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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

“ THIS IS MY BODY. ”

BY THE REV. HAROLD SMITH, D.D.

THOSE who maintain the “ Real Presence,” not simply of Christ with His People in the ordinance, but of His Body and Blood in the elements, often claim that they alone believe that the Lord meant what He said, whereas others disbelieve Him and so explain His words away. To this there is a double answer : (1) They themselves do not really take the Lord’s words literally. Few would agree with the recantation imposed on Berengar, that the Lord’s Body was perceptibly, not in sacrament but in reality, handled and broken by the hands of the priest and ground by the teeth of the faithful ; even though such a view was thought to have the support of various miracles. The Roman view is that the elements become in substance or essence the Body and Blood of Christ ; but the “ accidents ” (we might say sensible properties or qualities) of bread and wine remain. The more subtle this is, the farther it is from the literalism from which it starts. Others would say that the Lord’s Body and Blood are in, with, or under the elements. Here also the words are not taken really literally ; the identification is not absolute, but only in some partial and peculiar sense. (2) *Our* interpretation is quite a natural and obvious one, with constant parallels both in Scripture and in common usage. But in maintaining this, care is needed to put forward the closest parallels, and to have many in reserve ; otherwise it is easy to object that the alleged parallels are not exact, or that all belong to one class, e.g. parables, where such language is in place rather than in assertions and statements.

Dr. Moffatt in his translation of the New Testament, renders, “ Take and eat this, it means My Body.” This article seeks to show how this interpretation was upheld at the Reformation. It passes over the full positive teaching of the various writers on the meaning and effects of the Sacrament.

The first to work this interpretation out was a Dutch lawyer, Cornelius Hoen or Honius. He forms a link in an interesting historical line between Thomas à Kempis and Zwingli. One of Thomas’s pupils at Zwolle was Wessel Gansfort, a native of Friesland (see Ullmann, *Reformers before the Reformation*). He did not depart from the received doctrine of the Eucharist, but laid stress on its aspect as a memorial or remembrance of Christ, and identified spiritual eating with believing. The eating and drinking required as a necessary condition of life cannot be limited to the Sacrament.

One of Wessel’s chief friends and correspondents was Jacob Hoeck, Dean of Naldwyk ; on his death his papers, including a number of Wessel’s writings, came into the hands of Hoen, an advocate at The Hague. He was greatly impressed by Wessel’s teaching on the Eucharist, but went much farther, concluding that

in the Lord's words "*est*" ("is") stands for "*significat*" ("means"). He drew up a clear statement of his view and sent it to Germany by two friends, along with a collection of Wessel's writings, which he hoped to get published. (Some of Wessel's works were actually printed at Wittenberg, 1522-3; others not until 1614 at Groningen.) It is not clear whether it was especially Luther or Erasmus whose support was hoped for; at all events, Luther was not impressed. Carlstadt may have seen the Letter of Honius, but his own view differed:—when the Lord said "This is My Body," He pointed not to the bread but to Himself.

The friends, however, went on to Basel, where *Æcolampadius* recommended them to *Zwingli* at Zürich. He was delighted with the Letter; he had felt for some time that there was some "trope" or figure, but was uncertain where it was; now, in his own words, he found the "precious pearl" that *est* should be taken as *significat*. He published the Letter, as from "a pious and learned Dutchman," and it is included in his Works (Vol. IV, Egli and Finsler). The part of the Letter bearing directly on this subject is briefly as follows: Why do not they (the literalists) say that John the Baptist was transubstantiated into Elijah (Matt. xi. 14), or John the disciple into Christ (John xix. 26), or the rock into Christ (Rom. x. 4)? "The rock was Christ," i.e. represented Christ. Custom is, I know, the reason why this sense offends here and not in other cases; but I can find no reason for the distinction. There are many similar sayings of Christ, e.g. "I am the true Vine," yet we are not so precise as to say Him to be a true natural vine. . . .

Through these words "This is My Body," the Saviour did not mean bread to be transubstantiated, but through bread to give Himself; as it is the custom in some places, when the seller of a field wishes to give possession to the purchaser, he gives him a stick, straw, or stone, and says, "See, I deliver to you the field." So the possession of a house is given by delivery of the keys. So also the Lord through the bread delivers Himself to us, as if He had said, "Take and eat, and esteem it not a small thing, because this which I deliver to you signifies My Body which I give to you by giving this." . . . Scripture is full of such expressions, as Genesis xli. 12, 18; xli. 26. But the Romans have not been able to give one example for their exposition, or to show where Christ is believed to have wrought a miracle contrary to all experience; He gave sight to the blind, raised the dead, cleansed lepers; but in such wise that they appeared to all as cleansed, living, and seeing, not merely were believed to be such against experience.

Zwingli first shows the influence of this Letter in his Letter to Alber, November, 1524. He rejects Carlstadt's construction, but says, "The whole matter turns on a very short syllable, *est*, which is to be taken as *significat*." He compares Genesis xli. 26, where clearly *are* stands for *mean* or *portend*; so John xv. 1; Luke viii. 11. Such expressions may be seen constantly in Holy Writ. So here, "This means My Body, which is given for you." By Luke's words as to the cup a key is afforded to unlock those of Matthew and Mark.

In April, 1525, when the proposal to abolish the Mass was carried by a small majority in the Council of Zürich, Zwingli was opposed by the Secretary, Joachim am Grüt, who maintained that his examples of metaphor were not really parallel, being drawn from parables, whereas Christ's words in this case are a plain statement. Zwingli answered this objection, but felt its force, and realised that many were unconvinced. Near the close of the following night he dreamt that he was quite unable to answer the Secretary, but that someone said to him, “ Why do you not answer, that in Exodus xii. it is said, ‘ It is the Lord's Passover ’ ? ” He woke at once, leapt from bed, looked up the passage in the Septuagint, and preached on it with great effect next day. Its force lies (1) in the connection of the Eucharist with the Passover ; (2) in the memorial of a fact or event being called by the name of the fact itself. Zwingli does not attach undue importance to his experience ; “ I am telling nothing higher than a dream.” We may compare Thackeray, perplexed for a title for his novel, hearing a voice under precisely similar conditions, “ Why don't you call it ‘ Vanity Fair ’ ” ? So Nehemiah Curnock, seeking a key to the cipher in John Wesley's earliest Diaries, had his first effective clue given in a dream. Origen, meeting Celsus's objections to the messages of angels in dreams, Matthew i.-ii., says, “ It happens to many to be shown in a dream to do this or that, whether it be an angel or whatever it is that brings images before the soul.” Psychologists would speak of the workings of the subconscious or unconscious mind.

In his “ Subsidium,” August, 1525, he deals at length with this question, and says that the disciples were not troubled when Christ spoke of what He had just metaphorically called His Blood as wine or the fruit of the vine. It is clear from this very tranquillity of theirs that they rightly understood His speech as symbolical. They were used both to Christ's language and to the symbolism of commemoration. They had often kept the Passover, of which similar language is used (Exod. xii. 12). If we accept a figure here, all things are safe and clear, nothing is repugnant either to faith or to common sense, or to the character of Scripture, which is full of figures. All writings and speech are full of metaphors, so that we cannot dispense with them even in everyday speech (iv. 468-71).

In his last work, addressed to Francis I, King of France, he says that the Sacraments are significative of true things, once wrought essentially and naturally ; these things they bring back, commemorate, and as it were set before our eyes. . . . “ We are compelled to recognise that the words ‘ This is My Body,’ are not to be understood naturally and in the precise sense of the words, but symbolically, sacramentally, or by metonymy, ‘ This is the sacrament of My Body,’ or ‘ This is My sacramental or mystical Body,’ i.e. the symbol, sacramental and vicarious, of what I truly took and offered to death ” (*Expositio*, 15 and 83).

Bullinger, Zwingli's successor at Zürich, had much intercourse with England, many of the “ Original Letters ” and “ Zurich

Letters" of the Parker Society being addressed to him. His *Decades* (five books of ten sermons each) were translated into English in 1577, new editions appearing in 1584 and 1587. At the end of 1586 it was enacted by Convocation that every minister having cure, not being a master of arts or licensed to preach, should every day read and make notes on a chapter in the Bible, and every week also one sermon of the *Decades*, and show his note-books once a quarter to some neighbouring preacher, who was to certify to the archdeacon who they were who had performed these exercises and how they had profited. This of course does not involve agreement with every word in the *Decades*, but does imply general agreement and high esteem (see Cardwell, *Synodalia*, II, 562).

Some, says Bullinger (*Decade V*, Sermon 9), condemn our doctrine as heretical. Their argument is, "What the Lord says cannot be false, for He is Truth itself; but He says that the bread is His Body and the wine His Blood; therefore the bread and wine of the sacrament are verily really and essentially the Body and Blood of Christ. This truth must simply be believed, even though reason itself, the whole world, all senses and nature itself be against it." We answer that indeed all things are most true which the Lord has spoken . . . but in that sense which He Himself understood, and not in what we force upon His words. Therefore, before all things we must search out the true sense of His words. . . . There are numberless sentences in Holy Scripture which if we shall proceed to expound simply according to the letter, we shall overthrow the whole Scripture and the true faith. . . . When absurdity, not to reason but to piety, and repugnancy to the Scriptures and contrariety to other articles of our faith enforce us, then we contend that it is godly, yea necessary, to depart from the letter.

The Lord, having one only true human and natural body, with that very body delivered to the disciples bread and no body. . . . Therefore, these solemn words can only mean, "This is a commemoration, memorial or remembrance, sign or sacrament, of My Body which is given for you; this cup, or rather the wine in the cup, signifies or represents unto you My Blood once shed for you. . . ."

[The Lord used recognised sacramental language.] "In the solemnising of the feast of the Passover it is said, 'The lamb is the Lord's Passover.' The apostles understood that this lamb was a memorial of a passing-by in the past. . . . We interpret the Lord's words as, 'This is a memorial and remembrance of My Body'; or else, 'This signifieth My Body.' If the word 'est' ('is') is to be understood substantively, it follows that the bread is changed into Christ's Body. But that this is not so, all our senses bear witness, the very substance remaining, not only the accidents of the bread. It is necessary, therefore, that our adversaries do understand that *in* this, *with* this, and *underneath* this is My Body. But so are they gone from the simplicity of the Lord's words. . . . Again, if we be tied to the words above recited, that upon pain of sacrilege we may not start from them a hair's breadth, how durst Luke and Paul recite the words which belong to the cup far otherwise

than Matthew and Mark ? If we hold on still precisely to the letter, we shall be forced to confess that the cup, not the wine, is either the Blood of Christ or the New Testament, or the remission of sins. Here, to avoid absurdity, we willingly admit a trope ; why are we not impartial in a matter of equal importance ? ”

Calvin (*Institutes*, IV, xvii), says : “ Our adversaries charge us with giving no credence to Christ’s words, which we receive with as much submission as themselves, and consider with deeper reverence. . . . Nothing prevents us from believing Christ when He speaks, and acquiescing in everything He asserts. The only question is whether it be unlawful to inquire into its true meaning. Their objection, that it is not probable that the Lord spoke enigmatically or obscurely, when providing special comfort for His disciples in adversity, really supports our case. For if it had not been recognised by the apostles that the bread was called His Body figuratively, because the symbol of His Body, they would undoubtedly have been troubled at such an extraordinary thing. . . . By eating the bread without any hesitation they testify their consent ; hence it appears that they understood Christ’s words in the same sense as we do, considering that in mysteries it ought not to appear strange for the name of the thing signified to be transferred to the sign. Yet they charge us with accusing Christ of falsehood, if inquiry is made of the true meaning of His words ! ”

Tyndale says that his own school say that the sayings, “ This is My Body,” and, “ This is My Blood,” are true as Christ meant them, and as the people of that country were accustomed to understand such words, and as the Scripture useth in a thousand places to speak. As when one of us saith, “ I have drunk a cup of good wine,” that saying is true as the man meant it—that he drank wine only and not the cup. As when we say of a child, “ This is such a man’s very face,” the words are true as the manner of our land is to understand them, that the face of the one is very like the other. . . . We have a thousand examples in the Scripture where signs are named with the meaning of things signified by them.

In another work he says, Neither let it offend thee that *est* is taken for *significat*. For this is a common figure of speech in many places of Scripture, and also in our mother tongue ; as when we see pictures or images, which ye know well are but signs to represent the bodies to whom they be made like, yet we say of the image of Our Lady, This is Our Lady ; and of St. Katharine, This is St. Katharine ; and yet they do but represent and signify to us Our Lady and St. Katharine.

Hooper says : “ The bread was no more His Body nor the wine His Blood than Christ was a lamb, as John called Him.” Against insistence on the literal sense of Christ’s words he says, “ So may a man after the same sort prove Our Lady to be John the Evangelist’s mother ; and say always, whatever text of the Scriptures be brought against him, as Christ said *Ecce Mater tua*, ‘ Say what ye list, these words be true, Christ spake them ; they be plain, they need no interpretation.’ If any man ask a reason and confirmation

of the proposition, he may say still, ' *Ecce Mater tua* ; Ye must make no reason how it can be ; it sufficeth to have the word of God, the manifest text ; reason shall not mell with the matter ; it is a matter of faith.' "

Ridley says : The old authors do most rehearse the form of words in Matthew and Mark, because they seemed to them most clear. But here I would know whether it is credible or no that Luke and Paul, when they celebrated the Lord's Supper with their congregations, did not use the same form of words at the Lord's Table as they wrote, Luke in his Gospel and Paul in his epistle ? Now then if Christ's words which are spoken upon the cup, which Paul here rehearseth, be of the same might and power both in working and signifying [as those upon the bread], then must this word " is," when Christ saith " This cup is the new testament," turn the substance of the cup into the substance of the new testament. And if those will say that this word " is " neither maketh nor signifieth any such change of the cup, although it be said of Christ that this cup is the new testament, yet Christ meant no such change as that : marry, sir, even so say I, when Christ said of the bread . . . This is My Body : He meant no more any such change of the substance of bread into the substance of His natural body than He meant of the change and transubstantiation of the cup into the substance of the new testament. And if thou wilt say that the word " cup " here in Christ's words doth not signify the cup itself, but the wine or thing contained in the cup, by a figure called *metonymia*, for that Christ's words so meant and must needs be taken : thou sayest very well. But I pray you by the way here note two things. First, that this word " is " hath no such strength or signification in the Lord's words to make or to signify any transubstantiation. Secondly, that in the Lord's words whereby He instituted the sacrament of His Blood He useth a figurative speech. How vain then is it that some so earnestly do say as if it were an infallible rule that in doctrine and in the institution of the sacraments Christ used no figures, but all His words are to be strained to their proper significations ! . . . I say it is a like fault and even the same, to deny the figure when the place so requireth to be understanden, as vainly to make it a figurative speech which is to be understanden in his proper signification. Augustine gives rules for distinguishing such cases in his *De Doctrina Christianae*. One is, " If the Scripture doth seem to command a thing that is wicked or ungodly, or to forbid a thing that charity doth require : then know thou," saith he, " that the speech is figurative." And for example he bringeth in (John vi. 53) . . . a figurative speech commanding us to have communion or fellowship with Christ's passion, and devoutly and wholesomely to lay up in memory that His flesh was crucified and wounded for us. . . . This lesson of St. Augustine also teaches us how to understand Christ's words in the institution of the sacrament. . . . Christ commanding in His last supper to eat His Body and drink His Blood seemed to command in sound of words as great and even the same inconvenience and ungodliness as did His words

in John vi. ; and therefore must even for the same reason be likewise understanden and expounded figuratively and spiritually, as St. Augustine did the other. . . . Christ in His Supper to the commandment of eating and drinking of His flesh and blood addeth “ Do this in remembrance of Me ” ; which words surely were the key that opened and revealed this spiritual and godly exposition unto St. Augustine (pp. 21-2, Parker Society).

Cranmer says that Christ spoke so many things in parables, similes, allegories, metaphors and other tropes or figures ; for the most part the meaning is left to the judgment of the hearers without any declaration—e.g. (Luke xii. 35 ; ix. 62 ; John xii. 24), and when He called Herod a fox, Judas a devil, Himself a door, a way, a vine, a well. So here. No man that was there present was so fond, but he knew well that the bread was not Christ’s Body, nor the wine His Blood. And therefore they might well know that Christ called the bread His Body and the wine His Blood for some figure, similitude, or property [propriety, appropriateness] of the bread and wine unto His flesh and blood ; for as bread and wine be foods to nourish our bodies, so is the flesh and blood of our Saviour Christ (being annexed unto His Death) the everlasting food of our souls (*Answer*, p. 36).

It being fully proved (that Christ called natural bread His Body), it must needs follow consequently that this manner of speaking is a figurative speech. For in plain and proper speech it is not true to say that bread is Christ’s Body or wine His Blood. For Christ’s Body hath a soul, life, sense, and reason ; but bread hath none. . . . Likewise in plain speech it is not true that we eat Christ’s Body and drink His Blood. For eating and drinking in the proper and usual signification is with the tongue, teeth, and lips, to swallow down and chew in pieces ; which thing to do to the Body and Blood of Christ is horrible to be heard of any Christian. . . . The words *eating* and *drinking* are translated from the signification of a corporal thing to signify a spiritual thing, and by calling a thing that signifieth by the name of the thing that is signified thereby. Which is no rare nor strange thing, but a usual manner and phrase in common speech (*Defence*, 110).

In common speech we use daily to call sacraments and figures by the name of the things that be signified by them, although they be not the same thing in deed. As every Good Friday, as often as it returneth from year to year, we call it the day of Christ’s Passion ; and every Easter Day we call the day of Resurrection ; . . . and yet in very deed Christ never suffered but once, never arose but once (*Defence*, 125).

Marvel not that Christ spoke in figures when He did institute the sacrament, seeing it is of the nature of all sacraments to be figures. . . . As in the Old Testament God said, “ This is the Lord’s pass-by, or passover ” ; even so saith Christ in the New Testament, “ This is My Body, this is My Blood.” But in the old mystery and sacrament the lamb was not the Lord’s very passover or passing-by, but it was a figure which represented His passing-by ;

so likewise in the New Testament, the bread and wine be not Christ's very Body and Blood, but they be figures which by Christ's institution be unto the godly receivers thereof sacraments, tokens, significations, and representations of His very flesh and blood. . . . When Christ said, " This cup is the new testament in My Blood," here in one sentence be two figures : one in the word " cup," which is not taken for the cup itself but for the thing contained in the cup ; another is in this word *testament*, for neither the cup nor the wine contained in the cup is Christ's Testament, but is a token, sign, or figure whereby is represented unto us His testament, confirmed by His Blood (*Defence*, 135-7).

LIBERATING THE LAY FORCES OF CHRISTIANITY. By John R. Mott.
Student Christian Movement. 4s. cloth ; 2s. 6d. paper.

Any book by Dr. Mott is secure of attention, and this, which is the substance of the " Ayer Foundation " Lectures given in America last year, has much to commend it. The book suffers somewhat from an appearance of hasty production, and while Dr. Mott's theme is incontestable, it is only here and there that he hints at the root cause of the troubles that he has in view. Hardly anyone now denies the responsibility of ordinary Christian laymen in regard to evangelisation and other forms of work for the spread of the Gospel, or disputes the propriety of their undertaking it. The difficulty of the present time is a standard of spiritual life which is deplorably low in regard to knowledge and woefully deficient in enthusiasm. Until this is remedied there is little in the way of Lay " forces " to liberate. We have not among us men like D. L. Moody or Henry Drummond or the others of whom Dr. Mott writes so appreciatively, nor do we appear to have a body of clergy and ministers who can evoke and train these qualities in the layman. The problems of clergy and laity are bound up together. " Like priest, like people " epitomises this, so does the question which comes to us from the fourteenth century. " If gold should rust, what shall iron do ? " That there is another side to this we learn from Jeremiah : " The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means ; *and my people love to have it so.*" It is doubtful whether more conferences or more organisation will help us in our present need. We have had them in superabundance and have gained much from them, though we have also lost through them in some measure a sense of the urgency and value of individual effort and of the fact that it is not by organisation but by prayer that the power of the Spirit of God is made accessible to us. Those who desire that that power may have free course among us, will find much of interest and stimulus in Dr. Mott's book.

W. G. J.