2.1 The Multiformity of Anglican Eucharistic Theology

Anglican eucharistic theology is multiform in nature, expressing different theological and philosophical assumptions. The discourse of the Anglican eucharistic tradition varies between those who adopt what can be called a realist understanding of the Eucharist and those who do not accept this analysis and accept what is called a nominalist analysis. I have argued elsewhere that the philosophical assumptions of the Eucharist in Anglicanism vary between that of moderate realism and nominalism.1

In a realist analysis the signs of the Eucharist, bread and wine and the offering of these signs of bread and wine in the Eucharist are linked a real way to Christ’s body and blood as a presence of Christ in the Eucharist so that Christ is said to be present in some way in the elements and the eucharistic celebration and in the dynamic remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice in the eucharistic offering. Moderate realism implies that the linking of the sign and the signified is not in some fleshy or carnal manner but rather in a real yet mysterious and supernatural manner. Typically these realist philosophical assumptions are associated with a more Catholic understanding of the Eucharist. Pusey advocated such a moderate realist analysis in expressing eucharistic doctrine.

Nominalists do not accept this analysis and instead argue that the signs are not linked to what they signify in any real way but rather by a linguistic and textual analysis centred on the faith of a believer and typically as revealed in

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the text of Scripture in a propositional manner. Often these nominalist philosophical assumptions are associated with a more Evangelical or Reformed understanding of the Eucharist. Nominalists sever the participatory link between the earthly sacrament and the heavenly reality. As Boersma argues, nominalists in denying the participatory relationship between earthly objects and the heavenly reality, no longer see ‘earthly objects (as sacramento)’ receiving ‘the reality (res) of their being from God’s own being. Rather, earthly objects possessed their own being’. Such univocity ‘renders the created order independent from God’. This means that in a nominalist analysis the natural and the supernatural become two distinct orders where nature could pursue its own ends without any supernatural involvement. The result in terms of sacramental theology is that it became impossible in a nominalist analysis to follow the sacramental principle or to discern a sacramental character in the created order as a divine imperative.

Christopher Cocksworth suggests that on an empirical level, there can be no such thing as Anglican eucharistic theology, because Anglicanism is such an amorphous phenomenon and its eucharistic theology is inherently multiformal such that the real characteristic of Anglican eucharistic theology is its ‘multiformity rather than uniformity’. Such multiformity derives not only, in part, from the absence of an authoritative magisterium in Anglicanism, such as exists in the Roman Catholic Church, which clearly defines eucharistic doctrine, but also from the varying understandings by Anglicans of what happens in the Eucharist. Not only, says Cocksworth, is Anglicanism doctrinally diverse, but it is also ideologically diverse since:

Anglicanism has never seen itself as a self-sufficient unit isolated from the wider Church. Whether through a Protestant eye (as an expression of the Reformation faith) or through a Catholic eye (as a branch of the Church Catholic) or through both eyes (as Reformed Catholicism), Anglicanism has always seen itself as part of a bigger whole. Because of this it is reticent about claiming a distinctive theological content in regard to anything. The most which it has been willing to admit to is a distinctive theological method by which it interprets Reformation truth and Catholic faith.

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3 Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, p. 76.
4 The present Bishop of Coventry in the Church of England.
5 Cocksworth, ‘Eucharistic Theology’, p. 49.
6 Cocksworth, ‘Eucharistic Theology’, p. 49.