

A Spiritual Banquet: John Calvin on the Lord's Supper

Matthew W Mason

Summary

Much contemporary evangelicalism neglects the Lord's Supper. In contrast, John Calvin, whose view was shared by our English Reformers, viewed it as a 'spiritual banquet' wherein we feed on Christ. Although he did view the Supper as a memorial of Christ's death, the centre of Calvin eucharistic theology is the doctrine of faith-union. As believers feed on the bread and wine physically, they feed spiritually on Christ, a view supported by 1 Corinthians 10:16. As a covenant meal, the Supper comes annexed with covenant blessings for those who eat with faith, and covenant curses for unbelievers who partake. Calvin's view of the Supper is biblically faithful and theologically satisfying, and the contemporary church would profit from its recovery.

What we have so far said of the Sacrament abundantly shows that...it was ordained to be frequently used among all Christians in order that they might frequently return in memory to Christ's Passion, by such remembrance to sustain and strengthen their faith, and urge themselves to sing thanksgiving to God and to proclaim his goodness....[T]he Lord's Table should have been spread at least once a week for the assembly of Christians, and the promises declared in it should feed us spiritually....All, like hungry men, should flock to such a bounteous repast.¹

It seems unlikely that many twenty-first century Anglican evangelicals would echo John Calvin's sentiments. Judging by church websites and quarter cards, few evangelical congregations share his passion for the Lord's Supper. Services of Holy Communion tend to happen only once a month, morning and evening, and less frequent celebration is not uncommon.

A comparison of twenty-first century publications with those of the sixteenth century would show a similar picture. Carl Trueman, bemoaning evangelical neglect of the Supper, cites as evidence recent theology primers that neglect 'the theology of the Lord's Supper in the litany of what are otherwise considered to be evangelical essentials and distinctives'.² This stands in marked contrast to

the flurry of tracts, books and liturgies produced by both the Continental and the English Reformers. Doubtless this is, at least in part, due to our different historical context—sexuality and the clarity of God’s revelation in Scripture are now more pressing concerns—but it may also betoken a diminished regard for the Lord’s Table.

There are probably many other reasons for contemporary neglect of the sacraments, one of which is surely a healthy desire to avoid the errors of Roman and Anglo-Catholic sacramental theologies. In an effort to avoid an unbiblical *ex opere operato* view of the sacraments, evangelicals have downplayed their importance, and view with suspicion language that suggests any kind of presence of Christ at the Supper. However, perhaps another major reason for their neglect is a lack of understanding of the nature and role of the sacraments in the life of the church: it is doubtful that we will value the means of grace if we do not understand them. This, again, is in contrast to the Reformers. For—

While the Protestant Reformation cleared away the superstition surrounding the sacraments, it nevertheless recognized the place given by Scripture to baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which, alongside the Word, deliver the gospel to sinners.³

Of course, the Reformers may have got it wrong; we must hold their thinking to the bar of Scripture. Nevertheless, the fact that we have moved away from what they did and taught should at least give us pause for thought. Calvin urged frequent use of the Lord’s Supper because he valued it highly, and if he is correct, our neglect of the Supper is tantamount to hungry people deciding to starve themselves three weeks out of every four when they could be at a banquet.

In the light of this, I propose to examine Calvin’s eucharistic teaching in the hope that an increased understanding of the arguments of this key Reformation theologian concerning the Supper will lead us to an increased valuing of it. I shall not further discuss issues such as how often we should celebrate the Supper, or quite how it should be done, or whether or not children should be admitted to the Lord’s Table. Rather, I will concentrate on the theological significance of breaking bread and drinking wine as we gather

as the Lord's people. Only as we understand this can we hope to make headway in answering other questions we may have.

It may seem strange to examine the teaching of one particular theologian, no matter how eminent, rather than simply expounding the teaching of the Scriptures. But, for Anglican evangelicals in particular, and indeed for English evangelicals more generally, Calvin's eucharistic theology is significant if only because it is shared by our English Reformers, as expressed in the Book of Common Prayer, the Articles of Religion, and works such as Cranmer's *Defence of the True and Catholick Doctrine of the Sacrament*⁴ and Ridley's *Treatise Against the Error of Transubstantiation*.⁵ Moreover, Calvin is, I suspect, the theologian to whom most of us look as the exemplar of rigorous evangelical thinking. Thus, even if we decide that the Reformers fall short of the Bible at this point, it behoves us at least to understand the heritage from which we are departing. However, more importantly, Calvin's doctrine of the Supper also faithfully captures the essence of the biblical teaching, as I hope to demonstrate. Melvyn Tinker has argued in *Churchman*, from the perspective of speech act theory, that Calvin's view is fundamentally correct.⁶ Here I shall argue from a more extended exposition of Calvin's writings and a consideration of perhaps the key biblical text, 1 Corinthians 10:16f.

Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper must be understood in its sixteenth century context. As is well known, there were three leading contemporary alternatives: Roman, Lutheran and Zwinglian.

Rome held that 'after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things'.⁷ This happens because—

a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood.⁸

One looks at the bread, perceiving bread: the accidents, the bread's sensory aspects, remain unchanged. However, as the substance has changed, when one eats one chews the substance of Christ's body.

Owing to this substantial change, it is right to ‘render in veneration the worship of latria, which is due to the true God, to this holy sacrament’.⁹ In addition, the Mass is a sacrifice—

[I]n this divine sacrament which is celebrated in the mass, that same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner, who once offered Himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross.”¹⁰

Therefore, it is ‘truly propitiatory....For the victim is one and the same’.¹¹

Against Rome, Martin Luther denied that the Mass is a sacrifice: ‘It is quite certain that Christ cannot be sacrificed over and above the one single time he sacrificed himself.’¹² Indeed, ‘Such daily sacrificing...is the greatest blasphemy and abomination ever known on the earth’.¹³ He also denied the doctrine of transubstantiation.¹⁴ However, although he disagreed with Rome over the mode of Christ’s presence, Luther did insist, over against Zwingli, that Christ was bodily, albeit invisibly, present in the bread and wine.¹⁵ Thus, in the Supper, ‘he is just as near to us physically as he was to [those who touched him during his earthly life]’.¹⁶ This being the case, Luther could maintain ‘both the physical and spiritual eating. The mouth eats the body of Christ physically’.¹⁷ He did not, however, believe that physical eating is sufficient: faith is vital, otherwise ‘physical eating is...poisonous and deadly’,¹⁸ hence the importance for Luther of keeping Word and sacrament together, for faith comes by hearing the Word of God.

In order to explain how the exalted Christ could be at God’s right hand and locally present in the Supper Luther developed the doctrine of ubiquity. The key to this was to understand, against Rome and Zwingli, that—

The right hand of God is not a specific place in which a body must or may be, such as on a golden throne, but is the almighty power of God, which at one and the same time can be nowhere and yet must be everywhere.¹⁹

In addition to this, Luther argues for the direct communication of the Christ’s natures which meant that whatever is predicated of Christ’s divine nature can also be predicated of his human nature. As a result, Christ could be physically present anywhere, even in many places at once: his body, as well as his divine

nature, is ubiquitous. To suggest otherwise, according to Luther, would be to separate the divine and human natures, and so fall into Nestorianism. Because of the doctrine of ubiquity, Luther could construct a neat syllogism—

Christ's body is at the right hand of God....The right hand of God, however, is everywhere....Therefore, [Christ's body] surely is present also in the bread and wine at table.²⁰

For Luther this is vital as, if Christ is to be gracious, he must be present.

Huldreich Zwingli viewed Luther's Christology as fundamentally Eutychian, involving a fusion of Christ's divine and human natures.²¹ He therefore denied the ubiquity of Christ's humanity. Rather, as Christ is present at God's right hand—a particular physical location—he cannot be present physically in the Supper.²² The sacrament is no more than a sign of the thing signified.²³ Hence, the words, 'this is my body' are figurative, just as when Jesus said, 'I am the vine', he did not mean he was literally a vine.²⁴ Indeed, if Christ's body were present, 'its mass and substance would be perceived, and it would be pressed with the teeth'.²⁵ The Supper is simply a memorial of Christ's death:²⁶ 'the bread is only a figure of his body to remind us in the Supper that the body was crucified for us.'²⁷

The eucharistic differences separating Luther and Zwingli came to a head in 1529 at the Colloquy of Marburg. At Marburg, the German and Swiss reformers agreed on fourteen articles out of fifteen. In the fifteenth article they agreed on five out of six points. However, they failed to reach an agreement 'on whether the true body and blood of Christ are bodily present in the bread and wine'.²⁸ This led to a tragic split in the Magisterial Reformation, and provided a spur for Calvin to seek 'common ground among the different branches of the Reformation'.²⁹

Before considering his view of the Supper, it will be helpful to grasp his theology of the sacraments generally. For Calvin, sacraments are an

aid to our faith related to the preaching of the gospel...an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his goodwill toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn

attest our piety towards him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men.³⁰

Three things are noteworthy. Firstly, sacraments are related to the preaching of the gospel: 'a sacrament is never without a preceding promise but is joined to it as a sort of appendix.'³¹ But, when joined to the Word, they 'have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace'.³² Their primary direction is therefore God to us, not us to God, in contrast to the Roman Mass. Secondly, as an outward sign and seal the sacraments assure us that God's promises are reliable. It is not that the Word is insufficient; nevertheless we are weak, and so God in his grace provides seals, like those on government documents, to assure us of the truth of his promises.³³ The sacraments do what the Word does, but better, because they also contain a visible component:³⁴ 'The sacraments bring the clearest promises; and they have this characteristic over and above the word because they represent them for us as painted in a picture from life.'³⁵ Thus, they make the Word 'more vivid and sure'.³⁶ Thirdly, sacraments do not, *contra* Rome, work *ex opere operato*. They must be received by faith: this is the God-ward movement as, in response to his promises, we attest our piety.³⁷ However, even this God-ward movement is dependent on God's prior, gracious activity. The Spirit must work through the sacraments to confirm our faith. They

properly fulfil their office only when the Spirit...comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our soul opened for the sacraments to enter in.³⁸

Within this context, Calvin views the Supper as a banquet, whereby we feed on Christ.³⁹ Christ himself is 'the only true food of our soul',⁴⁰ but God gives 'visible signs best adapted to our small capacity'.⁴¹ The Supper is thus a covenant sign and seal, annexed to God's Word.⁴² Hence, Calvin agrees with Luther and Zwingli, against Rome, that the Word of God is indispensable to right administration.

With Zwingli, Calvin agrees that the Supper is a memorial. The Roman Mass 'suppresses and buries the cross and Passion of Christ,' suggesting that it is as weak as the Old Testament sacrifices, because it must be repeated frequently.⁴³ In contrast, the Supper, rightly understood, does not re-enact Christ's sacrifice.

Rather, it

directs and leads us to the cross of Jesus Christ and to his resurrection, to certify us that whatever iniquity there may be in us, the Lord nevertheless recognises and accepts us as righteous.⁴⁴

Christ does not become bread for us in the Supper; he gave himself as bread once for all when he died.⁴⁵ Thus, because the Mass re-offers Christ, whereas the Supper focuses on his one perfect sacrifice of himself, 'There is as much difference between [the Mass] and the sacrament of the Supper as there is between giving and receiving'.⁴⁶ Calvin consistently stresses God's gracious act in Christ, against the Roman view which transforms the Supper into a religion of human works.

However, Calvin goes beyond Zwingli. We do not simply remember Christ in the Supper; we also feed on him. The Supper's chief function is not simply to recall the cross to our minds, but to

seal and confirm that promise by which he testifies that his flesh is food indeed and his blood is drink [John 6:56], which feed us unto eternal life [John 6:55].⁴⁷

In contrast to a typical Roman Catholic view, Calvin does not view John 6 as eucharistic;⁴⁸ 'it would have been inept and unseasonable to preach about the Lord's Supper before He had instituted it'.⁴⁹ Indeed, to suggest that Jesus here speaks of the Supper, inverts the relationship, for 'we might say that Christ intended the holy Supper to be a seal of this discourse'.⁵⁰ John 6 does not speak of the Supper; the Supper signs and seals the promises of John 6.

There is evidence that Zwingli eventually moved away from a purely memorialist position, to a view that is closer to Calvin's own, teaching that in the Supper the body of Christ is eaten 'sacramentally and spiritually'.⁵¹ However, on a classically 'Zwinglian' view, as outlined above, and as espoused by many contemporary evangelicals, it is questionable whether eating the Supper is necessary. One might just as well remember Jesus' death by being present at the Supper; it is hard to see what consuming the bread and wine would add. Zwingli does not suggest that partaking is unnecessary, but his

theology, at least in its earlier form, implies it is not vital. In spite of his sacramental theology being poles apart from Rome, at this point, and for entirely different reasons, they are very close: attendance alone is required to receive the Supper's benefits.

In contrast, Calvin does not separate remembering and feeding. He sees in the memorialist viewpoint a danger of dividing the signs of the Supper (bread and wine) from the things signified (Christ's body and blood). The Supper 'is not a bare figure, but is combined with the reality and substance'.⁵² Whilst it is correct to distinguish the sacrament from the reality it signifies, one must not divide them: sign and signified belong together; therefore, it is right to speak of Christ's presence in the Supper, for in order for us to feed on Christ, he must be present. Calvin's 'argument with the Roman Catholics and Lutherans was over the mode of Christ's presence, not the fact of that presence'.⁵³

It is therefore important to specify what Calvin means when he speaks of Christ's presence. In order to do so, we must understand that union with Christ is at the heart of his doctrine of the Lord's Supper.⁵⁴

Against Luther and Rome Calvin denies physical presence, which necessarily involves a christological heresy—

[W]e must establish such a presence of Christ in the Supper as may neither fasten him to the element of bread, nor enclose him in the bread, nor circumscribe him in any way, [nor] parcel him out to many places at once, [nor] invest him with boundless magnitude to be spread through heaven and earth. For these things are plainly in conflict with a nature truly human.⁵⁵

Christ is locally and physically in heaven. Nevertheless—

There is no ground...for any individual to charge us with holding that he is absent from us, and thus separating the head from the members...but, dwelling in us by his Spirit he raises us to heaven to himself, transfusing into us the vivifying vigour of his flesh.⁵⁶

Thus, *contra* Luther, there is no need for Christ to be physically present in the

bread and wine in order to be gracious to us. For, if we are united to him by his Spirit, he is never absent from us, we are never outside of him.⁵⁷ The Spirit raises us to heaven to feed spiritually on Christ, even as we feed physically on the bread and wine. Thus, a double feeding takes place: 'our souls are fed by the flesh and blood of Christ in the same way that bread and wine keep and sustain physical life.'⁵⁸ In this manner, Calvin overcomes the Zwinglian problem, and demonstrates why partaking of the Supper is vital to receiving its benefits. He also shows a richer understanding of the benefits that flow from the Supper. We do not simply remember Christ's death as we partake, rather we actively feed on the body and blood of the crucified Saviour.

This language of being lifted up to heaven to feed on Christ probably sounds strange to many modern evangelical ears. This is quite possibly because we have neglected the central soteriological importance of the doctrine of union with Christ. Calvin's view here is simply an extension of what Ephesians 2 teaches about faith-union more generally. In bringing those who are dead in trespasses and sins (v. 1) to life together with Christ (v. 5), God raised us with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (v. 6). Making alive and raising are not here two different activities; the latter further explains the former: to be raised is to be made alive.⁵⁹ This life-giving resurrection is linked with God's grace in salvation (v. 6), which is received through faith (v. 8), suggesting that we are raised at the point of faith-union with Christ, i.e. conversion.⁶⁰ The Supper therefore reaffirms this union as, by the working of the Spirit, it signs and seals to us God's gracious promises in Christ, strengthening our faith, and so raising us up to feed once again on Christ. It is not that we ever stop being united to Christ; rather, this ongoing union is strengthened and nourished as we feed on him spiritually even as we feed on the bread and wine physically.

In contrast with modern evangelicals, the importance of faith-union for Calvin is seen in the way it pervades his eucharistic writings. Indeed, it is an even more significant theme than that of remembering Christ's death. He constantly emphasises that in the Supper, by the Spirit, believers feed on Christ as they feed on the bread and wine. Put crudely, the Spirit bridges the vast physical gap that separates Christ from the believer.⁶¹ Therefore, Christ's presence in the Supper is not physical and ontological, versus Rome and Luther; but it is a true presence, versus Zwingli. Calvin's view is best described as a spiritual and

functional presence, ‘with the Lord being present not in the elements themselves but through the actions done with them’.⁶² As signs and signifiers belong together—

The bread and the wine are visible signs, which represent to us the body and blood, but...this name and title of body and blood is given to them because they are as it were instruments by which the Lord distributes them to us.⁶³

Therefore—

We must confess...that if the representation which God gives us in the Supper is true, the internal substance of the sacrament is conjoined with the physical signs [Note, Calvin does not say that the physical signs *become* the internal substance] and as the bread is distributed to us by the hand, so the body of Christ is communicated to us in order that we may be partakers of it.⁶⁴

However, rather than speaking of Christ’s presence to the believer in the Supper, it may be more helpful to speak of the believer’s presence to and with Christ; it is not that Christ comes down and makes himself present to the believer, but rather, the believer is lifted up by the Spirit and made present with Christ. Thus, Keith Mathison suggests that, in contrast to Roman transubstantiation and Lutheran consubstantiation, we might helpfully designate Calvin’s view

suprasubstantiation.... The prefix *supra* means ‘above’, ‘beyond’, or ‘transcending’, [and] communicates the idea that there is a real participation in the substance of Christ’s body and blood, as Calvin taught, but that this participation occurs on a plane that transcends and parallels the plane in which the physical signs exist.⁶⁵

However, the question arises as to whether Scripture supports Calvin’s view at this point. Much biblical language concerning the Supper focuses precisely on remembering Christ’s death,⁶⁶ which would seem to support a more classically Zwinglian view. Calvin’s understanding turns on I Corinthians 10:16f, where Paul warns the Corinthians to flee idolatry, and avoid participating in pagan

altars and the cups of demons (vv. 18-22). To support his exhortation he argues from what happens when Christians share together in the Lord's Supper: they participate in⁶⁷ Christ's body and blood (v. 16). Calvin takes this to mean that believers enjoy communion with the risen Christ. They do so not in a crude, physical sense, nevertheless, they do so truly—

I agree that the reference to the cup as a communion is a figure of speech, but only so long as the truth which the figure conveys is not destroyed; in other words, provided that the reality itself is also present and the soul receives the communion in the blood, just as the mouth tastes the wine.

However, Gordon Fee and C. K. Barrett challenge this interpretation. Noting that in v. 17 *body* refers to the church, they suggest that it must mean the same thing in v. 16.⁶⁹ So Fee—

[Paul] does not mean that by eating the bread believers have some mystical participation in the 'broken body' of Christ, but, as he clearly interprets in v. 17, they are herewith affirming that through Christ's death they are 'partners' in the redeemed community.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, both commentators appear to ignore the parallelism in v16:

a participation in the blood of Christ (16a)
the body of Christ (16b)

In the New Testament, Christ's people are never described as his blood, so v. 16a cannot refer to the church; it must refer to Christ's blood shed on the cross. Therefore, v. 16b probably contains a parallel reference to Jesus' body broken on the cross. Hence, it seems most likely that v. 16 refers to the crucified Christ himself, in whom the Corinthians participate when they share in the Supper. This gives *body* a referent different in v. 16 from v. 17, where it clearly refers to the church, which is one body, although made up of many members. However, it is not impossible for a word to change its referent so quickly (cf e.g., *all* in Romans 5:18). This being the case, Paul's meaning appears to run along these lines: Christians who receive the bread and cup at the Supper participate spiritually in Christ's body and blood (v16). Therefore, *because there is one bread* (Christ's physical body, signified by the bread), *we who are many are one body* (one church), *because we all partake of the one bread*

(Christ) (v. 17).

If this exegesis is correct, Calvin's reading of v16f, and his overall understanding of the spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper, seems to be the most plausible of those on offer.

Since the benefits of the Supper flow from union with Christ, there are corresponding implications for those who are not joined to him by faith. The bread and wine, as visible words, must be received by faith: 'men bear away from this sacrament no more than they gather with the vessel of faith'.⁷¹ For—

just as rain falling upon a hard rock flows off because no entrance opens into the stone, the wicked by their hardness so repel God's grace that it does not reach them.⁷²

Thus, unbelievers receive no benefit from partaking in the Supper. Indeed, it is worse than this. Those who eat unworthily are not in a neutral position regarding the covenant of which the Supper speaks. Like any covenantal activity, the Supper is annexed with blessings and curses, so faithless partakers eat and drink covenant curses upon themselves. They eat condemnation for 'having profaned the mystery by trampling underfoot the pledge of sacred union with God, which they ought reverently to have received'.⁷³

Further, union with Christ has horizontal, as well as vertical implications, as the Epistle to the Ephesians makes clear. As those united with Christ, believers are united to each other. Thus, because the Lord's Supper has union with Christ at its heart, it has serious implications for Christian unity; it should lead believers to mutual love.⁷⁴ If this is absent, the Supper 'is turned into a deadly poison,' just as it is for those without faith.⁷⁵ In so teaching, Calvin faithfully reflects the teaching of I Corinthians 11:27-29. In 11:29, *body* most likely refers back to 10:17,⁷⁶ where it refers to the church, suggesting that Paul is addressing the problem of the loveless relationships characterising the Corinthian congregation (cf ch. 13). The context of chapter 11 strengthens this view: the divisions and factions (vv. 19f) in the Corinthian church were demonstrated by their loveless attitude towards one another, particularly those who had nothing, as they came together to eat the Lord's Supper (20-22). They were profaning Christ's death (v. 26f) because they were failing to discern his

body; that is, in not loving one another, they were failing to recognise Christ's body the church, brought into existence through the very death they were proclaiming as they ate and drank. And so they ate and drank God's judgement (v. 29). Just as there are very real spiritual benefits from feeding on Christ by faith in the Supper, benefits that contemporary evangelicals often downplay, so there are very real spiritual dangers from feeding in an unworthy, faithless and loveless manner.

Cranmer's attempts to fence the Table by including in his eucharistic liturgy dire warnings of the dangers of unworthy reception demonstrate a strongly Calvinistic theology of the Supper—

Dearly beloved in the Lord, ye that mind to come to the holy Communion of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ, must consider how Saint Paul exhorteth all persons diligently to try and examine themselves, before they presume to eat of the Bread, and drink of that Cup. For as the benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive the holy Sacrament; (for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood; then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us;)⁷⁷ so is the danger great, if we receive the same unworthily. For then we are guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ our Saviour; we eat and drink our own damnation, not considering the Lord's Body; we kindle God's wrath against us; we provoke him to plague us with divers diseases, and sundry kinds of death. Judge yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord; repent you truly for your sins past; have a lively and stedfast faith in Christ our Saviour; amend your lives and be in perfect charity with all men; so shall ye be meet partakers of those holy mysteries.⁷⁸

Cranmer's words sound extreme to our ears. It would be rare to hear something similar prior to the administration of the Supper in modern Anglican evangelical churches. Generally one might hear a welcome for all those who believe in Christ and have been baptised, leaving the lack of welcome for unbelievers implicit, rather than explicitly stated. This again may well betray the lack of seriousness with which we take the Supper, and our lack of understanding of its attendant blessings and curses.

In contrast, Calvin's eucharistic theology is biblically faithful, theologically rich and spiritually satisfying. By placing union with Christ at the heart of his understanding, he surmounts the problems inherent in the Roman, Lutheran and Zwinglian views, and holds before believers the riches of God's provision in the bread and the cup, whereby God feeds us in 'a spiritual banquet, wherein Christ attests himself to be the life-giving bread, upon which our souls feed unto true and blessed immortality'.⁷⁹

This being the case, evangelicals neglect the Supper at our peril. The Lord Jesus instituted it for our benefit; to disregard it is to put ourselves in danger of an eviscerated experience of God's gracious promises to us in his Son, and to deny ourselves the very real spiritual benefits that come from feeding on Christ as we partake of bread and wine.

Reinstating the Supper to its rightful place, alongside baptism and the preached Word, at the heart of what we do when we gather in the Lord's name, may involve significant changes to contemporary evangelical practises. It may necessitate a reassessment of the purpose of our Sunday gatherings—are they for evangelism, or should the focus be the edification of believers, regardless of whether unbelievers are present (cf 1 Corinthians 14:24-26 in the context of the rest of the chapter)? It may require a clearer emphasis in our preaching on the importance and significance of union with Christ more generally, and the sacraments more particularly. It may also raise questions of how often the Table should be spread, and who may partake. Clearly a renewed appreciation of our sacramental heritage is not in and of itself the only solution to the challenges facing us at the dawn of the twenty-first century. However, if Calvin is correct in his assessment of the biblical import of the Lord's Supper, as I believe he is, such an appreciation is vital if we are to enjoy fully the benefits of our union with the crucified and risen Christ.

MATTHEW W. MASON is studying for an MTh in Theological and Pastoral Studies at Oak Hill College, London.

ENDNOTES

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* John T. McNeill, ed, Ford Lewis Battles, trans, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960 [1559]), IV.xvii.44, 46.

2. Carl Trueman, "The Incarnation and the Lord's Supper," *The Word Became Flesh': Evangelicals and the Incarnation* David Peterson, ed. (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), pp. 185-208 citing p. 185.
3. Michael Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centred Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 93.
4. Thomas Cranmer, *A Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Saviour Jesus Christ* (Lewes: Christian Focus Ministries Trust, 1987 [1550]).
5. Nicholas Ridley, "A Treatise Against the Error of Transubstantiation," *The Works of Nicholas Ridley* Henry Christmas, ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 1841).
6. Melvyn Tinker, "Language, Symbols and Signs: Was Calvin's View of the Lord's Supper Right?" *Churchman* 112/2 (1998): 131-149.
7. The Council of Trent, *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent* J. Waterworth ed. and trans. (London: Dolman, 1848 [1545-1563]), <<http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/trentall.html>> Session XIII, chap. I.
8. *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* Session XIII chap IV.
9. *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* Session XIII chap IV.
10. *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* Session XII chap II.
11. *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* Session XII chap II.
12. Martin Luther, "That These Words of Christ, 'This Is My Body'," etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics, 1527' *Luther's Works Volume 37: Word and Sacrament III* Robert H. Fischer, ed. and trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961) p. 143.
13. Luther, 'This Is My Body' p. 143.
14. Luther, 'This Is My Body' p. 64.
15. Luther, 'This Is My Body' pp. 69-73.
16. Luther, 'This Is My Body' p. 94.
17. Luther, 'This Is My Body' p. 93.
18. Luther, 'This Is My Body' p. 87.
19. Luther, 'This Is My Body' p. 57.
20. Luther, 'This Is My Body,' pp. 63f.
21. On the Christological problems associated with a Lutheran view of the Supper, see Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* Contours of Christian Theology (Leicester: IVP, 1998), pp. 196-9; also Trueman "The Incarnation and the Lord's Supper," p. 187-9.
22. Huldrych Zwingli, "On the Lord's Supper," *Zwingli and Bullinger*, G. W. Bromiley trans. The Library of Christian Classics vol XXIV (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953 [1526]), p. 186.

23. Zwingli, "On the Lord's Supper," p. 188.
24. Zwingli, "On the Lord's Supper," p.189f.
25. Zwingli, "On the Lord's Supper," pp. 190f.
26. E.g. Zwingli, "On the Lord's Supper," p. 229.
27. Zwingli, "On the Lord's Supper," p. 225.
28. Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* 3rd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) p. 190.
29. Keith A Mathison *Given For You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), p. 5.
30. *Institutes* IV.xiv.1.
31. *Institutes* IV.xiv.3.
32. *Institutes* IV.xiv.17.
33. *Institutes* IV.xiv.5-6.
34. Cf Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1995), p. 137: 'the bare word cannot have its full effect without the sacraments.'
35. *Institutes* IV.xiv.5.
36. Wallace, *Word and Sacrament*, p. 133.
37. On the necessity of faith ,see *Institutes* IV.xiv.7.
38. *Institutes* IV.xiv.9.
39. *Institutes* IV.xvii.1.
40. *Institutes* IV.xvii.1; cf Calvin, "A Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of Our Lord Jesus Christ," John Calvin *Tracts: Containing Treatises on the Sacraments, Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Forms of Prayer, and Confessions of Faith, Volume Second* Henry Beveridge trans. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849 [1540]), §11.
41. *Institutes* IV.xvii.1.
42. Cf Calvin, "Short Treatise," §6.
43. *Institutes* IV.xviii.3 citing Heb. 9:12.
44. Calvin, "Short Treatise," §9.
45. *Institutes* IV.xvii.5.
46. *Institutes* IV.xviii.7.
47. *Institutes* IV.xvii.4.
48. John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St John: 1-10* T. H. L. Parker trans. Calvin's Commentaries (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1961), p. 169.
49. Calvin *John* p170; cf D. A. Carson *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP, 1991) pp. 276-80, 294-9 for further reasons why John 6 is unlikely to be the

Johannine record of the institution of the Supper.

50. Calvin, *John*, p. 170.
51. See Huldreich Zwingli, "An Exposition of the Faith," *Zwingli and Bullinger* G. W. Bromiley, trans. The Library of Christian Classics, vol. XXIV (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953 [1531]), pp. 245-79. In this brief work Zwingli restates the christological problems with suggesting that Christ can be physically present in the Supper. He concludes that, 'as regards a natural, essential and localized presence the humanity is not here, for it has left the world. Hence the body of Christ is not eaten by us naturally or literally, much less quantitatively, but sacramentally and spiritually' (p. 257). To eat Christ spiritually 'is equivalent to trusting with heart and soul upon the mercy and goodness of God through Christ' and may be done without reference to the sacrament (p. 258). To eat sacramentally, however, 'is to eat the body of Christ with the heart and the mind *in conjunction with* the sacrament' (p. 258, italics mine): a view that sounds very close indeed to Calvin. I am grateful to Garry Williams for drawing this reference to my attention, and indeed for stimulating much of the thinking behind this article.
52. "Short Treatise," §15.
53. Cf Mathison, *Given For You*, p. 27.
54. Compare *Institutes* IV.xvii.11 with III.i.1; Mathison *Given For You* p273; Wallace *Word and Sacrament*, p. 143.
55. *Institutes* IV.vii.19,
56. John Calvin, "Mutual Consent in Regard to the Sacraments; between the Ministers of the Church of Zurich and John Calvin, Minister of the Church of Geneva," John Calvin, *Tracts: Containing Treatises on the Sacraments, Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Forms of Prayer, and Confessions of Faith, Volume Second* Henry Beveridge, trans. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849 [1554]), p. 240.
57. Luther, of course, understood the doctrine of faith union (e.g. Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *Three Treatises* (Fortress Press, 1970 [1520]), pp. 261-316; on faith-union see pp. 286-91). Nevertheless, he appears not to have grasped its full implications for a biblical theology of the Lord's Supper.
58. *Institutes* IV.xvii.10; cf John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* John W. Fraser, trans. Calvin's Commentaries (Carlisle, Paternoster, 1960), p. 245.
59. Cf P. T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester: Apollos, 1999), p. 170.
60. Cf Richard B. Gaffin Jr, *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), p. 42.

61. *Institutes* IV.xvii.10.
62. Tinker, "Language, Symbols and Signs," p. 144.
63. Calvin, "Short Treatise," §18.
64. Calvin, "Short Treatise," §19.
65. Keith Mathison, *Given For You*, pp. 279f.
66. E.g. Luke 22:14-22; I Cor. 11:23-26.
67. *koinonia*, 'communal participation'; Anthony C. Thistleton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* New International Greek Testament Commentary (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), p. 761.
68. Calvin, *I Corinthians*, p. 216.
69. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* 2nd edn. Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: A & C Black, 1971), p. 233; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 469.
70. Fee, *I Corinthians*, p. 469.
71. *Institutes* IV.xvii.33.
72. *Institutes* IV.xvii.33.
73. *Institutes* IV.xvii.33.
74. *Institutes* IV.xvii.38.
75. *Institutes* IV.xvii.39.
76. Fee, *I Corinthians*, p. 563.
77. Note the emphasis on feeding on Christ and union with him.
78. 'The Communion' in *The Book of Common Prayer*.
79. *Institutes* IV.xvii.1.