

Letter 268: December 1525, Gemmingen, The people of Gemmingen to the Strasbourg Preachers

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[*Summary*]: They are saddened by the dissension over the nature of the Eucharist. This is a matter that should not be discussed in print or in sermons, but settled among the reformers. This concerns not simply the bread and wine, which are merely external things, but the interpretation of the Word of God. They agree with the Strasbourgers that salvation comes through faith and is not tied to external things. Yet external matters play a mediating role, and people who ask about the nature of the Eucharist deserve an answer. They acknowledge that Paul taught [the message of] Christ, even though he spoke only letters and words. Similarly we must acknowledge that we eat the body of Christ, even though it is only bread. Some people adore the Word of God in a superstitious manner, i.e. they adore the piece of paper on which it is written. Similarly, people may abuse the Eucharist by focusing on externals, such as the piece of bread. But the words of scripture are clear; there is no need to explain the bread as a sign. It is important, however, to teach the congregation in what spirit they must take communion: “not for the sake of the bread, but for the sake of the Word.” If Zwingli and Oecolampadius agree with that interpretation, there is no need for contention. The Strasbourgers demand a charitable attitude from their fellow reformers, but seem to lack that attitude themselves. The people of Gemmingen cannot accept Zwingli’s and Oecolampadius’ explanations as cogent proofs. Their preachers continue to believe in the literal meaning of the words, “This is my body.” Luther’s main purpose is to do away with the papistical concept of transubstantiation. If the Strasbourgers teach that the bread is the body of Christ *for the believer*, the question is settled and there can be no more dissension. It would be better for Oecolampadius to write against Erasmus’ book on free will than on the nature of the Eucharist.