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Calvinist and Zwinglian Views of the Lord's Supper among the Baptists of the Seventeenth Century

DR. Ernest Payne in *The Fellowship of Believers*¹ says that among the Baptists there has been no one view of the Lord's Supper. It is our purpose to expand the evidence for this statement with regard to the Baptists of the seventeenth century.

The General Baptists

John Smyth, the earliest English General Baptist, calls the Supper "the external symbol of the communion of Christ and the faithful among themselves with faith and love."² Elsewhere he makes it clear that the Supper does not confer grace, but presents and figures the Crucifixion of Christ, and shows that we are "flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone: in the communion of the same spirit."³ Again, it "teacheth us by the outward handling to mount upwards with the heart in holy prayer, to beg at Christ's hands the true signified food: and it admonisheth us of thankfulness to God, and of verity and love with one another."⁴ In fact, "the sacraments have the same use that the word hath, that they are a visible word and that they teach to the eye of them that understand as the word teacheth the ears of them that have ears to hear."⁵ Smyth's views accord with those of De Ries and the Mennonites,⁶ and are "Zwinglian."

Similarly, for Thomas Helwys the Lord's Supper is "the outward manifestation of the spiritual communion between Christ and the faithful mutually . . . to declare his death until he come."⁷ The first General Baptist Confession, that of 1651, says only that the Lord's Supper is "a memorial of his suffering."⁸

The 1678 Confession of Faith does strike a different note. It

¹ Payne, E. A.: *Op. cit.* (1944 Ed.), p. 51.

² Smyth, J.: (Latin) Confession of Faith, § 15.

³ Smyth, J.: (Longer) Confession of Faith, §§ 72 f.

⁴ Smyth, J.: (De Ries) Confession of Faith, § 32.

⁵ Smyth, J.: (Longer) Confession of Faith, § 74.

⁶ Mennonite Confession of Faith, §§ xxx, xxxiii; McGlothlin, W.: *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, pp. 42ff.

⁷ Helwys, Th.: *A Declaration of Faith*, § 16.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, § 53.

was put out in an attempt to minimise the differences between the Baptists, even those of Arminian views, and the Presbyterians, and to be as orthodox as possible from the Calvinist point of view.⁹ It was probably not the norm of Baptist belief but the utmost limit of Calvinist teaching they could accept. So, even when in chapter xxxiii., it presents only verbal differences from parts of the Westminster Confession of Faith,¹⁰ on which this Baptist Confession was based in general, it is still questionable how far it represents the actual views of Baptists. Even so it omits that paragraph in the Westminster Confession¹¹ which sets forth the manner of the partaking of the Body and Blood in unmistakably "Calvinist" terms. This General Baptist Confession refuses to commit itself to a "Calvinist" doctrine of the Supper, though it does not exclude it.

Thomas Grantham gave considerable space to refuting the doctrine of transubstantiation.¹² For him, otherwise, the Lord's Supper was "to set forth Christ and him crucified."¹³ "It was our Saviour's design by this Holy Rite, to keep himself the better in remembrance of his chosen Disciples."¹⁴ It saves us from thinking that there is any other propitiatory sacrifice for sin,¹⁵ and plainly shows that His blood was shed for sins; as well "the second coming of our Lord in person, or in that Body which dyed (*sic*) for us, is hereby evidently set forth, as the great expectation of all that believe on him."¹⁶ Otherwise, the Supper has three functions:—

- i. It teaches humility, brotherly love and Christian unity.¹⁷
- ii. It conduceth to the Stability of Christians in the Faith.¹⁸
- iii. "It is useful to stir up Christians to attain and keep up the Qualifications which fit them for Communion with Christ, and one with another."¹⁹ While this "holy manducation" is an evidence of Christian unity even more than is "cheerful joyning together in prayer,"²⁰ it is not thought of as itself constituting the life of the church as a body. Further, regarding iii, nourishment

⁹ Underwood, A. C.: *A History of the English Baptists*, p. 106.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, § xxix (I, V, VI).

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, § xxix (VII).

¹² Grantham, Th.: *Hear the Church*, pp. 12 f., 53-55. *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book II, Part II, Ch. 7, § ix, pp. 96-98.

¹³ Grantham, Th.: *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book II, Part II, Ch. 7, § iii, pp. 85 f.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, §§ iv f., pp. 87 f.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, § vi., pp. 89 f.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, § vii., p. 91.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, § v., p. 89.

is obtained subjectively from partaking of the Supper "with the whole heart" and "hungering after righteousness."

Another General Baptist writing: "Ten Infallible Signes and Markes,"²¹ is also "Zwinglian." In fact, it seems hard to find any evidence of any other than "Zwinglian" doctrine regarding the Lord's Supper. This is one matter in which the English General Baptists show the influence of Continental (Anabaptist) Mennonites.

The Particular Baptists

The earliest Confession of Faith of the Particular Baptists, that of 1644,²² makes but the barest mention of the Lord's Supper. It was not a matter of discussion among the earlier Baptists. The earliest writing by them on sacramental theory dates from the last decades of the seventeenth century, and even then there is no treatment on the scale of that given by such Independents as Thomas Goodwin and John Owen.

The 1677 Confession,²³ intended to show the solidarity of the Baptists with the Presbyterian and other Calvinist bodies, followed the Westminster Confession, particularly in §7²⁴, relating to the nature of the believer's reception in the Supper. However, §1 was emended by the Baptists to exclude the words "sacrament," "seal," "pledge" and "sacrifice of himself," and in §5 "figuratively" was substituted for "sacramentally." Clearly, at least some Baptists would not be bound to accept "Calvinist" sacramental doctrine. There were however those Particular Baptists who did hold a "Calvinist" view of the Lord's Supper. In fact the 1704 Baptist Articles of the Christian Faith reproduced the relevant items of the 39 Articles of the Book of Common Prayer²⁵ without modification.

Benjamin Keach said that in the Supper "there is a mystical Conveyance or Communication of all Christ's blessed Merits to our Souls through Faith held forth thereby, and in a glorious Manner received, in the right Participation of it."²⁶ Further: "Dost thou know what spiritual Blessings thou lovest by thy Neglect hereof; is not Loss of Communion with Christ a great Loss?"²⁷ The Articles of Faith of the Horsly Down church, of which Keach was pastor, say of the Supper, "it being appointed for our spiritual Nourishment and Growth in Grace, and as a

²¹ *Op. cit. supra*, pp. 13-15.

²² McGlothlin, W.: *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, pp. 174-189.

²³ *Op. cit.*, § xxx.

²⁴ § xxix of Westminster Confession=§ xxx of 1677 Baptist Confession.

²⁵ §§ xxv, xxvi, xxviii-xxx.

²⁶ Keach, B.: *Tropologia*, Book IV, p. 623.

²⁷ Keach, B.: *Op. cit.*, p. 625.

farther Engagement in, and to all Duties we owe to Jesus Christ, and as a Pledge of his eternal Love to us."²⁸ In the Catechism, based on the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and which Keach compiled, the Lord's Supper is called an "effectual means of Salvation," by virtue of "the blessing of Christ, and the working of the Spirit in those that by faith receive."²⁹ In it, "the worthy Receivers are not after a corporeal and carnal manner, but by Faith, made Partakers of his Body and Blood, with all his Benefits, to their spiritual Nourishment and growth in Grace."³⁰

However, this doctrine is not revealed in Keach's hymns. The nine of the "Near Three Hundred Hymns" in *Spiritual Melody*, for use at the Supper were hymns of praise to Christ with but little specific reference to the sacrament. We quote from the only one³¹ which has its imagery controlled by the Supper:—

1. With precious Food, Lord, we are fed,
Which we have cause to prize;
Our Table is most richly spread,
With choice Varieties.
2. The harmless Lamb most innocent
For us is ready slain;
And we as Guests are hither sent
To feed on him again.
3. But O what Love and Grace is here!
When we were hungry,
Christ's Body, Lord, Thou didst prepare
That for us he might die.

In his *Tropologia*,³² as the title itself suggests, Keach develops the aspect of representation, setting out in tabular form the various actions and their significations alongside. For example, in the fourth section, the "Metaphor" is "Christ gave the Bread to his disciples," while the "Parallel" is "Signifying not only his giving himself for us, but his giving himself freely with all his Benefits to us."³³ His exegesis of the Words of Institution was figurative³⁴; he noted a double figure in "the cup" = "the wine" = "the blood of Christ."

Keach was a "Calvinist" too in rejecting the spiritualising

²⁸ Horsly Down Articles of Faith, xxiv.

²⁹ Keach, B.: *The Baptist Catechism*, § 96. Note: This Catechism was approved by the General Assembly of Particular Baptists.

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, § 102.

³¹ Keach, B.: *Spiritual Melody*, No. 151, vv. 1-3.

³² Keach, B.: *Op. cit.*, pp. 620 f.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 616-620.

of the Body,³⁵ Christ's body was of the same kind as our own,³⁶ and at "the last Day he shall come visibly and locally from Heaven."³⁷ Thus the virtue in the Supper is by the working of the Spirit³⁸ and answering faith,³⁹ not by an ubiquitous corporeal Presence.

William Mitchell, too, is typically "Calvinist." "By the Spirit and faith," worthy receivers are made "Partakers of his Body and Blood, with all his Benefits, to their Spiritual Nourishment and Growth in Grace,"⁴⁰ using the wording of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.⁴¹ There is no "Real Sacrifice," but, in the words of the Westminster Confession,⁴² "only a Memorial of that one offering up of himself, by himself, upon the Cross, once for all; and a spiritual Oblation of all possible Praise unto God for the same."⁴³ The Word of Institution and "the Work of the Spirit," not the intention of the administrator, nor any inherent power, confers "the Grace which is exhibited in or by the Sacraments rightly used."⁴⁴ The purpose is to "represent him and his Benefits, and to confirm our Interest in him, and solemnly to engage us to the Service of God in Christ."⁴⁵

Hercules Collins is a "Calvinist" also. In the Lord's Supper there is declared and sealed to us the "Remission of Sins, and Life everlasting."⁴⁶ The Body of Christ is so described "sacramentally"⁴⁷; the Mass is a denial of the work of Christ,⁴⁸ but in "this visible Signe and Pledge" we are assured that "his crucified Body, and Blood shed, are indeed the Meat and Drink of our Souls, whereby they are nourished to eternal life."⁴⁹ "We are as verily Partakers of his Body and Blood, through the working of the Holy Ghost, as we do perceive (*sic*) by the Mouth of our Body, these holy Signes in Remembrance of him."⁵⁰ We become "Flesh of his Flesh, and Bone of his Bones."⁵¹ His body,

³⁵Cf. Calvin, J.: *Institutes*, IV, xvii, 26-30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Keach, B.: *The Baptist Catechism*, § 96; Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 268.

³⁹ Keach, B.: *Tropologia*, pp. 620 f.

⁴⁰ Mitchell, W., *Jachin and Boaz*, § xxxii.

⁴¹ § 96.

⁴² § xxix: II.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Op. cit.*, § xxx.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Collins, H.: *An Orthodox Catechism*, p. 25.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 42 f.

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 41 f.

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 38 f.

however, is in heaven; the virtue of the sacrament is effected by the Spirit, and our faith receives.⁵²

Thomas Hardcastle, pastor of the Broadmead Church, Bristol, declared that: "It is a great supper, in regard of the effects of it, it seales justification, it seales pardon, it seales peace and salvation. . . . Jesus Christ will be here himselfe at this supper."⁵³ Christ will do five things at his coming:—

- i. "See what posture of soul they are in."
- ii. "Bid his guests welcome, and bid them eat."
- iii. "See that they want nothing."
- iv. "Afford them his presence."
- v. "Draw forth their graces, and so perfume them, to set faith acting and love acting and joy acting."⁵⁴

It is a "strengthening Ordinance."⁵⁵ "The body and blood of Christ for faith applyes a Christ crucified and all the benefits of his death."⁵⁶ Of the subjective aspect Hardcastle says that we "eat and drink the body and blood of Christ spiritually" when we believe that Christ died for us, our sins are pardoned, and we are united to Christ.⁵⁷ The virtue of the sacrament "works diversly"; "the Lord doth not always poure out his gifts the same day we come to him in his holy Ordinances."⁵⁸ He closely connects the Supper with the Passion, of which it is a "lively preaching." "He is crucified in the Lord's Supper representatively."⁵⁹ Underneath this devotional treatment one may detect "Calvinist" doctrine. The Supper, however, is for the individual rather than either a mark of, or nourishment for, the Church.

Some Baptists, judging by their scanty references, viewed the Supper as a Memorial Feast. For example, Thos. Collier could say of it only that it is a figure "very significant and of especial use in the Church of Christ," which "serves especially to keep in remembrance the Death and Sufferings of our Lord Jesus."⁶⁰ It is an "Ordinance that presenteth Jesus Christ Crucified (with all his benefits) to the eye, that the eye may affect the heart . . . to make use of our senses for our spiritual good."⁶¹

Some very influential Baptists made very little reference to

⁵² *Op. cit.*, pp. 38 f., 42.

⁵³ Hardcastle, Th.: *Expositions*, pp. 152 f.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 146 f.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 151 f.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Collier, Th.: *Body of Divinity*, pp. 471f.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the Supper. Vavasor Powell, who appears to be a "Calvinist,"⁶² is one such. To John Bunyan the Supper was a valued "Ordinance,"⁶³ but he hardly did more than mention it.⁶⁴ When Edward Drapes defended the sacraments against "Spirit" sects he devoted fifty pages to Baptism, but only two to the Lord's Supper.⁶⁵

The last named is one who kept very severely to the repetition of Scriptural phrases in referring to the Supper. Randall Roper, likewise controverting sects which advocated the disuse of outward forms such as water, bread and wine, likewise keeps severely to Scriptural statements in his few references to the Supper.⁶⁶

Thus while it is well-nigh impossible to find any but "Zwinglian" views among the General Baptists, both "Calvinist" and "Zwinglian" approaches are found among the Particular Baptists.

(NOTE.—In the above we have used "Calvinist" as a convenient term for views of the Lord's Supper which allow for a real, spiritual partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ therein.⁶⁷ Likewise we have used the term "Zwinglian" to denote views of the Supper according to which it is either a mere badge of the fellowship, or a memorial and representation of the Passion of Christ. We do not imply necessarily that Ulrich Zwingli was a consistent "Zwinglian." The views of Calvin and Zwingli, as well as those of other Reformers are discussed at some length in books such as Alexander Barclay's *The Protestant Doctrine of the Lord's Supper*.)

E. P. WINTER.

⁶² (Vavasor Powell): *The Life and Death of Mr. Vavasor Powell*, p. 38.

⁶³ Brown, J.: *John Bunyan*, II, p. 147.

⁶⁴ Bunyan, J.: *Works* (Oxford Edition), I, pp. 516 f.

⁶⁵ Drapes, E.: *Gospel Glory*, pp. 164 f.

⁶⁶ Roper, R.: *Truth Vindicated*, pp. 12-16.

⁶⁷ Cf. Calvin, J.: *Institutes*, IV, xvii, 19 (Beveridge's translation): "I willingly admit anything which helps to express the true and substantial communication of the body and blood of the Lord, as exhibited to believers under the sacred symbols of the supper, understanding that they are received not by the imagination, or the intellect merely, but are enjoyed in reality as the food of eternal life."

In this context "exhibited" means "tendered," "proffered," not merely "shown." There is no record of the use of the word in the latter sense before the middle of the seventeenth century. The use of the word "exhibition" for a grant of money for college use is a better analogy here than for a flower-show, where the "exhibits" are merely for observation.