19. The Lord's Supper: symbol or real presence?

Often heard: "Jesus also said 'I am the door.' It's symbolic. 'Do this in remembrance of me.'"
Also heard: "When disciples left over eating His flesh (John 6:66), Jesus let them go. Why not call them back and say it was a symbol?"

Signs of Christ's body, received by faith

HELD BY Reformed spiritual presence

Anglican Articles; views range

Methodist Articles; real presence

Baptist memorial, most

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of remembrance: the bread and cup are signs of Christ's body and blood and remain bread and wine. Christ's body is in heaven, and the Bible forbids drinking blood. Many Baptists hold the Supper to be a memorial only and read the eating and drinking of John 6 as believing; the Reformed confessions, the Anglican and Methodist articles and the Second London Baptist Confession (30.7) teach that worthy receivers truly feed on Christ, not with the mouth but spiritually, by faith.

VERSES CITED

Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24–26; John 6:35, 47, 63 ("the flesh profiteth nothing"); John 10:9; 15:1; Matt 26:29 (still "fruit of the vine"); Lev 17:10–14; Acts 15:20; Acts 3:21; Heb 10:10–14.

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

Berengar of Tours (c. 1050) denied a real change and twice recanted. Wycliffe (1380s) rejected transubstantiation. Cornelius Hoen's letter (c. 1521) argued that "is" means "signifies"; Karlstadt and Zwingli (1524–25) taught a memorial view; Luther and Zwingli split over it at Marburg (1529). Baptist practice follows

Bread and wine changed into Christ's body

HELD BY Catholic transubstantiation

Orthodox change, as mystery

At the consecration the bread and wine become the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ, while their appearances remain (transubstantiation). In John 6, when hearers objected, Jesus intensified His language (*trōgō*, "chew"; "my flesh is meat indeed") and let disciples walk away rather than explain it as a metaphor. Paul says eating unworthily makes one guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. "Remembrance" (*anamnēsis*) is a liturgical memorial that makes the saving event present, as Passover did. "The flesh profiteth nothing" refers to a merely human, fleshly way of understanding, not to Christ's flesh, which He gives for the life of the world.

VERSES CITED

John 6:48–58, 60–69; Matt 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 10:16–17; 11:23–30; Luke 24:30–35; Exod 12.

EARLY CHURCH AND HISTORY

Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans* 7.1 (c. 110): heretics abstain from the Eucharist because they do not confess it to be the flesh of our Savior. Justin, *First Apology* 66 (c. 155): not common bread but the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.18.5; 5.2.2–3. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses* 4 (c. 350):

Zwingli (Baptist Faith and Message art. VII: a "symbolic act"), though the Second London Confession ch. 30 holds Calvin's spiritual-presence view.

don't judge by taste. Ambrose, *On the Mysteries* 9. Augustine, Sermons 227 and 272.

Chrysostom reads the water and blood from Christ's side (John 19:34) as the origin of the sacraments: "Hence the Mysteries take their beginning; that when you approach to that awful cup, you may so approach, as drinking from the very side" (*Homilies on John* 85.3); Augustine says "the sacraments of the Church" flowed from the opened side (*Tractates on John* 120.2). Reformed and Baptist writers answer that the verse shows first that Christ truly died (John 19:35), that John's text does not name the Supper, and that for them the Supper is a sign received by faith. See also Baptism.

CATECHISM AND COUNCILS

CCC 1322–1419 (esp. 1373–1381; 1376 quotes Trent; 1378–1381 adoration); Fourth Lateran Council (1215), first conciliar use of "transubstantiated"; Trent, Session 13 (1551).

Christ's true body in, with and under the bread

HELD BY Lutheran sacramental union

The true body and blood of Christ are present under the bread and wine and are given to all who eat and drink, for the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. The bread is not changed into the body: in a sacramental union Christ's body is present "under the bread, with the bread, in the bread," because His words "This is my body" are to be taken as they read, not as a figure. All communicants receive His body with the mouth, believers as a pledge that their sins are forgiven and the unworthy to their judgment; the benefit is received by faith in the words "given and shed for you."

VERSES CITED

Matt 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 10:16 ("the communion of the body of Christ"); 1 Cor 11:23–29 (the unworthy "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord").

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

Luther defended the plain sense of "This is my body" against Zwingli and Oecolampadius, and the two sides parted at the Marburg Colloquy (1529). The Augsburg Confession (1530, art. X) confessed the true presence, the Wittenberg Concord (1536) used the term sacramental union, and the Formula of Concord (1577, art. VII) defined it against both transubstantiation and a purely spiritual eating.

CONFESSIONS AND DOCUMENTS

Augsburg Confession, art. X; Small Catechism, The Sacrament of the Altar, Q 1–4; Large Catechism, Part V; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII.35–38, 54, 60–66.

Across the traditions

How each major tradition answers this question, in its own words and from its own documents.

Catholic

At the consecration the bread and wine become the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ, while their appearances remain, a change the Church calls transubstantiation. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Council of Trent, Session 13 (1551), ch. 4 and canons 1-2; CCC 1374-1376; Fourth Lateran Council (1215), canon 1.

Orthodox

The Orthodox Church confesses that in the Divine Liturgy the bread and wine are truly changed into the very Body and Blood of Christ; the priest asks God to send the Holy Spirit, "changing them by Thy Holy Spirit." Philaret's Catechism says the bread and wine are "changed, or transubstantiated," and the Synod of Jerusalem (1672) uses the equivalent Greek term, metousiosis. Both insist the word does not define the manner of the change, which God alone understands, so Orthodox writers usually speak of mystery rather than philosophy.

Sources: Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, anaphora (epiclesis); Longer Catechism of St Philaret, On the Communion, Q 339-340 (numbering as in the pravoslavieto.com edition); Confession of Dositheus (Synod of Jerusalem, 1672), decree 17.

Lutheran

Lutherans confess that the body and blood of Christ "are truly present" and are distributed to those who eat (Augsburg Confession X). The Small Catechism calls the Sacrament of the Altar the true body and blood of Christ "under the bread and wine," given for forgiveness, life and salvation. The Formula of Concord teaches a sacramental union, "under the bread, with the bread, in the bread," holds that even unworthy communicants receive Christ's body orally, and rejects transubstantiation.

Sources: Augsburg Confession, art. X; Small Catechism, The Sacrament of the Altar; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII.14, 35, 60-66, 108.

Reformed

Reformed churches, following Calvin, teach that believers truly feed on Christ's body and blood, "not by the mouth, but by the Spirit through faith," while His body remains in heaven (Belgic Confession 35). Calvin wrote that the Spirit "truly unites things separated by space." The Heidelberg Catechism denies that the bread becomes Christ's body (Q 78), and the Westminster Confession rejects both transubstantiation and a bodily presence in, with or under the elements, teaching that Christ is spiritually present to the faith of believers.

Sources: Belgic Confession, art. 35; Calvin, Institutes 4.17.10; Heidelberg Catechism Q 76, 78; Westminster Confession 29.6-7.

Anglican

The Thirty-Nine Articles teach that for those who receive rightly and with faith the bread is "a partaking of the Body of Christ," given and eaten "only after an heavenly and spiritual manner," and received by faith; transubstantiation is rejected (XXVIII), and the wicked receive only the sign (XXIX). The 1662 Black Rubric denies any corporal presence of Christ's natural flesh and blood in the elements. Anglicans range from Reformed and receptionist views to Anglo-Catholic belief in an objective real presence.

Sources: Thirty-Nine Articles, XXVIII, XXIX; Book of Common Prayer 1662, Holy Communion, final rubric

Methodist

Methodism inherited the Anglican article: to those who receive with faith the bread is "a partaking of the body of Christ," received after a heavenly and spiritual manner, and transubstantiation is rejected (Article XVIII). The United Methodist statement This Holy Mystery (2004) affirms "the real, personal, living presence of Jesus Christ" without claiming to explain how, and points to the Wesleys' 166 Hymns on the Lord's Supper as its richest resource. It admits that many Methodists later came to treat the sacrament only as a memorial.

Sources: United Methodist Articles of Religion, XVIII; This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding

(the "Black Rubric").

of Holy Communion (General Conference 2004), pp. 5-6, 12-13.

Baptist

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of remembrance in which the bread and cup symbolize Christ's body and blood (Baptist Faith and Message art. VII calls it "a symbolic act of obedience"), though the Second London Confession holds that worthy receivers feed on Christ spiritually. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Baptist Faith and Message (2000), art. VII; Second London Baptist Confession (1677/1689), 30.7.

Where it gets contested: Those who read the Supper as signs of Christ's body (Reformed, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists) quote Augustine's sign and figure language; Catholics answer that for Augustine sign and reality were not opposed. The word "transubstantiation" is medieval (formally 1215), while belief in a real presence is ancient. Lutherans, the Reformed confessions, many Anglicans and the Orthodox also reject a merely symbolic view.

See also: Chapter 20: the symbolic view; the Marburg Colloquy; Classic arguments 83–87

More: Chapter 20: the symbolic view

Deeper study: why most Baptists use grape juice: temperance, the "two-wine theory" and Welch's

For eighteen centuries the main Christian bodies, including the first Baptists, used wine at the Lord's Supper. Most Baptist churches today use grape juice. The change is recent and American: it came with the temperance movement, and a Methodist dentist's unfermented juice made it practical.

- **Scripture and the early church.** The cup at the Last Supper was the Passover cup, and the Jewish blessing over wine, "who creates the fruit of the vine" (Mishnah, *Berakhot* 6:1), is the source of Jesus' phrase in Matt 26:29. Most commentators add that Paul's Corinthians were getting drunk at the Supper ("one is hungry, and another is drunken," 1 Cor 11:21). When some second- and third-century ascetics used water instead of wine, Cyprian wrote a whole letter insisting that the cup must contain wine mixed with water as Christ's did (Letter 63, c. 253).

- **The temperance movement.** American temperance societies grew from the 1820s into a mass Protestant movement. Communion wine was an embarrassment to it. The Congregationalist scholar Moses Stuart's *Scriptural View of the Wine-Question* (1848) popularized the "two-wine theory": that the Bible's approving references to wine mean unfermented grape juice and its warnings mean fermented wine. Its defenders, from William Patton's *Bible Wines* (1871) to the Seventh-day Adventist scholar Samuele Bacchiocchi's *Wine in the Bible* (1989), argue that the Hebrew *yayin* and Greek *oinos* are general words for the juice of the grape, fermented or not, and that the ancients could keep juice from fermenting by boiling, filtering, cold storage or sulphur fumigation. Most biblical scholars reject the theory: they read the same words as fermented wine both where it "maketh glad the heart of man" (Ps 104:15) and where it "is a mocker" (Prov 20:1), and doubt that juice could be kept unfermented for long before modern preservation.
- **Welch's.** Thomas Bramwell Welch (1825–1903), a Wesleyan Methodist preacher turned dentist and the Communion steward of his Methodist church in Vineland, New Jersey, objected to serving alcohol. In 1869 he applied Louis Pasteur's new process to grape juice, heating sealed bottles to kill the yeast so the juice would not ferment, and sold it to churches as "Dr. Welch's Unfermented Wine." Sales were poor, and he gave the business up after four years until his son Charles, also a dentist, persuaded him to resume it. Charles renamed the product "Welch's Grape Juice," gave up dentistry for it in 1893, the year he promoted it at the Chicago World's Fair, incorporated the Welch's Grape Juice Company at Westfield, New York (19 April 1897) and marketed it to temperance-minded Protestants as the true biblical "fruit of the vine" for Communion and for the table. Charles's will stated that "unfermented grape juice was born in 1869 out of a passion to serve God."
- **Methodist rules.** The Methodist Episcopal Church's General Conference recommended "the pure juice of the grape" for Communion in 1864, made it the rule "whenever practicable" in 1880, and mandatory in 1916. The United Brethren made unfermented wine mandatory in 1889. Grape juice spread with the Prohibition campaign: in 1913 Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan served grape juice instead of wine at a diplomatic dinner, and in 1914 the Navy Secretary banned alcohol aboard ships. National Prohibition (1920–1933) exempted sacramental wine, which Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians and Jews continued to use.
- **Baptists.** Baptists have no central rule, but by the early twentieth century most Southern and Northern Baptist churches had adopted grape juice, and the Baptist Faith and Message describes the elements simply as "bread and the fruit of the vine." Some Reformed Baptist and many non-American Baptist churches still use wine.

How the traditions read the change. Catholics hold that the matter of the sacrament is what Christ used: wheat bread and grape wine, so a Mass with grape juice would be invalid (Code of Canon Law can. 924; priests who cannot tolerate alcohol may use *mustum*, juice whose

fermentation has been arrested, with permission). Catholic critics present the grape-juice story as an example of Baptist practice changing under cultural pressure without any sense that something was lost, and say the same happened on a larger scale with the sacraments in the sixteenth century. The Orthodox, like Catholics, use wine (red, mixed with warm water), as do Lutheran and most Anglican churches. Baptists reply that the Gospel accounts of the Supper speak of "the cup" and "the fruit of the vine" (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18), never of wine by name; that the element is a sign either way, so its fermentation is a matter of indifference; and that avoiding alcohol for the sake of the weak (Rom 14:21) is a Christian liberty.

What is actually in dispute: whether the fermented wine Christ used belongs to what he instituted, or is a detail his words leave to Christian liberty.

Deeper study: Eucharistic adoration

Why Catholics worship Christ in the consecrated host, and how the other traditions regard the practice. It does not decide between them.

The Catholic teaching. If the consecrated host truly is Christ sacramentally, worship given to it is given to Christ. The Council of Trent taught that the faithful may "render in veneration the worship of latria, which is due to the true God, to this most holy sacrament" (Session XIII, ch. 5). Its canon 6 condemns anyone who denies that Christ in the sacrament is to be adored, honoured with a festival, carried in procession and set before the people for adoration, or who calls its adorers idolaters.

Lutherans also confess Christ's true body and blood in the Supper, but hold that "Nothing has the nature of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ." The Formula of Concord says bread "enclosed, borne about, and exhibited for adoration" is no sacrament, and teaches that Christ is to be adored in the true use of the Supper, not the elements (Solid Declaration VII.85–87, 126).

Anglicans: the Thirty-Nine Articles say that "The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped" (Article XXVIII). Practice varies: Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, for which the Prayer Book makes no provision, is found in parishes of Anglo-Catholic piety (*An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church*, "Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament").

Reformed and Baptist: the Westminster Confession (29.4) and the Second London Baptist Confession (30.4) call worshipping the elements, "the lifting them up, or carrying them about for adoration," contrary to Christ's institution. The Heidelberg Catechism rejects the teaching that Christ "is bodily present in the form of bread and wine, and there is to be worshipped," and calls

the Mass "an accursed idolatry" (Q 80). From a memorialist view, in which the bread remains bread that symbolizes Christ, worship directed toward it is worship of a creature.

The Catholic reply is that the worship is directed to Christ, whom they believe present, and that if he is present it would be wrong not to adore him.

What is actually in dispute: first, whether Christ is present in the consecrated bread at all; second, among those who say he is, whether that presence continues outside the celebration of the Supper, so that the reserved host may be adored.

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