

CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

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ABSTRACT. In order to pinpoint its *proprium*, it is necessary to understand John Calvin's Eucharistic theology within the wider context of the intra-Protestant debates of his time. As a second-generation Reformer, Calvin developed his ideas explicitly in reaction to and as a middle way between the Lutheran and Swiss Reformed discussions of the 1520's. To that end this essay first focuses on the main developments from the Middle Ages onwards, and then presents Calvin from the perspective of the positions taken up by some of his contemporaries, in particular Philipp Melancthon. Next, some representative texts written by Calvin himself are analysed. Although Calvin's Eucharistic views were not from the beginning a coherent and unified doctrine but developed only gradually, they may be described in a systematic-synthetic way. With respect to the matter of closed, open, and frequent communion, it is observed that for Calvin a regular celebration is essential to the deepening of the believer's union with Christ.

KEY WORDS: John Calvin, the Lord's Supper, Eucharistic theology, Reformed sacramentology, communion

Introduction

Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is not just any chapter from Calvin's theology.¹ In his Eucharistic theology we touch upon the core of Calvin's thought. This is true not only for Calvin, but for all major sixteenth-century

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Protestant and Catholic theologians. In their sacramentology all main lines of their thought met, as in a prism or crystallization point. Unsurprisingly, it is in the views on the Eucharist—the heart of sixteenth-century theology—that agreement was sought, but at the same time it was this doctrine that usually meant a parting of the ways between Catholics and Protestant, and between the various Protestant denominations. With Calvin, too, his doctrine of the Holy Supper touched on the doctrine of God, Christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology.

- Matters regarding the doctrine of God include, for instance, the question whether the accent is on God’s transcendence, his immanence, or on both. Is He simultaneously absent and present in the sacrament, offering Himself up to us whilst at the same time withdrawing from all human attempts to grasp Him?
- The doctrine of the Holy Supper also required important christological decisions: was Christ present in bread and wine in his divine nature only, or also in his human nature (so the Lutherans), or as a God-man (so Melancthon)? Did Calvin in his Eucharistic theology remain faithful to the pronouncement of Chalcedon (451) that the two natures of Christ are merged (*unitae*) in hypostatic union undivided (*indivise*), non-separate (*inseparabiliter*), but without fusing (*inconfusae*) or changing (*immutabiliter*)? Or were the Lutherans correct in accusing Calvin of Nestorianism—i.e., separating the two natures—in his view that Christ was really present in the sacrament in his divine nature, but that at the same time his human nature remained behind in Heaven, sitting at the right hand of God? Or could the Lutherans be accused of the opposite—that is, a tendency towards Eutychianism or monophysitism: fusing the two sides into one human-divine nature, so that Christ’s presence in bread and wine also included his human nature?
- Besides the doctrine of God and christology, pneumatology was also a factor in the doctrine of the Holy Supper. Did Christ’s presence in the sacrament “through the Holy Spirit” imply his *real* presence (so Calvin), or was the understanding of the Holy Spirit essentially humanist-spiritualist rather than biblical-pneumatological, and did “spirit” in fact represent the human activity in the commemoration of the absent Christ (so Zwingli)?
- Finally, in its ecclesiology the doctrine of the Holy Supper touched on questions such as: does the celebration of the Supper only have a hori-

zontal dimension, i.e., as a mutual union between participants, and a society of like-minded individuals (so Zwingli and the Anabaptists), or does the Eucharist also have a vertical dimension, as a union of the celebrating congregation with Christ their head, and is what gathers around the table no less than the body of Christ, i.e., his congregation (so Martin Bucer and Calvin)?

So, bringing up Calvin's sacramentology is an attempt to find the essence of Calvin's theology. In the sixteenth century theology was not only a matter of conviction or belief, but also of identity. Ask a contemporary of Calvin's about his view on the sacraments and he will show you his ID. This means that in order to be able to pinpoint the characteristic aspect or *proprium* of Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Supper it will be necessary to first understand his thought within the wider context of the intra-Protestant debates of his time. As a second-generation Reformer, Calvin developed his ideas explicitly in reaction to and as a middle way between the Lutheran and Swiss Reformed discussions of the 1520's. What were the various positions Calvin was confronted with? To answer this question I will first sketch the main developments from the Middle Ages onwards in the next section (§ 2), and then (§ 3) indicate Calvin's positions in relation to several landmarks of Reformed theology. I will assume a basic knowledge of Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Supper. This approach means that in the first half of this essay I will present Calvin from the perspective of the positions taken up by some of his contemporaries. Next (§ 4), I would like to analyze some representative texts on the Holy Supper written by Calvin himself. Section 5 is devoted to the development of Calvin's Eucharistic theology, and § 6 offers a brief systematic-synthetic description of Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Supper. Finally, in § 7, a few words will be devoted to the specific question whether Calvin's theology contains concrete advice on the matter of closed or open communion.

Calvin's Context: A Bird's Eye View of the Developments Since the Middle Ages

A crucial problem for medieval theology was the question of the transcendence and immanence of God. Did God transcend our reality, or was He present in creation and was it possible to find Him there? This question became focused on the Church as the traditional representation of God in the world, or, in theological terms, on the Church as the means of grace, and its

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sacraments as the instruments of grace. Did God transcend these means, or was He fully present in them? Roughly speaking there were two main positions on this matter. The Dominican Thomas Aquinas (1224/25-1274), who was to put his mark on Tridentine theology, emphasized the immanence. Applied to the sacraments this meant that, according to Aquinas, these *contain* God's grace. The Franciscan John Duns Scotus (c. 1265/66-1308) emphasised God's transcendence and held that the sacraments *accompany* grace—that is, grace is conferred by the sacraments, but does not coincide with them, and is also available outside the sacraments.

All sixteenth-century reformers were confronted with these problems as university students, took up their positions, and so marked the mainstreams within the Protestant reformation that were later to be named after them. Luther (1483-1546) showed himself a rabid anti-Scotist in his entire theology and, together with Aquinas, emphasised God's immanence: grace was to be had through the Word and the sacraments. Luther and his followers wanted to “draw Christ into the flesh” (*ins Fleisch ziehen*), feel Him with the tongue and grasp Him, in order never again to relinquish the consolation of God's presence that Luther had missed so much during his time in the monastery. This desire took on such proportions that they came to speak of Christ's “real” presence, even his “substantial”, “carnal”, and “local” presence, of local inclusion in bread and wine (*localis inclusio*) or impanation (*impanatio*), implying the doctrines of consubstantiation and corporeal ubiquity. Contra the transubstantiation doctrine of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, the consubstantiation doctrine recognized that bread and wine retained their original substance, while carrying the real presence of Christ's body and blood in (*in*), with (*cum*), and under (*sub*) their substance. The corporeal ubiquity or omnipresence of Christ's human body at the same time on all Supper tables all over the world was the obvious christological consequence of the real-presence doctrine, even though it was mainly Luther's followers (especially Johann Brenz) who drew this conclusion and further elaborated sacramental christology in this sense. To Luther, Christ's real presence in the sacrament was simply still based on the consecration words in Matthew 26—“Dominus dixit”, Luther liked to say: “The Lord [himself] has said it”.

In the other camp, the Neo-Platonic-Augustinian spiritualist and humanist outlook of the Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) made him the advocate of transcendence: to him, the crux of the matter was Christ's real absence rather than real presence. The word *est* in the consecration

words he interpreted as *significat*, “This means my body”. According to this significative view, what the mouth received was only bread and wine, while the faith *commemorated* the sacrifice at Golgotha that Christ, now actually sitting at the right hand of God (*ad dexteram Dei*), had made a long time ago. To Zwingli, the Holy Supper was, in order: a commemorative meal (*Gedächtnismahl*), an emphasizing of the brotherly communion (*Gemeinschaftsmahl* in a horizontal sense: *communio sanctorum*), and a pledge or oath of faith and allegiance to Christ (a confessional and a commitment meal). For the latter aspect Zwingli used the beautiful term *Pflichtzeichen* (literally: “pledge sign”). The *Pflichtzeichen* was the oath that Swiss mercenary soldiers, whose military allegiance changed every year, swore on the colours of the war lord who had enlisted their services, as a pledge to do battle on his behalf only. This was how Zwingli liked to see the Holy Supper: as a *distinctivum* or a sign by which the participants distinguished themselves from the world, and committed themselves to the service of Christ. Stated in theological terms: Zwingli put the commemorative aspects of the sacrament first, followed by the ecclesiological aspects, with the ethical issues coming last. Note that for Zwingli the Holy Supper lacked any trace of a gift character: it did *not* confer communion with Christ.

The Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer (1491-1551), who in several respects had a decisive influence on Calvin, especially during the latter's stay in Strasbourg 1538-1541, initiated the *via media* between the positions taken by Wittenberg and Zurich I have just sketched, a middle ground we know as the Reformed position. Bucer underwent different influences in his development and managed to combine these into a harmonious whole. He started out as a Thomist (immanence) in the monastery in his birthplace in the Alsace, was won over by the Luther camp at the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 (immanence), next became an Erasmian and Zwinglian (transcendence), and finally reached the synthesis that Christ's presence in the sacrament is real and is conferred, but “in the manner of the Holy Spirit” (*modo Spiritus Sancti*), i.e., Spiritually with a capital S, or rather, pneumatologically: real and non-illusory, but not bodily or carnally. This dialectics was to make Bucer a builder of bridges—in the end, non-successful—between Luther and Zwingli's successor Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575).

The bipolarity in Bucer's views was also to characterize Calvin's, although the latter, unlike Bucer, came under the lasting influence of a reviving Scotism (transcendence). Calvin, too, emphasized the gift character of the sacrament, the union with the real Christ, or, in sacramental terminolo-

gy, being “fed” upon his body—Calvin emphasized the participation in the substance of his body and blood on the one hand, and, on the other, the role of the Holy Spirit as the author of this sacramental union, bridging the gap between the body that remains in Heaven and the celebrating community on earth.

With their dualist depreciation of outward appearances such as the Church, Bible, sacraments, and ceremonies, the Anabaptists were even more radical advocates of spiritualism than Zwingli: for them the commemorative, communal, and ethical aspects were the overriding aspects. The Council of Trent (1545-63) fully endorsed the Thomist view and confirmed the doctrinal decision of the Fourth Lateran Council.

Within the over-all spectrum I have just sketched I would now like to concentrate on some landmarks within the Protestant confession regarding the Holy Supper, in order to be able to pinpoint Calvin’s position more exactly.

Calvin’s Position Regarding Some Major Points of Reformed Doctrine

The “Confessio Augustana Invariata” (1530)

The most influential Eucharistic formula in the sixteenth century was without doubt that of Article X of the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530. This had been drawn up by Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560). After the introduction in 1529 of the death penalty for radicals and “sacramentarians” (among whom the Zwinglians)—as a reaction to the Peasants’ War—Melanchthon stated the Lutheran view for the benefit of Emperor Charles V in terms as closely as possible to the Catholic position, at the 1530 Diet of Augsburg. The result was that this Lutheran confession, still authoritative today, presents the most Catholic doctrine of the Holy Supper. Calvin did not sign this confession; in a moment we will see why. Article X, on the Holy Supper, ran as follows; I am giving both the German and Latin versions, which are slightly different:

X. Vom heiligen Abendmahl.

Von dem Abendmahl des Herren wird also gelehrt, daß *wahrer* Leib und Blut Christi wahrhaftiglich *unter der Gestalt* des Brots und Weins im

Abendmahl gegenwärtig sei und da ausgeteilt *und genommen* werde. Derhalben wird auch die Gegenlehr verworfen.²

In translation:

X. On the Holy Supper.

Regarding the Lord's Supper it is taught that *the true* body and blood of Christ are truly present in the Supper *under the forms* of bread and wine, and are handed out *and taken* there. For this reason, the opposing doctrine is rejected.

X. De coena Domini.

De coena Domini docent, quod corpus et sanguis Christi *vere* adsint et distribuantur *vescentibus* in coena Domini; et improbant secus docentes.³

In translation:

X. On the Holy Supper.

Regarding the Lord's Supper it is taught that body and blood of Christ are *truly* present, and are handed out *to the eaters* at the Supper of the Lord. Those adhering to another doctrine are rejected.

What was on the Supper table during the celebration, according to this article? The German version says “the true body and blood of Christ”. Calvin could have agreed to this, even though the Lutherans interpreted the adjective “true” (“true body”) in a material sense, which Calvin rejected because he wanted to retain the mystery of Christ's ascension and elevation to his circumscribed position *ad dexteram Dei*. However, Melancthon also said that the true body and blood were present “under the forms” of bread and wine, and with this he came close to the Catholic formulation—compare this to the text of Lateran IV (1215): “body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar *sub speciebus panis et vini* [under the forms of bread and wine]”. No wonder that the Catholics interpreted Melancthon's text as a reference to the transubstantiation, something Calvin was of course unable to subscribe to.

2 *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 10th ed. (Göttingen, 1986) (henceforth *BSLK*), 64.

3 *BSLK*, 64.

What does the Latin version of article X. tell us there was on the table? Objectively (*vere*) the body and blood of Christ: *corpus et sanguis Christi vere adsint*. This body and blood were not only actually present, but were also objectively “handed out to the eaters”. So, the participants did not receive bread and wine as a sign or a symbol of Christ’s body, a sign that, if received in faith, would refer to Christ’s body and sacrifice; on the contrary, Christ’s body and blood was handed out to them in actual fact (*vere*) and they received it (in the German version: “ausgeteilt und genommen”, it was handed out and taken). Calvin would have formulated this, not as “Christ’s body and blood are truly handed out to the eaters (*vescentibus*)”, but, “Christ’s body and blood are truly handed out to the believers (*credentibus*)”. This would prevent sacramental automatism, which makes faith unnecessary and would, if necessary, push down Christ’s body down the throats of even children and unbelievers (*impii*). The background to this Lutheran view was the idea of the power of the Word, especially the consecration words (“Dominus dixit”), which resulted in the administration of the sacrament being effective *ex opere operato* (“from the work having been worked”, “by the very fact of the action’s being performed”). Moreover, had Christ not come with the express purpose of justifying the impious? It was feared that Calvin’s emphasis on the precondition of faith would make faith a creative factor in determining whether or not participants receive Christ. The *Augsburg Confession* maintained Luther’s pastoral maxim that the Lord’s Supper can only serve as a consolation if no human conditions need to be fulfilled.

The “Confessio Augustana Variata” (1540)

By “the opposing doctrine” rejected by the Lutherans in Article X, Melancthon meant the more subjective approach taken by the “Zwinglians” in Southern Germany and Switzerland. Unavoidably, their figurative view made them the victims of Melancthon’s Augsburg attempt to reconcile the Lutheran and Catholic doctrines. Melancthon soon regretted his action. When in the 1530s it became clear that a compromise with Rome was impossible, and when, having met Calvin in 1539 (in Frankfurt), he found that they got along very well, Melancthon rewrote the *Augsburg Confession*, one reason being to accommodate the reformed viewpoint in Article X. In this *Altered Augsburg Confession* of 1540 (*Confessio Augustana Variata*) Article X now read as follows:

X. De coena Domini.

De coena Domini docent, quod *cum* pane et vino vere *exhibeantur* corpus et sanguis Christi vescentibus in coena Domini.⁴

In translation:

X. On the Lord's Supper.

Regarding the Lord's Supper it is taught that *with* bread and wine the body and blood of Christ are truly *represented-and-given* to the eaters at the Supper of the Lord.

This Calvin-friendly version not only lacked the rejection of “the contrary doctrine”, but contained a fundamental change. What is on the Lord's Table according to this new version? No longer “objective” “body and blood”, but bread and wine. Another essential aspect was the introduction of the preposition *cum* (together with), “with bread and wine”, and the disappearance of the verbs “to be present and handed out” (*adsint et distribuuntur*), to be replaced by *exhibere*, which means “to represent visually and confer actually”. *Exhibere* was used in Luther's writings, and was to become one of the central terms in Bucer's and Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Hence, according to the altered version of the *Augustana*, the participants received bread and wine as representations or signs of something else (the thing signified), namely the body and blood. These they received truly, *cum pane*, *with* the bread, either in a temporal (at the same time as) or in an instrumental sense (by means of). Some room had been left for the Lutherans to interpret this *cum* as “under the forms of”; at the same time, it enabled Calvin to receive, with the bread as a sign, the communion with Christ (namely, through the Holy Spirit) whilst retaining the local presence of his body in Heaven. To put it differently: the use of the preposition *cum* (with) prevented a massive identification of bread and body (“bread=body”); at the same time, it also excluded unbelievers' automatically eating Christ's body (the *manducatio impiorum*), whilst leaving room for the Reformed precondition of faith as the hand that receives Christ. Unlike the original version of 1530 Calvin did sign the *Confessio Augustana Variata* of 1540. In Germany this confession was adopted only temporarily and locally; it was not included in

4 BSLK, 65.

the definitive Lutheran *Book of Concord* of 1580. Meanwhile, it had brought Melanchthon to a position in-between Wittenberg and Geneva.

Melanchthon's "Advice Regarding the Eucharistic Controversy in Heidelberg" (1560)

In order to get an even clearer picture of Calvin's position and his independence *vis-à-vis* the Lutheran view, we will remain with Melanchthon a moment longer. When this co-reformer and successor of Luther's, after a long hesitation, finally openly declared his alliance to Calvin's views regarding the Holy Supper, Germany was in turmoil. This took place with the publication in 1560 of Melanchthon's *Advice regarding the controversy on the Lord's Supper* [Iudicium de controversia de coena Domini], addressed to the Reformed Count Palatine Frederick III, the well-known initiator of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563). Shortly before the publication of this *Iudicium* Melanchthon had died; had he lived longer, a considerable part of Germany—the so-called Philippists—would have joined the Reformed camp. I will now discuss some selected sentences from the *Advice*.

What first strikes the eye is Melanchthon's counsel to observe the consecration words, not as they are found in the de Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 26, etc.), but as they were passed on by the apostle Paul, i.e., 1 Corinthians 10:16. Melanchthon writes:

And in this controversy it would be best to stick to Paul's words: "The bread that we break, *κοινωνία ἐστὶ τοῦ σώματος* (*koinoonía esti tou soomatos*) [is *participation* in the body]"⁵

Where the synoptic rendering of the consecration words, *Hoc est corpus meum*, offered room for a material identification ("*Hoc=corpus*"; bread=flesh), the Pauline version pre-empted such an identification by its explanatory addition of the word *koinoonía*: "The bread=participation in [the body]". Here, Melanchthon shared Calvin's figurative view of the "real" presence as a spiritual presence. Consequently, the bread was a *sign* of, or an *instrument* for, participation. Orthodox Lutherans would always cite the synoptic version of the consecration words; anybody referring to 1 Corinthians 10:16 in this alone immediately showed his "Reformed" views.

5 Philipus Melanchthon, *Iudicium de controversia de coena Domini* (Heidelberg, 1560), CR 9,960-963, cited after the edition in *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl, Studienausgabe* (Gütersloh, 1951-1975) (henceforth *MSA*) 6, 482-486, there 484.

The word *κοινωνία* requires explanation. [...] Paul does not say [...]: “The bread is the true body of Christ”, but: “it is participation”, which means *something that evokes* an association [*consociatio*] with Christ's body. And this association takes place *in the action* [*in actu*], and *not without reflection*, as when mice nibble at the bread [which has fallen on the floor] [*et quidem non sine cogitatione, ut cum mures panem rodunt*].⁶

These words might have been written by Calvin. Christ is not present in the elements as such, but *in actu*, only in the action or celebration of the Supper, not outside it or after it, for believers. By linking a spiritual (1 Corinthians 10) to a ceremonial eating (the association takes place *in actu*), Melancthon avoided the preconceptions and consequences attached to oral eating (something which unbelievers and mice may indeed do in the same way), such as local inclusion, consubstantiation, substantial presence, and ubiquity:

Sarcerius demands that the pieces of bread which have fallen on the floor be burned, together with the scratched-up earth. [Recently] I was asked, “whether the body of Christ also descends into the stomach”. Rejecting these prodigious questions, it is more sensible to stick to Paul's phrase. [...] God's Son is present in the ministry of the Gospel, where He certainly works in the faithful [*credentibus*].⁷

Finally, citing the Church fathers and invoking a “Swiss” concept, Melancthon went so far as to call bread and wine “symbols” of Christ's body and blood (*σύμβολα του σώματος και αίματος*, “*symbola tou sōmatos kai haimatos*”), and to label the bread an “anti-type” (*αντίτυπον*). This was a well-known concept from the printers' trade: the stamp used by the printer was called “type”; the impression left by the stamp on paper, fabric or a book binding was the counterfeit, the anti-type, not the stamp itself, the original. The original remained with the printer, the customers received the anti-types. In this way, the bread was the *counterfeit* of Christ's body, not the actual body itself; this remained in Heaven. It is a well-known fact that Calvin went to great trouble to get Melancthon to move from Wittenberg to Geneva. This was in vain; Melancthon died an untimely death (19 April 1560), a crypto-Calvinist (a Calvinist in secret), driven into a corner by opponents from his own circle.

6 MSA 6, 484.

7 MSA 6, 485.

Some Representative Fragments from Eucharistic Texts by Calvin

Before I present a systematic-synthetic description of Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Supper, I would like to analyze some characteristic fragments from Calvin's texts on the Eucharist.

***Confession of Faith Concerning the Eucharist (1537);
Union with Christ, Pneumatology, and Holiness***

There is at least one important area in which Calvin went one step further than his German friend Philipp: that of pneumatology. Here, he acknowledged his similarity to and dependence on Martin Bucer. The question was not *whether* Christ was in the sacrament (*quod*), but *how* He was present there (*quomodo*) and was eaten (*modus manducationis*). In the aporia of the *quomodo* Melanchthon took refuge with the "*ubivoli* presence" or the ubiquity by will, i.e., the presence of the Lord "whenever and wherever He wishes". Moreover, he perceived the real presence as a "personal presence": body and blood are not mere parts of Christ but the entire living Lord. Since throughout the New Testament He promised that He would be present to believers, Christ could be personally present in his Supper even though seated at God's right hand. However, Melanchthon did not elucidate the exact manner in which participation in Christ is achieved. Calvin, too, together with Luther, Melanchthon, and Bucer, emphasized the mystery character of the sacrament. But Calvin went further: sharing Melanchthon's view of *praesentia personalis*, he solved the aporia by introducing his view of the working of the Holy Spirit as author of the participation in Christ's body. This was prominently presented by Calvin as early as 1537, in his *Confession of Faith concerning the Eucharist* [Confessio fidei de eucharistia]:

We confess that the spiritual life which Christ bestows upon us does not rest on the fact that He vivifies us with his Spirit, but that *his Spirit makes us participants in the virtue of his vivifying body*, by which participation we are fed on eternal life.⁸

Thus, this efficacy of the Spirit was more than our vivification in the daily life of faith; also, the effect was (much!) more than "commemorating Christ" at the Supper table and receiving Him in our hearts, as Zwingli would have it. At the Lord's Table, the Spirit makes the faithful participate in the virtue

8 *CO* 9,711-712, there 711; *OS* 1,435-436, there 435; cf. John K. S. Reid, *Calvin. Theological Treatises* [The Library of Christian Classics 22] (Philadelphia, [1977]; repr. of 1954), 168-169, there 168.

or power of Christ's vivifying body, and unites the believing congregation with Christ in the *unio mystica* of the bride with her Head, the bridegroom:

We acknowledge that *his Spirit is the bond of our participation in Him*, but in such manner that He really feeds us with the substance of the body and blood of the Lord to everlasting life, and vivifies us by participation in them.⁹

It is no small or common thing that the apostle teaches, when he asserts that *we are flesh of Christ's flesh and bone of his bone*. Rather, he points out the great *mystery* of our communion with his body, whose sublimity *no one is able to explain adequately in words*. [...] For the rest it is no contradiction with this that our Lord is exalted in heaven, and so has *withdrawn the local presence of his body from us*, which is not here required. For though we as pilgrims in mortality are neither included nor contained in the same space with Him, yet the *efficacy of his Spirit is limited by no bounds*, but is able really to unite and combine together into one things that are disjoined in local space.¹⁰

In 1561 Calvin again explained to the Lutheran Tilemann Heshusius that by his reference to the Spirit he did *not* mean a union in the spiritualist-Zwinglian sense, i.e., only between the human spirit and the Spirit or divinity of Christ, but much more:

I do not restrict this union to the divine essence, but affirm that it belongs to the flesh and blood, inasmuch as it was not simply said "My Spirit", but, "My flesh is meat indeed"; nor was it simply said "My divinity", but, "My blood is drink indeed". [...] I willingly embrace the saying of Augustine: "As Eve was formed out of a rib of Adam, so the origin and beginning of life flowed to us from the side of

9 CO 9,712; OS 1,435; Reid, 168.

10 CO 9,711; OS 1,435; Reid, 168. This confession was co-signed by Martin Bucer and his Strasbourg colleague Wolfgang Capito. This was intended to take away the suspicion that the Strasburgers had conceded far too much to Luther. The booklet clearly rejects the Lutheran and Zwinglian extremes, combines both viewpoints, and in this way represents Calvin's (and Bucer's) middle position. In their postscript to this Confession (CR 9,712; OS 1,436; Reid, 169), Bucer and Capito (and hence also Calvin) rejected the view that Christ was "diffused *locally* or *ubiquitously* in the Holy Supper [as stated by the Lutherans], but that He has a true and *finite* body and *remains in heavenly glory* [as Zwingli held]. Yet nonetheless, through his *word* [so Luther] and *symbols* [a Zwinglian term], *He is present* in the Supper [with Luther, against Zwingli]. [...] Besides, we hold it an error not to be tolerated in the Church to state that *it is naked and bare signs* that Christ sets forth in his blessed Supper [as Zwingli contended], or not to believe that here *the very body and the very blood* of the Lord is received [with Luther], that is, the Lord Himself [cf. Melancthon's personal presence], true God and man".

Christ". And although I distinguish between the sign and the thing signified [*contra* the Lutheran identification of bread and body], I do not teach that there is only a bare and shadowy figure [as Zwingli did], but distinctly declare that the bread is a sure pledge [*pignus*] of that communion with the flesh and blood of Christ which it figures,¹¹ the Holy Spirit being the bond of this mystical union between bridegroom and bride.

Meanwhile, Luther and his followers failed to understand—together with many Reformed today—what exactly Calvin meant by “the Spirit” that bridges the gap between Christ’s body in Heaven and the congregation on earth, and unites the two in a real sense. Since his confrontations in the 1520’s with the spiritualist Karlstadt, the revolutionary radical Müntzer and the fanatical *Zwickau Prophets*, Luther understood the word “spirit” in a spiritualist sense. When in the Marburg Colloquy of 1529 Luther, Zwingli, and Bucer failed to reach agreement on the doctrine of the Holy Supper it was exactly this point—the different conceptions of the Spirit—which caused the breakdown. “You are always talking about the spirit, the spirit, the spirit”, Luther said angrily to a bewildered Bucer, who had been speaking of a “real presence through the Spirit”: “Your spirit differs from ours!” Luther did not realize that Bucer’s conception of the Holy Spirit was not the spiritualist-humanist view as found with the *Schwärmer* and Erasmus, for whom “spirit” was contrasted with “flesh” (=earthly things) and was the opposite of “matter”. To them, “spirit” implied roughly *Gegenleiblichkeit* or *Gegenfleichlichkeit*—literally, “contra-physicality” and “contra-carnality”. Seen in this way, Bucer’s view of Christ’s real presence through the Spirit could only be understood in a Zwinglian sense, as real absence. However, Bucer—and Calvin with him—used *Spiritus* to refer to the Holy Spirit, God’s *Pneuma*, which is not outside creation but is part of it, and which already in the beginning (Genesis 1, 2) was hovering over the waters. It is this Spirit that in the Lord’s Supper really united the faithful with Christ’s body. Put differently: Calvin’s *pneumatological* view of Christ’s presence was interpreted by the Lutherans, and is still interpreted today by many Reformed and Presbyterians, as *spiritualist*, and so evaporated into something unreal or imaginary, as if to Calvin the celebration dissipated into commemorating the Absent. To Calvin, the Spirit with a capital S was anything but a nonor anti-

11 *Dilucida explicatio sanae doctrinae de vera participatione carnis et sanguinis Christi in Sacra Coena, ad discutiendas Heshusii nebulas* [Clear explanation of sound doctrine concerning the true partaking of the flesh and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, in order to dissipate the mists of Tileman Heshusius], *CO* 9, 457-517, there 470-471; cf. Reid, 268.

physical principle. A modest survey I recently held among Reformed ministers in the Netherlands showed that the majority of the Dutch Reformed family have lost the Calvinist view of a (mystical) union with Christ via the Holy Spirit in the Lord's Supper, and in fact do not know any better than the Zwinglian view: that the faithful at the Lord's Table only *commemorate* Christ's merits—the merits of Him who has become man among men, one of us. Since the sixteenth century there has been a shift of emphasis in a rationalist direction, from the unifying power of the *Holy Spirit* to the cognitive, commemorative power of the *human* spirit or ratio. Calvin, however, when commenting on Ephesians 5:30-1 and explaining what Paul meant by “For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones”, explicitly said:

[Paul] does not simply mean that Christ is a partaker of our nature, but expresses something higher [...] *and more emphatic*. [...] As Eve was formed out of the substance of her husband, and thus was a part of himself; so, if we are the true members of Christ, we share his substance, and by this intercourse unite into one body. [...] Paul says that *we are members of his flesh and of his bones*. Do we wonder, then, that in the Lord's Supper He holds out his body to be enjoyed by us, and to nourish us unto eternal life?¹²

Calvin's pneumatological view regarding the mystical union with Christ in the Lord's Supper also explains his strong emphasis on the holiness of the participants. In Calvin's view, the gift character of the sacrament comes first (the union with Christ and the participation in all his merits), and from these the ecclesiological and ethical aspects of the celebration follow: those who are united with Christ belong to Him and his congregation, they praise Him, and their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. The far-reaching implications of this will be reflected more and more in the lives of the participants:

In other words, we obtain *possession of Christ* as to the fountain of all blessings, both in order that we may be reconciled to God by means of his death, be *renewed by his Spirit to holiness of life*, in short, obtain righteousness and salvation;

12 Commentary on Ephesians 5:31; trans. by W. Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians by John Calvin*, Calvin Translation Society, 22 vols. (Edinburgh 1844-1856; repr. Grand Rapids, 1989); idem. 2003, 21, 323.

and also in order *that we may give thanks* for the blessings which were once exhibited on the cross, and which we daily receive by faith.¹³

*A Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ (1541);
the exhibitiv-instrumental function of the elements; substance*

I described the fiasco of Marburg 1529, Luther's spiritualist misunderstanding of Bucer's (and later Calvin's) pneumatological view of the Holy Supper, and his classification of them as "Zwinglians". During his stay in Strasbourg (1538-1541) Calvin wrote his characteristic *Short treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ* [Petit Traicté de la sainte cene de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ] of 1541, for the express purpose of closing the yawning chasm that had existed between Wittenberg and Zurich since 1529. In this work, he censured Luther for his carnal perception of the corporeal presence of Christ:

It was Luther's duty, in the first place, to make clear that he did not intend to set up such a local presence as the papists imagine; second, he should have protested that he did not mean the sacrament to be adored instead of God.¹⁴

Zwingli and his followers were reproached by Calvin with in turn having "emptied" the signs of bread and wine:

so [that] Luther thought that they [i.e., the Zwinglians] intended to leave nothing else but *bare signs* without any corresponding spiritual substance. [...] They took no care to make the reservation that they are *such signs that the reality is joined to them*.¹⁵

We see that Calvin rejected both a natural presence of Christ [Luther] and a pure symbolism [Zwingli]. His own positive contribution was the expansion of Zwingli's significative interpretation of the word *est* in the consecration words to an exhibitiv reading. This means that according to Calvin the

13 *Mutua consensio* [Mutual Consent]; CO 7,738; OS 2,249; John Calvin, *Treatises on the sacraments, Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Forms of prayer, and Confessions of faith*. Tracts by John Calvin translated from the original Latin and French by Henry Beveridge (Fearn/Grand Rapids, MI, 2002; also: Eugene, OR, 2002)=reprint of Vol. 2 (1849) of Calvin's Tracts and Treatises. Translated from the original Latin and French by Henry Beveridge, 1-3, Edinburgh 1844-1851 (repr. 1958, 1985) (abbreviated as *TT* 2); *TT* 2:214-215.

14 CO 5,459; OS 1,528; Reid, 165.

15 CO 5,458; OS 1,528; Reid, 165.

signs of bread and wine have an exhibitiv, i.e., a representative and truly conferring function. As an example, Calvin pointed to the dove that descended on Christ during his baptism: in and behind the dove John the Baptist rightly saw the Holy Spirit, since the Spirit was invisibly joined to this sign. Consequently, "hoc est corpus meum" did not mean: this bread is identical with the natural body [Luther]; neither did it mean: this bread signifies or points to the body in Heaven [Zwingli], but: the bread is a sign to which the matter signified is factually, but invisibly, linked. The bread and the cup represent and actually confer (participation in) the body:

Now, if it be asked nevertheless whether the bread *is* the body of Christ, and the wine his blood, we should reply that the bread and the wine are *visible signs*, which *represent* to us the body and blood; but that the name and title of body and blood is attributed to them [=an instance of metonymy, WJ], because they are like *instruments* by which our Lord Jesus Christ distributes them to us. This form and manner of speaking is very appropriate in principle. For though it may be that the communion we have with the body of Christ is something incomprehensible, not only to the eye but to our natural sense, *it is there visibly shown to us*. Of this we have a very apposite example in a similar case. Our Lord, wishing at his Baptism to give visible appearance to *his Spirit*, *represented* it under the form of a *dove*. John the Baptist, relating this story, says that *he saw the Holy Spirit* descending. If we enquire more closely, we find that *he saw only the dove*, for the Holy Spirit is essentially invisible. Yet knowing that this vision *is not an empty figure*, but a *certain sign* of the *presence* of the Holy Spirit, he does not hesitate to say that he saw it, because it is *represented* to him according to his capacity [=God's accommodation, WJ]. It is like this with the communion which we have with the body and blood of our Lord. It is a spiritual *mystery*, which cannot be seen by the eye, nor comprehended by the human understanding. It is therefore *symbolized by visible signs*, as our infirmity requires, but in such a way that *it is not a bare figure, but joined to its reality and substance*. *It is therefore with good reason that the bread is called body, since not only does it represent it to us, but also presents it to us.*¹⁶

Calvin even took another step in Luther's direction, at least terminologically, by speaking pregnantly of "matter and substance", even though, unlike Luther, he took "substance" to mean "content", "essence", or "the matter itself":

16 CO 5,438-439; OS 1,508-509; Reid, 147.

I am accustomed to saying that the matter and substance of the sacrament is the Lord Jesus Christ. [...] The sacraments of the Lord ought not and cannot at all be separated from their reality and substance.¹⁷

To conclude this section: in the same way as during Jesus' Baptism the Spirit was joined with the dove in an exhibitiv union, and the visible and locally present dove represented the Holy Spirit and made the Spirit actually descend on Christ, so the bread represents and confers Christ's body to us in an exhibitiv union. In this way, Calvin characterized bread and wine as much more than only "bare signs" [Zwingli], namely as instruments that confer the reality of what they picture and to which they are inextricably bound. Other examples from this tradition, in which Calvin found himself together with Bucer, Wolfgang Musculus, and others, are the rings by which the partners give themselves to one another in the marriage ceremony, the handing over of the sceptre during the consecration as bishop, the anointing with oil as a sign of the actual anointing with the Spirit, the baptismal water as symbol and instrument of cleansing and rebirth, etc. In the conclusion of Calvin's unifying *Short Treatise*, the characteristic points of his pneumatological, exhibitiv-instrumental view are succinctly summarized:

In receiving the sacrament *in faith* [contra Lutheran sacramental automatism], according to the ordinance of the Lord, we are truly made *partakers of the real substance* [Luther] *of the body and blood* of Jesus Christ. How this is done, some may deduce better and explain more clearly than others. But be this as it may, *on the one hand* we must, in order to shut out all *carnal fancies* [contra the Lutherans], raise our hearts [on high] to heaven [= *sursum corda*, with the Eucharistic canon of Nicea, characteristic of Calvin, WJ], not thinking that our Lord Jesus Christ is so abased as to be *enclosed under any corruptible elements* [contra the Lutherans]. *On the other hand*, in order not to diminish the *efficacy* [contra the Zwinglians] of this sacred mystery, we must hold that it is *accomplished by the secret and miraculous virtue* of God, and that *the Spirit of God is the bond of participation*, for which reason it is called Spiritual.¹⁸

17 CO 5,437, 439; OS 1,507, 509; Reid, 146, 147.

18 CO 5,469; OS 1,529-530; Reid, 166.

Historical Development of Calvin's Eucharistic Theology

I will not dwell too long on the development of Calvin's Eucharistic theology here,¹⁹ and limit myself to the remark that Calvin's Eucharistic views were not from the beginning a detailed, coherent, and unified doctrine, of which the 1559 *Institutes* are supposed to be the representative expression, but show a historical development. My own observations have shown me that in 1536-1537 "Zwinglianizing" accents—the absence of, e.g., instrumentalist language—may be noted. Evidence of "Lutheranizing" influences, also received via Bucer, is apparent between 1537 and 1548. Renewed spiritualizing tendencies from 1549 onwards were the result of the negotiations with Heinrich Bullinger about the *Consensus Tigurinus*. The 1559 *Institutes* also incorporated the results of the controversy with the Lutheran opponent of the *Zurich Agreement*, Joachim Westphal. In 1560 and 1562 Calvin again sought a *rapprochement* to the Lutherans and returned to his pro-Luther tune of the 1540s. In short, Calvin formed his own Eucharistic theology only gradually. Nevertheless, some key aspects may be summarized here.

Short Systematic-Synthetic Description of Calvin's Doctrine of the Holy Supper

In the fourth section of this essay we have seen that Calvin's pneumatological, exhibitiv-instrumental view of the function of the signs of bread and wine—in contrast with Luther's identifying and Zwingli's significative interpretation of these elements—is characteristic of this Reformer. This applies in any case to his more Lutheranizing period; in my view, it is in this aspect that the ecumenically inclined Calvin remained closest to his authentic self.²⁰ Accordingly, Brian Gerrish has helpfully characterised the Reformers' Eucharistic views as symbolic instrumentalism (Calvin), symbolic parallelism (Bullinger: in the same way and at the same time as the mouth receives the bread, the heart receives Christ), and symbolic memorialism (Zwingli). Another way of putting it is to say that Calvin's pneumatological instrumenta-

19 See for this development Wim Janse, "Calvin's Eucharistic Theology: Three Dogma-Historical Observations", ed. by H. J. Selderhuis, *Calvinus sacramentorum literarum interpret. Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research*, [Reformed Historical Theology 5] Göttingen 2008, 37-69; in Korean translation *John Calvin* [Korean Calvin Studies 5] (Seoul 2008), 93-142. See also idem, "The Sacraments", ed. by H. J. Selderhuis, *The Calvin Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK, 2009), 344-346.

20 Even when, under pressure by Bullinger, he introduced more Zwinglian accents into the *Zurich Agreement* of 1549, Calvin thought—incorrectly, as it turned out—that by doing so he could bridge the gap with the Lutherans.

lism moved between the Scylla of Luther's sacramental realism and the Charybdis of Zwingli's spiritualistic symbolism. Calvin's views may be summarized in the following ten points:

1. Fundamental to Calvin's thought is the duality, derived from Augustinian thought, of the outward vs. the inward, sign vs. signified reality, visible vs. invisible, perceptible to the senses vs. perceptible to the mind, physical vs. spiritual, mouth vs. heart.

2. This duality stamps Calvin's concept of the sacrament: sacraments are visible signs that confer invisible grace and strengthen the faith, for the sake of Christ. The sacrament consists of Word, sign, and gift, and operates through Spirit and faith (i.e., not *ex opere operato*).

3. For the Lord's Supper this duality implies that the Supper is a divine gift and not merely the reminder of a gift; that bread and body are not identical, but two different matters; that the presence of Christ, mysteriously effected by the Holy Spirit, is a Spiritual personal presence; and that the precondition of faith (the *sursum corda*) precludes the eating by unbelievers.

4. The Lord's Supper is the communal meal of Christ and his members, a commemorative meal, and a confessional meal. **The gift character** of the Supper emphatically precedes its commemorative and ecclesiological-ethical aspects.

5. The gift that is given is the whole of Christ together with his merits as the substance of the Supper. This gift is not spiritual, but Spiritual or pneumatological and hence real. Communion is not limited to either the human or Christ's spirit; for this reason, Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Supper cannot be called spiritualist.

6. A crucial aspect is Calvin's view of the sacramental union between the sign and the reality signified. This is an exhibitiv union, in which the sign and the thing signified are intimately linked, so that the sign not only represents the gift, but as an instrument actually confers it, in such a manner that the way in which *the reality that is signified* is conferred and is present, is not identical with the way in which the *sign* is conferred and is present.

7. The twofold exhibition of sign and thing signified is matched by the double reception: the physical reception by mouth, and the inner reception by Spirit and faith. The two are not only parallel and analogous (so Calvin,

with Bullinger, especially after 1549), but also and especially instrumentally linked (with Bucer).

8. In Calvin's concept of exhibition Neo-Platonic-Augustinian dualism and Lutheran sacramental realism touch. At this point of intersection the visible is joined to the invisible, in the consciousness that through the Holy Spirit God actually gives himself to people without committing himself to created beings, and protects against both Zwinglian evaporation and Lutheran reification of the sacramental offering. This concept of exhibition honours the reality of the gift (because of God's promise) as well as the mystery aspect of the Lord's Supper (because of the transcendence of grace). The desire to maintain the duality of a gift that is both real and transcendent forms the real ground for Calvin's rejection of both Swiss symbolism and Lutheran sacramental realism.

9. Christ's Spiritual personal presence has a specifically ecclesiological application: by means of the Spirit as a bond of participation the faithful partake of the substance of the body and blood of Christ, that is to say, they are grafted on to Christ's mystical body, the Church.

10. The testimony of divine grace to us in turn evokes the attestation of our piety toward God [*mutuam nostrae erga ipsum pietatis testificationem*, Inst. 1559, IV.14.1]: gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise.

Calvin and the Issue of Closed or Open Communion

Finally, does Calvin's theology offer a guideline regarding a closed or an open celebration of the Lord's Supper? In a sense, this is a rhetorical question. It is not likely that Calvin practiced an "open" Lord's Supper. For, before being admitted to the table, participants had to profess their faith. This implies that the ministers knew the members of the congregation who went to communion. Also: there were no denominations in Geneva other than Reformed, since these had been forbidden. Members of the local Italian exile community would have taken the sacraments in their own congregation. Acquaintances, family, or friends visiting Geneva would only have participated in the Lord's Supper after permission of the Consistory. For, the holiness of the Supper and the requirement for the participants to be holy were beyond dispute, as is sufficiently known. "They who come to this Communion [must] be approved members of Jesus Christ", it said in the *Articles concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva* (January 16, 1537). The *Draft of Ecclesiastical Ordinances* [Ordonnances ecclesiastiques] (1541) prescribed that on the Sunday before the celebration

intimation is to be made, in order that no child come before it has made profession of its faith as proved by examination by the Catechism, and also that all strangers and new-comers may be exhorted first to come and present themselves at the church, so that they be instructed and thus none approach to his own condemnation.²¹

The Manner of Celebrating the Lord's Supper [La maniere d'administrer les Sacramens] (1542) repeated

that each may prepare and dispose himself to receive it worthily and with becoming reverence; secondly, that young people may not be brought forward unless they are well instructed, and have made a profession of their faith in the Church; thirdly, in order that if there are strangers who are still rude and ignorant, they may come and present themselves for instruction in private.²²

Anybody who in Calvin's eyes was guilty of immoral behavior was to be excluded from the sacrament. Before the celebration, the preacher was to proclaim:

I excommunicate all idolaters, blasphemers, those who hold God in contempt, heretics, and all people who have made separate sects, rending the unity of the Church, all perjurers, all those who are rebels against father and against mother, and against their superiors, all seditious, mutinous, violent, pugnacious, quarrelsome, adulterers, lewd, thieves, plunderers, avaricious, drunks, gourmands, and all those who lead scandalous and dissolute lives, declaring to them that they must abstain from this holy table, for fear of polluting and contaminating the sacred viands which our Lord Jesus Christ gives only to his household and believers.²³

Next, the congregation was to be exhorted

to examine one's conscience, to repent truly of his faults, to repudiate his sins, to desire to live henceforth sanctified and according to God, to wed the mercy of God and seek one's salvation entirely in Christ, and to renounce all enmity and

21 CO 10,26; OS 2,344-345; Reid, 66-67.

22 CO 6, 197; OS 2,44; TT 2,119.

23 CO 6,198; OS 2,47; quoted in the translation by Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation. Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge, 2006),169; cf. TT 2,120.

rancor, in good will and courage to live in concord and brotherly love with one's neighbours.²⁴

Moreover, Calvin was not exactly in favour of people coming to communion only now and then, as they saw fit, or without obligation—which nowadays, with an open communion, could be the case with participants from outside. Calvin advocated a weekly (*Inst.* 1559, IV.17.43) or monthly celebration (*Draft of Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, Reid 2,66-7), and accepted a three-monthly celebration only by force of necessity. A regular celebration served the union with Christ, which could only take place over time, by the work of the Spirit through continual preaching and celebrating of the Supper. “Frequent communion, therefore, for Calvin was *essential* to one's growth as a Christian”.²⁵

I conclude with borrowed words. In his *Given for you. Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (2002), Keith A. Mathison concludes his chapter on Calvin with the following memorable consideration: “For Calvin, the Lord's Supper was not primarily a subject for debate. It was a gift of God to be thankfully celebrated as often as the church gathered together. The Eucharist was a gift that expressed the unbreakable unity of the body of Christ. This is why Calvin was so passionate about finding a way to heal the divisions that had arisen because of arguments about this sacrament. He was not able to accomplish this in his own generation, but his views on the doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper stand as a landmark in the history of the church. Those who consider themselves his heirs and those who share his passion for the church would do well to prayerfully consider what he taught”.²⁶

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25 Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation. Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge, 2006), 172

26 Keith A. Mathison, *Given For You. Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 2002), 47-48.

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