

“The Marburg Colloquy”

Four views on the Lord’s Supper

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In the age of the Reformation, political wars were fought for religious reasons and religious wars were often fought for political motives. Both motives led to the “Marburg Colloquy” that took place from 1-4 October 1529 and was held in the German city from which this historical event derived its name. Though the Marburg Colloquy was a gathering to unify Protestants on religious beliefs, it was also held for reason of political interests. Landgrave Philip of Hesse (1509-1567), ‘who championed the independence of German princes against the Holy Roman emperor Charles V’¹, feared severe armed suppression by the Roman Catholics, who at the Diet of Speyer, held in April of that year, unanimously voted to oppose the Protestants and defend the political power of the Pope. ‘Philip the Magnanimous’ firmly believed that a political defence was necessary to protect the Reformation’s religious progress.² The Colloquy failed due to disagreement between Luther and Zwingli on the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The gathering of four sessions was held in the ‘Rittersaal’³ in Philip’s Castle. All five major theologians of the hour were present, beside numerous guests: Luther and his theologian Melancton, Zwingli and his friend Oecolampadius, and unifier⁴ Bucer. The Marburg Colloquy of October 1529 resulted in the 15 “Articles of Marburg”, based on Luther’s earlier Confessions of Faith, and with Luther’s “Articles of Schwabach” of 16 October⁵, in 1530 resulted in the “Augsburg Confession of Lutheranism” under the leadership of Luther’s main theologian Philipp Melancton⁶, and was presented to Roman Catholic Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg in May that year to defend Protestant thought.⁷

¹ Encyclopedia Britannica, ‘Marburg Colloquy’.

² Enc.Brit., ‘Marburg Colloquy’, Thomas M.Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation*, Vol.1, p.352, 353

³ Enc.Brit., ‘Marburg’.

⁴ Enc.Brit., ‘Martin Bucer’.

⁵ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol.VII, Ch.9, § 117. The Augsburg Confession.

⁶ Enc.Brit., ‘Marburg Colloquy’.

⁷ Enc.Brit., ‘Diet of Augsburg’ and Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, The Augsburg Conf, www.reformed.org/documents/index.html

But what was intended to unify, *the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist*,⁸ resulted in disagreement and contention⁹, as a result of different views on the Lord's Presence at His own Table. Is Christ present physically or spiritually?¹⁰ Both Luther and Zwingli agreed that there was an error in the Roman Catholic doctrine of *transubstantiation* in the two parts of this one Sacrament, "The Lord's Supper": the Mass and the Eucharist. *Zwingli* addressed the Roman Catholic doctrine of the *Mass*, which focussed primarily on the *Death* of Christ, His *Sacrifice*, *Luther* addressed the issue of the presumed miracle in the *Eucharist*, with it's primary focus on the union of the saints with the Risen *Living* Christ.¹¹ Attending the Sunday *Mass* was the minimum requirement of the saints to belong to the Roman Catholic Church, Christ's Body¹², partaking in the *Eucharist* was necessary to attain salvation and union with Him¹³. In the *death* of Christ the saints are reconciled, in the *risen* Christ they receive all the benefits thereof in union with Him.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation teaches that at the ringing of a hand bell by a thereto ordained priest, the celebrant, due to the miraculous power given to him at the sacred sacrament of his ordination¹⁴, the elements of Bread and Wine are mysteriously changed into the *actual* Body and Blood of Christ though their outward appearance and taste remain the same. By *partaking* in this sacrament, communicants come to *union* with Christ and testify to belong to the true Church.¹⁵ *Without* partaking in this sacrament, a believer is not granted the grace necessary to be saved.¹⁶ But, without this *miracle*, the Bread and Wine *becoming* His very Body and Blood, Christ is not present¹⁷, Romanists believe and celebrate

⁸ Enc.Brit., 'Eucharist', and Ev.Lutheran Church of America, Who we are, Eucharist, www.elca.org.

⁹ Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, Ch.9, § 117. The Diet of Augsburg. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, on internet, Marburg Colloquy, E.A.Livingstone, 2000.

¹⁰ Thomas M.Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation*, Vol.1, p.353, 354 etc.

¹¹ A.Hist.of the Ref., p.354

¹² The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th edition, 2008, 'Mass'.

¹³ Papal Bull 'Unam Sanctum', 18 November 1302, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/b8-unam.html>

¹⁴ A Hist.of the Ref., p.353?

¹⁵ The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th edition, 2008, 'Eucharist'.

¹⁶ A Hist.of the Ref., p.353, 354.

¹⁷ A.Hist.of the Ref., p.353

at Corpus Christi, the feast established by Thomas Aquinas in 1264.¹⁸ Thus, by breaking the Bread and drinking the Wine, a sacrifice is made *again*.

Whereas *Luther* believed that the Presence of Christ at His Table was *co-existent* with the Bread and Wine, because a change *does* take place as the Presence of Christ *joins* the elements, *Zwingli* confessed the Eucharist to be only a *commemoration* of what He had done, and that the elements were *symbolic*¹⁹. As *Luther* insisted on Christ being *actually* present *alongside* the elements ‘in a *Glorified Body*’, ‘extended in space’²⁰, *Zwingli* reasoned Him to be present spiritually. *Luther* wanted only to correct the one error of the mysterious power of the priest and the miracle, which had ‘corrupted’ this important doctrine and leave the rest as it was, a sacrament, *Zwingli* was influenced by the humanistic thinking of Erasmus who had stated: ‘that the Sacrament of the Supper was the *symbol* of commemoration, of a covenant with God, and of the fellowship of all believers in Christ’²¹ *Luther* was influenced by scholastic nominalist William of Ockham, separating faith from reason, revelation from scientific exploration, leaving logic out of theological discussion²², *Zwingli* also by the Dutch Cristopher Honius (Cornelius Hoen²³) who declared that the word ‘*is*’ in Jesus’ words ‘This is My Body’ should not be taken *literally* but should only be interpreted as ‘*signifies*’, as the bread only *pointed* to His real body. The Bread and Wine are ‘signs’ that *symbolize* the real.²⁴ *Luther* was a *medieval* thinker who sought to extend medieval theology of sacramental grace with an evangelical approach of *faith* and leave the rest as it was, a sacrament imputing grace, *Zwingli*, ahead of him, influenced by humanistic thought, sought to resolve the issue by thinking of how the early Church Fathers handled it.²⁵

¹⁸ Col.Enc., ‘Corpus Christi’

¹⁹ The Col.Enc., ‘Lord’s Supper’, and A.Hist.of the Ref., p.354

²⁰ A.Hist., p.356

²¹ A Hist., p.355

²² A.Hist., p.354

²³ Making a meal of it, Ben Witherington III, p.121

²⁴ A.Hist., p.355, 356

²⁵ A.Hist., p.354

The following can be concluded as a response to the error of the Roman Catholic doctrine.

Zwingli declared that:

1. In the Lord's Supper Christ's death is commemorated, not repeated; the elements are not a new sacrifice being made, but symbolic signs that point to the real;
2. That forgiveness of sin is not in partaking in a Sacrament of a newly Sacrifice of Christ;
3. That the benefits of all that Christ has done are received by faith, and therefore reconciliation is by faith. The Presence of Christ is not received by eating, but by partaking in faith, and is therefore a real but spiritual Presence which leads to union with Him for those that believe and partake;
4. That though the Lord's Supper is a commemoration of His death, it also symbolizes union with a Risen Christ who is now alive;
5. That communion with Him is not by natural elements, which only symbolize or signify spiritual assets.²⁶

Luther declared that:

1. The Lord's Supper was intended to bring believers into communion with the living Christ;
2. The local Presence of the Body of Christ, His 'body extended in space', must therefore be in the Bread and Wine for them to commune with Him, as the saints that passed away now do in heaven;
3. No special priestly miracle is needed for that purpose, as Christ is omnipresent and local, and is therefore in the natural elements of the Supper which 'becomes a

²⁶ A Hist.of the Ref., p.356,357

sacramental Presence' when the believer partakes in it by faith and then inherits all the promises attached to it;

4. Faith in the *Death* of Christ will also lead to communion through His atonement with the *Risen* Christ.²⁷

Both confessed the Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist: Luther *in* or *alongside* the natural elements, 'physically' in a Glorified Body, Zwingli as a spiritual Presence, due to His omnipresence. *Both* believed in the experience of union with Him by faith. *Both* believed that those that partake in the Lord's Supper receive all the benefits of both His Death and Life by faith.

Luther and Zwingli were close. *Understanding the omnipresence of Christ* was the central theme that should have been addressed?²⁸ Of the 15 Articles drawn up by Luther after the discussions between him and Zwingli reached a deadlock on 3 October, 14 found unified agreement. Complete unity never occurred since and drove both parties apart. Had they known about their different angle to the subject, and how close they actually were in all their agreements, *completing* each other's theories instead of contrasting them²⁹, the Colloquy might have succeeded and a unified Reformation proceeded?

'This is My Body, given for you... This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you' (Luke 22:19, 20)³⁰. The Eucharist is an important part of Church-life. *All* Christians believe it is a grateful *commemoration* of the Lord's death, 'by which one remembered his passion'³¹, but different interpretations of Scripture lead to different views and practices. The Roman Catholic doctrine of *transubstantiation* is based on a *literal* interpretation of Jesus' words '*is*', influenced by Augustine's view on sacraments being 'a

²⁷ A Hist.of the R., p.357, 358

²⁸ Making a meal of it, p.123

²⁹ A Hist.of the R., p.358

³⁰ All Scripture verses taken from the NIV translation, The NIV Study Bible, Zondervan Corp., 1985

³¹ Making a meal, p. 102, quote from Justin Martyr (Dialogues 117.3)

visible sign of an invisible thing', grace, and the two natures of Christ³². *Luther's* view, *consubstantiation*, combines the *natural* elements with Christ's *physical* Presence. *Zwingli's* view, *memorialism*, emphasizes symbolism, '*do this in remembrance of Me*', and union with Christ's *spiritual* Presence, becoming spiritual food³³, based on Paul's address to the Corinthian believers in 1Cor.10:16-21, where he pointed with the natural elements to communion with spiritual presences, like evil spirits, on the altar. John Calvin (1509-1564) built further on Luther's and Zwingli's ideas later and held the view of *virtualism*: Christ is Present by the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the celebration of the Eucharist, and the (natural) elements 'are the vehicle through which the spiritual body and blood of Christ are received by the communicant'³⁴ while the elements remain unchanged.

Virtualism is right, according to 1Cor.10:16 which says that taking the elements are 'a participation in the body of Christ' (Greek: '*koinonia*', meaning 'fellowship', 'communion'), and 'one Bread' symbolizes 'one Body' under one Head (:17). *Memorialism* is right as Jesus told His disciples to 'remember' Him in the Eucharist (Luke 22:19, 20 - Greek: 'anamnesis', from '*anamimesko*': 'to call/bring to remembrance/mind', 'to remember and weigh well and consider', Strong's 364 & 363). *Consubstantiation* is *only* right if we can affirm the omnipresence of Christ's *physical* Body extended in space, present in natural elements³⁵.

Christ ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit has come (Acts 1:9, 2:1-4). The Lord's Presence is among us by *His Spirit* (2Cor.13:14). Christ dwells in us *by faith* (Eph.3:17). He does *not* need to be sacrificed *over and over again*, His sacrifice was '*once and for all*' (Rom.6:10, Hebr.7:27, 9:26, 10:2 & 10, 1Petr.3:18). Jesus told His disciples to '*remember*' Him in the Eucharist. There is no Scriptural basis for such a thing as 'sacramental grace',

³² Making a meal, p.117

³³ Making a meal, p.100

³⁴ The Free Dictionary by Farlex, 'Virtualism'.

³⁵ Making a meal, p.123.

‘doses of grace’ infused by partaking in sacraments, though there *is* communion with Christ for those that believe and partake³⁶. There *is* Scriptural evidence for *sola gratia et fide*: grace through faith alone (Eph.2:8).

The Presence of Christ is at His Table and the fellowship with Him of the believers, is by faith (Hebr.11:6, John 6:40). In the Lord’s Supper we remember that sin is removed and judgment passed our door, making all benefits of Christ’s *past* act our *present* asset (Ex.12:1-23).³⁷ It is more than a snack, less than magic³⁸, not an ‘entrance ritual’, leading to ‘initial union’, like Baptism, rather an ‘ongoing communion’³⁹, a repeated celebration of a union that is already there and a sign of participating in the ‘unity of the community’⁴⁰ (1Cor.10:17). If Christ is not Present, how will we partake in His fellowship? If we do not fellowship with Him, His Body, we would not be one with the Head (1Cor.10:16). But union with Him is not in eating and drinking, but in faith (Hebr.11:6). If grace is given through a church’s sacrament, like eating and drinking, will the people then turn their attention on rituals and/or ceremonies instead of faith? But if many theologians debated this subject and yet found no unified agreement in the whole, can I conclude with a 100% proper position that settles it all?

³⁶ Making a meal, p.136.

³⁷ Making a meal, p.8, 10

³⁸ Making a meal, Preface, p. x, xi., 125.

³⁹ Making a meal, Ch.1, p.1, 11

⁴⁰ Making a meal, p.114, 135

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