

THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

VOL. XXVIII.

JANUARY, 1917.

No. 2.

THE LUTHER QUADRI-CENTENNIAL.

BY THE REVEREND PRESIDENT W. W. MOORE, D. D., LL. D.,

Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va.

For many years the Christian people of Continental Europe of the two communions, Lutheran and Reformed, with a view to preserving the heritage bequeathed to them by the Reformers of the sixteenth century, have observed one Sabbath in the year as Reformation Day. In 1904, at Liverpool, the General Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System unanimously recommended to the churches of the Alliance—not only those in Europe but all the churches throughout the world—the observance of one Sabbath in the year “as a day of special thanksgiving for the blessings resulting to so many churches and countries from that great religious revival which we call the Reformation of the sixteenth century.” In 1910 the General Assembly of our own Church, expressing the belief that such commemorative exercises are fitted to render most important service in our own land at the present time, made provision for a similar annual observance by our pastors and people.

Few events in the history of the world are more worthy of such commemoration. For the Reformation was not only “a great insurrection of human intelligence,” as Guizot has called it—a mighty intellectual Renaissance; and it not only produced a tremendous political upheaval which inaugurated a new era of civil liberty; but it was a heroic vindication of freedom of

THE REFORMATION AND THE LORD'S SUPPER.

BY THE REVEREND PROFESSOR R. A. WEBB, D. D., LL. D.,

Theological Seminary of Kentucky, Louisville, Ky.

It was inevitable that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper should be a central topic in the Reformation controversy.

Our Lord had said in one of his discourses, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." Then, as if to insure against all misunderstanding, he repeated, "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life" (John 6:53, 54). This was plain. It was imperative. It permitted no sort of alternative.

But it is all impossible, unless his flesh and his blood should, somehow, be made available to those who were willing to eat the one and to drink the other. He made them available in the institution of his Supper. He said of the bread, "This is my body," and of the wine, "This is my blood." To eat the one was to eat his flesh, and to drink the other was to drink his blood.

Then Paul, a great and inspired expositor of his redemptive teachings, said, as though there could not be the least bit of doubt about it, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16.)

Could anything be plainer? So the mediaeval Church had come to think that it was saving men's souls by feeding them with the flesh and blood of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This was the very heart and marrow of the popish interpretation of the gospel. All godliness begins, or when begun, is continued, or when lost, is restored, through an elaborate system of sacraments.

Abuses followed. They were inevitable. They were logical. Only priests could make sacraments. Only sacraments could save souls. Trades were made. Tyrannies were imposed. Scandals abounded. The body and blood of Christ were in the

ecclesiastic's pantry. The key to the larder hung at his belt. Men must do his bidding for this saving bread. They must kneel at his feet to get this saving wine.

Luther felt distress of conscience. He caught himself thinking. He found himself reading the Bible. Was this correct? Was this the gospel? The issue must be raised. The controversy must be joined. Better a Church of a thousand fragments, than a single organization corrupt at the core. Better loose a principle that would liberate the conscience and save the gospel, than sacrifice all for the sake of the organic union of the Church.

The parties had to line up. They had to take sides on the issue. The very heart of the supposed gospel was called into question. The Protestants were in rebellion against the central dogma of the Church. The Lord's Supper must be interpreted. The issue was called "the real presence." The disputants divided into literalists and figurativists—the literalists were Romanists and Lutherans and Mystics, and the figurativists were Zwinglians and Calvinists.

I. *Romanists.*

These came forward with their dogma of *transubstantiation*. By this they meant that the unseen substance of the sacramental bread was changed into the flesh of Christ, and of the wine into the blood of Christ. The properties and appearances were those of bread and wine. But Christ was "really," that is, substantively, present in the sacramental elements, so that whoever partook of them, in a proper way, truly and literally ate his flesh and drank his blood, to the salvation of his soul.

In vain the Protestants said it was absurd. It contradicted common sense. The elements continue to look, smell, taste, sound, feel like genuine bread and wine. Christ did not have bodies enough for every communicant to have a whole one for his supper. No human being could take the body of a full-grown man into his stomach at one meal. So much human flesh and blood and bones would gorge him, and sicken him, and kill him. It would be cannibalism, anyhow. Besides,

eating cabbages and carrots did not turn the eaters into vegetables. Neither did eating beef turn a man into an ox. Neither would eating, and digesting, and assimilating Christ's body convert communicants into Christians. The Redeemer had never told any one that he had to make a supper on him, eating him every bit at a single meal, in order to be saved. It was a physical impossibility. It was exegetical nonsense. It turned the Lord's table into a butcher's meatblock. It made the gospel a childish absurdity.

It was all in vain. The Protestant must abdicate his reason, and believe it. He must contradict his five senses, and accept it. He must make his Bible ridiculous, and submit to it. Otherwise, the Council of Trent plastered him with sixteen awful anathemas, and turned him over to Satan and the pains of hell forever. And yet there are some, even to-day, who think he ought to have submitted in preference to committing the high crime of dividing a united Church! Is it possible that a united Church is more to be desired than a pure Church?

II. Lutherans.

Luther, hero of the Reformation as he was, literalized and dogmatized and split the Protestant party. He rejected *transubstantiation*, but he came forward with something just as unintelligible, which he called *consubstantiation*. By it he meant that the flesh and blood of Christ was with, in, or under the sacramental bread and wine. The Romish proposition was, "It looks like bread, but it is really flesh; it looks like wine, but it is really blood." Luther's proposition was, "It is really bread, but it is also really flesh; it is really wine, but it is also really blood. The elements are both—what they seem to be, and what the Lord said they were."

At the conference at Marburg with the Swiss reformers, he wrote with chalk on the desk, *Hoc est Corpus Meum* (This is my body). There he took his stand, and was as immovable as he was at the Diet of Worms, when he said, "Here I stand * * * God help me."

The Swiss conferees said it had no meaning. It contradicted

sense and reason, just as palpably as did transubstantiation. Christ's body is absent in heaven; how can it be on earth in the sacrament? It is limited to one place; how can it be ubiquitous? He had but one body; how could millions of communicants, each, eat a whole body every time he went to the Lord's table? The Scriptures abounded in parallel affirmative statements. "The seven lean kine are seven years." "My word is a hammer." "My word is a fire." "My word is spirit." "My word is life." "I am the vine." "Ye are the branches." "My Father is the husbandman." "I am the door." "I am the shepherd." "I am the bread of life." "I am the water of life." "I am the bright and morning star." Must we make the Scriptures silly, by denying that they use any metaphors?

In vain. Luther retorted that he would eat "crab-apples and dung," if God ordered him to do so. Zwingli said he would, too; but God has not commanded us to eat anybody's flesh or drink anybody's blood. The Saviour was but using a figure of speech. This bread *represents* my body; this wine *represents* my blood.

Luther put his finger on his text, *Hoc Est Corpus Meum*, and said you must believe it. The Swiss said, we cannot. Then said Luther, "I abandon you to God's judgment." The conference broke up. Luther refused to shake hands, saying to his opponents, "You do not belong to the communion of the Christian Church." His conduct was disgraceful. His behaviour was that of a defeated, irritable, stubborn dogmatist. The Landgrave could not leave matters so. He succeeded in getting some sort of an agreement patched up for the sake of appearances. But Protestantism divided into the Lutherans and the Reformed, over the question of "the real presence" of Christ in the Lord's Supper, while practically in accord upon every other tenet.

III. *Mystics.*

But yet another effort must be made to literalize, somehow. Our Lord had too plainly said the disciple must eat my flesh and drink my blood. He had too categorically said this bread

is my body and this wine is my blood. Sacramentarianism cannot die easily. There must be some way to get the body and blood of Christ into the Supper and into the stomachs of the communicants.

So Osiander came forward with his nonsensical doctrine of *impanation*. The Reformed had demonstrated the philosophical and exegetical absurdity of "the real presence" of the body and blood of the Redeemer in the sacrament, either by way of transubstantiation or consubstantiation. Obviously, the Saviour's body is in heaven, and glorified. If it is in the sacrament of the Supper (and it must be there), then it must somehow come from heaven, and be the glorified body of the Lord.

How could it come from heaven? The corpuscular theory of light, then the received science, can explain it. The sun pours a stream of light-corpuscles from his place in the sky into the earth where men dwell. Similarly, the "Sun of Righteousness" pours a stream of corpuscles from his glorified body in heaven, which are caught and concreted and communicated in his Supper. It is then the glorified, heavenly, spiritual, celestial body of Christ that is present in the Supper, and is manducated by the communicant. As the "incarnation" was the mystical union of divinity and humanity, so that when Simeon took the young child Jesus in his arms, he literally held both God and man in his hands; so when the communicant takes the sacramental bread and wine into his hands and mouth, he takes the material elements and the celestial, spiritual, glorified body of his Lord. The Son of God was "incarnated" in the womb of the Virgin Mary; so the theanthropic Christ is "impanated" in the Lord's Supper. This is what is eaten, digested and assimilated by the communicant, and the theanthropic life of Christ is thus imparted to all who worthily partake of the "impanated" Christ.

At Konigsberg, Osiander "intoned with unwearying energy the indwelling of Christ within us." It was his formative idea. Not Christ *for* us, but Christ *within* us, is the hope of glory. Justification is not by imputation, but by indwelling. The whole process is subjective. The Redeemer must become im-

manent in the disciple. To be Christian is to be Christ-ened. The mysticising thing is done in the Lord's Supper. The bread and the wine are not the natural body and blood of Christ. They are his spiritual, glorified, heavenly flesh and blood. In taking the elements, this is the kind of flesh and blood which the communicant takes into his stomach—some volatilized food which mysteriously nourishes the soul. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body; there is a natural blood and a spiritual blood. Both kinds are real. What the communicant gets at the Lord's table is the spiritual flesh and the spiritual blood of Christ.

By such interpretations, Osiander founded a mystical party within the Lutheran pale, and it exists to-day, both within and without that denomination. One may sometimes hear even a Presbyterian calling the bread the spiritual body of Christ, and the wine the spiritual blood of Christ, and telling the communicant that he is feeding upon spiritual and heavenly food, when he is eating a bit of common bread and drinking a sip of plain, every-day wine.

In vain the Reformed cry out, it is all pantheizing, mystical, inscrutable, unintelligible. They are reminded that the Lord said you must eat my flesh and drink my blood; the Lord said this is my body, this is my blood. If it is not his physical flesh and his venous blood, then it must be his heavenly flesh and his spiritual blood—even if the ideas have no meaning.

IV. *Zwinglians.*

Zwingli interpreted "is," in the clauses, "this is my body," "this is my blood," by the word "signifies." The bread represents the body, and the wine represents the blood, of Christ. It is a symbolism. The Redeemer used the rhetorical figure of metonymy. Hence, Christ never said any man must eat his flesh or drink his blood in any kind of a literal sense. He was using only a figure of speech. He never taught that his body was present in the Supper in any kind of realistic sense. It is simply and only a memorial service, and he is present only

as the imagination of the communicant may call him to his memory. The communicant feeds on his flesh and blood, only in a metaphorical sense—as the philosopher feeds on Aristotle, or the poet drinks the beauty of the landscape, or the children of Israel ate the “passover” when they ate the lamb. The Lord’s Supper is nothing but a ceremonial picture. All the benefit that the communicant gets out of the sacrament is gotten in a manner analogous to the way in which an artist improves himself when he meditates upon the canvass of an old master.

Such an explanation is plain. Any one can understand it. The communicant is simply remembering his Lord. There is nothing mysterious or magical about it. Just as the sermon is a verbal presentation of Christ to the ear of the hearer, the Supper is a sensible presentation of the same Redeemer to his eye. It is nothing but a lesson about Christ, made impressive by its simplicity. The citizen who can understand a Fourth of July celebration, can understand a sacramental celebration; and just as the Fourth of July celebration may stimulate and edify patriotism, so may a sacramental celebration stimulate and edify Christian piety and devotion.

Zwingli’s “sign” theory has become the view of Socinians, Unitarians, Remonstrants, and Independents. There are many who think Zwingli personally held more than his followers have put into his interpretation. The fury of the controversy is offered by some of his admirers as the true cause of his meagerness.

V. Calvinists.

Calvin and Geneva rejected transubstantiation and consubstantiation and impanation, and the whole idea of any kind of corporeal presence of Christ in his Supper. There was no sense in which any communicant took into his stomach the real body and blood and bones of the Lord Jesus. It would do his soul no good if he should eat ten thousand such bodies, whether terrestrial or celestial. The benefits of redemption come

altogether by grace, and are conditioned by no sort of diet whatever. Christ was speaking figuratively when he said the disciple must eat his flesh and drink his blood; when he said this bread is my body and this wine is my blood.

So far, Calvin agreed with Zwingli. But he thought Zwingli's notion of a bare memorial fell short of the full truth about this sacrament. It was not merely a "sign of grace," as Zwingli would have it; but it was a "means of grace." To get the Calvinistic addition to the Zwinglian idea, we have but to see the difference between a "sign" and a "means." A hatchet, for example, is more than a "sign" of cutting, it is a "means" of cutting.

Calvin's statement of his view is not always perfectly perspicuous and simple. He says in his Commentary on the Romans, "the body itself is also certainly given to us." Again, "the flesh itself of Christ does not enter into us." He is saying that the saving efficacy of Christ is in his broken body and shed blood—his death—but that it is the power and virtue of his sacrifice that are present to faith in the Supper. Calvin had in mind the "spiritual presence," and Luther the "bodily presence," of Christ in the sacrament.

The Lord Jesus is present in the sanctuary—how? Not corporeally, but representatively by his Spirit. How is he present in the sermon which truly expounds him? Not physically; not merely by verbal signs; but by his Holy Spirit. So he is in the sacrament of the Supper, not bodily, but by his Holy Spirit, who represents him, and makes the doing of the thing a means of grace to the worthy participant. As the Catechism frames it: "The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them." The Lord's Supper is less than grace itself; it is more than a sign of grace; it is a means of grace, in consequence of the blessing of Christ, and the inward working of the Spirit in them that commune in faith. By the "spiritual presence" of Christ in the Lord's Supper, Calvinists, who understand themselves,

do not mean some vague, ethereal, unintelligible, mysterious sort of presence. In theological science "spiritual" is an adjective formed upon the noun "Spirit," and always refers to the Holy Spirit. "Spiritual life" is that life of which the Holy Ghost is the author. "Spirituality" is an abstract noun for that state of being of which the Holy Spirit is the cause. The "spiritual presence" of Christ is that presence which is represented by the Holy Ghost. The theologian may always clear himself and test himself in using the adjective "spiritual" by translating it into the Holy Spirit.

Consequently, according to Calvinists and the Reformed, the communicant eats nothing but just common bread, and drinks nothing but just common wine; but this eating and drinking, when done in faith and repentance, is blessed by the Holy Spirit to his religious good, just as hearing the preached gospel is beneficial when "mixed with faith." At bottom, the only difference between the sermon and the sacrament is a difference in form: the sermon is the spoken gospel, addressed to the ear; the sacrament is a dramatic gospel, addressed to the eye. It takes an intenser frame of spirit to interpret a picture than to hear the spoken word. Hence, it is only those who have the "spiritual discernment" who are capable of appreciating the Lord's Supper; and so only such ought to commune at the Lord's table.

Erroneous views of the Lord's Supper are due, first, to literalizing the saying of Christ, "whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life." All the context shows that he was using a homely figure of speech. Moreover, at the time he spake these words his blood had not been shed. Furthermore, the idea of transforming a sinner into a saint by putting something into his stomach is out of all harmony with a scheme of salvation by faith. Zwingli was certainly thus far right when he said, "The body of Christ is then eaten, when his death for us is believed." Whenever we believe, and as often as we believe, we figuratively eat his body and drink his blood.

Another persistent and misleading error is to quote our Lord

as saying, "this is my blood," "this is my body," when speaking of the elements in his Supper. Such is not a correct report of his saying. What he said was, "this bread is my body *broken* for you," "this wine is my blood *shed* for you." These verbs, "broken" and "shed," are essential parts of his saying. It takes both the *elements* and the *actions* to make the symbolism. It is the sacrament, as a whole, that is significant and a means of grace to the believing communicant. The vexatious error consists in trying to make the bread and the wine, after some consecrating ceremony, to possess some sort of new character, and exert some sort of magical influence by being taken into the communicant's stomach. According to the gospel it is *believing* that saves and sanctifies the soul, and not some sort of *eating* and *drinking* or some sort of transubstantiated or consubstantiated or spiritualized or mysticized bread and wine. In the sacrament the blessing is given on account of the faith and repentance and evangelical obedience of the communicant, and not on account of some secret quality in the sacramental bread and wine, nor on account of the eating and drinking.