

# THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE REFORMED CONFESSIONS

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*“Schaff’s judgment, that Calvin’s eucharistic teaching ‘must be regarded as the orthodox Reformed doctrine,’ oversimplifies the evidence. In actual fact, Zwingli’s view continued to find its way into the confessions even after Calvin’s emergence as foremost leader of the Reformed Church. Moreover, Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession (1561/3) exhibits a third eucharistic type. There seem to be, then, three doctrines of the Eucharist in the Reformed confessions, which we may label ‘symbolic memorialism,’ ‘symbolic parallelism,’ and ‘symbolic instrumentalism.’”*

CURRENT interest in the Reformed confessions raises afresh an old question: do the historic Reformed confessions, despite their varied authorship, present a uniform “system of doctrine”? As a step toward an answer, my purpose is to take a test case, the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper and to inquire what the confessions say about it. The Lord’s Supper is a particularly appropriate choice at the present time, since the ecumenical dialogue has given special prominence to the doctrines of the ministry and the sacraments. The opening of conversations with the Lutherans (not to mention the Roman Catholics) obliges Presbyterians to reconsider their traditional eucharistic theology; and it becomes a matter of great importance to determine the “official” Reformed position, if there is one, as defined by the historic confessions.

It would be no great surprise if the classical Reformed confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were found to contain a variety of eucharistic theologies. The confessions are both numer-

ous and in origin diverse,<sup>1</sup> and it is common knowledge that the Reformed theologians of Switzerland were at first divided among themselves on the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Two types of eucharistic theology developed in the Reformed Church, with Zwingli and Calvin furnishing the respective models. What one might expect, in view of the mixed parentage of the Reformed Church, is the co-existence of two independent eucharistic traditions, or a merging of the two, or, it may be, the eventual triumph of one over the other. In actual fact, the evidence is not so simple: it seems to call for the distinguishing of yet a third eucharistic type, of which Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession may serve as the model. It is not claimed that these three types need be mutually exclusive, nor that each coincides completely with the thought of the Reformer who provides the confessional model. A full historical enquiry, which would take into account the non-confessional writings of the Reformers and the eucharistic controversy as a whole, is not here attempted. It is suggested only that careful analysis of the confessions themselves invites the triple distinction. What this may mean for the Reformed platform in ecumenical discussions is explored in the final section.

## I

The assumption still lingers, in the minds of friends and foes alike, that the differences between Zwingli's and Calvin's views on the Lord's Supper are not fundamental. Certainly, Calvin did share a number of Zwingli's eucharistic ideas. Nevertheless, the fact is that they represent two different types of eucharistic theology.

A number of Zwingli's writings may be considered confessional or quasi-confessional in character.<sup>2</sup> Without attempting, for the moment, to define the notion of a "confession," I shall simply take account of the documents from Zwingli's hand that are included in one or more of the major collections of Reformed confessions. The

<sup>1</sup> The most comprehensive collection of Reformed confessions is: E. F. Karl Müller, ed., *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*, Leipzig, 1903. Other important collections are: H. A. Niemeyer, ed., *Collectio confessionum in ecclesiis reformatis publicatarum*, Leipzig, 1840; Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. III, 4th revised edn., New York, 1919; Wilhelm Niesel, ed., *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche*, München, 1938. I abbreviate these four works, respectively, as "M," "N," "S," and "Ns." Where a satisfactory text is available in M, I do not give duplicate references to the other editions, though I have checked them for variants.

<sup>2</sup> They are as follows: the Sixty-Seven Articles, 1523 (given by N, S, and M); Short and Christian Introduction, 1523 (M only); *Fidei Ratio*, 1530 (N, M); *Fidei Expositio*, 1531 (N only). Of these four, only the second was ever published with official—i.e., "symbolic"—authority. Zwingli also had a hand in revising the Ten Theses of Bern, 1528 (N, S, and M), but the draft was by Haller and Kolb.

earliest of Zwingli's confessions, the Sixty-Seven Articles of 1523,<sup>3</sup> is terse, vigorous and in tone polemical—a kind of Swiss Ninety-Five Theses. It does not contain a full or careful presentation on the Lord's Supper. Nonetheless, two basic notions are already present in this, the earliest Reformed confession: the Lord's Supper is both a memorial and a pledge. Christ offered himself up once and for all as an abiding satisfaction for sins. It follows that the mass is not a sacrifice, but a commemoration (*widergedächtnüss*) of the sacrifice which was once offered on the Cross and a pledge (*sicherung*) of the redemption made manifest by Christ (Art. XVIII).

In the Short and Christian Introduction<sup>4</sup> of the same year Zwingli again assails the sacrifice of the Roman mass and insists that Christ's "ordinance" is rather a commemoration and preaching of his one sacrifice upon the Cross. Not the breaking of the bread, but his death was his sacrifice. All a man can now offer to God is himself, not Christ. He cannot sacrifice Christ, but he can commemorate the sacrifice of Christ. For Christ has left us "a certain visible sign of his flesh and blood." Hence Christ called the Supper, not a sacrifice or mass, but a testament and memorial. Nevertheless, Zwingli freely uses the traditional terms "sacrament" and "food of the soul"<sup>5</sup>; and he even speaks of "feeding believers with the Body and Blood of Christ" and "eating and drinking (*niessen*) the Body and Blood."<sup>6</sup> Apparently, his motives are pedagogic: he is plainly anxious to avoid offence to tender consciences, and his argument seems to be that *the people* have always believed the right thing about the Lord's Supper—that it is the food of their souls—despite the efforts of *the priests* to deceive them with the doctrine of the sacrificial mass.

Any possibility of interpreting this language in a "Lutheran" sense is ruled out in the *Fidei Ratio*<sup>7</sup> of 1530, Zwingli's "Augsburg Confession," addressed to the Emperor Charles V. Here Zwingli bluntly repudiates the entire notion of the means of grace. The grace or pardon of God is given solely by the Spirit, who needs no vehicle. The sacraments merely testify in public that grace has been received in private. Thus in Baptism testimony is given to the Church<sup>8</sup> that

<sup>3</sup> M, pp. 1-6 (German).

<sup>4</sup> M, pp. 7-29 (German).

<sup>5</sup> M 29, 7; 26, 25; 28, 15. (References in this form are to page and line.)

<sup>6</sup> M 29, 10; 29, 14. Presumably the statement that the mass has another purpose than eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ (M 26, 19) refers to the *Roman mass*.

<sup>7</sup> M, pp. 79-94 (Latin).

<sup>8</sup> The Eng. trans. in *The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, II, 47 (ed. by John Hinke, Philadelphia, 1922) has ". . . the Church certifies that grace has been given. . . ." But the Latin text (M 87, 12) reads *Ecclesiae testatur*.

grace has been exercised on him to whom the sacrament is given. A sacrament, in short, is a sign of past grace, of pardon consummated: it is *factae gratiae signum*. More precisely, it is a kind of picture or image (*figura, exemplum*) of the invisible grace which God has given, a similitude (*analogia*) of what has been done through the Holy Spirit. Hence the washing of Baptism signifies that by God's goodness we have been gathered into the fellowship of the Church, which worships its Lord by purity of life.<sup>9</sup> The sacraments visibly associate with the Church those who have previously been received into it invisibly.

It is no surprise, then, that when Zwingli turns to the Lord's Supper (or "Eucharist," as he prefers to say) he uses realistic language in a consciously figurative sense, for by his definition of a sacrament he has already ruled out any possibility of treating the signs as a vehicle by which Christ's Body might be communicated (Art. VIII). That the true Body of Christ is present to faith (*fidei contemplatione*) means that, while the worshippers thank God for His benefits in His Son, everything Christ did in the flesh becomes *as if (velut)* present to them. A plain "No" is therefore addressed to the Papists and "certain who look back to the fleshpots of Egypt": the natural Body of Christ is not present in the Supper essentially and really, nor masticated with the mouth and teeth.

Obviously, then, despite his liberal use of the high sacramental terminology, Zwingli has not moved beyond the position of the Sixty-Seven Articles. It is made plain that realistic-sounding language about Christ's Body is to be considered figurative or metonymous. To "distribute the Body and Blood in the Supper," for example, means to distribute the elements, which are signs of the Body and Blood.<sup>10</sup> The key notion remains that of a memorial. The idea of a "pledge," on the other hand, recedes into the background.<sup>11</sup> But a third idea is added, that of a public confession which identifies a man with the Christian community. Aside from this third factor, the main contribution of the *Fidei Ratio* is to make more explicit Zwingli's understanding of sacramental language, and he believes

<sup>9</sup> This does not really fit too well with Zwingli's point of view, since holy living in the Church strictly lies in the future for the baptismal candidate.

<sup>10</sup> Art. X (M 92, 19).

<sup>11</sup> What confirms and certifies is rather God's gift of His Son (M 91, 25). Sacramental eating is but a symbol of faith in Christ. Nevertheless, in his Letter to the Princes (1530), in which he defends himself against Eck, Zwingli comes surprisingly close to Luther and Calvin, arguing that the sacraments do in fact arouse, support, and restore faith. *Latin Works*, II, 113 and 116.

that he derives his understanding from the Fathers. The teaching of the Fathers was "not that sacramental eating could cleanse the soul, but faith in God through Jesus Christ, the spiritual eating, of which the external (eating) is a symbol and figure (*symbolum et adumbratio*)."<sup>12</sup> Zwingli displays a tendency which becomes universal in Reformed thinking to elaborate the symbolism of the sacramental elements and actions. "Just as bread sustains the body and wine enlivens and exhilarates it, so the fact that God gave us His Son confirms the soul and makes it certain of His mercy; and it revives the mind that the sins which consumed it have been extinguished by Christ's blood." We may say, then, that this fondness for symbolism is a fourth aspect of Zwingli's confessional writings on the Lord's Supper. But it is not just an ingredient like the other three: it is the overarching theory of sacramental language. The three basic ingredients are thankful recollection, the reassurance of faith, and union with the Church. And where in the world, asks Zwingli, can that be better found than in the celebration of the sacraments? This is what the elements "say" to Zwingli (his own expression). They proclaim that salvation is from God, they exercise our faith, and they draw us together in a common confession. In other words, they have to do with our threefold relationship to God, self and neighbor.<sup>13</sup>

In general, the *Fidei Expositio* (1531)<sup>14</sup> moves along the same lines. Zwingli's symbolic interpretation of the Sacrament is developed in the direction of a kind of parallelism. In the Lord's Supper the spiritual feeding upon Christ by faith is symbolized by an outward eating of the bread. "You do inwardly what you enact outwardly." An inward spiritual occurrence is symbolically represented by a parallel outward and physical occurrence. The relation between the two occurrences is not causal, as though the outward eating gave rise to the inward. Zwingli has nothing more to say about it than simply that the outward represents the inward.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The most important passage for Zwingli's idea of symbolism (from which the quotation is taken) occurs in his discussion of the Fathers (M 91, 18 ff.). The three "ingredients" within this symbolic framework are explicitly brought together in Zwingli's Letter to the Princes: *Latin Works*, II, 116-17. He adds that strictly it is the Spirit who works all these things in us; and, if He so chooses, He can do so without the external instruments.

<sup>13</sup> N, pp. 36-77 (Latin).

<sup>14</sup> See the entire section entitled "Praesentia corporis Christi in Coena" (N, pp. 44-50). Zwingli distinguishes three ways of eating the Body of Christ: naturally (which he rejects), spiritually (which he identifies with faith), and sacramentally (which is spiritual eating *adiuncto sacramento*). Zwingli denies, of course, that the sacraments can give faith, save in the sub-Christian sense of *fides historica*, but he admits that they may—and especially the

The *Fidei Expositio* also heightens the emphasis on the corporate aspect of the Sacrament by giving an ecclesiological interpretation to the "Body of Christ."<sup>15</sup> In the Eucharist we have to do with the ecclesiological, not only the natural, Body of Christ. This is an aspect of Zwingli's eucharistic thinking that has been strongly emphasized of late (notably by Julius Schweizer and Jacques Courvoisier).<sup>16</sup> I have no doubt about its theological importance, but its role in Zwingli's confessional writings is not especially prominent. The discussions on the Lord's Supper are mainly interested—though possibly for polemical reasons—in Christ's natural Body. And even where Zwingli interprets "not discerning the Body" ecclesiologically, he interprets it Christologically also in the self-same sentence.<sup>17</sup>

At neither of these points—"parallelism" and the "ecclesiological body"—does the *Fidei Expositio* add anything substantially new to the *Fidei Ratio*. It develops and undergirds what we have already noted in the earlier work. To be precise, it develops our fourth aspect (Zwingli's symbolism) and undergirds the third (identification with the Christian community through a public testimony).

## II

The editors of the *Corpus Reformatorum* included ten writings under the heading "confessions" in their edition of Calvin's works.<sup>18</sup> But the only one of the ten which has established a place among the Reformed confessions is the French Confession, of which Calvin was not strictly the author. Some of the astonishing omissions from the standard collections can perhaps be explained.<sup>19</sup> But the neglect of

Eucharist—help faith by engaging the attention of all five senses. See the section entitled "Quae sacramentorum virtus" (N, pp. 50–53).

<sup>15</sup> This appears in two separate contexts: on the condemnation of the unworthy (the unbeliever dishonors the Church because his participation in the Sacrament is a false testimony to faith); and on the sacramental symbolism (which has a secondary "analogy," besides the idea of nourishment, in the fact that the one loaf is made up of many grains). See N 48, 67; 73, 171 (from the Zürich order of service); 51, 78; 52–53, 82. (The second figure in each reference is to the section, not the line.) In the last of these passages the thought of dishonoring (failing to "discern") the Body is linked with the interpretation of a *sacramentum* as an oath of allegiance: the unbeliever who participates in the Sacrament is a traitor (*perfidus*).

<sup>16</sup> Julius Schweizer, *Reformierte Abendmahlsgestaltung in der Schau Zwinglis* (Basel, 1954); Jacques Courvoisier, *Zwingli: A Reformed Theologian* (Richmond, Virginia, 1963), pp. 74 ff.

<sup>17</sup> N 53, 82.

<sup>18</sup> C. R. XXXVII (*Calvini Opera IX*), cols. 693–778. The list could be extended. It omits the Brief Confession translated in *Tracts and Treatises* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1958), II, 130 ff., and the Geneva Consensus of 1552 (on predestination), which is included in Niemeyer's collection, pp. 218–310.

<sup>19</sup> Of the ten confessions in C. R., all the four major collections give the French Confession and Müller adds the Geneva Confession and Lausanne Articles (both 1536). Of the remainder, four are restricted to a particular doctrine (the Trinity [1537], the Eucharist [1537], predestination [undated], and the ministry [undated]) and two form a family-group with the French Confession (namely, the Paris Confession [1557] and the Scholars' Confession [1559]).

one of Calvin's confessions remains (to me) a mystery: the excellent Confession of Faith which he wrote in his closing years (1562) for the Reformed Christians of France. I shall make occasional reference to this confession; but I shall use as my main Calvin-source the Geneva Catechism. Though the Catechism does not appear among the ten confessions in the *Corpus Reformatorum*, it is selected as Calvin's chief contribution in three major editions of Reformed symbols.<sup>20</sup>

The resemblance of Calvin's sacramental ideas to those of Zwingli is striking, and it is not surprising that the two positions have been judged substantially the same. What I have disentangled as the three ingredients of Zwingli's position all reappear in Calvin. In general, Calvin views the sacraments as pledges of God's goodwill toward us, which represent His spiritual benefits (Q. 310). This is their primary function. They also serve, secondly, as "badges of our profession," by which we identify ourselves with the Christian Church (Q. 362). Here, then, are two of the fundamental Zwinglian ideas. Least in evidence is the notion of the Supper as a commemoration; but this also is perhaps implicit in the affirmation that the Lord's Supper "sends us back to his Death" (Q. 349). Finally, like Zwingli, Calvin has a fondness for elaborating the details of sacramental symbolism. The pouring of water pictures both cleansing from sin and the drowning of the old Adam (Qq. 325-326). Eating and drinking picture the sustenance and exhilaration we receive from Christ's Body and Blood (Q. 341).

What, then, justifies us in speaking of two types of eucharistic theology? The answer lies in the fact that Zwingli and Calvin held two totally different views of religious symbolism. Because the nature of the symbolical is not simply a fourth ingredient, but the total context of sacramental theology, it follows that even the verbal agreements of Zwingli and Calvin are totally qualified, and may conceal actual disagreement. Hence, though both can detect the same "analogies" in Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the disagreement between the two men is more fundamental than their agreements, and puts Calvin on Luther's side of the line, not Zwingli's. For in Calvin's view it is the nature of the sacraments to cause and communicate (*apporter et communiquer*) what they signify.<sup>21</sup> On Bap-

<sup>20</sup> I refer to the Catechism by question-number ("Q" in parenthesis). My translations are from the Latin text (M 117-153), but I have compared the Latin with the French text (Ns 3-41), from which I have derived the numbering of the questions.

<sup>21</sup> C. R. XXXVII, 764. Cf. the Scholastic formula *efficiunt quod figurant*.

tism Calvin says: "It is a figure in such fashion that the truth is joined with it (*simul annexa*; Fr. *conioinete avec*). God does not deceive us when He promises us His gifts. It is certain, therefore, that forgiveness of sins and newness of life are offered us in Baptism and received by us" (Q. 328). Similarly, in the Lord's Supper the benefits of Christ are not just signified, but given (Fr. *données*), so that he makes us participate in his substance (Q. 353). The Confession of 1562 is just as strongly worded: "Through the signs of the bread and wine our Lord Jesus presents to us his Body and Blood." The Supper is addressed both to the wicked and to the good, "to offer Jesus Christ to all without discrimination." The Lord Jesus "vivifies us with the proper substance of his Body." "He does not fail to make us partakers of the substance of his Body and Blood."<sup>22</sup> And so on.

Such passages make it obvious why Calvin, without dismissing it, cannot make much out of Zwingli's favorite notion of commemoration: the focal point of his sacramental theloogy lies elsewhere—in the notion of the means of grace, a notion which Zwingli had rejected. The two Reformers were both careful to make a distinction between sign and thing signified, and for the same reason: to avoid the virtual identity of sign and reality in Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism. But this cannot obscure their complete disagreement over the nature of religious symbols. For Zwingli symbolism is what enables him to use realistic language without meaning it realistically. For Calvin symbolism is what assures him that he receives the Body of Christ without believing in a localized presence of the Body in the elements. No one, Zwingli tells us, can speak so grandly of the sacraments as to give him offence, provided the symbolical is taken for what it is, and no more. Let signs be signs! "If (the sacraments) bestowed the thing or were the thing, they would be things and not a sacrament or sign."<sup>23</sup> Calvin agrees that the sacraments cannot be both signs and the things signified. But his position is still, in effect, the exact opposite of Zwingli's: *because* a sacrament is a sign, *therefore* it bestows what it signifies. More correctly, because sacraments are divinely appointed signs, and God does not lie, therefore the Spirit uses them to confer what they symbolize.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 768, 769, 770-771.

<sup>23</sup> This interpretation of Zwingli gathers together his arguments against Eck: *Latin Works*, II, 117, 118, 122, 124.

<sup>24</sup> See esp. the Geneva Catechism, Qq. 312, 328, and 353.

## III

In the next three sections it is not the intention to subject the Reformed confessions to detailed examination, but to ask of the major confessions which eucharistic type they seem to follow. And the point of division is whether their central thought on the Lord's Supper is commemoration or communication.

Of the Swiss Confessions the First Helvetic Confession of 1536, a team-product of the Reformed theologians, deserves to be mentioned first.<sup>25</sup> It shows plainly that what I have labelled the "Calvinistic type" of eucharistic theology is older than Calvin himself. The sacraments are signs, but not "mere empty signs" (Art. XX). They consist in "signs and essential things." (Latin: "They consist of signs and things at the same time.") In other words, the thing signified is inseparably bound up with the sacramental sign. In the Lord's Supper the thing signified is the communion (Lat. *communio*) of the Body and Blood, the salvation won on the cross, and forgiveness of sins, which are received in faith as the signs are received corporeally. It is, indeed, *through* the signs that the Lord offers his Body and Blood—that is, himself—to his people (Art. XXII). The signs convey and offer the spiritual things which they signify. As with Calvin, so in the First Helvetic Confession the echoes of Zwinglian ideas are unmistakable. But at the decisive point Zwingli is left behind. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper does not *only* symbolize, commemorate, move us to joyful thanksgiving, and bind us in loyalty to the Head and members of the Church: it also is the means by which God gives what He promises.

It comes, then, as something of a surprise to turn to the Geneva Confession<sup>26</sup> of the same year (1536) and find an explanation of the Lord's Supper that does not move beyond Zwingli. No doubt, it *could* be interpreted Calvinistically, but its language does not *require* such an interpretation. The sacraments represent, but it is not said that they give. It is hard to believe that Calvin even approved the statement, let alone wrote it, and it is significant that the latest research is inclined to attribute the Geneva Confession to Farel. Nevertheless, Calvin did not disapprove of the Confession, and it

<sup>25</sup> M 101 109 (German); S III, 211-231 (German and Latin). With the First Helvetic Confession may be compared the Tetrapolitan Confession (1530) and the Basel Confession (1534). See M 72, 20 and 97, 22. All three of these confessions think of the Eucharist as an actual giving of the Body and Blood, not simply a representation of the Body once given.

<sup>26</sup> C. R. XXXVII, 693-700.

was his desire that the Genevan citizens should be herded into the Cathedral of St. Pierre, lined up by the police, and obliged to confess under oath that this was their faith (July, 1537).

Heinrich Bullinger demonstrated in 1545 that Zwinglianism was still very much alive. His Zurich Confession,<sup>27</sup> provoked by renewed Lutheran attacks on the Swiss, defiantly asserts that remembering is the "real chief part and purpose" of the Supper. He who believes *has* eaten Christ's Body, for eating is believing. The believer therefore brings Christ *to* the Supper in his heart. He does not receive him *in* the Supper. Of course, it is possible that an unbeliever may be present at the Supper; and he may certainly receive Christ there, that is, may become a believer. But the saving events themselves are present only in the believing imagination (*Eynbildung*).

By the time Bullinger wrote the Second Helvetic Confession (probably in 1561) the Zurich Consensus had already closed the gap between the two eucharistic theologies. Schaff's description of the Second Helvetic Confession as "the last and the best of the Zwinglian family" needs some qualification.<sup>28</sup> In the Zurich Consensus<sup>29</sup> the favorite Zwinglian terminology was liberally employed, and Calvin trod softly in the introduction of non-Zwinglian ideas.<sup>30</sup> The Consensus did not say all Calvin liked to say about the Sacraments, only what he was not prepared to omit. But enough was said to put it beyond all doubt that Bullinger had moved beyond his teacher. God truly offers (*praestat*) what the sacraments symbolize (Art. VIII). The reality is not separated from the signs, but Christ is received with his spiritual gifts (Art. IX). And so on.

That Bullinger did not consent to such expressions merely for a political accommodation with Geneva, is proved by the use of similar language in the Second Helvetic Confession,<sup>31</sup> in which he taught a sacramental union of sign and reality (Art. XIX). And yet in some passages (Art. XXI) Bullinger seems to be thinking in terms of a

<sup>27</sup> M 153-159 (German; extracts only). It was Luther's *Short Confession* (1545) that finally provoked Bullinger to make response. The Rhaetian Confession (1552) also does not seem to advance beyond the old Zwinglian ideas (M 163-170).

<sup>28</sup> *Creeds of Christendom* Vol. I (sixth edn., New York, 1919), p. 390.

<sup>29</sup> M 159-163 (Latin).

<sup>30</sup> For example, it is made abundantly clear that the sacraments have no sacral efficacy in themselves, and for this reason the medieval *sacramenta conferunt gratiam* is denied (Arts. XII, XIII, XVII). But this is said, not to denude the sacraments, but to reserve the *agendi facultas* for God, who uses them in freedom (*ubi visum est!*) as His instruments (Art. XIII).

<sup>31</sup> M 170-221.

symbolic parallelism: outwardly we eat the bread, inwardly *at the same time* we also feed upon Christ's Body. (In Latin, the connection is denoted by the words *intus interim*: "Meanwhile, inside.")<sup>82</sup> This, of course, does take us beyond Zwingli, whose characteristic tense is the past, not the present. In Zwingli's view, the elements call to mind something that has happened: Christ's Body *was* broken, we *have* turned to him in faith.<sup>83</sup> And yet Bullinger's parallelism is not Calvin's position either, for it lacks the use of instrumental expressions; the outward event does not convey or cause or give rise to the inward event, but merely indicates that it is going on.

Perhaps, then, the original distinction between a Zwinglian and a Calvinistic type of Eucharistic theology is not adequate for classifying the Reformed Confessions. Is there, in fact, also a third type of Reformed Eucharist, of which Bullinger's second Helvetic Confession serves as the model? I advance this suggestion at this point as a hypothesis, to be tested by other Reformed confessions.

#### IV

My hypothesis seems to me to be confirmed by the three main Continental Reformed Confessions that originated outside of Switzerland: the French and Belgic Confessions and the Heidelberg Catechism. The French Confession of 1559, though not from Calvin's own hand, is for the most part a faithful summary of his theology, especially his sacramental theology.<sup>84</sup> The two sacraments are not empty signs, nor yet do they possess any intrinsic power: they are instruments employed by God to strengthen faith (Art. XXXIV) and to give us Jesus Christ (Art. XXXVII). God signifies nothing to us in vain (Art. XXXIV). In both sacraments He gives us really an efficaciously (Lat. *efficaciter*) what He there represents to us, and with the sign is joined the true possession of what is signified (Art. XXXVII).

<sup>82</sup> M 210, 28. A similar passage occurs at M 211, 10, but it uses everyday eating as a general analogy to spiritual eating and has no specific reference to the Lord's Supper (cf. John 6).

<sup>83</sup> In characterizing parallelism as Bullinger's typical contribution, I do not, of course, overlook the fact that Zwingli in some passages seems to anticipate him, apparently transcending his customary retrospective direction. Moreover, my concern here is only with the confessional sources.

<sup>84</sup> M 221-232 (French); N 329-339 (Latin). The French Confession needs to be read as a whole. Certain passages, if taken in isolation, could be given a parallelistic interpretation. A particular difficulty appears in Art. XXVII, which seems to say that the thing signified in the Lord's Supper is not the Body or communion with the Body, but *the fact that* the Body nourishes the soul. How, then, does God give us really and efficaciously what He signifies?

The Belgic Confession (1561) was closely modelled on the French Confession, which, in some articles it simply amplifies. On the sacraments, however, I would classify it as only semi-Calvinist. The statement on the sacraments in general (Art. XXXIII) seems to follow the French Confession; but the Article on Baptism looks rather to Zwingli and Bullinger; and the Article on the Lord's Supper then reverts to Calvinism.<sup>85</sup> If this is a correct reading of the Belgic Confession, then we have to make a further observation on the sacramental theology of the Reformed confessions: not only are different theological types represented in the *corpus confessionum* as a whole, but there may also be strange combinations within a single confession. However, on the Lord's Supper itself the Belgic Confession does not seem to differ from the French model: "This feast is a spiritual meal in which Christ communicates himself to us . . . nourishing our poor souls by the eating of his flesh" (Art. XXXV).

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)<sup>86</sup> shows a subtle variation from Calvin's Geneva Catechism at the very beginning of the presentation on the sacraments. It asks, not how does Christ communicate himself to us (cf. Geneva Cat., Q. 309)? but how do we obtain faith (Heidelberg Cat., Q. 65)? This is not, I think, a trivial distinction, but a quite fundamental one; for the Heidelberg Catechism is apparently shy about the notion of sacramental means. Despite the contrary judgments of Schaff and Müller, it does not seem to me that the Catechism teaches a full Calvinistic doctrine of the sacraments.<sup>87</sup> The treatment is highly didactic and intellectualistic. The sacraments confirm faith, seal the promise, help us to understand, point us to the Cross, remind and assure us, testify to us, and so on. The characteristic formula is "*so gewiss . . . so gewiss*": as certainly as I am washed with water and eat the bread, so certain can I be that Christ's Blood cleanses me from sin and his Body nourishes my soul.

<sup>85</sup> I have used the French version in S III, 388–436, in preference to the later Latin version (M 233–249). Even the general Article on the sacraments (XXXIII) does not say unambiguously that God gives what He represents: it could be read to mean that by the sacraments God works faith. This would go further than Zwingli, but stops short of Calvin. One can only speculate why Baptism is interpreted in terms of enlistment and parallelistic representation (Art. XXXIV). Perhaps the hint is to be sought in the statement (Art. XXXV) that the Word of the Gospel is the instrument of regeneration—therefore (may one add?) Baptism cannot be. It may also be pointed out that one section of the Article on the Lord's Supper could, if taken out of context, be interpreted parallelistically: the phrase "*aussi véritablement . . . aussi vraiment*" is echoed by the Heidelberg Catechism's "*so gewiss . . . so gewiss*."

<sup>86</sup> M 682–719 (German). My exposition uses the entire section on the sacraments (Qq. 65–85).

<sup>87</sup> Schaff, *op. cit.*, I, 543; Müller, *op. cit.*, p. lii.

Of course, the sacraments do not merely inform us that forgiveness is like washing, believing like eating: they also assure us that we really are washed from our sins and united with Christ's Body. The broken bread of the Lord's Supper does not only point back to the Body broken on the Cross, but means also that by the same broken Body I am continually fed. The signs are also pledges. The Catechism explicitly teaches a communion with the Body of Christ and, like Calvin, makes the Holy Spirit the bond of union between Christ's Body in Heaven and ourselves on earth. But the elements do not convey this union: they remind us that we have it independently of the sacraments. Hence those who should come to the table are those who trust that their sins are (already!) forgiven, and desire to strengthen their faith and improve their life. The overall verdict on the Catechism must be, then, that its sacramental theology owes more to Zwingli and particularly to Bullinger than to Calvin.

## V

Finally, I would wish to argue along the same lines in interpreting the British Reformed Confessions: if my triple distinction is used as the measure the results are again very mixed. Whether or not the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles (1563/71)<sup>38</sup> belong among the Reformed confessions, I would classify their teaching on the Lord's Supper as cautiously Calvinistic. Zwinglianism is plainly ruled out, and the focal point is the *communicatio corporis*: the Body of Christ is "given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner" (Art. XXVIII). This could, of course, be read as parallelism: it is at least ambiguous, and neither on the sacraments in general nor on the other sacrament do the Articles say unambiguously that through the signs God gives what they signify.<sup>39</sup> The definition of a sacrament in the Anglican Catechism (1662),<sup>40</sup> on the other hand, expresses Calvin's intention exactly: a sacrament is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given to

<sup>38</sup> M 505–522 (Latin); S III, 487–516 (Latin and English).

<sup>39</sup> Art. XXV does not make clear *what* God works through the sacraments, but the answer seems to be that He strengthens faith. Art. XXVI speaks of four effects brought about through the instrumentality of Baptism, but regeneration (of which Baptism is the sign) is not among them, unless regeneration is taken ecclesiologically as engraving into the Church.

<sup>40</sup> The Catechism dates from 1549, but underwent several changes before its definitive form of 1662. The section on the sacraments was added by Bishop Overall in response to a request made by the Puritans at the Hampton Court Conference (1604). At the Savoy Conference (1661) the Puritans objected in vain to the first three questions, which touch on Baptism. The idea that sponsors can make vicarious vows and promises reappears in the questions devoted directly to Baptism. M 522–525.

us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof." Taken in conjunction with this definition of a sacrament, the statement on the Lord's Supper must also be judged faithfully Calvinistic.

Curiously enough, the Westminster Confession's<sup>41</sup> teaching on the sacraments (1647) is not so plainly Calvinistic as the teaching of the Anglican Catechism; and the confession comes as close to symbolic parallelism as do the Thirty-Nine Articles. Since the aim of the Westminster Divines was to produce a more strictly Calvinist confession than the Thirty-Nine Articles, their lack of clarity in the area of sacramental theology is surprising. The Calvinistic intention of their teaching on the sacraments has to be gleaned from incidental phrases, which presuppose the instrumental view.<sup>42</sup> In itself, the Article on the Lord's Supper invites the parallelistic interpretation of the sacramental union: "Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, do *then also* inwardly . . . feed upon Christ crucified . . ." (Art. XXIX, sec. vii). Indeed, the statement that Christ's Body is present "to faith" could be understood in a purely Zwinglian sense.

If the hesitance of the Westminster Confession is surprising, even more surprising is the fact that the teaching of the two Westminster Catechisms<sup>43</sup> does not fully coincide with that of the Confession. Perhaps the difference may be traced to the catechetical structure, which treats Word and sacraments as answers to the question "what are the outward means by which Christ communicates to us the benefits of His mediation" (L. C., Q. 154)? The sacraments are effectual means of salvation (Q. 161), which exhibit Christ's benefits (Q. 162) and by means of which the benefits are communicated to us (Q. 154). Hence when the Catechisms speak of feeding upon the Body of Christ, they must surely mean a spiritual feeding which is effected

<sup>41</sup> M 542-612 (English and Latin). The connecting link between the Thirty-Nine Articles and Westminster was the Irish Articles (1615) of Archbishop Ussher, which incorporate the predestinarian Lambeth Articles (1595) and yet move away from Calvin on the sacraments. Irish Art. 89, on Baptism, excludes the instrumental language of the Thirty-Nine Articles, and Art. 94, on the Lord's Supper, develops the sacramental symbolism into a parallelism of two "parts," one outward and the other inward. Texts in M 525-526 (the Lambeth Articles in Latin) and 526-539 (the Irish Articles in English).

<sup>42</sup> The expression "grace which is exhibited (*exhibetur*) in or by the sacraments" (Art. XXVII, sec. iii; cf. sec. v) means more than "displayed"; the word "conferred" seems to be used as a synonym. The Latin commonly means "to hold forth" or "to present." Note also the expressions "efficacy of Baptism" (Art. XXVIII, sec. v) and "the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred" (*ibid.*, sec. vi).

<sup>43</sup> Larger Catechism (abbrev. "L. C.") in M 612-643 (Latin); Thomas Torrance, *The School of Faith* (London, 1959), pp. 185-234 (English). Shorter Catechism (abbrev. "S. C.") in M 643-652 (English).

through the outward eating of the bread. Although much of what the Confession says on the Lord's Supper is simply repeated in the Catechisms, they set it in a clearer light by treating it explicitly under the rubric of the means whereby Christ communicates himself to his people.

That the idea of Christ's self-communication was the heart of the matter for the Westminster Divines is demonstrated by comparing the two Catechisms. The Larger Catechism lists five functions of a sacrament (Q. 162) and four or five functions of the Lord's Supper (Q. 168). In the interests of brevity, the Shorter Catechism restricts itself precisely to those functions which go beyond Zwingli's or Bullinger's eucharistic types; and particularly to the function of communicating Christ and his benefits (S. C., Qq. 92, 96). The notions of a testimony to our thankfulness, our engagement to God, and our mutual fellowship with one another are simply omitted. The point could hardly be more forcefully made that, although these notions belong to the full presentation of Reformed teaching on the Eucharist, they lie close to the perimeter and can, if necessary, be cut out. The essential part of the Sacrament is the divine gift conveyed by it, not the Church's profession of its faith or love, nor even the Church's "affectionate meditation" upon Calvary (L. C., Q. 174). One is astonished at the effectiveness with which the Shorter Catechism puts to flight the oppressive, introspective spirit of the Puritan that broods over the Larger Catechism. In the Larger Catechism generous attention is given to the inward state of the Christian before (Qq. 171–173), during (Q. 174), and after (Q. 175) the Sacrament. (Especially formidable is the exhortation to examine ourselves after, as well as before, the Sacrament: "The duty of Christians after they have received the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, is seriously to consider how they have behaved themselves in it, and with what success . . ." [!].) In the Shorter Catechism, on the other hand, the objective gift of grace, not the subjective operations of grace, holds the center.<sup>44</sup>

I close this section by pointing out that the Scottish Church was particularly emphatic in its adherence to the "high Calvinistic" view of the sacraments. In Scotland the Westminster Standards super-

<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the Shorter Catechism persists in ranking prayer with the Word and sacraments as a means of grace, as did the Larger Catechism—a rather questionable arrangement. And perhaps both Catechisms say too much about Christ's "benefits," although this is not intended to distract attention from his Person. Cf. L. C., Qq. 165, 170, 176.

seded the native Scots Confession (1560),<sup>45</sup> which affirmed the full Calvinistic doctrine of the Lord's Supper in strikingly realistic language. It has indeed been said that the sacramental affirmations of the Scots Confession can lay claim to a validity that is transconfessional: not just *reformiert* but *reformatorisch*. "Here in fact," writes Paul Jacobs, "the Reformed and the Lutheran concerns are woven together in a new affirmation."<sup>46</sup> I do not share that verdict, but find it significant that such a verdict has been given.<sup>47</sup>

## VI

Now some brief concluding remarks: historical, theological and ecumenical. The *historical* conclusion to this survey of the Reformed confessions is, I think, sufficiently plain. Schaff's judgment, that Calvin's eucharistic teaching "must be regarded as the orthodox Reformed doctrine," oversimplifies the evidence.<sup>48</sup> In actual fact, Zwingli's view continued to find its way into the confessions even after Calvin's emergence as foremost leader of the Reformed Church. Moreover, Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession (1561/3) exhibits a third eucharistic type. There seem to be, then, three doctrines of the Eucharist in the Reformed confessions, which we may label "symbolic memorialism," "symbolic parallelism," and "symbolic instrumentalism."

Nevertheless, the major Reformed confessions do not display three equally vigorous and wholly exclusive eucharistic traditions. The characteristic Zwinglian view is represented only in the minor confessions. (Zwingli's own great confessional works, the *Fidei Ratio* and *Fidei Expositio*, never attained symbolic authority and ought strictly to be excluded from the *corpus confessionum*.) The view contained in Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession, on the other hand, appears in several other important statements, including the

<sup>45</sup> I have used the texts in Ns 82–117 (Scots and Latin). M 249–263 gives the Latin only.

<sup>46</sup> *Das Schottische Bekenntnis* (Witten/Ruhr, 1960), p. 36. The fact that Danish Lutherans and Scottish Presbyterians practice intercommunion lends support to his thesis. But why speak of "conscious appropriation of Lutheran confessions" to account for Scottish emphasis on eating the Body? Why not seek the model in the French, or other Calvinistic, confessions?

<sup>47</sup> There is no space to discuss the interesting Scottish catechisms, which were virtually superseded by the Westminster Catechisms. I should judge that they cover the entire spectrum of eucharistic types: from pure Zwinglian (e.g., *The Little Catechism*, 1556) to high Calvinist (e.g., John Craig's Catechism, 1581). Documents in Torrance, *op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, 456. Parallelism does not seem to have been a problem for Schaff, as it is in contemporary German discussions. That the *distinction* between parallelism and instrumentalism was not made a point of *controversy* within the confessions themselves, is apparent from the Declaration of Thorn (1645), which uses both types of language (N, pp. 681–682).

most respected of the German-language confessions.<sup>49</sup> And yet it is not so much anti-Calvinistic as timidly Calvinistic. All the leading confessions place the emphasis on communication rather than commemoration. Some simply reflect a certain shyness toward the idea of the means of grace. Perhaps this hesitancy did owe something to Zwingli, but the real division in the Reformed confessions is not Zwingli versus Calvin, but (so to say) "Franciscan" Calvinists versus "Thomistic" Calvinists. The major confessions generally insist (against Zwingli) on a sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified, but they are not agreed on the nature of the union. Communion with Christ actually takes place in the Lord's Supper, and is the focal point of interest. But is the communion given *simultaneously with* the elements (a kind of "Franciscan" interpretation) or *through* the element (a "Thomistic" interpretation)? The difference is perhaps just a "school" dispute.

Next, some *theological* conclusions. I have no doubt that confessional language needs some up-dating. Zwingli remarks that the language of the Eucharist, literally understood, is as repulsive as to speak of eating one's own children out of love.<sup>50</sup> But can we really save "Capernaitic" language today even by adding that of course it is intended "spiritually"? I doubt it. Nonetheless, the first essential is to try to grasp the inner significance of confessional language in its own terms; to interpret with historical impartiality, yet with conscious sympathy, what the confessions were after. No doubt, that is an easily abused approach, since we may seat the Reformers in the saddles of our own hobby-horses. But I shall try to say what I think is theologically at stake in the differences between Zwingli and Calvin.

John Eck must be given the credit for spotting the weakness of Zwingli's sacramental theology. He laughs at Zwingli's claim to be the hammer of the Anabaptists, since he was in fact the founder of the sect.<sup>51</sup> "How near is Zwingli now to the Anabaptists whom

<sup>49</sup> Walter Kreck's claim, that the eucharistic teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism cannot be adequately characterized as a "parallelism of two processes that are divorced from each other," may of course be granted if the qualifying phrase (*voneinander getrennten*) means simply "unrelated": see "Das Ergebnis des Abendmahlsgesprächs in reformierter Sicht," *Zur Lehre vom heiligen Abendmahl* (ed. G. Niemeier, München, 1961), p. 43. Cf. also Paul Jacobs, *Theologie reformierter Bekenntnisschriften* (Neukirchen, 1959), p. 112. In a fascinating debate of the mid-nineteenth century, John Nevin dismissed as absurd Charles Hodge's view that the Heidelberg Catechism was not purely Calvinistic in its doctrine of the sacraments: "Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper," *The Mercersburg Review*, Vol. II, no. 5 (Sept. 1850), p. 525. But the dividing lines were drawn differently by Hodge than in our presentation.

<sup>50</sup> N 50, 72; 71, 161.

<sup>51</sup> See *The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, II, 82-83.

nevertheless . . . he torments to death . . . and tortures limb by limb." This is not merely unfounded maneuvering to implicate Zwingli in the guilt of the Anabaptists. Zwingli's sacramental theology really does point the way to the denial of infant baptism and the interpretation of a sacrament as an act of public confession. Against this, Eck makes the same fundamental claim as do Luther and Calvin: a sacrament is a sign, not of past grace only, but of present grace.

It would, I think, be unjust to Zwingli should we explain his theology as the product of a philosophical bias. That the Spirit needs no vehicle, least of all a material vehicle, certainly is one of his reasons for rejecting the old concept of the means of grace. But he was also motivated by what one may perhaps call anachronistically a "Barthian" dread of putting God at man's disposal. If grace were bound up with the sacraments, they would profit and renew whenever they were celebrated. The clergy would then have infallible power to grant or withhold salvation. Indeed, they would have the fearful power to sell God at a higher price than even Judas asked. Zwingli is therefore speaking as reformer and pastor in his protest against abuses in sacramental theology and practice. Do not buy what you possess already! The Sacrament is simply a public testimony that you do indeed possess what God has given freely. Zwingli's sacramental theology sounds persistently the joyful note of possession. The "image" of Christ in the Eucharist, like the ring the husband gives to his wife, is a perpetual reminder to the Church that he is wholly ours in all that he is.<sup>52</sup>

Zwingli is by no means to be under-estimated. He knew what the Gospel is, just as well as did Luther or Calvin. And he wanted the Evangelical Eucharist to give cultic expression to the Evangelical Faith. Nevertheless, it does make a profound difference that for Zwingli the Lord's Supper was an act of thanksgiving for the Gospel, whereas for Luther and Calvin it was a concrete offer of the Gospel. The twin weaknesses in Zwingli's eucharistic thought are his fondness for the past tense and his "objectifying" of the Sacrament's true Subject. The gift of Christ lies for him in the past, as does the gift of faith; and in the Sacrament *we* give thanks, *we* make confession before men. As long as Christ is the object of the confession, I do not see any sufficient reason to judge Zwingli un-Evangelical. But it

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 113, 118.

still seems to me that Calvin was right to insist that the Living Christ is the Subject, not merely the Author, of the Sacrament, and that he gives here and now.

Bullinger's position, as represented in the Second Helvetic Confession, avoids some of the pitfalls of Zwinglianism. For Bullinger, as for Calvin, Christ is the one who gives, not only gave; and we are to receive, not only to remember that he once gave. But there is something arbitrary and irrational about what I have nicknamed the "Franciscan" way of speaking. Grace, on this view, bypasses the human understanding: by some mysterious divine arrangement, grace is given at the same time as the Sacrament is administered (*concomitatur!*). On the high Calvinistic ("Thomistic") view, God really works by means of symbols (*significando causant!*).

Finally, what do I conclude concerning the Presbyterian Church's *ecumenical* position? At first glance, it may seem that I have simply made it more difficult for Presbyterians to decide what their position really is. It can hardly be doubted that many Presbyterians (perhaps most) are Zwinglians by default—because they are unaware of their tradition. But if the high Calvinist doctrine, which I have defended, were accepted as the most representative Reformed position on the Lord's Supper, what would this do to the traditional opposition between, let us say, the Lutherans and the Presbyterians? This is by no means a private problem for Lutherans and Presbyterians, since Congregationalists, Baptists, Anglicans, and Methodists all have a Calvinist strain in their eucharistic theologies. The Calvinistic doctrine has always been a live option (though not the only one) in all of these separate traditions.

It is probably clear enough already what I intend by putting Calvin and Luther together against Zwingli. I have tried to draw the line at a different place than the Lutherans have traditionally selected. The test-questions concerning the *manducatio oralis* and the *manducatio indignorum* have been simply ignored in my presentation. If *they* are allowed to define the boundaries, then Calvin stands opposed to both Zwingli and Luther, since he teaches that the Body of Christ is given to all, but received only by faith. In drawing the line elsewhere I do not believe that I am simply exercising the theologian's right to draw lines anywhere he pleases. My line-drawing is historically conditioned. It is an attempt to answer the question *why* the Lutherans made the *manducatio indignorum* the test-question. Ob-

viously, I must be excused for not dealing with the historical problem at any length. But it seems to me that what Luther himself was fighting for—especially in his magnificent work *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525)—was precisely the gift-character of the Lord's Supper. Luther was shocked at Carlstadt's view, which, he thought, turned the Blessed Sacrament into a devotional exercise. Instead of receiving the Crucified and Risen Lord, who offered himself with the broken bread and poured-out wine, Carlstadt strove to focus his thoughts upon Jesus of Nazareth suffering on the Cross. As Luther saw it, nothing less than the Gospel was at stake, as in his controversy over the Roman mass. Christ gives himself to us in the sacrament; but some presumed to offer him to God, and others turned to their devotions. Both made the gift of God into a work of man. Whether these accusations are well founded or not, the heart of Luther's own position seems clear: the sacrament is a gift, and the Gift is Jesus Christ. If that is what was dearest to Luther in his reverence for the sacrament, then the Calvinist confessions can answer, "without horns and without teeth," that, though there is still much to disagree about, they are on Luther's side of the line.



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