

ZWINGLI'S DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

THERE are many good reasons which call for an investigation of Zwingli's doctrine of the Supper, an enquiry whether the popular and current impression on the subject is correct. It is not only what is due to historical accuracy, and to the reputation of a man whom the Reformed Churches hold in high esteem ; it is called for also in the interest of the true Reformation doctrine of the Sacrament. On the one hand, that doctrine is made to bear the reproach of certain views which are commonly ascribed to Zwingli ; and on the other, certain defective views of the Sacrament which from time to time threaten to invade the Church are prone to shelter themselves under Zwingli's great name. Inasmuch as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli are rightly regarded as a kind of triumvirate of Reformers, of nearly, if not quite, equal authority, it is easy to represent each of the three theories of the Eucharist, which commonly pass under their respective names, as having an equal claim to recognition by the Churches of the Reformation. If a man does not follow Luther or Calvin in his doctrine of the Supper, he is apt to defend himself by asserting that he follows the third of the Reformation Fathers, giving to a view which is really Socinian or Remonstrant the name of the orthodox Reformer of Zürich. The question is, Is he historically justified in so doing ?

It will not be necessary to spend any time in expounding what is commonly understood to have been Zwingli's view of the Lord's Supper. It is usually expressed in the phrase "mere commemoration," and as it is generally represented, at least from outside, it sets the Sacrament on a level with

a modern "memorial service." Theologically it connotes the idea that the elements are *nuda signa*, and denies any specific grace in the Sacrament, any specific presence of Christ and any specific communion with Him.

Now the only official documents in which this view is set forth are not of Reformed but of Socinian origin. It appears, for example, in the Socinian Catechism of Cracow: "Coena Domini est Christi Institutum, ut fideles ipsius panem frangant et comedant et ex calice bibant, mortis ipsius annuntiandae causa."

"Annuntiare mortem Domini est publice ac sacrosancte Christo gratias agere . . . Nonne alia causa, ob quam coenam instituit Dominus, superest? Nulla prorsus."

From this even the early Arminian view differs by a shade, inasmuch as the Remonstrant Confession recognises in the Supper not only the commemoration, but the testifying of "vivificam et spiritualem communionem cum ipso Jesu Christo." What I have called the impression of Zwingli's view may include this latter point, but at any rate it does not go farther.

Neither will it be necessary to show at length that Zwingli did hold and teach that the Holy Supper was a commemoration feast, a feast in commemoration of the death of Christ. For this is the Scriptural basis of all views of the Sacrament whatever. But it may be useful to set forth some at least of the passages in which he has most clearly defined this part of his doctrine.

In his Treatise, *De vera et falsa Religione*, he writes: "Est ergo eucharistia sive coena dominica nihil aliud quam commemoratio, qua ii, qui se morte Christi firmiter credunt patri reconciliatos esse, hanc vitalem mortem annunciant, hoc est, laudant, gratulantur et praedicant."

Similarly, in his Commentary on Exodus, when dealing with the institution of the Passover, he says:

"Quis non videt eucharistiam nostram aliud nihil esse

quam pro morte Christi gratiarum actionem, dominumque pane et vino nihil aliud voluisse quam ut beneficentiae suae nobis signa in manus et oculos poneret? ”

And, in the same connection: “Hic sole clarius videtur, quid prosint signa ut vocant sacramentalia: non enim fidem interiorem, ut plerique somniant, confirmant, sed sensus exteriores admonet ac solantur.” But even here he adds a sentence which invites a closer examination of his view, “Dicit ergo Deus per Mosem populo: ‘Fiet autem quum haec exteriora ob oculos versabuntur et in manibus tractabuntur, ut tibi potentia, gratia et misericordia mea *innoventur.*’ ”

But perhaps the strongest statement of his view on this negative side is that found at the end of his reply to Jakob Strauss: “In order that the simple-minded man who does not quickly see what is contained in high discourse may be in less danger of being misled, I will indicate three points in which Strauss and his party go wrong; for they have no word of God for these.

1. “‘Der Leichnam Christi werde hier leiblich doch unsichtbarlich gegessen: und Christus sei leiblich hier, doch unsichtbarlich,’ reden sie nicht allein ohne sondern wider Gottes Wort.”

2. “‘Der Leichnam Christi leiblich gegessen, befestige den Glauben: gebe das wesentlich das man predige und glaube’ reden sie ohne Gottes Wort.”

3. “St. James teaches that men should anoint the sick and pray for them. If now the Apostles had believed in the confirming power of the corporeal feeding on the Body of Christ, as these assert, then St. James would have said before all else, ‘Bring to him the bread of the Sacrament’; for one in peril of death requires above all else the confirmation of his faith.”

Passages such as these—and there are plenty of them scattered throughout his works—explain, and go far to

justify, the account which is commonly given of Zwingli's view of the Lord's Supper; for they not only assert the commemoration, but they appear at least to deny explicitly every other aspect of the rite.

These passages all belong to what may be called the middle part of his brief career as a Reformer, say between 1524 and 1528. And if we turn, in the first place, to examine his utterances in an earlier stage, we shall find many of a different kind, which must also be taken into account in arriving at Zwingli's doctrine of the Supper.

So far as Zwingli's published works are concerned, his criticism of the Romish system began with a denial of the specific value of fasting and an appeal against the enforced celibacy of the clergy. The sermon on *Die Freiheit der Speisen* was published in 1522, but it was both preceded and followed by other sermons which have not been preserved, but evidently made a deep impression. These were directed against the doctrine of the Mass, but more especially against the conception of the Mass as propitiatory sacrifice. One result of these sermons and the discussion they caused was the First Zürich Disputation, which is important for our purpose. In view of this conference Zwingli had prepared, as he says, a digest of the purport and contents of his speeches and sermons in Zürich in the form of some seventy propositions or articles. Of these, the eighteenth concerns the Mass, and it runs thus: "Christ offered Himself once for all, and is for ever a sufficient and redeeming offering for the sins of all believers; hence we conclude that the Mass is not an offering, but a commemoration of the offering, and guarantee of the redemption which Christ hath procured for us."¹

In the *Exposition* of these articles, published in the same year, Zwingli interprets the words of Institution thus: "Observe this among yourselves in such a way that you

¹ *Op. ed.* Schultens, i. 154.

eat and drink my body and blood for a memorial of Me; that is, that you renew with commemoration the benefit which I have procured for you."

Again in the same *Exposition*, "It remains therefore established by Holy Writ that though 'das heilig Mal der Seel' is not a sacrifice, it is a commemoration and renewal of that which, having once taken place, is for ever effective, and precious enough to make satisfaction for our sins to the righteousness of God."

"On this account I have for some years called the enjoyment of this Meal (*diese Speis niessen*), a commemoration of the suffering of Christ and not a sacrifice. But for some time past Martin Luther has entitled this Meal a Testament, a name with which I willingly concur; for while he has named it according to its nature and property, I have named it according to its use and employment; and there is no contradiction between the two names." And, in general, Zwingli gives in the same exposition a solemn assurance to the simple-minded "that there is no dispute as to whether the body and blood of Christ are eaten and drunk, *for no Christian has that in doubt (denn daran zweiflet kein Christ)*, but the dispute is whether it is a sacrifice or only a commemoration (of the Sacrifice)."

In this article, therefore, and Zwingli's exposition of it we have to observe two things. (1) as Dorner says (*Hist. Prot. Theol.*, p. 300): "The characteristic thing in all Zwingli's writings prior to 1524 is his opposition to the conception of the Supper as Sacrifice or Mass." (2) He distinctly represents the Supper as commemoration and more. It is in some sense an eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ; it is not only a commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ, but in some sense a renewal of the benefit of that sacrifice.

The second disputation of Zürich was specially concerned with the questions of Pictures and the Mass (1523, August). There we find Zwingli saying: "Touching the Mass, how-

ever, I declare thus: in the first place let all men know that neither my speech nor that of my brother Leo tends or will ever tend to suggest that there is any kind of deceit or falsehood about the body and blood of Christ; but all our effort is directed to showing that it is not a sacrifice, which one can offer for another. . . . But according to its first name it is a sacrifice, that is, a ransom (*bezahlung*) for our sin, which God Himself hath offered for our sins" (*Op.*, i. 498).

A passage to the same effect will be found in his *Kurze christliche Einleitung* of the end of the same year: "Whatever may be said about the Mass, we must first of all make clear, in order that none may be offended (*verletzt*) that no one has any intention of doing away with the body and blood of Christ, or disparaging it, or teaching that it is naught, or that the Mass has any other meaning than the participating (*niessen*) in the body and blood of Christ" (*Op.*, i. p. 562).

Again, "Das sacrament nûts anders ist weder das niessen des lychnams und blut Christi" (*Op.*, i. p. 564).

Further evidence to the same effect is found in the so-called *Canon Missae*, drawn up by Zwingli in 1523 for use in the Reformed Congregation of Zürich. It is there laid down that the bread and the wine are to be given to the communicants with the words, "Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi; Sanguis Domini nostri; prosit tibi ad vitam aeternam." And in the prayers we find such phrases as these: "ut ad hoc sacrosanctum filii tui convivium accedamus, cujus ipse et hospes est et epulum." "Da ut quotquot ex hujus filii tui corporis sanguinisque cibo participaturi sunt."

It is plain from these and many similar passages which might be quoted that at this period of his activity as a Reformer Zwingli held and taught that the Supper was more than mere commemoration, that it was a means of

grace by which a positive benefit might be received (though he might not have said "may be conferred"), that he recognised in it a true partaking of the body and blood of Christ.

If we now recur to the point from which we started, the strong assertion that the Eucharist is "*nihil aliud quam pro morte Christi gratiarum actionem,*" and the like, when we seek for an explanation of what seems a glaring inconsistency, it appears most simple and natural to suppose that Zwingli's views on this subject had developed or changed in the direction of finding less meaning in the Sacrament than he had done at the outset. And I suppose that is the explanation with which those have been contented who have traced his thought thus far.

But surely some other explanation must be sought in face of the fact that in the third and last period of his short career as a Reformer (1528-1531) there is again abundant evidence of the same positive elements in his teaching.

It would be tedious to go through the report of the famous conference at Marburg, in which Luther and Zwingli met for the only time in their lives. But any one who takes the trouble to do so will not only see reason to admire the courteous and conciliatory spirit of Zwingli in his genuine desire to find a common formula, but will confirm the judgment of Bullinger on the whole matter—"that the two parties were at one with one another in all the Articles, except in regard of the degree of the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament (*ohne in der Mass der Gegenwärtigkeit des Libs und Bluts Christi*). The Article on which they agreed was as follows: "quod Sacramentum altaris sit sacramentum veri corporis et sanguinis Jesu Christi, et spiritualis istius veri corporis et sanguinis sump-tio præcipue unicuique Christiano sit necessaria." They further agreed that the purpose of the Sacrament was "ut infirmas conscientias ad fidem et dilectionem excitet per Spiritum Sanctum." The only point on which Zwingli

differed from Luther was whether the true body and blood of Christ were present "*corporaliter* in pane et vino."

To this we have not only the testimony of the Articles themselves, but that of the interesting letter of Luther to his wife, written the same day as the Articles were signed. "I do want you to know that our friendly colloquy at Marburg is at an end, and that we are agreed in almost every point, except that the opposite party wants to have only bread in the Lord's Supper, and acknowledge the spiritual presence of Christ in the same."

No one can honestly charge Zwingli with truckling to Luther on this occasion. On some points, *e.g.* on Penance and Invocation of Saints, he showed a stubborn independence; and if at Marburg he accepted, as he must have done, a non-"Zwinglian" view of the Sacrament, it clearly follows that he did not regard such a view as either inconsistent with Scripture or inimical to the faith of the Reformed Church.

Again, this positive side of Zwingli's teaching on the Supper appears very clearly in his Confession addressed to Francis I. three months before the Reformer's death. "Christum credimus vere esse in coena immo non esse Domini coenam nisi Christus adsit. . . . Adserimus igitur non sic carnaliter et crasse manducari corpus Christi in coena, ut isti perhibent, sed verum Christi corpus credimus in coena sacramentaliter et spiritualiter edi, a religiosa, fidei et sancta mente, ut Chrysostomus sentit."

We have here the assertion of the real presence of Christ in the Supper, and of that presence as essential to its validity; further, the assertion that the body of Christ is eaten in the Supper "sacramentally and spiritually." In fact, we have a doctrine closely approximating to that of Calvin,¹ of Cosin and Overall, of Jeremy Taylor and Hooker

¹ Valuable confirmation of the view here maintained as to Zwingli's doctrine is found in Calvin's recognition of it as consonant with his own. He did not

in England. There seems no reason to doubt that Zwingli would have assented *ex animo* to the view stated by Overall for example: "In Sacramento Eucharistiæ corpus et sanguis Christi, adeoque totus Christus adhibetur digne recipientibus, non per modum transubstantionis nec per modum consubstantionis, sed Spiritu Sancto per fidem operante."

For Zwingli did connect the presence in sacramental sense with the bread. Thus, in his letter to the German princes, he writes: "Diximus (de consecrato pane) quod nullo modo volumus Papistarum sensu capi quasi panis sit conversus in corpus Christi reale aut naturale, sed in sacramentale. Puta si quotidianus panis sanctificatur per verbum et orationem, multo magis ille panis qui mutatur ut sacramentale corpus Christi nunc sit, qui prius vulgaris erat, sanctificatur et consecratur ut jam divinus panis sit et sacer."

It will not be necessary to point out how widely this view of the Sacrament differs from that commonly ascribed to Zwingli. It is in fact what might be called the Reformed Catholic view.

It might be more pertinent to enquire how this grasp of the objective value of the Sacrament is to be reconciled with the statements to which I referred at the outset. The explanation may be sought along one, possibly along all, of three lines. 1. Zwingli differed from the other leaders of his time, and especially from Luther, in his intense desire to preserve the unity of the Visible Church Reformed. His object was to go as far as possible with his opponents on either side, to emphasize points of agreement rather than points of difference. This tendency might well be interpreted to his discredit, as every attempt to "be all things to all men" can be. But such a charge is fully met by the stubbornness

deny a difference, but he saw that it was only a difference of emphasis. His defence of Zwingli and the "Zürich doctrines" is chivalrous, but it is evidently sincere. And no one who knows Calvin and his doctrine will suspect him of tolerating a doctrine of "mere commemoration." See Calvin's *Tracts*, II. pp. 196, 207, 252, and, indeed, the whole of his Second Defence against Westphal.

and consistency with which he resisted, on the one hand, the doctrine of the Mass as propitiatory sacrifice and other Romish notions, and on the other the anti-sacramentarian views of the Anabaptists and others.

2. The apparent ambiguity or inconsistency might arise from want of clear thinking or dialectic power in himself. I should be prepared to give weight to this, at least, to the extent of recognising that Zwingli was not the equal of Calvin, for example, in profound constructive thought, and that most of his published work consists of controversial tracts thrown off in the heat of conflict and in great haste. But comparatively little weight needs to be assigned to either of these explanations, when due weight is allowed to the third, viz., that the object of his criticism was not the Roman doctrine of the Eucharist as a whole, but only a few, practically only two points in it. These were the Mass as propitiatory sacrifice and the presence of the Body of Christ *in* or *sub* the consecrated bread *corporaliter* or "leiblich." In spite of the copiousness and frequency with which the subject is treated by Zwingli, his criticism is really narrowed to these two points; but against these he is so vehement and insistent that in not a few passages his denials sweep away more than he intends.¹ The only opponents whom he had to meet on this side were those who asserted that the Body of Christ was "wesentlich und leiblich gegessen." And where he seems to surrender a partaking of any kind, he must be corrected by his own indubitable testimony to himself. He appears himself to have been conscious of the danger of misunderstanding, as when he says: "And I have called it a commemoration in accordance with the Word of God in order that I might overthrow

¹ This is plainly the explanation adopted by Calvin, who says, *e.g.*, in his Second Answer to Westphal: "Æcolampadius and Zwinglius, at the commencement of the dispute, from being too intent on refuting superstition, did not speak of the Sacrament in sufficiently honourable terms." Compare also Calvin's *Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, §§ 56, 58.

the view of those who make of it a sacrifice," and adds that "Christ beyond all doubt (*zu sicherheit*) has given his flesh and blood "zu einer Speis so dick wir die Speis niessen werden, den Tod, das ist das erlosen und aufopfern Christi auskundend und danksagend" (*Op.*, i. 249).

If any one were to start from Zwingli's positive doctrine as I have now collated it, and were patiently to bear in mind the narrowness of the field towards which his criticisms are directed, I venture to think that he would find little difficulty in harmonizing even those passages which seem so negative with the non-Zwinglian view which I have claimed for him.

One other point seems worth adverting to. Throughout his works, and especially in his controversy with Luther, we find Zwingli appealing, and that with great confidence, to Augustine. "Nobiscum sentit Augustinus," he says to the Emperor Charles V. To the German princes, "sed ne nimis longus sim, . . . in hac de sacramentis et eorum virtute controversia ad arbitrum aut sequestrum Augustinum rejici me patiar." And at Marburg Luther candidly admits that it is so. "Augustinum et Fulgentium habet ihr auf euer Seiten."

Does this point to a misunderstanding of Augustine on the part of Zwingli and Luther, or to an ambiguity in the teaching of Augustine himself, such as Canon Gore points out? (*Dissertations*, p. 232). "Augustine's language, as a whole, is certainly susceptible of being interpreted in the sense of an objective spiritual presence in the elements; or it may fairly be interpreted on a receptionist theory like Hooker's: it is in fact somewhat inconsistent." There is certainly more in common between Augustine's view of the Sacrament and Zwingli's than has been generally supposed; and if there is some inconsistency or ambiguity about Zwingli's teaching also, he too may perhaps be pardoned and not dubbed a "Zwinglian."