

# The Moment of the Sacramental Union and the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper

A Response by the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations to "The Six-Point Explanation of Thesis Nine of the ELS Lord's Supper Statement"

1. Holy Scripture records the institution of the Lord's Supper four times. Literally translated, these passages read:

Matthew 26:26-28. While they were eating, Jesus, after he had taken bread and blessed [it], broke it and, after he had given it to the disciples, he said, "Take, eat. This is my body." And after he had taken a cup and given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Mark 14:22-24. While they were eating, after he had taken bread and blessed [it], he broke it and gave it to them and said, "Take, this is my body." And after he had taken a cup and given thanks, he gave it to them. And all of them drank from it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is being poured out on behalf of many."

Luke 22:19-20. After he had taken bread and given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is being given on your behalf. Keep on doing this to remember me." And the cup in the same way after the meal, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is being poured out on your behalf."

1 Corinthians 11:23-25. I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread. And after he had given thanks, he broke it and said: "This is my body, [broken] on your behalf. Keep on doing this to remember me." In the same way also the cup after the meal, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Keep on doing this, as often as you engage in drinking [it], to remember me. For as often as you engage in eating this bread and drinking this cup, you are proclaiming the death of the Lord, until he comes."

In addition, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:16, "The cup of blessing which we regularly bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we regularly break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"

2. The four divinely inspired accounts of the institution of the sacrament obviously supplement without contradicting one another. It would be false hermeneutics to set one account against another or to draw from a more condensed account, like Luke's, conclusions that fail to take into account details presented by the other holy writers.
3. Careful reading of the Bible's four accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper reveals that the inspired authors do not specifically address the question as to the precise moment when the body and blood of Christ become present and are united with the elements so that they are in, with, and under the bread and wine. The variant orders and forms of the scriptural statements clearly indicate that specifying a time of the sacramental union is not a concern of the holy writers.

In Mark 14:22 ("After he had taken bread and blessed (it), he broke it and gave it to them and said, 'Take, this is my body.'") the speaking of the words, "This is my body," is simultaneous with or subsequent to the reception. In Mark 14:23,24 the words, "He said, 'This is my blood,'" follow the statements, "He gave it to them. And all of them drank from it." In 1 Corinthians 11:24 ("He broke it and said") there is no distinct mention of the distribution per se. It is therefore arbitrary to single out Luke 22:19 ("He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body'") as proof of the real presence during the distribution. Even the grammatical construction of the past (aorist) verb and present participle in this passage does not necessarily mean that the saying was simultaneous with the giving. Similar constructions such as "he came, saying" (Lk. 8:49; 10:25; 19:16; 21:8) do not always indicate that the coming and saying are simultaneous, but can very properly be translated, "He came and (then) said." According to the more detailed account in Matthew, Jesus said, "This is my body," after telling his disciples, "Take and eat," and he said, "This is my blood," after telling them, "Drink from it, all of you" (Mt 26:26-28). A careful comparison of the sequence of Jesus' actions and words in these various accounts shows that it is not possible to draw a conclusion from them as to the moment of the sacramental union.

4. It is clear that Jesus' command, "Keep on doing this to remember me," involves three distinct sacramental actions: the thanksgiving (blessing), or the consecration; the giving (offering), or the distribution; and the taking, eating and drinking, or the reception, also known as the sumption. All three of these actions are necessary to carry out Jesus' injunction, "Keep on doing this."

Hence the Formula of Concord cites the ancient rule or standard, "Nihil habet rationem sacramenti extra usum a Christo institutum (Nothing has the nature of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ) or extra actionem divinitus institutum (apart from the action divinely instituted)" (F.C., S.D., VII,85; *Concordia Triglotta*, 1001; Tappert, 584). The Formula explains, "If the institution of Christ be not observed as He appointed it, there is no sacrament" (*ibid.*). It adds,

The use or action here does not mean chiefly faith, neither the oral participation only, but the entire, external, visible action of the Lord's Supper instituted by Christ, the consecration, or words of institution, the distribution and reception, or oral partaking of the consecrated bread and wine, of the body and blood of Christ (VII,86; *Triglotta*, 1003; Tappert, 585f.).

The Formula also says concerning the consecration,

This blessing, or the recitation of the words of institution of Christ alone does not make a sacrament if the entire action of the Supper, as it was instituted by Christ, is not observed (as when the consecrated bread is not distributed, received and partaken of, but is enclosed, sacrificed, or carried about), but the command of Christ, This do (which embraces the entire action or administration in this Sacrament that in an assembly of Christians bread and wine are taken, consecrated, distributed, received, eaten, drunk, and the Lord's death is shown forth at the same time) must be observed unseparated and inviolate, as also St. Paul placed before our eyes the entire action of the breaking of bread or of distribution and reception, 1 Cor. 10,16 (VII,83,84; *Triglotta*, 1001; Tappert, 584).

5. From the biblical record it is therefore clear that there is no scriptural basis or warrant for the claim that because of the consecration "Christ's body and blood are present in the elements of bread and wine before the reception of the elements by the communicants" (*72nd Annual Convention of the E.L.S.*, p. 74, Pt. 9,b). Despite the disclaimer of "The Six-Point Explanation" (p. 5), such a statement also obviously violates the nihil rule and the other statements of the Formula of Concord cited above. There is no statement in the

Lutheran Confessions to the effect that Christ's body and blood are present in the sacrament apart from the entire sacramental action consisting of the consecration, distribution, and reception of the elements (see A.C., X [*Triglotta*, 47; Tappert, 34]; S.A., Pt. III, VI,1 [*Triglotta*, 493; Tappert, 311]; F.C., S.D., VII,8 [*Triglotta*, 975; Tappert, 570]; VII,10,11 [*Triglotta*, 975; Tappert, 571]; VII,14 [*Triglotta*, 977; Tappert, 571]; VII,16 [*Triglotta*, 977; Tappert, 572]; VII,19 [*Triglotta*, 979; Tappert, 572]; VII,75,77 [*Triglotta*, 999; Tappert, 583]; VII,82 [*Triglotta*, 1001; Tappert, 584].

What we say in This We Believe (VI,8) is therefore in full agreement with Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, "We reject the view that the body and blood of Christ are present in the Sacrament through the act of consecration as such, apart from the reception of the elements."

6. Contrary to the claims of "The Six-Point Explanation" that Point "b" is "really in agreement with Thesis Nine" (p. 1), it is obvious that there is a difference between the original ELS statement, "what is distributed and received [emphasis added] is the body and blood of Christ," and the new explanation, "Christ's body and blood are present in the elements of the bread and wine before the reception [emphasis added] of the elements by the communicants." That this is not a purely subjective opinion is demonstrated by the fact that we of the WELS are not the only ones who have recognized the difference. The difference lies in the fact that the explanation separates aspects of the usus which were joined together in the original statement. Without the reception the sacramental action enjoined by Christ is incomplete. The "entire action of the Supper," spoken of by our Confessions (cited above under Point 4), is lacking. Hence, as the Confessions say, "There is no sacrament."
7. The statement cited above (under Point 5) from *This We Believe* does not mean that we "depotentiate," that is, empty of their power, the words which Christ spoke in instituting the sacrament and which we repeat when we celebrate the sacrament. In *This We Believe* (VI,4) we also state, "We believe that all who partake of the Lord's Supper receive the true body and blood of Christ 'in, with, and under' the bread and wine. This is true because, when the Lord instituted this Sacrament, He said, 'This is my body which is given for you ... This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you' (Luke 22:19,20)."
8. We therefore wholeheartedly subscribe to what is stated in the Lutheran Confessions:

It is the Word (I say) which makes and distinguishes this Sacrament, so that it is not mere bread and wine, but is, and is called, the body and blood of Christ. For it is said: Accedat verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum. If the Word be joined to the element, it becomes a Sacrament. This saying of St. Augustine is so properly and so well put that he has scarcely said anything better. The Word must make a Sacrament of the element, else it remains a mere element (L. Cat., V,10; *Triglotta*, 755; Tappert, 448).

And again:

If you take away the Word or regard it without the words, you have nothing but mere bread and wine. But if the words remain with them, as they shall and must, then, in virtue of the same, it is truly the body and blood of Christ. For as the lips of Christ say and speak, so it is, as He can never lie or deceive (L. Cat., V,14; *Triglotta*, 755f.; Tappert, 448; also F.C., S.D., VII,23; *Triglotta*, 979; Tappert, 573).

And yet again:

For the true and mighty words of Jesus Christ which He spake at the first institution were efficacious not only at the first Supper, but they endure, are valid, operate, and are still

efficacious, so that in all places where the Supper is celebrated according to the institution of Christ, and His words are used, the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed, and received because of the power and efficacy of the words which Christ spoke at the first Supper. For where His institution is observed and His words are spoken over the bread and cup, and the consecrated bread and cup are distributed, Christ Himself, through the spoken words, is still efficacious by virtue of the first institution, through His word, which He wishes to be there repeated. As Chrysostom says in his Sermon concerning the Passion: Christ Himself prepares this table and blesses it; for no man makes the bread and wine set before us the body and blood of Christ, but Christ Himself who was crucified for us. The words are spoken by the mouth of the priest, but by God's power and grace, by the word, where He speaks: "This is My body," the elements presented are consecrated in the Supper. And just as the declaration, Gen. 1,28: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," was spoken only once, but is ever efficacious in nature, so that it is fruitful and multiplies, so also this declaration was spoken once, but even to this day and to His advent it is efficacious, and works so that in the Supper of the Church His true body and blood are present. Luther also [writes], Tom. VI, Jena, Fol. 99: This His command and institution have this power and effect that we administer and receive not mere bread and wine, but His body and blood, as His words declare: "This is My body," etc.; "This is My blood," etc., so that it is not our work or speaking, but the command and ordination of Christ that makes the bread the body, and the wine the blood, from the beginning of the first Supper even to the end of the world, and that through our service and office they are daily distributed. Also Tom. III, Jena, Fol. 446: Thus here also, even though I should pronounce over all bread the words: This is Christ's body, nothing, of course, would result therefrom; but when in the Supper we say, according to His institution and command: "This is My body," it is His body, not on account of our speaking or word uttered, but because of His command -- that He has commanded us thus to speak and to do, and has united His command and act with our speaking (F.C., S.D., VII,75-78; *Triglotta*, 999-1001; Tappert, 583f.).

9. Our doctrine is based solely on Holy Scripture. We subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions because we are convinced that they are a correct exposition of biblical truth. We do not base our teaching on the writings of the fathers of the church. Nevertheless, when the writings of the fathers agree with what the Scriptures teach, we gladly take note of such agreement, thank God that he has preserved his truth in his church, and are encouraged to give heed to and continue to uphold the faithful testimony handed down by the orthodox teachers of the church.

While we are not contending for what has been called receptionism, it is a fact that many faithful and revered teachers of the church have taught that the sacramental union occurs at the time of the eating and drinking. The Lutheran Church has not considered their teaching to be false doctrine, and we are not willing to do that now.

The following quotations are not an exhaustive list but are representative of what faithful teachers of the church have written on this matter.

Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586): "...the words: 'This is My body; this is My blood,' are by divine institution, command, and promise bound to the action which is prescribed in the words of institution; that is, when the bread is taken, blessed, distributed, received, and eaten. For when the words are indeed spoken over the bread but the action which is prescribed and commanded in the institution is either not observed or is changed into another use, then we do not have the promise of the presence of the body and blood of Christ there" (*Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II, Fred Kramer, translator [St. Louis: Concordia, 1978], p. 280).

David Chytraeus (1531-1600) rejects the error that "in the passage of Paul, 'The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ,' the word 'communion' is to be understood of the communion or union of the bread and the body of Christ before the reception [emphasis added] and not with respect to the communicants' eating" (*Der Abschied der Mecklenburgischen Herzoege*, also known as the *Wismar Recess*, cited in Fr. H. R. Frank, *Die Theologie der Concordienformel* [Erlangen: Theodor Blaesing, 1863], Vol. III, p. 148, translated).

Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1603): "As the bread is the communion of the body of Christ only in the act of eating and not before, so, too, the bread is not sacramentally united with the body till this communion and reception takes place" (Art. s. loc, "De sacramentis," 1590, p. 712f., cited in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1953], p. 373).

Andreas Quenstedt (1617-1688): "This sacramental union itself does not take place except in the distribution: for the elements, bread and wine, do not become portative media ... of the body and blood of Christ until during the distribution they are eaten and drunk....Christ does not say absolutely of the consecrated bread that it is His body, but of the bread broken and given to eat. For first He said, 'Take, eat; thereupon He said, 'This is My body.'" (*Theologia didactico-polemica sive systema theologicum* (Wittenberg, 16851, *Cap. de Coena S.*, 1187, 1268, cited in Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, translated by Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961], p. 573), and Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 373).

C. F. W. Walther (1811-1887): "The sacrament has not yet been effected by the mere reading of the words of institution, if in addition the consecrated elements are not also distributed to the communicants and received by them" (*Amerikanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie*, 4th ed., [St. Louis: Concordia, 1897], p. 174).

Adolf Hoenecke (1835-1908): "This unitio [sacramental union] takes place through the words of institution. Quenstedt, however, immediately adds that the sacramental union takes place only in the distribution. Bread and wine are not vehicles of the body and blood of Jesus Christ before they are eaten and drunk. The word of Christ proves this to be correct, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' For this reason the dogmaticians call the unitio that takes place in the consecration a 'preclusive' one, that is, one the result of which commences only in connection with an action, the eating and drinking" (*Ev.-Luth. Doqmatik* [Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1909], IV, p. 127, translated).

Subsequently, Hoenecke writes: "With respect to the moment at which Christ's body and blood are present under the earthly elements and united with the bread and wine, Baier says it is not necessary to determine the same. Quenstedt enters into this point by taking up the question: If the bread of the Lord's Supper, when the reception is omitted, is also to be carried about for adoration. Against such a carrying about he adduces the principle: the sacrament is not a permanent thing, but an action. He proves this principle decisively:

1. From the manner in which Christ celebrated the Supper;
2. From 1 Cor. 10:16: 'The bread that we break,' i.e., distribute to be received;
3. From the words: 'Take, eat';
4. From the absence of any command of Christ to carry it about.

"Against this Bellarmine argues: What something is, is determined by its essence, but not by its

use. Its use, rather, presupposes its essence. So the Supper is a sacrament already before its use, i.e., before the eating and drinking. This objection Quenstedt fully refutes as follows: 'A distinction must be made between the word "use" in so far as it denotes the purpose, benefit, and effect of something, and so does not give a thing its essence, and in so far as it denotes the act itself of a thing, and so often is the same as the essence of the thing, when, namely, that thing consists in the predication of an action.' Certainly, a knife does not first become a knife through the fact that I use it. But the sacrament is different because its essence consists in the predication of an action, that is, according to Scripture it belongs to those things the essence of which is designated as a particular action, a particular use. In this case essence and use are one and the same; and apart from the use the essence is not there, accordingly also not Christ's body and blood. Thus Quenstedt comes to the conclusion that in the moment of eating and drinking Christ's body and blood are under the bread and wine. That is also fully substantiated by the words, 'Take, eat; this is my body. Drink from it, all of you; this is my blood.' And that in the moment of eating and drinking bread and wine are vehicles of the body and blood of Christ for the recipient, that is brought about by means of the consecration which takes place through the words of institution. That is also what our Confession intends to say in that it, on the one hand, says that the words of institution bring it about that Christ's body and blood are present, and, on the other hand, also says at the same time that without eating and drinking there is no sacrament. Thereby it clearly says that by virtue of the words of institution in the moment of receiving the bread and wine Christ's body and blood are under the same. If one would understand the matter differently, one would always arrive at a kind of impanation" (*ibid.*, pp. 130-131, translated).

Francis Pieper (1852-1931): "On the contention of Bellarmine that Christ spoke the words, 'This is My body,' before the act of partaking and that, accordingly, already before its reception [emphasis added] the Sacrament must by the consecration be complete (confectum), that is, the unio sacramentalis must obtain, Quenstedt gives the apposite answer: 'Christ does not say absolutely of the consecrated bread that it is His body, but of the bread broken and given to eat. For first He said, "Take, eat"; thereupon He said, "This is My body."' (*Syst. II*, 1268)" (*Christian Dogmatics*, III, p. 373).

10. Since Scripture is silent as to the precise moment when the union of the body and blood of Christ with the bread and wine occurs, the question of the moment is and must remain an open question. Views that it occurs at the consecration, before the reception, or at the moment when the elements touch the lips are human speculation and, at best, pious opinions which dare not be made binding on the church or normative for its teaching. It has been well said that the belief that Christ's body is present on the altar or in the hand of the minister dare not be raised to the status of a nota ecclesiae Lutheranae (see Hans Kirsten, "Einige Ergaenzungen 'zur lutherischen Lehre von der Konsekration,'" *Lutherische Blaetter*, Vol. 7, No. 41 (April 1955), p. 33, and "Praesentia Christi in Rebus," *Lutherischer Rundblick*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (February/March 1964), p. 28).
11. Only this can be asserted with certainty on the basis of Scripture: when we have eaten the bread and drunk the wine in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, we can be assured that we have also received Christ's true body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Scripture does not answer the questions how or when the supernatural, heavenly mystery of the sacramental union occurs.
12. We therefore reaffirm what was said in the 1981 Statement by the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (*Proceedings of the Forty-Sixth Biennial Convention, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 1981, pp. 87-90; *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 78, No. 4 (October 1981), pp. 320-322), namely, that on the basis of Scripture "we can establish the following concerning the essence of the usus of the Lord's Supper

(consecration, distribution, reception):

- "1. The real and substantial presence of Christ's body and blood during the usus.
- "2. The sacramental union of bread and wine and of Christ's body and blood during the usus.
- "3. The oral manducation of bread and wine and Christ's body and blood by all the communicants during the usus.
- "4. The real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the usus is brought about solely and alone by the power of Christ according to the words of institution, that is, by his command and promise.

"We accept this statement (Point 4) with the understanding that:

- a) The real presence is effected solely by the original words of institution spoken by our Lord (causa efficiens) and repeated by the officiant at His command (causa instrumentalis);
- b) While we cannot fix from Scripture the point within the sacramental usus when the real presence of Christ's body and blood begins, we know from Scripture and acknowledge in the Confessions that what is distributed and received is the body and blood of Christ;
- c) The Confessions do not assert more as a point of doctrine than the above which is clearly taught in the Scripture."

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### A NUMBER OF ADDITIONS

"with respect to the Lutheran Doctrine of the Consecration" which are being offered in order to guard the detailed presentation of this doctrine by Helmut Roser in No. 39 of Lutherische Blaetter against certain misunderstandings

To begin with, the factual material adduced by the author leaves no doubt that Luther indeed had a very definite and concrete conception of the duration of the real presence: "that it has its beginning with the beginning of the Lord's Prayer and that it continues until all have communed, have emptied the chalice, have consumed the hosts, the people have been dismissed and one has left the altar"\*

\*(Letter to Wolferinus, Pastor in Eisleben, 20,7; WA Br 10,348f; St. L., 20,1607ff.)

One must likewise agree with the author when he opposes limiting the canon, "apart from the use no sacrament is present (extra usum nullum sacramentum)" to the reception (sumptio). There can be no doubt that also in the Formula of Concord, Article VII, with usus the entire actio including the consecration is meant, since that is there presented in an express and unmistakable way. (Except that there not the real presence and its duration but the sacrament as such is under discussion.)

Less convincing, to be sure, is the assertion that the Formula of Concord champions "exactly the same conception" as Luther in the matter, namely, the conception of the author: "The consecrated bread is the body of Christ, also when it is lying on the altar or when the pastor holds it in his hand." Certainly the Formula of Concord does not contradict Luther. But just as little does it confirm Luther's view. On the contrary, Article VII of the Formula of Concord is silent with respect to this particular question. The Formula of Concord does indeed discuss at length what "by itself does not make a sacrament." It includes in the sacrament "the entire action of the breaking of bread or of distribution and reception" (totam actionem) together with the consecration and in support of this very point establishes as a "useful rule and standard" the principle: "If the institution of Christ be not observed as He appointed it, there is no sacrament." But in regard to the special question, when within this "action" (actio sacramenti) the real presence begins and how long it lasts, the Formula of Concord is silent (FC, SD, VII,83ff; "Nihil habet rationem sacramenti extra usum a Christo institutum"). This silence is, however, very eloquent at this point. For just through the Saliger controversy, which occurred not long before the preparatory work that led to the Formula of Concord (Saliger was deposed in 1568) and in which Chytraeus, one of the co-authors of the Formula of Concord, even had a direct part through the "Recess" he drafted, emotions ran very high, and nothing would have been more natural than to go into the matter and take a position on this point of controversy. In other cases it was the clear effort of the Formula of Concord to settle at once all kinds of questions that arose in connection with the big questions. This was not done, however, in this case, and certainly on purpose.

We should not overlook what Luther in his previously cited letter to Wolferinus gives as his interest in taking the position he did: "So we will be safe and free from qualms of conscience and the offenses of endless questions." Luther's interest therefore was not so much theoretical - to establish a particular position - but very practical - to ward off scruples and problems which in this connection arise very quickly and which are of such a kind that they divert interest from what is essential to all kinds of secondary and basically fruitless discussions.\*



\*That with this he wanted to counter the Crypto-Calvinism in his own camp is shown in his letter to Amsdorf (WA Br 11,259; St. L. 21,3179f) by the reference to the deacon "who as a despiser of God and men dared openly to treat consecrated and unconsecrated hosts alike. For that reason he must be expelled at once from our churches; let him go to his Zwinglians." Cf. H. Roser, op. cit, p. 183; H. Sasse, Letter to Lutheran Pastors, 23, p. 13.

Luther obviously hoped to be able to oppose this "pestilential war of words" most firmly by clearly defining the limits outside of which the actio and thus the usus sacramenti did not take place.

If now the Formula of Concord for its part does not enter into the question, its reasons for this could well be the same as Luther's. It had also just again become evident in the Saliger controversy that through a decision and determination of any kind in the controverted question "the scruples of conscience and offenses of endless questions" could not be avoided, but rather were thereby actually again and again provoked - contrary to the wishes of Luther and of all those who till then had concerned themselves with this problem.

The question was - and is - in fact not capable of a satisfactory solution, inasmuch as Holy Scripture, as Roser moreover concedes, also for its part is silent regarding it.\*

\*The *Einiqunqssaetze* without question offer no basis for a particular doctrine about the time of the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

And this silence on the part of Scripture and the Confessions is, in our opinion, the deciding factor also for us. Our Confession on obviously well-considered grounds has refrained from binding the church in this matter. Why are now ever and again attempts undertaken in the Lutheran Church to decide the question in one or another sense and thereby again to drag those scruples and questions before the church? -

Particularly also if the question is raised from the aspect of justification, as Roser properly undertakes to do, can a legitimate interest in the real presence in the Lord's Supper be indicated only from the aspect of faith. The interest of faith is, however, only in the real presence as such, not in the calculated point of time or in a particular duration of the same. A Christian's faith wants to be certain that in the Lord's Supper under bread and wine he actually receives the body and blood of his Lord, "given and shed for the forgiveness of his sins." And, praise God, he can be [certain of this] regardless of whether the real presence takes place only in the moment of reception (sumptio) or at certain times before or after it. Without losing anything essential in the sacrament, faith can forgo the answer as to what happens to the elements before or after the reception. Precisely for this reason the church can confidently leave this question open. No believer who comes to the sacrament with a longing for salvation will be harmed even in the least as to the benefit of the sacred gift and the sacrament if the church leaves him without an answer to a question for which neither Scripture nor the Confessions have an answer.

Apart from the matter of faith, there is, of course, yet another interest in the question, which is, to be sure, of lesser importance, but which, nevertheless, on practical grounds cannot simply be dismissed: that is the liturgical interest, the interest about the appropriate handling of the elements of the holy sacrament during the action. If the "punctiliar" conception of the real presence (as it has been called, although that is not a very nice expression and not even one that is entirely free from misunderstanding), that is, therefore, the conception that the real presence occurs only in the moment of reception, would exclusively be in agreement with Scripture, those people would be correct who reject every special reverence in handling the holy sacrament and who, for example, wish to treat the host like any other piece of bread. Since the time of Luther the Lutheran Church has correctly objected to this. But now this "punctiliar" real presence can be demonstrated as little as a "linear" one, that is, one which begins at a point in time that can be established and ceases at one which can likewise be

established. And even if faith is merely interested in this that in fact the body and blood of Christ "are truly present," at all events therefore in the reception, the fact is thereby not after all excluded that also before or after, at any rate as long as the action continues, Christ's body and blood are present in it. This mere possibility, even if it cannot be demonstrated with certainty, must induce the pastor and the congregation to show all reverence toward the elements of the action which are proper for the body and blood of Christ that under certain circumstances are present in it, and this reverential attitude is to be extended throughout the entire action until the clear conclusion of it.

But since this involves only a possibility, not a certainty, there is also a clear limit to it. The limit is there where the showing of reverence becomes a cult and adoration. Luther knew very well how to establish this limit. There are, to be sure, statements of Luther's that seem to cross it. That is the case when he on occasion can say: "Moreover, if Christ is truly present in the bread, why should he then not be treated there with the highest reverence and also be adored?" Apart from the fact, however, that such expressions are very incidental remarks in Table Talks and the like, one dare not overlook the fact - as Grasz also emphasizes - that Luther in all these statements is always speaking, not about the host, but about the person of Christ.\*

\*Something similar must be said about Luther's intervention on behalf of the elevation in the familiar passages, especially WA 54,163.

In all of that Luther knows very well and also says so very emphatically as soon as he is not speaking merely off-the-cuff but dealing with the question systematically as a question of principle: "Christ did not institute the sacrament in order that he might be adored, but that we should eat."\*

\*So in the *Disputatio contra privatam Missam* (1536). To the argument of the opponents, "Christ is to be adored. Christ's body is in the sacrament. Therefore the sacrament is to be adored," Luther replied, "There are four terms in this syllogism. Therefore Christ did not institute the sacrament for this purpose that he might be adored, but that we might eat" (WA 39,1, 139f.).

Here one should also not overlook what Theodor Knolle correctly pointed out in his thankworthy essay, "Luther's Reform of the Celebration of the Lord's Supper in its Constitutive Meaning," namely, the close arrangement of the consecration and communion, yes, the interweaving of both in the *Deutsche Messe*, "that one at once after the consecration of the bread distribute and give the sacrament, before (!) one consecrates the cup..., then (!) one consecrates the cup and gives it too." Luther's downright revolutionary procedure in spite of all tradition (even of his own earlier *Formula Missae*) - which the church, to be sure, in this radical form did not follow - is connected also, as Knolle convincingly sets forth and substantiates, with the fact that Luther intended to ward off making the consecration something independent in the liturgical performance of the sacrament and thereby every possibility of a cult of all kinds of sacramental prayers and adoration ceremonies between the consecration and the communion. Thus Luther in the *Deutsche Messe* himself removed the Lord's Prayer from its traditional placement. "The Prayer," Knolle says, 'placed between the words of Christ and the reception of his body and blood breaks for Luther the immediate connection between the promising and commanding voice of Christ and the believing reception 'in power and remembrance' of his Word .... When he has spoken, there is no more need for human prayer, but rather of faith," which now simply takes and receives.

Luther can therefore also not be cited without qualification as the chief witness for a host or even altar cult of some kind. And we too must carefully guard against every crossing of the line, which, of course, is suggested as soon as we presume to teach something binding about the duration of the real presence. Whoever above and beyond the correct administration of the sacrament (recta administratio) makes the bodily presence "already on the altar, not first in the communion," a mark of the church (nota

ecclesiae) has thereby left the firm basis of the word of Scripture and has elevated to the rank of church doctrine a pious human opinion ("pia opinio"), which for himself he is at liberty to hold, and has put human pronouncements in the place of evangelical truth. Whoever wants to make Christians obligated to believe "that the altar, in particular the sacred vessels, now" (namely, as a result of the consecration) "become the dwellingplace of the Lord," speaks and teaches where Scripture is silent and does not "agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tm 6:3). Here the line is crossed! It is crossed wherever the altar and the vessels are accorded more than their ministerial liturgical function, and where Christians are put under obligation to show toward the bread and wine on the altar more than the proper reverence due to the elements of the sacred ceremony.

Neither the "punctiliar" nor the "linear" real presence can therefore be proved with certainty for the faith of the communicants from Scripture and the Confessions, even when the example of Luther is cited. Both have no more standing in the church than the right of an opinion which someone may hold personally, but which he cannot force on anyone or even make the shibboleth of the truth and the distinguishing point of the church (discrimen ecclesiae). We do not believe that Roser's detailed arguments were intended to elevate to something binding in the church his personal opinion, which he, to be sure, openly expresses. He has not said that anywhere, and he himself also speaks about a "real problem" that is involved here. Nevertheless, it has not been stated clearly enough that the other opinion, which later dogmaticians,\* for example, held, may also be advocated in the church (provided only that that is not done with the claim of being exclusive), without the unity in doctrine (the consentire de evangelio) being thereby disrupted.

\* E. g., Hutter.

And the warning has not been sounded clearly enough concerning the dangers which arise for the church if the binding force of such an opinion is advocated and those conclusions are drawn from it which unnecessarily confuse the church with their scruples (scrupula) and offenses (scandala).

May we therefore in our circles hold to the threefold rule of Augustine: "Unity in necessary things, liberty in uncertain things, love in all things!"

Dr. theol. Hans Kirsten, Oberursel

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Excerpts from  
"*Praesentia Christi in Rebus*"

by Hans Kirsten  
(Translated)

....As a result, in my opinion, one must hold to this that first of all historically Luther, to be sure, held very definite ideas and championed them with respect to the beginning and end of the real presence in the act of celebrating the Lord's Supper:

"that it begins with the beginning of the Lord's Prayer and continues until all have communed, have drunk the cup, have eaten the pieces [of bread], the people have been dismissed and one has left the altar" (Letter to Wolferinus, 20,7; 1543. WA Br 10, 348f; St. L., 20, 1607ff).

but that FC, Art. VII, here is expressly silent, even though, in view of the just concluded Saliger doctrinal controversy, taking a position would have been very natural.

Exegetically, it must be [recognized as] established: Also Scripture is silent. As little doubt as the words of institution permit as to the fact of the real presence, so little is it possible to elevate something from them or from the accounts of the institution or perhaps from 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 to a doctrine about the duration of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

This silence on the part of Scripture and the Confessions is, in my opinion, the most important and practical decisive factor in the whole matter, the systematic result of which is that in the controversy referred to we are dealing with an "open question." With all due respect to Luther's pious opinion, it is not enough to firmly bind the church and, for example, to elevate the [idea of] the body of Christ on the altar or in the hand to a mark of the Lutheran Church (*Nota Ecclesiae Lutheranae*)....

Naturally also here [in the practical questions] one must proceed from the fundamental openness of the question. Scripture and the Confessions are silent about the beginning and end of the real presence. On the other hand, however, the pastor must deal with the things in the elements (res in rebus) and is confronted with the presence of Christ in the elements (praesentia Christi in rebus). He must, of course, deal with things at the altar. For this now not merely a certainty can be decisive, which, of course, exists only for the distribution and sumption, but not for the rest of the ceremony, but here also the possibility is a factor not to be overlooked. One still has to take into account the presence in the elements also before the distribution and after the sumption; it is by virtue of the institution and from the character of the entire action at least possible and conceivable, at any rate not excluded, from the consecration (it takes place, of course, by virtue of the first institution) until the end of the celebration, yes, under certain circumstances until the complete consumption of sacramental elements. (Under no circumstances, however, after the celebration, because extra usum nullum sacramentum.) The pastor can not prove that in this span of time the real presence does not exist, and so he must determine his liturgical conduct from the consecration to the conclusion in such a way that he does not omit anything in his handling of the sacrament that has a bearing on this circumstance.....