

The Spirit gives Life and Light

extract from Proposition XIII § iii

§ iii. *Question:* How does man come to partake of it, and to be fed by it?

Answer: I answer in the plain and explicit words of Christ, “I am the bread of life,” he says, “he who comes to me shall never hunger; he that believes in me shall never thirst.” Later he says, “for my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink.”¹ Whoever you are who asks this question, or reads these words, whether you consider yourself a believer, or else you really feel, by sad experience, that you are still in unbelief; Though you find that the outward body and flesh of Christ is so foreign to you that you cannot reach it or feed upon it; Though you have often swallowed and taken in something which the Papists have persuaded you is the real flesh and blood of Christ, and you have believed it to be so, though all your senses told you the opposite; Or, being a Lutheran, you have taken that bread because the Lutherans have assured you that the flesh and blood of Christ is in, and with, and under it; Or, being a Calvinist, you have partaken of bread which the Calvinists say is only a symbol of the body, and yet it gives those who take it a real participation in the body, flesh, and blood of Christ, though they have never known how —

If despite all this, you find that your soul is still barren, still hungry, and ready to starve for the lack of something you are longing for, know that the Light which shows you your iniquity, that shows you your barrenness, your nakedness, your emptiness — that Light is the body you must partake of, and feed upon. Though you hunger for it, you cannot be satisfied with it until you abandon iniquity, and turn to it, and come unto it, and receive it, because the

¹ John 6:35, 55.

Light “has no communion with darkness.”² You cannot “drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils” nor can you “partake of the Lord’s table and the table of devils” (1 Corinthians 10:21). But when you allow that small Seed of righteousness to grow within you and to become a birth, that new substantial³ birth which is born in the soul naturally feeds on and is nourished by this spiritual body. The outward birth cannot live unless it sucks in breath from the outward elementary air; in the same way this new birth does not live in the soul unless it breathes the spiritual air or vehicle.⁴ Just as the outward birth cannot exist without something outward to feed on, some outward flesh and outward drink, so also this inward birth cannot exist unless it is fed by this inward body, this inward flesh and blood of Christ, which corresponds to it in the same way, by analogy.

All this is in complete agreement with the doctrine of Christ. Just as the natural body has no life without outward food, so also Christ says, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”⁵ Just as the outward body lives by eating outward food, so also Christ says, that he who eats him shall live by him.⁶ Man is united to God and has fellowship and communion with him by this inward participation of the inward man in this inward and spiritual body. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood” (says Christ) “dwells in me and I in him.”⁷ We cannot interpret this as our outward eating of outward bread. By this the soul has fellowship with God, and in the

² 2 Corinthians 6:14

³ Barclay refers to the scholastic distinction between “substance” which is what a thing really is spiritually, and the “elements” or “accidents” which are the specifics of physical appearance. See the note on “elemental” in Prop. XIII § ii.

⁴ *vehiculum Dei*, the vehicle of God.

⁵ John 6:53 RB.

⁶ John 6:57 RB.

⁷ John 6:56 RB.

same way, insofar as all the saints are partakers of this one body and one blood, they also come to have a joint communion. For this reason the apostle (1 Corinthians 10:17) says in regard to this, that they “though many, are one bread and one body.” He also says to the wise people among the Corinthians, “The bread which we break is communion in the body of Christ.”⁸

This is the true spiritual supper of the Lord, which men partake of by hearing the voice of Christ, and opening the door of their hearts, and letting him in, according to the plain words of the scripture (Revelation 3:20), “Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will eat with him, and he with me.” So the supper of the Lord, and eating with the Lord, and partaking of his flesh and blood is not in any way limited to the ceremony of breaking bread and drinking wine at particular times. It is truly and really experienced as often as the soul retires into the Light of the Lord, and feels and partakes of that heavenly Life by which the inward man is nourished. This is often experienced by the faithful at any time, though more particularly when they are assembled together to wait upon the Lord.

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XIII § iii (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 378-380 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 291-292.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:16 RB.