

The Practice of the Real Presence

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Introduction

Doctrine and practice are intrinsically linked. While there is practice that may be in and of itself neutral, no practice in the Church is divorced from the doctrine which the Church confesses. In the modern age it has become common to make a distinction between practical, historical, and systematic theology. This distinction, while useful, has too often served to divide rather than to unite Christian theology into a cohesive whole. The unifying principle of all theology, whether systematic, historical, or practical, must be the person and work of Jesus Christ in type, in prophesy, in religious practice, in history, and finally in exposition.

If all theology is unified in the person and work of Jesus, then one may never separate practice from doctrine. Rather, we do because we believe what Christ has spoken.

So also we must avoid the opposite temptation: presuming that a practice derived from right doctrine will itself ensure the purity of said doctrine. The history of the Christian Church is a testament to the fact that retaining rituals informed by, consistent with, and derived from right doctrine is no guarantee that right doctrine will thereby be preserved. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* is only true when the rule of faith continuously informs, shapes, and constrains the rule of prayer.

For theology to be centered in Christ, the Word of Christ must be central to all of our doctrine and practice. We do not say this only as a reaction to the rationalistic spirit that has permeated the visible church. Those who reprintinate the theology of our fathers, and claim adherence to the Confessions are more vulnerable to the blindness of human rationalism than are the liberals who reject the perspicuity of Scripture. The latter make no pretense of orthodoxy, whereas the former are prone to a genealogical arrogance which presumes that since they are the inheritors of the legacy of the confessors, they are immune to the rationalistic spirit of the age.

For the present discussion, I would like to coin the term *congruodoxy*. Congruodoxy is an attempt to justify an inconsistent practice by altering the doctrine from which it is otherwise derived, not out of malice toward the truth, but out of a misplaced zeal for an erring practice which, due to long usage, is assumed to be orthodox. Congruodoxy is conservative in nature. It respects the past, and attempts to preserve an inherited and well established practice, even at the expense of his confession, and his understanding of history. This is not viewed by the congruodox man as an alteration but as a recognition of what must already have been true. His practical theology has altered both his systematic and historical theology, but he is blind to this fact.

Heterodoxy is a broad brush. Congruodoxy is a more subtle form of heterodoxy. It always proceeds from practice, and hides behind a confessional spirit. We should not equate those churches who merely give lip-service to orthodox doctrine and those who make a serious effort to preserve and practice it. The former, broadly known as liberals, do not take theology seriously except in so far as it can be harmonized with the spirit of the age. The latter, the congruodox, seriously desire to uphold the doctrine of the orthodox faith, but nevertheless compromise it to one degree or another by holding to an erring practice which inevitably alters the theology they are zealous to uphold.

This distinction is necessary and made for the sake of charity, for it is the nature of theological thinkers to caricature their theological adversaries as hardened rationalists in any matter in which they disagree, disregarding their zeal for the pure word and doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ. Men err, and theological men err theologically. The devil and the flesh can pervert any human emotion, even the zeal for the truth, both to blind the accuser to his own folly, and to blot out the bonds of Christian love which should govern all the dealings of brother with brother.

Historical theology, which is the context of congruodoxy, is critical in any discussion of orthodox practice. Since practice is derived from doctrine, one should never ignore the practices of the past when evaluating the theology of the past. If our understanding of the doctrine of the Lutheran fathers directly contradicts their actual practice, we must give the fathers the benefit of the doubt. Before we accuse them of an inconsistent practice, we should consider whether we have failed to understand their theology. Perhaps we are the ones who have fallen into historical and doctrinal error.

Systematic, historical, and practical theology are inseparably intertwined as we attempt to examine, criticize and correct doctrinal error. Christ speaks to His Church in every age with one voice. Since His Word does not change, we must change when our practice contradicts His Word. Likewise, we must first be the pupil when we observe the practice of our confessing fathers before we become the judge of our teachers. Sometimes we must be judge. The fathers can and do err. However, at such times one does well to remember the rebuke of Luther to Simon Wolferinus: "There is no doubt that it is not we who got it from you, but you who got it from us." Lest we fall into arrogance, let us give the fathers, and in particular Luther, Chemnitz, and the other authors of the Confessions, the benefit of the doubt and be more ready to believe that we have misunderstood their confession than accuse them of an inconsistent practice.

This paper is specifically about the practice of the Lord's Supper. I thought it necessary to lay the above foundation because the practice of the Lord's Supper is and has always been at the center of Christian worship. This is not to take away from the centrality of preaching, but a recognition that it is specifically in the Lord's Supper that we have the command of Jesus, "This do," with explicit actions that we are to perform and thereby proclaim His death (1 Cor. 11:26). With his command, "This do," our Lord has established a liturgy for the Church. It is easy to see, both in itself and in any examination of the historical development of the liturgy, that the eating and drinking of the Body and Blood of Christ is the central action around which the liturgy is constructed.

It follows, therefore, that the central act of Christian Worship will be a prominent locus of erring practice as the Church concerns itself with the question, “Since we have here the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself with the words ‘This do,’ what then are we to do, and how are we to behave as these Words are done in our midst?”

With this foundation, let us turn to the present topic: The practice of the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. In the first part of this work we will address the doctrine of the Real Presence according to the Words of Christ, considering also the historical understanding of the Real Presence in the Confessions and certain other writings, with an emphasis on those aspects of the doctrine which directly inform our practice of the Lord’s Supper. In the second part we shall address specific practices of the Lutheran Church derived from the doctrine of the Real Presence from the time of the Reformation to the present, with an emphasis on those practices which were and are sources of controversy within the Lutheran Church.

Part I. The doctrine of the Real Presence.

In laying the foundation for the practice of the Real Presence before a Lutheran audience, we can state at the outset that all confessional Lutherans hold to the doctrine of the Real Presence. We can summarize this doctrine in the following five points:

1. In the Lord’s Supper, the actual flesh of Christ is present with the bread in such a way that without apology we can say, “This bread is the Body of Christ. This wine is the Blood of Christ.”
2. The elements of bread and wine are still bread and wine, even when they are also the true Body and Blood of Christ. Our confessions have used the formulation “in, with, and under” to describe the relation of the Body and Blood of Christ to the bread and wine.¹ This is in distinction to the medieval doctrine of the Real Presence, transubstantiation, in which the substance of the bread and wine are replaced by the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ, while leaving the accidents of bread and wine in place.
3. All those who eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord’s Supper receive the true Body and Blood of Christ with the mouth. This is true regardless of the communicants faith. He receives the Body and Blood of Christ even if he does not believe in the Real Presence, or is a hypocrite.
4. Those who believe in the Real Presence and trust in the merits and atonement of Christ, receive the Body and Blood of Christ to their salvation. All those who partake without this faith receive the Body and Blood of Christ to their judgment.

1. FC SD, VII, par. 36.

5. The *mode* of the Real Presence is unique to the Lord's Supper. The Body and Blood of Christ are present in a supernatural manner unique from any other mode of His presence. This mode is not the same as that of omnipresence, whereby His Body and Blood share in the divine attribute of ubiquity. Likewise it is not the same as the *localized* mode in which the Body and Blood of Christ were present in a specific place during His state of humiliation and thereafter when he appeared to His disciples. Beyond this distinction, the Lutheran Church does not attempt to describe *how* Christ's true Body and Blood are present in the Lord's Supper.

The proof for these five points can be found in the Words of Institution and the corresponding actions of Christ as described in the synoptic Gospels, and explained by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:16f. and 11:17f. Paul's explanation of these words confirms that we are to stick with their plain and simple meaning. Paul makes no defense of the words of Christ. He feels no need to anticipate the errors of the crass Sacramentarians and Zwinglians who outright denied the Real Presence. There is no need, for the words defend themselves: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). Therefore, no one would have been surprised to hear his conclusion in 1 Cor. 11:27: "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."

Paul is perfectly capable of drawing deep analogies and applications from the Biblical text, but he does not do this with the Words of Institution. He understands Jesus' words simply and directly. It is clear that his audience had the same understanding. Since this is the Body and Blood of Christ, how can it be other than profanity to treat the Lord's Supper as a common meal? It can only be that one who partakes of the Supper without discerning there the Body and Blood of Christ is eating and drinking to his judgment.

Were we without the explanation of Paul, we must still come to the same conclusion. If the Words of Christ stand as they are written, without any attempt to interpret them beyond their plain meaning, then there can be no other way to treat this Supper than with the greatest reverence. To do otherwise is to profane God Himself and bring upon oneself the condemnation of Ex. 20:7, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain." Likewise we would arrive at the same practice of closed communion upon which Paul insisted in Corinth (1 Cor. 11:34): "If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment."

In short we must take our lead from Paul's treatment of the Supper in 1 Corinthians, and the practice which he derives from it: The presence in our midst of the Body and Blood of Christ must determine how we practice the Lord's Supper. If the words of Christ are to mean anything at all, then we must regard the elements of the Lord's Supper the same way we would regard Christ Himself standing locally in our midst.

THE TIME OF THE REAL PRESENCE

While it would be tempting to stop here and say little more, a serious commitment to the plain meaning of Jesus' words which we see in Paul's letter to Corinth compels us to press on and consider the how the Real Presence is to be practiced in the Divine Service. We will have much more to say on this in part II. Here we are concerned with a more essential question: If we are to reverently regard the presence of Christ in the Supper, when is Christ present?

This is not a frivolous or scholastic question, but a serious and important one, to which every Christian who partakes of the Supper needs an answer. If we cannot know when Christ is present, how shall we be able to discern His Body and Blood? If Paul's treatment of the Words of Institution have any relevance at all, then we must acknowledge that in the Lord's Supper there is an actual *time* of the Real Presence, when we can know for certain that the Body and Blood of Christ are present in our midst.²

As with every other part of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, the answer to this question must be found in the Words of Institution. We do not have *theories* of the Real Presence. We have only the Words of Jesus.

Here we enter into an area of controversy that presently divides the Lutheran Church, and already divided it shortly after the death of Luther. Before we can answer any other questions, and determine our practice, we must first answer this: "When is the Body and Blood of Christ there?"

One might answer, "It does not matter when He is there so long as you believe that you receive His Body and Blood."³ This would only be true if Jesus gives no answer to the question. But if Jesus has indeed indicated a time when His Body and Blood are present then surely all must acknowledge that it is a serious offense to ignore His Words, disregard His presence, and call common what God has called Holy.

The Words of Institution answer the question conclusively. Jesus took bread, broke it (that is, for distribution), and said, "This is My Body." He took the cup and said, "This is my Blood of the New Covenant." This fully answers the question. The Body and Blood of Christ are present *when He says they are*. If Christ has declared, "This is My Body," can there be any doubt that from that point in time forward we must regard the words of Jesus as true?

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2. The claim has been repeatedly made, particularly in the Wisconsin Synod, that the Lutheran Confessions do not address this question. We will see in the following sections on the Consecration and the Usus rule that this claim is patently false and misleading. The Confessions directly address the question by identifying the Consecration as effective, and by noting a progression in time in which the Body and Blood of Christ are *present, distributed, and received*.
 3. This is the answer which is usually given by Receptionists.

This understanding of His words is so obvious that it staggers the mind that there is any controversy at all. One can understand the inheritors of Calvin and Zwingli disregarding the simple meaning of Jesus' words. One would never suspect that the very Lutherans who confess the plain meaning of the words "This is My Body" would doubt that the words of Jesus are true when He says them.

But doubt they do, and it is my contention that this error is derived, originally, from an aversion to the practice of adoring the Lord's Body and Blood in the Supper which has been falsely associated with the aberrations of Rome. In order to deny adoration, it is necessary to explain the Words of Christ in a different manner than one otherwise would from their plain meaning.

The argument which they make is as follows: Because Jesus also said, "Take, eat" and "Take, drink," this somehow changes *when* the bread and wine are the Body and Blood of Christ.

There can be no doubt that when the bread and wine are eaten and drunk, they are indeed the Body and Blood of Christ. There is also no doubt that Jesus commanded that they be eaten and drunk. But what system of epistemology has ever asserted that something which exists for a particular purpose does not actually exist until that purpose is carried out?

When God spoke at the beginning and caused the earth to bring forth every herb that fields seed and every tree whose fruit yields seed to be food for man to eat and to drink (Gen. 1:29f), does the fruit thereof only become food when man actually eats it? Before that time was it unhealthy, or unfit for consumption?

We can apply the same question to the words of Jesus in John 6:22,56: "For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. . . . He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." Is the flesh of Jesus truly food, and the blood of Jesus truly drink only when one is eating and drinking it?⁴ (I suppose if one denied the doctrine of Objective Justification they could make such an argument, but that's a topic for another paper.)

We could go on with numerous other examples of a thing that is declared to be true, followed by a statement of what you are to do with it. But the intended use of a thing does not make a thing what it is only when it is used.

The present author finds this question truly astonishing given the theological foundation which we have inherited from Luther. Luther taught us to take the Words of Institution in their most plain and simple sense, focusing especially on the words, "This is My Body." But now we are expected to ignore the plain and simple meaning of these words, and take them to mean something different. Instead of "Take and Eat. This is My Body," we have, "When you take and eat this bread, it shall be

4. Regardless of whether one takes John 6 as a reference to the Lord's Supper, the question remains valid. However, one would hope that confessional Lutherans would agree with the Formula of Concord's determination (FC SD, VII, par. 61) that John 6 is the eating and drinking of faith.

My Body.” These two statements are not equivalent. If Jesus meant the latter, then in a matter so important as whether or not we have before us His own Body and Blood, He would surely have given us some indication.

One might well paraphrase Luther’s statement to Zwingli: “Even if the body and blood of Christ were only present in the Supper at the eating and drinking, and yet I tried, simply for my own satisfaction, to express the thought that they were present as soon as Christ had spoken, I still could not say anything in a more certain, simpler, and clearer way than, ‘Take, eat, this is my body.’”⁵

In fact, there are no clearer words that our Lord could have spoken to indicate when His Body and Blood are present, than those which He spoke. He says, “This is My Body.” That the bread is His Body for the purpose of our eating it does not change the simple meaning of His words.

Therefore we can easily answer the question of when His Body and Blood are present: When Jesus, through His servant, speaks the words “This is My Body,” then without doubt His Body is present from that point forward, and correspondingly His Blood after He has said, “This is the new covenant in My Blood.”

Lutherans have never at any time made an attempt to identify a precise instance in time when the Real Presence takes place (simultaneous, for example, with some syllable of the Words of Institution), nor is there any need for such precision. It is enough for us to know that once Christ has spoken, what He declares is true.

Up to this point we have dealt with the position known as Receptionism, that the Words of Institution mean that the Body and Blood are only present when the bread and wine are eaten and drunk. However, what we say of Receptionism equally applies to its softer (and perhaps more common) form, which states: “We do not know when the Body and Blood of Christ are present, but only that when we eat and drink, we eat and drink His Body and Blood.” Making the matter indeterminate is no better. It is still a modification of Jesus’ Words, in this case, saying something like this: “When you take and eat this, you can be certain that it is my Body.” Again, this statement is not equivalent to “This is my Body.” Such soft-Receptionism is even worse in its effect. At least a hard Receptionist can say, “I know when Christ is present — when I eat and drink Him.” This links the words of Jesus to a specific thing, a point in time where Jesus does what He says. But a soft-Receptionist makes Jesus’ words so mystical that they can never look up and say, “This, here, is the Salvation of God.” Thus they lose the external and visible assurance of Christ coming to them in an absolute sense. At best, they can believe, “His Body and Blood were in there somewhere, at some time.” Such uncertainty can only lead to doubt, when the words of Jesus were specifically given to remove all doubt.

5. *Great Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, LW 37, p. 306.

THE CONSECRATION

It is impossible to contend with the question of the time of the Real Presence without also discussing the matter of the Consecration. Here we bring the Words of Institution into a specific observation of the Lord's Supper, and consider the question: When the Words of Institution are used today, must we regard them in the same sense as when they were spoken by Jesus at the institution of the Lord Supper?

To state the matter more clearly: When the Words of Institution are spoken by the Pastor, is this an *effective* Word? Note carefully we are not asking whether they remain the words of Jesus. All confessional Lutherans answer, "Yes." Nor are we asking whether the pastor is, by his intrinsic power, speaking the Words and bringing about the Real Presence. All confessional Lutherans answer, "By no means." The call to the Ministry does not impart a special character or ability to the office holder's person to affect the Real Presence:

No man's word or work, be it the merit or the speaking of the minister, be it the eating and drinking or the faith of the communicants, can effect the true presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper. This is to be ascribed only to the almighty power of God and the Word, institution, and ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁶

Instead, we ask: When the Pastor speaks the Words of Institution, is Christ Himself speaking, bringing to pass in our presence with those very words the same Real Presence of His Body and Blood that He effected at the Institution of the Supper? Or rather, are the words merely history, a recitation with no effect at all?

The Formula of Concord has decidedly answered this question:

For the truthful and almighty words of Jesus Christ which he spoke in the first institution were not only efficacious in the first Supper but they still retain their validity and efficacious power in all places where the Supper is observed according to Christ's institution and where his words are used, and the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed, and received by the virtue and potency of the same words which Christ spoke in the first Supper. For wherever we observe his institution and speak his words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed bread and cup, Christ himself is still active through the spoken words by the virtue of the first institution, which he wants to be repeated.⁷

Quoting Luther, the Formula continues:

Here, too, if I were to say over all the bread there is, 'This is the body of Christ,' nothing would happen, but when we follow his institution and command in the Lord's Supper and say, 'This is my body,' then it is his body, not because of our speaking or of our efficacious word, but because of his

6. FC SD, VII, par. 74.

7. FC SD, VII, par. 75.

command in which he has told us so to speak and to do and has attached his own command and deed to our speaking.⁸

In conclusion, the Formula unequivocally states that when the Words of Institution are spoken today in a valid observance of the Lord's Supper, they have the same effect as when Christ first spoke them, and therefore it is essential that these words be spoken, and can in no wise be omitted:

In the administration of Communion the words of institution are to be spoken or sung distinctly and clearly before the congregation and are under no circumstances to be omitted.

Thereby we render obedience to the command of Christ, 'This do.'

Thereby the faith of the hearers in the essence and benefits of this sacrament (the presence of the body and blood of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and all the benefits which Christ has won for us by his death and the shedding of his blood and which he gives to us in his testament) is awakened, strengthened, and confirmed through his Word.

And thereby the elements of bread and wine are hallowed or blessed in this holy use, so that therewith the body and blood of Christ are distributed to us to eat and to drink, as Paul says, "The cup of blessing which we bless," which happens precisely through the repetition and recitation of the words of institution.⁹

This is entirely in keeping with Luther's statement in the Large Catechism:

It is the Word, I maintain, which distinguishes it from mere bread and wine and constitutes it a sacrament which is rightly called Christ's body and blood. It is said, "Accedat verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum," that is, "When the Word is joined to the external element, it becomes a sacrament." This saying of St. Augustine is so accurate and well put that it is doubtful if he has said anything better. The Word must make the element a sacrament; otherwise it remains a mere element.¹⁰

Again, Luther writes:

For as soon as Christ says: "This is My Body," His Body is present through the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. If the Word is not there, it is mere bread; but as soon as the words are added they bring with them that of which they speak.¹¹

The necessity and function of the Consecration are beyond question if one accepts the doctrine of the Formula of Concord.¹² We must conclude that it is impossible to separate the cause and effect

8. FC SD, VII, par. 78.

9. FC SD, VII, pars. 79–82. Emphasis added.

10. LC, V, par. 10.

11. *Sermon on the Sacrament*, 1526, AE, 36, 341.

12. It should be noted that F. Pieper has a very different idea concerning the necessity of the Words of Institution and the effect of the Consecration. For Pieper, the consecration is nothing more than the congregation declaring their intent to receive the Lord's Supper: "It is imperative therefore that the congregation unmistakably declare at every celebration of the Lord's Supper that its intention is to celebrate the Supper instituted by Christ, or, in other words, that it would repeat the act ordained by

of Christ's words from the first Lord's Supper, and their subsequent use in the consecration of all Suppers which follow until the end of time. The Words of Institution bless the bread and wine, so that therewith the Body and Blood of Christ are distributed to us to eat and drink, also today, when the Pastor speaks these words on behalf of Christ. To regard the effect of the Words differently today than when Christ first spoke them would be to separate Jesus from His own Words, something we cannot do.

It is impossible to hold the Receptionist position and also confess the Formula's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Unconditionally Confessional Lutherans are unabashedly Consecrationists. One does not even need to go to the Formula to demonstrate this. In every place in the Book of Concord where the doctrine of the Lord's Supper is presented, the simple meaning of Jesus' words are followed as to *when* His Body and Blood are present. The formula is almost always the same: The Body and Blood of Christ are *present, distributed, and received*. Note the progression. It is one of time. First the Body and Blood are present. Then the Body and Blood are distributed by the Pastor. Finally the Body and Blood are received by the communicant. One can no more remove the element of time from this formula than one can remove it from Jesus' own words, "Take and eat, This is My Body which is given for you."

It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received.¹³

They approve the tenth article, where we confess our belief that in the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present and are truly offered with those things that are seen, the bread and the wine, to those who receive the sacrament.¹⁴

We hold that the bread and the wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ and that these are given and received not only by godly but also by wicked Christians.¹⁵

Finally, the Formula quotes Luther once more:

Christ. This declaration the congregation makes by consecrating the elements ordained by Christ, namely, bread and wine, for use in the Lord's Supper. Consecration is correctly defined as the act whereby bread and wine are detached from their ordinary use and appointed to the use in the Lord's Supper, that is, are set apart to this end, that with the bread, according to Christ's promise, the body of Christ and with the wine, according to Christ's promise, the blood of Christ be received." (*Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3, p. 366). He even attempts to make the case that the purpose of the Words of Institution is so that the congregation has made clear their intention, whereas it would be confusing for the words to be omitted and the congregation merely intended in their hearts to celebrate the Lord's Supper. (cf. p. 369).

13. AC X, par. 1.

14. AP, X, par. 1.

15. SA, VI, par 1.

This his command and institution can and does bring it about that we do not distribute and receive ordinary bread and wine but his body and blood, as his words read, ‘This is my body,’ etc., ‘This is my blood,’ etc. Thus it is not our word or speaking but the command and ordinance of Christ that, from the beginning of the first Communion until the end of the world, make the bread the body and the wine the blood that are daily distributed through our ministry and office.¹⁶

The preceding discussion may seem to belabor the issue of Receptionism, but in fact this is the very point upon which all questions concerning the practice of the Lord’s Supper depend. *Unless we are agreed on his first, it is not possible to have any further discussion regarding the practice of the Supper.* What use is there in discussing the practice of the Real Presence when there is no agreement to there being a Real Presence apart from the moment when the bread and wine are eaten and drunk?

The confessors of the Book of Concord they had no compunctions about recognizing the presence of Christ at a specific time. For them it is clear that after the consecration and before the distribution the Body and Blood of Christ are present. One may disagree with their conclusion, but such a person can no longer claim to be an unconditional subscriber to the doctrine of the Lutheran Confessions.

WHAT ABOUT THE USE OF THE SACRAMENT?

The preceding discussion proves that the Book of Concord teaches that the Consecration affects the Real Presence. However one further point of contention must be addressed: The “uses” rule. This is the axiom that was first expressed by Martin Bucer,¹⁷ and later popularized and enshrined in the halls of Lutheran theology by Philip Melancthon: “Nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ.”

Unfortunately, there are two distinctly different ways that this “rule and norm” has been understood in the Lutheran Church. The two camps can be delineated as those who followed Luther’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, and those who followed Melancthon’s doctrine.

For Luther, the rule determined whether a particular observance of the Lord’s Supper was itself the Supper. If the Words of Jesus were entirely followed, namely, that bread and wine are consecrated, distributed by the pastor, and eaten and drunk by communicants, then this is a true Lord’s Supper, and the Body and Blood of Christ are present. For Luther, the *usus* rule distinguished a true Supper from a false Supper. Thus if there are no communicants, or if only the priest communes (with the remaining elements being reserved for the purpose of processions with the blessed Sacrament), this is not the Lord’s Supper, for the Words of Jesus are not being followed. “This do,” said Christ, and when we do not “do” what Christ commands, then we do not have what He has or-

16. FC SD, VII, par. 77.

17. Actually, in its earliest form, it was first proposed by Zwingli prior to his rejection of the Real Presence, but Bucer is responsible for formulating it in the Lutheran Church.

dained. For Luther, the “use” of the Lord’s Supper refers to the entire command of Christ, the entire *action* to which Jesus referred when He commanded, “This do.”

With Melanchthon, we have something quite different. His understanding of the rule has little to do with the question of whether a particular Lord’s Supper is a true Lord’s Supper. Instead he applies the rule within the Sacrament itself to determine whether or not, at a given point in time, the bread and wine are the Body and Blood of Christ. For Melanchthon, the *use* of the Sacrament is not the entire Sacramental action as it was for Luther, but rather *the reception, and nothing else*. In other words, Melanchthon uses the rule to teach that the Body and Blood are only present when they are being eaten and drunk. Melanchthon is an unabashed receptionist. He outright denied that the Words of Institution are consecratory.¹⁸

The *usus* rule was incorporated into the Formula of Concord. One must therefore determine which sense of the rule the Formula intends to confess. Thankfully, the Formula leaves no doubt:

To maintain this true Christian doctrine concerning the Holy Supper and to obviate and eliminate many kinds of idolatrous misuse and perversion of this testament, the following useful rule and norm has been derived from the words of institution: Nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ, or apart from the divinely instituted action (that is, if one does not observe Christ’s institution as he ordained it, it is no sacrament). This rule dare not in any way be rejected, but it can and should be profitably urged and retained in the church of God.

In this context “use” or “action” does not primarily mean faith, or the oral eating alone, but the entire external and visible action of the Supper as ordained by Christ: the consecration or words of institution, the distribution and reception, or the oral eating of the blessed bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ.

Apart from this use it is not to be deemed a sacrament, as when in the papistic Mass the bread is not distributed but is offered up, or locked up, or carried about, or exposed for adoration, just as the baptismal water is no sacrament or Baptism if it should be used to consecrate bells, or to cure leprosy, or is otherwise exposed for adoration. It was against such papistic abuses that this rule was first formulated and explained by Dr. Luther.¹⁹

It is plain that the Formula confesses Luther’s understanding of the rule, and denies Melanchthon’s. Therefore Receptionists appeal in vain to the presence of the *usus* rule in the Formula. In the Formula, the rule has only one purpose: to identify which specific observations of the Supper are true Sacraments and which are not. If a specific observation is a true Sacrament, then without question the Body and Blood of Christ are present from the consecration onward.

18. He went further, even denying such statements as: “the bread is the essential Body of Christ, or “the bread is the True Body of Christ.” Cf. *Corpus Reformatorum*, IX, 959, 962. His justification for this is that He claims this contradicts Paul who says that the bread is “a participation” in the Body of Christ.

19. FC SD, VII, pars. 85–87. Emphasis added.

BUT WHEN DOES IT STOP?

In all the preceding discussion we have addressed the question of when the Real Presence begins by appealing to the Words of Institution, the Apostle Paul's interpretation of those words, and the Lutheran Confessions. Luther and the Confessions are in agreement: The Body and Blood are present after Christ has spoken. When He declares the bread to be His Body, and the wine to be His Blood, from that time forward they are His Body and Blood. But when does the bread and wine cease to be His Body and Blood?

Melanchthon and his followers have a clear answer: As soon as the eating and drinking stops, the Real Presence stops, for the Real Presence only exists in the *use*, that is, in the eating and drinking. This is the position of the Wisconsin Synod. It was also the opinion of most of the theologians of the 17th century²⁰, as well as Franz Pieper²¹, and Adolf Hoenecke²².

What of Luther? What of the Formula? It is not an oversight on their part when neither answers the question. When does the Real Presence cease? Look to the Words of Institution. Those determine our doctrine of the Lord's Supper. We have the clear word of Jesus, "This is my Body," but we have no word which says, "This is no longer my Body." In fact, we have no word at all placing a limit on His austere statement, "This is my Body" within the confines of the Sacrament itself. Jesus does not limit His words. He simply declares, "Take and eat. This is my Body." Indeed the only limit of any kind may be found in the words, "This do." If the *this* is *done*, then the Words of Christ must stand without modification. Either Christ's words are done or they are not. Either you have the entire Sacrament, or you do not.

We do not have the right to speak of a divine matter where Christ has not spoken. Nor do we have the right to place a limit upon the words of Jesus where He Himself has placed no limit. This is why Luther and the Formula understands the *usus* rule as it does. Our question should not be "When do the words of Jesus stop being true?" but rather: "Who is following the Words of Christ, and who is not?"

It is pure scandal and offense to speak where Christ has not spoken, to call profane what Christ has called Holy. That neither Jesus Himself, nor Paul, nor Luther, nor the Formula places a limit upon Christ's declaration, "This is My Body" beyond the words, "This do," should establish our

20. Cf. *The Origin and Meaning of the Axiom: "Nothing has the Character of a Sacrament Outside of the use,"* in *Sixteenth-century and Seventeenth-century Lutheran Theology*, E. F. Peters, Chapter IX.

21. Cf. *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. III, p. 373, n. 118. Here Pieper quotes Ægidius Hunnius favorably who states in no uncertain terms: "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 this reception takes place."

22. Cf. *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. IV, 132–133.

entire practice of the Lord's Supper. Everything in keeping with His Words should be accepted, and everything contrary or offensive according to His Words must be rejected.

Part II. The Practice of the Real Presence

The liturgy of the Church, as we noted, is formed and shaped by the Lord's Supper. This can be seen in the words of the Liturgy itself. When we sing the Sanctus, we repeat the words which the people sang as Christ entered Jerusalem to take up His Cross: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" The Sanctus declares that Christ is coming into our presence. When the pastor speaks the Words of Institution, Jesus Himself is consecrating the Sacrament, declaring that this bread and wine before our eyes are His Body and Blood. When we sing the Agnus Dei, we worship Christ who is now sacramentally present with us with His true Body and Blood: "Oh Christ, Lamb of God, have mercy upon us, grant us Your peace." This peace we receive as we eat and drink the Body and Blood of the Lord. The pastor echoes the last line of the Agnus Dei when he dismisses us with the words, "Depart in peace." As we sing the words of the Nunc Dimittis, we declare that we have now *seen* the Lord's salvation, just as He has promised.

Aside from the Words of Institution, none of these liturgical actions are prescribed by the command of Christ, and yet we do them because we believe Christ's Words. We sing the Sanctus, the Agnus Dei, and the Nunc Dimittis because His Words are true, and His Body and Blood will be, are and were truly with us, offered to us, eaten and drunk by us. The singing of the liturgy is itself a practice of the Real Presence.

Would we be departing from the words of Jesus to omit these words, to practice the Lord's Supper without them? It depends. If we were to omit the Words of Institution we would indeed be departing from Jesus' Words. However, we would not depart from His words were we to omit the Sanctus, the Agnus Dei, or the Nunc Dimittis. Yet we would certainly have lost something: the voice with which the Church for centuries has praised our Lord, and acknowledged that He has come into our presence with His promised salvation. Yet to omit them would not in itself be sin.

In the worship which the Lutheran Church has in common with nearly all Lutherans in the world, it is already necessary to distinguish between those things which confess the Real Presence and yet are not commanded by Christ, and those things which Christ specifically commands, things which we could not omit without either denying the Real Presence, or even invalidating the entire Supper.

Aside from the above liturgical acts of worship, there are others which the Church has performed in connection with the Lord's Supper that are common enough, even if they are not universal. There are still others which, at the time of the Reformation, had to be re-examined in the light of the Gospel and either accepted or rejected.

Luther did this very thing when he reformed the liturgy. It had become laden with practices which variously denied the Salvation of Christ in the Supper or invalidated it all together. When Luther discarded the Canon of the Mass in which the priest offered to God the Body and Blood of Christ as an unbloody sacrifice for sins, he did so because the sacrifice of the Mass was a denial of the very thing which Christ in the Lord's Supper declared, "This is my Body, which is given *for you for the remission of sins.*" When he eliminated processions and reservation, he did so because Christ had given us this Sacrament with the words "take and *eat,*" "take and *drink.*" When he abolished the practice of private masses in which only the priest communed, he did so because the lack of communicants to which the Body and Blood of Christ are actually distributed with the word "*take*" called the validity of the Supper into question to such a degree that Luther was willing to declare that it was no Lord's Supper at all. The bread from such false Lord's Supper which was then carried about in procession was also no sacrament, and all adoring of this bread was idolatry, for it was not the Body of Christ.

Today the locus of the controversies surrounding the practice of the Lord's Supper are the same as they were in the 16th century. In 500 years we are still considering the same questions as we evaluate our own practice of the Supper: What are the implications of the Words of Institution? When do we confess them? When do we deny them? When do we obey or disobey them?

We should all be grateful that the age of confession continued with the publication of the Formula of Concord. As with the doctrines of Election, and the Third Use of the Law, we have never grown beyond this confession, for it continues to address and resolve the controversies which the church militant endures. It directs us to the doctrinal writings of Luther, particularly his Great Confession on the Lord's Supper, and his definition of the action and time of the Sacrament which are as relevant today as when they were written. Were the Formula taken seriously, particularly by those who claim to confess it without exception, there would be no receptionists in the Lutheran Church. There would be no controversy concerning various practices in connection with the Lord's Supper. That we still endure such controversies, even the *very same* controversies, is a testament to the perpetual forgetting and arrogance of man. We all must confess with Elijah, "I am no better than my fathers" (1 Ki. 19:4).

Therefore let us learn from our fathers to hear and apply the Words of Christ by which He gave us His Supper, and judge our current practice according to it.

ADORATION

The adoration of the Sacrament refers to various external and internal forms of worship which the Church has long practice, and which are directed at the Body and Blood of Christ which is present in the elements of the Supper.

We noted above that such adoration begins even prior to the Real Presence when the Church sings the Sanctus, acknowledging that Christ Jesus is coming into our presence with Hosannas, and

again in the Agnus Dei where we sing to Christ, who is there with His true Body and Blood, waiting for us to eat and drink. To acknowledge Christ for His grace and mercy, and to recognize His sacramental presence among us to forgive us our sins is indeed adoration.

However, the adoration which is usually referred to by the term is kneeling, bowing, or lying prostrate before Christ's Body and Blood in the Supper. This adoration has at times been controversial in the Lutheran Church. Philip Melanchthon on several occasions called it *ἀρολατρεία*, or "bread worship," and it was a source of bitter contention between the inheritors of Luther's position on the one hand, and Melanchthon's on the other.

Historically speaking, there can be no doubt that Luther practiced adoration all his life, for we have eye-witness accounts of the same.²³ Yet at the same time, Luther is on record that one can neither command nor forbid such external adoration:

For this reason we say now that one should not condemn people or accuse them of heresy if they do not adore the Sacrament, for there is no command to that effect and it is not for that purpose that Christ is present. Just as we read that the Apostles did not adore the Sacrament since they were sitting and eating at the table. On the other hand, one should not condemn and accuse of heresy people who do adore the Sacrament. For although Christ has not commanded it, neither has He forbidden it, but often accepted it. Free, free it must be as you have devotion in your heart and opportunity. Therefore, both parties are to be blamed when they take a stand on either of these two sides and quarrel over this matter and condemn one another, and both of them miss the middle way. The first group would like to compel people not to adore the Sacrament, as if Christ were not there at all; and the other group would like to compel people to adore it, as if Christ's state of glory were in the Sacrament as it is in heaven.²⁴

But as to the adoration of the heart, that is required, for without it, one should not go to the Supper at all:

For example, if you bow or kneel before the Sacrament, and do not do so even much more before the Words of the Sacrament, especially in your heart, you are really inverting the honors.²⁵ . . .

Therefore where there is no faith and spiritual worship, it is better to stay far away. And one should not celebrate Mass except where there are only genuine Christians.²⁶

Shortly before his death, we see that Luther's position had not changed:

23. Cf. the witness of the Prince of Anhalt, who stated: "We have seen Luther throw himself on the floor with earnest and with reverence and worship Christ when the Sacrament was elevated." WATR, 5:308.15ff.

24. *On the Adoration of the Sacrament*, 1523, AE, 36, 295; WA, XI, 448.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

In the venerable Sacrament of the Altar, which one is to worship with all honor, the natural body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is veritably given and received, both by the worthy and the unworthy.²⁷

Regarding the Melanchthon's charge of "bread worship," it should be noted that Melanchthon is not on record using this term prior to Luther's death. Nevertheless Luther had already answered this charge when it was being made by Carlstadt. He writes in *Against the Heavenly Prophets*:

We do not teach that the form of the bread should be adored, venerated, or the Lord's death forgotten. Rather we do honor to the Body and Blood of Christ in the bread, as Carlstadt well knows.²⁸

This same distinction between worshipping bread and worshipping Christ who is present with the bread in His Body, is also expressed in the Formula of Concord regarding that which is rejected and condemned:

Likewise, the teaching that the elements (the visible forms of the blessed bread and wine) are to be adored. Of course, no one except an Arian heretic can or will deny Christ himself, true God and man, who is truly and essentially present in the Supper when it is rightly used, should be adored in spirit and in truth in all places but especially where his community is assembled.²⁹

The Epitome states the antithesis more briefly: "That the external visible elements of bread and wine in the holy sacrament should be adored."³⁰ It must be noted that this is once again referring to the adoration of the elements of bread and wine themselves, and not Christ's Body and Blood. This was in answer to the Council of Trent which explicitly ordered that the elements of bread and wine be worshiped.³¹ The statement of the Epitome cannot be taken to deny the Adoration of Christ in the Sacrament, particularly since the Solid Declaration even demands such adoration in one's spirit if one is truly a Christian at all. This is much in keeping with Luther's own statement, that the external adoration is an adiaphoron, but he who does not adore Christ in his spirit in the Sacrament, should not go to the Sacrament at all.

ELEVATION

Adoration has traditionally taken place in connection with the elevation of the Sacrament. Elevation refers to the practice of lifting up the elements off the altar, more commonly holding them up above the administrant's head.

27. AE 34, p. 355; WA 54, p. 432.

28. AE, 40, 201.

29. FC SD, VII, par. 126.

30. FC Ep., VII, par. 40.

31. Council of Trent, Session XIII, chap. 5, 6.

The situation with elevation is much the same as with adoration. It is neither commanded nor forbidden, but when it is properly understood, it is a confession that here, before your eyes, is Christ's Body and Blood. Luther notes:

We however take the middle course and say: There is to be neither commanding nor forbidding, neither to the right nor to the left. We are neither papistic nor Carlstadian, but free and Christian, in that we elevate or do not elevate the Sacrament, how, where, when, as long as it pleases us, as God has given us the liberty to do.³²

Luther, while he did not object to abolishing the elevation, preferred to retain it, specifically *because* it was a confession of the Real Presence over and against the Sacramentarians, and Carlstadt in particular:

And although I had intended to abolish the elevation also, now I will not do it, to defy for a while the fanatic spirit since he would forbid it and consider it a sin and make us depart from our liberty. For before I would yield a hairsbreadth or for a moment to this soul-murdering spirit and abandon our freedom (as St. Paul teaches — Gal. 5:1), I would much rather tomorrow become a strict monk and observe all the monastic rules as stringently as I ever did. This matter of Christian liberty is nothing to joke about. We want to keep it as pure and inviolate as our faith, even if an angel from heaven were to say otherwise. It has cost our dear, faithful Savior and Lord Jesus Christ too much. It is also altogether too necessary for us. We may not dispense with it without the loss of our salvation.³³

Luther writes in His *German Mass*:

We do not want to abolish the elevation, but retain it because it goes well with the German Sanctus and signifies that Christ has commanded us to remember Him. For as the Sacrament is elevated in a material manner and yet Christ's Body and Blood are not seen in it, so He is remembered and elevated by the Word of the sermon and is confessed and adored in the reception of the Sacrament. Yet it is all apprehended by faith, for we cannot see how Christ gives His Body and Blood for us and even now daily shows and offers it before God to obtain grace for us.³⁴

Again:

The priest intends this too when he lifts up the Sacrament and chalice and bells are rung along with it, which is nothing more than that we are thereby reminded of Christ's Word, as if the priest and bell-ringer were saying to us all, "Listen, you Christians, and look, then take and eat, take and drink, this is the Body and Blood of Christ."³⁵

The Table Talk records Elizabeth Cruciger asking Luther what one should do when he is present at a papal Mass and the sacrament is elevated. Luther's answer is striking:

Dear Els, just do not take the priest from the altar and do not blow out the candles! If I were in their church at the elevation of the Sacrament, it would be the same as if other hands were elevating; I

32. Against the Heavenly Prophets, AE, 40, 130.

33. Against the Heavenly Prophets, AE, 40, 133–134.

34. AE, 53, 82f.

35. Sermon for Maundy Thursday, WA, VII, p. 694. Tr. E. F. Peters.

would adore it in reverence for the Sacrament, because the true Sacrament is present, for its substantial elements are present.³⁶

Note well how Luther's acceptance of a practice is directly formed by his theology of the Real Presence. Because he recognizes the Body and Blood of Christ as soon as Christ has spoken, he is glad to elevate and adore the Body and Blood of Christ as a testimony to the Real Presence.

It should not be missed that these same testimonies of Luther speak against those who would only acknowledge the Real Presence in the eating and drinking. These statements are as much an indictment against the position of the Receptionists as they are against that of the Sacramentarians, and should put to rest any doubt concerning Luther's believe in an essential presence of the Body and Blood of Christ after the Consecration and before the Reception.

OSTENSIO

The Ostensio is literally a "showing" of the Body and Blood of Christ to the congregation. The Ostensio does not appear as a practice by itself in the Reformation literature, since where it was practiced it was usually considered part of the elevation. The term does appear, but it is difficult to determine whether it is merely a synonym for the elevation.

In our day it appears either in connection with the elevation, with the pastor often speaking words such as, "Behold the True Body of Christ," or after both elements have been consecrated, holding the chalice and a wafer before the congregation, and saying, "The peace of the Lord be with you always."

In any case, it is a displaying of the elements to the congregation, acknowledging that here is Christ's True Body and Blood according to His promise. As such it is an invitation, as much as saying, "Come, eat and drink to your salvation."

One can say of the ostensio what has already been said regarding the elevation and adoration: It cannot be required or forbidden.

However, when it is done, as with all ceremonies in the Church, vestments, or even the parts of the liturgy, the pastor is duty bound to teach His congregation the meaning of the liturgical actions which he performs. He does not want there to be any confusion between what God has commanded, and what we do in response to His command in Christian liberty, as a sincere expression of our faith in His Words. If the people are not taught, they will not know the difference, and will be more inclined to "go through the motions," with little or no understanding of what they do. Such mindless actions are not actions of faith. Adoration, elevation, and ostensio must be done in faith, in recognition of the Body and Blood of Christ, or they have indeed become mere idolatry. If the pastor is un-

36. WATR, I, 382–383, Nr. 803. This particular anecdote is found in four separate editions of the Table Talk. Note that Luther makes plain in this same context that he is not talking about private masses, but High masses, where the congregation is present and receiving the Supper.

willing to teach the meaning of such actions, then he is better off not doing them at all, lest he risk confusing that which we do in Christian freedom, with that which Christ has specifically commanded.

RESERVATION AND THE COMMUNING OF THE SICK

Reservation refers to the practice of setting aside part of the consecrated elements to be eaten and drunk later, or to be worshipped in processions.

We must be careful to distinguish between Reservation as it is practiced in the Papacy, and as it has been practiced in some places in the Lutheran Church. In the Papacy, Reservation occurred most often in connection with the private mass, whereby the priest holds a mass with no one but himself eating and drinking. Such reservation was done so that the consecrated bread (but not the wine) could be carried around in processions and worshipped. We reject such reservation outrightly. To have a Sacrament where there is no eating and drinking (other than that of the priest) is to have no Sacrament at all, for this is not what Christ has instituted. They intentionally do not do what Christ has commanded. Such reservation is universally condemned by Luther, Melancthon, and the later Lutherans.

However, here we must consider reservation which takes place in two other circumstances: when there are more elements than have been eaten and drunk, and when some elements are intentionally reserved so that they can later be carried to the sick.

Regarding the carrying of elements to the sick, there has been no universal practice in the Lutheran Church even in Luther's day. Luther looked upon it as a practice that should ultimately be abolished,³⁷ but allowed it for a time:

Concerning the chrisam and carrying the Sacrament to the sick, it may be allowed, as long as it is not used in a papistic fashion. However, in order that I may say to your electoral grace what I think: because I see that your electoral grace is serious about it, it seems to me that one might retain the use of these two practices anyway, but one ought not make them a part of the Reformation and put them into print. For since the preface says that this Reformation is to be founded upon Scripture and that its usages were to have been those of the early Church, these practices would arouse many jeers and accusations, and so would produce just the opposite, for there has been a great variety of church usages from the beginning. . . .

Therefore, carrying the Sacrament to the sick may remain as a practice (as long as it is to be done), and it is not necessary so establish it or command it in print, for this is an ordinance of human devotion and not God's command; therefore, one may do it but without superstition until one can do something better.

37. "Concerning the Sacrament of the Altar, how is one to deal with it when it is kept in ciborium and consecrated for the use of the sick?" Luther's response: "It is to be abolished," Letter to Prince George of Anhalt, Dec. 25, 1545, WA BR, XI, 245.

Also one should take the Sacrament from the altar in the Mass and not put it into a ciborium.³⁸

In the Table Talk, Luther is asked about carrying the Sacrament to the sick, and is recorded as answering:

We are not accustomed to do it. But then one has to let it continue for a while. It will probably fall into disuse because you have no ciborium. Then how can one do it? Here they are also disputing in the churches, whether or not one should carry the consecrated Sacrament to another altar. I, for my part, let it happen for the sake of several heretics, to whom one must give an answer, for there are some who want it to be a Sacrament only while it is in use; that is left over, they throw away. That is not right. We have someone consume it. One must not be so exact that four or five steps or a few hours [make the difference]. What harm does that do! How can one bless bread for each one? Therefore, we also retain the practice of elevating the Sacrament for the sake of certain heretics who say that it must be that way. But it does not have to be that way, because as long as one is in the action, whether or not one delays it an hour or two or carries it to another altar, or as with your people (he said to Cordatus) one carries it in the alleys, it still is and remains the Body of Christ.³⁹

Ultimately, there is no reason to reserve the Sacrament for the sick, and such a practice creates more problems than it solves. Furthermore, to reserve the sacrament and carry it to the sick ultimately takes the place of carrying out a consecration in front of the sick person, and thus depriving them of hearing the Word of Christ joined to the elements.

Too often this reservation is done as a matter of convenience, so that someone other than the pastor can visit the sick and carry the sacrament to them, most often by individuals who have no call to the ministry. This is also a problem, for God has specifically made His ministers the stewards of His mysteries, and it is the calling of pastors to administer the supper to his flock, a task they have no right to assign to another.

Our practice of the Supper should never be formed by what is convenient, but rather by the Words of Christ and the needs of Christ's people to hear His Words, and eat and drink His Supper for their salvation.

Finally, the more the eating and drinking of the supper is separated from the Words of Institution, the more and more the Sacrament is being kept anything but "whole and inviolate," words which the Formula uses regarding how we should practice the Supper.

DISPOSITION OF THE RELIQUA

One final, and important, question remains, one with which we began this paper. When does the Sacrament cease, and what should be done with any unconsumed consecrated elements, and how should we regard such elements?

38. Luther commenting on the Church Order of Mark Brandenburg in a letter to Elector Joachim II, WA BR, VIII, 623.

39. WATR, V, 55, Nr. 5314.

In order to take up this question, I have taken the liberty of saving one aspect of the doctrinal treatment for this last section. We have already asserted that one must stick to the Words of Christ when considering how one regards the Supper. Furthermore, that Christ has clearly stated when the Sacrament begins: after He has declared that the bread and wine is His Body and Blood when the Words of Institution are spoken. The remaining question as to when the Real Presence ceases, we have also addressed: Where Christ has not spoken, we must remain silent. Here Christ has declared the bread and wine to be His Body and Blood. We therefore have no right to set *any* time limit on His Words. We have no right, at any time, to say “Now the bread and wine are no longer His Body and Blood.” If we take the Words of our Lord seriously, we will not thereafter regard what He has consecrated with His Words to be anything other than what He declares it to be.

Therefore it is an error in itself to talk of any “ceasing” of the Real Presence. This forces us to consider the question of elements that remain far more seriously than we would otherwise be inclined. We cannot take what Christ has called His Holy Body and Blood, and consider it to be common bread and wine. Therefore we absolutely cannot mix consecrated and unconsecrated elements. Nor can we throw the consecrated elements away. To do so is scandal, error, and sin.

There are only three options in the end: Eat and drink all that is consecrated, reserve the elements separately to be consumed at a latter Lord’s Supper, or dispose of the elements.

The question then becomes: which of these is in keeping with Jesus’ Words? Which did Jesus tell us to do? The answer is plain. Jesus said “Take and eat; take and drink.” There should be nothing that remains because Jesus has already told us what to do with that which He has blessed. We should do what Jesus commanded. We are here at the supper. He has blessed the bread and wine. It is His Body and Blood. These He gives us with the command, “Eat,” “Drink.” Therefore that is what we do. The Sacrament must be kept integrally and inviolately.

The Formula declares:

But this blessing or recitation of Christ’s words of institution by itself, if the entire action of the Lord’s Supper as Christ ordained it is not observed (if, for instance, the blessed bread is not distributed, received, and eaten but is locked up, offered up, or carried about), does not make a sacrament.

But the command of Christ, “Do this,” which comprehends the whole action or administration of this sacrament (namely, that in a Christian assembly we take bread and wine, consecrate it, distribute it, receive it, eat and drink it, and therewith proclaim the Lord’s death), must be kept integrally and inviolately, just as St. Paul sets the whole action of the breaking of bread, or of the distribution and reception, before our eyes in 1 Cor. 10:16.

To maintain this true Christian doctrine concerning the Holy Supper and to obviate and eliminate many kinds of idolatrous misuse and perversion of this testament, the following useful rule and norm has been derived from the words of institution: Nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ, or apart from the divinely instituted action (that is, if one does not observe Christ’s institution as he ordained it, it is no sacrament). This rule dare not in any way be rejected, but it can and should be profitably urged and retained in the church of God.

In this context “use” or “action” does not primarily mean faith, or the oral eating alone, but the entire external and visible action of the Supper as ordained by Christ: the consecration or words of institution, the distribution and reception, or the oral eating of the blessed bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ.

Apart from this use it is not to be deemed a sacrament, as when in the papistic Mass the bread is not distributed but is offered up, or locked up, or carried about, or exposed for adoration, just as the baptismal water is no sacrament or Baptism if it should be used to consecrate bells, or to cure leprosy, or is otherwise exposed for adoration. It was against such papistic abuses that this rule was first formulated and explained by Dr. Luther.⁴⁰

The key words here are that the whole action of the Sacrament must be kept *integrally and inviolately*. What then is “the whole action”? The Formula directs us to Luther’s explanation of the action and time of the Sacrament. The footnote in the 1580 Book of Concord directs us to Luther’s letter to Simon Wolferinus, where this explanation can be found:⁴¹

Therefore, one must look not only upon this movement of instant or present action, but also on the time, not in terms of mathematical but of physical breadth, that is, one must give this action a certain period of time, and a period of appropriate breadth of time, as they say, “in breadth.”

Therefore, we shall define the time or the sacramental action in this way: that it starts with the beginning of the Our Father and lasts until all have communicated, have emptied the chalice, have consumed the Hosts, until the people have been dismissed and [the priest] has left the altar. In this way we shall be safe and free from the scruples and scandals of such endless questions. Dr. Philip defines the sacramental action in relation to what is outside it, that is, against reservation of and processions with the Sacrament; he does not split it up within [the action] itself, nor does he define it in a way that it contradicts itself. Therefore see to it that if anything is left over of the Sacrament, either some communicants or the priest himself and his assistant receive it, so that it is not only a curate or someone else who drinks what is left over in the chalice, but that he gives it to the others who were also participants in the Body [of Christ], so that you do not appear to divide the Sacrament by a bad example or to treat the Sacramental action irreverently.⁴²

This understanding of the time of the Sacrament was critical for Luther. Wolferinus was insisting that there was no Real Presence apart from the eating and drinking, and that therefore it was perfectly fine to mix the consecrated and unconsecrated elements together after the Supper had ended.

40. FC SD, VII, par. 83–87.

41. It should be noted that this is the *only* place in the writings of Luther where such an explanation can be found, so there is no doubt as to what writing of Luther was meant by the Formula. This so-called “lost” Luther reference was never lost, but was in the exact volume of the Jena edition of Luther’s Works that is indicated by the Formula. Wisconsin Synod writers have made desperate attempts to make the reference apply to a letter which Luther wrote to Carlstadt, a letter in which Luther makes no attempt whatever to explain the usus rule, or even to mention the rule. The reason for this is plain enough: they are uncomfortable with the Formula directing us to a writing of Luther which directly contradicts their doctrine of the Lord’s Supper.

42. WA BR, X, 348–349.

Luther refused to allow the Sacrament to be defined this way. To do that would abolish the Sacrament entirely:

For you can do what we do here, namely, to eat and drink the remains of the sacrament with the communicants, so that it is not necessary to raise these scandalous and dangerous questions about when the action of the Sacrament ends, questions in which you will choke unless you come to your senses. For with this argument you are abolishing the whole Sacrament, and you do not have anything with which to answer those who are making false accusations, who say that in the action of the Sacrament there is more cessation than action.⁴³

And again:

Indeed Dr. Philip wrote rightly that there is no Sacrament outside of the sacramental action; but you are defining the sacramental action much too hastily and abruptly. If you do it in this way, you will appear to have absolutely no Sacrament. For if such a quick breaking off of the action really exists, it will follow that after the speaking of the Words [of Institution], which is the most powerful and principal action in the Sacrament, no one would receive the Body and Blood of Christ, because the action would have ceased.⁴⁴

As you can see, the matter of Luther's definition of the time and action of the Sacrament is not an adiaphoron. It is a confession of Christ's words. To mix consecrated and unconsecrated elements together could only be done after one had defined away the Sacrament entirely. This is what happens when one attempts to use the rule "Nothing has the character of a Sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ" to divide the Sacrament within itself.

Luther was, unfortunately, too generous to Melancthon in asserting that the latter had no intention of dividing the Sacrament with this rule. That is precisely what Melancthon did, as became especially evident after Luther's death. Be that as it may, Luther's position is clear, and it is not Melancthon's but Luther's position that the Formula of Concord adopts.

Therefore we will only speak of the Sacrament ceasing when we have done the entire action that Christ has commanded, namely, eaten and drunk *everything* which He has declared to be His Body and Blood.

Any alternative to this requires us either to 1) Reserve the Sacrament, 2) Discard or destroy the Sacrament, or 3) Deny the words of Jesus.

This is why the Formula insists that the entire Sacrament be kept *integrally and inviolately*, and this means, in particular, that there is no division between the consecration and the eating and drinking. Reservation would introduce such a division, and bring in questions and controversies that are entirely unnecessary. Furthermore, because Reservation would cause a division in the Supper, it

43. *Ibid.*, 341.

44. *Ibid.*, 348.

would cast doubt upon the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ, and even introduce scandalous questions such as: What if a mouse comes and eats the reserved Sacrament?

If we are serious about the practice of the Real Presence, we will do exactly what we confess in the Formula: eat and drink everything that is consecrated as part of the divine service in which it is consecrated, and thus keep the Sacrament undivided.

We must absolutely reject and condemn the practice of mixing consecrated and unconsecrated elements together. This is directly contrary to the words of Christ, and clearly condemned by Luther (who called it the insanity of Zwingli, and a despising of the Sacrament), and the Formula of Concord. To repeat the same:

But the command of Christ, “Do this,” which comprehends the whole action or administration of this sacrament (namely, that in a Christian assembly we take bread and wine, consecrate it, distribute it, receive it, eat and drink it, and therewith proclaim the Lord’s death), must be kept integrally and inviolately, just as St. Paul sets the whole action of the breaking of bread, or of the distribution and reception, before our eyes in 1 Cor. 10:16.⁴⁵

PRACTICING THE WORDS OF JESUS

It should be evident that there is a clear divide in the Lutheran Church concerning the practice of the Lord’s Supper. For a significant number of Lutherans, primarily in the Receptionist camp, practices such as Adoration, Elevation, and Ostensio are not adiaphora. They condemn them as idolatry.

The reason for this condemnation should now be evident: The Receptionists have a different doctrine of the Real Presence, a different understanding of the Consecration, and a different understanding of the purpose of the Words of Institution. In some congregations it has become common that the Words of Institution are spoken as a history lesson, facing toward the congregation and away from the elements. Such a practice is perfectly in keeping with their doctrine of Real Presence. Since in their minds, the Words of Institution and their purpose in consecration is merely to announce the intent of the congregation, they have nothing to do with the Real Presence, or the elements of bread and wine. How far they have fallen from the Formula’s doctrine:

And thereby the elements of bread and wine are hallowed or blessed in this holy use, so that therewith the body and blood of Christ are distributed to us to eat and to drink, as Paul says, “The cup of blessing which we bless,” which happens precisely through the repetition and recitation of the words of institution.⁴⁶

On the contrary, they call adiaphora that which denies the Words of Jesus: mixing consecrated and unconsecrated elements.⁴⁷ But in their mind it does not deny Jesus’ words at all, for the Words of

45. FC SD, VII, par. 84.

46. FC SD, VII, par. 82.

47. In contrast, Luther wrote Wolferinus: “Perhaps you want to be considered a Zwinglian, and am I to

Institution have nothing to do with the Real Presence when they are spoken before the congregation. It is only intent that matters, and the intention of the congregation to commune is carried out only in the eating and drinking itself. That concerning which Jesus has declared, “This is my Body, This is my Blood,” to them is mere bread and wine, and thus they may do anything to it they wish, for the consecration was not *effective* for them in the first place. The only *effective* consecration they acknowledge is Jesus’ first speaking. The rest is, literally, history.

An individual practice may be adiaphora, but one’s reaction to it certainly is not. The Receptionists condemn the Consecrationists for worshipping mere bread and wine. The Consecrationists condemn the Receptionists for profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord. These two positions cannot be reconciled. There is no middle ground between “This is my Body” and “This is only bread.”

Those of us who have claimed that the consumption of the reliquia is not an adiaphora but is required by the Words of Christ and the Formula of Concord are not schismatics who are attempting to divide the Church. The Church is already divided on this point, and the division is not one merely of practice, but of a different doctrine.

Our insistence on this point should be judged in its context. We have not made every point of practice a matter of division. We are perfectly content to grant that many practices surrounding the Supper are indeed neither commanded nor forbidden. Our congregations do not adhere to a perfectly consistent practice regarding the Supper. Some adore and some do not. Some elevate and some do not.

Yet the presence of adiaphora in one’s practice does not make all related practices adiaphora. There is a line beyond which one’s practice comes into direct conflict with the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. At such points, one has a choice: He can stubbornly adhere to a false practice, but if he does so, he will inevitably have to justify his practice by altering his doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. This is the path of congruodoxy.

The more difficult but rewarding path requires much of the man who has up until now been guilty of an erring practice. Now he must correct himself, and teach his congregation rightly. But therein lies the reward, for to teach one’s congregation about the right practice, he will teach them about the Words of Jesus, who is even now coming into our presence according to His promise. Jesus does not only speak from history, but He speaks in their presence, bringing about, right before their eyes, what His words declare. This makes all the difference in the world.

believe that you are afflicted with the insanity of Zwingli, when you are so proudly and contemptuously irritating, with this peculiar and magnificent wisdom of yours? Was there no other way for you to avoid giving the suspicion to the weak and to the enemy that you are despiser of the Sacrament, than to cause offense with this evil appearance that what is left of the Sacrament is to be mixed, poured in with [unconsecrated] wine?” WABr, X, 340–341.

When the practice of the Lord's Supper confesses the doctrine of the Real Presence from beginning to end, it directs the communicants away from themselves and their receiving, and directs them toward the promise of Christ, and the Body and Blood which they receive. It externalizes the Lord's Supper so that the Promise of Christ is truly coming to them as a free and gracious gift to be grasped and eaten and drunk. The mystery of the Real Presence remains: none can explain how Christ is there in bread and wine with His Body and Blood, but the mysticism is gone whereby His presence has become some undefined and undefinable reality. On the contrary: Christ is right there where He says He is. He is right there, for me and for my sins.

S. D. G.

M. W. Diers