

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) on the Lord's Supper

Now the faithful (for this is the generally accepted term for believers or pious persons, or worshippers of the true God) are by virtue of this one thing faithful, because they believe in one only true and omnipotent God and have faith in him only.

It must be, therefore, that this supreme good, which is God, is by its nature kind and bountiful, not with that bounty with which we like to seem bountiful, looking for a return or for glory, but with a bounty that causes him to desire the profit of those to whom he gives, with only this one thing in view, that he may belong to those things which were made by him; for he desires to impart himself freely. . . . But this good is so exuberantly abundant that it is more than sufficient for the needs of all; for it is limitless and loves to impart itself.

To know man is as toilsome as to catch a cuttlefish, for as the latter hides himself in his own blackness in order not to be caught, so does man, as soon as he sees one is after him, stir up such sudden and thick clouds of hypocrisy that no Lynceus or Argus can discover him. . . . We require God, therefore, as a sort of diver, and him alone, in order really to explore man. . . . Faith, therefore, is just as necessary to a man for knowledge of himself as for a knowledge of God.

Pious devotion, therefore, or religion, is this: God reveals man to himself, that he may recognize his disobedience, treason, and wretchedness as fully as Adam did. The result is that man utterly despairs of himself, but at the same time God shows ample store of his own bounty, so that he who had despaired of himself may see that he has with his Creator and Father an abundance of grace so sure and ready that he cannot possibly be torn away from him on whose grace he leans.

For when a man through repentance has come to the knowledge of himself, he finds nothing but utter despair. Hence, wholly distrusting himself, he is forced to take refuge in the mercy of God. But when he has begun to do that, justice makes him afraid. Then Christ appears, who has satisfied the divine justice for our trespasses. When once there is faith in him, then salvation is found; for he is the infallible pledge of God's mercy. For "he that gave up a Son for us, how will he not with him also give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

The true religion of Christ, then consists in this: that wretched man despairs of himself and rests all his thoughts and confidence on God, sure that he can refuse nothing who has given his Son for us; and that the Son, who is equally God with his Father, can refuse us nothing, since he is ours. . . . Almighty God, grant that we may all recognize our blindness, and that we who have thus far clung to creatures may henceforth cleave to our Creator, that he may be our only treasure and our heart abide with him [cf. Matt. 6:21].

In this way, then, is Christ the food of the soul, because the soul, seeing that God spared not his only Son but delivered him to an ignominious death in order to restore us to life, becomes sure of the grace of God and of eternal salvation. . . . He is a means of salvation to us not by being eaten but by being slain; for the human mind is made sure of the mercy of God when it sees that he spared not his Son, etc. [cf. Rom.8:32].

The flesh of Christ profits very greatly, aye, immeasurably, in every way, but, as I have said, by being slain, not eaten. Slain it has saved us from slaughter, but devoured it profits absolutely nothing. The Truth has said so, and the fact cannot be otherwise.

The Spirit teaches spirit. The Spirit of God, I say, deigns to draw the wretched spirit of man to itself, to unite and to bind it to itself, and wholly to transform it into itself. This thing feeds and rejoices the heart and assures it of salvation. What else is this than the food of the soul?

For I fear that if there is anywhere pernicious error in the adoration and worship of the one true God, it is in the abuse of the Eucharist. . . . The result is that we worship with embraces and kisses wood, stones, earth, dust, shoes, vestments, rings, hats, swords, belts, bones, and anything that pious men have ever handled. And (most foolish thing of all) we think ourselves directly blessed if we have got just a look at any such thing; we promise ourselves the remission of our sins, preposterous fortune, and the whole world. . . . To be one who trusts in God and is holy—this it was to be a Christian.

The Greeks gave the name *eucharistia* to the Lord's Supper, having always, if I may be permitted to say so, been more pious and more learned than the Latins, as their written works bear witness clearer than day. And they undoubtedly gave it this name for the reason that they understood, both from faith and from the meaning of the words of Christ and the Apostle, that Christ wished to have a joyful commemoration of himself by this supper and thanks given publicly for the blessing which he has bountifully bestowed upon us. For the Eucharist is a thanksgiving. He, therefore, that would take part in this public thanksgiving should prove to the whole Church that he is of the number of those who trust in the Christ who died for us.

A sacrament is a sign of a holy thing. When I say: The sacrament of the Lord's body, I am simply referring to that bread which is the symbol of the body of Christ who was put to death for our sakes. . . . But the very body of Christ is the body which is seated at the right hand of God, and the sacrament of his body is the bread, and the sacrament of his blood is the wine, which we partake with thanksgiving. Now the sign and the thing itself cannot be one and the same. Therefore the sacrament of the body of Christ cannot be the body itself.

To eat the body of Christ spiritually is equivalent to trusting with heart and soul upon the mercy and goodness of God through Christ, that is, to have the assurance of an unbroken faith that God will give us the forgiveness of sins and the joy of eternal salvation for the sake of his Son, who gave himself for us and reconciled the divine righteousness to us. For what can he withhold from us when he delivered up his only-begotten Son?

If I may put it more precisely, to eat the body of Christ sacramentally is to eat the body of Christ with the heart and mind in conjunction with the sacrament. . . . So then, when you come to the Lord's Supper to feed spiritually upon Christ, and when you thank the Lord for his great favor, for the redemption whereby you are delivered from despair, and for the pledge whereby you are assured of eternal salvation, when you join with your brethren in partaking of the bread and wine which are the tokens of the body of Christ, then in the true sense of the word you eat him sacramentally. You do inwardly that which you represent outwardly, your soul being strengthened by the faith which you attest in the tokens.