

The Biblical and Lutheran Doctrine of the Lord's Supper

by Docent Seth Erlandsson

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Every Christian doctrine must be based on a clear word of the Bible, on the *sedes doctrinae*, i.e., clear passages of Scripture that specifically deal with the question involved. If an article of faith becomes a matter of controversy between Christians, it must be examined in the light of Scripture, not in the light of some "interpretation" of a Scriptural statement but in the light of the bare word of Scripture itself.¹

The biblical doctrine of the Holy Supper must be based on the words of institution which are found in Matthew 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:17–20, and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. Besides these, the Supper is also treated in 1 Corinthians 11:27ff and 1 Corinthians 10:16–17.

From the words of institution it follows that the Supper consists of a) the blessing (Gr. *eucharistia* - "praised" or *eucharistia* - "spoke a thanksgiving"), b) the distribution, and c) the reception. It is in connection with the distribution and reception that we are accustomed to calling it communion, as Jesus says, "Take, eat! This is my body" and "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood, (the blood) of the testament, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:26ff). From the words, "giving it to the disciples He said" (Mt 26:26), "gave to them and said" (Mt 26:27; Mk 14:22). "gave it to them saying" (Lk 22:19), it follows that the words of Jesus "This is my body," "This is my blood" belong together with the communion. The word "This" refers to something very definite. "This" does not refer to any bread or wine, but definitely to *that bread and wine which is distributed and received*. The Lord's Supper texts do not deal with the question of *when* and *how* the bread and wine *become* the body and blood of Christ. The text reveals to us that the bread and wine which are distributed and received are also the body and blood of Christ.

Christ has commanded His disciples to celebrate often that meal which He instituted in the night in which He was betrayed. That follows from the words, "This is my body, which is given for you. *This do in remembrance of me!*" (Lk 22:19). "This cup is the new testament in my blood. *This do, as oft as you drink it, in remembrance of me!* For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:25f.). This means that when we today celebrate the Supper in accord with the word and institution of Christ, the bread and wine which are distributed and received are the body and blood of Christ just as they were at the first Supper. Those who like Zwingli deny the real presence of the true body and blood in *our* Supper have come into conflict with the clear and easily understood words of the Bible.

The words "This is my body" are simple and easily understood and cannot be interpreted away. 1) The word "This" ties the real presence to *that bread and wine which were given to the disciples to eat and to drink*. The body and blood of Christ are united with the bread and the wine in a sacramental union. The bread has not ceased to be bread, and the wine has not ceased being wine, but these elements are also the body and blood of Christ. 2) The word "is" tells us that there we are dealing with a real connection between the bread and the body of Christ. No one has a right to change the word "is" into "signifies" or "symbolizes." 3) The words "my body, which is given for you" show that we are dealing with just that body which was given on the cross for all of our sins. This body is present and united with the consecrated bread, which is distributed and received orally.

He who eats this bread also thus becomes a sharer in the body of Christ. "The bread which we break (distribute) is it not a sharing of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). Not only the one who *believes* that he receives the body of Christ in the Supper truly receives it with his mouth, but also the one who does not believe this. Only he receives it not for life and salvation, but to his judgment. This follows from 1 Corinthians 11:27: "He that eats this bread and drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily, sins against *the body and blood of the Lord.*" It is not bread and wine against which he sins but against "the body and blood of the Lord," and his

¹ Cp. F. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1924), I, 426f.

unbelief becomes a judgment over him. “For he who eats and drinks without making a distinction between it and other food eats and drinks judgment to himself” (1 Cor 11:29).

From 1 Corinthians 11:27 it also follows that it is not our faith which makes the bread and wine be the body and blood of Christ, for also those who do not believe partake of the body and blood of Christ in union with the bread and the wine. That which brings about the real presence in our Supper is solely and alone the almighty power of Jesus Christ. The words “This is my body” and “This is my blood” are just as true as they were at the first Supper, since Christ with His words “Do this” commanded us to celebrate the same supper repeatedly. My certainty that the body and blood of Christ are given to me in the Supper is thus founded on the Word and institution of Christ, and not on my qualifications nor on those of the pastor. And since the foundation is the Word and institution of Christ, the Supper must be celebrated in accord therewith, without any reinterpretation or change.

The Supper is to be celebrated in remembrance of Christ (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24f.). It is Christ, His atoning death for all sins, who stands in the center. As often as we celebrate the Supper according to Christ’s institution, we proclaim the Lord’s death (1 Cor 11:26), that Christ’s body and blood were given and shed for us for all our sins. In the Lord’s Supper I not only get to hear the gospel about Christ’s death for all my sins. In the Supper I receive the forgiveness of sins just as surely as I receive with my mouth the body and blood as a pledge that all my sins are forgiven. Only unbelief can deny this fact. Therefore only he is unworthy to receive the Lord’s Holy Supper who does not believe the words, “This is my body,” “This is my blood,” given and shed for you “for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28).

Some Truths about the Lord’s Supper Drawn from the Formula of Concord

The Lutheran confession, the Formula of Concord, which was completed in 1577, is biblical theology in the best meaning of that term. The eleven articles of this confession only aim at a comprehensive statement of the clear and easily understood teaching of Scripture on certain controverted questions of doctrine. The Formula seeks to do no more than to ground each doctrinal assertion in the bare and clear Word of Scripture. The biblical doctrine of the Lord’s Supper is summarized in Article VII. Here follows a short outline of some important points. (Translator’s note—while all references to the Confessions have been translated from the Swedish, the page numbers are those of the *Concordia Triglotta*.)

1. The glorious sacrament of the Holy Supper is ordained for the Christian congregation. It should be used with great reverence and humility until the end of the world and be an eternal remembrance of the bitter suffering of Christ, His death and all His blessings. It is the seal and confirmation of the new testament, a comfort for all troubled and terrified consciences, the firm band of Christian fellowship and a close union with Christ the Head and between Christians mutually (p 987).
2. The Lord’s Supper is instituted especially for the weak in faith, that they may find in it comfort and strengthening for their weak faith. There is only one kind of unworthy guest at the Lord’s Table, namely those who do not have faith. The worthiness of the guest at the Supper consists only in “the most holy obedience and perfect merit of Christ.” This merit we make our own through a true faith (p 813).
3. The true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are truly and essentially present in the Supper, are distributed with the bread and wine and received orally by all those who use this sacrament, irrespective of whether they are worthy or unworthy, good or evil, believing or unbelieving (p 809).
4. It is not faith which brings about the presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Supper but only “the almighty word of Christ’s testament” (p 815). Also the unworthy and the unbelieving partake of the true body and blood of Christ in the sacrament, but this becomes for them judgment and condemnation (p 813).

5. The body and blood of Christ are received with the bread and wine not only by faith but also with the mouth, yet not in a Capernaïtic but a supernatural and heavenly way as a result of the sacramental union (p 811).
6. In the Supper “a sacramental union between the nature of the bread, which is not changed, and the body of Christ” takes place (p 985). As the two distinct natures of Christ are indissolubly united without being altered, so also in the Lord’s Supper, two unlike natures, namely, the natural bread and the true and natural body of Christ, are here on earth present together in the ordained sacramental action (p 985).
7. In the sacramental words of institution Christ expressly speaks of his true and real body, which He has given into death for us, and of His true and real blood, which He shed on the cross for us for the forgiveness of sins (p 989).
8. We ought not to adore the external elements of bread and wine (p 817). But Christ Himself, who is true God and true man, ought also in the Lord’s Supper to be worshiped in spirit and in truth (p 1015).

The Question Concerning the Moment When the Presence Begins and Ends

We have already pointed out that the biblical texts have nothing to say concerning the question of *when* and *how* the bread and wine *become* the body and blood of Christ. The text speaks only about what it is (Latin: *est*) that Christ gave His disciples to eat and to drink. Just as the text which tells us of the miracle of the wine at Cana (Jn 2) does not concern itself with the question of *when* and *how* the water *became* wine (did it take place gradually as the jars were filled, or when all six jars had been filled, or when it was drunk?), so also the Lord’s Supper texts do not concern themselves with such questions as “In which moment does the presence begin?” and “When does the presence end if something is left over (*reliqua sacramenti*)?” The text gives us full certainty about *what we receive* in the Holy Supper and *what is distributed* by virtue of the word and institution of Christ. The words “This is my body” belong together with the distribution, since they are preceded by the words, “He gave it to them and said, Take and eat!” The text also says nothing about the bread and wine which were eventually left over. It speaks only of the bread and wine which are distributed and received.

How did it come about that the question about the beginning of the presence has arisen when the biblical texts do not take up the question? To a certain extent this certainly has its occasion in our communion liturgy. We have seen that the Lord’s Supper consists of a) the blessing, b) the distribution, and c) the reception. At the first Supper the words “This is my body” and “This is my blood” were spoken in connection with b) and c), i.e., the distribution and the reception. In our Supper these words are spoken in connection with a) the blessing, which is separated in time from the distribution and reception. For him who pays attention to the meaning of institution this, however, creates no problem, for he in conformity with the text connects the words “This is my body” and “This is my blood” with the distribution and reception. He is satisfied with not allowing the time element to separate the words from the action.

Martin Luther, who vehemently emphasized that it is the all-powerful word of Christ which creates the sacramental union between the bread and Christ’s body, never permitted the separation in time between the speaking of the words and the distribution to obscure the fact that the speaking and the distribution belong together. *By virtue of the spoken words, which are identical with the words spoken by Christ at the first Supper, we know what is given to us to eat and to drink.* In a letter to Carlstadt from 1528 Luther touches on the question of the relation of the word to distribution. There he states that “the words have reference to the bread which is distributed in the Supper.”² For, says Luther, the participle “saying” (*dicens*) proves that Christ, while he was giving, said, This is my body....So it ought to happen every time it is given, that the giver at the same time gives and says or names that which he gives. About the question of the “moment of consecration” he writes in the same letter, “We do not quarrel about in which moment the leper was cleansed, when Jesus said,

² Tom G.A. Hardt, *Venerabilis & Adorabilis Eucharistia* (Uppsala: Ljungbergs Boktryckeri, 1971), p 229.

Mt 8: I will; be thou clean, but it is enough (*satis est*) that we believe that he was cleansed, as Jesus said.” “We avoid all unnecessary quarrels about words, in which men dispute about moments or letters of the alphabet. For it is prescribed to us that we should believe the true words of God and not seek to discover in what moment or in what way they are true and go into fulfillment” (WA Br4, No. 1214, pp 363–371).

It seems clear that Luther saw a danger in separating the words from the action, the meal, by too long an *interval of time*, since that could also lead to an *actual* separation between words and action, as was the case, for example, with the Roman Catholics. An actual joining of words and action should be made easy by joining the words also *in time* as closely as possible with the action. For that reason also Luther tried in his *Deutsche Messe* of 1526 to reduce the temporal separation which is still found in his *Formula Missae* of 1523 to a minimum. In a very radical way he now broke with the earlier tradition and permitted the distribution to follow immediately upon the words “Take and eat! This is my body.” Only after that was the cup consecrated to be distributed in turn. Luther, in other words, tried to approach more nearly the practice of the first Supper by also tying together the same words “This is my body,” “This is my blood” with the distribution of the gifts. And yet Luther has not dogmatized about the question but allowed the liturgical practice to remain an open question.

Laurentius Petri (1499–1573), who emphasized strongly that the presence is effectively produced by the words of institution, was of the opinion that if any bread and wine was left over after the communion (*reliqua sacramenti*), this should as ordinary bread and wine be kept to be used at the next celebration of the sacrament. Also he was of the opinion that the consecration would not need to be repeated (later consecration), if the bread and wine was used up and additional bread and wine would have to be obtained. Since the words “This is my body,” “This is my blood” point to *that bread and wine which is distributed and received, they apply to everything that is distributed and not to that which is not distributed (reliqua sacramenti)*. Other Lutheran theologians, e.g., Luther himself,³ have emphasized the importance of later consecration, if additional bread and wine had to be gotten.

The Saliger Controversy

In the 1560’s some Lutheran pastors, first in Danzig and then in Luebeck and Rostock, stirred up a controversy concerning the moment of the beginning of the real presence, about later consecration, and about the *reliqua* (that which was left over). Because the biblical texts do not deal with these questions, it is understandable that human speculations and conclusions should be many and diverse. That a *time* separation between consecration and distribution could lead to an *actual* separation of the words from the act of distribution now became evident. John Saliger accused all those of being false teachers and sacramentarians who did not fix the moment for the beginning of the real presence as the moment of consecration. He used, in a provocative way, such expressions as that God lay on the altar or on the plate. He demanded that nothing of what had been consecrated be left over and insisted that it was a great sin if the leftover bread and wine was mixed with ordinary bread and wine after the consecration.

Saliger’s accusations against the orthodox Lutherans that they were celebrating the Supper in a wrong way and that they were sacramentarians and Melancthonians created great unrest in Luebeck, where Saliger was pastor, in 1568. As a consequence of Saliger’s “offensive way of expressing himself” and his accusations against the orthodox Lutherans he was deposed. His accusations were rejected as unjustified. So far as the *reliqua* were concerned, every dispute about the nature of what was left over was rejected as *abwegig* (leading astray). It was also emphasized that the *verba testamenti* (the words of institution) alone did not make the sacrament but that they must be joined to the whole action.

After Saliger promised to stop his attacks against his colleagues and not to involve himself in useless speculations, he was accepted as pastor in Rostock. But there he was met with a great deal of suspicion, and the controversy blossomed forth once more, after Saliger in his sermons in the last days of 1568 and the beginning of 1569 vehemently attacked also the pastors in Rostock as not being orthodox Lutherans. In February of 1569

³ Cp. C.F.W. Walther, *Pastorale* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1906), pp 172ff.

the ministerium rejected these accusations and accused Saliger, among other things, of the following: that he had renewed the Luebeck controversy, that he had used “offensive expressions” about the elements already before the distribution, that he had designated his colleagues as new sacramentarians without justification, that he had taken with him into the pulpit six or seven books in order to draw from them proof for his doctrine and in this way to give the impression that the rest of the preachers were sacramentarians, and that he would not listen to admonition.

At the end of March 1569 the superintendent in Wismar, *Johann Wigand* (1523–1587), gave out a statement in the matter. He was of the opinion that there was *de facto* agreement between Saliger and his opponents concerning this that the real presence was a reality already before the eating, and he hoped that the great Rostock theologian, *David Chytraeus* (1531–1600), in an essay would bring about full clarity in regard to the problem. Wigand emphasized in his statement what it is that is distributed and received in the Supper in consequence of the words of Christ, which are repeated at His command. He emphasized that “the consecrated bread is the true body of Christ also before the eating, which, however, ought to follow in order and immediately (*ordentlich und alsobald*).” Wigand, however, did not propose any doctrine about the exact moment when the presence began.

Chytraeus’ attitude toward the Saliger controversy is of the greatest interest, since he was one of the chief authors of the Formula of Concord and especially of Article VII on the Lord’s Supper (J.W. Montgomery is of the opinion that Chytraeus is the sole author of Art. VII, Sol. Decl.).⁴ In a letter to Saliger on April 18, 1569, Chytraeus called the controversy which Saliger had begun unnecessary and a mark of “presumptuousness.” He held that it was sufficient (*satis est*) to know from the words of institution that the bread which is distributed to me in the Supper is “the true body of Christ.” “What point is there in disputing about the bread which lies on the plate or which is left over after the reception?”

In October 1569 the “Mecklenburg Edict” (the so-called *Abschied*) was issued. It was for the most part the work of Chytraeus. This edict, which in an ecclesiastically legal way settled the Saliger controversy for the region of Mecklenburg, has to a certain extent influenced the seventh article of the Formula of Concord, which deals with the Lord’s Supper. In the first paragraph of the edict it says that the dukes order all preachers and teachers in the church and the university of Rostock “not to create or carry on unnecessary, confused, and confusing disputes and logomachies...” As such it designates the question of “How and when and in what way the bread in the sacrament is the body of Christ.” The edict also refers to the above-mentioned letter of Luther to Carlstadt in 1528: “For we do not prescribe to God any moment or any time, says Dr. Luther, but it is enough for us that we simply believe that what God says shall happen or be, will certainly happen.”

Saliger was invited to abstain from further controversy and to accept the Mecklenburg Edict. He refused and was deposed in October 1569. He now moved to Wismar and continued to attack his opponents as false teachers. Later he came to Hamburg and finally to Woerden in Holland.

Together with Chytraeus, *Martin Chemnitz* (1522–1586) and *Jacob Andreae* (1528–1590) are mainly responsible for the text of the Formula of Concord. Besides them, *Nicolaus Selnecker* (1530–1592) had much to do with the production of the Formula, not as author but as a driving force behind this effort at achieving unity.

Chemnitz, who, like Luther, gives prominence to the powerful effect of the words of institution, makes no doctrine of any “moment of consecration,” and he does not give any indication of rejecting the position of Chytraeus in the Saliger controversy or in the Mecklenburg Edict. On the contrary, he had great confidence in Chytraeus and the Rostock faculty. In the Luebeck confession of June 9, 1574, the Mecklenburg Edict is extensively quoted. In his examination of this confession Chemnitz demonstrates a very favorable attitude toward it.

In his *Examen Concilii Tridentini* I–IV (1569–1573) Chemnitz discusses the danger of separating the consecration from the communion and teaching a presence apart from the distribution and reception. This is done in the “Second Part,” *De Eucharistia Sacramento*, in the *Examen* of Chapter III and Canon III and IV. One

⁴ John Warwick Montgomery, *Chytraeus on Sacrifice* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), p 21.

is struck by certain similarities between the argumentation of Saliger and that of the papists, as it has been referred to here.⁵

Against the papists Chemnitz stated that the words of institution must be kept together with the sacramental action (*actio, usus*), for Christ said, “This is my body,” in connection with the *giving*, the *taking*, and the *eating* (“gave it to them and said, Take and eat! This is my body”). The consecration is counted as part of the *actio* or *usus*, because it belongs organically together with the distribution and reception. The consecration must not be carried out as a part that can stand by itself, an *actio* by itself, aside from the distribution and reception. When one forgets that the consecration aims at the distribution and reception, one gives to the consecration an *actio* of its own, a series of ceremonies that have no relation to the communion. Just as the *actio* in baptism is *that one baptizes*, so the *actio* in the Supper is *that one distributes and receives consecrated bread and wine*.⁶ In that *actio* the words “This is my body,” “This is my blood” are to find their home. “For it is in regard to that consecrated bread which is distributed, received, and eaten that Christ gives us the assurance: This is my body” (*De benedicto enim pane qui distribuitur, accipitur, et manducatur, Christus affirmat: Hoc est corpus meum*). In that way we know that what is distributed in the Lord’s Supper is the body of Christ (*quod distribuitur in Coena, est corpus Christi*).

The error of the papists is that they do not keep the whole institution (*tota institutio*) together, but tear a certain part (*particula illa*) out of it, namely, “This is my body,” “This is my blood.” But these words may not be viewed as separate from the distribution and reception but are to be bound to that action. “When the words of institution are thus spoken over bread and wine and the use (*usus*) and the action (*actio*) is not there and does not take place (*non adest vel accedit*), which is not only prescribed in the institution but also commanded, the truth forces us to think and to say without question, that there Christ is not present with His body and His blood.”

When the words of Christ “This is My body” are separated in fact and in thought from “the giving, the reception, and the eating,” Chemnitz speaks about *ante usum* (before the use). He does not intend to say here that the words of the testament in our liturgy must be read at the same time with the distribution but that they must *factually* and *conceptually* be kept together with the distribution. To make it easy to do this in a liturgy in which the words of institution are separated *in time* from the distribution, it is customary to add certain words at the distribution. In our liturgy the distribution words, “Christ’s body given for you,” “Christ’s blood shed for you,” are used as support for keeping the word and the action factually and conceptually joined. When the words, “This is My body,” “This is My blood” are connected with any other action (*alia actio*) than that which is commanded in the institution, this, according to Chemnitz, is a question of *ante usum* (before the use) or *extra usum* (outside the use).⁷

Nor did *Andreae* wish to fix the moment when the real presence begins in the Supper or to make any doctrine about a presence apart from the sacramental action itself in which the consecrated gifts are distributed and received.

In 1590 *Selnecker* wrote the book *Vom Heiligen Abendmal / was es sey, und was man darin austeile / und neme* (printed in 1591). This is, he said, “my confession in God’s name concerning the Holy Supper”:

⁵ Cp. Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959), p 175, fn. 106, where Sasse speaks of the “papistic” way in which Saliger expressed himself and his faith.

⁶ “*Institutio enim inquit: Baptizate eos. Quod si extra illum usum, verba institutionis super aquam pronuncientur, non faciunt Sacramentum: sed magis est prophanatio nominis divini, si aqua verbis institutionis sanctificata, non accomodetur ad eum usum, quem institutio praescribit, aut si transferatur ad aliam actionem, quam quae in institutione mandata est.*” In the same vein about the Lord’s Supper: “*Institutio inquit: fregit, hoc est distribuit, dedit discipulis, & iussit ut acceperent, ut domederent & biberent. Haec verba certe extra omnem controversiam, actionem significant, & quidem expresse utitur verbo faciendi, inquit enim: Hoc facite, quod scilicet in prima hac mea coena factum est. Si igitur iuxta institutionem iudicandum est, erit Sacramentum Eucharistiae, certa quaedam actio, & consistet in usu, non minus quam Baptismus.*”

⁷ We may not join the word “This is my body,” “This is my blood” with any other “*usum Eucharistiae, quam qui in verbis institutionis praescriptus & mandatus est.*” “*Institutam esse normam & regulam, ex qua & secundam quam omnes tales quaestiones & disputationes diiudicandae sunt.*”

The Holy Supper is the special ordinance, institution, and testament of Christ which is to be celebrated, distributed, and received in His Christian churches and among their members as He has commanded until His return in the last days. That means that when the consecrated bread is distributed and received in agreement with the Word of Christ, then also likewise the body of the Lord Christ, which was given for us, that is, His true, real human body, is distributed and received or eaten; and when the consecrated cup or wine is distributed and received in agreement with the Word of Christ, then also in like manner the blood of the Lord Christ, which was shed for our sins, that is, His true, real human blood, is distributed and received or drunk.

These are and are called an institution and testament of the Lord Christ, as the words say, Take, eat, this is My body, which is given for you; Take, drink, this is My blood, which is shed for you. He who has ears, of course hears what Christ says and what he should take, eat, and drink, namely, bread and body, wine and blood.⁸

We see how clearly Selnecker keeps together the words and the distribution and reception, and he does not enter into any speculation about the words separated from the action.

The Formula of Concord Concerning Consecration

We have seen above how the authors of the FC refused to dogmatize about the beginning of the presence, to fix a time for the effect of the consecration. The reason for this is simple: the biblical text speaks only about *that bread and wine which is distributed and received* in the Supper. Since every article of doctrine must be built on clear and easily understood proof passages in the biblical text, one cannot make articles of faith about things which God has not revealed.

Let us summarize the teaching of the FC concerning the consecration and its effect. The FC has nothing to say of any moment of consecration. It is satisfied to keep word and action together. Some examples: The reading of the words of institution by itself does not make a sacrament. The whole sacramental action must be kept in view. To the whole action belongs the consecration, the distribution, and the reception. Apart from this use there is no sacrament (p 1003). Apart from the sacramental use, when the bread is placed and reserved in some vessel or displayed in processions, the body of Christ is not present (p 977). The bread is the body of Christ through a sacramental union, “That is, that, when the bread is distributed, the body of Christ is also present and truly distributed” (p 975). It is maintained that the words “This is My body” are said “about the consecrated and distributed bread” (p 991). “Just as the words (Gen. 1:28) ‘Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth,’ were only spoken once but are always efficacious in nature to make things grow and multiply, so also these words (this is My body, this is My blood) were spoken once, but they give power to this sacrament and permanence in all places *where the Lord’s Supper is distributed* until this day and until He comes again” (p 999). The following Luther word is quoted: “This command and institution from Him can and does bring it about *that we do not distribute and receive only bread and wine but also His body and blood*. For His words say: This is My body, this is My blood. Therefore it is *not our officiating or our speaking* that brings it about that the bread is Christ’s body and the wine is His blood, but the command, the ordinance of Christ. And

⁸ “Das heilige Abendmal ist des Herrn Christi sonderbare verordnung/ einsetzung und Testament/ das man also/ wie ers befohlen/ in seiner Christlichen Kirchen/ und bey derselben Gliedmassen/ halten/ austheilen und empfaehen sol/ bis zu seiner Zukunfft zum Juengsten Gericht/ nemlich/ das wenn das gesegnete Brodt nach laut der Wort Christi ausgetheilet und genommen wird/ zugleich auch des Herrn Christi Leib/ der fuer uns gegeben/ das ist/ sein warer Wesentlicher Menschlicher Leib/ ausgetheilet und genommen/ oder gessen werde/ und wenn der gesegnete Kelch oder Wein/ nach laut der Wort Christi ausgetheilet und genommen wird/ zugleich auch des Herrn Christi Blut/ das fuer unsere Suende vergossen/ das ist/ sein wares wesentliches Menchliches Blut/ ausgetheilet und genommen/ oder getrunken werde.

Das ist und heist des Herrn Christi einsetzung und Testament/ wie die wort lauten: Nemet hin/ esset/ das ist mein Leib/ der fuer euch gegeben: Nemet/ trinket/das ist mein Blut/ das fuer euch vergossen. Wer nu hie Ohren hat/ der hoeret ja/ was Christus sage/ und was er nehmen/ essen/ und trincken sol/ nemlich/ Brodt und Leib/ Wein und Blut.”

that regularly happens from the first institution of the Supper until the end of the world, but through our official action it is distributed daily” (p 999).

The FC excludes both a) that our speaking and acting effect the sacrament, and b) that the words of institution, nevertheless, spoken by a man when we celebrate the Supper, could be ineffective.

It is neither the speaking of the words of institution by the pastor nor the eating or believing of the communicants which brings about the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament. It is *only and alone* “the power of the almighty God and the Word, institution and ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ which brings about the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper” (p 999). “The true and almighty words of Christ which were spoken at the first institution” are powerful and effective still today, “so that in all places, where the Lord’s Supper is celebrated according to the institution of Christ and His Word is used, there the body and blood of Christ are truly present, by virtue of the words which Christ spoke at the first Supper. For Christ Himself...is also still, through the read words, *by virtue of the first institution*, powerful and active in His Word, which He wants to have repeated in the Supper” (p 999).

When we celebrate the Supper Christ’s words of institution are to be “read or sung distinctly and clearly and by no means omitted” (p 1001). This should be done for three reasons:

1. We should not omit the words of Christ spoken at the first Supper, since with the words “This do” He commanded us to do that which He Himself did at the first Supper.
2. Through the distinct and clear reading or singing of the words of institution the faith of the hearers is awakened and strengthened: They are made certain about the nature and benefit of this sacrament, about the presence of Christ’s body and blood, about the forgiveness of sins and all the blessings which have been won for us through the death of Christ and the shedding of His blood, and which are given to us in the testament of Christ.
3. Through the reading of the words of institution the visible elements, the bread and wine, are hallowed and designated for holy use in the sacramental meal, that is, *together with this bread and wine the body and blood of Christ are given to us to eat and to drink* (p 1001). The FC also tells us on what grounds we can be sure that this bread and wine which is given to eat and to drink are likewise the body and blood of Christ. How long before the distribution and reception the bread and wine have been the body and blood of Christ is not discussed, since the biblical text speaks only about the bread and wine which are distributed and received. If one wishes to speculate beyond what is written (cp. the biblical word “not beyond what is written,” 1 Cor 4:6), one can raise all possible “presumptuous, scoffing, and blasphemous questions,” which the FC rejects and condemns (p 1015). The FC also rejects the “papistic consecration or blessing which ascribes to the speaking of the words, as a work of the priest, the power to effect a sacrament” (p 1013).

Some Statements of Orthodox Lutherans

Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), the outstanding representative of Lutheran orthodoxy, is of the opinion that Christ’s body is surely present “prior to the eating” but not in such a way that this presence can be fixed objectively prior to the distribution. Only the action, that is, the distribution for eating and drinking, creates certainty that the presence has become a reality (*foereligger*) by virtue of the Word of Christ and is given to me to be received orally. The consecration is not a magical spell, which works without reference to the distribution and reception of the gifts. Through the consecration the bread and wine are hallowed to become the means for the distribution of the body and blood of Christ.

Johann Andreas Quenstedt (1617–1685) is very concerned about binding together the words “This is My body,” “This is My blood,” with the communion. If they are separated from the communion, which happens, for example, when the consecrated elements are borne about in procession to be adored as Christ’s body and blood, there is no presence. For the words “Take and eat” presuppose that the words of the testament

are bound together with the action for which they are designated, namely, the distribution and reception. Quenstedt therefore is of the opinion that the sacramental union has no place outside of the distribution (*ausser der Austheilung*). “Christ does not say absolutely about the consecrated bread that it is the body of Christ, but He says this about the bread which is broken and given to be eaten. For first He said: ‘Take and eat,’ and then He said, ‘This is my body.’”⁹

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811–1887) says about the consecration in connection with a quotation from the FC,

Certainly the body and blood of Christ are not, so to speak, conjured into the visible elements by virtue of the words of institution spoken by a man because the mysterious power, which works such wonders, dwells in those words. For in that case the body of Christ would come to be present wherever these words are spoken over bread, even in connection with a blasphemous joke. But if the words of institution are not spoken at all over the elements and the elements are therefore not blessed or consecrated thereby, then what Christ has commanded has not been done, and then He also will not do what He has commanded, nor is the Supper instituted by Christ in that case celebrated and the body and blood of Christ are not present and nothing but bread and wine are distributed or received.¹⁰

Since the words of institution do not work magically but are necessary to obey the Lord’s command “This do,” and to carry out the action to which the Lord by promise has attached the presence of his body and blood, it follows that *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 communicants and received by them.¹¹

Adolph Hoenecke (1835–1908) tells us in his well-known *Ev. Luth. Dogmatik*, Vol. IV, what is *the effective cause* for the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper. In connection with the FC he emphasizes that the effective cause is “the true and powerful words of Jesus Christ, which He spoke at the first institution.” These “were not only effective in the first Supper but their power and effect endures to this day, so that in all places wherever the Lord’s Supper is celebrated according to the institution of Christ and His Word is used, the body and blood of Christ become truly present, are distributed and received by virtue of the words which Christ spoke at the first Supper” (*Triglotta*, p 999; Hoenecke, p 129). “So far as the *point of time* from which Christ’s body and blood are present under the earthly elements and united with the bread and the wine is concerned, Baier (1647–1695) says that it is not necessary that it be fixed” (Hoenecke, p 130).

Franz Pieper (1852–1931) emphasizes in his *Christliche Dogmatik*, Vol. III, that the sacramental union obtains in the sacramental bread, that is, the consecrated bread which is distributed and received. The bread which is not distributed, but, for example, falls to the floor during the distribution, is according to Pieper not the body of Christ. Pieper opposes those who suppose that the Lutheran doctrine teaches that it is a

human word or human authority which effects the real presence. Against such an understanding Luther maintains again and again: It is not the speaking of men that brings forth the body and blood of Christ, but only Christ’s word of promise and command. Christ’s words, “This is my body” brought into being the first Supper, that is, they made the sacramental bread the bearer of Christ’s body. And since Christ has commanded us to do what He did until the end of time, therefore also *our* Supper is what the first Supper was. Christ’s word of command (*Heisselwort*) now also makes our word an effective word (*Taetelwort*) (p 426).

⁹ Quote from Walther, *Pastorale*, pp 174f.

¹⁰ Walther, *Pastorale*, p 172.

¹¹ Walther, *Pastorale*, p 174.

Pieper maintained that the FC rejects the view that the Lord's Supper comes into existence already in the consecration. In that connection he points to the following passage:

This blessing or reading of the words of institution alone does not make a sacrament if the *whole* sacramental action, as it was instituted by Christ, is not kept in view, for example, when the consecrated bread is not distributed and received, but instead is enclosed, sacrificed, or carried in procession. For the command of Christ, "This do," which includes the *whole* action, ought to be kept whole and undisturbed. But for the administration of this sacrament it is necessary that the bread and wine should in a Christian assembly through the blessing be consecrated, *distributed* and *received*, that is, eaten and drunk and the Lord's death proclaimed. For in this way St. Paul describes for us the whole action, in which the bread is used or distributed and received (1 Cor 10:16) (Triglotta, p 1001; Pieper, p 434).

On New and Presumptuous Questions

In later times efforts were made in various places to blow life once more into the Saliger controversy. It is denied that what the FC and its authors describe as unnecessary and presumptuous speculations are unnecessary and presumptuous. On the contrary, they take their place at Saliger's side and demand, among other things, that all those who do not expressly teach that the real presence begins at the moment of consecration and that no consecrated bread and wine should be left unconsumed must be excluded from an orthodox Christian fellowship. That means that the men behind the FC, Chytraeus, Chemnitz, Andreae, Selnecker, as well as, e.g., Gerhard, Quenstedt, Walther, Hoenecke and Pieper, yes, all the orthodox fathers except Saliger and some others, would have to be excluded from Christian congregations, if they were alive today.

It is a serious matter when this doctrinal discipline must take place without a clear proof passage from Scripture for this notion that has been elevated to a teaching of the Bible. When Helmut Loser in *Lutherische Blaetter* 1954 pleads for the view that the real presence begins in the moment of consecration, he at the same time admits that there is no scriptural proof which would enable us to raise this view to the level of a biblical teaching. "We must ask the Scriptures, but they have nothing to say about this question. There are no direct nor implied assertions of Scripture which can support either point of view" (p 191f.). Loser also says, "So far as the actual moment of consecration is concerned, Sasse says correctly that the FC, in contrast to Roman doctrine, does not permit the view that one can with a bell in hand indicate the beginning and end of the real presence" (p 189).

For anyone who wants to embrace biblical and Lutheran teaching it is essential that he not go beyond what is written (1 Cor 4:6). Questions which are not answered by the clear words of Scripture must be left open. We have seen above how some questions which have been raised in connection with the Lord's Supper were answered in different ways by orthodox Lutheran theologians. That will always be the case in regard to questions which are not answered in God's Word. But when it comes to those things which the biblical text reveals and teaches, there is no disagreement between orthodox theologians. In regard to the Saliger controversy which has recently been renewed, the FC and its authors have already taken a position. The battle has already been decided for those who have adopted the Lutheran Confessions for themselves because these teach in accord with God's Word. The position of the FC on the questions raised in the Saliger controversy is sufficient. There is no need for an additional article in the spirit of Saliger. Such an article, moreover, could not be reconciled with the conscious silence on questions which can not be answered from God's Word, and it could also not be made to agree with statements made by the authors of the FC on various occasions in connection with the Saliger controversy.

Finally let us cite a statement from both faculties in St. Louis and Springfield from 1959. This statement has to do with the question of fixing a time for the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper (see CTM, XXX, 7 (July, 1959), pp 530-531). The text reads:

1. Scripture is silent with reference to the “moment” of the Real Presence in the Lord’s Supper, for 1 Cor. 10:16 relates the sacramental union to the total sacramental action.
2. According to the Formula of Concord (VII 83) the Lord’s Supper is a sacrament only when the elements are consecrated and the directives included in Christ’s command “This do” are executed. The paragraph reads:

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 places before our eyes the entire action of the breaking of bread or of distribution and reception, 1 Cor 10:16. (English translation from *Triglot*, p 1001).
3. The Formula of Concord does not, however, fix the moment when the sacramental union takes place. It rather lashes out in severe language against speculative questions dealing with the “when” and “how” of the sacramental union. “When and how does the body come into the bread? How long does the sacramental union last? When does the body cease to be in the bread?” See *Bekennnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 2d ed. (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952), p 1016, n. 4, for a list of such questions as had appeared in Kurtz Bekenntnis, 1571, a forerunner of the Formula of Concord. See also Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), pp 164–176. The condemnatory statement in the Formula of Concord (VII 127) reads: “We reject and condemn also all presumptuous, frivolous, blasphemous questions and expressions which are presented in a gross, carnal, Capernaïtic way regarding the supernatural, heavenly mysteries of this Supper.” (English translation from *Triglot*, p 1015).
4. In view of the above considerations (silence of Scripture regarding the “moment” of the Real Presence in the Lord’s Supper, and statements quoted from the Formula of Concord) Lutheran theologians, whether they be in the preaching or teaching ministry, will be careful not to ask or evoke “presumptuous, frivolous, blasphemous questions” regarding the mystery of the “moment” of the Real Presence in the Lord’s Supper, lest Christian consciences be disturbed and Satan be given an opportunity to sow the seed of discord in the church. Lutheran theologians need constantly remember that the chief emphases in the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord’s Supper are those succinctly expressed in the statement of the Small Catechism: “‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’ Which words, besides the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament; and he that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins.”