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Peter Martyr Vermigli's View of Faith and the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist¹

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[Abstract]

At the time of the Reformation, the doctrine of the Eucharist was the most pivotal issue between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Most of Protestants had to fight a much harder struggle because unlike the doctrine of justification, transubstantiation had already been accepted as official doctrine by the Roman Catholics. Furthermore, there was no unified view of the Eucharist within the Protestants traditions. The Reformed understanding of the Eucharist was essentially different not only from the Roman Catholics but also from the Lutherans and the Anabaptists. Vermigli is a Reformed theologian who developed a unique Reformed view of the Eucharist by emphasizing the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the role of faith.

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I. Introduction

The doctrine of the Eucharist was a pivotal theological issue in the Reformation Era. One of the primary reasons why the Protestant Church finally broke off from the Roman Catholic Church was the Protestant condemnation of the Catholic Church's view on the Eucharist which the Protestants perceived as a form of idolatry. Despite their agreement on most of the other important doctrinal articles, the Lutherans and Zwinglians failed to unite with each other due to their diverging views on the Eucharist. Furthermore, the Zwinglian view was also significantly challenged by Calvin. This shows that the Eucharist became a highly controversial issue among the Protestants. Thus, four major different views competed for orthodoxy during the middle of the 16th century. Each group attempted to bridge the gap, but in general, such attempts failed.²

Even though Calvin is regarded as the most important Reformed

² Colloquy of Marburg, 1529: The Lutherans and the Zwinglians; Colloquy of Regensburg, 1541: The Lutherans and Catholics; *Consensus Tigurinus*, 1549: The Calvinists and the Zwinglians; Colloquy of Poissy, 1561: The Reformed and the Evangelical Catholics; Colloquy of Paris, 1566: The Reformed and the Catholics; Colloquy of Montbéliard, 1586: The Reformed and the Lutherans. Of these Colloquies only *Consensus Tigurinus* or *Zürich Consensus* was successful and Vermigli expressed his great delight at the agreement of the two Reformed groups.

theologian today, it is impossible to fully understand the Reformed doctrine of the Eucharist without considering Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562).³ Vermigli was born in Florence, Italy, and was well trained in humanism and scholasticism before he converted to the Reformed faith. Post-conversion, Vermigli was highly regarded as a leading authority by his contemporaries. In particular, Vermigli devoted himself to defending the Reformed view of the Eucharist against the Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Zwinglians. He produced three major works on the Eucharist: *Tractatio de sacramento eucharistiae . . .* (1549), *Defensio Doctrine veteris & Apostolicae de sacrosancto Eucharistiae Sacramento . . .* (1559), and *Dialogus de utraque in Christo Natura* (1561).⁴ *Defensio* became “a leading protestant source book”⁵

3 There are two major biographies on Vermigli: Philip McNair, *Peter Martyr in Italy: An Anatomy of Apostasy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967) and Marvin W. Anderson, *Peter Martyr Vermigli: A Reformer in Exile (1542-1562): A Chronology of Biblical Writings in England and Europe* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1975). For the definite study on Vermigli in general see Torrance Kirby, ed., Emidio Campi and Frank James III, *A Companion to Peter Martyr Vermigli* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2009).

4 For details, see John Patrick Donnelly, S.J. and Robert M. Kingdon, *A Bibliography of the Works of Peter Martyr Vermigli* (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers 1990). The first and third books were recently translated into English. *Tractatio* is found in trans. J.C. McLelland, *The Life, Early Letters, and Eucharistic Writings of Peter Martyr* (Oxford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1989): 159-285. Hereafter McLelland's translation will be called *The Eucharistic Writings*. In this book, McLelland gives us a detail introduction to the Oxford Disputation in 1549. The *Dialogus* was translated as *Dialogue on the Two Nature in Christ*, trans. John Patrick McDonnelly, S.J. (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 1995). It is to be noted that the *Dialogus* is Vermigli's only anti-Lutheran controversial work and the genre of the *Dialogus* is humanistic in contrast to *Defensio* and *Tractatio*, both of which are scholastic in content. From this fact we can infer that Vermigli fights for the true doctrine of the Eucharist as a scholastic and humanist. Therefore, there is no contradiction between scholasticism and

on the doctrine of the Eucharist and *Dialogus* was published in 1561, when the printings on the sacraments reached their peak.⁶

Given the significance and authority Vermigli had during his time, his major works on the Eucharist drew significant attention from modern scholars. Vermigli's eucharistic theology was subjected to considerable scrutiny, and resulted in two important books: Joseph C. McLelland, *The Visible Words of God: An Exposition of Sacramental Theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli, A.D. 1500-1562* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957); Salvatore Corda, *Veritas Sacramenti: A Study in Vermigli's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975). McLelland and Corda helped scholars to recognize the value of Vermigli's writings by offering a full understanding of the early Reformed doctrine of the Eucharist. Drawing upon these ideas, this essay

humanism in Vermigli as far as his Eucharistic doctrine is concerned.

- 5 Marvin W. Anderson, "Rhetoric and Reality: Peter Martyr and the English Reformation," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19 (1988), 466. Although there is a consensus that Vermigli had a great influence on the continental Reformed Church, not all scholars see him as a positive influence in England. M. A. Overall labeled Vermigli "more of a failure, or at least less of a success, than has generally been believed." Cf. M. A. Overall, "Peter Martyr in England 1547-1533: An Alternative View," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984), 5-25. *Defensio* runs 821 folio pages. *Biographia Evangelica*, which was published in 1789 (4 volumes), describes *Defensio* as follows: "None of his [Vermigli] works raised his reputation higher in England, that his defense of the orthodox doctrine of Lord's Supper, against bishop *Gardiner*, which all the foreign divines likewise allowed to be a most able and accurate performance."
- 6 Christopher Elwood, *The Body Broken: The Calvinistic Doctrine of the Eucharist and the Symbolization of Power in Sixteenth-Century France* (Ph. D. Dissertation: Harvard University, 1995), 209. Elwood surveyed the printings on the Eucharist during the middle of the 16th century. In his book we can see some interesting statistics of the printings. According to his analysis, the year 1561 was the "decisive year for publication of writing on the Eucharist."

will focus on Vermigli's view concerning faith and the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist. This approach will show that Vermigli's doctrine of the Eucharist is fundamentally Reformed.

II. Faith

1. The Relationship of Faith and the Holy Spirit

The inseparability of faith and the Holy Spirit are notable and visible in Vermigli's Eucharistic works. This inseparable relationship between faith and the Spirit is often emphasized by Calvin and other Reformed theologians. Hence, it is critical for one to have a proper understanding of the relationship between faith and the Spirit in order to fully grasp Vermigli's doctrine of the Eucharist. In his letter to Martin Bucer on June 15, 1549, Vermigli thoughtfully described the role of faith and the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist as follows:

It is by faith that the body of Christ is made present to us; and by communion with it we are incorporated and transformed into that body. I acknowledge that we truly receive the realities of the sacrament (*sacramenti res*), namely the body and blood of Christ, but in such a way to maintain that this comes about in the soul and by faith, while at the same time agreeing that the Holy Spirit is actively at work in the sacrament, by the Spirit and Lord's institution.⁷

⁷ Vermigli, "Letters on the Eucharist" in *The Eucharistic Writings*, 338. Emphasis mine.

The emphasis on faith and the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist is the most distinctive feature of the Reformed theology. This feature is well summarized by Gordon E Pruett. “The presence of Christ,” says Pruett, “is *granted* by the operation of the Holy Spirit; and it is received by the operation of faith.”⁸ After surveying Calvin’s view of Eucharist, Brian Gerrish provides us with six Calvinistic propositions on the Lord’s Supper. According to Gerrish, the first proposition is that the Lord’s Supper is a gift; this gift is given by the Holy Spirit (proposition 4) and received by faith (proposition 6).⁹ It is clear that Gerrish’s propositions are essentially the same as Pruett’s view of the Reformed doctrine on faith and the Holy Spirit. In the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit gives Christ to the believer and the believer receives Him with faith

2. Faith and the Eucharist

Vermigli approved three marks of the true church: the doctrine, the right administration of the sacrament, and the care of the discipline.¹⁰ He thought that although baptism had, by the

⁸ Gordon E. Pruett, “A Protestant Doctrine of the Eucharistic Presence,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 10 (1975), 142. Italics original.

⁹ Brian A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 135-39. The complete propositions are as follows: 1. The Lord’s Supper is a gift; 2. The gift is Jesus Christ Himself; 3. The gift is given with the signs; 4. The gift is given by the Holy Spirit; 5. The gift is given to all who communicate; 6. The gift is to be received by faith.

¹⁰ Vermigli, “Whether Evangelicals are Schismatics?” in the *Early Writings: Creed, Scripture, and Church*, trans. Mariano Di Gangi and Joseph C. McLelland (Kirksville: Truman State University, 1994), 187. Hereafter *Early Writings*. For

providence of God, remained less contaminated in the Roman Catholic Church, the Lord's Supper had been so corrupted that it became synonymous with idolatry. This is one of the reasons that the Protestant churches had to leave the Roman Catholic Church, under which Vermigli believed most Christians experienced "the unity of idolatry and mass."¹¹ Against the Roman Catholics who criticized him of destroying the unity of the church, Vermigli argued that "the first and only unity exists in the church among those who preserves its faith."¹²

Faith is not only critical for the unity of the church but also for the correct administration of the sacraments. With that in mind, what are the implications of "right" administration? First, the sacrament of the divine supper should be "used." The Eucharist is nothing without being employed. For this reason, Vermigli condemned the doctrine of transubstantiation according to which the bread remains permanently as the body of Christ even after the ceremony. Second, the Eucharist should be used "rightly." Vermigli readily affirms that believers receive the true body and blood of Christ. The issue between the Reformers and the Roman Catholics is not what the believers receive but how they receive it. Vermigli's answer to the question was *sola fide*. "When we make use of [the Eucharist]," says Vermigli, "we grasp

the marks of the true Church in Vermigli, see Robert M. Kingdon, "Peter Martyr Vermigli and the Marks of the True Church," in F. F. Church and T. George ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History: Essays Presented to George Huntston Williams* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979): 198-214. Unfortunately, Kingdon's article focuses the church discipline alone.

¹¹ Vermigli, "Whether Evangelicals are Schismatics?", in the *Early Writings*, 223.

¹² Vermigli, "Whether Evangelicals are Schismatics?", 223.

the body of Christ and blood of Christ by faith alone.”¹³ For Vermigli, the Protestant motto sola fide has not only a soteriological implication but also a sacramental one.

3. Not Sacrifice but Sacrament

During the Reformation, the Eucharist was essentially considered to be a sacrifice by the Roman Catholics. This sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist was severely attacked by the Reformers. After making a distinction between the propitiatory sacrifice and the thanksgiving-sacrifice, that is, the Eucharist,¹⁴ Vermigli completely rejects the former view of the Eucharist. This kind of sacrifice is none other than the sacrifice on the cross offered to God by Jesus Christ. On the basis of Christ's unique sacrifice, His blood has its own power and merit. As a result, God becomes merciful to his people. The Eucharist is only a thanksgiving response to the sacrificial works that Christ already accomplished on the cross, which is contrary to the fundamental Christian articles of faith.

For Vermigli, the Roman mass entirely contaminated the Lord's Supper by erasing the difference between the two sacrifices. In his two short articles on the Roman mass,¹⁵ Vermigli argued that the Roman sacrifice reverses the relationship between God and believers, because believers give Christ to God whereas God

¹³ Vermigli, “The Oxford Disputation and Treatise, 1549,” in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 165. Hereafter “Oxford Disputation, 1549.”

¹⁴ Vermigli, “The Sacrifice,” in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 310.

¹⁵ Vermigli's “De Missa” and “De Sacrificio” were published in 1561. Both are translated into English in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 297-309 and 310-18.

receives the body of Christ. According to the Roman Catholics, however, man is an agent and so does something for God. This view had been highly criticized by Luther and his followers. They believed that just as the gospel is a free gift, so the Lord's Supper must be the free gift from God. The Lord's Supper speaks of "what has been achieved for us *to receive*, not what remains for us *to do*."¹⁶

Vermigli followed the main Protestant line in his criticism on the Roman mass. The Eucharist cannot be a sacrifice an offering to God in the way that prayer, praise and thanksgiving are. For Vermigli, the agent of the Eucharist is not man but God. The Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice but a sacrament. Both are the same in that they are a voluntary action, but a sacrifice is man's voluntary action while a sacrament is God's.¹⁷ For this reason, it is impossible for the partakers to do something for God through the Eucharist. In particular, the Lord's Supper cannot be a merit for obtaining the grace of God. "By no means do we make offering to God," says Vermigli, "but he produces sign and amplifies his gifts to us while we accept what is offered with a firm faith."¹⁸

If faith is identical to receiving, then the partakers of the Eucharist are always recipients. They are active partakers when they are receiving the bread and wine, which is far from passive. Participating in sacraments, is an active way to give back to God. But the essence of this participation is a response to the work

16 Christopher J. Cocksworth, *Evangelical Eucharistic Thought in the Church of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 19.

17 Vermigli, "The Sacrifice," in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 310.

18 Vermigli, "The Sacrifice," in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 310.

that God already has done. Hence, for Vermigli, thanksgiving is a significant element in determining the character of the Eucharist. This is why the nomenclature of the practice was important for Vermigli. He preferred to call the Lord's Supper the Eucharist, which means thanksgiving. "The mystery of Christ's body and blood," writes Vermigli, "is called Eucharist because its whole construction depends upon the giving of thanks."¹⁹

According to the Roman Catholic understanding of the Mass, the body of Christ is present in the Lord's Supper due to the words of institution pronounced by the priest. Therefore, the doctrine of the Mass grants him a very powerful function to effect the miracle of transubstantiation. There can be no true sacrament without the priest and, as a result, there is little room for faith and the Holy Spirit. The priest becomes in some way a mediator between God and believers in the Eucharist. Vermigli and all other Protestants believed that there is no mediator other than Jesus Christ. As a result, Vermigli and all other Protestants could not accept the Roman Catholic view of the Mass with the priest as a mediator. In the light of the Roman Catholic perspective, Vermigli's emphasis on faith in the Eucharist undermines the clerical authority, as it attacks the role of the priest. The Roman Catholic critics considered the teaching of the Reformers on the Eucharist to be "a principal cause of social and political anarchy."²⁰

19 Quoted from McLelland, "Peter Martyr: Servant of the Sacrament" in his *The Reformation and Its Significance Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 66.

20 Elwood, *The Body Broken*, 306. Elwood's work is a brilliant monograph in which the author studies the Eucharist not only from the perspective of theology but

4. A Powerful Instrument

As we have seen above, faith is entirely passive in the Eucharist in Vermigli's view. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the power of faith. Faith is receiving, but it is not receiving of mere knowledge or imagination. Vermigli's understanding of faith significantly differs from the Roman Catholics and from Zwinglians. According to the Roman Catholics faith is merely a knowledge. This kind of faith is regarded as a faith of the historical fact. Believers believe in the literal occurrence of the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the real body and blood of Christ. On the other hand, faith does not have any role for receiving the true body of Christ in the Eucharist. Likewise, for the Zwinglians, faith is primarily a memory of the past. Although Vermigli does not entirely deny the Zwinglian view of faith, he believes that faith possesses more significance than the Catholic and Zwinglian views.

Vermigli was aware of the Zwinglian view of the relationship between sign and faith. According to Vermigli, the Zwinglians had two analogies concerning the sign: "One is of a friend, whose friend being absent in body is said to be present when he thinks of him; the other one they submit concerns a number of mirrors, which surround a man whose appearance and face is multiplied in them although he does not move from his place."²¹ For Vermigli, the two analogies are merely a cold figure. Vermigli

also from the perspective of politics.

²¹ Vermigli, "The Oxford Disputation and Treatise, 1549," 274.

points out the powerlessness of the friend whom the thinker tries to grasp with his mind. The friend cannot “change the thinker,” or “nourish his mind.”²² In this respect, Vermigli’s understanding of role of faith in the Eucharist is fundamentally different from that of the Zwinglians.

Vermigli, like the other Reformers, was assured that faith is the only instrument to receive the true body and blood of Christ.²³ Vermigli defines faith as follows: “Faith is a firm assent of the mind to the divine promises concerning Christ, through the persuasion of the Holy Spirit to salvation.”²⁴ In the Eucharist, faith is the “mouth of the soul.” When partakers eat the bread with their mouth, they eat the body of Christ with the mouth of the soul, that is, faith. Therefore, the sacrament itself is useless without faith. Vermigli describes the relationship of the mouth of the body and mouth of the soul as follows:

With what mouth do they receive it? Of the Body? Never! For, just as a sacrament consists of sign and thing signified, so he that receives the sacrament with the mouth of the body is also supplied by the mouth of the soul. As believers both eat and drink the bread and wine with bodily mouth, so their

²² Vermigli, *Eucharistic Writings*, 274.

²³ Vermigli, “Strasbourg Statement,” in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 320.

²⁴ Vermigli, “Proposition from Genesis (1543),” in the *Early Writings*, 106. We can see that Vermigli’s definition is exactly the same with that of Calvin. For Calvin’s definition of faith, see his *Institutes* III.ii.7. “Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a *firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.*”

souls are stirred up by the favour of the Holy Spirit, the words of God and the outward symbols, and are carried to heaven, reaching all the way to Christ with the mouth of faith.²⁵

Just as the mouth of the body eats the bread and wine, so the mouth of the soul eats the spiritual food, the true body and blood of Christ. For the Roman Catholics, the mouth of the body corresponds to the body of Christ. In other words, in the Eucharist union with Christ is the union of the body of the partaker and the body of Christ. On the contrary, Vermigli views that the true components of the Eucharist are the soul of the partaker and the true body of Christ. Through the mouth of faith, the partaker overcomes the infinite gap between Christ in heaven and the believers on the earth.

Even if we approve the miraculous power of faith, we must also note that faith is not a work in a meritorious sense. For Vermigli, faith cannot be compatible with work or merit, since faith itself is the gift from God. When Vermigli speaks of the power of faith, one should not fail to remember that he presupposes that faith is a divine gift. Vermigli says as follows:

In this sacrament [the Eucharist], if received rightly and with faith, not by any power of works, but by the free benefit of Christ which we apprehend in believing, we acknowledge that our sins are forgiven, the covenant between God and ourselves confirmed, and God's very Son, possessing life in

²⁵ Vermigli, "Letters on the Eucharist" in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 351. Emphasis mine. This letter was written to the minister of the church of Poland in 1556.

himself through the Father, so received that whoever partakes of his flesh and blood in true faith, lives through him, so that the heavenly inheritance is possessed by the faithful, as far as the state of this life permits. ²⁶

In short, the sacrament for Vermigli is the means of grace. Therefore, there is no room for work or merit in the Eucharist. Only God's grace is predominant in the Lord's table. This will be clearer when context is given to the work of the Holy Spirit. The recipients cannot boast of their faith. Vermigli explains the relationship between faith and its power as follows:

We are therefore said to be joined to Christ by faith, which no man dare boast to be of himself, since Paul teaches plainly that it is the gift of God . . . Wherefore power is not ascribed to faith insofar as it belongs to us, but to Christ himself as he gives himself to us to be apprehended more or less.²⁷

Again, it is to be stressed that faith is an instrument. Faith does not have a power in itself. Moreover, this power does not belong to us, but to God alone. Faith is powerful only when God uses it as an instrument. Faith is powerful, but, at the same time, it is an instrument. We should not lose one by neglecting the other.

So long as faith is a divine instrument, even the weakest faith should not be ignored. Since God attributes a great instrumental

²⁶ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 164.

²⁷ Vermigli, "Letters on the Eucharist," in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 349.

power to faith,²⁸ believers should not hesitate to participate in the Lord's feast despite their sins.²⁹ Of course, one should carefully distinguish those who do not have faith at all from those whose faith is weak. It is known from experience that in the visible churches there are many who seem to have faith but indeed do not have it. For Vermigli, they may be called nominal Christians.³⁰ They participate in the external element of the sacrament but are excluded from its effect due to their lack of faith. They eat only the bare sign of the sacrament, but they do not eat its reality, the body of Christ. It follows that faith is the criterion for determining the true eating of the Lord's Supper.

5. Faith, Reason and Sense

Throughout his Eucharistic works, Vermigli consistently denies that the body of Christ is present locally, substantially, bodily and carnally in the Eucharist. Eating the body of Christ by faith does not mean either eating Him falsely or by imagination. For Vermigli faith must not be considered false, feigned, counterfeit or a phantom and a dream. Eating by faith is a true, spiritual, and even real or natural eating. The spiritual eating is not opposed to the true or real eating. "For our faith is not directed to a fiction or phantom, but to the true and natural human body which the

²⁸ Vermigli, "Proposition from Exodus (1545)," in the *Early Writings*, 133.

²⁹ Vermigli, "Second Exhortation, 1552," in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 361.

³⁰ Vermigli sharply distinguishes between *manducatio impiorum* and *indigni*. While the former pertains to the nominal Christian, the latter to the weak Christian. In contrast to the Lutherans, Vermigli rejects the *manducatio impiorum*. For this study, see Corda's *Veritas Sacramenti*, 158-64.

Word of God took from the Blessed Virgin, and gave for us on the cross.”³¹ That is reason why Vermigli does not object to using the term ‘substance’ in his discussion on the eating of the body of Christ.

For Vermigli, faith does not exclude sense or reason either. Vermigli of course acknowledges that our reason has a limit, thus there is something that cannot be understood through the reason. For example, “the certitude of our salvation which we possess is not according to sense or experience or knowledge, but faith.”³² Nevertheless, Vermigli does not ignore the utility of reason in the Eucharistic controversy. One of the reasons why Vermigli rejects the doctrine of transubstantiation³³ is that it is not discussed in the Bible and is not harmonized by reason. Vermigli does not always resort to the Scripture, even though it is the final authority for doctrinal issues. The advocates for transubstantiation legitimize the separation of substance from form or *accident*, using Aristotle’s philosophy according to which substance can exist prior to accident. For Vermigli, this theory may apply to the spiritual being such as God, but it cannot apply to the body of Christ. The substance, the body of Christ, and

³¹ Vermigli, “Poissy Statements,” in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 329. For the study of Vermigli and the Colloquy of Poissy, see B. F. Paist, “Peter Martyr and the Colloquy of Poissy,” in *Princeton Theological Review* 20 (1922): 212-31, 418-47, and 616-46.

³² Vermigli, “Leviticus (1547),” in the *Early Writings*, 156.

³³ Vermigli summarizes the theory of transubstantiation as follows: “When the minister ordained to it utters the words instituted by the Lord over the proper and appointed *materia*, that is bread and wine, providing he have an intention (as they say) to do this, the substance of bread and wine is converted into the substance of the body and blood of Christ; and so converted that the accidents of the changed or destroyed substance remain apart from a subject”

the accident, its localness, cannot be separated from each other. For this reason, Vermigli calls the theory of transubstantiation 'a new philosophy,'³⁴ which was presumably considered to be wrong in the 16th century.

Vermigli believes that the doctrine of transubstantiation cannot escape from being criticized as a Marcionism. The Roman Catholics say that it seems to be bread, but is really not. Vermigli identifies this view with Marcionism. He says, "This is the very thing Marcion said about Christ's flesh and body, that it was not true flesh, but only an appearance. Christ is not a conjurer, nor does he delude our senses. By the senses he proved his resurrection: "touch and see."³⁵ Following Marcionism, the Roman Catholics grant that Christ is heavenly visible, but that he is invisible in the sacrament. Vermigli argues that in doing so, the Roman Catholics allow for two bodies of Christ, visible and invisible. For Vermigli, however, the term "invisible body" itself is nonsense.³⁶

Vermigli believed that historical facts supported his own view against transubstantiation. For example, it was well known in those days that Victor, a Pope of Rome, had died from drinking poison from the chalice. For Vermigli, the Pope's death cannot be explained by transubstantiation. Vermigli asks the following question rhetorically, "how are such things possible, if everything is transubstantiated, and only accidents remains?"³⁷

³⁴ McLelland, *The Visible Words of God*, 182.

³⁵ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 186.

³⁶ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 194.

³⁷ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 198.

How can the Roman Catholics legitimize transubstantiation, if neither reason nor sense can prove it? Vermigli knew the answer to that question. Vermigli says, “since sense does not apprehend this transubstantiation, neither reason understands it nor experience teach it, how can it be known? I know you will say: through faith. If it is a question of acting in faith, this cannot happen without the Word of God; and of that you are quite destitute.”³⁸ In sum, according to Vermigli, for Catholics, faith is not a power which receives the transubstantiated reality or causes transubstantiation, but instead it is merely a knowledge of miracle that the bread is transubstantiated into the body of Christ. In this miraculous event, there is only a little room prepared for faith. For Vermigli, however, this kind of faith is a house built on sand, since transubstantiation is not based on the word of God.

In conclusion, for Vermigli, faith pertains to the spiritual thing in the Eucharist. Nevertheless, this does not mean that faith contradicts the reason and the sense.

III. The Holy Spirit

1. The Two Ways of the Accommodation of the Holy Spirit.

While faith elevates our soul to heaven, the Holy Spirit provides the heavenly things to us on the earth. For Vermigli, the accommodation of the Holy Spirit is a very significant concept

³⁸ “Oxford Disputation, 1549,” 195.

in the doctrine of the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit accommodates himself in two ways: by analogy or figure and by sacraments.

The first way of the accommodation of the Holy Spirit is that He humbles himself to the feeble human understanding by figurative words. Vermigli says, "The Holy Spirit attends to our weakness—having granted us a light and understanding beyond our nature, he also humbled himself to these metaphors, namely abiding, dwelling, eating and drinking, that we may know in some way this divine and heavenly union which we have with Christ."³⁹ Why is then the Scripture written in figure? Is it impossible for the Holy Spirit to write it literally? Of course he can do it since the Holy Spirit is omnipotent. However, the issue is not what he can, but what he wants to do. The method of figure is chosen by the Holy Spirit in order to describe the spiritual things to man who has a weak sense and reason. Man cannot understand them in a direct way. This is why we should interpret the certain biblical passages not literally but figuratively. Hence, sacramental texts in the Bible should be interpreted with prudence and caution.

The Roman Catholics were strongly opposed to the figurative interpretation of the Eucharistic texts. In a somewhat ironic development, many Roman Catholic scholars came to be champions in the plain sense of the biblical texts, at least when discussing the meaning of the sacramental words spoken by Christ at the Last Supper.⁴⁰ The general opinion that the Roman

³⁹ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 167.

Catholics prefer the allegorical interpretation and the Protestants prefer the literal or historical interpretation does not apply to the interpretations of the Eucharistic texts.

The second way of accommodation of the Holy Spirit is that He humbles himself to weakened human sense by sacraments. Although Vermigli emphasizes man's faith, as seen above, he never praises it as man's own work. In comparison with the Holy Spirit, faith is merely his servant. While the Holy Spirit is a giver, faith is a receiver. Faith cannot cause Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. The power to originate a sacrament lies wholly beyond human capacity. For Vermigli, as Corda points out, a sacrament is never the *causa efficiens*, but simply the *causa instrumentalis* of the *manducatio spiritualis*.⁴¹ For Vermigli, nevertheless, the Holy Spirit always works together with faith. The Holy Spirit powerfully and mysteriously works in believers and unites them with Christ.

The Holy Spirit prepares us for the sacrament so that we can easily receive the thing signified through our faith.

By his secret and ineffable operation, the Holy Spirit effects in us, here on earth, this communication and participation in his body which dwells nowhere else than in heaven; divinely accommodating his grandeur to our capacity and bringing together distant places. He unites heaven and earth by his power, as if visibly, to place his royal throne in the midst of the Supper and to give himself more closely as food for

⁴⁰ Elwood, *The Body Broken*, 220.

⁴¹ Corda, *Veritas Sacramenti*, 141.

our soul. In the same way, and yet incomprehensibly, faith by its wonderful property accommodates and lifts our soul to heaven, giving it access and entrance to the throne of his majesty.⁴²

The quoted passage shows what the roles of faith and the Holy Spirit are in the Eucharist. While the Holy Spirit prepares the body of Christ as a spiritual food for us, faith prepares us for the spiritual food. The Eucharist is located between the Holy Spirit and faith, and thus the Eucharist is the mediation between the two. One can respond with faith to the reality represented “only because of the inward movement of the Spirit of Christ.”⁴³

Corda summarizes Vermigli's view of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament as follows:

the Holy Spirit uses the sacramental symbols as instruments by which he stirs up and arouses man's faith, so that man is then able to receive that to which the sacramental symbols are intimately related, namely Christ's body in heaven. This body, in fact, can be received exclusively through faith.⁴⁴

Why does the Holy Spirit use the sacrament? Can He unite us with Christ without using the sacrament? As in the case of figure, the reason that the Holy Spirit uses the sacrament does not lie in the powerlessness of the Holy Spirit, but in our weakness. For our soul cannot receive the true body of Christ as it is.

⁴² Vermigli, “Poissy Statements,” in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 330.

⁴³ Vermigli, “Plain Exposition of the Twelve Articles,” in the *Early Writings*, 70.

⁴⁴ Corda, *Veritas Sacramenti*, 142.

Something else is required: the sacrament. Through the sacrament, the body of Christ becomes edible for the mouth of the soul.

The sacrament is a work of God from beginning to end, but the sacramental relationship does not operate automatically and independently from the participants. What is the relationship between faith and the sacrament? Both are an instrument for receiving the body of Christ. But, they are different in that the sacrament is an instrument to arouse and strengthen faith. The Holy Spirit works with our faith but at the same time He also increases our faith. This nourishment of faith is one of the wonderful works of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist. Vermigli says,

Herein standeth the whole power and reason of this meate and of this drink; whereunto our faith is stirred up and kindled. . . Christ gaue in the supper, bread and wine for signes, the which by his institution and his wordes are made sacraments, that is to wit instruments, whereby the holy Ghost stirreth up faith in our mindes, that by the same faith we may be spiritually, but yet truly nourished and sustained with his bodie and blood.⁴⁵

For Vermigli, the Holy Spirit uses the bread not simply but sacramentally. Something should be changed. Thus, Vermigli often speaks of the sacramental change. However, this change does not mean a change of substance. They are changed in that they are set apart for a special use. Therefore, the function of

⁴⁵ Vermigli, "A Preface to the Eucharist," in *Common Places* (1583), Part 4, 142.

bread and wine has been changed while they are used in the Eucharist. Vermigli writes, "Paul does not call it simply cup, but cup of the Lord. We see also in the Old Testament that what was offered was called not just holy, but holy of holies, that is in the Hebrew phrase 'the holiest.'⁴⁶ Vermigli's emphasis of the change should not be ignored. He even argued for the sacramental change of the bread. According to Vermigli, the bread is not "not common or simple but now sanctified and converted into the nature of a sacrament. It can therefore be said that divinity is added, since the Holy Spirit uses it as an instrumental for our salvation."⁴⁷

The concept of sacramental change distinguishes Vermigli from the Zwinglians. According to Vermigli, the Zwinglians do not speak of this change or, they speak little of it. The Zwinglians may have objected that such kind of change attributed too much to the material. Vermigli answers to this objection as follows: "We answer that it is not attributed to them for their own sake, but on account of the institution of the Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the clearness of the words."⁴⁸

The accommodation of the Holy Spirit is clearest in his self-limitation of His power. Just as the Holy Spirit does not destroy the substance in the Eucharist, so he does not change the body of Christ into a spirit. This is true of the risen body of Christ. The Lutherans criticized the Reformed theologians of overlooking the great distinction between his body before and

⁴⁶ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 276.

⁴⁷ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 247.

⁴⁸ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 277.

after the resurrection. Of course, Vermigli was well aware of the difference in that Jesus' risen body was not limited by time and space. However, although the body of the risen Christ is called spiritual, such body nevertheless "is not so spiritual that it passes into the nature of spirit."⁴⁹ God can change bread into flesh but, he cannot make Christ's body be present everywhere so long as it is a body. Vermigli argues as follows:

The nature and truth of the humanity so involve circumscription, limits and bounds that it cannot be everywhere, nor without some specific place. This follows, of course, not from any weakness of the divine power but from the permanent and unchangeable condition of human nature, just as the number three cannot be the number six, nor can something done yesterday be undone.⁵⁰

In sum, just as faith does not contradict the reason or sense, the work of the Holy Spirit does not destroy the nature.

2. Spiritual Participation in the Body of Christ.

The doctrine of the Eucharist is primarily focused on our union with Christ. How can we know that Christ is with us? How can we bridge the gap between Christ in heaven and us on the earth? These are not trivial questions to serious Christians. The Roman Catholics tried to solve the problem by adopting the doctrine of transubstantiation. In this case, the body of Christ came down

⁴⁹ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 255.

⁵⁰ Vermigli, "Strasbourg Statement," in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 320.

from heaven to the earth in a mystical way. In contrast, Vermigli viewed that believers are elevated and participate in the body of Christ in heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, our souls ascend into heaven from the earth, just like Christ who ascended into heaven. The Roman Catholics claim that the bodily presence of the Lord in the bread represents the most intimate union with Christ. However, for Vermigli, the carnal presence is not only redundant but also harmful, since "the flesh profits nothing, but the spirit gives life"(John 6:33).

For Vermigli, spiritual presence is much better than physical or bodily presence. This spiritual presence, for Vermigli, is a spiritual but real participation. Vermigli says, "If by *presence* one understands the perception of faith by which we ourselves ascend to heaven, by mind and spirit embracing Christ in his majesty and glory, to him I easily consent."⁵¹ The following passage clearly shows how Vermigli understands the spiritual presence of Christ.

The distance of places does not hinder our union with the body and blood of Christ, because the Lord's Supper is a heavenly matter, and while on earth by the mouth of the body we take bread and wine, sacraments of the body and blood of the Lord, yet by faith and the work of the Holy Spirit our souls, to which this spiritual and heavenly food applies, are carried up to heaven and enjoy the present body and blood of Christ.⁵²

⁵¹ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 168.

⁵² Vermigli, "Poissy Statements," in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 329.

Even if the Holy Spirit is in spiritual form, he still should not be excluded from the material. The Holy Spirit does not destroy the nature in the sacrament. Just as the Holy Spirit does not repel or destroy the nature of the water in baptism, the reality of this sacrament [the Lord's Supper] does not destroy or cast out the essence of the symbols.⁵³ Thus, the Holy Spirit does work through the materials in the Eucharist.

The Holy Spirit uses materials such as the bread and wine to communicate grace to believers. The things signified can be joined only through the sacrament and outward symbols. For Vermigli, the fact that the Eucharist is merely one of the sacraments is a firm foundation against the transubstantiation.⁵⁴ Just as transubstantiation is not required in baptism, it is not required in the Lord's Supper either since it is not a special sacrament at all. The Roman Catholics argue that that Christ is present in the Eucharist in a better and more excellent way than in baptism, and thus that the bread should be transubstantiated whereas water does not need to be transubstantiated. Vermigli entirely rejects such discrimination between baptism and the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the same with baptism in its essence, even though they are different from each other only from the perspective of different emphasis.

3. The True and Real Union with Christ

What really happens to participants when they receive

⁵³ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 246

⁵⁴ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 185.

sacraments? Vermigli is not entirely satisfied with the idea that the participants receive only the merit of Christ's death through the Eucharist. We receive more than his benefits because we receive the Lord himself, who is the source of all good. The manner in which this happens, however, should be correctly understood; we receive that body neither physically nor corporeally, but only spiritually. Without a doubt, the remembrance of Christ's death is powerfully revived and consequently our faith is strengthened in the Eucharist. However, Vermigli did not regard this as sufficient. The Lord's Supper is not only commemoration but also communion. The sacrament is the "note and symbol of a true communion with Christ."⁵⁵ For Vermigli, eating the body of Christ cannot be separated from the union with Christ. "The more we eat the body of Christ, the more intimately we are united with Christ. But there follows such an eating as Christ himself told, that he dwells in us and we in him. So the inference is that if the eating—that is, faith itself—is increased, so is the indwelling, that is our union with Christ likewise grows. For this is the nature and power of things conjoined, that the one being augmented the other also has increases."⁵⁶

According to Vermigli, there are three kinds of union with Christ: natural, spiritual, and mystical.⁵⁷ First, the natural union is a union with Christ through incarnation. This is the most general and feeble union of the three. All men have this

⁵⁵ Vermigli, "Letters on the Eucharist," in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 348.

⁵⁶ Vermigli, "Letters on the Eucharist," in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 353.

⁵⁷ Vermigli, "Letters on the Eucharist," in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 345–48.

communion with Christ, whether they have a faith in Christ or not. The spiritual union is a union through regeneration. By this communion we become more and more like the true image of God. The mystical or secret communion is based upon the fact that Christ is given to us as the head of the church. By this communion, says Vermigli, “we are said to be integrated in Him. Thus we first put him on and so are called by the Apostle flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones.”⁵⁸ We can infer that for Vermigli the Eucharist corresponds to the third union with Christ. It follows that the Eucharist symbolizes the most intimate union with Christ.

The third union with Christ distinguishes Vermigli from the Zwinglians. Both affirm the first two unions with Christ, but the Zwinglians doubt the third one. Vermigli complains that the Zwinglians look down upon the third union: “they do not often speak of this [union with Christ], though they are not entirely silent.”⁵⁹

The mystical union with Christ is closely related with Vermigli’s understanding of the Word of God. Vermigli contends that the Word of God is three-fold: one is internal, the other two are external. He explains the three-fold Word of God as follows: “[1] Sometime inwardly, while the Holy Spirit, by his secret yet mighty power, clearly incites our souls to renew these things in ourselves, that they may be embraced with lively and willing faith”; [2] to the same end we are often moved by the help of the words

⁵⁸ Vermigli, “Letters on the Eucharist,” in the *Eucharistic Writings*, 347.

⁵⁹ “Oxford Disputation, 1549,” 274-5

of God, piercing us either by outward sound or writing; [3] and finally, to provide every help for our infirmity, Christ added in the supper bread and wine as signs."⁶⁰ The bread and wine are given to us as the "third" Word of God for our weakness.

IV. Conclusion

During the time of Vermigli, The Lord's Supper was so contaminated by the theory of transubstantiation and satisfaction that it became idolatry. Vermigli lamented in prayer, "Your holy name has already been subject to these insults long enough. The purity of your Gospel has already lain in filth long enough. More than long enough have men twisted you Son's institution of the Supper to foul idolatry."⁶¹ Vermigli tried to restore the damaged Supper in the name of faith and the Holy Spirit, as they are the true power in the Eucharist which enables to united us with Christ.

How can Christ be united with us in the Eucharist? This is the fundamental question in the controversy on the Eucharist in the Reformation era. Vermigli tried to solve the question by raising ourselves to the heaven. We have seen that the Holy Spirit and faith have an important part in this union. In the Eucharist the Holy Spirit gives the true body of Christ in heaven to the

⁶⁰ "Oxford Disputation, 1549," 162. Emphasis mine.

⁶¹ Vermigli, "Prayer of Doctor Peter Martyr Against Bread Worship and All Superstition," in *Sacred Prayer: Drawn from the Psalms of David*, trans. John Patrick Donnelly, S.J. (Kirksville, 1994), 162. It is very interesting to note that the "Prayer" is found in the original text, the *Preces Sacrae ex Psalmis Davidis* . . .

soul of the believer on the earth through his faith. In this mysterious union the sacrament is located in the middle. We can describe this relation as follows:

**The Soul of the Partakers ← Faith ← the Eucharist
← the Holy Spirit ← the Body of Christ**

The figure above shows us that the Eucharist can be effective only when the Holy Spirit works with our faith. As we have seen, the Lord's Supper, for Vermigli, is a spiritual food. For this reason, in the Eucharist the important thing is not material or external but instead spiritual or internal. No external authority such as a priest can authenticate the power of the Eucharist. Only the internal and spiritual power of faith and the Holy Spirit can make the Lord's Supper meaningful.

Peter Martyr Vermigli is not simply a "Calvinist," much less one who was a disciple of Calvin. He is older than Calvin! Vermigli does represent the independent theological movement in Italy. Nevertheless, I'd like to put him into the Reformed or Calvinist group rather than to separate him from it. In doing so, we can enrich the Reformed doctrine of the Eucharist.

[초록]**성찬에 있어서 성령과 믿음의 역할에 대한 버미글리의 견해**

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종교개혁 당시 성찬론은 천주교와 개신교 사이에 가장 논쟁적인 이슈였다. 이신칭의와 달리 화체설이 이미 공식 교리로 받아들여졌기 때문에 종교개혁가들은 훨씬 더 힘든 싸움을 해야 했다. 더 나아가 종교개혁가들 내에서도 통일된 견해가 없었다. 개혁파는 로마교회뿐만 아니라 루터파와 재세례파와도 구분된 성찬론을 가지고 있었다. 그것은 한 마디로 영적 실제적 임재설이라고 할 수 있다. 이 입장을 가장 정교하게 발전시킨 개혁파 신학자가 바로 버미글리이다. 버미글리는 성령의 사역과 믿음의 역할을 강조함으로써 그리스도의 살과 피가 어떻게 떡과 잔에 임하게 되는지 잘 설명하였다.

키워드: 성찬, 버미글리, 믿음, 성령, 그리스도의 몸, 승천

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