

**The
Sacramentarian
Controversy
(1529 A.D.)**

Chapter 37

By Andrew Miller

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The Sacramentarian Controversy

The doctrine of the *real presence* of Christ in the Eucharist had been established in the Romish church since the fourth Lateran Council in the year 1215. For three hundred years the mass and transubstantiation had been the principal bulwarks of Rome, and her greatest blasphemy. The idea of the corporeal presence of Christ in the holy supper threw a halo of sacred importance around it, excited the imagination of the people and fixed it deeply in their affections. It was the origin of many ceremonies and superstitions, of great wealth and dominion to the priesthood; and the most stupendous miracles were said to be wrought by the consecrated bread, both among the

living and the dead. It thus became the corner stone of the papal edifice.

Luther, as a priest and a monk, firmly believed in this mystery of iniquity, and never was, throughout his whole career, delivered from its delusion. He sinned against God and his own conscience when he accepted priestly ordination, and from that period a judicial blindness seems to have rested on his mind as to the power of the priest over the elements. Transubstantiation, or the actual conversion of the bread and wine into the real body and blood of Christ, by priestly consecration, was then, as it still is, the recognized doctrine of the church of Rome. Those who doubt this are denounced as infidels.

As a reformer, Luther gave up the term transubstantiation and adopted, if possible, the still more inexplicable term of consubstantiation. He renounced the papal idea that the bread and wine after consecration remained no longer, but were changed into the material body and blood of Christ. His strange notion was, that the bread and the wine remained just what they were before - real bread and real wine - but that there was also together with the bread and wine, the material substance of Christ's human body. No invention of man, we may freely affirm, ever equaled this popish doctrine in absurdity, inconsistency and irreconcilable contradictions. "The hands of the priest," said the Pontiff Urban, in a great Roman Council, "are raised to an eminence granted to none of the angels, of creating God, the Creator of all things, and of offering Him up for the salvation of the whole world. This prerogative, as it elevates the pope above angels, renders pontifical submission to kings an execration." To all this the sacred synod, with the utmost unanimity, responded,

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Amen. Surely this is the last test of human credulity, and the consummation of human blasphemy.¹

1 For the authority of this incredible blasphemy, see Edgar's *Variations of Popery*, p. 384.

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Zwingle's Early Views

Ulric Zwingle, the great Swiss Reformer, and compeer of Luther, differed entirely from both the teaching of Rome and the Saxon Reformers as to the real presence of Christ in the holy supper. The Swiss had long held opinions contrary alike to the Roman and the Saxon. At an early period of Zwingle's christian course, his attention had been attracted by the simplicity of scripture on the subject of the Lord's supper. In the word of God he read that Christ had left this world and gone to His Father in heaven; and that this was to be a matter of special faith and hope to His disciples. This we find clearly taught in the Acts of the Apostles: "And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from

you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him to into heaven.” Thus we see that the blessed Lord ascended personally, bodily, visibly; and that He shall return in like manner, but not until the close of the present dispensation, or church period. “Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things.” (Acts 1:10, 11; 3:21.)

The words of our blessed Lord; “This is My body,” - “This is My blood;” Zwingle maintained to be figurative in their character, and to imply nothing more than that the sacramental bread and wine were simply symbols or emblems of Christ’s body; and that the ordinance or institution is commemorative of His death for us. “This do in remembrance of Me ... For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord’s death till He come.” (1 Cor. 11:22-28.)

For several years, Zwingle had privately entertained these views of the Lord’s supper, but knowing the hold that the old church doctrine had on the minds of the ignorant and superstitious people, he did not openly avow them. But believing that the time would soon come for the public promulgation of the truth, and foreseeing the opposition he would have to encounter, he diligently, though in a private way, sought to spread the truth and strengthen his position. Letters on the subject were sent to many learned men in Europe, so as to influence them to examine the word of God, even if they did not agree with the views of the Swiss Reformers. But while Zwingle was thus quietly waiting for the right moment to speak aloud, another, with more zeal than wisdom, imprudently wrote a pamphlet against Luther’s doctrine of the Lord’s supper, and raised

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the storm of controversy, which raged with great violence for four years.

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Carlstadt, Luther, and Zwingle

Andrew Bodenstein, better known as Dr. Carlstadt, once a professor at Wittemberg, commenced the attack. This man has the reputation of having been both able and learned, and really devoted to the cause of the Reformation; from his extreme views on that subject and the impetuosity of his spirit, his measures were sweeping and revolutionary. He would have all the images destroyed, and all the rites of popery abolished at once. We have met with him before. He was one of the earliest and warmest friends of Luther, but he had rejected Luther's notion of the real presence in the Eucharist, and that was the unpardonable sin in the eyes of the Reformer. He had also given too much countenance and encouragement to the excesses of the Anabaptists, or "the

celestial prophets” as they were called, and this gave Luther a show of reason for visiting with the same condemnation the Sacramentaries and the Anabaptists. But this was most unjust, as Zwingle and his followers were as opposed to the fanaticism of the so-called prophets, as were Luther and his colleagues.

In refutation of Dr. Carlstadt, Luther wrote a pamphlet against these prophets in 1525, in which he says: “Dr. Carlstadt has fallen away from us, and become our bitterest foe. Although I deeply regret this scandal, I still rejoice that Satan has shown the cloven foot, and will be put to shame by these his heavenly prophets, who have long been peeping and muttering in concealment, but never would come fairly out until I enticed them with a guilder: that, by the grace of God, has been too well laid for me to rue it. But still the whole infamy of the plot is not yet brought forward, for still more lies concealed which I have long suspected. I know also, that Dr. Carlstadt has long been brewing this heresy in his mind, though till now he has not found courage to spread it abroad.”

Zwingle was now persuaded that the time for silence was past. Although he sympathized with Carlstadt’s views of the Eucharist, he greatly objected to his offensive style and levity.

He published in the year 1525, an important treatise “concerning true and false religion.” His own views of the Eucharist are fully and clearly stated in this book, besides his utter condemnation of the seditious spirit of the Anabaptists, and the errors of the papists on the subject in dispute. An opponent soon appeared in a pamphlet, “against the new error of the Sacramentaries.” To this Zwingle replied in the same year, 1525; and took occasion

to remind his opponents, the Lutherans, that they should be less personal in their abuse, and more rational and scriptural in their arguments. There was a mildness and respect in the writings of the Swiss, which the Saxons were utter strangers to; even Melancthon, at times, became the reflection of his violent master.

OEccolampadius, the intimate friend of Zwingle, was preaching the simple doctrine of the New Testament, as to the Lord's supper, at Basle, just about this time. But finding that his enemies were associating him with Carlstadt, he published and defended his own views. The effect of this book was great: written in such a christian spirit, so full of the closest reasoning, and the fairest arguments, both from the scriptures and the most eminent among the fathers, that many were drawn to consider the new opinions. Erasmus himself was well nigh converted by the book. "A new dogma has arisen," he writes to a friend, "that there is nothing in the Eucharist but bread and wine. To confute this is now a very difficult matter; for John OEccolampadius has fortified it by so many evidences and arguments, that the very elect might almost be seduced by it."

An abusive reply to this book very soon appeared, signed by fourteen German theologians, with a preface written by Luther. Zwingle was deeply offended, and complained of the insults offered to a brother reformer by his German brethren. "I have seen nothing in this age," he says, "less praiseworthy than this reply, on account both of the violence offered in it to Holy Writ, and of its immoderate pride and insolence. OEccolampadius, of all men the most harmless, a very model of every sort of piety and learning, he, from whom most of them have learned what they know of literature, is so infamously treated by

them, with such filial ingratitude, that we are called upon, not for reproaches, but for execrations.”²

Thus the controversy went on. Luther was deeply grieved and astonished to find so many learned and pious men holding the same views as Zwingli; and many of whom he had entertained the highest opinion now expressed themselves favorable to the new views. This was gall and wormwood to the spirit of Luther, and filled him with inexpressible grief and anger. In his letters and writings at this time he expressed himself in the most unmeasured and unguarded terms. He calls them “his Absaloms, sacrament-conjurors, in comparison with whose madness the papists are mild opponents - the Satanic instruments of my temptation.” Luther’s followers took up the tone of their master, and he transferred to this controversy all the vehemence and obstinacy of his own nature. From about the close of the year 1524 till the year 1529, Luther had written so violently against the Swiss, and so little against the papists, that it was sarcastically said by Erasmus, “the Lutherans are eagerly returning to the bosom of the church.”

2 Waddington, vol. 2, pp. 346-370.

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Such were the christian doctors, and such their feelings, whom the political Landgrave sought unweariedly to reconcile. The thought is a truly humiliating one, and casts a dark shade over the character of Luther. Philip, in his pacific exertions, showed much more of a christian spirit on this and former occasions than the great Reformer, though it may not have been from the Christian's point of view. But we do not judge motives; there is One who will judge the secrets of all men." (1 Cor. 4:5.)

The connection of this great dispute with the political movements of Germany, made it one of intense interest and anxiety to the Protestant chiefs. It was the one great hindrance to their union; and without unity what could be done in the presence of such powerful adversaries as Rome and the Emperor? The papal theologians had

been watching with malicious satisfaction the growth and bitterness of this disgraceful dissension, and were using all their art to profit by it. The Landgrave evidently grieved over this division more than the theologians of Wittenberg, and now determined without further delay to bring about a conference, and if possible, a reconciliation between the leaders of the different parties. On the great fundamental truths of revelation, the German and the Swiss reformers were agreed. Only on one point did they differ - the manner in which Christ is present in the bread and wine of the holy Eucharist. It appears that Philip thought the whole question little more than a dispute about words, as he says, "The Lutherans will hear no mention of alliance with the Zwinglians; well then, let us put an end to the contradictions that separate them from Luther." Accordingly, he summoned the principal divines of Saxony, Switzerland, and Strasburg, to meet together at Marburg in the autumn of 1529.

Zwingle accepted the invitation with all gladness, and made ready to appear at the time appointed. But Luther - generally so bold and dauntless, as we have repeatedly seen - expressed the greatest unwillingness to meet Zwingle. The several pamphlets that had passed between them on the subject in question had produced such an impression on his mind of the power of Zwingle, that he sought by the most unworthy means to avoid meeting him. The Landgrave's repeated entreaties, however, at length prevailed. Thus wrote Luther to Philip: -

"I have received your commands to go to Marburg to a disputation with OEcolampadius and his party, about the Sacramentarian difference, for the purpose of peace and unity. Though I have very faint expectation of such

unity, yet as I cannot too highly commend your zeal and care thereon, so will I not refuse to undertake a hopeless, and to us, perhaps, a dangerous office; for I will leave no foundation for our adversaries to say that they were better inclined to concord than myself. I know very well that I shall make no unworthy concession to them... And if they do not yield to us, all your trouble will be lost." His private letters at this time express the same opinion and breathe the same spirit. The whole question was discussed, and closed in the mind of Luther before he started on his journey. But his mind was far from being at ease. He had a certain conviction that the victory would be awarded to the Swiss. This conviction is fully proved by the following propositions.

1. Luther wrote to say for himself and Melancthon, that they could only attend the conference on condition that "some honest papists should be present as witnesses against those future Thrasos and vain-glorious saints... If there were no impartial judges the Zwinglians would have a good chance to boast of victory." This is a strange passage in the history of the Saxon divines, and exhibits a backward movement from the principles of the Reformation; but especially in the case of the author of the "Babylonish Captivity," and the denouncer of Antichrist. Had Luther forgotten that the papists were pledged to the real presence more than any other party in Christendom? And yet he proposes them as impartial *judges*. What a change, at least for the moment, in that great man! How can we account for this? Luther is no longer standing on the sure ground of the word of God, but on the false ground of an absurd superstition. He could not have the sense of the divine presence

or approval. And little wonder that he manifested such weakness and inconsistency. In place of trusting in the living God and setting at naught popes and emperors, he pitifully turns to his old enemies to be his friends and refuge in the approaching discussion. What a solemn lesson for all Christians! May the written and living Word be our resource and refuge at all times. We need only further add, that Philip was too warm an antipapist to give any heed to Luther's proposal; it therefore fell to the ground, leaving to its authors the disgrace which impartial history has assigned to it.

In a letter, generally ascribed to Melancthon, written to the Prince Elector as early as May 14th, he goes farther still. "Let the prince refuse to permit our journey to Marburg, so that we may allege this excuse." "But the Elector," says D'Aubigne, "would not lend himself to so disgraceful a proceeding; and the reformers of Wittemberg found themselves compelled to accede to the request of the Landgrave."

Another proposition was suggested, which shows still more the fear and misgiving of the Saxon divines - "that among the theologians to be summoned from Switzerland to the controversy, Zwingle should not be one." But neither could this proposal be entertained; the invitations had been given, and Philip was already too much offended by the obstinacy of Luther to listen to his requests. These little matters are only worth recording as showing the difference of the same man when he stands for the truth of God, and when he contends for the foolish dogma of consubstantiation. In the former case he stands by faith, and grace gives him moral courage, firmness, and nobility of bearing; but in the latter, we find him exhibiting the most

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pitiful features of weakness, distrust, and dissimulation. It is the presence of God and faith in Him that makes the vast difference; as the poet sings:

*“Is God for me? I fear not, though all against me rise;
When I call on Christ my Savior, the host of evil flies,
My friend, the Lord Almighty, and He who loves me,
God!*

*What enemy shall harm me, though coming as a flood?
I know it, I believe it, I say it fearlessly,
That God, the highest, mightiest, forever loveth me,
At all times, in all places, He standeth by my side;
He rules the battle’s fury, the tempest, and the tide.”*

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The Conference at Marburg

The senate of Zurich had positively refused to allow Zwingli to go to Marburg, lest any harm should befall him. But he felt that his presence at the conference was necessary for the welfare of the church, and that he must go! Accordingly he prepared for his journey, and started during the night, with only one friend to accompany him - Rodolph

Collin, the Greek professor. He left the following note for the Senate, "If I leave without informing you, it is not because I despise your authority, most wise lords; but because, knowing the love you bear towards me, I foresee that your anxiety will oppose my going." They arrived safely at Basle, where they were joined by OEccolampadius; and at Strasburg, where they were joined by Bucer, Hedio, and Sturm. The company reached Marburg on September

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29th. Luther and his friends on the 30th. Both parties were courteously received by Philip, and entertained in the castle at his own table.

The Landgrave, not ignorant of the bitter feelings which the late controversy had produced between the chiefs of the parties, wisely proposed, that previously to the public conference, the theologians should have a private interview for the purpose of paving the way to reconciliation and unity. Knowing the tempers of the men, he directed Luther to confer with OEcolampadius, and Melancthon with Zwingle. But so many accusations as to false doctrine were brought against the Swiss by the Saxon divines, that little progress was made towards unity, and the main question became more complicated. The public disputation was accordingly appointed for the following day, October 2nd, 1529.

The general conference was held in an inner apartment of the castle, in the presence of the Landgrave and his principal ministers, political and religious, the deputies of Saxony, Zurich, Strasburg, and Basle, and of a few learned foreigners. A table was placed for the four theologians - Luther, Zwingle, Melancthon, and OEcolampadius. As they approached, Luther, taking a piece of chalk, steadily wrote on the velvet cover of the table, in large letters, HOC EST CORPUS MEUM - "This is my body." He wished to have these words continually before him, that his confidence might not fail, and that his adversaries might be confounded. "Yes," said he, "these are the words of Christ, and from this rock no adversary shall dislodge me."

All parties having assembled, the Chancellor of Hesse opened the conference. He explained its object, and exhorted the disputants to a christian moderation,

and the re-establishment of unity. Then Luther, instead of proceeding at once to the question of the Eucharist, insisted on a previous understanding concerning other articles of faith; such as the divinity of Christ, original sin, justification by faith, etc., etc. The Saxon divines professed to regard the Swiss as unsound on these and other subjects. What Luther's object could be, in seeking to widen the field of debate, we pretend not to say; but the Swiss replied that their writings bore sufficient evidence, that on all these points there was no difference between them.

The Landgrave, to whom belonged the direction of the meeting, signified his assent, and Luther was compelled to give up his project; but he was evidently angry and ill at ease in his own mind, and said, "I protest that I differ from my adversaries with regard to the doctrine of the Lord's supper, and that I shall always differ from them. Christ said, *'This is My body.'* Let them show me that a body is not a body. I reject reason, common sense, carnal arguments, and mathematical proofs. God is above mathematics. We have the word of God; we must adore and perform it." Such was the commencement of this celebrated debate. The impetuous headstrong Saxon, had written his text on the velvet, and was now pointing to it, and saying, "No consideration shall ever induce me to depart from the literal meaning of these words, and I shall not listen either to sense or reason, with the words of God before me." And all this was done and said, be it observed, before the deliberations were so much as opened, or a single argument had been advanced. This declaration, coupled with the notorious obstinacy of its author, was enough to crush every hope of a satisfactory termination to the conference.

But the Swiss, notwithstanding Luther's high-handed style, did not decline the argument. They no doubt knew his measure, cared little for his arrogant assertions, and probably never counted on his conversion. "It cannot be denied," said OEcolampadius mildly, "that there are figures of speech in the word of God; as John *is Elias*, the rock *was Christ*, *I am the vine*." Luther admitted that there were figures in the Bible, but he denied that this last expression was figurative.

OEcolampadius then reminded Luther that the blessed Lord says in John 6, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; *the flesh profiteth nothing*." "Now Christ who said to the people of Capernaum, the *flesh profiteth nothing*, rejected by these words, the oral manducation of the body. Therefore he did not establish it at the institution of the supper."

"I deny," retorted Luther vehemently, "the second of these propositions. There was a material eating of Christ's flesh, and there was a spiritual eating of it. It was the former, the material eating, of which Christ declared that it profiteth nothing."

OEcolampadius hinted that this was in effect to surrender the argument. It admitted that we were to eat spiritually, and if so, we did not eat bodily, the material manducation being in that case useless.

"We are not to ask of what use," replied Luther; "everything that God commands becomes spirit and life. If it is by the Lord's order that we lift up a straw, in that very action we perform a spiritual work. We must pay attention to Him who speaks, and not to what He says. God speaks: Then, worms, listen! God commands: let the world obey! And let us all fall down together, and humbly kiss the word."

We may just notice in passing, that there is no ground for supposing that the question of the Eucharist is referred to in John 6. It was not even instituted for some time after this. Incarnation, death, and ascension are the fundamental truths which the Lord is here unfolding to the Jews, as the only means of eternal life and of all spiritual blessings. "Himself the eternal life which was with the Father before all worlds, He took flesh that He might not only reveal the Father, and be the perfect pattern of obedience as man, but that He might die in grace for us, and settle the question of sin forever, glorifying God absolutely, and at all cost, on the cross. Except the corn of wheat (as He Himself taught us) fall into the ground and die, it abides alone; dying it brings forth much fruit. His death is not here regarded as an offering to God, as elsewhere often, but the appropriation of it by the believer into his own being... He only is life, yet this not in living, but in dying for us, that we might have it in and with Him, the fruit of His redemption, eternal life as a present thing but only fully seen in resurrection-power, already verified and seen in Him, ascended up as man, where He was before as God, by-and-by to be seen in us at the last day, manifested with Him in glory.

"Jesus, therefore, come down to earth, put to death, ascending again to heaven, is the doctrine of this chapter. As come down and put to death, He is the food of faith during His absence on high. For it is on His death we must feed, in order to dwell spiritually in Him and He in us."

We now return to Marburg.

Zwingle, just at this moment, interfered in the discussion. He pressed and greatly troubled the spirit of Luther by his reasoning from the scriptures, science, the senses, etc.; but he took his stand first on the ground of

scripture. After quoting a number of passages in which the sign is described by the very thing signified, he introduced the argument which had been started by OEcolampadius in the morning, namely, John 6. Concluding that, in consideration of our Lord's declaration, *the flesh* profiteth nothing, we must explain the words of the Eucharist in a similar manner.

Luther. - "When Christ says the flesh profiteth nothing, He speaks not of His own flesh, but of ours."

Zwingle. - "The soul is fed with the Spirit, and not with the flesh."

Luther. - "It is with the mouth that we eat the body; the soul does not eat it; we eat it spiritually with the soul."

Zwingle. - "Christ's body is therefore a corporeal nourishment, and not a spiritual."

Luther. - "You are captious."

Zwingle. - "Not so; but you utter contradictory things."

Luther. - "If God should present me wild apples, I should eat them spiritually. In the Eucharist, the mouth receives the body of Christ, and the soul believes His words."

There was now great confusion and contradiction in the language of Luther; as if the four words were to be taken neither "figuratively nor literally; and yet he seemed to teach that they were to be taken in both senses." Zwingle thought that an absurdity had been reached, and that no good could be attained by proceeding farther in this line of argument. He maintained from a wider view of the scriptures, that the bread and wine of the holy Eucharist are not the very body and blood of the Lord Jesus, but only the representatives of that body and blood.

Luther was, however, by no means shaken. "*This is My body,*" he repeated, pointing with his finger to the words

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written before him. “*This is My body,*’ and the devil himself shall not drive me from that. To seek to understand it is to fall away from the faith.”

But although no favorable impression was produced on the mind of Luther, many of the hearers were struck by the clearness and simplicity of Zwingli’s arguments, and many minds were opened to the truth on this important subject. Francis Lambert, the principal theologian of Hesse, who had constantly professed the Lutheran doctrine of the Eucharist, was amongst the most notable of the converts. He was the personal friend and a great admirer of Luther, but conscience moved him to confess the truth. “When I came to this conference,” he said, “I desired to be as a sheet of blank paper on which the finger of God might write His truth. Now I see it is the Spirit that vivifies, the flesh profiteth nothing. I believe with OEcolumpadius and Zwingli.” The Wittemberg doctors greatly lamented this defection; but turned it off by exclaiming, “Gallic fickleness!” “What!” replied the ex-Franciscan, formerly of Avignon, “was St. Paul fickle because he was converted from Pharisaism? And have we ourselves been fickle in abandoning the lost sects of popery?”

Great agitation now prevailed in the hall, but the hour to adjourn had arrived, and the disputants retired with the prince to dinner.

In the afternoon the conversation was resumed by Luther, who said, “I believe that Christ’s body is in heaven, but I also believe that it is in the sacrament. It concerns me little whether that be against nature, provided that it is not against faith. Christ is substantially in the sacrament, such as He was born of the virgin.”

O Ecolampadius, quoting 2 Cor. 5:16, said, "We know not Jesus Christ after the flesh."

"After the flesh means," said Luther, "in this passage, after our carnal affections."

"Then answer me this, Dr. Luther," said Zwingle, "Christ ascended into heaven; and if He is in heaven as regards His body, how can He be in the bread? The word of God teaches us that He was in all things made like unto His brethren. (Heb. 2:17.) He therefore cannot be at the same instant on every one of the thousand altars at which the Eucharist is being celebrated."

"Were I desirous of reasoning thus," replied Luther, "I would undertake to prove that Jesus Christ had a wife; that he had black eyes, and lived in our good country of Germany. I care little about mathematics."

"There is no question of mathematics here," said Zwingle, "but of St. Paul who wrote to the Philippians, that Christ took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."

Finding himself in danger of being moved or drawn away from his original position, he flew back to his four words, exclaiming, "Most dear sirs, since my Lord Jesus Christ says, *Hoc est corpus meum*, I believe that His body is really there."

Wearied with the inflexible obstinacy and unreasonableness of Luther, Zwingle moved rapidly towards him, and striking the table, said to him: "You maintain then, doctor, that Christ's body is locally in the Euchaist; for you say, *Christ's body is there-there-there*. *There* is an adverb of place. Christ's body is then of such a nature as to exist in a place. If it is in a place, it is in heaven, whence it follows that it is not in the bread."

“I repeat,” replied Luther warmly, “that I have nothing to do with mathematical proofs. As soon as the words of consecration are pronounced over the bread, the body is there, however wicked be the priest who pronounces them.”

Let the reader note this saying. It is certainly blasphemy, though not intentionally so by this deluded man. According to this dogma, the Lord, willing or not willing, must descend into the idolatrous bread of the priest, however wicked he may be, the moment he mutters the words of consecration. This is popery in its most daring blasphemy.

The Landgrave, perceiving that the discussion was growing hot, proposed a brief recess. As reason and fairness are all on one side, there is little interest in watching the progress of the debate. Zwingle and OEcolampadius had established their propositions by scripture, philosophy, and the testimony of the most ancient fathers; but all were met by the one unvarying answer, “*This is My body.*” And as if to insult and exasperate the Swiss divines, Luther seized the velvet cover on which the words *Hoc est corpus meum* were written, pulled it off the table, held it up before their eyes, saying, “See, see, this is our text; you have not yet driven us from it, as you had boasted, and we care for no other proofs.”

After such an exhibition of weakness and folly, with the assumption of infallibility, there was no hope of drawing Luther from his hold, and no good reason for prolonging the conference. The discussion, however, was resumed the following morning, but at the close of the day the hostile parties were no nearer a reconciliation. A severe epidemic, in the form of the sweating sickness, had broken out in Germany about this time, and had reached Marburg during the conference, and no doubt hastened its termination. The

ravages of the plague were frightful; all were filled with alarm and anxious to leave the city.

“Sirs,” exclaimed the Landgrave, “you cannot separate thus; can nothing more be done to heal the breach? Must this one point of difference irreconcilably divide the friends of the Reformation?” “Is there no means,” said the chancellor, “of the theologians coming to an understanding, as the Land-grave so sincerely desires?”

“I know of but one means for that,” replied Luther, “and this it is; let our adversaries believe as we do.” “We cannot,” replied the Swiss. “Well then,” said Luther, “I abandon you to God’s judgment, and pray that He will enlighten you.” “We will do the same,” added OEccolampadius. Zwingli was silent, motionless, but deeply moved while these words were passing. At length his lively affections gave way, and he burst into tears in the presence of all.

A Proposal for Toleration and Unity

The conference was ended, and nothing had been done towards unanimity. Philip and other mediators endeavored at least to establish an understanding of mutual toleration and unity. The theologians, one after another, were invited into his private chamber: there he pressed, entreated, warned, exhorted, and conjured them. "Think," said he, "of the salvation of the christian republic, and remove all discord from its bosom." Politically, things were threatening: Charles V. and the pope were uniting in Italy; Ferdinand and the Roman Catholic princes were uniting in Germany. Union among all the Protestants seemed the only thing that could save them. So Philip believed, and

toiled exceedingly to accomplish it; but the intractable and imperious disposition of Luther stood in his way.

The Swiss doctors entered most heartily into the wishes of the Landgrave. "Let us," said Zwingle, "confess our union in all things in which we are agreed, and as for the rest, let us forbear and remember that we are brethren. Respecting the necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus, as to the grand doctrine of salvation, there is no point of discord."

"Yes, yes!" cried the Landgrave, "you agree! give then a testimony of your unity, and recognize one another as brothers." "There is no one upon earth," said Zwingle, "with whom I more desire to be united than with you, approaching the Wittemberg doctors." OEcolumpadius, Bucer, and Hedio said the same.

This most christian movement seemed for the moment to produce the desired effect. Many hearts were touched even among the Saxons. "Acknowledge them! acknowledge them!" continued the Landgrave, "acknowledge them as brothers!" Even Luther's obduracy seemed to be giving way. The keen eye of Zwingle seeing what he hoped was a measure of relenting, he burst into tears - tears of joy - approaches Luther, holds out his hand, and begged him only to pronounce the word "brother." But, alas! that glowing heart was doomed to a cruel disappointment. When all eyes were fixed on the two leaders, and all hearts full of hope that the two families of the Reformation were about to be united, Luther coldly rejected the hand thus offered, with this cutting reply, "You have a different spirit from ours;" which was equal to saying, "We are of the Spirit of God, you are of the spirit of Satan." "These words," says D'Aubigne, "communicated to the Swiss, as it were, an electrical shock. Their hearts sank each time

Luther repeated them, and he did it frequently.” “Luther’s refusing to shake hands with Zwingle,” says Principal Cunningham, “which led that truly noble and brave man to burst into tears, was one of the most deplorable and humiliating, but at the same time solemn and instructive, exhibitions of the deceitfulness of sin and the human heart the world has ever witnessed.”*

A brief consultation now took place among the Wittenberg doctors, but the result was not more conciliatory. Luther, Melancthon, Agricola, Brenz, Jonas, and Osiander, conferred together.

Turning towards Zwingle and his friends, the Saxons said, “We hold the belief of Christ’s bodily presence in the Eucharist to be essential to salvation, and we cannot in conscience regard you as in the communion of the church.”

“In that case,” replied Bucer, “it were folly to ask you to recognize us as brethren. We think that your doctrine strikes at the glory of Jesus Christ, who now sits at the right hand of God. But seeing that in all things you acknowledge your dependence on the Lord, we look at your conscience, which compels you to receive the doctrine you profess, and we do not doubt that you belong to Christ.”

“And we,” said Luther, “declare to you once more that our conscience opposes our receiving you as brothers.”

“Well, doctor,” answered Bucer, “if you refuse to acknowledge as brethren those who differ from you in any point, you will not find a single brother in your own ranks.”

The Swiss had exhausted their solicitations. “We are conscious,” said they, “of having acted as in the presence of God.” They were on the point of leaving: they had manifested a truly Catholic christian spirit; and the feeling of the conference was in their favor and also of

their doctrine. Luther perceiving this, and especially the indignation of the Landgrave, appeared to soften down considerably. He advanced towards the Swiss and said; "We acknowledge you as friends, we do not consider you as brothers ai-A members of Christ's church; but we do not exclude you from that universal charity which we owe even to our enemies."

Although this concession was only a fresh insult, the Swiss resolved to accept what was offered them without disputation. The Swiss and the Saxons now shook hands, and some friendly words passed between them. The Landgrave was overjoyed that so much had been gained, and at once called out for a report of this important result. "We must let the christian world know," said he, "that except the manner of the presence of the body and blood in the Lord's supper, you are agreed in all the articles of faith." This was resolved upon, and Luther was appointed to draw up the articles of the Protestant faith.

A "Formula of Concord" was immediately drawn up by Luther. It consisted of fourteen articles; rather general in their character - such as the Trinity, Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension, Original Sin, Justification by faith, the Authority of the scriptures, the Rejection of tradition, and lastly, the Lord's supper, which was spoken of as a *spiritual feeding* on the very body and very blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the thirteen articles as they were read, one by one, the Swiss gave their hearty amen. And although the terms in which the fourteenth was expressed appeared to them objectionable, yet being somewhat obscure and capable of different interpretations, they agreed to sign the articles without causing further discussion. This important document received the signatures of both parties

on October 4th, 1529. A desire was expressed to cherish towards one another the spirit of christian charity, and to avoid all bitterness in maintaining what each deemed to be the truth of God.

The confession of Marburg was now sent to the press. Its appearance gave the Saxons some ground for saying that the Swiss had signed Luther's creed; that they had recanted all their errors; that on the Eucharist alone excepted. That they were prepared to retract even that, but they had been deterred by fear of the vulgar; and that they had produced no argument against the doctrine of Luther, except their own inability to believe it. Reports such as these flew rapidly through every part of Germany; but they were false reports. The reader must have observed that the courage and confidence of the Swiss increased as the contest advanced, and that their fairness and gentleness were mightier far than the unreasonableness and haughtiness of their adversaries.

On Tuesday, October 5th, after a four days' conference, the Landgrave left Marburg early. The doctors and their friends soon followed; but the amount of truth which had been brought out, and the opinions expressed, were widely propagated in Germany, and many hearts were turned to the simplicity of the New Testament in observing the Lord's supper.

The Sacramentarian Controversy (1529 A.D.)

Reflections on the Conference at Marburg

With feelings of the deepest gratitude and the most unfeigned humiliation, we would pause awhile, and meditate on the late scenes at Marburg. With gratitude to God for having given such publicity to the teaching of scripture on the subject of the Lord's supper; but with mourning and humiliation over the inconsistency of one who had so much influence there. The doctrines so clearly taught by the Swiss, had been little known in Germany till that time. Consubstantiation having been adopted by Luther and his followers, the true meaning and object of that sacred institution were unknown. Great interest was awakened in all parts by the newly-discovered truths, which were embraced by an immense number of persons.

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It spread rapidly throughout all Germany, and may have been an everlasting blessing to thousands of precious souls. Lambert, as we have seen, was converted to the views of Zwingle; and the Landgrave himself, a short time before his death, declared that the conference had induced him to renounce the error of consubstantiation.

Thus God in His own goodness overruled these unseemly debates for the spread of the truth, and for the accomplishment of His own gracious purposes. Little did Luther contemplate the merciful use that God would make of that conference; and that, when *he*, Luther, was caring only for his own reputation, God was caring for the advancement of the Reformation.

But alas! what is man - fallen, self-seeking man! Where is now the Luther of the early days of the Reformation? Why has the heart that was so large, liberal, and considerate of all, so soon degenerated into the most undisguised and intolerant bigotry? The answer is plain - then he stood for God by faith; now he stood in pride as the head of a party. And this explains not only the wonderful change that had come over the spirit of Luther, but the ignoble failure of many distinguished men from that day until now. At the Diet of Worms and other places, Luther, almost alone, fought for the truth of God against the lie of Satan; but at Marburg he fought for the lie of Satan, in the form of his new dogma, against the truth of God. Some may be ready to say that he was fighting for the truth according to his conscience; so far it may have been so. But it will be remembered that he resisted all peaceful investigation of the truth, all reasonable means for arriving at a proper understanding of those "four words" - *This is my body* - and seemed only to care for the maintenance of his own

authority and power as the chief of his party. There was no concern manifested by either Luther or any of the Saxons for the general interest of the gospel, or for the triumph of the Reformation. Thus was the great and blessed work of Luther marred and vitiated by the most absurd and foolish dogma ever proposed to the credulity of man.

The position and danger of a party leader in the things of God, are clearly expressed in the following opinion of Luther. "At Marburg, Luther was pope. By general acclamation the chief of the evangelical party, he assumed the character of a despot; and to sustain that part in spiritual matters, it is necessary to create the prejudice of *infallibility*. If he once yielded any point of doctrine - if he once admitted that he had fallen into error - the illusion would cease, and with it the authority that was founded on it. It was thus at least with the multitude. He was obliged by the very position which he believed he occupied, or which he wished to occupy, to defend in the loftiest tone every tenet that he had once proclaimed to the people ...

"Upon the whole, he lost both influence and reputation by that controversy. By his imperious tone, and elaborate sophistry he weakened the affections and respect of a large body of intelligent admirers. Many now began to entertain a less exalted opinion of his talents, as well as of his candor. Instead of the self-devotion and magnanimity which had thrown such a luster over his earlier struggles, a vain-glorious arrogance seemed to be master of his spirit; and but for the indulgence of this ignoble passion, the mantle, which might have wrapped Germany and Switzerland in one continuous fold, was rent asunder. He was no longer the genius of the Reformation. Descending from that magnificent position, whence he had given light to the

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whole evangelical community, he was now become little more than the head of a party, then, indeed, the more conspicuous and powerful section of the reformers, but destined in after times to undergo reverses and defections, which have conferred the appellation of Lutheran on an inconsiderable proportion of the Protestant world.”³

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3 Dean Waddington, vol. 2, p. 401.