

The Evangelical Debate Over the Person of Christ in the 16th Century: Luther and Zwingli at Marburg (1529)

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One of the tragedies of Christian history is that so much of it is characterized by divisions - between east and west, Protestants and Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed, Calvinists and Arminians, etc. etc. To a certain extent - at least here in pluralistic America - we have long since learned to live with these divisions, but at a conference like this - devoted to Jesus but also dealing with more recent divisions in the evangelical community about the nature of God - it is worth recalling that differences among evangelicals regarding the person and work of our Lord go all the way back to the progenitors of the Protestant movement, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. Their dispute in the 1520's led to confessional differences between Lutheran and Reformed churches in the sixteenth century¹ - differences that are still evident today in the publications of members of the Evangelical Theological Society.²

¹ E.g., "Therefore now not only as God, but also as man, he [Christ] knows all things, can do all things, is present to all creatures, has under his feet and in his hand all things which are in heaven, in the earth, and under the earth," "Formula of Concord" (Lutheran) in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 3:152; and "According to his [Christ's] human nature, he is now not upon earth; but according to his Godhead, majesty, grace, and Spirit, he is at no time absent from us," "Heidelberg Catechism" (Reformed) in Schaff 3:322.

² E.g., Millard J. Erickson, "If we take 'This is my body' and 'This is my blood' literally, a problem results....This would have been something of a denial of the incarnation, which limited his physical human nature to one location, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 355; and David P. Scaer, "What is distinctively Lutheran is the understanding that...the man Jesus...always possesses the divine majesty with all of God's attributes," *Christology* (Ft. Wayne: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1989), 30.

But how did this happen and why? To answer these questions is the purpose of this paper.

To begin with, it's important to note that, like the members of this society, both reformers recognized the ultimate authority of the Scriptures; and the debate that culminated at Marburg in 1529³ was between two champions of biblical authority in the Church. Although the Marburg Articles that were signed by both men at the end of their meeting do not include a specific article regarding the Scriptures, the thirteenth article does say that tradition or human ordinances may be freely kept or abolished in accordance with the needs of the people, "provided they do not plainly contradict the word of God."⁴ Furthermore, most of the Marburg debate revolved about the meaning of specific Bible passages, since for both men, the doctrine of the eucharist had to proceed from the Holy Scriptures. Patristic evidence was definitely secondary.⁵

³ The Marburg Colloquy and the events leading up to it have been studied frequently. The most exhaustive treatment is that of Walther Köhler, *Zwingli und Luther: Ihr Streit über das Abendmahl nach seinen politischen und religiösen Beziehungen*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1924). The standard biographies of both Luther and Zwingli also cover it, e.g., Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532* (Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990), 325-34, and G. R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 316-32. There is a good introduction in Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 4 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. "Marburg, Colloquy of." A monograph in English that is particularly useful on account of its efforts to reconstruct the debate as well as for its discussion of the issues is Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar*, rev. ed. (Adelaide, Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977).

⁴ The Marburg Articles can be found in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vols. 1- (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1883-) 30^{III}:160-71 (hereafter cited as WA). Unless otherwise noted, the English translation in this essay is from Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works*, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, and Phil.: Fortress Press, 1955-86) (hereafter cited as LW). The Marburg Articles can be found in LW 38:85-89. For this particular citation, see LW 38:88 (WA 30^{III}:168.1-8).

Although no official minutes of the colloquy were taken, there are several accounts of the proceedings from the period that are still extant. These can be found in WA 30^{III}:110-159 and are translated in LW 38:15-85. Both collections provide introductions to the various documents.

⁵ According to the account of Andreas Osiander (LW 38:64; WA 30^{III}:141.7-9), the two sides agreed that they would "refrain from mentioning the fathers until the

Both Luther and Zwingli had much earlier affirmed the normative authority of the Scriptures apart from an official ecclesiastical interpretation. Zwingli, for example, in his *Archeteles* (1522) had promised, “We will test everything by the touchstone of the Gospel and the fire of Paul. Where we find anything that is in conformity with the Gospel, we will preserve it; where we find something that does not conform to it, we will put it out....Because one must obey God rather than man.”⁶ Luther too in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) had insisted, “It is not right to give out as divinely instituted what was not divinely instituted. ...We ought to see that every article of faith of which we boast is certain, pure, and based on clear passages of Scripture.”⁷

Since both men were committed to the Scriptures as the Word of God and employed them as the source and norm of their theology, it has always been a source of dismay to evangelicals that they differed so profoundly over their understanding of two critical issues. Although the principal point of disagreement between Luther and Zwingli was whether Christ’s body and blood were truly present in the eucharist, their controversy also revealed different understandings of the person of Christ. But how could this be if they really accepted Scriptural authority? By examining their writings leading up to their face to face meeting at Marburg in 1529 as well

sacred and divine Scripture had been first dealt with.” Regarding the fathers, Luther is quoted by Caspar Hedio (LW 38:33) as saying at Marburg, “When the fathers speak, they are to be accepted in accordance with the canon of Scripture. Whatever they appear to write contrary to Scripture must either be interpreted or be rejected.” See also Sasse, 212.

⁶ Quoted in Gottfried W. Locher, *Zwingli’s Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 155 note 40. For original, see *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*, vols. 1- (Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke, 1905-) (hereafter cited as Z) 1:319.6-11. For Zwingli’s attitude toward the authority of the Scriptures, see W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 51-58.

⁷ *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, LW 36:107 (WA 6:560.26-29). For Luther’s attitude toward the authority of the Scriptures, see Eugene F. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz on Scripture and the Word* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1971), 51-75.

as what they said in that encounter, one can see that other concerns intruded themselves as each side developed a scriptural argument regarding the person of Christ.

The principal responsibility for introducing the question of the person of Christ into the eucharistic discussion resides with Zwingli and his supporters. For his part, Luther, in his early writings on the sacrament directed mainly at his papal opponents, affirms the bodily presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine without explaining how this is possible in view of the true humanity of our Lord. Nevertheless, in his attacks upon Rome's teachings, Luther takes the same basic approach that he would take in his argument with the Swiss.

In his *Babylonian Captivity* (1520), for example, as Luther takes issue with communion in one kind, transubstantiation, and the sacrifice of the mass, we find the same themes that would characterize the later controversy. Thus, Luther rejects a sacramental understanding of John 6 and instead insists that one derive eucharistic doctrine from the words of institution recorded in the synoptic gospels and St. Paul. Luther writes:

On [these words] we must rest; on them we must build as on a firm rock, if we would not be carried about by the wicked doctrines of men who reject the truth. For in these words nothing is omitted that pertains to the completeness, the use, and the blessing of this sacrament; and nothing is included that is superfluous and not necessary for us to know.⁸

In rejecting transubstantiation, Luther also argues that there is no need for an explanation of how the body and blood are present in the sacrament. "Why," he asks, "do we not put aside such curiosity and cling simply to the words of Christ, willing to remain in ignorance of what takes place here and content that the real body of

⁸ *Babylonian Captivity*, LW 36:37 (WA 6:513.6-11). For his opinion regarding John 6, see LW 36:19-20 (WA 6:502).

Christ is present by virtue of the words?”⁹ Exactly the position he would later take with Zwingli.

Scholastic theologians wrestled with the question of how the bread and body, wine and blood related to one another. They ended up with the answer, “transubstantiation” – the substances of the earthly elements change into the substances of the heavenly while the accidents (quantity, appearance, etc.) remain constant. Later, Zwingli would give an entirely different answer. But in arguing against either, Luther contents himself with the *Verba* – “This is my body” – and relies on the power of God to accomplish what His Word says:

For my part, if I cannot fathom how the bread is the body of Christ, yet I will take my reason captive to the obedience of Christ, and clinging simply to his words, firmly believe not only that the body of Christ is in the bread, but that the bread is the body of Christ, My warrant for this is the words which say: “...Take, eat, this (that is, this bread, which he had taken and broken) is my body.”

After all, as Luther also says, “The authority of God’s Word is greater than the capacity of our intellect to grasp it.”¹⁰

For Luther in 1520 as later, efforts to explain the mystery of the Real Presence are beside the point. Even though Luther does offer a few additional arguments in the *Babylonian Captivity* in support of his views, this should not obscure his principal contention that “the real body of Christ is present by virtue of the words” and that one must not expect fully to understand how God works.¹¹

Only at one point in this early work does Luther resort to christology and then very briefly in order to illustrate the union of bread and body in the sacrament by means of the union of the divine and human in one Christ. Luther writes:

⁹ *Babylonian Captivity*, LW 36:33 (WA 6:510.32-34).

¹⁰ *Babylonian Captivity*, LW 36:34, 35 (WA 6:511.18-23, 38-39).

¹¹ *Babylonian Captivity*, LW 36:33 (WA 6:510.34-35).

What is true in regard to Christ is also true in regard to the sacrament. In order for the divine nature to dwell in him bodily, it is not necessary for the human nature to be transubstantiated....Both natures are simply there in their entirety, and it is truly said: "This man is God; this God is man." Even though philosophy cannot grasp this, faith grasps it nonetheless....In like manner, it is not necessary in the sacrament that the bread and wine be transubstantiated...in order that the real body and real blood may be present. But both remain there at the same time, and it is truly said: "This bread is my body; this wine is my blood," and vice versa."¹²

At this point in Luther's thinking, the personal union simply models the bodily presence of Christ in the sacrament. Only later would he suggest that the former is a precondition for the latter.

By that time, however, Zwingli was already contending that the reverse was true: the personal union rendered the bodily presence impossible. Since Christ was true man as well as true God, His body *could not* be present in the sacrament. According to W. P. Stephens, Zwingli first employed this argument from the human nature of Christ against the Real Presence in his 1526 treatise (in German), *On the Lord's Supper*.¹³ For some time prior to that, he had already rejected the bodily presence of Christ in the supper and had been arguing for a symbolic understanding of the *Verba*, i.e., "This is my body" means "This signifies my body." John 6 had been crucial to his thinking, and Cornelius Honius¹⁴ had opened up to

¹² *Babylonian Captivity*, LW 36:35 (WA 6:511.34-512.2).

¹³ "On the Lord's Supper" in G. W. Bromiley, ed. and trans., *Zwingli and Bullinger* (Phil.: Westminster Press, 1953), 185-238. For original, see Z 4:789-862.

Zwingli's principal writings directed against Luther's eucharistic doctrine are: (1) *A Friendly Exegesis* (1527) (Z 5:562-758); (2) *A Friendly Answer* (1527) (Z 5:771-94); (3) *Zwingli's Christian Reply* (1527) (Z 5:805-977); and (4) *Two Replies to Luther's Book* (1528) (Z 6^{II}:22-248). There are modern German versions of (3) and (4) in Joh. Georg Walch, *Dr. Martin Luthers sämmtliche Schriften*, 23 vols., 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1880-1910) (hereafter cited as W²) 20:1122-1229, 1228-1473.

¹⁴ For Honius, see OED, s.v. "Hoen, Cornelis Henricxzoen." His treatise is available in Z 4:512-19 and in English translation in Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents* (Phil.: Fortress Press, 1981), 268-78.

him the possibilities of reinterpreting the “is” in the words of institution. But now, in pursuit of additional reasons for rejecting a literal reading of the *Verba*, he resorts to classical christology.¹⁵

Zwingli introduces this new line of thought by showing the implications of the creed for the eucharistic presence. He is convinced that the ascension of our Lord, His sitting on the Father’s right hand, and His visible return to judgment all militate against His bodily presence in the eucharist. But he bases this conclusion on his understanding of the person of Christ. First of all, these credal affirmations are true only of the humanity of Christ, as he says, “When we read in Mark 16 that Christ was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God we have to refer this to his *human nature*, for according to his divine nature he is eternally omnipresent [emphasis mine].”¹⁶

For Zwingli, thus carefully distinguishing between the two natures in the one person is essential to making sense out of the Scriptures which on the one hand, promise the abiding presence of Christ with the faithful as in Matthew 28 (“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”), but on the other, say that He is not here as in Matthew 26 (“Ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always”). In order for both kinds of statements to be true, they must be understood as applying to each nature separately. However much Christ is present everywhere in His divinity, He is present in only one place according to His humanity. According to the Scriptures as confessed in the creed, that place is heaven;

¹⁵ Stephens, 227-38. See also Köhler 1:306. Christology continues to be a major argument in his subsequent contributions to the eucharistic debate. See, for example, Zwingli’s first major work written directly against Luther, *Friendly Exegesis, that is, Exposition of the Matter of the Eucharist to Martin Luther*, in H. Wayne Pipkin, ed. and trans., *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*, 2 vols. (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1984) 2:251, 266, 303, 305, 317-19, 319-36, 338-42.

¹⁶ *On the Lord’s Supper*, 213 (Z 4:828.11-15).

and therefore, according to Zwingli, “the body and blood of Christ cannot be present in the sacrament.”¹⁷

For Luther, the obvious answer to this objection to the bodily presence is the almighty power of God. In his most comprehensive contribution to the eucharistic debates, his *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528), Luther writes:

I do not want to deny in any way that God’s power is able to make a body be simultaneously in many places, even in a corporeal and circumscribed manner. For who wants to try to prove that God is unable to do that? Who has seen the limits of his power? The fanatics may indeed think that God is unable to do it, but who will believe their speculations?¹⁸

For Zwingli, however, this appeal to divine omnipotence misses the point. It is not a question of what God *can* do but of what God *wills* to do, “The omnipotence of God accomplishes all things according to the Word of God: it never does that which is contrary to that Word...For because a thing is possible to God it does not follow that it is.”¹⁹

But what is the will of God, as revealed in the Scriptures, regarding a bodily presence in the sacrament? That is the question for Zwingli in this matter, and his christology – not the *Verba*²⁰ – provides the answer. For it was God’s will for the second person of the Godhead to become a true human being, and every true human being has a body, and an essential property of a body is that it be in one place. This is as true after the Resurrection as it was before. “We will now prove to them from the Word of God,” he promises,

¹⁷ *On the Lord’s Supper*, 214 (Z 4:830.19-20).

¹⁸ *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, LW 37:224 (WA 26:336.32-36). See also pp. 207, 209, and 213.

¹⁹ *On the Lord’s Supper*, 215 (Z 4:831.23-25). See also, *Friendly Exegesis*, 314.

²⁰ In fact, Zwingli calls Jesus’ statement, “This is my body,” “obscure...and contradicted by the clear sayings,” *On the Lord’s Supper*, 215 (Z 4:831.15-16). In his *Friendly Exegesis*, 342 (Z 5:710.20-23), Zwingli makes the following point, “Everybody know what ‘this’ means, and ‘is’ and ‘body’ and ‘my,’ but the sentence is not necessarily plain because it consists of such plain words.”

“that it is not possible for the body of Christ to be in many or all places at one and the same time, but that even after the resurrection it is possible for his body only to be in the one place.” Although Zwingli uses the language of “impossibility,” he understands this not as a limitation to God’s power but rather one that God has imposed on Himself on account of the incarnation. Accordingly, Zwingli cites several passages which speak of Jesus’ presence or absence in order to show the limitation of His body to a place.²¹

For Zwingli insists that a real presence of Christ’s body in the eucharist leads either to physical eating of the sort specifically rejected by Jesus in John 6:63 or else threatens the integrity of Christ’s human nature in such a way as to undermine Jesus’ passion. Since the words of institution refer to the body that is put to death for us, if that body is truly present in the sacrament, one must be eating it as it suffered or it is the kind of body that didn’t really suffer on the cross. In other words, Zwingli concludes, either Christ “did not experience his passion or...he had only an incorporeal and spiritual body” – a position that Zwingli ascribes to Marcion.²²

For Zwingli, therefore, a realistic understanding of the *Verba* contradicts the doctrine of the person of Christ; or, to put it more positively, Zwingli’s christology confirms his sacramentology. For Luther, it is the reverse: sacramentology shapes his christology. As a response to Zwingli’s attack upon the Real Presence, Luther develops a doctrine of the person of Christ that is consistent with his interpretation of the sacrament. For Luther accepts the words of Jesus at the first eucharist just as they read, “This is my body,” and

²¹ *On the Lord’s Supper*, 220 (Z 4:838.19-21). Passages cited include Matt. 28:5-6; Matt. 24:23-27; John 12:26; John 14:1-4; and John 17:24.

²² *On the Lord’s Supper*, 219 (Z 4:837.11-13). For Marcion, see F. L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), s.v. “Marcion.”

therefore refuses to set the ascension and session of our Lord against Christ's bodily presence in the sacrament. "They say," Luther writes, "it is a contradiction that Christ's body is in heaven and in the Supper. But they do not prove it. We say, therefore, on the contrary that it is not a contradiction, for Scripture says both."²³ Significantly, however, Luther goes well beyond this simple affirmation of Scriptural teaching to make important statements about the person of Christ.

Of course, like Zwingli, Luther assumes the chalcedonian doctrine of the two natures in one person; but instead of emphasizing the distinction of the natures, he emphasizes the oneness of the person as an explanation of how the body of Christ can be present in the sacrament as well as in heaven. For he maintains that Christ is *everywhere* in both natures. In his first foray into the eucharist debates, *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ – Against the Fanatics*, Luther writes that "Christ, according to his human nature, is put over all creatures and fills all things....Not only according to his divine nature but also according to his human nature, he...is present everywhere" [emphasis mine].²⁴

Zwingli, of course, has a field day in his rebuttal by mocking the notion of a body that expands to fill the universe,²⁵ so in his later writings, Luther elaborates – but does not retreat – by distinguishing three modes of presence for Christ's body, only one of

²³ *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, LW 37:203 (WA 26:314.7-9). Luther's two other major works directed against Zwingli and his allies are *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ – Against the Fanatics* (1526) (LW 36:335-61; WA 19:482-523) and *That These Words of Christ, "This Is My Body," Etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics* (LW 37:13-150; WA 23:64-283).

²⁴ *The Sacrament – Against the Fanatics* LW 36:342 (WA 19.17-20).

²⁵ "When...you say the body of Christ is everywhere and fills all things as barley fills a sack (I can hardly help laughing, my dear Luther, whenever your sack is mentioned), you expand human nature to the measure of the divine," *Friendly Exegesis*, 303 (Z 5:655.2-5). See also pp. 323, 341

which is spatial, the other two being definitive and repletive.²⁶ While Zwingli thinks only in terms of the first category (a kind of local, measurable presence occupying space), Luther insists that besides this kind of presence, the Scriptures also recognize a non-spatial presence like that of the angels whereby one can say they are *there* even if they do not occupy space. Similarly, on Easter, Christ's body passed through the gravestone and then through a closed door without displacing either stone or door. It was *in* these places but not in a measurable, spatial way.²⁷

Even more importantly, however, Luther describes a third kind of presence – omnipresence – that is true only of God. But because Christ is both God and man in a single person, His humanity is everywhere just as His divinity is everywhere – not spatially but supernaturally. Luther explains:

If he [the Son of God] is present naturally and personally wherever he is, then he must be man there, too, since he is not two separate persons but a single person. Wherever this person is, it is the single, indivisible person, and if you can say, "Here is God," then you must also say, "Christ the man is present too."

And if you could show me one place where God is and not the man, then the person is already divided....For it would follow from this that space and place had separated the two natures from one another and thus had divided the person.²⁸

For Luther, the omnipresence of the human nature is a necessary consequence of the personal union. But for Zwingli, Luther's position amounts to the destruction of the personal union because a human nature that is everywhere is no longer human at all but divine. Zwingli writes:

²⁶ According to Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology in Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minn.: Fortress Press, 1999), 230, Luther derived these distinctions from William of Occam and Gabriel Biel. See also Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 3rd ed. (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1983), 276.

²⁷ *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, LW 37:215-16 (WA 26:327.2-329.7).

²⁸ *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, LW 37:218 (WA 26:332.28-333.1).

You [Luther] say that it [the human nature of Christ] is unbounded. Then it would follow that it had been changed into infinite deity. But this is impossible....For if the humanity of Jesus Christ were turned into the deity, then he would not have been able to suffer, for the divine nature cannot suffer.²⁹

Again Zwingli raises the specter of Marcion who taught that Christ did not have a real human body. If, says Zwingli, Luther believes that Christ's body was in heaven when it was also on earth, then one of two errors must follow. Either Christ's body was incapable of suffering in heaven and therefore also incapable of suffering on earth – Marcion's position – or else Christ had two bodies, one on earth (and suffering) and the other in heaven. In either case, the result is heresy.³⁰

For Zwingli, the integrity of Christ's human nature is essential to the work of salvation. It is the vehicle by which God saved man through suffering and death, as he says:

When he who is from all eternity Son of God put on humanity, he was made Son of Man also...in the sense that God and a human being became one Christ, who, in that he is the Son of God, is the life of all (for all things were made by him) and in that he is a human being, is the offering through which the eternal righteousness, which is also his righteousness, is reconciled.³¹

Therefore, according to Zwingli, Luther was creating doubt about the reality of Christ's offering of Himself in the flesh by attributing divine characteristics to the human nature.

²⁹ *Zwingli's Christian Reply*, Z 5:933.15-934.2 (W² 20:1200).

³⁰ *Zwingli's Christian Reply*, Z 5:941.14-942.7 (W² 20:1205-06).

³¹ *Friendly Exegesis*, 320 (Z 5: 681.14-682.6). Earlier (282), Zwingli had written, "We do not mean in any way to depreciate Christ's body as a sacrifice offered for us" (Z 5:626.3-4), and again (255), "I do not even understand the notion of faith in Christ Jesus without the idea of his body and blood. For it was from this that Jesus was anointed Savior and Christ, that taking a body he might save us" (Z 5:588.18-21). See also Gottfried W. Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden: E. J. Brill,), 173-78., and Stephens, 111.

But Zwingli was also concerned for the integrity of Christ's divine nature, going so far as to insist that Christ is worshipped correctly only according to His divinity and not His humanity. Thus, Luther's view ran the risk of restoring papal abuses on account of its failure to distinguish the two natures properly.³²

However, Luther also argued that his opponent's position threatened the gospel by separating the deity from the work of salvation. Luther writes:

He [Zwingli] leaves us no other Christ than a mere man who died for us and redeemed us. But what Christian heart can hear or endure this? This teaching altogether rejects and condemns the entire Christian faith and the whole world's salvation. For whoever is redeemed by the humanity only, is certainly not yet redeemed, nor will he ever be redeemed.³³

For Luther, the work of redemption was a work of the entire person of Christ and had to be, for sinners need a *divine* Savior. Luther acknowledges Zwingli's point that "the Deity surely cannot suffer and die"; but on account of the personal union, Luther also maintains, "the Scriptures ascribe to the divinity...all that happens to humanity and vice versa." Zwingli explained such Scriptures as a figure of speech,³⁴ but Luther insists, "And in reality it is so....you must say that the person...suffers and dies. But this person is truly God, and therefore it is correct to say: the Son of God suffers." To separate the deity from the suffering and death is, according to Luther, to construct a Christ who does no more than any other Christian. In fact, says Luther, "if I believe that only the human nature

³² "For all reject adoration for the humanity of Christ," *Friendly Exegesis*, 303 (Z 5:654.15-16). See also pp. 305, 318, 324, 330. Also Stephens, 116-18.

³³ *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, LW 37:231 (WA 26:342.14-20).

³⁴ "Alloiōsis...is that leap or transition or, if you prefer, interchange, by which when, speaking of one of Christ's natures, we use the terms that apply to the other," *Friendly Exegesis*, 320 (Z 5:680.1-682.1). See also *Zwingli's Christian Reply*, Z 5:925.17-926.3 (W² 20:1194-95) and *Two Replies to Luther's Book*, Z 6^{II}:126.26-127.2, 127.26-128.2 (W² 20:1309-10). Also Stephens, 112-15.

suffered for me, then Christ would be a poor Savior for me, in fact, he himself would need a Savior.”³⁵

In short, for both men the position of the other threatened not only the eucharist but redemption itself. For Luther, Zwingli’s position dissolved the personal union. For Zwingli, Luther’s position destroyed the humanity of Christ. In either case, Christ’s redemptive work was threatened.

By the time of the Marburg Colloquy, therefore, it was clear from the standpoint of their rhetoric, that the two men were as far apart in their understanding of the person of Christ as they were in their interpretation of the eucharist. Nonetheless, something very interesting took place in their face to face meeting or rather, did not take place. There was no real debate about the person of Christ.

In fact, at the end of the Marburg Colloquy, the major participants, including Zwingli, signed a set of articles, drafted by Luther, that included the following christological statement,

We believe that...the Son of God the Father, true and natural God himself, became man....that this same Son of God and of Mary, undivided in person, Jesus Christ, was crucified for us, died and was buried, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of God, Lord over all creatures, and will come to judge the living and the dead.³⁶

Obviously, these statements are more interesting for what they do not say than for what they do, since they affirm the personal union (“undivided in person,” *unzertrentte person*) and nothing more. Although Luther had charged Zwingli with dividing the person, Zwingli had always rejected the accusation, insisting instead that it was a question of carefully distinguishing the two natures not separating

³⁵ *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, LW 37:210 (WA 26:321.4-10, 320.10-12). For Luther’s insistence on the presence of God in the passion of Jesus, see Lohse, 228-31, and Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Phil.: Fortress Press), 197-98.

³⁶ “Marburg Articles,” LW 38:85-86 (WA 30^{III}:161.3-162.2).

them.³⁷ Thus the phrase, “undivided in person,” was not enough to keep Zwingli from signing the articles.

As for Luther’s more distinctive position regarding the communication of attributes and, in particular, the omnipresence of Christ in both His divine and human natures, the articles are silent. But this is hardly surprising in view of the fact that the preceding conversations at Marburg likewise did not really address this argument. Instead, the various accounts of what took place there indicate that Zwingli persisted in his argument from the humanity of Christ that since the body was located in heaven, it could not be in the Supper; but for his part, Luther did not press his argument regarding the ubiquity of Christ’s body. Instead, he relied almost exclusively on the argument that God is able to accomplish what He has said.

Caspar Hedio records a conversation that is typical of the way in which the parties dealt with this issue during the colloquy. According to Hedio, Zwingli contended that “since the body of Christ is finite, it must therefore be in a certain place,” and Luther answered:

I have said that it can be in a place and not in a place. God can even arrange my body so that it is not in a place. In this text there is no room for mathematics. “Place” is a mathematical consideration. The sophists have held that one body can be in many places; he [Luther] does not want to deny this. Who am I to measure the power of God? The driving force of the universe is not in one place.³⁸

³⁷ Stephens, 115-18. One of Luther’s allies, Osiander, later claimed that by signing the articles, the Swiss repudiated their earlier error regarding “the indivisible union of the divine and human nature in the one person of Christ.” LW 38:73 (WA 30^{III}:151.23-24). However, throughout the dispute, Zwingli always affirmed the personal union, e.g., “The two natures that are each essentially and properly in Him are only one Christ Jesus,” *Zwingli’s Christian Reply*, Z 5:923.28-30 (W² 20:1193; also cols. 1200, 1207, 1213, 1215). See also *On the Lord’s Supper*, 212; *Two Replies to Luther’s Book*, W² 20:1352-54; and *Friendly Exegesis*, 302, 305, 320, and 324.

³⁸ “Hedio’s Account” LW 38:32 (WA 30^{III}:137.2-138.3). See also Hedio’s Account, LW 38:29, 34; Anonymous, LW 38:44-45, 49, 50; Collin, LW 38:58, 60, 61; Osiander,

Instead of arguing from the properties of *Christ's* body, in communion with the divine nature, Luther talks about what God can do with *any* body, including Luther's.

At one point, Luther and Oecolampadius (Zwingli's ally from Basel) discussed the significance of christology for salvation. This started when Oecolampadius "began to admonish Luther not to cling to the humanity and flesh of Christ but to lift up his mind to his divinity." This aroused a rather sharp response from Luther, "that he could hardly put up with such remarks. For he did not know or worship any God except him who was made man; nor did he want to have another God besides him. And besides him there was no other God who could save us." But to this, Oecolampadius responded by changing the subject. He said "that he does not know any other God, nor is there another besides him who was made man. Nonetheless, even though he is himself true God and man, he is not to be known according to the flesh." At this point, then, the conversation moves toward what does it mean "to know Christ" and not the properties of the body.³⁹

In summary, therefore, at the Marburg Colloquy, even though Zwingli persists in his argument from the nature of Christ's body that it cannot be in the eucharist, Luther ignores his previous argument regarding the ubiquity of that same body. He rejects Zwingli's position but does not advance his own. This is not to say that Luther repudiated his earlier position. He continued to insist, even after Marburg, on a real communication of attributes between the two natures.⁴⁰ However, at Marburg regarding the eucharist,

der, LW 38:66, 67; Brenz, LW 38:75, 76-77; Rhapsodies, LW 38:81-82; and Summary, LW 38:84.

³⁹ "The Report of Anonymous," LW 38:46 (WA 30^{III}:132.20-133.14). Also LW 38:82.

⁴⁰ There is, for example, a lengthy discussion of the person of Christ in Luther's 1539 treatise, *On the Councils and the Church* (LW 41:100-12; WA 50:587.29-

just as he did in his earlier argument with Rome, Luther finally rests with what Jesus originally said when He instituted the sacrament. For him, all other arguments – even christological ones – are at length besides the point.

May we then conclude that the differences between the two sides regarding the person of Christ were unimportant because not really debated at the Marburg Colloquy? One can hardly say so since, after all, it is Jesus who is at the center of the Christian faith and not the eucharist. The debate over the latter was simply the occasion for bringing to light differences over the former. While both sides affirmed the orthodox christology of the early Church, they had profound differences regarding the implications of that christology not only for the sacrament but also for Christ's redemptive work. Such differences may not have marred Marburg particularly in 1529, but they still characterize 21st century evangelical heirs of the two sides, the Lutherans and the Reformed.

598.22). Luther (p. 109) summarizes the errors of Nestorius and Eutyches with these words, "Nestorius does not want to give the *idiomata* of humanity to the divinity of Christ, even though he maintains Christ is God and man. Eutyches...does not want to give the *idiomata* of divinity to the humanity....To sum up,...whoever confesses the two natures in Christ, God and man, must also ascribe the *idiomata* of both to the person; for to be God and man means nothing if they do not share their *idiomata*," (LW 41:109; WA 50:595.3-6, 30-33).