

# The Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in The Lord's Supper: Contemporary Issues Concerning the Sacramental Union

By John F. Brug

[Finland, June 1998]

The great importance of the Lord's Supper is indicated by the fact that it is one of the few events of our Savior's ministry that is recorded four times in the Holy Scriptures. Literally translated, these passages read:

Matthew 26:26-28 Ἐσθιόντων δὲ αὐτῶν λαβὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἄρτον καὶ εὐλογήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ δούς τοῖς μαθηταῖς εἶπεν, Λάβετε φάγετε, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου. καὶ λαβὼν ποτήριον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, Πίετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες, τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

While they were eating, Jesus, after he had taken bread and blessed [it], he 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 unto the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 14:22-24 Καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐλογήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς καὶ εἶπεν, Λάβετε, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου. καὶ λαβὼν ποτήριον εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἔπιον ἐξ αὐτοῦ μάντες. καὶ αἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν.

And 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 καὶ λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, Τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. καὶ τὸ ποτήριον ὡσαύτως μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι, λέγων, Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἢ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματι μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον.

And 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 for my remembrance" 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 11:23-31 Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδοτο ἔλαβεν ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν, Τοῦτό μου ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι λέγων, Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἢ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστιν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὡσάκις ἐὰν πίνετε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. ὡσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνετε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε ἄχρις οὗ ἔλξη.

Ὡστε ὅς ἂν ἐσθίη τὸν ἄρτον ἢ πίνη τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ κυρίου ἀναξίως, ἔνοχος ἔσται τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου. δοκιμαζέτω δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἑαυτὸν καὶ οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ ἄρτου ἐσθιέτω καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποτηρίου πινέτω· ὁ γὰρ ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων κρίμα ἑαυτοῦ ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει μὴ διακρίνων

τὸ σῶμα. διὰ τοῦτο ἐν ὑμῖν πολλοὶ ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ἄρρωστοὶ καὶ κοιμῶνται ἱκανοί. εἰ δὲ ἑαυτοὺς διεκρίνομεν, οὐκ ἂν ἐκρινόμεθα:

For 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 for my remembrance.” 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 are drinking [it] for my remembrance. For as often as you are eating this bread and drinking this cup, you are proclaiming the death of the Lord, until he comes.”

Therefore, whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For the one eating and drinking eats and drinks judgment upon himself, if he is not recognizing the [Lord’s] body.<sup>1</sup> For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number have fallen asleep. If we would judge ourselves, we would not be condemned.

In addition, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:16:

τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστὶν;  
The cup of blessing which we are blessing, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we are breaking, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?

All our teaching about the Lord’s Supper must be derived from these five passages of Scripture. In this paper we will not be able to speak at length about the great blessing of the Sacrament for God’s people. This is described very simply in the *Small Catechism*:

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?

Answer. That is shown us in these words: *Given and shed for you, for the remission of sins*; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. (*Trig.* p. 557; Tappert, p, 351-352.)<sup>2</sup>

I assume there is no disagreement about this blessing of the Supper among us. In our discussion today we shall have to limit ourselves largely to a consideration of three questions about the Sacrament which are a source of discussion and debate among Lutherans today.

### **What is the Nature of Christ’s Presence?**

Lutherans have always emphasized that Christ’s true body and blood are really present “in, with, and under” the bread and wine and that Christ’s true body and blood are received by all who receive the elements, either to their blessing or to their condemnation.

Article X of the *Augsburg Confession* states:

<sup>1</sup> The Greek simply has a participle here. It could be translated, “Because he is not recognizing...”

<sup>2</sup> All references to the Lutheran Confessions are to the *Concordia Triglotta* with reference also to Tappert. In a couple of places I have modernized punctuation to improve readability.

Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present and are distributed to those who eat the Supper of the Lord; and they reject those that teach otherwise. (*Trig.* p-47; Tappert, p. 34 ) [All underlining is added]

Article III, VI of the Smalcald Articles states:

1] Of the Sacrament of the Altar we hold that bread and wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ and are given and received not only by the godly, but also by wicked Christians.  
5] As regards transubstantiation, we care nothing about the sophistical subtlety by which they teach that bread and wine leave or lose their own natural substance, and that there remain only the appearance and color of bread, and not true bread. For it is in perfect agreement with Holy Scriptures that there is, and remains, bread, as Paul himself calls it, 1 Co 10: 6: The bread which we break. And 1 Co 11:28: Let him so eat of that bread. (*Trig.* p. 493; Tappert, p.311)

In the *Large Catechism* Luther says:

Now, what is the Sacrament of the Altar?

Answer: It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by the Word of Christ to eat and to drink. And as we have said of Baptism that it is not simple water, so here also we say the Sacrament is bread and wine, but not mere bread and wine, such as are ordinarily served at the table, but bread and wine comprehended in, and connected with, the Word of God.

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.<sup>3</sup> The Word must make a Sacrament of the element; else it remains a mere element. Now, it is not the word or ordinance of a prince or emperor, but of the sublime Majesty, at whose feet all creatures should fall, and affirm it is as He says, and accept it with all reverence, fear, and humility. (*Trig.* p. 755; Tappert p. 447-448)

Article VII of the *Formula of Concord* affirms:

1. We believe, teach and confess that in the Holy Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and essentially present and are truly distributed and received with the bread and wine.
2. We believe, teach and confess that the words of the testament of Christ are not to be understood otherwise than as they read, according to the letter, so that the bread does not signify, the absent body and the wine the absent blood of Christ, but that, on account of the sacramental union, they [the bread and wine] are truly the body and blood of Christ.
3. Now, as to the consecration, we believe, teach, and confess that no work of man or recitation of the minister [of the church] Produces this presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, but that this is to be ascribed only and alone to the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ.
4. But at the same time we also believe, teach, and confess unanimously that in the use of the Holy Supper the words of the institution of Christ should in no way be omitted, but should be publicly recited, as it is written 1 Co 10, 16: The cup of blessing which we bless, etc. This blessing occurs through the recitation of the words of Christ. (*Trig* p 809; Tappert, p. 482-483)

<sup>3</sup> See Luther’s commentary on this phrase in the appendix of testimonies,

The *Thorough Declaration* adds:

35] For the reason why, in addition to the expressions of Christ and St Paul (the bread in the Supper is the body of Christ or the communion of the body of Christ), also the forms: under the bread, with the bread, in the bread [the body of Christ is present and offered], are employed, is that by means of them the papistical transubstantiation may be rejected and the sacramental union of the unchanged essence of the bread and of the body of Christ indicated. (*Trig.* p. 983; Tappert, p. 575)

Lutherans emphasize that although the presence of Christ in the Sacrament is a supernatural presence, which is beyond our understanding and explanations, it is a real, substantial presence. Jesus simply says, “This is my body. This is my blood,” and Lutherans confess this when they say, “The bread and wine we receive are Christ’s body and blood.” They also combine the words “in and under” from the Catechism and the word “with” from the Formula of Concord into the expression “Christ’s body and blood are received in, with, and under the bread and wine.” Each of these three words is important in confessing the whole truth. Each of these words guards against an error or misunderstanding. 1) The word “in” emphasizes the close union of Christ’s body and blood with the bread and wine, but this word has been twisted by the Reformed to ridicule the Lutheran conception of the real presence, as if the presence of Christ’s body in the bread were like a natural mixture of raisins or nuts into bread dough, or as if the presence of Christ’s blood in the wine were like a mixed drink. 2) The word “under” emphasizes the supernatural nature of the presence (we do not see, smell, or taste Christ’s body and blood; we see and taste only bread and wine), but because it is used to express the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation, the word “under” by itself can leave the impression that only the outward appearance of bread and wine remain. 3) The word “with” emphasizes that real bread and wine are still present, but it does not state the union as explicitly as the word “in” does. The combination “in, with, and under” best expresses the real, yet mysterious and supernatural nature of the sacramental union.<sup>4</sup> By using this formula we are not imagining that we have explained the sacramental union in a way that satisfies human reason, but we are simply confessing our faith in Christ’s words, “This is my body. This is my blood.” We call the union of Christ’s body and blood with the bread and the wine “the sacramental union,” because it is unique to the Sacrament and has no parallel.

The other important word used to describe the presence is the word “communion” (*koinonia*), found in 1 Corinthians 10: 16, The translation, “a *participation* in the blood and body of Christ” (NIV) is not necessarily wrong since it emphasizes that all recipients really receive Christ’s body and blood. The translation “*communion* of the blood and body of Christ” (KJV) is, however, better since it more clearly expresses the sacramental union of the earthly elements with Christ’s body and blood.

The nature of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament has important implications for the answer to our next question:

### **Who May Properly Receive Christ’s Body and Blood?**

In determining with whom we may properly practice communion fellowship, we must consider everything the Bible tells us about the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11. This is the Lord’s Supper, not ours. His directions determine our practice. To attend the Lord’s Supper with blessing people must:

---

<sup>4</sup> If only one word is used, the word “with,” as used by the Formula, is the best choice since it stresses that all four elements (body and blood, bread and wine) are present, but it does not attempt to explain how. Since the Formula was written specifically to reject “philippism” in the Sacrament, it is completely contrary to history to suggest that use of the words “with” or “in, with, and under” to describe the real presence is an evidence of philippism.

1. believe in Christ so they can remember and proclaim his death,
2. recognize the presence of Christ's true body and blood so that they do not bring judgment upon themselves by eating and drinking unworthily,
3. be able to examine themselves,
4. be repentant for all their sins,
5. be united in doctrine so they can truly be "one body" as they eat and drink together (1 Co 10: 17).

We call the Lord's Supper "Communion" because three communions or fellowships are involved every time we celebrate the sacrament: 1) the communion (fellowship) with God through faith, 2) the communion (union) of the body and blood of Christ with the elements of the bread and wine, and 3) the communion of faith, that is, the fellowship between all of those who attend together. To participate in Communion in a God-pleasing way an individual must understand and participate in all three of these communions. Those who participate without such understanding bring judgement rather than blessing upon themselves.

We should not allow children to attend the Lord's Supper until they have been carefully instructed and examined so that they may receive the sacrament as a blessing. Although the Bible does not specify the precise age at which children can examine themselves, the necessity of being able to examine oneself excludes infants from Communion. We also must not allow adults who have not been instructed in the doctrines of Scripture to attend Communion with us, since they would attend to their detriment. In cases in which mental retardation, mental illness, or senility raise doubts about the person's ability to receive the Sacrament, the pastor must exercise judgment on the basis of his discussion with the person.

To permit people to attend the Lord's Supper without proper knowledge and preparation is as irresponsible as it would be for a doctor to dump all of the medicine out on his waiting room table and to tell the patients to help themselves. A pastor, who is a doctor of the soul, is as responsible for careful diagnosis and instruction of his "patients" as a doctor of the body is for his. If people wish to attend the Lord's Supper without receiving instructions in the teachings of the church, this would be as reckless as signing a contract they have never read or joining an organization without knowing what it stands for. Love requires pastors and congregations to exercise careful stewardship of the Lord's Supper.

Because a person must recognize the presence of Christ's body and blood to receive the Sacrament beneficially, Lutherans cannot have joint Communion with Reformed churches (whether Zwinglian or Calvinistic) since they deny the real presence of Christ's true body and blood in the Sacrament. Nor can Lutherans have joint Communion with the Church of Rome because of its theory of transubstantiation and its teaching that the mass is a sacrifice that pays for the sins of the living and the dead by "re-presenting" Christ's sacrifice.

Because the biblical principles of fellowship require us to "keep away" from those who persist in false teachings, confessional Lutherans cannot join in Communion with Lutherans who cling to false doctrines, nor with those Lutherans who join in Communion with Reformed or Roman churches. Those who hold to false doctrines should not be admitted to our Communion, nor should we attend theirs. The impenitent must not be admitted to the Lord's Supper.

Because the practice of "closed communion" can become a very emotional issue, it is important for all confessional Lutherans to carefully study the scriptural principles of Communion and church fellowship so that our practices will give a clear testimony to the truth and will protect people from receiving the Sacrament to their condemnation.<sup>5</sup> In obedience to God's Word we stand in reverence and awe before the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, given and shed for us. As congregations and pastors we will want to administer and use this sacrament as Christ directs so that the bonds of fellowship within our churches will be strengthened. We will carefully warn everyone against improper reception of this sacrament and make every effort to reach out to others to win them to faith and repentance and to prepare them for a beneficial reception of the Lord's

---

<sup>5</sup> That "close communion" was the practice of the orthodox church from the beginning is demonstrated in Werner Elert's *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*.

Supper. To use the Holy Supper as a sign of a false, ecumenical unity, which is not based on a confession of the truth is a perversion of the purpose for which Christ gave the Sacrament.

### **The Moment of Christ's Presence In the Sacrament**

The Scriptures stress that all communicants receive the true body and blood of the Lord with the bread and wine. Beyond this Scripture says nothing about the specific moment at which Christ's body and blood become present. Because this issue has caused considerable strife and even division among confessional Lutherans in Scandinavia, it is necessary to discuss it briefly here.

Any teaching which is made binding on the church and which is made divisive of fellowship must be based on a clear word of Scripture. The Scripture provides no such testimony in the matter of the moment of presence. 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.

Careful reading of the Bible's four accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper reveals that the inspired authors do not answer the question concerning the precise moment in the sacramental celebration when the body and blood of Christ become united with the elements, so that they are in, with, and under the bread and wine which we receive. 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. Mark 14:22 says, "After he had taken bread and blessed [it], he broke it and gave it to them and said, 'Take, this is my body.'" Here Jesus speaks the words "This is my body" during or even after the distribution and reception of the elements. In Mark 14:23,24 the words "He said, 'This is my blood'" follow the statement, "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. 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, but before the reception. Even the grammatical construction of Luke 22:19, which consists of the aorist verb "he gave it" and the present participle "saying," does not necessarily mean that the speaking was simultaneous with the giving. Similar constructions elsewhere in Scripture, 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 actions, 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 dogmatic conclusion from them as to the precise moment of the sacramental union. None of them fix the moment of presence at the moment when Jesus spoke his word of blessing. In fact, none of the accounts record the words of Jesus' blessing.

Some have claimed that the words "the cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ" demonstrate that the blood must be present from the moment of consecration, if an effort is made to deduce a time of presence from these words, the words prove too much, since, taken literally, they would say that the cup is already the blood of Christ at the time when we are blessing it.

It is clear that Jesus' command, "Keep on doing this," involves three sacramental actions: 1) the thanksgiving or blessing, also called the consecration; 2) the giving, offering, or distribution of the elements; and 3) the taking, eating, and drinking, also called the reception or sumption. All three of these actions are necessary to carry out Jesus' injunction, "Keep on doing this." Our Confessions never separate the distribution from the reception. They are always treated as two aspects of one act, as the pastor is giving, the communicant is receiving.

Hence the Formula of Concord cites the ancient rule or standard, "*Nihil habet rationem sacramenti extra usum a Christo institutum*" or "*extra actionem divinitus institutum*" ("Nothing has the nature of a sacrament

apart from the use instituted by Christ” or “apart from the action divinely instituted”) (F.C., S.D., VII,85; *Trig.* p. 1001; Tappert, p. 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; *Trig.* p. 1003; Tappert, p. 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 Co 10:16 (VII,83,84; *Trig.* p. 1001; Tappert, p. 584).

Since the time of the Reformation, the majority of orthodox Lutheran teachers have held the opinion that Christ’s body and blood become present with the elements only when the elements are received by the communicants and that they do not remain united with any elements that are left after the completion of the Sacrament.<sup>6</sup> Among the theologians who held this view were the David Chytraeus, an author of the Formula of Concord, the dogmatician Andreas Quenstedt, and the American Lutheran theologians C.F.W. Walther and Francis Pieper. Some authorities claim that the two Martins, Martin Luther and Martin Chemnitz, insisted that Christ’s body and blood are present from the moment the pastor speaks the consecration, but there are statements in their writings which suggest otherwise. For those who are interested in pursuing this historical question, citations from the writings of these theologians have been attached to this paper.

While we are not contending that one must believe that Christ’s body and blood first become present only at the time of reception, it is a fact that many faithful and revered teachers of the church have believed and taught this. The Lutheran Church has not considered this opinion to be false doctrine, and we should not do that now. This belief that the presence first occurred at the *time of* reception never implied that the presence occurred *because of* the reception. The presence was due entirely to Christ’s words of institution, which are repeated by the consecrating pastor.

What Lutherans must confess about the Sacrament is simply this, “We believe that all who partake of the Lords 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). We demand nothing more.

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 of presence is and must remain an open question. Views that it occurs at the consecration, before the reception, or at the moment when the elements are received are human speculation and, at best, pious opinions which dare not be made binding on the church or divisive of fellowship. Such views may be held as personal opinion, but may not be made binding on the church. It is wrong to divide the church over such issues.

---

<sup>6</sup> This last point is clearly stated also in the *Thorough Declaration*: They believe in no transubstantiation, that is, an essential transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, nor hold that the body and blood of Christ...are otherwise permanently united therewith apart from the use of the Sacrament.... For apart from the use, when the bread is laid aside and preserved in the sacramental vessel or is carried about in the procession and exhibited, as is done in popery, they do not hold that the body of Christ is present (VII, 14, 15, *Trig.* p. 977; Tappert, p. 572).

## **Conclusion**

Confessional Lutherans must insist on agreement concerning the doctrine of Christ's real presence in the Holy Supper and on agreement in the other doctrines of Scripture as a basis for Communion fellowship. They must not divide the church on the basis of speculation and questions about the moment of presence, which are not answered by Scripture. As a basis for unity we must insist on everything Scripture says, but on nothing more.



### **Addenda One: Exceptional Cases Pertaining to Closed Communion**

We normally commune only members of our congregation and visitors from congregations in fellowship with it. Exceptional situations may arise that permit an exception to the normal practice. For example, a member's mother who belongs to the Missouri Synod is visiting her daughter and becomes critically ill. She is hospitalized and has no LCMS pastor to commune her. As she faces death, the WELS pastor who visits her in the hospital at her daughter's request could commune her since her immediate spiritual needs would be the paramount concern. The private setting in which the action occurs minimizes the likelihood of the offense that would be caused by such an action in a public worship service. Naturally, the normal requirements for being properly prepared to receive the Lord's Supper would apply. We could never, for example, commune someone who does not recognize the presence of Christ's body and blood, for they would be eating and drinking to their own judgment.

In asking whether it is possible to justify such exceptions to the normal practice we may consider Jesus' evaluation of a similar "hard case," which permitted an exception to a ceremonial law which God had given to Israel (Mk 2:27). The rule governing the situation was clear: lay-people were not allowed to eat the showbread from the tabernacle (Lev 24:9). Yet Jesus did not condemn the priests or David for allowing David's men to eat the showbread in an emergency situation (1 Sam 21). Furthermore, Jesus stated that even the law against work on the Sabbath permitted exceptions for the priests offering sacrifices or for anyone helping individuals or even animals in distress. The Pharisees' mistake was that they had forgotten that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." We shouldn't forget that "fellowship principles were made for man, man wasn't made for fellowship principles." If we remember that "God wants mercy and not sacrifice," we won't condemn the innocent (Matthew 12:7).

Some Lutheran writers of unquestioned orthodoxy say that that the Lord's Supper is never enough of an emergency to allow for a exception to the rule since the Lord's Supper is never an absolute need for salvation. But David's men would probably not have starved in one day, and the people who can to be healed on the Sabbath could have waited till Sunday. Jesus, nevertheless, does not condemn the exceptions made in order to help them.

We should, however, be careful that exceptions do not undermine the rule, which still stands. Exceptions will normally occur only in cases in which we can establish that the person is properly prepared to receive the Lord's Supper, but there is not time to fully explore the issues raised by the person's affiliation with a heterodox church, or the person has lost the mental capacity to understand those issues. Cases in which a person, for convenience sake, wants to attend Communion both in a WELS congregation and in an ELCA or LCMS congregation, such as when Midwesterners spend the winter in the Sun Belt or when students are away at school, are not emergency situations. In such circumstances we owe the people a clear testimony that they cannot keep one foot in each camp. Since attendance at the Lord's Supper is not often emergency need, exceptional cases will be very rare.

When members of another Lutheran synod which is not in fellowship are visiting services in a WELS church because they are disturbed by the liberalism in their church and they are considering becoming members of the WELS for confessional reasons, we will encourage them to regard themselves as communicant members of their present church until they have given their testimony against the false teaching of that church, it is not accepted, and they are, therefore, compelled to leave. If they are leaving their previous church for confessional reasons, they will understand and appreciate our careful stewardship of the Lord's Supper, and they will realize that they cannot be on both sides of the fence at the same time.

## Addenda Two: Testimonies Concerning the Moment of Presence in the Holy Supper

All doctrine must be established from Scripture, not from the writings of men. We, therefore, offer, these quotations from orthodox Lutheran theologians, not as a resolution of the debate concerning the moment of presence in the Lord's Supper, but as a matter of historical interest relating to a topic which has been a subject of much discussion. These quotations show that since the time of the Reformation most orthodox Lutheran theologians have leaned toward the opinion that the body and blood of Christ are present "in, with, and under" the sacramental bread and wine only when the elements are distributed and received.

The *Lutheran Confessions* always emphasize an undivided act of distribution and reception in their statements about the presence. They also emphasize the enduring power of Christ's Original consecration:

For the true and mighty words of Jesus Christ which He spoke 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, Ge 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., V11, 75-78; *Trig.* p. 999-1001, Tappert, p. 583f).

The "moment of presence" in the Lord's Supper has been a subject of much discussion in recent years within the Lutheran Church. It has often been claimed that Luther believed that Christ's body and blood were present from the moment of consecration. Although some quotations taken from his writings may seem to support such a view, Luther's opinion translated here, in which he more directly addresses this issue, seems to cast doubt on the claim that "consecrationism" was Luther's consistent view.

Luther's Opinion About Augustine's Words: *Accedat verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum:*

It is all the more important to understand this statement of Augustine, because of the degree to which the papists have misused it and deduced the greatest errors from it. They draw the following conclusion: Augustine affirms that a sacrament consists of two parts, namely the word and the outward sign (*elemento*). Hence they conclude that as soon as the officiating priest has spoken the words of institution in the presence of the bread and wine, immediately the body and blood of Christ must be present. Furthermore, in order to render fitting honor to Christ, this bread must be enclosed in a secure little house so that mice and worms don't eat it, and then people must worship it. Therefore, under the papacy a similar thought was impressed on the hearts of the people so that they believed that none of their prayers were more acceptable to God and more readily heard than those spoken at the place where the consecrated bread is enclosed. In order to avoid these errors, one must know that Augustine was not speaking only of the pronunciation of the words of Christ, but rather includes with it the command to take and eat the bread. And afterward he adds: *hic est corpus meum* [here is my body], which is as much as to say that apart from this use My body and blood do not become connected with these outward signs. For one must not think that this Lord's Supper is like some kind of magic illusion in which Christ can be taken hold of without the word<sup>7</sup> through mere human superstition. Wherefore, even as baptism, unless a child is there that is to be baptized,<sup>8</sup> is nothing else than mere water: so we maintain with absolute certainty that where there are no people present who are eating and drinking according to Christ's institution, nothing else than bread and wine are there even though one, should speak the words a thousand times.

If, however, the question is asked what parts are essential to the sacrament, we answer: there are three things that belong to the sacrament. First of all, the element must be there, that is, a visible sign. Thereupon must follow the complete speaking of the words. And thirdly, the correct use according to Christ's institution must be added. For example, the element in baptism is the water; the accompanying words that must be spoken are these: "I baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Finally, the proper use commanded by Christ includes that the child itself is immersed or sprinkled. One must assert the same in regard to the Lord's Supper. To begin with, all the elements, the bread and the wine, must be present. Thereupon all the words of the testament must be spoken. Finally, the proper use must be added, that is, the eating and drinking. This I believe throws sufficient light on the true meaning of this saying which all the schools drum into their students.

But here we must also incidentally examine the question whether the adoration of the elements is necessary or not. Some want to establish and prove its necessity under the pretext: Christ is to be worshipped; Christ is present in the Lords Supper; therefore the Supper must be adored. There is an easy answer to this allegation, if the words of Christ are diligently weighed. For he does not say: "Take and worship," but he commands that we should eat and drink. For only the performance of what Christ commanded, namely, the worthy eating and drinking, is the true and foremost honor we can and should render this ceremony. Although no one will find fault with the show of honor for the elements that consists in outward reverence, nevertheless, since this custom had its origin in the traditions of these people [that is, the Roman Catholics] it must be a superstitious opinion when it is taught as though it is a necessary service to God and cannot be

---

<sup>7</sup> The German has *ohne Wort*. This seems to refer to Christ's command to take and eat.

<sup>8</sup> The German has *Wenn ein Kind da ist* but the sense and parallelism require the rendering "unless a child is there," or "if no child is there." An alternate rendering would be "Wherefore, even as baptism, if a child is present which is to be baptized, is nothing else than mere water [until the water is applied], so we maintain with absolute certainty..., etc. In both sacraments Luther is stressing that unless the action Christ commanded takes place, there is no sacrament.

omitted without sin. For we must at all times remember the principle which Jesus in Matthew 15 applies from Isaiah: “They honor me in vain with human ordinances.” That is, human traditions are no divine worship. Therefore, if we were to worship the bread and wine which is given to us in the sacrament under this superstitious opinion, we would become open idolaters and would establish a divine worship that militates against the express Word of God because God does not want us to call on him in any other way than he himself prescribes, namely in spirit and in truth.<sup>9</sup>

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 and not with respect to the communicants’ eating” (*Der Abschied der Mecklenburgischen Herzöge*, also known as the *Wismar Recess*, cited in Fr. H. R. Frank, *Die Theologie der Concordienformel*. Erlangen: Theodor Bläsing, 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, III, 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, Cap. de Coena S.*, 1187, 1268 [Wittenberg 1685], 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*, III, 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*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., St. Louis: Concordia, 1897, p. 174).

<sup>9</sup> This statement has been translated from Vol. 21b of the St. Louis edition, columns 3457-3459. In Volume 21, 393-395 of the Walch edition of 1588 it appears among Luther’s letters. It is letter number 156 in the third collection of letters, previously unpublished letters prepared from the autographs. No information is provided about the date or situation of this short writing. In the St. Louis edition it is included among the addenda (*Nachlese*). Translated by Armin Schuetze. Underlining added.

*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 dogmatists 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. Dogmatik*, 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, Baler says it is not necessary to determine the same. Quenstedt enters into this point by taking up the question: What 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 Co 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 thing 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 the Sacrament must by the consecration be complete (*confectum*), that is, the *unio sacramentalis* must obtain, Quenstedt gives the opposite 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).

*Eugene Klug*, one of the leading Confessional scholars of the Missouri Synod, rejected the view which demands that we believe that Christ’s body is present from the moment the words of consecration are read: Lutheran theologians have regularly refrained from trying to designate the “moment” of the real presence. They resist tying it merely to the act of the minister who repeats the words of institution, harking back rather to Christ’s own ordaining of this holy Supper. Therefore, not only the repetition of the words is of the essence but also the distribution and reception of the elements are constituting parts of the Savior’s gracious gift (cf. FC VII 83,84). It is regrettable that Teigen<sup>10</sup> feels called on to ride his hobby-horse on “consecrationism” to the point where he labels those who do not follow his “high” view of the miracle of consecration as Melancthonians, or even worse as holding to Reformed thinking with a “functional doctrine” of the Lord’s Supper. One thing leads to the next as Teigen eventually also speaks a word for veneration of the elements that have been consecrated, as also for the need to consume *all* the elements (the *reliquiae*) consecrated at a given service. In so speaking, he has distanced himself, however conscientiously he speaks in behalf of a more pious practice in the Lutheran church, from virtually all responsible and loyal teachers from Luther onward. In fact, what becomes most disturbing is Teigen’s mustering of Luther along with Chemnitz for defense of this reasoning. Having worked with both Martins for some years now, I must say that the conclusions drawn by Teigen do not accurately reflect what Luther and Chemnitz taught concerning the Lord’s Supper. (*Concordia Theological Journal*, 1987, p 53-54.)

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. Different opinions about this are not divisive of fellowship. 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*.<sup>11</sup>

Our doctrine must be 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.

<sup>10</sup> Bjarne Teigen is a defender of the views of Tom Hardt.

<sup>11</sup> See Hans Kirsten, “*Einige Ergänzungen ‘zur lutherischen Lehre von der Konsekration,’*” *Lutherische Blätter*, Vol. 7, No. 41 (April 1955), p. 33, and “*Praesentia Christi in Rebus,*” *Lutherischer Rundblick*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (February/March 1964), p. 28.