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**Severing the Dragon's Tail:
The Rejection of the Mass and the Adoption of the Reformed Practice of the Lord's Supper
during the Scottish Reformation**

The Protestant Reformation brought about a great many changes in the Church of Scotland. At the very least, it must be admitted that the concept of the church itself was revised in Scotland. No longer was the church a puppet of the papacy, receiving her marching orders from Rome. Instead, the true Head of the church was viewed to be Christ Himself, and the marching orders for His saints came from His word, the Scriptures. The Scottish interpretation of the church was perhaps best defined as it appears in the Scots Confession of 1560, which states, "The notes of the true Kirk, therefore, we believe, confess, and avow to be: first, the true preaching of the Word of God...; secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus...; and lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's word prescribes..."¹ Although all three of these marks were significant, it was perhaps the second of these that gave a clear, visual indication of the marked differences between Catholics and Protestants. In particular, the Roman Catholic Mass was determined to be so offensive that Martin Luther, using imagery from the book of Revelation, referred to it as the "dragon's tail."² In Scotland, a major portion of the conflict surrounding the growing influence of Protestantism centered on the

¹ *The Scottish Confession of Faith, 1560*, Chapter 18 in Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 176-77. These marks of the true church were not unique to the Scottish Reformation. For example, Article 29 of the *Belgic Confession of Faith* likewise declares, "The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in chastening of sin." See Cochrane, 210.

² Martin Luther, *The Schmalkald Articles*, trans. William R. Russell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 8. Citing Rev 12:3 and 20:2, Luther writes, "Moreover, this dragon's tail, the mass, has produced many noxious pests and the excrement of numerous idolatries..."

celebration of the Mass.³ In fact, opposition to the Mass was “one of the distinguishing marks of the Reforming attitude in Scotland.”⁴ The celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the Scottish church during the sixteenth century was a reflection of the developments resulting from the rejection of Roman Catholic theology and the embrace of Reformed theology.

It would be a mistake to assume that objections to the Mass did not arise until the sixteenth century. Medieval reformers, John Wycliffe and John Hus in particular, challenged many of the errors of the Roman Catholic Church, including the doctrine of transubstantiation, the theological basis for the celebration of the Mass.⁵ Brown observes that “Hus learned of Wyclif’s [sic] criticism of transubstantiation; this became the basis of his own teaching.”⁶ The doctrine of transubstantiation was formally defined at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and rested upon Aristotelian, rather than Scriptural, foundations.⁷ The theory behind this doctrine affirmed “that the accidents [i.e., the outer appearance] of the bread and wine ... remain unchanged at the moment of consecration, while their substance [i.e., essential nature] changes

³ George B. Burnet, *The Holy Communion in the Reformed Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), 1.

⁴ Alax C. Cheyne, “The Scots Confession of 1560,” *Theology Today* 17 (1960): 335.

⁵ Ted A. Campbell, *Christian Confessions* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 163. Campbell notes that Wycliffe and Hus “questioned the Catholic understanding of the church, arguing that the only true church is the church of God’s elect, which is ‘invisible’ or hidden in this world. Both ... laid the background for the Protestant Reformers’ challenges to inherited views of the church, its ministry, and its sacraments.” Interestingly, this view seems to correspond with the Reformed understanding of the marks of the church discussed earlier. The rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation was an integral part in shaping the understanding of the true church.

⁶ Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988), 298. According to Brown, “Hus wanted to restore the ancient eucharistic meal to its original importance and make Christians once again look on it as a wonderful privilege....” See Brown, 299.

⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 524. It must be said that the doctrine of transubstantiation is also rooted, to some degree, in the teachings of a Paschasius Radbertus, a Frankish monk of the ninth century. In 831, Radbertus published a volume entitled *On the Body and Blood of the Lord*. Historically, the book is the first full treatment of the doctrine of the Eucharist; its distinctive is that it puts forth the idea of the corporeal presence of Christ at the Supper. See Brown, 229. Brown adds, “Where earlier Christians had stressed union with Christ by faith, and by it had meant faith *in him*, the newer view [of Radbertus] stressed a sacramental union. Faith was still required, but it was not so much the faith of the individual as the faith of the church, which presented Christ to the communicant.” Emphasis is in the original.

from that of bread and wine to that of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.”⁸ The inevitable consequence of this interpretation of the sacrament was that Christ became a daily sacrifice upon the altar, a view that was denounced by Luther and others as idolatrous.⁹ In addition to the sacrificial nature of the Mass, the sacrament carried with it (in Roman Catholic theology) the notion that it actually infused grace into its recipients.¹⁰ For Luther and the other Reformers, the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross was full, sufficient, and perfect, never to be repeated.¹¹ Thus, the rejection of the Mass became a visible representation of the rejection of Roman Catholic theology. In breaking with Rome on the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, the Protestant Reformers were adopting a theology that not only led to a correct understanding of the sacraments, but one that led to a correct understanding of biblical soteriology as well.

Lutheranism found its way into Scotland primarily through the work of Patrick Hamilton.¹² While Luther had rejected transubstantiation, he adopted a doctrine that stressed “Christ is truly, really, and especially present in his full nature in the bread and wine of the Eucharist.”¹³ For example, Luther comments that “the sacrament is the body and blood of the Lord under the bread and the wine....”¹⁴ This view is clearly expressed in the Augsburg

⁸ Ibid. In response to Protestant criticism during the Reformation, the Council of Trent (1551) put forth the official position of the Roman Catholic church on this doctrine, stating that “our Lord Jesus Christ is truly, really and substantially contained in the venerable sacrament of the holy eucharist under the appearance of physical things.” See McGrath, 524. While some Roman Catholic theologians of recent times may have interpreted the doctrine behind the Mass in slightly different terms (e.g., a representation of the sacrifice of Christ rather than a repetition of His sacrifice), the decrees of Trent are still considered to be official and authoritative within Roman Catholicism. See Stewart Mechie, “The Principles of the Scottish Reformation,” *The Expository Times* 71 (1966): 357.

⁹ William H. Willimon, *Word, Water, Wine and Bread* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1980), 63. Cf. D.M. Murray, “Lord’s Supper” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron et al. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1993), 496.

¹⁰ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1995), 275.

¹¹ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship That Is Reformed According to Scripture* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 127. Old writes, “Once the mass is regarded as a sacrifice the uniqueness of Christ’s sacrifice disappears.”

¹² James Atkinson, “Reform” in *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, ed. Tim Dowley (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 390.

¹³ Willimon, 64.

¹⁴ Martin Luther, “Sermons on the Catechism, 1528” in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor, 1962), 236. Brown comments, “In his effort to defend the real, bodily presence of Christ in the sacrament, Luther inclined dangerously to monophysitism, the doctrine that after the incarnation Christ

Confession of 1530, which states, “It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are *really present* in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received.”¹⁵ Luther rightly rejected the repeated sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ inherent in the Mass, but it is difficult to see any other great distinction between the Roman Catholic and Lutheran theories of the presence of Christ in the Supper. Although Luther heavily influenced Hamilton, it is difficult to ascertain whether Luther influenced Hamilton’s view of the Lord’s Supper.¹⁶ Prior to his martyrdom in 1528, Hamilton was interrogated concerning his Lutheran beliefs, and while he vigorously denied several unbiblical Roman Catholic doctrines, this group does not appear to have included the Mass.¹⁷ While it is certain that Hamilton rejected the Mass, his doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, Lutheran or otherwise, does not appear to have been influential in Scotland.

The extent to which Lutheranism affected Scotland can be seen in the years following the death of Hamilton. Among other things, Hamilton’s example encouraged others to embrace the “new” doctrines of the Reformation, and these men, in turn, helped to lay a Protestant foundation

possesses only one incarnate divine nature.” For a fuller discussion of the ramifications of Luther’s view, see Brown, 317-20.

¹⁵ *The Augsburg Confession*, Article 10 in John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 71. Emphasis is added.

¹⁶ This is difficult, since it is difficult to find Hamilton’s opinion on the subject. Hamilton was martyred as a young man, and his theology may not have been fully developed in this area. In fact, there is some indication that Hamilton’s understanding of the doctrine of justification may have been lacking. Torrance writes, “A developed account of the justifying activity of Christ...is missing in Hamilton. ...Hamilton...concentrates on the ‘passive obedience’ of Christ only, with the result that his doctrine of justification looks like a merely forensic perpetual letting-off of sin, which his doctrine of redemption is closely reminiscent of the Roman idea of infusion of grace.” See Iain R. Torrance, “Patrick Hamilton and John Knox: A Study in the Doctrine of Justification by Faith,” *Archive for Reformation History* 65 (1974): 176-78. Whether this view produced an “infusion of grace” view in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is unknown. In Hamilton’s defense with regard to the active obedience of Christ, it should be noted that this doctrine was a distinctive of Calvin, which Torrance acknowledges (177-78, n. 10). Hamilton died in 1528, years prior to Calvin’s conversion to Christianity.

¹⁷ James Edward McGoldrick, “Patrick Hamilton, Luther’s Scottish Disciple,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (Spring 1987): 86. McGoldrick writes, “During the interrogation to which he was subjected Hamilton decried the idolatrous use of images in the church, and he denied that the Virgin Mary and the saints are intercessors in heaven. He rejected the doctrine of purgatory, and he called the pope anti-Christ.” Hamilton’s view on the Mass is noticeably absent from this list.

that would later help to shape the Reformation in Scotland.¹⁸ John Gau, for example, produced a translation of a Lutheran text in the Scottish vernacular, while John Johnson, probably an eyewitness to Hamilton's martyrdom, produced a work of Lutheran influence designed to comfort those undergoing persecution for their Protestant beliefs.¹⁹ It is notable that the works of these two men are nearly silent on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.²⁰ In fact, Cameron even comments that Lutheran works in Scotland during the period after Hamilton's death "seemed to minimize the sacraments."²¹ According to McEwan, "There is ... no evidence that an explicitly Lutheran Communion was ever celebrated in Scotland."²² Lutheran theology apparently did not have a direct effect upon the Scottish understanding of the Lord's Supper during this period, at least to the extent to which Luther understood the presence of Christ in the sacrament.

A second figure instrumental in bringing the Protestant Reformation to Scotland was George Wishart. Prior to his work for the gospel in Scotland, Wishart had spent time on the Continent, and his stay in Zurich almost certainly influenced him greatly, particularly his view concerning the celebration of the Lord's Supper.²³ This influence ran the risk of resisting a Lutheran celebration of the Lord's Supper, although in the opposite "extreme." The original leader of the Reformation in Zurich was Huldrych Zwingli, whose theology concerning the

¹⁸ James K. Cameron, "Aspects of the Lutheran Contribution to the Scottish Reformation 1528-1552," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 19 (May 1985): 12; McGoldrick, 87.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15. Gau's work was entitled *Richt Vay to the Kingdom of Heuine* and Johnson's work had the slightly lengthier title *An Comfortable Exhortation of our mooste Holy Christen Faith and her Frutes written unto the Christen brethren in Scotland after the pure word of God*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15-6. Gau's work describes the Lutheran doctrine of the church and mentions that the unity of the church is demonstrated in the sacrament, but does not go beyond this. According to Cameron, Johnson's work "has nothing to say concerning the doctrines of the Church, the ministry or the sacraments."

²¹ *Ibid.*, 17. Richard Kyle maintains, however, that Scottish Protestants during this period were Lutheran in their view of the Real Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Apparently, however, they did not hold strongly to this view, and this may be the reason that the doctrine does not seem to be significantly represented by the Scots of the era prior to George Wishart. See Richard G. Kyle, *The Mind of John Knox* (Lawrenceville, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1984), 169.

²² James S. McEwan, *The Faith of John Knox* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961), 55.

²³ Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Scottish Reformation: Its Epochs, Episodes, Leaders and Distinctive Characteristics*, ed. D. Hay Fleming (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1899; reprint, Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1995), 77.

Lord's Supper was as decidedly different from that of Luther as it was opposed to that of Rome. Zwingli confesses, for instance, that the sacrament "is not a sacrifice but a recollection of the sacrifice and an assurance of the redemption which Christ has manifested to us."²⁴ One must be careful not to caricaturize Zwingli's view. He did reject the idea that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace, preferring to view the sacrament as "a sign of *past* grace, not of *present* grace."²⁵ For Zwingli, the sacrament was viewed as a memorial or "visual aid," although "he did affirm, to some degree, the presence of Christ at the Eucharist ... [and] he did say that Christ's spiritual nature could be present among the believers at the meal but not in any way *in* the meal."²⁶ Contra the Roman Catholic dependence upon Aristotelian assumptions concerning the Mass, Zwingli's view was, in fact, Platonic in that he preferred to distinguish between the human and spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.²⁷ However, in adopting a memorialist view, Zwingli did not deny the spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament.²⁸ The blame for the non-spiritual view normally leveled at Zwingli more properly rests with the Anabaptist movement. Anabaptists in Switzerland carried the views of Zwingli to an extreme by interpreting the sacrament as a commemorative service that stressed the participants' communion with one another rather than communion with God.²⁹ While one could say that Zwingli's theology of the Supper may be

²⁴ *Zwingli's Sixty-seven Articles of 1523*, Article 18 in Cochrane, 38.

²⁵ Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 63. Emphasis is in the original. Mathison comments that for Zwingli, "the Supper is a memorial, not a means."

²⁶ Willimon, 68. Emphasis is in the original.

²⁷ George Yule, "Continental Patterns and the Reformation in England and Scotland," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22 (Sept. 1969): 307. Yule notes that Zwingli's humanist background is at work here.

²⁸ *Ibid.*; cf. Kyle, 168. Yule writes, "Quite clearly Zwingli does not deny the spiritual presence of Christ. What he denies is the presence of Christ's humanity, so forcefully stressed by Calvin and Luther." Likewise, Kyle notes, "This position did not mean that Zwingli denied the spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Rather what Christ did in the past is spiritually present to the believer by faith." Stephens makes the very important point that in his later writings, "Zwingli makes in clear that there is no dispute about Christ's being present in the supper, only about whether he is present bodily and thus offered and eaten in it. He affirms that Christ is eaten spiritually and sacramentally." See W.P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 252.

²⁹ Kyle, 168. Cf. McEwan, 51.

partly responsible for such a symbolic view, he may not, in fact, deserve as much blame as for this view as he usually receives.³⁰

The Zwinglian influences upon Wishart, however, were secondary at best. Wishart would have probably been more influenced during his stay in Zurich by Henry Bullinger, Zwingli's successor. When Wishart returned to Scotland, he brought with him a copy of the first Helvetic (Swiss) Confession, and his translation of this document had a definite influence on Scottish thinking.³¹ While the document can be said to be Zwinglian in essence, there is a particular emphasis "on the significance of the sacramental signs and the real spiritual presence of Christ, who gives his body and blood – that is, himself – to believers...."³² The confession's articles on the sacraments were primarily the product of a collaboration by Bullinger and Martin Bucer and, as a result, actually reflected Lutheran tendencies.³³ Consider for, example, the following statements from the Confession:

These sacraments are significant, holy signs of sublime, secret things. However, *they are not mere, empty signs*, but consist of the sign and the substance. ...In the Lord's Supper the bread and wine are the signs, but the spiritual substance is the communion of the body and blood of Christ.... As these signs are bodily received, so these substantial invisible things are received in faith. Moreover, the entire power, efficacy and fruit of the sacrament lies in these spiritual and substantial things. Consequently we confess that the sacraments are not simply outward signs of Christian fellowship. On the contrary, we confess them to be signs of divine grace by which the ministers of the Church work with the Lord for the purpose and to the end which He Himself promises, offers, and efficaciously provides.³⁴

³⁰ One historian, commenting on just one of the enormous contributions of the great Protestant peacemaker Martin Bucer, writes, "In 1528 a change took place in Bucer's attitude toward the whole subject [of the Eucharist]. He had always deprecated the strife; now he discovered that fundamentally Luther and Zwingli were in agreement. They fought only because each expressed his doctrine in different words, in order to exclude different errors." See Hasting Eells, "The Contributions of Martin Bucer to the Reformation," *Harvard Theological Review* 24 (Jan 1931): 32. While the present writer would prefer to maintain a greater distinction between the views of both of these Reformers, it is still important to note that they are not nearly as far removed from one another as is commonly alleged.

³¹ W. Ian P. Hazlett, "The Scots Confession 1560: Context, Complexion and Critique," *Archive for Reformation History* 78 (1987): 310.

³² Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 6th ed., rev. by David S. Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 1:389.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *The First Helvetic Confession of 1536*, Article 20 in Cochrane, 107. Emphasis is added.

The influence of all this upon Wishart cannot be overstated. He returned to Scotland in 1544 and began preaching and administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper according to the Reformed model he had learned on the Continent.³⁵ According to Burnet, in 1545 Wishart led the first public celebration of the Lord's Supper in Scotland.³⁶ As a visible departure from the Mass, this marked the beginning of the proper observance of the sacrament in Scotland.

The man who helped to nurture the correct understanding of the Lord's Supper in Scotland was none other than the Scottish Reformer *par excellence* himself, John Knox. Burnet credits Knox's 1547 observance of the sacrament as "the second public celebration of the Holy Communion in Scotland according to the Reformed ritual."³⁷ Knox's hatred for the Roman Catholic Mass has been well attested.³⁸ The Mass, for Knox, was the central doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.³⁹ To Knox, the Mass comprised everything that was wrong with Roman Catholicism. Hence, his concern for the proper administration of the sacrament was a driving force behind his theology. One would assume, given his opposition to the Mass, that Knox would have formulated his view of the Lord's Supper along the lines of Zwingli. To the contrary, Knox had a more mystical view of the sacrament.⁴⁰ He rejected the superstition that

³⁵ Gordon Donaldson, "Reformation to Covenant" in *Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland*, ed. Duncan B. Forrester and Douglas M. Murray (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1984), 34.

³⁶ Burnet, 1. This is the first recorded instance of such a celebration. Burnet cites John Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (Glasgow, 1874), 32.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2. Burnet adds, "It was an important milestone on the road from a mere Protestant Movement to a Reformed Church." This celebration may have been based, in part, on Wishart's translation of the First Helvetic Confession. See Kyle, 170.

³⁸ Douglas Wilson records that Knox once declared, during a sermon, "that one Mass was more fearful to him than 10,000 men [invading Scotland seeking to suppress Christianity]." See Douglas Wilson, *For Kirk and Covenant: The Stalwart Courage of John Knox* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2002), 66. For the source of the statement, Wilson cites Henry Cowan, *John Knox: The Hero of the Scottish Reformation* (1905; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1970), 268.

³⁹ A. M. Renwick, *The Story of the Scottish Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 57.

⁴⁰ Wilson, 136.

surrounded the Mass, condemning it for that which it was, blasphemy and idolatry.⁴¹ His objections, however, ran deeper than this. Wilson comments:

Many modern Protestants see the doctrine of transubstantiation as idolatry because man worships a created thing (the host) as God – and some Protestants have trouble seeing even this. However, Knox did not identify this as the problem. This was certainly idolatrous fruit, but it was because it had grown up from an idolatrous seed – an invention of man in worship. Something that began in idolatry could not hope to end in true and pure worship. ...[Knox's] zeal was for the pure worship of God, and God was the only One with the authority to determine what that pure worship should look like.⁴²

For Knox, the Mass signified a manmade, impure, irreverent worship of God. If Christians intended to worship God properly, then He would have to be worshipped according to the means He had revealed in Scripture.

In addition to his view of the Mass as improper worship, Knox, like Luther and the other Reformers, objected to the soteriological implications of the ritual. Because Roman Catholic theologians interpreted the Mass as a sacrifice, this view tended to diminish the importance and sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ. Torrance writes:

[In] trying to show what is basically wrong with the Mass, Knox points to the death of Christ. The Roman priest performing the Mass was attempting to procure remission of sins for those who were participating. Knox rejects this unequivocally. We already have remission of sins: Christ has died for us. The Roman would object: “Do we not continually need the remission of sins?,” and the basic difference between him and Knox becomes clear. Knox can reply that this would be so if the league between us and God were dependent on our own state of holiness: if, that is, redemption were a process leading to sanctification. But our league [covenant] with God is not so precarious: in Christ we have a Mediator whose righteousness we are unable to spoil. Thus ...we see Knox exposing a doctrine which stems from a failure to recognise sufficiently clearly the precise nature and activity of Christ in his work of redemption.⁴³

The reason for the rejection of the Mass by Knox and others during the Scottish Reformation stemmed from a proper understanding of the work of Jesus Christ. If salvation was by the sovereign grace of God, then a manmade ceremony that misrepresented the perfect work of

⁴¹ Ibid., 60, 136.

⁴² Ibid., 163-64.

⁴³ Torrance, 182-83.

Christ had no place in the worship of God. In this, the view of the Mass by the Scottish Reformers was very much in line with that of the Continental Reformers.

What, however, was the correct interpretation of the Lord's Supper? On the Continent, it seemed two extreme viewpoints were struggling for control – the Lutheran interpretation and the Zwinglian interpretation. Judging from the influence of Lutheran theology and the spiritual view of the sacrament in Scotland, it would seem that Scotland was destined to progress along the lines of Lutheranism with respect to the Lord's Supper. This was not to be the case. During his exile in Geneva, John Knox was exposed to the teachings of John Calvin, and this shaped Knox's theology concerning the sacrament.⁴⁴ Calvin steered toward a middle ground between the theology of Zwingli and Luther concerning the sacrament, maintaining a high view of the sacraments (as “means of grace”) but avoiding a doctrine of “real presence” in the Lord's Supper, except to say that Christ is spiritually present in the sacrament.⁴⁵ Like the rest of the Reformers, Calvin condemned the Mass as idolatrous. Like Luther, he maintained a spiritual view of the sacrament and rejected the symbolism suggested by Zwingli. However, according to Calvin, Christ was not present in the sense that Luther suggested.⁴⁶ The bread and wine were symbolic of the body and blood of Christ, and yet the Christian feasts upon them in a spiritual way. Calvin writes:

From the physical things set forth in the Sacrament we are led by a sort of analogy to spiritual things. Thus, when bread is given as a symbol of Christ's body, we must at once grasp this comparison: as bread nourishes, sustains, and keeps the life of our body, so

⁴⁴ For example, when Knox was asked to write a Reformed liturgy for the Lord's Supper, he followed the Genevan liturgy of Calvin, although Knox “improved it considerably.” See Old, 139. Cf. Mitchell, 116.

⁴⁵ Willimon, 69-70. Willimon writes, “For Calvin, Christ was really and fully present in the Lord's Supper by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit. The believer, therefore, participates really but ‘spiritually’ in the presence of Christ when the Lord's Supper is celebrated. The presence is real, but it is a spiritual presence. Calvin's doctrine of the eucharistic presence is somewhere between Luther's and Zwingli's.”

⁴⁶ Many Roman Catholic theologians in the sixteenth century tended to group together all Reformed teachings on the Eucharist *except* Luther's in order to critique them as sacramentarianism – merely signs or symbols, devoid of any real power or content. This is not to say that they were not critical of Lutheranism on the subject, only that there was a very obvious distinction concerning the Protestant interpretations of the sacrament. See Hazlett, 308.

Christ's body is the only food to invigorate and enliven our soul. When we see wine set forth as a symbol of blood, we must reflect that the same are spiritually imparted to us by Christ's blood. These benefits are to nourish, refresh, strengthen, and gladden.⁴⁷

Calvin viewed the elements of the Supper as things present, rather than things absent.⁴⁸ In this regard, Calvin distinguishes himself from Zwingli, since "for Zwingli the bread and wine are symbols of what is absent, namely Christ's body, whereas for Calvin they are seals of what is present – Christ's risen humanity."⁴⁹ At the same time, Calvin believed in the true spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament, but he rejected the implications of corporeal presence of Christ.⁵⁰ Thus, Calvin maintained a view of the Lord's Supper deeper than the symbolism suggested by Zwingli, he but also avoiding the Eucharistic extremes of Luther.

Although Calvin's influence played a large part in helping to formulate the sacramental theology of Knox, the centrality of the Lord's Supper and its importance in Scottish worship can be seen as being firmly entrenched in the thought of Knox prior to his stay in Geneva under Calvin. Knox first met Calvin in 1554, so anything recorded by Knox on the sacrament prior to this date should give a clearer view of his opinions before coming under the influence of Calvin.⁵¹ Of Knox's works prior to 1554, two are noteworthy.⁵² The first is a polemic against the Mass, but the second affords the true feelings of Knox concerning the sacrament. In this second work, Knox clearly supported a high view of the sacrament (i.e., a mystical view, as opposed to a "memorial" view). He writes, "Through the vertew of the Halie Giast, ...we, being fed with his

⁴⁷ John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vols. 20-21, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1363 (4:17.3).

⁴⁸ Mathison, 23.

⁴⁹ Yule, 307.

⁵⁰ Mathison, 27.

⁵¹ Wilson, 44. This is not to say that Calvin could not have influenced Knox prior to 1554, as he was almost certainly reading the works of Calvin by 1550. See Kyle, 170; McEwan, 54.

⁵² John Knox, "A Notable sermon, made by the sayde John Knox, wherein is evydentlye prouved that the masse is and alwayes hath ben abhominable before God and Idolyatrye" in *The Works of John Knox*, vol. 3, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: 1854; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1966), 33-70; Knox, "A summe, according to the Holie Scriptures, what opinioun we Christians haif of the Lordis Supper, callit The Sacrament of the Bodie and Blude of our Saviour Jesus Christ" in Laing, 3: 73-75. The first of these is a sermon delivered in 1550, while the second, which has no date, may be assigned to the same year (according to Laing).

flesche, and refrescheit with his blude, may be renewit both unto trew godliness and to immortalitie.”⁵³ He also adds, “For in the Sacrament we receive Jesus Chryst spirituallie....”⁵⁴ In this viewpoint, Knox objected to the Mass (a given), but he also apparently presented an opinion, which, as a consequence, was opposed to the Lutheran interpretation of the sacrament as well. The sacrament is “to be receiveit with faith, and not with mouth, nor yit by transfusioun of substance.”⁵⁵ Knox firmly believed that no physical transformation of the bread and wine takes place in the sacrament, and his frequent mention of the spiritual aspects of the Lord’s Supper also seems to preclude the literal presence of Christ (in the Lutheran sense) in the sacrament.

Knox comments:

For yf we suld beleive that his verie naturall bodie, both flesche and blude, were naturallie in the bread and yne, that suld not save us, seeing many beleif that, and yit receive it to thair dampnatioun. For it is not his presence in the bread that can save us, but his presence in our hartis through faith in his blude, whilk hath waschit out our synnis, and pacifeit his Fatheris wraith towardis us. And again, yf we do not beleive his bodilie presence in the bread and wyne, that sall not dampn us, but the absence out of hart throw unbeleif.⁵⁶

Thus, Knox emphasized the spiritual aspects of the sacrament instead of the actual physical presence of Christ in the sacraments.

In this brief statement of his belief concerning the sacrament, traces of Knox’s thoughts on the Supper, later found explicitly in the Scots Confession, are evident. Unlike the Mass, the sacrament is not a good work to be performed by Christians, for the believer “must in no wyse think, that for this workis sake thair synne be forgevin.”⁵⁷ Through the sacrament, Christ brings together His body, the church. According to Knox, in the Lord’s Supper “the Lord Jesus gathereth us unto ane visibill bodie, so that we be memberis ane of another, and mak altogether

⁵³ Knox, “A Summe,” 73.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

one bodie, whair of Jesus Chryst is onlie heid.”⁵⁸ Thus, Knox’s view of the sacrament comes forward. It is not a sacrifice, nor is it a good work to be performed. Christ is present in the sacrament, but He is present in a spiritual manner, through the work of the Holy Spirit. In the sacrament, the saints are brought together as one body. There is an aspect of remembrance in the Lord’s Supper, but it is different than the memorial interpretation that is often associated with Zwingli. Knox writes, “By the same Sacrament, the Lord calleth us to remembrance of his Death and Passioun, to steir up our hartis to prais his maist holie name.”⁵⁹ Far from being simply a solemn ceremony, the Lord’s Supper is to be a celebration of the work that Jesus Christ has done for His people. It is a spiritual feast in which all of God’s people are brought together and spiritually nourished through the partaking of the bread and wine.

The influence of Calvin’s theology concerning the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper greatly affected the Scots Confession of 1560. For his part in penning the Confession, Knox looked to Calvin, particularly regarding the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Hazlett writes, “It would seem hard to deny that the main instrument behind the Confession’s orientation to Calvin was Knox.”⁶⁰ Some have apparently suggested that the Scots Confession was written along Zwinglian lines and retreated from the mystical elements of Luther and Calvin.⁶¹ This, however, is in no way an accurate representation. The Scots Confession teaches the same doctrine as Calvin; in fact, within the Confession, “the Zwinglian doctrine is as explicitly rejected as the Romano-Lutheran ... [and] the language as well as the doctrine closely resembles Calvin’s.”⁶²

The Confession follows Calvin in rejecting the idea of the sacraments as merely signs or

⁵⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Hazlett, 309. W. Stanford Reid comments, “John Calvin obviously provided the background for [the Scots Confession], although the Scottish doctrine was filtered through Knox.” See Reid, “French Influence on the First Scots Confession and Book of Discipline,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 (Fall 1972): 9.

⁶¹ Mitchell, 116.

⁶² Ibid.

symbols.⁶³ The Confession states, “We utterly condemn the vanity of those who affirm the sacraments to be nothing else than naked and bare signs.”⁶⁴ This is an obvious repudiation of those who took Zwingli’s doctrine to its memorialistic extremes. Others claim that the Confession is somehow reconcilable with the Lutheran view of the sacrament, but it does not teach “a ‘Real Presence’ in the traditional or Lutheran sense.”⁶⁵ Chapter 21 of the Confession, which deals strictly with the administration of the sacraments within the church, essentially came directly from the thought of Calvin, such that “there is barely a feature of it which is not found in Calvin’s *Institutes*.”⁶⁶ The Confession plainly states, “We readily admit that we make a distinction between Christ Jesus and His eternal substance and the elements of the sacramental signs.”⁶⁷ In considering all of this chapter, the Confession appears to be making a very conscious effort to distance itself from both Luther and Zwingli. Thus, the understanding of the sacrament within the Scottish churches, as was the case with most Reformed churches, came primarily from Calvin.

Knox, however, was not content simply to copy Calvin. While Knox was an ardent follower of Calvin’s doctrine, in the doctrine of the sacrament, he had an emphasis “wholly and peculiarly his own, and he impressed this peculiar emphasis permanently on the Scottish Church.”⁶⁸ With Calvin, the preaching of the Word was central to the church, and the sacraments were secondary, while with Knox the sacraments held a more central role.⁶⁹ According to McEwan:

⁶³ James Kirk, “Scottish Confession” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 35.

⁶⁴ *Scottish Confession*, Chapter 21 in Cochrane, 179.

⁶⁵ Hazlett, 307.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁶⁷ *Scottish Confession*, Chapter 21 in Cochrane, 180.

⁶⁸ James S. McEwan, “John Knox,” *Reformed and Presbyterian World* 26 (Mar 1960): 20.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*; R.T. Halliday, “Will the Real John Knox Please Stand?” *The Expository Times* 106 (1995): 171. Halliday claims that the right use of the Lord’s Table was “perhaps the central concern of [Knox’s] life.”

Knox is not denying that the Church is founded on the Word; but he is asserting, with a clarity and force unparalleled elsewhere in the Reformed world, that the foundation of the Church is the Word as completed and fulfilled by the action of Christ in the Sacrament. ...To Knox, the Sacrament is creative of the very life of the Church, as it never was for Calvin, or even for Luther.⁷⁰

Knox was passionate about the proper restoration of the Lord's Supper to the church because he considered the sacrament to be as foundational to the church as the preaching of the Word of God. According to Knox, true Reformation within Scottish churches required the correct practice of the Lord's Supper as much as correct preaching.

Although the theology of Calvin undoubtedly played a large part in influencing Knox concerning the Lord's Supper, the role of Peter Martyr Vermigli cannot be overlooked. Vermigli, an Italian Reformed theologian who came to England in 1547 at the request of Thomas Cranmer, had an enormous effect on Anglo-Saxon eucharistic theology.⁷¹ Vermigli preferred to use the word "eucharist" when referring to the sacrament, "because that word emphasized that the Lord's Supper is a feast of praise and thanksgiving."⁷² A central part of Vermigli's liturgy of the Lord's Supper was his Eucharistic Prayer, and Knox made heavy use of this focus when he revised Calvin's Geneva liturgy.⁷³ It is not particularly difficult to see the reason that this theology of the Lord's Supper was so important in Knox's theological understanding. It was a celebration, not merely a religious ritual, and Knox brought the concept of that celebration to Scotland. This attitude had an influence on the Scottish custom of having the congregation sit around a table to receive the elements, a practice that was not uncommon

⁷⁰ McEwan, "John Knox," 20-21. McEwan adds, "[Knox] refers the whole action of the Sacrament to Christ. It is not a ministerial act, or a churchly act, but something that Christ does for us."

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 138. In Greek, the verb εὐχαριστέω means "to give thanks" or "to be thankful."

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 139.

with other Reformers.⁷⁴ If the Lord's Supper was a celebration to be shared by all of God's people, then the receiving of the sacrament should reflect this.

It would not be incorrect to say that the understanding of the Lord's Supper during the Scottish Reformation involved a synthesis of Reformed theology on the sacrament. Undoubtedly, the greatest part of this came from Knox, who was most heavily influenced by Calvin.⁷⁵ However, even Calvin's theology in this area was, at least partially, affected by Lutheran tendencies.⁷⁶ Also, there were influences on Knox's theology of the Lord's Supper even prior to his stay with Calvin in Geneva. The celebration of the Lord's Supper in Scotland may nonetheless be summarized as the rejection of two extremes. The idolatry of the Mass was condemned, as was the bareness of the memorialist service suggested by Zwingli. In addition, Knox appears to have consciously rejected the ramifications of the Lutheran idea of real presence in the Lord's Supper.⁷⁷ Thus, the mystical nature of the sacrament as formulated by Calvin and adopted by Knox prevailed in Scotland. The Lord's Supper became a true celebration and thanksgiving where the people of God communed with their Redeemer in a manner prescribed in Scripture, instead of the empty ritual of manmade worship.

⁷⁴ William Child Robbins, *The Reformation: A Rediscovery of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 161. Robbins cites Zwingli and Bullinger as preferring this method of receiving the elements, "since the Lord sat at table with His disciples."

⁷⁵ Richard Greaves argues that the similarity between Calvin and Knox on the Lord's Supper is not due primarily to the fact that Calvin influenced Knox, but that Martin Bucer influenced both Calvin and Knox. Greaves writes, "The continuity in Knox's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is due to the early influence on him of Bucer's views through the medium of Wishart and the *First Helvetic Confession*." See Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1980), 98. This would almost certainly be true of Knox's earlier celebrations of the Lord's Supper, prior to his contact with Calvin. Calvin's great influence on Knox, however, cannot be ignored. Neither can the fact that Knox rejected the Lutheran extremes of the sacrament, and he did this prior to meeting Calvin in Geneva.

⁷⁶ Hazlett, 309. Hazlett writes, "It cannot be stressed enough that Reformed eucharistic theologizing, more particularly in its Genevan expressions, cannot be understood or divorced from the Lutheran dimension. ... Like Bucer before him, Calvin was ... convinced that his sacramental theology harmonized with the *Augsburg Confession*." The mere fact that lay elders distributed the elements of the Lord's Supper (instead of the people receiving the elements directly from the minister) was not only a departure from the Mass – it was a direct result of the application of the Lutheran doctrine of the priesthood of believers. See Robbins, 161; Donaldson, 33.

⁷⁷ McEwan, *Faith of John Knox*, 54; Greaves, 100; Kyle, 171-72.

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