Communion does not rise or fall on the pen strokes of Archbishop Cranmer. Nevertheless, the Eucharistic liturgies he composed form the foundation for the Eucharistic theology that is experienced by nearly 90 million Anglicans worldwide. The lion's share of the interpretive history of Cranmer's thought centres on the contentious issue of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. This study is concerned with explicating the manner in which Cranmer utilizes spiritual sense language and conceptions to describe the encounter with God that occurs between the faithful and the divine during the Eucharist. For Cranmer, as I will show, there are two parallel states of affairs that obtain in the instance of the consumption of the Eucharistic elements by the faithful. There is:

(A) the physical reality of a human eating a piece of bread and drinking some wine,

and parallel to this there is:

(B) the spiritual reality of the soul/mind/heart of the faithful being directly connected to the body and blood of Christ.

This parallelism is apparent throughout Cranmer's polemical writings and his Eucharistic liturgical work.⁴ Because of Cranmer's frequent use of spiritual sense language, his interpreters have had difficulty neatly placing him along the spectrum of views on the metaphysics of the Eucharist, thus bringing about the perhaps seemingly intractable disputes regarding the interpretation of his views.⁵

Conceptual Context and Preliminary Distinctions

When one analyses an author's discussion of the Eucharist and the author commends the reader to, say, 'taste the body of Christ' it is difficult to delineate the referents of those terms. This utterance might be understood along lines where:

- (1) 'taste' refers to the bodily activity of the physical mouth and 'the body of Christ' refers to the sacramental bread that has taken this name;
- (2) 'taste' refers to a/the faculty of the spiritual sensorium and 'the body of Christ' refers to some immaterial aspect of God; or
- (3) 'taste' refers to a/the faculty of the spiritual sensorium and 'the body of Christ' refers to the body of Christ (born of the Virgin Mary, crucified on the cross, etc.).

⁴Brian A. Gerrish introduced the term 'symbolic parallelism' to describe views like Cranmer's in his influential essay 'The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Confessions', *Theology Today* 23.2 (1966), pp. 224-43; see also Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 614-16.

⁵For a recent discussion of contemporary approaches to a spectrum of views on the metaphysics of the Eucharist, see James M. Arcadi, 'Recent Philosophical Work on the Doctrine of the Eucharist', *Philosophy Compass* 11.7 (2016), pp. 402-12 and *An Incarnational Model of the Eucharist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 13-23.

(1) requires a literal understanding of the first term ‘taste’, where literal entails ‘physical’, and a figurative understanding of the second term, ‘the body of Christ’. (2) uses figurative explications of both terms. Yet, (3) is another mix of literal and figurative with ‘taste’ being figurative and ‘the body of Christ’ being literal. I argue that by an expression like ‘taste the body of Christ’ Cranmer means both (1) and (3), corresponding to the realities described in (A) and (B) above. I make this argument by attending to recent work on the spiritual senses in the Christian tradition.

As noted in the introduction to a recent study of the spiritual senses in the Christian tradition edited by Paul Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, many passages in Scripture, and many statements made by theologians of the Church’s past, ‘seem to point to certain features of human cognition that make perception-like contact with God possible’.⁶ Further, these editors note, “spiritual sense” is an umbrella term covering a variety of overlapping, yet distinct, expressions in which “sense” in general or a particular sensory modality . . . is typically qualified by reference to spirit . . . heart . . . soul . . . mind or intellect . . . inner man . . . or faith’.⁷ Likewise, authors in the Christian tradition even utilize ‘the language of sense-perception to describe divine-human encounters without qualifying the senses as “spiritual” or correlating them with the soul, mind, heart and so on explicitly’.⁸ Cranmer employs both these categories of spiritual sense-language in the expressions of his Eucharistic theology.

I here offer a couple of distinctions and points of clarification regarding, first, spiritual perception in the Eucharist and, second, discerning analogy from metaphor. With respect to the former, much of the recent literature on spiritual perception tends to focus on the interaction between a human and God, where the latter is taken to be a more or less generic transcendent entity. However, as William Alston notes, ‘not all “religious experiences” with sensory content are taken to be perceptions of God. Visions of saints, of the heavenly city, of the Virgin Mary, of doves, are not.’⁹ To this, he adds the comment, ‘Visions of Jesus Christ represent a special case, since, according to Christian doctrine, to see Christ is to see God’.¹⁰ Eucharistic religious experiences might even be a more special case as there are a number of distinct aspects to this perceptive experience. Thus, it is important to clarify the object and modes of perception in these instances.

First, in order to be a Eucharistic religious experience, there must be a perceptive experience of bread and wine. This qualification will come into play further on in this essay.¹¹ Secondly, a participant in a Eucharistic religious experience could have

⁶Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 1-19 (1).

⁷Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, p. 2.

⁸Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, p. 3.

⁹William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 18.

¹⁰Alston, *Perceiving God*, p. 18.

¹¹I want to leave this vaguely stated so as to allow ‘Eucharistic religious experience’ to cover a diversity of instances from manducation of the elements, to observation of consecrated elements, to a vision of the elements, to remembering an instance of interacting with the elements, etc.

a perceptive experience of a number of 'spiritual'¹² entities: God, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word, the body of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and so on. In this regard, what a particular person believes about the metaphysics of the Eucharist could come to bear on the understanding of what the object of perception is. For instance, if one holds to the official Roman Catholic explication of Christ's corporeal presence in the Eucharist, then, in a Eucharistic perceptive experience, one may very well likely suppose oneself to be having an experience of the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ in the elements of bread and wine, albeit not empirically so.¹³ However, if one holds to a view of the presence following the theological lineage of Huldrych Zwingli, one might not suppose oneself to perceive the actual body of Christ during their experience of the Eucharist; rather, one might simply report a perception of God or Jesus Christ in some way independent of his body.

In fact, given the theological commitments of the followers of Zwingli with respect to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, these Christians present an interesting test case for using the spiritual perception motif to describe the Eucharistic encounter. The followers of the Zwinglian position have sometimes had their view of Christ's presence in the Eucharist referred to as 'memorialist'¹⁴ or a 'No special presence'¹⁵ mode of presence. This view holds that, in the Eucharist, Christ is not present 'in any way more unique than his general presence in the cosmos'.¹⁶ The adherent to the memorialist perspective holds that the Eucharist is not a location of a special or different presence of God. Rather, the elements serve as a kind of mnemonic device that aid and encourage a recipient's mind to recall the past work of Christ. Remembering is a related but distinct cognitive process from perception, even if both processes produce beliefs in the one who cogitates. Remembering is a cognitive process directed at past events, whereas perception is one directed at present realities. Hence, on the one hand, the activity of remembering would not count as an instance of spiritual perception for the memorialist. However, on the other hand, if the memorialist were to attend to God's omnipresence during the Eucharist, then it seems as though this experience could count as an instance of spiritual perception, it just would not be an instance of perception uniquely available by way of the Eucharist.

A further unique aspect of spiritual perception in Eucharistic situations is that in these experiences, although one might make a fine-grained distinction between the two, consumption entails perception. I want to make the category of Eucharistic perceptive experience broad enough to include instances where the elements are not eaten (e.g. viewing a consecrated piece of bread, having a vision of a cup of wine). But in those instances where eating obtains, that act of consumption entails perception. Of course, this is just what normally occurs in physical eating as well.¹⁷ Thus, when Cranmer or other theorists commend the consumption of the body and

¹²Where by 'spiritual' I simply mean an entity not empirically verifiably present to one's physical senses.

¹³I understand that '*in the elements*' may not be the most metaphysically precise way to put things, but speaking loosely I think the locution is apt enough.

¹⁴Gerrish, 'The Lord's Supper'.

¹⁵Arcadi, 'Recent Philosophical Work', p. 402.

¹⁶Arcadi, 'Recent Philosophical Work', p. 402.

¹⁷Notwithstanding that one can consume nutrients via an IV when one is unconscious, or a nursing babe may not perceive the milk she is consuming. Generally, one perceives when one consumes.

blood of Christ, this includes the commendation to perceive the body and blood of Christ.

Discussions of the distinction between the modes of figurative speech of metaphor and analogy are frequent components of conversations about the nature of the Eucharist. Within the spiritual senses discussion, Gavrilyuk and Coakley offer this helpful distinction between analogy and metaphor in the context of spiritual perception: 'Analogy obtains when the operation of the spiritual senses is described in terms akin to the operation of physical sensation. Metaphorical use can be assumed when no close similarity with the functioning of a physical sensorium is intended.'¹⁸ With respect to Cranmer's view on the Eucharist, this distinction is especially pertinent as a means for distinguishing how he could hold to both (1) and (3). For when he is discussing the physical activity of eating bread and drinking wine with the physical body – the (A) level – he intends this to be an analogical process. For the physical activity is an analogy for a reality obtaining on the spiritual level (or the (B) level) of a connection between the actual body of Christ and the recipient.

Because of the distinction in Cranmer's mind between the phenomena described in the two levels, (A) and (B), he has proven difficult to interpret. For instance, one recent and helpful study of Anglican Eucharistic theology openly wonders whether there is an unresolved inconsistency in Cranmer's own thought. Brian Douglas describes a spectrum of views on the metaphysics of the Eucharist by deploying the terms: immoderate realist, moderate realist, moderate nominalist, and immoderate realist.¹⁹ For example, Douglas categorizes the standard Roman Catholic view as an instance of moderate realism, whereas the standard Zwinglian view is an instance of immoderate nominalism.²⁰ Douglas describes Cranmer's view in the following manner:

It seems that for Cranmer he is a moderate nominalist in regard to the earthly Eucharist, but a moderate realist in regard to the heavenly and spiritual encounter. Cranmer's views seem peculiar to him and the possibility that he was both a nominalist and a realist at the same time explains to some extent why it is so difficult to categorise Cranmer's views on the Eucharist and why to some extent his views will always remain a mystery.²¹

¹⁸Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, p. 6.

¹⁹See Brian Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*. I. *The Reformation to the 19th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), especially pp. 20-34. For an expanded discussion of the philosophical underpinning to Douglas's terminology, see Brian Douglas and Terence Lovat, 'The Integrity of Discourse in the Anglican Eucharistic Tradition: A Consideration of Philosophical Assumptions', *The Heythrop Journal* 51.5 (2010), pp. 847-61.

²⁰It should be noted that Douglas intends this categorization to pertain to the issue of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, not to the ontological status of the elements. Hence, the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran would both be termed moderate realists in Douglas's view, even if they disagree about the continued status of the bread. For this distinction, see Arcadi, 'Recent Philosophical Work', pp. 403-405.

²¹http://anglicaneucharistictheology.com/Anglican_Eucharistic_Theology/Case_Studies/Entries/2006/5/30_Thomas_Cranmer1489-1556Archbishop_of_Canterbury.html (accessed 16 April 2018). Douglas makes this comment in the midst of his very helpful online resource of case studies that accompany his Brill texts.

This terminology has also been deployed before in discussions of Cranmer's Eucharistic thought, most notably in the middle of the last century by Cyril Richardson.²² In describing Cranmer's views on the conjunction of the notions of the dwelling of Christ in the believer and the absence of Christ's body from the Eucharistic elements, Richardson asserts, 'I should contend it is downright impossible [to reconcile these views], and that what we have in Cranmer is an unresolved conflict between Nominalist and Realist notions.'²³

However, I agree with Bryan Spinks that 'these [Nominalist/Realist] categories are far too broad and "catch all" to be particularly helpful'.²⁴ I am also wary about adopting this terminology because the terms 'nominalism' and 'realism' are already extensively in use in discussions in metaphysics regarding the nature of abstract objects and are hence fraught with qualifications and distinctions within those conversations. Moreover, it is not immediately clear that historians or theologians have utilized these terms in ways consistent with one another or consistent with standard philosophical usage. I do not disagree with Douglas or Richardson that Cranmer articulates two different positions. I do, however, disagree that this articulation results in an inconsistency or mystery. Rather, my effort here is to utilize the spiritual senses lens to show that there is not an inconsistency in Cranmer's thought because Cranmer is attempting to describe two independent, though related, phenomena. To use terminology avoiding the nominalist/realist complications, I aver that when Cranmer speaks of the state of affairs of (A) he is using his language figuratively, but when speaking of (B) he intends his language literally.²⁵ Since these two states of affairs are non-identical and even potentially non-coincidental, there is no need to attribute inconsistency or contradiction in Cranmer's thoughts on the matter. The next section highlights his remarks on (A), the following homes in on his reflections on (B).

Figurative Language

Gavrilyuk and Coakley note that theologians in the history of Christian theological reflection often use figurative language to describe real instances of spiritual perception. In the (A) realm, that of the description of the metaphysical status of the body or blood of Christ connected to the elements, Cranmer's mature view can only be categorized as holding to a figurative or symbolic relation between the elements and the body of Christ. That is, the physical reality that obtains in Eucharistic eating is only the consumption of bread and wine. Given this reality, Cranmer is faced with

²²Richardson, 'Cranmer and Eucharistic Doctrine', *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 (1965), pp. 421-37 (429). In fact, in the mid-twentieth century there was a raft of efforts to pin Cranmer down on the nominalism/realism spectrum, the most notable of which are: Eugene K. McGee, 'Cranmer and Nominalism', *Harvard Theological Review* 57.3 (1964), pp. 189-216 and 'Cranmer's Nominalism Reaffirmed', *Harvard Theological Review* 59.2 (1966), pp. 192-96; William J. Courtenay, 'Cranmer as a Nominalist: Sed Contra', *Harvard Theological Review* 57.4 (1964), pp. 367-80.

²³Richardson, 'Cranmer and Eucharistic Doctrine', p. 429.

²⁴Bryan Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: The Eucharist from the Early Church to the Present Day* (London: SCM Press, 2013), p. 315.

²⁵'Figurative' is a term Cranmer himself uses. 'Literal' is not Cranmerian, and not without potential for confusion, however it seems more apt when considering the potential landmine field that is the term 'real'.

the interpretation of the words of institution against Roman and Lutheran theologians who provided a plain, literal reading of the phrase, 'This is the body of Christ'. This kind of interpretation is ubiquitous throughout his polemical works on the Eucharist against Bishop Stephen Gardiner of Winchester. But a collection of his thought in preparation for a theological discussion in the political sphere is a helpful summation of his views on the interpretation of the words of institution.

A great debate on the Eucharist took place in the House of Lords in December of 1548. The records of the discussion are slight and condensed, but the pithy statements of Cranmer and his notes made during the debate show that, from the angle of the language regarding the words of institution, Cranmer embraced a figurative understanding. For instance, we have these statements from Cranmer:

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*.²⁶

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.²⁷

Hoc est Corpus meum, id est figura Corporis. Thus sayeth the old fathers.²⁸

For Christ when he bids us eat his body it is *figurative*.²⁹

It is clear that Cranmer distances himself at this point in 1548 from any literal interpretation of the words of institution. Those utterances referring to the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ are to be interpreted figuratively. Hence, we can see that, for a paradigmatic sentence such as, 'taste the body of Christ', from the angle of perceiving the bread Cranmer would interpret this along the lines of:

- (1) 'taste' refers to the bodily activity of the physical mouth and 'the body of Christ' refers to the sacramental bread that has taken this name.

The bread signifies or figures the body of Christ; but it is not, literally speaking, the body of Christ.

However, it is not enough to say that Cranmer simply understands the entirety of the Eucharistic encounter along figurative lines. Rather he explicitly points to the two realities, (A) and (B):

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

²⁶Cardinal Francis Aidan Gasquet and Edmund Bishop, *Edward VI and the Book of Common Prayer: An Examination into its Origin and Early History with an Appendix of Unpublished Documents* (London: J. Hodges, 1891), p. 418. Further, 'Eating with the mouth giveth nothing to man, nor the body being in the bread', p. 425.

²⁷Gasquet and Bishop, *Edward VI*, p. 429.

²⁸Gasquet and Bishop, *Edward VI*, p. 430.

²⁹Gasquet and Bishop, *Edward VI*, p. 434.

be though a man never taste the Sacrament. All men eat not the body in the Sacrament.³⁰

What Cranmer refers to here as ‘to dwell in Christ’ is (B), which I argue the spiritual senses lens helps to show as a literal phenomenon. Literal, not with respect to the presence of Christ’s body or blood in the elements, but literal with respect to the connectivity between the faithful and the body and blood of Christ.

A Literal Connection

When viewed from the angle of the spiritual reality that obtains in the Eucharist, an angle enlightened by the lens of spiritual perception, Cranmer describes a literal relation between the recipient and the flesh and blood of Christ. Cranmer does not offer a metaphorical understanding of the spiritual consumption; it is not such that he assumed ‘no close similarity with the functioning of a physical sensorium.’³¹ Rather an analogy obtains between physical and spiritual eating because the operation of the spiritual senses requisite for consumption of the body of Christ is ‘described in terms akin to the operation of physical sensation’.³² Thus, the argument is that, on the spiritual plane via the spiritual senses, Cranmer holds to a literal interaction between the body of Christ and the faithful in addition to his figurative interpretation of the words of institution.

Parallelism: As/So

In Cranmer’s Eucharistic parallelism, two realities obtain that are not necessarily coincidental. In Cranmer’s view, neither (A) nor (B) necessitate the other. One can participate in (A) without (B) obtaining (as in the case of the ‘wicked’, Cranmer’s term for non-Christians); likewise (B) can occur even without one performing (A) (as in the case of the infirm who are unable to eat). Yet, Cranmer describes these two realities as typically occurring in parallel to one another.

One way that Cranmer expresses this parallelism is through an almost formulaic use of two small words, ‘as’ and ‘so’, in some form of ‘as [the physical] . . . so [the spiritual] . . .’. For instance, Cranmer states:

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.³³

Here we see 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

³⁰Gasquet and Bishop, *Edward VI*, pp. 399–401, emphasis added.

³¹Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, p. 6.

³²Gavrilyuk and Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses*, p. 6.

³³Cranmer, *Remains II*, p. 11, emphasis added.

with our hearts, by faith, do we eat Christ's very flesh and drink his very blood'). In addition to the physical mouth, Cranmer articulates an analogous, parallel spiritual capacity for consumption. The heart, which for Cranmer means some immaterial component of the human person, by faith has the capacity for a direct connection to the body of Christ. This capacity is the ability to consume spiritually, to taste/touch/smell spiritually, the flesh and blood of Christ.

Yet, for Cranmer the acts of physical perception, including consumption, parallel an instance of spiritual perception and spiritual consumption. If we take consumption as an act of perception, Cranmer is commending that the recipient perceive the 'very' flesh and blood of Christ. So, when attuned to the notion of spiritual perception, we see that Cranmer is clear that the actual body of Christ is consumed with the heart. There is a direct spiritual connection that obtains between the body and blood of Christ and some inward aspect of the recipient which is referenced by 'heart'.

Further, this connection is one of nourishment and sustaining, for which physical eating is an apt analogy. In this vein he also says, '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.'³⁴ Cranmer is not here concerned to insist upon a figurative interpretation of this spiritual, (B)-level reality. What might be the case for the physical bread on the (A) level, a figurative read, is not the case for the spiritual eating of the body of Christ. But note that in this quotation Cranmer does not even draw an analogy between physical Eucharistic eating and the act of spiritual consumption, rather the analogy is between mundane instances of physically eating 'meat and drink', that is analogous to the spiritual feeding on Christ's body and blood; (B) level is independent of (A) level eating.

Cranmer does not shy away from explicitly stating that the 'flesh and blood' of Christ is that which feeds and nourishes the recipient on the (B) level. In like manner as the above he states, '*as* our bodies be fed, nourished, and preserved with meat and drink, *so* (as touching our spiritual life towards God) we be fed, nourished, and preserved by the body and blood of our Saviour Christ'.³⁵ The analogy is such that *as* the physical reality of eating obtains, *so* does the spiritual reality of consuming inwardly the body and blood of Christ. Since consumption entails perception, when Cranmer states that the faithful consume the body and blood of Christ on a spiritual plane they are in fact perceiving the body and blood of Christ.

These acts of spiritual consumption are parallel to the acts of physical consumption that occur in the Eucharist. Because the object of perception is not present empirically, the consumption/perception of this object cannot be empirical. However, that, for Cranmer, does not make the perception any less real. Rather it is appropriate to the object of perception that the mode of perception is spiritual and with the spiritual part of the human. The inward activity here mirrors the outward activity of eating bread and wine with the mouth. As this physical reality obtains, so too on a spiritual plane does the spiritual reality of the perception of Christ obtain.

³⁴Cranmer, *Remains* II, p. 301, emphasis added.

³⁵Cranmer, *Remains* II, p. 303, emphasis added.

Because Cranmer is keen to aver that there is no connection between the body of Christ and the consecrated elements, he has been interpreted as leaning toward the Zwinglian side of the theological spectrum. Certainly, for Cranmer there is no real presence in the elements; however, when it comes to the connection between the faithful and the body of Christ on a spiritual level, Cranmer is as realist as any Eucharistic theorist. It is the actual body of Christ that is the object of spiritual perception, not some sense of the divine or even the divine nature of Christ. Rather the object of perception is in fact the very human body of Christ, again not in the elements, but on the level of (B).

Parallelism: Carnal Imagery

Cranmer repeatedly uses overt physical descriptions and terminology in his attempt to describe a realist interaction between the recipient and the body of Christ. He writes that in the Eucharist, '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.'³⁶ In a similar vein he writes that would-be participants in the Eucharist should 'be taught that we spiritually feed upon Christ, eating him and drinking him, and as it were sucking out of his side the blood of our redemption and food of eternal salvation, although he be in heaven at his Father's right hand.'³⁷ This imagery espoused here is striking for one holding to a figurative interpretation of the words of institution. To emphasize the carnal imagery of drinking the blood of Christ flowing from his pierced side is highly unusual among Reformed theologians. But with Cranmer's emphasis on 'spiritual eyes' and 'spiritual mouths' he is able to commend a literal spiritual perception on level (B), even while holding a figurative metaphysical explication of the elements on level (A).

However, one commentator takes these realistic and carnal descriptions to indicate that Cranmer in fact did not mean them literally. Judith Anderson asserts without argument that regarding the realism of this utterance 'Cranmer exaggerates its realism both to convey the actuality of spiritual hunger and to make literal interpretation unreasonable, indeed, horrific.'³⁸ But in her evaluation and ascription of exaggeration to Cranmer's literalism, Anderson fails to appreciate the 'two things'³⁹ that Cranmer insists are in the sacrament. With respect to (A) the physical eating of the bread and wine, this description is nothing but figurative, as Cranmer self-attests. Anderson categorizes these utterances as metaphoric; however, in staying with the spiritual senses terminology offered by Gavriyluk and Coakley, I interpret these as analogous rather than metaphoric utterances. Yet, the point still stands that the eating on the physical plane is only a literal eating of physical bread and wine. And yet what Cranmer is attempting to describe on the spiritual plane – level (B) that Anderson terms 'the actuality of spiritual hunger' – according to the

³⁶Cranmer, *Remains* II, p. 485.

³⁷Cranmer, *Remains* II, p. 12.

³⁸Judith Anderson, 'Language and History in the Reformation: Cranmer, Gardiner, and the Words of Institution', *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2001), p. 31.

³⁹Gasquet and Bishop, *Edward VI*, pp. 399-401.

spiritual sensorium is not figurative at all. There is some literal – call it realist if one likes – relation between the body and blood of Christ and the recipient that is aptly described by this graphic terminology. Anderson goes on to respond to this description by Cranmer by saying, ‘the danger of inconsistency or deception, of mere subjectivity and solipsism, is also apparent in his use of such language’. Of course, I agree that there is a danger of inconsistency. But the danger of inconsistency is different from the attribution of inconsistency to Cranmer’s teaching. One avoids this latter attribution, so I argue, by offering a plausible interpretation of Cranmer’s statements that attend to the two levels on which Cranmer’s Eucharistic theology operates and to note, by way of the spiritual sense motif, that the (B) level reality is not inconsistent with figurative interpretations on the (A) level.

Cranmer would not consider the spiritual activity of consuming the body of Christ to be a purely remembrance activity, even if it is mental. Certainly, Cranmer was concerned to allow no metaphysical presence of Christ’s body and blood connected to the elements. In this regard, Richardson is right that, for Cranmer, the body of Christ is ‘located in a definite and circumscribed space in heaven’.⁴⁰ As I noted above, Cranmer accepts that Christ ‘be in heaven at his Father’s right hand’.⁴¹ However, Richardson wrongly assumes that this entails that Christ’s body cannot be an object of perception. In veridical instances of perception, there must be some object of perception as well as a faculty of perception. When I hear a song play on my car radio, the song is the object and my hearing capacity is the faculty of perception. Cranmer is clear that the faculty of spiritual perception is a spiritual sense, termed ‘heart’ or ‘mind’ or ‘soul’ that operates by faith. The object of perception is not some memory of a past event; rather Cranmer avers again and again that the object of perception is the body and blood of Christ.

Moreover, it is not at all clear that a contradiction exists here, as Richardson avers. He asserts, ‘An object can only be in one location at one time. The body of Christ is in heaven and never on earth.’⁴² First, the first proposition in Richardson’s statement is false for potentially two reasons. It is false because the terms ‘object’ and ‘location’ are vague. If the object under examination is my body and the location is my office, then my body is only presently located in one location. But if the object is my body and the location is (a) under my desk, (b) beside my desk, and (c) above my desk, then my body is in multiple locations with no trouble at all. Moreover, Richardson’s assertion is false because recent work in mereology has shown it is not impossible that a singular object cannot be in multiple locations at the same time.⁴³ Second, Richardson’s second proposition is irrelevant to instances of spiritual perception. Similar to other spiritual senses literature, Cranmer often speaks of the ‘inward’ or ‘spiritual’ part of the person as consuming/perceiving

⁴⁰Richardson, ‘Cranmer and Eucharistic Doctrine’, p. 426.

⁴¹Cranmer, *Remains* II, p. 12.

⁴²Richardson, ‘Cranmer and Eucharistic Doctrine’, p. 426.

⁴³For an application of this work to constructive Eucharistic theology see Alexander Pruss, ‘Omnipresence, Multilocation, the Real Presence and Time Travel’, *Journal of Analytic Theology* 1.1 (2013), pp. 60–73, and Martin Pickup, ‘Real Presence in the Eucharist and Time-Travel’, *Religious Studies* 51.3 (2015), pp. 379–89.

Christ. Cranmer writes, 'For as Christ is a spiritual meat, so is he spiritually eaten and digested with the spiritual part of us.'⁴⁴ That 'spiritual part of us', an inward spiritual sense or spiritual consumer, engages with the body of Christ. But *where* does an instance of spiritual perception take place? Where does even an instance of physical perception take place? If I hear a song coming from my car radio, where is this experience? In the speakers? At the radio station? On my eardrum? In my brain? Christ need not be any more on earth in order for one to have a spiritual perception of him than I need to be in the studio hearing the band record the song in order to have a physical perception of the music. However, in the above quotation, Cranmer emphasizes the *sursum corda* of Eucharistic worship: 'we lift up our hearts unto heaven, and with our faith we see . . .'.⁴⁵ Hence, Christ's body and blood can remain in heaven while at the same time being an object of spiritual perception as a current reality.⁴⁶

Parallelism: Non-coincidental

I alluded to the fact above that the act of spiritual perception that obtains in the Eucharist need not be considered to coincide necessarily with participation in the Eucharist. Rather, for Cranmer, feeding on the body of Christ in the 'spiritual part of us' is something that can occur even without actually eating the elements. Hence, his parallelism is a non-necessarily coincidental parallelism. This teaching of spiritual feeding being non-coincidental with physical consumption is no more clearly seen than in the arena of practical theology, when Cranmer's Eucharistic theology directly impacted the liturgical and pastoral practice of the ministers under his direction. In both the 1549 and 1552 Books of Common Prayer, a rubric is included to instruct those ministers who may be visiting and bringing the Eucharist to the infirm. These instructions include the following directions:

But if any man either by reason of extremity of sickness, or for lack of warning given in due time, to the curate, or by any other just impediment, do not receive the sacrament of Christ's body and blood the curate shall instruct him, that if he do truly repent him of his sins and steadfastly believe that Jesus Christ has suffered death upon the cross for him, and shed his blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he has thereby, and giving him hearty thanks therefore; he does eat and drink spiritually the body and blood of our saviour Christ, profitably to his soul's health, although he do not receive the sacrament with his mouth.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Cranmer, *Remains* II, p. 195.

⁴⁵Cranmer, *Remains* II, p. 485.

⁴⁶One anonymous reviewer wonders whether the purported perception of something that is not present amounts to an instance of hallucination, not perception. This is not the scenario Cranmer describes. Cranmer holds, or so I argue, that while the body and blood of Christ are not present to the physical senses and they are not located at the location of the bread and wine, the 'spiritual part' of the perceiver is, by faith, able to have a spiritually perceptual experience of the body and blood of Christ that is located in heaven. Imagine this 'spiritual part' as a spiritual telescope or spiritual binoculars aiding in the perception of an external reality, rather than the perception of a hallucination which in the end is merely in the mind of the hallucinator.

⁴⁷Thomas Cranmer, 'The Communion of the Sicke', http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1549/Visitation_Sick_1549.htm#Communion (accessed 1 March 2016). I have modernized the spelling.

On Cranmer's understanding, the eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ can occur even if the physical eating of the elements does not occur. This further reinforces the notion that spiritual perception is what is paramount for Cranmer, not the physical acts of eating. The real action or focus of the Eucharist occurs on the (B) plane. This is where Christ's body and blood come to have a direct connection to the spiritual part of the faithful.

Recall that initially I defined a Eucharistic religious experience as requiring a perceptive experience of bread and wine. Given this, is the above scenario then properly categorized as a Eucharistic religious experience? It seems not; for in the case described in the rubric, bread and wine are not present to the physical senses. But this is of no concern for Cranmer because the crux of the Eucharist is not the bread and the wine, but the spiritual reality obtaining in (B). The perceptive experience Cranmer is concerned with is the spiritual perception of eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ, which can occur without the physical perceptual experience of bread or wine.

It is on this point about these realities being not necessarily coincidental that makes Cranmer's view difficult to categorize and might make the term 'parallelism' in fact inapt. Douglas glosses his discussion of Gerrish's category of symbolic parallelism as such, 'In symbolic parallelism . . . the sign and a happening in the present are simultaneous, occurring in the present through the power and work of God.'⁴⁸ According to my estimation of Cranmer's view, he does not hold that the realities of (A) and (B) are necessarily simultaneous. This might disqualify Cranmer's view from falling under the category of symbolic parallelism, at which point it might be easiest to re-categorize his view as not falling neatly into Gerrish's taxonomy regarding the Reformed confessions. In this regard, I agree with Spinks that, 'ultimately, Cranmer's doctrine of the sacraments, even if it has a Swiss German flavour, is "Cranmerian".'⁴⁹ However, the instances when these two realities come apart are rare enough that I think the parallelistic description is apt in that, on the whole, these realities occur simultaneously.

Given Cranmer's view on the non-coincidental parallelism of the physical and spiritual consumption, the question naturally arises about the benefit of one's participating in the Eucharist. If one can have instances of spiritual perception of Christ's body and blood without going through the rite of the Eucharist, why bother with the rite? Does Cranmer fall prey to the allegation that there is nothing the Eucharist provides that could not be achieved by a good sermon or some focused time of prayer? Indeed, Richardson goes so far as to say that in Cranmer's mind there is no essential difference between, what Richardson calls, 'spiritual feeding' and 'the spiritual fruit of preaching'.⁵⁰ I am not as confident as Richardson that there are no resources in Cranmer's thought to offer a principled distinction between the

⁴⁸http://anglicaneucharistictheology.com/Anglican_Eucharistic_Theology/Case_Studies/Entries/2006/5/30_Thomas_Cranmer1489-1556Archbishop_of_Canterbury.html (accessed 16 April 2018).

⁴⁹Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, p. 315. By 'Swiss German', Spinks intends the family of sixteenth-century Eucharistic views held by such thinkers as Calvin, Zwingli, Bullinger, Bucer, and Vermigli in such locales as Geneva, Zürich, and Strasbourg.

⁵⁰Richardson, 'Cranmer and Eucharistic Doctrine', p. 429.

spiritual feeding of the Eucharist and the spiritual benefit of hearing a sermon, however this might be the locus of an actual unresolved issue in Cranmer's mind.

Cranmer at least attempts to describe why, in his mind, the Eucharist is a unique instance of potential spiritual benefit. For instance, Cranmer writes:

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, chewing 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.⁵¹

For Cranmer, the spiritual reality of the faithful's feeding on the body of Christ obtains even when they are not participating in the Eucharist. In fact, it is possible even to perceive this reality at any point for the faithful. The Eucharist then becomes, for Cranmer, an instance where spiritual perception is heightened and deepened by the physical activity of eating the elements. The goal for the faithful, then, is for in some sense the physical level (A) to become unneeded, for the capacity of spiritual perception would become so acute as to perceive the spiritual reality of the feeding on the body and blood of Christ at all times.


However, this does not make the Eucharist superfluous in Cranmer's mind. For, notice the distinction that Cranmer makes in the last sentence. The Eucharist is the sacramental feeding on Christ's promise. This is how one might understand the elements in a metaphoric sense (not an analogical sense). The sacramental elements are metaphors for the promise of Christ. But, by this act of eating the sacramental elements, the spiritual – (B) level – consumption of Christ's body and blood is intensified. Although the spiritual reality does not change, the faithful come to the Eucharist 'for their more comfort' in order that 'their former spiritual feeding is increased' and they may 'grow and wax more strong'. At the end of the day, this might not be a satisfactory distinction between the benefit of the Eucharist and the benefit of a sermon. But this would be a different locus of an unresolved issue in Cranmer's Eucharistic theology than the one addressed by Richardson and others.

Conclusion

Thomas Cranmer's Eucharistic theology is difficult for his commentators to exposit. This, I argue, is in part because, in his discussions of the Eucharist, he is actually talking about two things. When attending to (A) the physical eating of bread

⁵¹Cranmer, *Remains* III, p. 130.

and wine and the ontological status of those elements, he offers nothing but a standard figurative interpretation. However, when focusing on (B), as explicated by means of the spiritual senses perspective, Cranmer offers a realist account of the direct connection between the faithful and the body and blood of Christ. In the ‘spiritual part’ of the faithful, the recipient of the Eucharist chews, sips, swallows, and digests the body and blood of Christ. Cranmer does not shy away from deploying striking carnal imagery in his attempt to describe the spiritual realities of the faithful’s perception of the body and blood of Christ. Although this spiritual perception is ongoing and continual for the faithful, he describes the Eucharist as a unique means by which the attention of the faithful is drawn to this spiritual reality and thereby increases their connection to the body of Christ.⁵²

Author ORCID.  James M. Arcadi, [0000-0001-6870-8310](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6870-8310)

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