

Mutual agreement concerning sacramental substance, between the ministers of the Church of Zurich and master John Calvin, minister of the Church of Geneva, recently edited by the authors themselves.

I Corinthians 1:10 I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no dissension among you, but that you be whole and complete in one body, of the same mind and same judgment.

To the most distinguished men and faithful servants of Christ, the pastors and doctors of the Church of Zurich, well-beloved colleagues and respected brothers, John Calvin sends greeting.

Although I often engage with you concerning the same subject, yet I need not fear to appear troublesome. When the same matter is an object of study to us both, it cannot be that you will disapprove of what I do. As for the suggestion that I am a little too keen, the assiduous pleadings of good men urge me on.

I have already warned you on a number of occasions, not without cause, that many were offended because I appear to hold a position different from yours concerning the sacraments. With good reason they reverence your church, adorned as it is with so many excellent gifts. And to our church they also defer, and perhaps somewhat to me as an individual. And so they desire to be assisted by our writings in learning the doctrine of piety lest any manner of dissension impede their progress. On this account I thought there could be no remedy more apt to remove this offence than that we should jointly undertake a friendly conference for the purpose of testifying to our agreement. It was for this purpose, as you know, that I have undertaken this journey to you. And our venerable colleague William Farel, that untiring soldier of Christ who, with me, was in some respect a leader and an instig-

ator, did not refuse to attend the meeting. That there is agreement among us we are able on both our parts truly and faithfully to bear witness, but because I do not persuade all regarding the substance, namely that it is, it grieves me greatly that there are some who remain in doubt or anxiety, whose peace of mind I would rather have considered. Hence, as I said at the outset, I do not consider myself to be acting out of season when I urge that there should be some public witness to the agreement we have now concluded.

Indeed I thought it would be worthwhile briefly to collect and to set in order the headings which we have discussed, so that if my plan is approved by you, anyone may discern for himself in tabular form as it were what was done and transacted between us. In any event I trust that you will bear witness that I have recorded in good faith the details of our discussions which I now set down. Pious readers will, I hope, observe that we (I speak for Farel and myself) have striven with eagerness equal to your, for sincere clarity of expression free from all pretence and cunning. Yet at the same time be advised that this work contains nothing which has not been officially approved by our colleagues who serve Christ under the republic of Geneva or in the countship of Neuchâtel. Farewell, most excellent men and brethren, truly cherished by me from the heart. May the Lord continue to guide and direct you by his Spirit for the edification of the church; and may he bless your labours.

At Geneva on the first of August in the year of our Lord 1549.

Here follow the articles of the agreement

[1] Since Christ is the fulfilment of the law¹ and because knowledge of him comprehends in itself the sum of the gospel, there is no doubt that the entire spiritual government of the Church looks to this end, that is to lead us to Christ, for it is by following him alone that one comes to God² who is the final goal of a happy life. Consequently, whoever deviates from this in the least degree never speaks well or aptly concerning any of the ordinances of God.

The entire spiritual regiment of the Church leads us to Christ.

[2] Since the sacraments are supplements to the gospel, only one who begins with Christ can expound correctly and usefully their nature, power,

True knowledge of the sacraments derives from the knowledge of Christ.

¹ Rom. 10:4.

² Cf. John 14:6.

office, and enjoyment. Nor should one refer perfunctorily to the name of Christ, but rather hold true to that end for which he was given to us by the Father and on account of the blessings he has bestowed upon us.

*The nature of
the knowledge
of Christ.*

[3] Thus it is consequently held that Christ, being the eternal Son of God and of the same essence and glory as the Father, clothed himself with our flesh in order to communicate to us by right of adoption that which belonged to him by nature, that we might truly be sons of God. This is accomplished when, by faith, we are grafted into the body of Christ, and when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are first reckoned as righteous by a free imputation of righteousness. Then are we regenerated into new life and, being restored in the image of our heavenly Father, we reject the old man.

Christ as priest.

[4] Thus Christ, in his flesh, is to be considered a priest on our behalf, who expiated our sins by the sole sacrifice of his own death. He removed all our iniquities by his obedience, secured a perfect righteousness for us, and now intercedes on our behalf in order that we may stand before God. He is to be deemed an atoning victim by whom God is reconciled to the world. He is also to be regarded as a brother who, from our condition as miserable sons of Adam, has rendered us blessed sons of God. He is also to be deemed a restorer who, by the agency of his Spirit, reforms whatever is vicious in us, in order that we may cease to live for the world and the flesh, and that God himself may dwell in us. He is to be deemed a king who enriches us with every kind of good thing, governs and upholds us by his power, provides us with spiritual weapons that we may stand unconquered against the world and the devil,³ delivers us from all harm, and governs and rules us by the sceptre of his mouth. And so he is to be considered in order that he may raise us to himself, the true God and Father, until that is brought to fulfilment which is finally to take place, when God is truly all in all.⁴

Christ as king.

*How Christ
communicates
Himself to us.*

[5] Moreover, in order that Christ may exhibit himself to us in this fashion and produce these effects in us, it is necessary that we be made one with him and that we grow together in his body.⁵ For he does not pour forth his life into us unless he is our head, from which the whole body, fitly bound and connected together through every contributing joint, works for the increase in due proportion of every member of that body according to his operation.⁶

*Spiritual com-
munion.*

[6] The communion we have with the Son of God is spiritual when, by his Spirit dwelling in us, he makes all believers capable of all the good things

³ Cf. Eph. 6:11.

⁴ Cf. 1Cor. 15:28.

⁵ Cf. Eph. 4:15.

⁶ Cf. Eph. 4:16.

which reside in him. In order to testify to this, the preaching of the gospel was instituted and the use of the sacraments entrusted to us, namely holy baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Institution of the sacraments.

[7] Indeed the goals and purposes of the sacraments are such as to be marks and tokens of Christian profession and community or fraternity, that they may be incitements to gratitude and exercises of faith and a godly life, in short, contracts binding us to this. But the goal which is preeminent among others is that through them God may testify, represent, and seal his grace to us. For although they signify nothing apart from what is announced by the Word itself, it is nonetheless a great and remarkable thing that they are presented before our eyes as living images which affect our senses better as though leading in a manner to the thing itself. At the same time they recall to our remembrance the death of Christ and all his benefits, that faith may be better exercised, and also that what has been pronounced by the mouth of God may be confirmed and ratified as it were by seals.

The ends of the sacraments.

[8] Moreover, while the testimonies and seals of his grace which God has given us are true, without any doubt he truly offers inwardly by his Spirit that which the sacraments figure to our eyes and other senses. That is to say, we may obtain in Christ as the fountain of all blessings, both reconciliation to God by means of his death, and renewal by the spirit in holiness of life, in short, that we may obtain righteousness and salvation; and likewise we may give thanks for these blessings once displayed on the cross which we now grasp daily by means of faith.

What the sacraments truly figure, the Lord truly offers.

[9] Hence, although we distinguish between the signs and the things signified, as is right and proper, yet we do not separate the truth from the signs; but rather we confess that all who by faith embrace the promises there offered receive Christ spiritually together with his spiritual gifts, and as long they have been made partakers of Christ, continue and renew that fellowship.

The act of thanks.

Signs and things signified are distinct.

[10] Neither indeed is it proper to look to the bare signs, but rather to the promise attached to them. As far, therefore, as our faith in the promise there offered is effective, so far will that virtue and efficacy of which we speak extend itself. Thus the matter of water, of bread, or of wine by no means offers Christ to us, nor makes us partakers of his spiritual gifts. Rather the promise must be regarded whose function it is to lead us to Christ by the straight path of faith, which faith makes us partakers of Christ.

The promise is chiefly to be regarded in the sacraments.

[11] This refutes the error of those who gaze stupefied upon the elements and who attach their confidence of salvation to them, since the sacraments separated from Christ are but empty masks, and in them all a voice clearly proclaims this, namely that we adhere to no other than to Christ alone, and seek the gift of salvation from none other than him.

There is to be no stupefied gazing upon the elements.

The sacraments accomplish nothing by themselves. Every saving act is to be attributed to God alone.

[12] Besides, if any good thing is conferred upon us by the sacraments, it is not owing to any intrinsic virtue, even if one should include the promise by which they are distinguished. For it is God alone who acts by his Spirit, and when he employs the service of the sacraments he neither infuses his own power into them nor does he derogate in any respect from the efficacy of his Spirit. Accommodating himself to our ignorance, however, he uses them as supporting instruments, albeit the whole power of acting remains with him alone.

God uses the instrument, but in such a way that all power is His.

[13] Consequently Paul, in similar fashion, warns him who plants or sows that he is nothing, but it is God alone who provides the increase.⁷ And so also it must be said concerning the sacraments that they are nothing, because they will profit nothing, unless God should in all things make them effectual. They are indeed instruments by which God acts efficaciously when he so pleases, yet in such a manner that the whole work of our salvation must be ascribed to him alone.

[14] We conclude, then, that it is Christ alone who truly baptizes inwardly, Christ alone who makes us partakers of himself in the Supper, and in sum Christ alone who fulfils what the sacraments figure, and who uses these instruments in such fashion that the whole effect rests in the power of his Spirit.

How the sacraments serve to confirm.

[15] Thus the sacraments are sometimes called seals, and are said to nourish, confirm, and promote faith; however, the Spirit alone is properly the seal, as well as the author and finisher of faith. For all these attributes of the sacraments settle down to a lower place, so that not even the smallest aspect of our salvation may be transferred to mere creatures or elements.

Not all who partake of the sacraments partake of their substance.

[16] We are careful to point out, moreover, that God does not exert his power indiscriminately in all who receive the sacraments, but only in the elect. For as he enlightens in faith none but those whom he has preordained unto life, so by the secret agency of his Spirit he brings about that the elect actually receive what the sacraments offer.

The sacraments do not confer grace.

[17] That fabrication of the sophists which teaches that the sacraments of the new law confer grace on all who do not interpose the obstacle of mortal sin is overthrown by this doctrine. For beyond the fact that in sacraments nothing is received unless by faith, we must also hold that the grace of God is by no means bound to them such that whoever receives the sign partakes of the substance itself. While the signs are administered to the reprobate and the elect, the truth of the signs reaches only the latter.

⁷ 1Cor. 3:7.

[18] It is certain that Christ, together with his gifts, is offered to all in common and that the truth of God is not overthrown by the unbelief of men.⁸ And while the sacraments always retain their efficacy, not all are capable of receiving Christ and his gifts. Accordingly, nothing is changed on God's part, but with regard to men, each receives according to the measure of his faith.

The gifts of God are offered to all, but are received solely by believers.

[19] Just as the use of the sacraments will confer nothing more on unbelievers than if they had abstained, but on the contrary is destructive to them; so even outside their use the reality which is figured in the sacraments remains firm for the faithful. Thus the sins of Paul were washed away by baptism, even though they had previously been cleansed.⁹ Likewise for Cornelius baptism was the "bath of regeneration"¹⁰ even though he had already received the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Thus in the Supper Christ communicates himself to us, even though he had previously imparted himself to us, and dwells perpetually in us. For since individuals are enjoined to examine themselves,¹² it follows that faith is required of them before they may approach the sacrament. Yet faith is not without Christ, but inasmuch as faith is confirmed and increased by the sacraments, the gifts of God are indeed confirmed in us, and thus Christ in a certain manner increases within us, and we in him.

Both before and without the use of the sacraments the faithful also participate Christ.

[20] Moreover, the benefit which we obtain from the sacraments should not be restricted in the least to the time when they are administered to us, as if the visible sign at the precise moment of its public distribution conveyed together with it the grace of God. For God regenerates in childhood or early adolescence, and occasionally even in old age, those who were baptized in infancy. Consequently the benefit of baptism is accessible throughout life, whence the promise contained by it is continually effectual. On occasion it can happen that the use of the Lord's Supper accomplishes very little from either thoughtlessness or slowness of heart, yet afterward may come to fruition.

Grace is not so closely bound to the action of the sacraments that their benefit may not be received at some time following the action.

[21] The notion of any kind of local presence ought especially to be set aside. While signs are present in this world, they are discerned by the eyes and touched by the hands, but Christ, so far as he is man, is to be sought nowhere other than in heaven, and not otherwise than with the mind and the understanding of faith. Hence it is a perverse and impious superstition to seek to contain him under the elements of this world.

The notion of local presence must be set aside.

⁸ Rom. 3:3 f.

⁹ Acts 9:15–19; Col. 2:12–14.

¹⁰ Titus 3:5.

¹¹ Acts 10:44–48.

¹² 1Cor. 11:28.

*An elucidation of
the words "This
Is My Body".¹³*

[22] Consequently we repudiate those outrageous interpreters who insist on the precisely literal sense of the traditional words of the Supper, "This is my body;¹⁴ this is my blood"¹⁵. For we hold beyond all dispute that they are to be taken figuratively, such that the bread and wine are said to be that which they signify. Nor should it be viewed as novel or unusual that the name of the thing signified should be transferred to the sign by metonymy, since similar modes of expression occur throughout the Scriptures, and by speaking in this way we convey nothing which is not already set out by the most ancient and esteemed writers of the Church.

*Of eating the
body of Christ.*

[23] When by the power of his spirit Christ nourishes our souls through faith by means of eating his flesh and drinking his blood,¹⁶ which are here figured, it is not to be understood as if any intermingling or transfusion of substance occurs, but rather that we draw life from flesh offered once for all in sacrifice, and from blood shed in expiation.

*Against transub-
stantiation and
other foolishness.*

[24] In this way not only is the fabrication of the papists concerning transubstantiation refuted, but all the crude inventions and futile sophistry which either detract from his celestial glory or are less than consistent with the true reality of his human nature. For we judge it no less absurd to situate Christ under the bread or to join him with the bread than to transubstantiate the bread into his body.

*The body of
Christ is locally
in heaven.*

[25] And lest any ambiguity may remain when we say that Christ is to be sought in heaven, this manner of speaking denotes and expresses to us distance of place. Although philosophically speaking there is no place above the skies, yet as the body of Christ bears the nature and mode of a human body, it is finite and is contained in heaven as it were in place; it is necessarily as distant from us by as great an interval of place as heaven is from earth.

*Christ not to be
worshipped in
the bread or in
the sacrament.*

[26] If it is not right and proper to attach Christ to the bread and the wine in our imagination, much less is it permissible to worship him in the bread. For although the bread is held out to us as a symbol and pledge of the communion which we have with Christ, yet because it is a sign and not the substance itself, and does not have the substance either included in it or attached to it, those who turn their minds towards it with the intention of worshipping Christ make an idol of it.

¹³ Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; 1Cor. 11:24; cf. Luke 22:19.

¹⁴ Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; 1Cor. 11:24; cf. Luke 22:19.

¹⁵ Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; cf. Luke 22:20; 1Cor. 11:25.

¹⁶ Cf. John 6:53.

Reply of the Zurichers to Master Calvin's letter.

To the faithful pastor of the Church of Geneva, their most dear brother, Master John Calvin, the pastors, doctors, and ministers of the Church of Zurich send greeting.

Your immense zeal for learning, Calvin, most cherished brother in the Lord, and the diligent labours by which you endeavour daily to shed light on the doctrine of the sacraments and to rid the Church of stumbling blocks which appear to have arisen from a rather obscure explanation of the mysteries, cause not the least annoyance to us so that we deem them rather to be worthy not only of commendation and praise, but also to be upheld and followed by us to the best of our ability. Since the sacred laws of our prince Jesus Christ refer all actions to the purpose of cultivating charity or zeal for mutual assistance, they prohibit nothing more severely than to cause hindrance to another so that he may not judge rightly concerning those things the knowledge of which is necessary or at least useful and salutary for men, or so that he may not perform that duty which he owes first to God and then to his neighbour. With the same seriousness these laws command us to remove, as far as possible, the obstacles which men usually come up against. For this reason it seemed to us that the visit of both William Farel, our respected brother, and yourself was most fitting and specially worthy of leading churchmen, in the first instance that by friendly discussion we might expound to each other, in the simplest fashion possible, our way of thinking regarding the sacraments, especially on those heads concerning which there has been a certain amount of controversy among those who, on other topics, have taught the pure doctrine of the gospel with complete agreement; and, moreover, that we might testify to our agreement in a published record. For we see no other means nor a more convenient method by which we may bring an end to religious controversy or banish empty suspicions where no disagreement exists, or by which we may remove offences which are sometimes born in the church of God from the controversial opinions of the learned, than if those who seem to disagree, or who do in truth disagree, explain their thinking openly and in turn, both in speech and in writing. It would not be enough, moreover, were they to withhold the truth once investigated and confirmed, without also making it available to other men with fuller explanation of those things which had been barely made known and obscurely expressed, by expounding with clarity by a declaration in definite, appropriate, and significant statements what had been set forth ambiguously. This method was always approved by the church fathers and frequently employed in settling controversies concerning matters of religion; it was never

without a salutary effect on the church; and finally it was approved by the supreme example of the apostles of Christ, our Lord and God. For as we read in Acts, chapter 15,¹⁷ the gravest dissension was settled in no other way than this when the apostles and their own true disciples taught that hearts are purified by faith in the name of Christ and men are saved by his grace alone, whereas others contended that it was necessary to be circumcised and to observe the Mosaic Law. Therefore, we cannot but thoroughly approve your holy efforts, dear brother Calvin, and those of all devout men who strive by means of suitable arguments to remove offences and to repair the damaged peace and harmony of the church, while they endeavour by simple and accurate explanation to render Christian doctrine more and more lucid and plain, and to rid minds of empty, divisive conjectures; and also to lead back into true, enduring, and holy concord those who have been in some disagreement of words or opinions.

For the rest, in publishing a document in which we seek to give witness to our agreement, both to the devout and to enemies of the truth, we are persuaded that when it has completed its present trial, we may hope for that fruit which you foretell in your letter. For we have sent the draft of our mutual agreement to a number of other brethren. And here [in Zurich] we have shown it to several men who love Christ and the truth and are by no means uninformed in sacred things. They have not only acknowledged that we are in agreement on those points on which hitherto, in the opinion of many, we were disagreed, but have also offered thanks to Christ our Saviour; perceiving that we are agreed in God and in the truth, they entertain great hope of more abundant fruit in the church. Nonetheless, some have desired a fuller treatment of the argument on account of certain subtle men who, on hearing of our agreement, found it somewhat difficult to admit satisfaction. What purpose would it serve to explain at great length that God is the author of the sacraments and instituted them for legitimate sons of the church; or that just so many sacraments were given to the church by Christ and others were introduced by men; or what are the parts of the sacrament; or in what place, at what time, and by what sacred means the mysteries ought to be performed? Published tracts on the sacraments, which either our tutors of devout and sacred memory or we ourselves have written, prove sufficiently that there has been no semblance or shadow of dissension among us on these or any other points of a similar nature. Indeed concerning the true bodily presence of our Lord Christ, the correct meaning of the solemn words, the eating of the body of Christ, and the end, use, and effect of the sacraments — on which issues many have hitherto thought our opinions, or certainly our

¹⁷ Acts 15:5–34.

words, to have been in conflict – we have spoken so fully, plainly, and simply that we hope men, zealous both for brotherly concord and for transparent truth, will not find our work lacking either in fullness or in clarity of expression. Nor do we despair that the ministers of the other churches of Christ in Switzerland will also readily acknowledge that we have expressed the very same doctrine of the sacraments which for many years has been commonly received by Christian people, so that they will be the last folk to disagree with us in the acknowledged truth. And not without good reasons do we anticipate this from all the faithful throughout the churches of other nations.

Then again, if anyone should produce a clearer explanation of the sacraments, we would prefer to use it together with all the devout, rather than urge a single individual to subscribe to our agreement, in which nonetheless we have employed the words of the sacred scriptures and expounded openly the sense in which we understand them, and indeed we hold ourselves to be in agreement with the catholic church on the very best authority. Moreover, if this document should not remove the stumbling blocks of all whom any semblance of disagreement among us may have hindered in the ways of the Lord, we will nevertheless think that it has borne fruit splendidly because we have witnessed to all without obscurity or pretence, and also that we, to whom Christ has given to think and to speak in the same terms concerning the doctrines of religion, by no means differ in the explanation of these mysteries. Farewell dearest brother.

At Zurich, 30 August, in the year of our Lord 1549.

übersetzt von / translated by: Torrance Kirby