

Week 8 Book IV: The Lord's Supper

1. 4.17.1-5, 8-11, 16, 19, 21, 24, 26, 31-33 The Lord's Supper

Controversy: 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' (1 Corinthians 11:24)

'This is my body': a simple proposition or a metaphor?

'do this in remembrance of me', uppermost in his mind?

1. Three views on the Lord's Supper explained: Zwinglian, Roman Catholic and Lutheran

The **Zwinglian** theory, primarily a memorial. ['mere symbol', a *nuda signa*]

The sacrament *benefits* believers through faith, and Christ can be said to be *present spiritually*

Catholic theology takes a diametrically opposite view. Sacraments act *ex opera operato*, that is, 'by the work worked'- they actually do something by their very performance, not simply memorial.

'Literal' reading of 'This is my body'. So the sacrament is a re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ.

Transubstantiation was developed in mediaeval period. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica*, Part 3 Question 75 article 5. Whether the accidents of the bread and wine remain in this sacrament after the change?

The **Lutheran** wants to take a literal view of 'This is my body'. Christ's body is really present 'in, with and under' the elements This theory is called consubstantiation (analogy of heat in iron)

Requires the Christological theory of the ubiquity of Christ's human nature. This is something distinctively Lutheran and different to the Reformed churches' Christology: 'Christ is in heaven'.

2. The fourth view: Calvin

a) A middle way

'Now here we ought to guard against two faults. First, we should not, by too little regard for the signs, divorce them from their mysteries, to which they are so to speak attached.

Secondly, we should not, by extolling them immoderately, seem to obscure the mysteries themselves.' (4.17.5)

1) the sign is not just a sign that merely represents the thing signified

2) too elaborate theories obscure the real mystery at the heart of the sacrament

'Now, if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare.' (4.17.33)

b) Avoid (over)literal interpretation of 'This is my Body' – contra Roman Catholic and Lutheran

Lutherans argued that they are being biblical, Calvin points out that they are not consistent:

'[Where John says,] "The Holy Spirit was not yet..." if they remain true to their rule, the eternal essence of the Spirit will be destroyed.' (4.17.22, he lists further examples.)

Similarly, the 'the rock was Christ' (1Cor 10:4).

To take the Luther accusation seriously was, in Calvin's opinion 'to banish from the church the gift of interpretation which sheds light upon the word.' (4.17.25) To say "'is" means "is"' does not equate to interpretation, and displays, rather, a 'haughty fastidiousness'. (4.17.25)

c) There is a real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper – contra Zwingli

'And truly he offers and shows the reality there signified to all who sit at the spiritual banquet... For why should the Lord put in your hand the symbol of his body, except to assure you of a true participation in it?' (1.17.10)

‘But here is the difference between my words and theirs [Zwinglians]: for them to eat is only to believe; I say that we eat Christ’s flesh in believing, because it is made ours by faith, and that this eating is the result and effect of faith.’ (4.17.5)

d) Unacceptable theories behind the real presence

Catholic use of Aristotelian philosophy; Lutherans the ubiquity of the human nature of Christ.

Remember the *Calvinistic extra*? The disagreement starts from the understanding of the sacrament.

In brief: because of the hypostatic union is present at every celebration of the Lord’s Supper (in with and under the elements). Lutheranism argues that in the hypostatic union the attributes of the human nature of Christ and the divine nature of Christ are communicated between the natures. Reformed theology denies this.

‘But some are carried away with such contentiousness as to say that because of the natures joined in Christ, wherever Christ’s divinity is, there also is his flesh, which cannot be separated from it. As if that union had compounded from two natures some sort of intermediate being, which was neither God nor man! So, indeed, Eutyches teach, and Servetus after him.’ (4.17.30)

‘the body of Christ from the time of his resurrection was finite, and is contained in heaven even to the Last Day’ (4.17.26).

e) So how do we feed on Christ?

‘To them Christ does not seem present unless he comes down to us. As though, if he should lift us to himself, we should not just as much enjoy his presence! The question is therefore only of the manner, for they place Christ in the bread, while we do not think it lawful for us to drag him from heaven.’ (4.17.31)

‘a serious wrong is done to the Holy Spirit, unless we believe that it is through his incomprehensible power that we come to partake of Christ’s flesh and blood.’ (4.17.33)

- not ‘spiritual’ in the sense denying the reality of the eating.
- ‘In his Sacred Supper he bids me take, eat, and drink his body and blood under the symbols of bread and wine. I do not doubt that he himself truly presents them, and that I receive them.’ (4.17.32, cf. quotation from 4.17.10 earlier.)
- Catholic and Lutheran materialistic explanation has to conclude, ‘that even the impious and the wicked eat Christ’s body, however estranged from him they may be.’ (4.17.33)
- ‘the rest of the disciples ate the bread which *was* the Lord, but Judas ate the bread *of* the Lord’ (4.17.34, quoting Augustine, my italics).

The right manner in partaking of the Supper:

- 1) not superstitiously by adoring the elements (4.17.35-7),
- 2) in unity of love (4.17.38)
- 3) accompanied by the Word (4.17.39) [We haven’t been able to explore Calvin’s discussion about the church, which include the two marks: ‘We have laid down as distinguishing marks of the church the preaching of the Word and the observance of the sacraments’ (4.1.10)]
- 4) with appropriate self-examination (4.17. 40-42)

f) Highland Christianity

The **sort person** in mind: ‘Men of this sort who, without a spark of faith, without any zeal for love, rush like swine to take the Lord’s Supper do not discern the Lord’s body’ (4.17.40).

Over-scrupulous: ‘They interpreted “in state of grace” to mean to be pure and purged of all sin. Such dogma would debar all the men who ever were or are on earth from the use of this Sacrament’ (4.17.41)

Rather: ‘the worthiness, which is commanded by God, consists chiefly in faith ... secondly, in love’ (4.17.42)

‘Whoever does not partake of the mysteries is wicked and shameless to be present there. I beg of you, if anyone, invited, comes to a banquet, washes his hands, reclines at table, and seems to get ready to eat, then tastes nothing – does he not dishonour both the banquet and the host? ...’ (4.17.45)

A note on the **frequency:** ‘the Supper could have been administered most becomingly if it were set before the church very often, and at least once a week’ (4.17.43)

Acts 2:42, ‘Thus it became the unvarying rule that no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving. That was the established order among the Corinthians also ... And it remained for many centuries after’ (4.17.44).

3. A Compromise reached: The Consensus Tigurinus [Consensus of Zurich]?

a) The sticking points

In the letter from Calvin to Bullinger at the start of negotiations:

Of the twenty-four propositions, only two did not receive eventual agreement within this exchange of mini-treatises, yet these two revealed the foundational difference between Calvin and Bullinger: the fourth proposition, on God acting through (per) the sacraments, and the seventh, on the sacraments as instruments of grace.¹

b) Details of the Consensus

Consensus	Calvin’s concession (according to Rorem)
Article 5 ‘being ingrafted into his body’	Christological not sacramental?
Article 7 ‘testify, represent and seal his grace to us’	‘instrumental’ - not used
Article 8 ‘truly performs inwardly by his Spirit that which the sacraments figure to our eyes and other senses’	‘that which is figures is truly offered to us’
Article 9 ‘all who in faith embrace the promises there offered receive Christ spiritually’	‘whosoever rightly and faithfully uses the sacraments receives Christ, since he is offered there to us, along with his spiritual gifts.’
Articles 12 and 13 ‘instrument(ality)’	caveat the ‘whole power of acting remains with him [the Spirit] alone’.
Article 14 ‘the Supper makes us partakers of himself; ‘in the Supper Christ communicates himself to us’	‘during the supper’ rather than ‘by means of the supper’

¹ Rorem, ‘Calvin and Bullinger’, 364.