

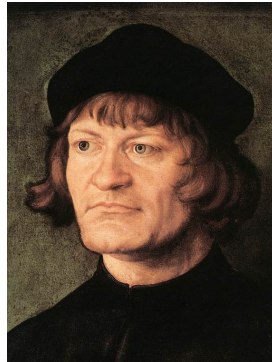


Reformation Reflections

THE LORD'S SUPPER

“God is omnipotent; he can do more than we see; therefore I believe his words as they stand.” (Martin Luther)

While Martin Luther's struggles with the Roman Catholic Church are well known, there were other opponents, as well. One such group, known as the Sacramentarians and led by Swiss theologian *Ulrich Zwingli*, challenged Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper.



Both sides agreed that Rome's novel and convoluted doctrine of transubstantiation was to be rejected. Where they parted company was on the meaning of Jesus' words, "This is my body, ... my blood." Luther held, like countless Christians and theologians before him, that Christ's words should simply be taken at face value and believed.

For Zwingli, however, the Lord's Supper was only a memorial meal in which the participants are drawn away from created things, and drawn TO the Creator and Savior. Zwingli even went so far as to say that the body of Christ was too "creaturely," or bound in human time and space, to be a place where our faith resides. It was essentially useless for us.

The crux of the matter though, and this was realized by both Zwingli and Luther, was not over bread and wine, or real presence versus spiritual presence, or even the meaning and work of the Holy Spirit in the words of institution. The crux of the matter was (is) the meaning of "faith." They both said that "faith" is trust in Jesus Christ and that it is a purely spiritual relationship.

However, when Zwingli said this, he meant that this spiritual relationship draws faith away from created things—it must have no earthly object, even the body of Christ, for its object. Hence, the sacrament couldn't have been instituted to provide a bodily eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood. Instead, it lifts our faith to where Jesus sits now, at the Father's right hand, giving us Christ's spiritual presence.

Luther's most complete response to Zwingli came in March of 1527, when he published his *Great Confession of the Lord's Supper*. As he had before, Luther maintained that faith is spiritual in that God the Holy Spirit produces it and nourishes it. Because God chooses and uses earthly means to come to us, faith must cling to those earthly means. They are not the objects of our faith, but are the signs of the very presence of God, the points where we shall find God.

Luther (rightly) held that the God we find in these means is none other than Christ himself, the very Word of God made flesh, Immanuel, God With Us, and that, because of this, his humanity cannot be called useless in our salvation. Rather, it is essential. Luther further explained that being at God's right hand was not a place but a manifestation of God's power—namely, wherever God works, there is the divine-human Christ Jesus at work.



In the Lord's Supper, then, God works through his means in which Christ gives himself to us, not where we do anything for him. It is a means of grace, where Christ feeds his people, and this can't be useless since Jesus commanded it. It matches what Scripture has revealed to us about how God reveals himself to us and, like Luther, we **“believe his words as they stand.”**

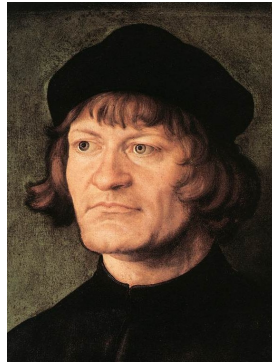


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