



Presbyterian Story Part III: Reformed View of Communion

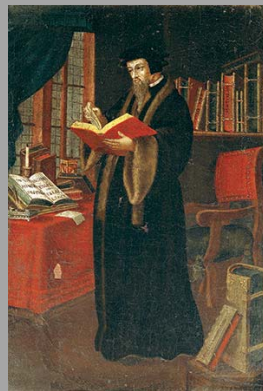
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Introduction



Zwingli

VS



Calvin

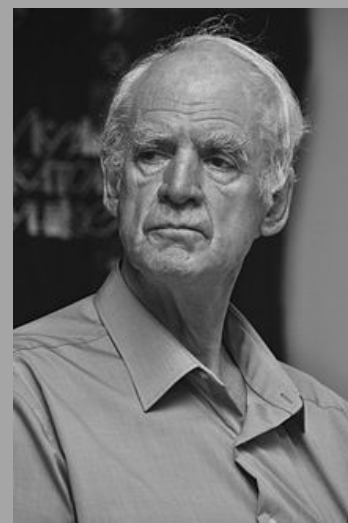
- The Reformed tradition boils down into two views named “spiritual presence” and the “memorial view”.
- The two views come from John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli.
- Zwingli’s most famous disciple was Bullinger. Both were in Zurich. Calvin’s most famous disciple was John Knox. Both spent time in Geneva.

Zoe's Reaction to Zwinglian Presbyterians



Introduction

- Last week, I shared a quote from Andrew Jumper and used the word “disenchantment”. I stated how I liked that word.
- Canadian Philosopher Charles Taylor has dedicated his life to this idea. His argument is that secularism seeks to disenchant the world.
- I believe he is correct and shows why most people find Calvin’s view “strange”.

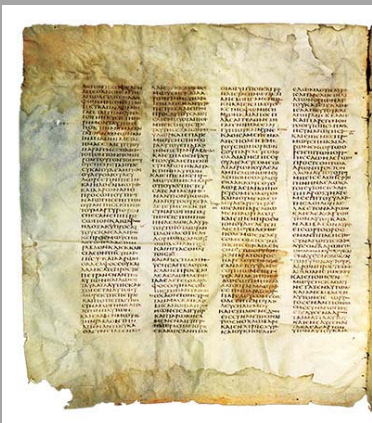


The Old Testament and Communion



- Communion is rooted in the Old Testament and the Passover event. Exodus 12:27 ESV “you shall say, it is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover, for he passed over the house of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spare our houses”.
- The meal was used to demonstrate and remember the Lord’s saving of His people. It is the major salvific event in the Old Testament and the archetype for the New Testament.

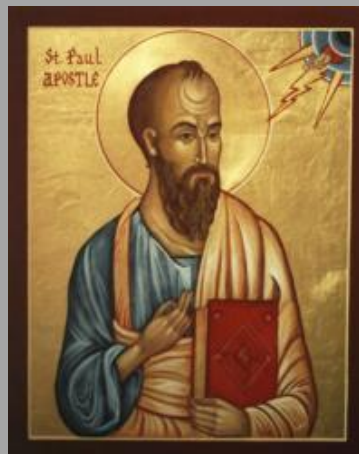
Communion in the New Testament



- Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper during Passover with his disciples.
- The major texts are Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22: 19-20, John 6, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.
- It is important to note that Paul’s letters predate the gospels.

1 Corinthians 11:23-25

- “The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

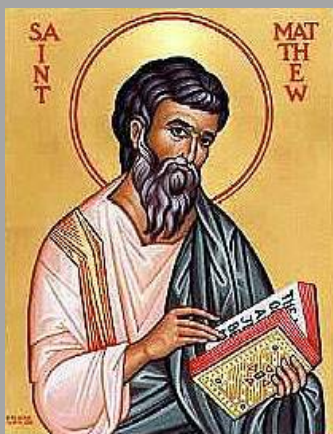


1 Corinthians 11:23-25



- This text is normally recited by a minister whenever the sacrament of communion is administered.
- The Lord’s words were passed down to Paul. This is a type of oral tradition that has been given to him.
- Paul advises Christians to partake of communion. The primary word used is remembrance.

Matthew 26:26-29



- Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.”²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you,²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”

Matthew 26:26-29

- Matthew advises Christians to administer communion. It is not negotiable.
- Jesus body and blood signify that the New Covenant has been ratified through His sacrificial death.
- This text captures the already but not yet dynamic of communion. Also, communion in a sense pulls Christians into the future. It isn't just remembering Jesus' death! But the promise of His return too!



John 6:22-59



- This text is what got Calvin into trouble with his followers. It is named The Bread of Life Discourse.
- The language speaks of those partaking of the bread and drinking the wine will never thirst again.
- Calvin's view on this passage will become the major reason why his followers will depart from his view.

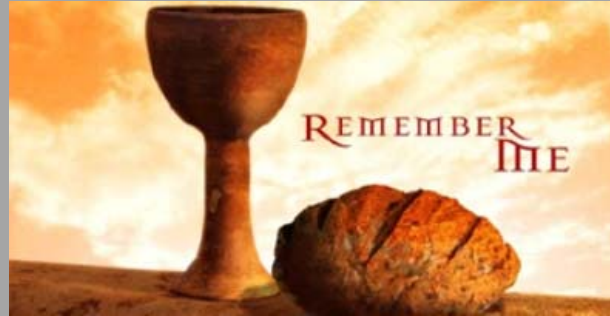
Revelation 19:6-9

- ⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.
⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;
⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure" — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.⁹ And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."



Zwingli's View

- Zwingli's view has been named the "memorial view".
- He did not believe there was any type of "grace" being given to the believer during the administration of the Lord's Supper.
- Those who follow this view normally partake once a month or quarterly.



Calvin's View



- Calvin's view has been named "the spiritual presence" view.
- When people partake of communion in faith, there is a "sanctifying grace" that is given through the Holy Spirit.
- Calvin believed communion should be administered weekly. However, his session shot him down!

How Does Spiritual Presence Work?

- Calvin believes the bread “nourishes, sustains, and protects our bodily life, so the body of Christ is the only food to invigorate and keep alive the soul”. The blood “is to foster, refresh, strengthen, and exhilarate”.
- When Christians partake of the elements they do so in faith. The results are greater union with Christ.
- The elements do not have any magic in them. Rather, it’s the work of the Spirit that sustains and nourishes Christians.



Union With Christ



- Calvin states “when Augustine, whom they claim as their patron, wrote, that we eat by believing, all he meant was to indicate that eating is of faith, and not of the mouth. This I deny not; but at the same time add, that by faith we embrace Christ, not as appearing at a distance, but as uniting himself to us, he being our head, and we his members”.
- Union with Christ is the major theme in Acts 2 and is to be understood as a mystery (Ephesians 5:32).

Sign and Seal

- Sign and seal is taken from Augustine. The sign is the bread and wine.
- The seal could be said to be “visible form of an “invisible grace”. We do not see the seal. It’s the work of the Spirit!
- Calvin borrowing from Augustine also calls the sacraments “visible words of God”. They were also placed after the preaching of God’s word.



Benefits of the Lord’s Supper?

- “Therefore, what our mind does not comprehend let faith conceive - , that the Spirit truly unites things separated by space. That sacred communion of flesh and blood testifies and seal in the Supper, and that not by presenting a vain or empty sign, but by their exerting an efficacy of the Spirit by which he fulfills what he promises. And truly the thing there signified he exhibits and offers to all who sit down at the spiritual feast, although it is beneficially received by believers only who receive this great benefit with true faith and heartfelt gratitude”.
- There is a mystery of the sanctifying grace that is given to the believer during Communion. Christians should not be scared of this word!

Scots Confession

- “in the Supper rightly used, Christ Jesus is so joined with us that he becomes the very nourishment and food for our souls. Not that we imagine any transubstantiation of bread into Christ’s body, and of wine into his natural blood, as the Romanists have perniciously taught and wrongly believed; but this union and conjunction which we have with the body and blood of Christ Jesus in the right use of the sacraments is wrought by means of the Holy Ghost, who by true faith carries us above all things that are visible, carnal, and earthly. And make us feed upon the body and blood of Christ Jesus, once broken and shed for us but now in heaven, and appearing for us in the presence of his father.”

Westminster Confession

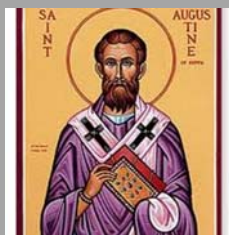


- The Westminster appears to be open to either the Zwinglian or Calvinistic view.
- It states that only ordained ministers can administer the sacrament, that Christ’s death only occurred once, and advises what texts to use during administration.
- It sticks to its Calvinistic roots by using the words “signs” and “seals”. But does not speak of “spiritual presence”.

Conclusion

- Calvin's reading of the Old and New Testament is more robust than the Zwinglian view. The memorial view focuses more on the text found in Paul. Calvin integrates all of them.
- Zwingli's view is more "modernist" than Calvin's "pre-modernist" view. In my opinion, Zwingli's followers want all enchantment in the world abolished.
- We should think long and hard about Calvin's view. If it's true, Christians are losing out on sanctifying grace that is administered by the Spirit through Communion. It is not an empty symbol!

If It's Good Enough For?



You

