

Huldrych Zwingli: The Implementation of the Lord's Supper



Translation and Introduction by Jim West

A Pitts Theology Library Publication

Huldrych Zwingli

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Editor's Preface

M. Patrick Graham

Since 1987 and the gift of the 41 early German Reformation imprints by Richard and Martha Kessler, the Pitts Theology Library has collaborated with the Kesslers and almost 150 other supporters of the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection to build one of America's most remarkable collections of early sixteenth century imprints related to Luther's reformation in Germany. This corpus now includes more than 3,700 manuscripts and printed works, of which 1,052 were written by Martin Luther himself. In addition to several hundred works by Roman Catholic authors, the collection also includes works by other reformers who were engaging Luther and his supporters along the way. Such diversity in the collection was part of the collection development policy from the beginning, carefully articulated by Pitts Librarian Channing R. Jeschke in collaboration with the Kesslers and the Standing Advisory Committee for the Kessler Reformation Collection. The aim was always to enable researchers to hear both sides of the sixteenth-century debate.

The acquisition of rare and important materials related to the German Reformation has been accompanied over almost three decades by the lecture and musical programs of the annual Reformation Day at Emory University and the print and electronic publications that make the riches of the Kessler Collection more widely known and accessible. In addition, the creation of the Digital Image Archive—with its 60,000 digital images of woodcuts and etchings from special collections at the Pitts Theology Library, freely available to all for teaching and research via the Pitts Library's home page—has made thousands of woodcuts from the Kessler Reformation Collection available to the church and academy. The current pamphlet represents Pitts' latest effort to make Reformation materials available for the first time in English translation.

Huldrych Zwingli's *Actio[n] oder Brauch des Nachtmals, Gedechtnus, oder Dancksagung Christi* (1525) was purchased for the Kessler Reformation Collection in 2010 and given a bookplate to honor Prof. Valerie Hotchkiss for her lecture at the 2011 Reformation Day at Emory. This rare volume was acquired to document the vigorous debate between Luther and Zwingli about the Lord's Supper, one of the most divisive issues among Protestants in the third decade of the sixteenth century. We are delighted that Dr. Jim West, widely known for his scholarly engagement with Zwingli's work, helped us identify a Zwingli pamphlet for translation and then undertook this difficult project himself. His translation reflects both the strength of his scholarship and his personal engagement with the theological contributions of the great Swiss reformer.

Finally, I must express appreciation to three more who have made this work possible. First, Prof. Kurt K. Hendel, the Bernard Fischer, Westberg Distinguished Ministry Professor Emeritus of Reformation History at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, carefully reviewed Dr. West's translation and made many helpful comments. Prof. Hendel is renowned for his translations of the works of Johann Bugenhagen, a member of the Scholars Advisory Board for the Kessler Reformation Collection, and a steadfast friend of the Pitts Theology Library. In addition, I must note the generous contribution of Nancy and Walker Ray in honor of Susan Snow Hope, which has made this publication possible. Dr. Ray serves on the Standing Advisory Committee for the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection, and he and Nancy's encouragement and involvement over the years has been exemplary. They are indeed friends of the Pitts Theology Library. Once more, the staff of the Creative Group, Emory University, have used their fine artistic sense and design expertise to produce a publication that is at once beautiful and reminiscent of the famous *Flugschriften* of the early sixteenth century. All these—translator, reviewer, patron, and designer—have collaborated in a beautiful way to allow Zwingli's voice to be heard once more, but this time in English. For this we can all be thankful.

M. Patrick Graham
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Candler School of Theology, Emory University

Translator's Preface

Jim West

In the summer of 2015 Prof. Pat Graham and I discussed over lunch the possibility of making more of Zwingli's works available to English-speaking audiences. This pamphlet is the first step toward that end. It presents Zwingli's work in a modern English translation that is faithful to both the reformer's words and intent.

Very few of Zwingli's writings have been translated into English. Indeed, those that have fit into three average size volumes, and all those volumes were published at the beginning of the twentieth century. Not a single work of Zwingli's has been rendered into modern English for over a century.

This is in my view an unacceptable reality. Accordingly, I want to thank Prof. Graham for the invitation to provide this translation and the Standing Advisory Committee for the Kessler Reformation Collection for bringing it to fruition. God willing, future days will see additional works of this great reformer in modern English translation.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this slender volume to several colleagues in Zurich who share my opinion that Zwingli deserves greater appreciation and wider accessibility. Their input in connection with various projects regarding Zwingli over the years has been utterly indispensable.¹ So to them this work is offered with great appreciation (in no particular order): Emidio Campi, Peter Opitz, Pierrick Hildebrand, Luca Baschera, and Christian Moser.

Notes

1. Jim West, *The Humor of Huldrych Zwingli: The Lighter Side of the Protestant Reformation* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007); *idem*, "Christ Our Captain": *An Introduction to Huldrych Zwingli* (Quartz Hill: Quartz Hill Publishing House, 2011); *idem*, *Through the Year with Zwingli and Bullinger* (Quartz Hill: Quartz Hill Publishing House, 2015).

Introduction

Jim West

The German title of this short work is literally rendered, “Action or Practice of the Lord’s Supper,” a title that may leave modern readers of English scratching their heads. A more appropriate English translation would be, “The Implementation of the Lord’s Supper,” because that is exactly what this pamphlet addresses. It is literally a step by step, line by line, phrase by phrase, and word by word implementation of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper for Zwingli’s newly-reformed congregation in Zurich and elsewhere in the German-speaking cantons of the Swiss Confederation.

The critical edition of Zwingli’s works, the justly famous *Corpus Reformatorum*, includes a copy of this tractate in volume 4, pp. 1-24, most of which is taken up with introductory matters (pp. 1-12) and copious explanatory footnotes.¹ The editors of the critical edition explain that the pamphlet was only printed twice and that both printings date from 1525. These editions are designated A and B. The first has a colophon, indicating that it was printed in Zurich by Christopher Froschauer on April 6, 1525. The second was issued without any designation of place, publisher, or date, and the copy held by the Kessler Collection represents this printing.² The differences between the two editions are orthographic or dialectical and so do not represent a different textual base. So, for example, while the first edition has “kilch,” the second uses the more common “kirch,” and while the first uses “sin,” the second uses the more common “sein.” Since these differences are insignificant for purposes of translation, they will receive no further attention here. What follows is a translation of the critical text presented in *Corpus Reformatorum*.

Zwingli’s pamphlet itself sprang from the author’s growing awareness that the Lord’s Supper was a “memorial” and not an event at which the bread became the actual body of Christ and the wine his blood. It also springs from an era before Zwingli and Luther began their occasionally acrimonious debate about the meaning of the Supper. This debate culminated in the Marburg Colloquy of 1529, which itself ended in hardened positions and a recognition that these two reformers would never see eye to eye on the subject.³

More specifically, Zwingli’s re-thinking of the meaning of the Mass had begun several years earlier. Indeed, as early as the 67 Theses of 1523 we find Zwingli moving towards an understanding of the Supper as “memorial” but—in contrast to the various misrepresentations of Zwingli’s thought promulgated by Lutheran partisans—never *merely* as a memorial. Here he simply, plainly, and forcefully illustrates the practical nature of his reformation of the Mass.⁴

The pamphlet at hand allows readers “virtually” into the liturgy of the Zurich congregation itself, permitting them to “sit on the back pew” and watch the celebration of the Lord’s Supper unfold, as it was actually practiced by Zwingli and the other Reformed of the canton from 1525 on. Consequently, it is an invaluable historical work, and not least because it shows us that Zwingli was well before his time in allowing women to participate in liturgical acts. As will be seen in the translation that follows, women have a role to play in the liturgy of the Lord’s Supper.

The work itself is divided into two chief segments. First, readers receive basic theological instruction concerning the purpose and meaning of the Supper, and then in the second part the liturgy of the Supper is described. The translation below is not wooden and in many places it is more paraphrase than translation. This is necessary, since a relatively literal rendering would make little sense to modern readers. Nonetheless, the spirit of Zwingli’s intention is retained throughout, even when the translation treats his actual words rather freely.

Notes

1. *Huldrych Zwingli’s Sämtliche Werke* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1982) 4: 1-24.

2. The first edition of the pamphlet is VD 16 M4921, and the second edition VD 16 M 4922. While the editors of the *Corpus Reformatorum* suggest that the second edition was issued in Augsburg (on the basis of orthographic considerations), the editors of VD 16 assign it to the print shop of Hans Hager in Zurich. However, it has also been assigned to Heinrich Steiner in Augsburg by Michael A. Pegg in *A Catalogue of German Reformation Pamphlets (1516-1546) in Libraries of Great Britain and Ireland* (Bibliotheca Bibliographica Aureliana, 45; Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 1973) 307 (#3968). Cf. also Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 73. The assertion by the editors of the critical edition that the same woodcut was used in both printings is erroneous, since the same woodblock was not used for both printings (one woodcut is a copy of the other).
3. Most recently, Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015) 204-207.
4. See, e.g., Carrie Euler, "Huldrych Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger," in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation*, ed. Lee Palmer Wandel (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 46; Leiden: Brill, 2014) 57-74.

The Practice or Use of the Supper, Remembrance, or Thanksgiving of Christ as it is instituted at Easter in Zurich in the year, as commonly reckoned, 1525.



We entreat all Christian people inhabiting Zurich to be obedient to and serve the word of God. May God grant his grace and peace.

After a long and error-filled era of darkness we are overjoyed, dearest brothers, that God our heavenly Father has revealed the proper way and light through his grace. This was also esteemed so highly by us and was accepted and received with much desire, because the error was all the more damaging and dangerous to us. In spite of the fact that very many errors have arisen and brought harm to faith and love, we realize that not the least have occurred in connection with the celebration of this supper. Just as the children of Israel at the time of Hezekiah [cf. 2 Kings 18:4] and Josiah [cf. 2 Chronicles 34:3-7]¹ conquered the kings after a long imprisonment, so we have conquered the Passover lamb again with God's help, as we hope, and have established it in accordance with its proper use, and we have done so with regard to the essence of the Supper. With regard to the accompanying ceremonies, some should be observed and respected less and others more. Each congregation has an opinion about these ceremonies, and so we, therefore, wish to argue with no one regarding them. Without doubt, all believers certainly know what harm and leading away from God have occurred until now as a result of many of these ceremonies. Therefore, we have been

occupied in instructing our people in the use of this Supper (which is also a ceremony, but one instituted by Christ), even though we are disinclined to prescribe ceremonies and ecclesiastical customs through which the old error could eventually again be permitted. However, since the matter is dealt with so poorly and meagerly and in order to acknowledge human ignorance, we have (as they are here specified) established such ceremonies that are useful regarding this matter. We have considered them to be somewhat beneficial and fit for the human heart in fostering the spiritual remembrance of Christ's death, the increase of faith and brotherly fidelity, the improvement of life, and the prevention of depravity.

However, we do not want to condemn the ceremonies of other churches, such as singing and others (which may all be suitable to them and conducive to fostering devotion), for we hope that all leaders everywhere always endeavor to nurture hearts and to win many people.

We also desire (because this remembrance of the suffering of Christ and thanksgiving for his death should become commonplace among Christians and that an innocent and pious life should follow) that this supper, given by God to us according to his will, reminds us that as members of the body of Christ our irremovable stains and spots have been cleansed and removed. However, how this will happen (because we have little time now) will be explained later in another little book.²

The grace of Christ be with you all.

Notes

1. The second edition of the pamphlet reads "Ezekiel and Joshua."
2. Zwingli means his *Ratschlag betreffend Ausschliessung vom Abendmahl für Ehebrecher, Wucherer (Huldrych Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke, 4: 25-34. [Number 52])*.

A Preface

For a long time God's word has strongly and clearly revealed that the supper of Christ is greatly misused. Thus it is necessary that everything that does not conform to God's word must be abolished.

And since this remembrance is a thanksgiving to and rejoicing in the almighty God for the grace that he has shown us through his son, and since this grace is apparent in this festive meal or thanksgiving, and since he assures them that he belongs to those who believe that they are redeemed by the death and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the disciples, who come in faith and in the knowledge of God and who want to attend this thanksgiving and Supper, should gather together on Holy Thursday at the front of the church—the men on the right side and the women on the left—while the others remain in the nave, the narthex, and in other places. And when the sermon has concluded, the unleavened bread and the wine should be placed on a table in the chancel, according to the meaning and practice of Christ as he instituted this remembrance. The words should be spoken by us in understandable German (as they follow hereafter). Then the bread on a flat, wooden plate is to be distributed from one seat to the other, and each person is to break off a bite or mouthful with his own hand and eat it. Thereafter the wine should be similarly distributed so that it is not necessary for anyone to move from their seat.

Once the elements are distributed, God should be given praise and thanks with public and clear words and with a clear, distinctive voice. Then the whole congregation should speak the concluding "Amen." On Good Friday those who are middle-aged should go to the named place of the chancel and participate in the thanksgiving in the same manner, although men and women should be divided as noted above. On Easter Day the most senior members of the congregation should do so in the same manner.

The plates and cups are wooden so that the pomp of the mass does not return.

We will follow this practice, as far as it will please our churches, four times a year, namely, Easter, Pentecost, harvest time, and Christmas.

The Practice or Use of the Supper, Remembrance, or Thanksgiving of Christ as it is instituted at Easter in Zurich in the year 1525.

The bishop or pastor turns to the people and prays the following prayer with a loud, distinctive voice: O' almighty, eternal God, whom all creatures rightly honor, worship, and praise as their maker, creator, and father, grant us poor sinners that we praise you and give you thanks as you have commanded us believers to do with true sincerity and faith in remembrance of your only begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, through the same Lord Jesus Christ, your son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God eternal. Amen!

The assistant or lector speaks with a loud voice thusly: What we now read is written in the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 11 [1 Corinthians 11:20-29]: "When you come together in one place, you do not eat the Lord's Supper, for each one eats his own supper beforehand; and one is hungry and another is drunk. Do you not have houses in which you may eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you in this matter. For I received and learned from the Lord that which I also reported to you, namely, that the Lord Jesus, in the same night in which he was betrayed and given into death, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, 'Drink from this all of you. This drink is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you should proclaim and highly praise the Lord's death. Now, whoever eats this bread or drinks from this cup of the Lord but does so in an unworthy manner, that is, not as it is fitting and as one should, becomes guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Therefore a person should first investigate, admonish, and examine himself, and then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For the one who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, that is, not as is fitting and as one should, eats and drinks judgment and condemnation to himself, because he does not discern the Lord's body."

Then the assistants together with the whole congregation say: God be praised.

Now the pastor begins the first verse of the following hymn of praise, and then the people, both men and women, say each verse in the form of a litany: The Pastor: Glory to God in the highest!

The Men: And peace on earth!

The Women: And a right spirit among the people! [Luke 2:14]

The Men: We praise you; we glorify you.

The Women: We beseech you; we worship you.

The Men: We give you thanks for the sake of your great glory and blessing, O' Lord God, heavenly King, almighty a!

The Women: O' Lord, you, the only begotten son Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit.

The Men: O' Lord God; you, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, who takes away the sin of the world [John 1:29], have mercy on us!

The Women: You who take away the sin of world, hear our prayer!

The Men: You who sit at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.

The Women: For you alone are the Holy One.

The Men: You alone are the Lord.

The Women: You are the Most High, O' Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father.

Men and women: Amen.

Now the Deacon or Lector says: The Lord be with you.

The people answer: And with your spirit.

Then the Lector says: What is hereafter read from the Gospel is written in the sixth chapter of John [John 6:47-63].

The people respond: Thanks be to God.

Then the Lector begins thusly [John 6:47-63]: Truly I say to you, "He who believes and trusts in me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that everyone who eats of it does not die. I am the living bread who came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" However, Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and do not drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As my living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father's will, so he who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna and are dead. Whoever eats this bread will live forever." These things he said in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. However, many of his disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" However, when Jesus knew himself that his disciples complained about this, he said to them, "Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."

Then the lector kisses the book and says: God be praised and thanked, because according to his holy word he desires to forgive all of our sin.

The people say: Amen!

Then the Pastor begins the Creed: I believe in one God,

The Men: In the Father almighty.

The Women: And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord.

The Men: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

The Women: Was born of the Virgin Mary.

The Men: He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

The Women: He descended into hell.

The Men: On the third day he rose from the dead.

The Women: Has ascended into heaven.

The Men: He sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty.

The Women: Whence he is coming to judge the living and the dead.

The Men: I believe in the Holy Spirit.

The Women: The holy catholic Christian Church, the communion of saints.

The Men: The forgiveness of sins.

The Women: The resurrection of the body.

The Men: And everlasting life.

The Men and Women: Amen.

Then the minister says: Dear brothers, according to the order and institution of our Lord, we want to eat the bread and drink the cup which he has commanded us to use in such a way as a remembrance, praise, and thanksgiving of this, namely, that he has suffered death for us and has shed his blood for the washing away of our sin. Therefore, everyone should remind herself or himself according to the word of Paul, what comfort, faith, and certainty each has in our Lord Jesus Christ so that no one passes herself or himself off as a believer, when she or he is not, and thereby becomes guilty of the death of the Lord. One should also not become guilty of sin against the whole Christian community (which is a body of Christ).

Therefore, kneel and pray: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us our daily bread. Forgive us our debt, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

The people shall say: Amen!

Now the minister continues to pray: O' Lord, almighty God, through your Holy Spirit you have made us into your united body in the unity of faith, and you have commanded this body to give you praise and thanks for your kindness and for the free gift of giving your only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, into death for our sin. We pray, grant that we do this so faithfully so that we do not provoke the sincere truth to anger with any kind of hypocrisy and deceit. Grant also that we live so innocently and properly as your body, your servants, and your children that unbelievers also learn to know your name and honor. Lord, protect us so that your name and honor are never slandered because of our lives. Lord, everywhere and always increase our faith, that is, our trust in you, who lives and reigns, God eternally! Amen!

How Christ instituted this remembrance. The minister reads the following [cf. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26]: Jesus, in the night in which he was betrayed and given into death, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is my body; do this in remembrance of me." In the same manner he also took the cup (after supper), gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from this, all of you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood. As often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you should proclaim and highly praise the Lord's death."

Then the ordained ministers carry around the unleavened bread, and each believer takes a bite or a mouthful with his own hand or allows it to be offered by the minister who carries the bread around. And after those with the bread have distributed it so that everyone has eaten a piece, the other ministers follow with the cup and in the same way give each one a drink. All of this happens with such reverence and propriety as is, indeed, proper in the community of God and in Christ's supper.

After everyone has eaten and drunk, one should give thanks after the example of Christ with Psalm 112 [Psalm 113:1-9], and the shepherd or pastor begins as follows: The Pastor: Give praise, you servants of the Lord; praise the name of the Lord.

The Men: Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time on and forevermore!

The Women: From the rising of the sun to its setting, the Lord's name is to be praised.

The Men: The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.

The Women: Who is like the Lord our God, who dwells on high and can be seen below in heaven and on earth?

The Men: Who raises the simple one out of the mud,

The Women: So that he seats him with the princes, the princes of his people.

The Men: He appoints the barren one of the house to be a mother who experiences joy with children.

Then the pastor says: Lord, we give you thanks for all of your gifts and blessings, who lives and reigns, God forever!

The people answer: Amen!

The Pastor should say: Go in peace!

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