

The Anglican Reformers Were Not Zwinglians! Addendum

Although I did not make the connection at the time, I later realized that the “former Anglo-Catholic” advocating the Zwinglian reading of the Anglican Reformers is Gary W. Jenkins, author of *John Jewel And The English National Church: The Dilemmas Of An Erastian Reformer* (Ashgate Publishing, 2006). The blurb at Amazon describes the book as follows:

Gary Jenkins argues that, far from serving as the constructor of a positive Anglican identity, Jewel's real contribution pertains to the genesis of its divided and schizophrenic nature. . . . [H]e paints a picture not of a theologian and humanist, but an orator and rhetorician, who persistently breached the rules of logic and the canons of Renaissance humanism in an effort to claim polemical victory over his traditionalist opponents such as Thomas Harding. By taking such an iconoclastic approach to Jewel, this work . . . demonstrates how he used his Patristic sources, often uncritically and faultily, as foils against his theological interlocutors, and without the least intention of creating a coherent theological system.

An Amazon reader offers a quote from the text:

When using Erastianism as a prism, Jewel's lack of theologically precise doctrinal formulations becomes not some complex via media between Rome and Geneva, but a means whereby a political necessity was wedded to an ecclesiastical virtue. Jewel's works do not present a body of theological literature abundant with insight, but instead give a pedestrian reading of scriptural texts, a prosaic use of the early church, and a banal approach to its theological topics. Jewel's use of sources is often disingenuous, his logic

faulty and his theology in several areas flawed. What Jewel really gives the student of the Reformation is an iconoclast in a prelate's vestments.

I read this book right after it was published. Needless to say, it is a prime example of what I have called "enclave theology." Jenkins' reading is not theological, but political, and, to say the least, polemical. Throughout, he assumes Jewel's insincerity. Jewel's theology is portrayed as simply the mask behind which lies an Erastian agenda.

What I found most frustrating about the book was precisely Jenkins' lack of interest in the actual content of Jewel's theology. If one assumes that someone like Jewel is simply insincere, there is no reason to take his theology seriously, or to read it carefully. I have read both Cranmer and Jewel at length, including their tedious and voluminous debates with Gardiner and Harding. The rhetoric of the debates is typical of the time, on both sides. But what is clear as one reads them is that Cranmer and Jewel were both sincere, and believed sincerely that their eucharistic theology was in line with patristic eucharistic theology in a way that transubstantiation was not.

How do Jewel and Cranmer differ from Zwingli? It is not enough to point out that Zwingli also uses the language of "spiritual presence" or "spiritual feeding"; so does Calvin, and (in his reading of John 6), Luther does as well. It is not enough to point out that Jewel and Cranmer argue that Christ's humanity is seated at the right hand of God. The argument here is against Lutheran ubiquity, and is the orthodox Catholic position, found, for example, in Thomas Aquinas, who insists that Christ's presence in the Eucharist cannot be a local presence ("as if in a place.")

It is not enough to point out that Cranmer and Jewel deny that Christ is present "corporally" and "in the elements." Calvin

denies this as well, and, if, as most scholars argue, Cranmer and Jewel (and Hooker) were “virtualists,” Christ would not be present physically in the elements, but in the *usus*, the act of eating.

Hooker, of course, repudiates Zwingli by name, and insists that his own position, which he certainly believes is consistent with that of his Anglican predecessors, is entirely compatible with the Lutheran position, except for the question of whether Christ’s presence is located physically “in the elements.” Despite Hooker’s rejection of ubiquity and transubstantiation, he is clear that his “virtualist” understanding of communion is one of “real presence”:

Is there any thing more expedite, clear, and easy, than that as Christ is termed our life because through him we obtain life, so that parts of this sacrament are his body and blood for that they are so to us who receiving them receive that by them which they are termed? The bread and cup are his body and blood because they are causes instrumental upon the receipt whereof the participation of his body and blood ensueth.” “The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ,” Laws, Bk. 5, LXVII [5].

How do Cranmer and Jewel (and Hooker) differ from Zwingli?

I would say that the crucial difference between Zwinglian (symbolic) interpretations of the Eucharist and sacramental interpretations of every kind, including not only transubstantiation, transelementation, Lutheran consubstantiation, Reformed “spiritual presence,” and Cranmerian virtualism, has to do with the continuing significance of the risen humanity of Christ, and with union with Christ in his risen humanity.

Zwingli’s theology has the following unique characteristics:

1) A radical spirit-matter dualism, which he seems to have

picked up from Erasmus. John 6:63 was a crucial text, which Zwingli interpreted to mean that physical realities (including the humanity of Christ) have nothing to do with salvation.

2) An insistence that Christ's presence at the right hand of the Father meant that Christ's humanity was inaccessible until his second coming. Christ's presence (Matt. 28:19-20) means that Christ is present only in his divine, but not his human nature: "according to his divine nature he is with us always."

3) An insistence that any references to "eating" or "drinking" Christ's flesh and blood or to the Eucharist as the "body of Christ" were to be interpreted metaphorically to refer to having faith in the saving efficacy of Christ's atoning death.

4) An insistence that the sacraments were symbols of the realities to which they pointed and nothing more. So Zwingli is quite willing to say that baptism is an "initiatory sign," and "Water-baptism cannot contribute in any way to the washing away of sin."

5) Zwingli has no hesitation in suggesting that the Fathers simply were mistaken in their eucharistic theology.

In contrast:

1) There simply is no spirit/matter dualism in the Anglican Reformers. Cranmer insists that John 6 is not about the Eucharist, as does Zwingli, but so does Luther. Calvin disagrees! But one looks in vain in Cranmer's writings for the dualist interpretation of John 6:63. Cranmer does speak of a "spiritual eating" by faith (but so does Luther!), but he also speaks of a "sacramental eating," and they are not simply "the same thing."

2) There is repeatedly in Cranmer's writings, a focus on union with Christ, not only in his deity, but in his full humanity, and this takes place through the sacraments:

And where you say that in baptism we receive the spirit of Christ, and in the sacrament of his body and blood we receive his very flesh and blood; this your saying is no small derogation to baptism, wherein we receive not only the spirit

of Christ, but also Christ himself, whole body and soul, manhood and Godhead, unto everlasting life, as well as in the holy communion. For St Paul saith, Quicumque in Christo baptizati estis, Christum induistis: "As many as be baptized in Christ, put Christ upon them:" nevertheless, this is done in divers respects; for in baptism it is done in respect of regeneration, and in the holy communion in respect of nourishment and augmentation

Compare Jewel (from *The Apology of the Church of England*):

And we do expressly pronounce, that in the LORD'S Supper there is truly given unto the believing, the body, and blood of our LORD – the flesh of the Son OF GOD, which quickeneth our souls the meat [food] that cometh from above – the food of immortality, of grace, truth, and life : and that the same Supper is the communion of the body and the blood of CHRIST; by the partaking whereof we be revived, strengthened, and fed unto immortality ; and whereby we are joined, united, and incorporate unto CHRIST, that " we may abide in him, and he in us."

The focus here is on union with the risen Christ in his humanity and deity. It is more fully articulated in Hooker, but it is there in Cranmer and Jewel. Contrast this with Zwingli's position that Christ is present only in his divine nature.

3) While Cranmer also speaks of "eating spiritually" by faith, he also speaks of a presence of Christ that takes place (not corporally in the elements) but in the "ministration" of the elements:

[W]e be agreed, as me seemeth, that Christ's body is present, and the same body that suffered: and we be agreed also of the manner of his presence. For you say that the body of Christ is not present but after a spiritual manner, and so say I

also. And if there be any difference between us two, it is but a little and in this point only: that I say that Christ is but spiritually in the ministration of the sacrament, and you say that he is but after a spiritual manner in the sacrament. And yet you say that he is corporally in the sacrament, as who should say that there were a difference between spiritually, and a spiritual manner; and that it were not all one, to say that Christ is there only after a spiritual manner, and not only spiritually.

It is this focus on “ministration” which leads to a “virtualist” interpretation. How does Christ become “spiritually present” in the ministration of the sacraments? Neither Cranmer nor Jewel are clear, but they do echo Geneva in adapting the language of “sursum corda”: We “lift up our hearts.” This is admittedly a metaphor, not a real explanation.

4) In contrast to Zwingli’s merely “symbolic interpretation,” Cranmer, Jewel, and Hooker disavow that the sacraments are “vain tokens.” Hooker repudiates Zwingli by name. They are more than willing to use the language of “baptismal regeneration.” Thus, Cranmer above (on baptism), but also Jewel, who not only uses the language of regeneration, but also “remission of sins,” and justifies infant baptism on the grounds that infants are “born in sin”:

We say, that Baptism is a sacrament of the remission of sins and of that washing which we have in the blood of CHRIST; and that no person, which will profess CHRIST’S name, ought to be restrained or kept back therefrom- – no, not the very babes of Christians, forsomuch as they be born in sin, and do pertain unto the people of GOD.” Apology

Contrast this with Zwingli’s statement about baptism above.

5) Throughout their debates with Gardiner and Harding, Cranmer

and Jewel repeatedly appeal to the church fathers, arguing that their position is consistent with that of the Fathers, and transubstantiation is not. Jenkins argues in his book that Jewel's patristic scholarship is faulty. Perhaps so. But is it really credible to believe that Cranmer and Jewel believed that the Church Fathers were Zwinglians? Is it not more credible to interpret their argument as that the Fathers believed in a form of "real presence," but not transubstantiation?

In conclusion, is it possible to interpret the Anglican Reformers as Zwinglian? It certainly is possible, because some have done so.

I think it rather clear that a comparative reading of the texts shows significant differences. I also think the Zwinglian reading is simply too cynical. It presumes an insincerity on the part of Cranmer and Jewel, and an intentional obscurity on the the part of the Reformers to mislead their readers. Cranmer in particular, died for what he believed. One can die as much for Zwinglianianism as for "virtualism." If Cranmer believed that the sacraments were "only symbols," he had plenty of opportunity to make that clear at his trial.

Was the virtualist or receptionist theology of Cranmer and Jewel adequate? I have argued elsewhere that it is not. At the same time, I think we really need to be fair to those with whom we disagree. Unsympathetic readings can too easily become tendentious readings.