

The title page of *Das diese wort Christi (Das ist mein leib, etce) noch fest stehen widder die Schwermgeister* (That These Words of Christ [This Is My Body etc.] Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics) published in Wittenberg by Michael Lotther (1527). The treatise was reprinted seven times in 1527.

That These Words of Christ,
“This Is My Body,” etc.,
Still Stand Firm
Against the Fanatics

1527

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INTRODUCTION

The Evangelical movement was united in its opposition to the Roman church, but by the mid-1520s it was fragmenting as disagreements in theology and practice emerged. None of these disagreements would be more important for the development of Protestantism than the eucharistic controversy that began in the fall of 1524. Underlying that controversy was the question of how Evangelicals defined heresy. Catholics denounced Luther and his followers as heretics from the beginning of the Reformation, but the Evangelicals insisted that their teachings were based on the word of God and so could not be heretical. Evangelicals agreed with their Catholic opponents, however, that rejection of the trinitarian and christological positions formulated by the church councils of the fourth and fifth centuries was heretical. The status of other doctrines was not so clear, and Evangelicals would divide over the question of Christ's bodily presence in the consecrated elements of the Eucharist. Was belief in that presence an essential part of the Christian faith whose rejection was heresy, or was it an error introduced by the medieval church?

In the ninth century and again in the eleventh century, debates over the Eucharist resulted in the church's emphasis on the presence of Christ's body and blood in the consecrated elements. The

Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 made this position official when it declared that Christ's body and blood were "truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the species of bread and wine, the bread being transubstantiated into the body, the wine into the blood by divine power." Transubstantiation was understood in Aristotelian terms as the conversion of the substance of bread and wine into Christ's body and blood, although the outward appearance or "accidents" remained unchanged.^a Late-medieval preachers emphasized the presence of Christ's body and blood in the consecrated host and encouraged devotional practices that reinforced this belief. Those who questioned that presence were condemned and burned at the stake as heretics.

In *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*^b Luther argued that the church had no right to require acceptance of a particular Scholastic formulation, but he did not question the belief that the consecrated elements were Christ's true body and blood. Others were more radical than Luther, although fear of persecution kept them from voicing their views publicly. One who would be particularly influential was the Dutch jurist Cornelius Hoen, whose *Most Christian Letter* circulated in manuscript through the early 1520s. Hoen marshaled arguments taken from various sources, including popular heresy, to argue against Christ's bodily presence in the elements of bread and wine, and he suggested that Christ's words, "This is my body," should be understood as "This signifies my body."^c

Luther's colleague in the Wittenberg theology faculty, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486–1541), was the first reformer to reject Christ's bodily presence in print. In the fall of 1524 Karlstadt published several pamphlets in which he asserted that Scripture did not teach that the bread and wine became Christ's body and blood. Luther responded to these pamphlets with a major work published in two parts, *Against the Heavenly Prophets*.^d Karlstadt published a quasi-retraction of his views in

1. Cornelius Hoen (d. 1524) was arrested by the Inquisition in 1522 but released in the fall of 1524 and died a few months later. See Bart Jan Spruyt, *Cornelius Henrici Hoen (Honus) and His Epistle on the Eucharist (1525)*, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions* 119 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 73–84; this work includes a critical edition of the Latin pamphlet and its contemporary German translation, 226–51. There is a partial English translation in Heiko A. Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 268–78. Luther had read Hoen's pamphlet by 1523, for he rejected the equation of "is" with "signifies" in *The Adoration of the Sacrament*, LW 36:279–84.

^a James F. McCue, "The Doctrine of Transubstantiation from Berengar through Trent: The Point at Issue," *Harvard Theological Review* 61 (1968): 385–430.

^b See pp. 9–129 in this volume; also LW 36:3–136.

^c LW 40:79–223; TAL 2:39–126. See Amy Nelson Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy: A Study in the Circulation of Ideas*, *Oxford Studies in Reformation Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54–76.

the fall of 1525 and withdrew from the public debate, but by that time Hoen's pamphlet had been published and other works rejecting Christ's bodily presence were circulating. Luther condemned their authors as "sacramentarians" because they argued that the bread and wine were only signs and did not contain Christ's true body and blood.²

The sacramentarians may have disagreed about how they understood the Lord's Supper, but they were united in rejecting Christ's bodily presence in the consecrated elements, and in the first phase of the controversy, that was the only issue that mattered. Luther and his followers understood Christ's words, "This is my body," literally, and believed that the church had taught Christ's bodily presence since its foundation and rejection of that presence was therefore heretical. The sacramentarians, however, regarded the bodily presence as a medieval invention that enhanced the tyranny of the clergy and encouraged popular superstition and even idolatry, since it led to worship of bread, and they vigorously rejected the charge of heresy.

The reformers of Zurich, Basel, and Strasbourg became the most outspoken defenders of a sacramentarian position. In the spring and summer of 1525 Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) published three works in Latin that were quickly translated into German: a *Letter to Matthias Alber on the Lord's Supper*,^d *Subsidiary Essay or Crown of the Work on the Eucharist*,^e and *Commentary on True*

2. The term comes from the definition of *sacramentum* as a "sign of a sacred thing."



A portrait of Ulrich Zwingli by Hans Asper (1499–1571).

d Zwingli, *Ad Matthaeum Alberum de Caena Dominica Epistola*, Z 3:335–54; Ger. trans., *Epistel oder sendbrieff von des Herren nachtmal* (Zurich: Hager, 1525); English trans., HZW 2:131–45.

e Zwingli, *Subsidium sive Coronis de Eucharistia*, Z 4:440–504; Ger. trans., *Nachhüt von dem Nachtmal oder der Dancksagung Christi* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1525); Eng. trans., HZW 2:194–231.

and *False Religion*, a section of which was devoted to the Lord's Supper.^f His counterpart in Basel, Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), published an even more important work, *On the Genuine Exposition of the Lord's Words, "This Is My Body," According to the Oldest Authorities*,^g that cited many of the church fathers to argue that the early church did not believe the elements became Christ's body and blood. From Strasbourg, Martin Bucer (1491–1551) sent copies of Oecolampadius's book and defended its arguments to Johannes Brenz (1499–1570) in Schwäbisch Hall and to others throughout southern Germany.

The new view of the Lord's Supper did not go unchallenged. Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558), Luther's colleague and pastor, published an *Open Letter Against the New Error on the Sacrament* aimed at Karlstadt and Zwingli.^h Hoping to prevent further public debate, the Strasbourgers sent Gregor Casel (d. 1528) to Wittenberg with letters asking the Wittenbergers to consider the harm to the Evangelical movement caused by dissension within its ranks, and so to refrain from further public attacks.ⁱ Luther rebuffed their overtures, however, and the public debate only grew more heated over the next few months. The Nuremberg patrician Willibald Pirckheimer (1470–1530) published a *Response to Johannes Oecolampadius on the True Flesh of Christ and His True Blood*,^j while the Nördlingen reformer Theobald Billican (d. 1554) wrote a *Letter on the Words of the Lord's Supper and the Vari-*

^f Zwingli, *De vera et falsa religione commentarius*, Z 3:773–820; Ger. trans., *Von dem Nachtmal Christi/vidergedechtnus/oder dancksagung Huldrychen Zuinglis meinung* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1525); Eng. trans., Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1981), 197–253.

^g *Ioannis Oecolampadii de genvina verborum domini, hoc est corpus meum, iuxta vetustissimos authores, expositione liber* (Strasbourg: Knobloch, 1525); the treatise would have an even broader influence through the German translation by Ludwig Hätzer, *Vom Sacrament der Dancksagung. Von dem waren nateurlichen verstand der worten Christi: DAS IST MEIN LEIB nach der gar alten Lerern erklärungs* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1526).

^h Bugenhagen, *Contra novvm errorem, de sacramento corporis et sanguinis domini nostri Iesv Christi epistola Ioannis Bvgenhagii Pomerani* (Wittenberg: Lotter, 1525); Ger. trans., W² 20:500–506.

ⁱ The correspondence can be found in WA Br 3:585–87, 599–607; BCorr 2:46–48, 55–59, 71–78; BDS 3:421–30.

^j Pirckheimer, *De vera Christi carne et vero eius sanguine ad Ioannem Oecolampadium responsio*, WPBW 6:80–85, 435–502.

ety of Opinions, which was published, with an approving response, by his Augsburg colleague Urbanus Rhegius (1489–1541).^k Johannes Brenz wrote both a refutation of Oecolampadius’s book in the name of his fellow Swabian pastors, the *Syngramma on the Words of the Lord’s Supper*,^l and a *Letter on the Lord’s Words*,



Portrait of Willibald Pirckheimer engraved by Albrecht Dürer (1524).



A seventeenth-century engraving of Johannes Brenz.

^k Billican, *De verbis coenae dominicae et opinionum uarietate. Theobaldi Billicani ad Vrbanum Regium epistola. Responsio Vrbanij Regij ad eundem* (Augsburg: Ruff, 1526); Ger. trans., W² 17:1547–70.

^l Brenz, *Syngramma clarissimorum qui Halae Suevorum convenerunt virorum super verbis cenae dominicae ad Johannem Oecolampadium*, in Johannes Brenz, *Werke. Eine Studienausgabe* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970–86), 1/1:234–78.

3. Zwingli wrote responses to Bugenhagen, Z 4:558–76 (Ger. trans., W² 20:506–21); and to Billican and Rhegius, Z 4:893–941. Oecolampadius combined his responses to the *Syngramma* and to Billican in one lengthy treatise, *Apologetica de dignitate Eucharistiae Sermones duo. Ad Theobaldum Billicanvm quinam in uerbis Caenae alienum sensum inferant. Ad Ecclesiastas Svevos Antisyngamma* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1526), and published separately *Ad Billibaldum Pyrkaimerum de re Eucharistiae responsio* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1526).

4. This translation was published as the *Well-Founded and Sure Conclusion of Certain Preachers in Swabia Concerning the Words of the Supper . . . Written to Johann Oecolampadius*; Luther's preface is in LW 59:156–61. An earlier translation of the *Syngramma*, with a different title, had been published in Augsburg; a later translation with yet another title would be published, also with a preface by Luther, a few months later in Wittenberg.

“*This Is My Body*,”^m addressed to Bucer. These works in turn produced rebuttals from the Swiss reformers³ and from Bucerⁿ in the spring of 1526. Although Oecolampadius and Bucer still wrote in Latin, Zwingli switched to German in order to give a *Clear Instruction on the Christ's Supper for the Sake of the Simple*.^o The debate broadened further as radicals influenced by Karlstadt began to publish pamphlets attacking Christ's bodily presence.

Luther watched the growing controversy with concern. He believed that he had effectively countered the arguments of the sacramentarians in *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, but he provided a preface for the German translation of the *Syngramma* by the Eisleben schoolmaster Johann Agricola (1494–1566).⁴ Oecolampadius responded to this attack on his *Genuine Exposition* in the summer of 1526 with his first German treatise, *Reasonable Answer to Martin Luther's Instruction Concerning the Sacrament*.^p

At about the same time, Luther became aware that Bucer had inserted his own views of the Lord's Supper into his German version of Bugenhagen's Psalms commentary and in his annotations and prefaces to his Latin translation of Luther's postil. Zwingli's colleague Leo Jud (1482–1542) had also published a pamphlet, under the pseudonym of Ludwig Leopoldus, claiming that Erasmus, Luther, and Zwingli all agreed concerning the Lord's Supper.^q Luther saw these publications as deliberate attempts to make readers think the Wittenbergers agreed with the sacramentarians. Although Luther's Wittenberg friends had

^m Brenz, *Epistola de uerbis domini: Hoc est corpus meum*, BDS 2:39–45.

ⁿ *Apologia Martini Buceri qua fidei suae atque doctrinae, circa Christi coenam . . . rationem simpliciter reddit* (Strasbourg: Herwagen, 1526); abridged English trans. as “The Eucharist: The 1526 Apology,” in *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, trans. and ed. D. F. Wright (Appleford, England: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 313–53.

^o Zwingli, *Eine klare Unterrichtung vom Nachtmahl Christi*, Z 4:773–862; English trans. as “On the Lord's Supper,” in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley, Library of Christian Classics 24 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 185–238.

^p Oecolampadius, *Billiche Antwort auff D. Martin Luthers bericht des sacraments halb* (Augsburg: Steiner, 1526); the work also contained a German rebuttal of the *Syngramma*. There is a critical edition of the first part, addressed to Luther, in Adolf Laube et al., *Flugschriften vom Bauernkrieg zum Täuferreich (1526–1535)*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), 1:137–55; the entire treatise is in W² 20:582–635.

^q Jud (Leopoldus), *Des hochgelehrten Erasmi von Rotterdam und Doktor Luthers Meinung vom Nachtmal Jesu Christi* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1526).

published his three Holy Week sermons on the Lord's Supper in the fall of 1526 as a way of making the reformer's position better known,^r Luther resolved to enter the public debate himself with a treatise intended to respond to all of the sacramentarians.

Luther began work on *That These Words of Christ, "This Is My Body," etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics* at the beginning of 1527. The rather cumbersome title summarized the heart of his argument: Christ's words, "This is my body," must be understood literally, despite all efforts by the sacramentarians to interpret them differently. In accordance with the precepts of classical rhetoric, he first asserted his own position and then refuted the position of his opponents.^s Rather than responding to individual pamphlets, Luther grouped his opponents' arguments under three main headings: that Christ had ascended into heaven and his body was seated at the right hand of the Father, as the creeds said, and so could not be in the consecrated elements of the supper; that Christ's statement, "The flesh is of no use" (John 6:63), meant that the carnal eating of his body was useless; and that the church fathers had not taught that Christ was bodily present in the elements. These arguments had been made most strongly by Oecolampadius in his Latin treatises, especially his *Genuine Exposition*, and had been repeated by other sacramentarians, including Zwingli. Luther also repeated arguments that other Evangelicals had advanced in their pamphlets against the sacramentarians. His discussion of the church fathers was especially indebted to Pirckheimer's two *Responses* to Oecolampadius, the second of which was published while Luther was writing his treatise.^t

^r *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics*, LW 36:335–61.

^s Amy Nelson Burnett, "Rhetoric and Refutation in Luther's *That These Words Still Stand Firm*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 29 (2015): 284–303.

^t Pirckheimer, *Bilibaldi Birckheimberi de vera Christi carne & vero eius sanguine, ad Ioan. Oecolampadium responsio*, WPBW 6:80–85, 435–502; idem, *Responsio secunda de vera Christi carne et vero eius sanguine adversum convicia Joannis, qui sibi Oecolampadii nomen indidit*, WPBW 6:247–52 and 7:511–88; Amy Nelson Burnett, "According to the Oldest Authorities": The Use of the Church Fathers in the Early Eucharistic Controversy," in Anne Marie Johnson and John A. Maxfield, eds., *The Reformation as Christianization: Essays on Scott Hendrix's Christianization Thesis, Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation* 66 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 373–95.

5. LW 37:161–372. Zwingli and Oecolampadius published a joint response, *Über D. Martin Luthers Buch, Bekenntnis genannt, zwei Antworten*. Z 6/2:1–248 contains only Zwingli’s contribution; Oecolampadius’s contribution is in W² 20:1,378–1,472.

6. The critical edition of *That These Words Stand Firm* in WA 23:38–320 includes the texts of both the first printed edition and the manuscript that was the basis for that edition. This translation is based on the printed text, since that was the version that reached a public audience. It follows but updates the translation by Robert Fischer in LW 37:3–150. The notes in WA and LW provided a starting point for my own annotations, but I have added to and corrected them in order to draw attention to Luther’s interaction with works concerning the Lord’s Supper by his opponents and supporters.

Luther finished his treatise in time for the spring book fair in Frankfurt. Zwingli also wrote two treatises on the Lord’s Supper, available at the book fair, his *Friendly Exegesis* in Latin and his *Friendly Admonition Concerning Luther’s Sermon* in German.⁴ Both he and Oecolampadius would quickly pen rejoinders to Luther’s *That These Words Stand Firm*,⁵ and in response Luther would write his final *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*.⁶ With these treatises the positions of the two sides were clear. Despite later negotiations and elaboration of positions on both sides, the division within the Evangelical movement would never be mended.



THAT THESE WORDS OF CHRIST, “THIS IS MY BODY,” ETC., STILL STAND FIRM AGAINST THE FANATICS⁶

[The Devil and Heresy]^w

THAT PROVERB WE USE IS VERY TRUE, which says that the devil is master of a thousand arts! He proves this powerfully in all those things through which he rules his world: in physical, outward tricks, guile, sins, wickedness, murder, destruction, etc. But especially and beyond all measure he demonstrates this in spiritual, inward matters that concern the glory of God and conscience. How he

^u Zwingli, *Amica Exegesis*, Z 5:548–758; idem, *Freundlich Verglimpfung über die Predigt Luthers*, Z 5:771–94.

^v Zwingli, *Das diese Worte, “Das ist mein Leib” etc. ewiglich den alten Sinn haben warden*, Z 5:805–977; Oecolampadius, *Daß der Mißverstand . . . nit bestehn mag, Die ander billich antwort* (Basel: Cratander, 1527).

^w Headings in brackets were added throughout to guide the reader and were not in the original manuscript.

can slither, squirm, twist, and turn in all directions, and hinder and thwart us on all sides, that no one may be saved and remain in the Christian truth. Let us consider the history of Christianity (I won't mention the ancient fathers and the Jews) as an example. In the beginning of the gospel, when God's Word was preached by the apostles purely and clearly, and no human commandments but only Holy Scripture was set forth, it seemed as if there would never be any trouble, since Holy Scripture was the empress among the Christians.

But what could the devil not do? He finally permitted Scripture to be the sole authority, and allowed no pharisaical, Jewish commandments or laws concerning works to prevail any longer. But he also had some of his followers in the Christians' schools, through whom he stealthily snuck and crept into Holy Scripture.⁷ Once he was inside and was sure of his position, he burst out on all sides, creating a real brawl over Scripture and producing many sects, heresies, and factions among Christians. Since every faction claimed Scripture for itself and interpreted it according to its own understanding, the result was that Scripture began to lose its worth, and eventually even acquired the reputation of being a heretics' book and the source of all heresy, since all heretics seek the aid of Scripture. Thus the devil was able to wrest from the Christians their weapons, armor, and fortress (i.e., Scripture), so that it not only became feeble and ineffective against him, but it even had to fight against the Christians themselves. He got Christians to become suspicious of it, as if it were plain poison against which they had to defend themselves. Tell me, wasn't that a clever scheme of the devil?

Once Scripture had become like a broken net and no one would be restrained by it, but everyone poked a hole in it wherever they stuck their snouts, and followed their own opinions, interpreting and twisting Scripture any way they pleased, the Christians knew no other way to cope with these problems than to call many councils.⁸ In these they issued many outward laws and ordinances alongside Scripture, in order to keep the common people together in the face of these divisions. From this undertaking (though they meant well) arose the saying that Scripture was not sufficient, that we also needed the laws and interpretations of councils and the fathers, and that the Holy Spirit did not reveal everything to the apostles but reserved certain things for the fathers. Out of this finally developed the papacy, in which

7. Luther is thinking especially of the heresies of the fourth and fifth centuries, but his discussion also reflects his attitude toward Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, his colleague on the Wittenberg theology faculty, who had worked closely with him at the beginning of the Reformation but whose disagreements with Luther became apparent by the spring of 1522.

8. The Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) concerned the Arian heresy; the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) concerned christological heresies.

9. A gloss was the explanation of a word or passage printed in the margin of a book.

10. A decree of Boniface VIII (b. c. 1235; pope from 1294 to 1303) incorporated into canon law stated that the Roman pontiff has all laws “in the chamber of his heart”; *Sexti Decretalium*, lib. I, tit. II, cap. 1, CIC 2:937.

11. Beginning with the Investiture Controversy in the eleventh century, much of medieval history is marked by struggles between popes and rulers for both control of appointment to high church office and secular control of the Italian peninsula. Within the Holy Roman Empire there were struggles over control of the church between bishops and territorial rulers, religious orders competed with each other for adherents, and parish clergy and friars fought over the rights and income associated with providing pastoral care.

there is no authority but human commandments and glosses⁹ according to the “chamber of the holy father’s heart.”¹⁰

When the devil saw this he jeered and thought, “Now I have won! Scripture lies prostrate, the fortress is destroyed, the weapons are beaten down. In their place they now weave walls of straw and make weapons of hay, i.e., they intend now to array themselves against me with human commandments. Now it becomes serious: what shall I do? I won’t fight against this but will help them build in confidence, so that they remain nicely united and gather enough straw and hay.^x It serves me well that they do not dispute over Scripture and neglect the Word, but that on this very point they are at peace and believe what the councils and the fathers say. But within this peace and unity I will stir up other controversies and quarrels, so that the pope will contend against emperor and kings, bishops against princes and lords, scholars against scholars, clerics against clerics, and everyone against the other, for the sake of temporal honor, possessions, and pleasure, yet leaving untouched their unity of belief in the holy fathers.¹¹ The fools! What can they expect to accomplish with quarrels over Scripture and the things of God they do not understand? It is better for them to quarrel over honor, kingdoms, principalities, property, pleasure, and bodily needs, which they do understand, and meanwhile remain pious Christians united in the glossed faith of the fathers, i.e., a flimsy faith.”^y

This is the way the attack went on the fathers: because they thought they should have Scripture without quarreling and dissension, this became the cause of turning wholly and completely away from Scripture to pure human drivel. Then, of course, there was necessarily an end to dissension and contention over Scripture, which is a divine quarrel in which God contends with the devil, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 6[:12], “We have to contend not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in the air.” But in place of this, there has broken out human dissension over honor and goods on earth, yet there remain a united blindness, a lack of understanding of Scripture, and a loss of the true Christian faith, i.e., a united obedience to the glosses of the fathers and to the holy see at Rome. Isn’t this also a piece of devil-

x An allusion to 1 Cor. 3:12-13.

y An untranslatable pun in German, where the words for “gloss” and “flimsy” rhyme.

ish craftiness? No matter what play we make, he is a master and an expert at the game.

Now in our day, because we saw that Scripture was utterly neglected^z and that the devil made us captives and fools with the mere straw and hay of human commands, we have tried by God's grace to aid the situation. With immense and bitter effort indeed we have brought Scripture to the fore again and dismissed human commands, freed ourselves and escaped the devil, although he stubbornly resisted and still resists. But although he had to let us go, he does not forget his tricks and has secretly sown his seeds among us^a so that they may take hold of our teachings and words. This is done not to aid and assist us in fostering Scripture, but, while we were leading the fight against human drivel, they would attack us from behind, incite rebellion, and raise an uproar against us so that, caught between two enemies, we would more easily be destroyed.¹² This is what I call throwing quicksilver into the pool!¹³

He does not leave the matter there, though, but begins most quickly with the sacraments, although on this topic he has already torn at least ten holes and ways of escape in Scripture. I have never read of a more shameful heresy, which from the outset has so many heads, so many factions and dissensions among itself, although they are united on the main point, the persecution of Christ.¹⁴ But he will keep on and attack still other articles of faith, as he already declares with flashing eyes that baptism, original sin, and Christ are nothing.¹⁵ Once more there will arise a brawl over the Scriptures, and such dissension and so many factions that we may well say with St. Paul, "The mystery of lawlessness is already at work" [2 Thess. 2:7], just as he also saw that many more factions would arise after him.

If the world lasts much longer, people will do as the ancients did on account of this dissension, and again seek human schemes and issue laws and commands to keep the people in the unity of the faith. Their success will be the same as it was in the past. In short, the devil is too clever and too mighty for us. He resists and hinders us at every point. When we wish to deal with Scripture, he creates so much dissension and quarreling over it that we become tired and too weak to trust Scripture and must

^z Lit., "lay under the bench."

^a Matt. 13:25.

12. The two enemies are the Catholics and those in the Evangelical movement who went beyond Luther by advocating a reform of society according to God's law. Luther blamed the latter for the Peasants' War of 1525.

13. It was a common German belief that casting mercury into a well would destroy its ability to hold water.

14. Luther made this point already in early 1526 when he wrote to the church of Reutlingen that his opponents could not agree on how to interpret Christ's statement, "This is my body," WA 19:121–23.

15. Both Zwingli, *Commentary*, 184–87, and Oecolampadius, *Billiche Antwortt*, W² 20:612, saw baptism only as an external sign. Luther regarded Zwingli's assertion that righteous pagans could be saved as denial of original sin. Zwingli, "Declaration Regarding Original Sin," in Ulrich Zwingli, *On Providence and Other Essays*, The Latin Works and the Correspondence of Huldreich Zwingli 2 (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1983), 12–13.

16. The Hebrew word *Satan* means “adversary”; cf. 1 Pet. 5:8.

17. *Schwärmer*, a term derived from the swarming of bees, which Luther used against all those who claimed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit prior to or apart from Scripture. He first used the term against Thomas Müntzer (c. 1489–1525) and the Zwickau prophets, three men who came to Wittenberg at the turn of 1521–22 claiming to have visions from God. By 1524 he had extended the term to include Karlstadt and all those who rejected Christ’s bodily presence in the bread and wine. “Fanatic” is the conventional translation of *Schwärmer*, although the word has lost the sense that it had in the seventeenth century of one who acts as if possessed or mad.

18. In a series of pamphlets published in the fall of 1524, Karlstadt was the first to claim in print that the bread and wine remained simply bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper. Luther responded to these pamphlets in *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, published in two parts at the turn of 1524–25.

forever be scuffling and wrestling with him. If we wish to stand upon human councils and counsels, we lose Scripture entirely and remain in the devil’s possession, body and soul.^b He is and is called Satan, i.e., an adversary.¹⁶ He must be an adversary and cause misfortune; he cannot do otherwise. Moreover, he is the prince and god of this world,^c so that he has sufficient power to do so. Since he is able and determined to do all this, we should not think that we will have peace from him. He takes no vacation and he does not sleep. Choose, then, whether you would rather wrestle with the devil or else belong to him. If you consent to be his, you will receive his guarantee to leave you in peace with Scripture. If you refuse to be his, then grab him by the hair! He won’t fail you but will create such dissension and factions over Scripture that you will not know where Scripture, faith, Christ, and you yourself stand. [. . .]^d

It is precisely the same devil who now assails us through the fanatics¹⁷ by blaspheming the holy and venerable sacrament of our Lord Jesus Christ, out of which they would like to make mere bread and wine as a symbol or memorial sign of Christians, as they dream or fancy. They allege that the Lord’s body and blood are not present, even though the plain, clear words stand right there: “Eat, this is my body,” and those words still stand firm and invulnerable against them. Now, I dealt with this subject carefully in my attack against Karlstadt,¹⁸ in such a way that anyone who did not take pleasure in erring could find guidance against this specter of the devil.^e But my dear fanatics despise me so haughtily that they do not consider me worthy of a careful answer. It is enough for them to look at my book and turn up their noses at it and say, “It lacks Spirit.” How does it help if I write at length? They scorn it, and if they just babble a few words about it, without touching a single argument correctly, they consider it refuted. They rest their case only on writing many books and soiling much paper.

^b Lit., “with skin and hair.”

^c John 12:31.

^d Here and elsewhere in the treatise, bracketed ellipses denote that a portion of the treatise has been omitted. Here, a portion of LW 37:17–18.

^e *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, Part II, LW 40:144–223; TAL 2:39–126.

One of the reasons I have hesitated until now to write further against them is that I have sensed such arrogance and contempt beneath their celebrated humility. Secondly, their fanaticism is such sheer, empty prattle that it amazes me how these fine, erudite people ever got entangled with it. They proceed, moreover, with such a timid, despairing conscience that it appears to me they wish the beer were back again in the keg. Had they not started the affair, I believe, they would now leave well enough alone. I see in this affair nothing but the wrath of God, who gives the devil free rein to produce crude, clumsy errors and thick darkness to punish our shameful ingratitude for having scorned the holy gospel and held it as worthless, “so that,” as St. Paul says, “we believe what is false, because we have not accepted the love of truth” [2 Thess. 2:10-11]. This fanaticism, moreover, lacks nothing but being new. For we Germans are the kind of fellows who pounce upon anything new and cling to it like fools, and whoever restrains us only makes us more crazy for it; but if no one restrains us, we will soon on our own become fed up and bored with it, and soon chase after something else that is new. Thus the devil has the advantage that no teaching or dream, however crazy, can arise but he can find disciples for it, and the crazier it is, the faster they come.

But “God’s word alone endures forever” [Isa. 40:8]; errors always spring up by its side and pass away again. For this reason I am not worried that this fanaticism will last long. It is much too crude and impudent, and it does not attack obscure or uncertain Scripture, but instead clear, plain Scripture, as we shall hear. So I shall once more set myself against the devil and his fanatics, not for their sake, but for the sake of the weak and simple. For I have no hope that the teachers of a heresy or fanaticism will be converted. Indeed, if that were possible, so much has already been written that they would have been converted. It has never been reported that the originator of false doctrine



A portrait of Andreas Bodenstein
von Karlstadt (c. 1541).

was converted. For this sin is too great, because it blasphemes God's Word and sins against the Holy Spirit.^f Therefore God lets it become hardened, with the result, according to the word of Isa. 6[:9-10], "With seeing eyes you shall not see and with hearing ears you shall not hear, for this people's heart is hardened."

Christ did not convert any high priests, but their disciples were indeed converted—Nicodemus, Joseph, Paul, and the like.^g The ancient prophets did not convert any false prophets. Paul, too, was not able to convert false apostles, but he laid down the teaching: "When one has been admonished two or three times, let that person be avoided and dismissed as perverted" [Titus 3:10]. So too the holy teachers have never converted an arch-heretic; not because they had not sufficiently opposed and confuted all the heretics' errors with the truth, but their hearts were obsessed with their own fancies, and they fared the same as those who look through a colored glass: place before them whatever color you will, they see no other color than that of their glass. The fault is not that you have placed the wrong color before them but that their glass has a different color, as the same passage in Isa. [6:9] also puts it, "You shall see," he says, "and yet not see." What is this but to say: It will appear before your eyes quite clearly enough for you to see, and others will see it, but you will not. This is the reason, says John 12[:40], that one cannot convert such people. The proffered truth does not do it. God must take away the colored glass; this we cannot do.

Even if I too cannot convert any arch-fanatic, yet I shall leave nothing undone, God willing, to place the truth clearly and plainly before their eyes and win away some of their disciples, or at least to strengthen the simple and weak and protect them from the fanatics' poison. Even if I do not succeed in this (may God protect me from this!), at any rate I will have testified and confessed before God and all the world that I have nothing to do with these blasphemers of the sacrament and fanatics, and that I never had or ever will, God willing; and I shall wash my hands of all the blood of those souls whom they steal, murder, and seduce from Christ with their poison. I am innocent of it and have done my part. On my own account, of course, I do not need to write against them, but their own writings are my strength.

^f Mark 3:29.

^g John 3:1-2; 19:38-39; Acts 9:1-9.

When I read these they fill me with strength and joy, because I see that though the devil rages so bitterly against God's Word, yet God permits him no more than to spew out feeble, stale, rotten obscenities, so that I must say, "You would like to, but you cannot!" So to spite the devil again, I shall on this occasion take up only the single saying of Christ, "This is my body," and show how the fanatics have mutilated it up to the present time. Most especially, since they are so slippery and fickle, twisting and turning in a thousand secret corners, I would plead with them in God's name to take their stand on this one passage and to give me a real answer. The other passages I shall save for another time.¹⁹

[Response to Calls for Tolerance]

I would like to ask them in a friendly way not to become angry when I condemn their doctrine and ascribe it to the devil. I cannot do otherwise or call it anything other than I believe in my heart. Since they regard us as un-Christian and as those whom the Spirit of God has forsaken,²⁰ they really ought to be tolerant too, in accordance with their spirit and boasts, and demonstrate in deeds this tolerance with which they spatter so many books full. For there is no end or limit of boasting in their writings what holy martyrs they are, how much they suffer, how meek and forbearing they are, how they seek only the glory of Christ.²¹ Yet they are always crying and complaining meanwhile how the ministers of Christ are vilified and how the common people are offended by this.²² And they wish that we should simply praise them, saying, "you are pure spirit, pure spirit; you teach pure truth, pure truth!" Then they would be tolerant. In addition, we godless and intolerant un-Christians must put up with having these holy and moderate teachers revile us as idolaters and having our God called the baked God, the edible and drinkable God, the bread-God, the wine-God, and ourselves called God-forsaken Christians and such names.²³ This altogether venomous, devilish abuse and slander exceeds all bounds (for a person would rather be upbraided for being full of devils than have a baked God). Yet we must not be praised for our tolerance or moderation in putting up with this, for our ministers of Christ are not vilified or our people offended by it. We must call it pure praise and reform, joy and gladness, when they revile us! But if

19. By this Luther excludes discussion of the communion of bread and cup (1 Cor. 10:16-17), the words concerning the cup (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; and 1 Cor. 11:25), and the explanation of unworthy eating (1 Cor. 11:27-29), all of which were used by both sides to justify their position.

20. Oecolampadius claimed that God's Spirit had forsaken Luther; *Billiche Antwort*, W² 20:584, 599.

21. Bucer defended the reputations of Zwingli and Oecolampadius in his *Apologia*; cf. the abridged translation in *Common Places*, 316-17. He did the same in the instructions to Gregor Casel, who was sent to Wittenberg in the fall of 1525 in the hope of forestalling further public controversy over the Lord's Supper, BDS 3:425-26. Zwingli also boasted of his moderation and reserve in "On the Lord's Supper," *Zwingli and Bullinger*, 237.

22. Bucer emphasized the offense to the simple folk caused by the eucharistic controversy in his instructions for Casel, BDS 3:422.

23. In their Latin treatises, the Swiss reformers equated adoration of the consecrated bread with idolatry, and they called flesh-eaters or cannibals those who believed they ate Christ's physical body in the elements; Zwingli, *Commentary*, 216, 223, 249-50; Oecolampadius, *Genvina expositione*, fol. B4v, K6v. Oecolampadius referred to the *impanated body* in *Genvina expositione*, fol. C6v, G8v. The German translations of these treatises encouraged more radical authors such as the pseudonymous "Conrad Ryss zu Ofen" to use even more offensive terms, such as "bready Lord God," *Antwort dem Hochgeleerten Doctor Johann Bugenhage*, fol. B2r, C2v. In a letter to Johann

Bugenhagen (1485–1558) of 8 Oct. 1525, Guillaume Farel (1485–1565) also mocked belief in an “edible God,” in A.-L. Herminjard, ed., *Correspondance des Réformateurs dans les pays de langue française* (Geneva: H. Georg, 1866–97), 1:394.

24. Willibald Pirckheimer belonged to one of Nuremberg’s leading families and had a distinguished political career serving his home city. He was also a highly respected humanist known for his translations of classical Greek texts into Latin. He published a refutation of Oecolampadius’s *Genvina expositione* in 1526, beginning a published exchange that resulted in five treatises by the two men over the next two years. See also the introduction, above, p. 166.

25. Oecolampadius complained that Pirckheimer had defamed his character in *Ad Pyrkaimerum responsio*, a3r-a7r.

26. This was the view especially of the Strasbourg reformers Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito (1478–1541), both in their published pamphlets and in their contacts with Luther; see n. 21, p.177.

one only looks sideways at them or displeases them—oh, that is hindering the glory of Christ, defaming Christ’s ministers, offending the whole world; there you have suffering, there you have tolerance, there you have all the martyrs’ crowns in a single heap! And even when they are not chided openly, they torture a casually written word and wring from it a complaint over their suffering, dragging the subject in by the ears, as Oecolampadius does against Pirckheimer of Nuremberg,²⁴ in order that they may boast of their tolerance.²⁵ A person simply dare not speak with them without their raising a howl and complaint, doubtless because of their great tolerance and holiness.

Since we un-Christians and intolerant heathens, I say, must put up with such horrible slander and shameful vilification from them, they, as the holy Christians, in turn should put up with something too, even though they are unwilling to put up with as much as we. For they have to remember that in our conscience and faith we take God’s Word just as seriously as they do in their faith, since we too wish to be saved and come to God. We too hope that we shall do as much as they in this matter, and more than they. Thus St. Paul says, “We are not contending against flesh and blood” [Eph. 6:12]. Therefore I do not fix my attention as much upon them, as upon him who speaks through them—the devil, I mean—just as they regard me as full of devils. Yet we are glad to be garbage and scum^h so they may rule, if only we remain free to confess our faith and to shun and condemn what is not of our faith. Now then, let us proceed to the subject at hand.

In the first place, we begin at the point where they write, produce books, and admonish that these subjects ought not be the occasion for rending Christian unity, love, and peace. It is a minor matter, say they, and an insignificant quarrel, for the sake of which Christian love should not be obstructed. They chide us for being so stubborn and obstinate about it and for creating disunity.²⁶ Now, see here, my dear friend, what should I say? We are in the same situation as the sheep that came to the watering place to drink with the wolf. The wolf went upstream, the sheep downstream to the water. Then the wolf chided the sheep for making the water muddy. The sheep said, “How can I be making it muddy for you? You are upstream, and you are making

^h 1 Cor. 4:13.

it muddy for me.” In short, the sheep was forced to admit that he had made the water muddy for the wolf.²⁷ So too with my fanatics: they have kindled this fire, as they themselves with all lordliness boast as a blessing, and now they would like to shove off the blame for disunity upon us. Who ordered Dr. Karlstadt to start it?²⁸ Who ordered Zwingli and Oecolampadius to write?²⁹ Haven’t they done it on their own accord? We would have been, and would still be, glad for peace, yet they were unwilling; now the blame is ours, of course!

I earnestly wish, however, that even if these fanatics refuse to fear God, they would at least feel a little abashed before the people and not write such shameless lies. They say there should be peace, but they themselves do not cease to increase strife, as everyone sees and hears; and the more it continues the more they rejoice. Again, they say it is a minor matter, yet there is no topic that they so diligently promote and cultivate and espouse; all other topics lie dormant. Here they become martyrs and saints. Anyone who does not share their fanaticism is no Christian and can accomplish nothing in Scripture and in matters of the spirit.

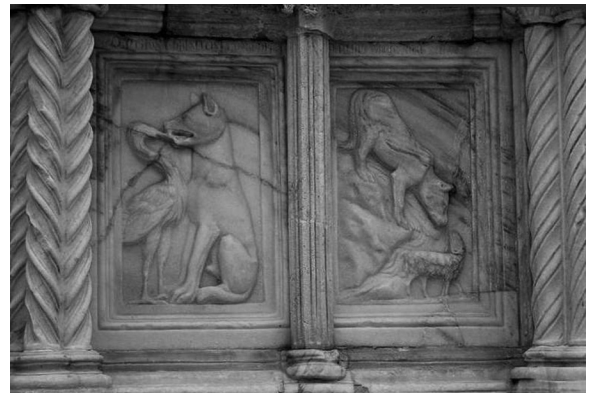
It is a great and magnificent skill when anyone can say, “Bread and wine!” With this skill the Holy Spirit alone now operates! In reality what is going on here is simply that on top of everything the damnable devil is mocking us through them, as if to say, “I intend to cause all kinds of mischief and dissension in deeds, and then to wipe my mouth and say in words, ‘I seek and desire love and unity!’”—as the Psalter also says, “They speak peace with their neighbors, while mischief is in their hearts” [Ps. 28:3].

Well, since they are so completely wicked as to mock the whole world, I shall add a Lutheran warning and say: Cursed be such love and unity in the abyss of hell, because such unity not only divides the Christian church wretchedly, but in true devilish fashion even mocks it and pokes fun at it for its wretchedness. Now I do not mean to interpret it so harshly as to hold that they do this out of malice. But I think they are blinded by Satan, and perhaps they have developed a conscience that bites them, saying, “Truly we have caused a great offense and kindled a great fire,

27. This is one of Aesop’s fables that Luther included in the collection he published in 1530, WA 50:441.

28. At a meeting in Jena in August 1524, Luther gave Karlstadt a golden *gulden* as a token that Karlstadt would be allowed to print his pamphlets against Luther.

29. Although he dissociated himself from Karlstadt’s understanding of “This is my body,” Zwingli defended Karlstadt’s position in his *Letter to Matthias Alber* and in his *Commentary on True and False Religion*, both published in March 1525. His *Subsidiary Essay* was published in the late summer of 1525, as was Oecolampadius’s *Gevina expositione*.



A detail of the thirteenth-century Fontana Maggiore, in Perugia, Italy, sculpted after 1275 by Nicola Pisano and Giovanni Pisano. The detail shows Aesop’s fables “The Wolf and the Crane” and “The Wolf and the Lamb.”

now we must paste and putty up the affair with words, and claim indulgence because it is not an important matter. And even if we lose the argument, let us declare in advance that we have not lost anything important, but have committed only a minor offense, and as we say of singers when they make a mistake, “They only slipped a little.”ⁱ

No, dear sirs, none of this peace and love for me! If I were to strangle someone’s father and mother, wife and child, and try to choke him too, and then say, “Keep the peace, dear friend, we wish to love one another; the matter is not so important that we should be divided over it!” what should he say to me? O how he should love me! Thus the fanatics strangle Christ my Lord, and God the Father in his words, and my mother the church^j too, along with my brethren. Moreover, they would have me dead too, and then they would say I should be at peace, for they would like to cultivate love in their relations with me. But I intend to expose the fanatics here and everyone may see what kind of spirit is in them, so that their adherents may realize who it is they believe and follow.

It is perfectly clear, of course, that we are at odds concerning the words of Christ in the Supper. And it is well known on both sides that these are Christ’s or God’s words. That is one thing. So we say, on our part, that according to the words, Christ’s true body and blood are present when he says, “Take, eat; this is my body.” If our belief and teaching go wrong here, tell us, what are we doing? We are lying to God, and proclaiming that he did not say this but said the opposite. Then we are assuredly blasphemers and liars against the Holy Spirit, betrayers of Christ, and murderers and seducers of the world. Our opponents say that mere bread and wine are present, not the body and blood of the Lord. If they believe and teach wrongly here, then they blaspheme God and are giving the lie to the Holy Spirit, betray Christ, and seduce the world. One side must be of the devil, and God’s enemy. There is no middle ground.

i Lit., “they have only made a piglet,” a colloquialism for making a small error.

j *Christenheit*, a term Luther uses throughout the treatise as synonymous with the church; cf. Rom. 5:14; Eph. 5:32.

Now let every faithful Christian see whether this is a minor matter, as they say, or whether God's Word is to be trifled with. Here you have the fanatics and their spirit. I have often said that no ungodly person can have a high regard for God's Word. These fanatics demonstrate forthrightly that they regard the words and works of Christ as nothing but human prattle, like the opinions of academic hairsplitters, which ought fairly to yield to love and unity. But a faithful Christian knows clearly that God's Word concerns God's glory, the Spirit, Christ, grace, everlasting life, death, sin, and all things. These, however, are not minor matters. You see, this is how they seek God's glory, as they boast everywhere.

Neither does it help them to assert that at all other points they have a high and noble regard for God's words and the entire gospel, except in this matter. My friend, God's Word is God's Word; this point does not require much haggling! When one blasphemes and calls God a liar with a single word, or says it is a minor matter if God is blasphemed or called a liar, one blasphemes the entire God and makes light of all blasphemy. There is only one God, who will not be divided, praised in one place and reprimanded in another, glorified in one word and scorned in another. The Jews believe the Old Testament, but because they do not believe Christ, it does them no good. You see, the circumcision of Abraham [Gen. 17:10ff.] is now an old dead thing and no longer necessary or useful. But if I were to say that God did not command it in its time, it would do me no good even if I believed the gospel. So St. James asserts, "Whoever offends in one point is guilty in all respects" [James 2:10]. He possibly heard the apostles say that all the words of God must be believed or none, although he applies their interpretation to the works of the law.

Why is it any wonder, then, if fickle fanatics juggle and play the clown with the words of the Supper according to their fancy, since at this point they are convicted of belittling God's words and concerns, and making them secondary to human love? Just as if God must yield to human beings, and let the authority of his Word depend on whether people are at one or at odds over it. How can one believe that these fanatics teach rightly and well, when they are clearly found to be entertaining such devilish ideas and advising things which make for the despising, blaspheming, and disgrace of God and our eternal death and destruction, and who