

PROTESTANT TRANSUBSTANTIATION Part 3: Historic Reformed & Baptist Testimony

by Keith A. Mathison

We turn now to the testimony of the historic Reformed and Baptist churches. Because American Baptists and Presbyterians have been among those at the forefront in rejecting the biblical and historical practice of using wine in the Lord's Supper, the following list of quotations from prominent Reformed and Baptist theologians and confessions is provided to show that the historic position even of these denominations was the same as the rest of the church. Some of the quotations provide evidence that the use of wine was simply taken for granted, that it was not an issue in the church. Others argue more forcefully that the use of wine is not an optional matter. All testify against their denominational descendants who have rejected the use of wine in the Lord's Supper.

John Calvin (1540)

"When we see wine set forth as a symbol of blood, we must reflect upon the benefits which wine imparts to the human body. We thus come to realize that these same benefits are imparted to us in a spiritual manner by the blood of Christ. These benefits are to nourish, refresh, strengthen and gladden" (*Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, as quoted in Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, p. 185).

John Calvin (1559)

"First, the signs are bread and wine, which represent for us the invisible food that we receive from the flesh and blood of Christ" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Book IV, xvii, 1).

"But as for the outward ceremony of the action – whether or not the believers take it in their hands, or divide it among themselves, or severally eat what has been given to each; whether they hand the cup back to the deacon or give it to the next person; whether the bread is leavened or unleavened; the wine red or white – it makes no difference. These things are indifferent, and left at the church's discretion" (IV, xvii, 43).

Comment

Calvin states that the elements to be used are bread and wine. He then wisely points out several matters of indifference in the observance of the Lord's Supper. One of these matters of indifference is the kind or color of the wine, but wine itself is *not* a matter of indifference.

Theodore Beza (1560)

"It must be noted that we understand by this name *sign* not only the material things which are used in the Sacraments, as the water in Baptism, the bread and wine in the Supper; but we also understand under the name *sign* the ceremonies themselves of these mysteries, for they are not without significance: that is why we also hold that it is not lawful to add to, or subtract from them" (*The Christian Faith*; 4:38).

Belgic Confession (1561)

"To represent to us this spiritual and heavenly bread Christ has instituted an earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body and wine as the sacrament of his blood" (Article 35).

Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

Question 79: Why then does Christ call the bread his body and the cup his blood, or the new covenant in his blood? (Paul uses the words, a participation in Christ's body and blood).

Answer: Christ has good reason for these words. He wants to teach us that as bread and wine nourish our temporal life, so too his crucified body and poured-out blood truly nourish our souls for eternal life.

The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)

"Likewise, in the Lord's Supper, the outward sign is bread and wine, taken from things commonly used for meat and drink; but the thing signified is the body of Christ which was given, and his blood which was shed for us, or the communion of the body and blood of the Lord" (Chapter XIX).

Robert Bruce (1589)

“Every ceremony which Christ instituted in the Supper is as essential as the bread and wine are, and you cannot leave out one jot of them without perverting the whole institution; for whatever Christ commanded to be done, whatever He spoke or did in that whole action, is essential, and must be done” (*The Mystery of the Lord’s Supper*, p. 43).

“In Baptism, the thing that represents Christ is water; in the Supper, the things that represent Christ are bread and wine. Water is appointed to represent Christ in Baptism, because it is most appropriate to represent our washing with the Blood of Christ... In the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, He has appointed bread and wine, because there is nothing more appropriate to nourish the body than bread and wine. Thus the Lord has not chosen these signs without a reason” (*The Mystery of the Lord’s Supper*, p. 76).

Comment

This Scottish Presbyterian points out that Christ did not use the elements simply because that was all he had available at the time, but that He chose the elements for a reason. They are the most appropriate elements to symbolize the spiritual reality to which they point. But they are not only the most appropriate elements that Jesus could have chosen – they are also essential to the proper observance of the sacrament. Bruce also rightly points out that to change the sacrament is to pervert the sacrament.

William Ames (1623)

“Bread and wine are to be used, for nothing more fitly expresses the very close union we gradually come to enjoy with Christ, a union founded on the sacrifice of his body and the shedding of his blood” (*The Marrow of Theology*, Book One, Chap. XL, sect. 21; p. 212).

Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God (1645)

“The minister is to begin the action by sanctifying and blessing the elements of bread and wine set before him.”

Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)

“The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed His ministers to declare His word of institution to the people; to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine” (*Confession of Faith* 29:3).

Westminster Larger Catechism (1648)

Question 168: What is the Lord’s Supper? (See also WSC 96.)

Answer: The Lord’s supper is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, his death is shewed forth; and they that worthily communicate feed upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; have their union and communion with him confirmed; testify and renew their thankfulness, and engagement to God, and their mutual love and fellowship each with the other, as members of the same mystical body.

Question 169: How hath Christ appointed bread and wine to be given and received in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper?

Answer: Christ hath appointed the ministers of his word, in the administration of this sacrament of the Lord’s supper, to set apart the bread and wine from common use, by the word of institution, thanksgiving, and prayer; to take and break the bread, and to give both the bread and the wine to the communicants: who are, by the same appointment, to take and eat the bread, and to drink the wine, in thankful remembrance that the body of Christ was broken and given, and his blood shed, for them.

Question 177: Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper differ?

Answer: The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper differ, in that baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants; whereas the Lord’s supper is to be administered often, in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him, and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves.

Comment

The Westminster Confession and Catechisms state that the Lord's Supper consists externally in the use of bread and wine. This confessional standard singles out these as the elements Christ ordained, and as the elements ministers of the gospel are to set apart, bless, and give to the people. Many of the churches which have replaced wine with grape juice are led by elders who have taken ordination vows indicating their agreement with and subscription to the Westminster standards.

Francis Turretin (1679)

“As to the symbols which hold the place of the external matter with the actions performed about them, two were instituted by Christ which hold the place of elements (the bread and wine), neither more nor fewer” (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*; Vol. 3, p. 429).

The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689

“The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed his ministers to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine” (Chap. 30, sect. 3).

Comment

One of the earliest Baptist confessions repeats the doctrine of the Westminster Confession almost word for word. It again points out that the elements of bread and wine are those that Jesus appointed for this sacrament.

Thomas Watson (1692)

Question 2: What is the Lord's Supper?

Answer: It is a visible sermon, wherein Christ crucified is set before us; or, it is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein by receiving the holy elements of bread and wine, our communion with Christ is signified and sealed up to us; or it is a sacrament divinely instituted, wherein by giving and receiving bread and wine, Christ's death is showed forth, and the worthy receivers by faith are made partakers of his body and blood, and all the benefits flowing from thence” (*Body of Divinity*; p. 385).

Wilhelmus a Brakel (1700)

“The second matter to be considered in reference to this sacrament is the *external signs*... The signs are identical to those used in meals in order to nourish and refresh the body: *bread and wine*. One is to be neither superstitious nor concerned regarding the kind of bread and wine. The bread and wine which Christ used were such as were available and in common use” (*The Christian's Reasonable Service*, Vol. II, p. 528).

Comment

Like Calvin, this influential Dutch theologian wisely points out that there are matters of indifference in the Lord's Supper, but the use of bread and wine is not one of them.

Jonathan Edwards (1746)

“Christ, by the speeches and actions of the minister, makes a solemn profession of his part in the covenant of grace: he exhibits the sacrifice of his body broken and his blood shed; and in the minister's offering the sacramental bread and wine to the communicants, Christ presents himself to the believing communicants, as their propitiation and bread of life; and by these outward signs confirms and seals his sincere engagements to be their Saviour and food, and to impart to them all the benefits of his propitiation and salvation” (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; Vol. I, p. 458).

John Gill (1767-1770)

“The wine is another part of this ordinance, and of the matter of it, and one of the outward elements of it, a symbol of the blood of Christ...It is also a question, whether the wine used was mixed or pure; since it was usual with the Jews, whose wines were generous, to mix them, Prov. 9:2. But there is no need to dilute them in our climates; and as the quantity is so small drunk at the ordinance, there is no danger of intoxication in those who are least used to it” (*A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*; p. 918).

Comment

Gill, a Baptist, points out that although the purity of the wine used by Christ is a matter impossible to ascertain and thus indifferent, it shouldn't be a concern. Even if perfectly pure wine is used, there is no danger of intoxication since the amount used in the Lord's Supper is so small.

Herman Witsius (1822)

“It does not appear, whether Christ mixed the wine, or drank it pure. Yet we grant the former to be probable... Certainly those plainly shew, that they put a greater value on their own imaginations, than on the very institution of Christ, who have thought it superfluous to use wine in the holy supper, which by the command and prescription of our Lord, is a necessary part: but on the contrary, have judged water necessary, which is of human appointment, as if we were left to our own liberty by the divine institution” (*The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*; Vol. II, p. 449-450).

Comment

In the context of discussing whether or not it is necessary to use wine mixed with water, Witsius points out the fact that it is the wine that is required. Whether or not it is mixed is indifferent.

John L. Dagg (1858)

“The Jewish ceremonies were typical of Christ to come; but the Lord’s Supper is a memorial of Christ already come. It is, therefore, not included in the meat and drink intended by the apostle... Paul says, ‘Let no man judge you in meat or in drink.’ The abrogated ceremonies are now without divine authority; and, therefore, he calls *these meats and drinks* the commandments of men. But the bread and wine of the Supper, are commandments of the Lord” (*Manual of Church Order*, p. 208).

“In this, we have ascertained, that Christ designed a literal use of bread and wine, and, this point being ascertained, our duty is determined; whatever doubt and obscurity may remain respecting any other subject” (Ibid. p. 209).

Comment

This early Southern Baptist theologian points out that although there may be confusion and uncertainty on a number of issues surrounding the Lord’s Supper, the use of bread and wine is not one of them. Since Christ clearly ordained the use of bread and wine, it is our duty to follow this command.

Southern Baptist Abstract of Principles (1859)

“The Lord’s Supper is an ordinance of Jesus Christ to be administered with the elements of bread and wine, and to be observed by His churches till the end of the world.”

Comment

This early Southern Baptist statement of faith unambiguously states that the Lord's Supper is to be administered with the elements of bread and wine, not bread and grape juice.

A.A. Hodge (1860)

“What is the meaning of the term *oinos*, wine, in the New Testament, and how does it appear that wine and no other liquid must be used in the Lord's Supper?”

“It is evident from the usage of this word in the New Testament that it was designed by the sacred writers to designate the fermented juice of the grape – Matt. 9:17; John 2:3-10; Rom. 14:21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Tim. 3:8; 5:23; Titus 2:3. This is established by the unanimous testimony of all competent scholars and missionary residents in the East... That wine and no other liquid is to be used is clear from the record of the institution, Matt. 26:26-29, and from the usage of the apostles” (*Outlines of Theology*, p 633-634).

Comment

Hodge plainly argues that wine is the only element to be used with bread in the Lord's Supper.

Charles Hodge (1871-1873)

“By wine as prescribed to be used in this ordinance, is to be understood ‘the juice of the grape;’ and ‘the juice of the grape’ in that state which was, and is, in common use, and in the state in which it was known as wine. The wine of the Bible was a manufactured article. It was not the juice of the grape as it exists in the fruit, but that juice submitted to such a process of fermentation as secured its preservation and gave it the qualities ascribed to it in Scripture. That *oinos* in the Bible when unqualified by such terms as *new*, or *sweet*, means the fermented juice of the grape, is hardly an open question. It has never been questioned in the Church, if we except a few Christians of the present day” (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 616).

Comment

Hodge points out first that the element to be used in the Lord's Supper is wine and not grape juice. He also points out that, until his day, this practice has never been questioned in the history of the church.

Robert L. Dabney (1871)

"The elements are bread and wine" (*Systematic Theology*; p. 801).

James Petigru Boyce (1887)

Question: In what does this ordinance [The Lord's Supper] consist?

Answer: In eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Christ" (*A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine*; In *Abstract of Systematic Theology*; p. xxiii).

Comment

Boyce, a Southern Baptist and the principal founder of the first Southern Baptist Seminary, states that bread and wine are the elements to be used in the Lord's Supper.

W.G.T. Shedd (1889)

"The bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are *specialy* and *divinely appointed* symbols, differing in this respect from all natural symbols" (*Dogmatic Theology*; Vol. II, p. 573).

Comment

Shedd notes that these symbols are unlike symbols chosen by men. They are specifically chosen by God.

A.A. Hodge (1890)

"The contents of the cup were wine. This is known to have been 'the juice of the grape,' not in its original state as freshly expressed, but as prepared in the form of wine for permanent use among the Jews. 'Wine,' according to the absolutely unanimous, unexceptional testimony of every scholar and missionary, is in its essence 'fermented grape juice.' Nothing else is wine. The use of 'wine'

is precisely what is commanded by Christ in his example and his authoritative institution of this holy ordinance. Whoever puts away true and real wine, or fermented grape juice, on moral grounds, from the Lord's Supper sets himself up as more moral than the Son of God who reigns over his conscience, and than the Saviour of souls who redeemed him. There has been absolutely universal consent on this subject in the Christian Church until modern times, when the practice has been opposed, not upon change of evidence, but solely on prudential considerations" (*Evangelical Theology*; p. 347-348).

Comment

Hodge states that not only is the use of wine in the Lord's Supper clearly commanded by Christ, and that it has been the universal practice of the church until his day, but he also correctly points out that to reject the use of wine on moral grounds is implicitly to proclaim oneself to be more moral than God.

B.B. Warfield (1901)

"The bread and wine of which we partake at the Lord's table are in like manner, according to our Lord's precise declaration, the representations of his body and blood - his body given, his blood poured out for us" (*Selected Shorter Writings of B.B. Warfield*; Vol. I, p. 333).

J. Gresham Machen (1914)

"The breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine signify the death of the Lord. In this sacrament, as elsewhere in the New Testament, the death of Christ is put in the very centre of the Christian faith" (*The New Testament*; p. 317).

Baptist Faith and Message (1925)

"...the Lord's Supper, in which the members of the church, by the use of bread and wine, commemorate the dying love of Christ."

Comment

It is quite ironic to note that even at this late date when virtually all Southern Baptists had already rejected the God-ordained use of wine, their statement of faith (in an accidental oversight?) bore witness against their actual practice.

John Murray (1937-1966)

“They [the sacraments] are ordinances in which material elements and visible signs are used, in baptism water and washing with water, in the Lord’s supper bread and wine and the oral participation of these” (*Collected Writings*; Vol. 2, p. 366).

“VALIDITY

What is necessary to their administration?

1. The elements.
2. The actions.
3. Intention - of doing what Christ commanded” (*Collected Writings*; Vol. 2, p. 369).

Comment

Murray argues that several factors must be present in order for the sacraments to be valid and properly administered. One of these factors is the use of the correct elements, which he states are water, bread, and wine. Since the proper administration of the sacraments is one of the marks of a true church, the rejection of one of the proper elements is not a trivial matter.

Louis Berkhof (1933-1939)

“Each one of the sacraments contains an external element, namely, the water in baptism, and the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper. Where these elements are administered and appropriated, there we have the entire external matter of the sacrament” (*Manual of Christian Doctrine*; p. 311).

“The external matter of the sacrament includes not only the elements that are used, namely, water, bread, and wine, but also the sacred rite, that which is done with these elements” (*Systematic Theology*; p. 617).

Comment

Berkhof points out that it is where *these* elements (water, bread and *wine*) are properly used that we have the Lord’s Supper.

G.H. Kersten (1947)

“Moreover, at the Supper the Lord took wine, and He did not mix it with anything. Neither must the wine be replaced with water, as the *Ebionites*, *Gnostics*, and *Manichees* would have it. We must abide by the institution of the

Lord, and He gave bread and wine as the signs of the Lord's Supper" (*Reformed Dogmatics*; Vol. II, p. 519).

Comment

Kersten points out the little known fact that until recent years the only groups that ever objected to the use of wine in the Lord's Supper were early heretical sects with radical ascetic tendencies. In the orthodox community of believers it was never questioned.

Herman Hoeksema (1966)

"It is true that in the institution of the Lord's Supper Jesus did not use the symbol of water, but that of wine. For this we can find two reasons. In the first place, wine is the color of blood, and the wine at the communion table is the sign of the blood of Jesus Christ. And, secondly, wine is a symbol of communion, of prosperity and joy, according to Scripture [Gen. 14:18; 27:27, 28; 49:10-12; Deut. 7:13; 33:28; Psalm 104:14, 15]. Wine is the symbol of heavenly joy, and therefore it was very fitting at the wedding of Cana that the heavenly bridegroom should change the water into wine. And thus we can understand that at the Lord's Supper it is not water but wine that is used as the proper sign of the blood of the Lamb, by which not only our sin is changed into righteousness, but also our earthly life is translated into the joy of God's heavenly tabernacle" (*Reformed Dogmatics*; p. 706-707).

Comment

Hoeksema provides one of the reasons why the choice of wine by Jesus was not an arbitrary choice. Jesus chose wine because of what it symbolized in the Old Testament and because of what He would ordain it to symbolize in the New. It already symbolized heavenly joy in the Old Testament, and by declaring it also to symbolize His shed blood in the New, Jesus subtly demonstrated their inseparability. By partaking of wine in the Lord's Supper, we point back to His shed blood and forward to the wedding supper of the Lamb, and we symbolically declare that only those who participate in the reality of the first will participate in the reality of the latter.

G.C. Berkouwer (1969)

"There is then no longer a contrast between symbol and reality for him who knows that through these signs communion is experienced and salvation is represented and given. He who sees this profound meaning in the institution of the Supper by Christ himself will understand the sacramental manner of

speaking, which is not a meaningless and exaggerated phraseology but which indicates the conjunction between the believing eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine and the blessing and efficacy of Christ's reconciling suffering and dying" (*The Sacraments*; p. 217).

James Montgomery Boice (1986)

"The sacraments are ordinances in which *material elements are used as visible signs of God's blessing*. In baptism the sign is water. In the Lord's Supper two signs are used: bread, which signifies the broken body of the Lord Jesus Christ, and wine, which signifies his shed blood" (*Foundations of the Christian Faith*; p. 595).

Wayne Grudem (1994)

"Just as ordinary food nourishes our physical bodies, so the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper give nourishment to us" (*Systematic Theology*; p. 990).

"Today most Protestants would say, in addition to the fact that the bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of Christ, that Christ is also *spiritually present* in a special way as we partake of the bread and wine" (*Systematic Theology*; p. 995).

The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America

"The table, on which the elements are placed, being decently covered, and furnished with *bread and wine*, and the communicants orderly and gravely sitting around it (or in their seats before it), the Elders in a convenient place together, the Minister should then set the elements apart by prayer and thanksgiving" (58-5).

Comment

The PCA's Book of Church Order, in agreement with its doctrinal standards, declares that the proper elements of the Lord's Supper are bread and wine.

Conclusion

The testimony of historic Presbyterians and Baptists is remarkable in its agreement on this subject. Until the middle of the 19th century, the use of wine in the Lord's Supper in accordance with Christ's institution was a non-issue for most of these theologians. Because no one since the early gnostics had made any argument or attempt to change the elements, they simply state the use of these elements as a given fact. Those Presbyterians and Baptists, such as A.A. Hodge and John L. Dagg respectively, who were forced in the 19th century to deal once again with radical ascetic and gnostic tendencies within the church were adamant in their refusal to change the elements of the Lord's Supper in order to pacify the spirit of the age. Sadly, their followers have not been as careful, in some cases going so far as to ignore the clear statements of confessions and directories for worship to which they have vowed to adhere.

It is clear from our survey, not only of Presbyterian and Baptist sources but of sources from the entire spectrum of historic Christianity, that the use of wine in the Lord's Supper has been the unexceptional and universal practice of all orthodox Christian churches from the time of Jesus until today. The only historic precedent for the recent American evangelical alteration of the sacrament is found in the practice of ancient heretical sects.