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Incarnation and the Lord's Supper in Luther

Norman Nagel

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_nageln@csl.edu

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INCARNATION AND THE LORD'S SUPPER IN LUTHER

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

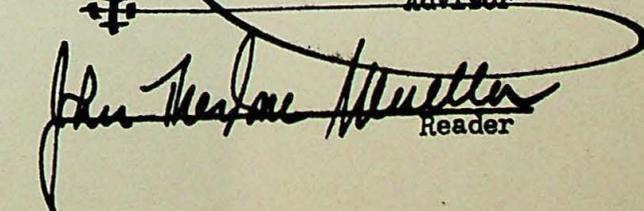
by

Norman Nagel

June 1953

Approved by


Advisor


Reader

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The study of the life of the author. Despite the passage of time and
distance, the spirit of the author, despite our wandering and
straying, we may yet discern a unity in the way in which
we study the life of the author.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE THESIS	2
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The ways of God to men are one. Despite the paradox of Law and Gospel, despite His myriad Providence, despite our wondering and paltry understanding, we may yet discern a unity in the way in which the Holy God deals with us. It is the way of His grace of which Christ is the archetype and the Lord's Supper the consequent and continuing form.

It will be the attempt of this paper to set forth some of the aspects of the parallel between God's dealing with us in Christ and Christ's dealing with us in His Supper as grasped and expressed by Luther, especially in the controversies concerning the Lord's Supper in the 1520's. The references are given, with a few Erlangener Ausgabe exceptions, from the Weimarer Ausgabe.

CHAPTER II

THE THESIS

With Luther we must begin with God. This, however, is exactly what we as natural men are anxious not to do. Yet God cannot be escaped. We are haunted and hounded by the dread of Him to Whom we are responsible, before Whom we are guilty, and Who yet remains the hidden, the Holy God. What knowledge we have of Him can only make us fear. Of God in and for Himself we can know nothing.¹ Reason with natural knowledge can know that there are God, right, wrong and retribution. This helps nothing; nor does man's aspiration to understand.

Philosophi disputant et quaerunt speculative de deo et perveniunt ad qualemcumque notitiam sicut Plato intuetur et agnoscit gubernationem divinam. Sed omnia sunt objective tantum, nondum est cognitio illa . . . quod curet, quod exaudiat et opituletur afflictis, hoc non potest statuere Plato. Manet in cognitione Metaphysica, wie ein kue ein neues thor ansihet.²

God does not suffer Himself to be seized and pressed into a pattern of man's making. All static conditions and human categories are shattered by the living God.³ This God, as Luther knew Him; is set forth in "De Servo Arbitrio", a writing Luther never wished to alter. Here God

¹Cf. Theodosius Harnack, Luthers Theologie (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1927), I, 84 f.

²Weimarer Ausgabe, XLIV, 591. Hereafter referred to as W. A.

³Cf. Werner Elert, Morphologie des Luthertums (München; C. Beck, 1931), I, 18.

is characterized as Will and Action and these are one.⁴ God as such is subject to neither circumscription nor prescription.

Deus est, cuius voluntatis nulla est causa nec ratio, quae illi ceu regula et mensura praescribatur, cum nihil sit illi aequale aut superius, sed ipse est regula omnium. Si enim esset illi aliqua regula vel mensura aut causa aut ratio, iam nec Dei voluntas esse posset. Non enim quia sic debet vel debuit velle, ideo rectum est quod vult. Sed contra: Quia ipse sic vult ideo rectum est quod fit.⁵

This baffling will of the deus absconditus is occulta et metuenda voluntas.⁶ This is more than frightening. God is a consuming fire,⁷ nihil ad nos, and also requiring fear and adoration.⁸

This reduces man to the punctum mathematicum and its despair.

נוכי דא, as St. Paul would say, there is not only the deus absconditus,

⁴W. A., XVIII, 719. Here it seems we may be touching on a basic difference in the understanding of God, which is of importance also for the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Erich Seeberg points out that Luther's and the Roman Catholic views of the Sacrament ". . . scheiden sich voneinander dadurch, dass Luther in der theologischen Ausprägung seiner Anschauungen von einer dynamisch gearteten Metaphysik bestimmt ist, während die katholischen Theologen zumeist einer substantialen Metaphysik folgen. Bei Luther ist alles in Bewegung gelöst; bei den katholischen Theologen seiner Zeit herrscht in der Sakramentsfrage die substantiale Bindung vor." Christus Wirklichkeit und Urbild (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1937), p. 318. See also p. 329.

This dynamic view of Luther also placed him in opposition to Zwingli's static, scholastic and rational concepts as especially in the understanding of the body of Christ as localized. Cf. R. Seeberg, Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1917), IV, No. 1, 365.

⁵W. A., XVIII, 712.

⁶W. A., XVIII, 184.

⁷W. A., XL, 761.

⁸W. A., XVIII, 685.

there is also the deus revelatus and this is the deus incarnatus. Here is Luther's Alpha and Omega. This is the fountainhead of his entire theology. All derives from this, all is consequent with this, that God was made man.

Dieser Artikel macht nun Christen undt sonst keiner undt, wen dieser verlohren wirdt, so helffen die andern alle nicht. Undt mit dem Artikel werden wir auch von allen falschen Christen undt heiligen abgesondert.⁹

Only when we take the Incarnation as entirely seriously as Luther will we be able to move toward a proper understanding and valuing of his theology in general and of his treatment of the Lord's Supper in particular.

Luther distinguishes between "Gott inwendig in der Gottheit, auszer und über der Kreatur, und Gott, auswendig der Gottheit, in der Kreatur."¹⁰ Yet the transcendent and immanent Creator is still the deus absconditus and in His Creation we see only His honour and majesty.¹¹ Man cannot know God,¹² and it is arrogant rebellion to attempt to know God in Himself.¹³ Man cannot move or climb toward God. The only hope is that God come to man, that the deus absconditus become the deus revelatus. This God did in the Incarnation. In Christ alone can God be known.

⁹W. A., XXXIII, 160.

¹⁰Erlangener Ausgabe, XXXVIII, 43. Hereafter referred to as E. A.

¹¹W. A., XL, No. 1, 76.

¹²W. A., XXV, 237.

¹³W. A., V, 172.

Wiltu alles treffen und erfgreifen, was Gott ist und thut und ym sinn hat, so suche es nur nirgend, denn da ers selbs hin gesteckt und gelegt hat. . . . Darumb sol ein Christen nicht anders wissen Gott zu suchen noch zu finden denn ynn der jungfrawen schos und am creutz odder wie und wo sich Christus ynn dem wort zeigt.¹⁴

Du must aber nicht vergessen, . . . das wir bey dem man bleiben und wissen, das Gott alles durch yhn redet, thuet und gibt, das man beide alle Gottes wort und werck ynn Christo suche. Wie sich Christus gegen dir stellet und mit dir umgeheth, verheisset, locket, tröstet, tregt, schencket, das thut alles der vater. Summa, du kanst nichts sehen noch hören an Christo, du sihest und hörst den Vater selbs.¹⁵

Luther's Christology was traditional and catholic.¹⁶ However, delineation of his Christology is not here our task. Because of subsequent relevance we shall here try only to emphasize with what entire seriousness Luther took the Incarnation.

Of vital importance for our purpose, for Luther, and altogether for that matter, is the way in which God comes to man, that is, the incarnation way. He came so close He could not come closer, for He became a man.¹⁷ God became a creature.¹⁸ He became a part of time and place. God was born of a Jewish maiden and slept on straw in a stable in Bethlehem in the days of Herod the King. Deus revelatus et incarnatus is seen and touched and heard. God came to us as and where we are and made Himself knowable to us. This is the only way. Any attempt to rise

¹⁴W. A., XXVIII, 136.

¹⁵W. A., XXVIII, 135.

¹⁶Erich Seeberg, op. cit., pp. 67 f. and 241 ff.

¹⁷W. A., XXIX, 643.

¹⁸W. A., IX, 41.

above our creatureliness, of which God has made Himself a part, is to remove oneself from the only place and way of knowing God. "Ausser Christo, kein Gott."¹⁹ "Ausser diesem menschen kein Gott ist."²⁰

Non debes ascendere ad deum, sed incipe ibi, ubi incepit: in utero matris, factus homo et factus, et prohibe sensum speculationis.²¹

Die gottliche natur ist uns tzu hoch und unbegreyfflich, darumb hatt er uns tzu gutt sich begeben ynn die natur, die uns am aller bekendlichsten ist, als die unszer. Da will er unszer wartten, da will er sich finden lassen und sonst nicht; wer hie yhn anruufft, der ist szo bald erhoret, hie ist der thron der gnaden, da niemant auszgeschlossen wirt, wer do kumpt. Den andern, die yhn hie lassen umbsonst wonen und wollen sonst gott dienen und anrufen, der hymnell und erden geschaffen hatt, die haben alle schon yhr antwort ps. 7.; da er von yhn sagt: Sie ruffen, und niemant wirt yhn helffen, sie schreyen tzu gott, und er horet yhr nit.²²

"Averte ergo oculos a majestate dei et converte ad humanitatem eius in gremio matris jacentem."²³ Luther rejoiced to emphasize the utter humanity of Christ. It is impossible to make Christ too human; the more human, the more sure hope.²⁴ Luther's Christmas sermons and hymns depict most apprehendably the complete humanity of Christ and also the wonder that in this baby we confront God.

Des ewgen Vaters einig Kind jetzt man in der Krippen findt;
In unser armes Fleisch und Blut verkleidet sich das ewig gut.
Kyrieleis.

¹⁹W. A., XXIII, 131.

²⁰W. A., XXVI, 332.

²¹W. A., XL, No. 1, 76.

²²W. A., X, No. 1, 356.

²³W. A., IV, 649.

²⁴W. A., X, No. 1, 67.

Den all Welt Kreis nie beschlosz, der liegt in Marien Schosz;
Er ist ein Kindlein worden klein, der alle Ding erhält allein.
Kyrieleis.²⁵

When God comes as a baby to Luther, he worships with humble simplicity as a man. He does not impudently strive to leave the place to which God has come to meet him. We see his vivid, personal and creaturely apprehension when he declares that when he hears God's Word,

so ist myrs unmdglich, das ich nicht ynn meym hertzen sollt bilde davon machen, denn ich wolle oder wolle nicht, wenn ich Christum hore, so entwirfft sich ynn meym hertzen eyn man bilde, das am creutze hanget, gleich als sich meyn andlitz naturlich entwirfft yns wasser, wenn ich dreyn sehe.²⁶

However offended we may be by a God Who so humbles Himself to us, we may not say that the Incarnation is unworthy of God.

Darüber sollen wir nicht viel disputiren, obs Gottes schande oder ehre sey, das Gott ist Mensch worden, ja, ich sols von hertzen gerne annemen, denn es ist mir zu gut und zu trost geschehen, und sol Gott von hertzen darumb dancken.²⁷

God has His honour in the opposite of what men call honour. Men gauge their honour by the number of men that they have serving them; God has His honour in that He became the humble, suffering servant of all men. The deeper the humiliation, the higher the honour.

Unseres Gotts ehre aber ist, die so er sich umb unser willen auff's aller tieffest erunter gibt, yns fleisch, yns brod, ynn unsern mund, hertz und schos, Und dazu umb unserer willen leidet, das er unehrlich gehandelt wird beyde auff creutz und altar.²⁸

²⁵ Kirchen-Gesangbuch, Hymn 21.

²⁶ W. A., XVIII, 83.

²⁷ W. A., XLVI, 634.

²⁸ W. A., XXIII, 156. See also W. A., XIX, 486.

It follows from this that whoever would diminish the descent of God to man and things, robs God of His honour. Hence Luther does not minimize the condescension and with glad and grateful heart he glorifies the inexpressible grace.

Wie konnte sich die hohe Majestät tiefer demütigen, denn dasz er dies arme Fleisch und Blut also ehret und hebet mit seiner göttlichen Ehre und Gewalt, dasz er sich in diese unsere Natur senket und selbst ein Glied wird menschlichen Geschlechts? Welche Ehre auch keinem Engel widerfahren ist; Hebr. 2, 16.²⁹

We may not say that it does not make sense. Of course it does not make sense.

O das ist ein lecherlich ding, das der einige Gott, die hohe maiestet solt ein mensch sein, Und kompt hie zusammen beide, Creatur und Schepffer, jnn eine person, Da sperret sich die vernunft mit allen krefftten, da diese person sol zugleich ein mensch sein, von einem menschen geboren, rechter natürlicher geburt, wie ein weib geben sol, wahrhaftig fleisch und blut, mit allen gliedern und allem natürlichem wesen (on die sünde), den ein mensch auff erden gebirt, seugtet, windet wartet als ein natürliche mutter und lesset sich wiegen, tragen etzen und trencken etc. aller dinge wie ein ander kindlin. Das wir da sollen solche narren werden, die vernunft so gar blenden und uns gefangen geben, das wir sagen, Das eben dieser mensch der rechte wahrhaftige Gott und ausser jm kein Gott sey, Und wo das kindlin jnn der wigen odder der mutter an armen und brüsten ligt, da sey Gott wesentlich und persönlich. . . . Darumb mus man sich hie widder alle vernunft und synne allein an das wort hengen, von himel offenbaret: "DIS ist mein lieber Son" etc.³⁰

If God says it is so, it is so, and there is no further doubt.

Nor may we ask what is the use of Christ's humanity. The question is rather to be reversed, for

Deus sine carne nihil prodest. In Christi enim carnem, in illum infantem haerentem ab uberibus Virginis oculi defingi sunt, ut simpliciter obfirmes animum et dicas: ego nullum nec in coelo neque

²⁹E. A., XL, 59.

³⁰W. A., XXXVII, 42.

in terra Deum habeo aut scio extra hanc carnem, quae fovetur in gremio Mariae Virginis. Hoc cum dicis, non est periculum, ut aberres a Deo aut ut animus terrore ac metu ad desperationem adigatur. Deus enim omnibus aliis modis incomprehensibilis est, in sola autem carne Christi et comprehensibilis.³¹

The Personal Union was such that Christ operative apart from His humanity was unthinkable.

Du sollst von keinem Gott noch Sohn Gottes etwas wissen, es sei denn der, so da heisse: geboren aus der Jungfrau Maria, und der da sei Mensch worden; wie die christlich Glaube davon redet. Und so jemand ihn scheiden will von Gottes Sohne und eine Wand machen zwischen Gottes Sohn und dem Sohn von Maria der Jungfrauen geboren, so nimm einen solchen Prediger nicht auf und höre ihn nicht; sondern sage: ich weisz von keinem Gott oder Gottes Sohn, denn da der christliche Glaube von sagt. Ists nun nicht der Mensch, der von Maria geboren ist, so will ich ihn nicht haben. Kannst du dich nun demütigen and hängen mit dem Herzen an dem Worte, und bleiben bei der Menschheit Christi, so wird sich die Gottheit wol finden, und der Vater und heilige Geist und die ganze Gottheit dich ergreifen. Dieser Artikel lässt dich nicht irren.³²

Despite his emphasis on the humanity and his rejection of any transmutation of the human into the divine, nothing is further from Luther than the suggestion that Christ is merely man. "Die Menschheit allein wäre kein nütze."³³ He gave bold and unequivocal emphasis to both poles of the paradox of the Incarnation. He did not care to attempt

³¹W. A., XXV, 107.

³²W. A., XXX, 154.

³³W. A., XL, 558. Cf. Wilhelm Link, Das Ringen Luthers um die Freiheit der Theologie von der Philosophie (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1940), p. 374. "Gottes Wort ist nicht Gottes Wort ohne seine Externität, Gott ist nicht unser Gott auszer in seiner Menschwerdung in Christus. Göttliches und Menschliches, Auszerliches und Innerliches, Natur und Gnade in ein irgendwie geartetes, entelechisches oder psychologisches oder politisches Verhältnis bringen zu wollen unter Absehung von diesem Ereignis der Menschwerdung Gottes, heiszt die Theologie in Philosophie auflösen, heiszt das vom Menschen aus vollziehen wollen, was im Ereignis des Kommens Gottes zu uns Menschen vollzogen ist."

to range them into adjusted harmony or neat formulation. That was left to his successors, and it is surely significant that the men both of Wittenberg and Württemberg claimed full loyalty to him. For Luther the humanity meant first and last the way of God to man.

God Incarnate was seen, touched and heard by men. Now, however, we cannot see, touch or hear Him. God came to us as man, but what is the use of that to us if the man has gone? The necessary consequences of the Incarnation and the Ascension is that the *λογος ἐνανθρώπησας* be also the *λόγος ἔγγραφος*. The steps are these: Scripture confronts us with Mary's son, by Mary's son we are confronted by God. Remove one of these and we are lost, for then God is lost to us.

We begin with the spoken or written words, but these have their significance in leading us to the man born in Bethlehem, in whom we are confronted by God.

Verbum caro factum est; hoc est, Deus homo factus est. Solch wunderlich und uberwunderlich Ding, dasz Gott ist Mensch worden, lehret dies ganz und einig Buch (die Bibel), davon kein ander Buch Nichts weisz. Denn wo du nicht suchest in diesem Buch das Verbum caro factum est, so wäre dir besser einen Marcolfus oder Ulenspiegel gelesen. Es ist Alles um dies Verbum zu thun, was geschaffen und geschrieben ist. Er ist der Herr, der in der Krippen and Marien in den Armen liegt. Wers nicht gläubt, dem ist dies Buch nichts nütze.³⁴

"Gott mag nit fundenn werden denn durch und ynn diszer mescheyt."³⁵

"Wo Gottes wort ist, da ist Christus."³⁶ This is the way God comes to

³⁴E. A., LII, 348.

³⁵W. A., X, No. 1, 208.

³⁶W. A., XVII, No. 2, 132.

us and no less really when it is spoken today than it was in happening centuries ago in Palestine.

Luther had no care for the delineation of the "how" of all this; he built all on the fact: God at work dealing with us in Jesus of Nazareth who meets us in Scripture. Reason may not intrude with impudent inquiry. Any diminution of the wonder of what was begun in the stable of Bethlehem is a threat to our salvation. Certainty of salvation is of life and death earnestness for Luther. Therefore with all the vehement energy of his faith he contended against every attempt to remove Christ. In the defense of his faith, his salvation, Luther's Christology became more explicit; but it did not change. We have hence here quoted him quite unchronologically for if there was anything constant in Luther it was this. Already 1514 shows clear adumbration and 1519 certain statement.³⁷

To Luther the Incarnation says,

Er hat sich niedergelassen in diesen Sack, in unser Fleisch und Blut, allein darum, auf dasz er ausschüttete den unmisslichen Schatz seiner Güte, und uns von Sünde, Tod, Teufel, Hölle und von allem Unglück errettete.³⁸

Haec est consolacio omnibus credentibus, dicentes: Das ist meyn got, induit carnem meam, wyrdt, wie ich byn, meam fert calamitatem, extra peccatum tamen. Do musz den der glauben weytter spaczyren, cum imaginatur deum ita puerum vagientem, dicit: Er kunde nicht neher kummen. Es geht uber alle bruderschaft, vetter-schaft. Den meyn bruder, vetter seyn vor nahe gewest. Ille autem longe a me et tamen magnus includit se in hoc corpusculum. Das ist vil neher den Mutter, bruder etc. Ideo appellatur frater noster et eciam unser beyn und fleysch, noch neher zwsamen den man und weyp, attamen dicit Suam carnem esse nostram, das ers vor eynen

³⁷Cf. Theodosius Harnack, op. cit., II, 103.

³⁸W. A., XVII, No. 2, 327.

leyp, blut etc. rechnet. Das mochte eyn trost seyn, si quis oculis caperet. Nam qui credit hunc puerum natum deum, szo musz seyn hercz lachen et dicere: Das gylt mjr, ipse mihi venit. Ego non ad eum ascendi. Ipse puer non fit angelus, leo, sed hos digitos, manus, corpus induit etc. Si hoc potes credere, est consolacio. . . . Si in scriptura non plus esset quam hi duo articuli de conceptione et nativitate Christi, szo solden wyr ewig lachen.³⁹

Christ says this also elsewhere, for He is laid into our grasp not only in flesh and Scripture, but also in wine and bread. There God is present dealing with us also and His coming is the same in re.⁴⁰ "Gott kann nicht unser Gott sein, er gebe uns denn etwas Euserliches, daran wir jn finden, als das Mündlich Wort und die zwey Sacrament. Wenn ich Gott nicht ergreife durch Euserliches ding, wie kann ich jn denn antreffen?"⁴¹ "Quanta consolatio sit habere Deum non nudum in spiritu sed incarnatum et Baptismo ac Eucharistia indutum."⁴² Only via creatureliness does He reach us, His creatures; and in that very creatureliness it is the living God Himself that reaches us.

Luther does not derive his doctrine of the Lord's Supper by deduction; it is not simply an ex hypothesi of his Christology. Should it even be conceded that his Christology was to Luther a regulative doctrine--and a cogent and revealing case, it would seem, can be made for this--there would be little need for apology. This would certainly be much sooner true than that his Christology is the product of his doctrine of the Sacrament. To Luther each scripture spoke and he was bound

³⁹W. A., XXXIV, No. 2, 492.

⁴⁰W. A., IV, 258.

⁴¹W. A., XXVIII, 576.

⁴²W. A., XXV, 128.

by the words of God. This loyalty to Scripture and the refusal to harmonize by deduction from a regulative doctrine gives us those logical paradoxes which are the glory of the Lutheran statement of doctrine, e.g., grace universal and serious and yet the damnation of many, salvation by grace alone and damnation by human fault. In the matter before us, however, there are no such contradictions, though indeed no dearth of matter for awed worship and wonder, but a quite marvelous unity. God reveals Himself and deals with men only through the concrete realities of His Son's humanity and the things designated by Him.⁴³ In these palpable and ordinary things the fullness of the Godhead is come to men. This oneness of God's ways to men is basic for Luther in both the Incarnation and the Lord's Supper. Yet he does not move merely deductively from the Incarnation to the Lord's Supper. Ernst Sommerlath would seem to be pressing farther than Luther when in expounding Luther he bluntly declares, "Das Ursakrament ist Christus selbst, das Leibwerden des ewigen Logos."⁴⁴ This conclusion is certainly not in disharmony with Luther and he does almost say it; but that he does not surely shows even more clearly his lack of intrinsic interest in pursuing deductions.⁴⁵ The connection that he discerns between the Incar-

⁴³W. A., XXV, 128. ". . . nos autem simus admoniti, ne cum Deo nudo seu absoluto agamus, sed amplectamur illas species, quas ipse nobis proposuit, in quibus se certo inveniri promisit, nempe in homine Christo et Sacramentis."

⁴⁴Ernst Sommerlath, "Das Abendmahl bei Luther," Vom Sacrament des Altars, ed. Hermann Sasse (Leipzig: Dörffling and Franke, 1941), p. 109.

⁴⁵This is recognized by Sommerlath, op. cit., p. 116, but he is perhaps a little overanxious to formulate too neat a case.

nation and the Sacrament is nothing so superficial, so rational, so unreal. It is rather the deep and thoroughgoing harmony of a faith that lays hold of Christ and in that grasp gets everything. The explications drawn from Luther when the apprehensions of his faith were attacked, were nothing novel but the organic consequences of that same faith.

"Im Kampfe erst wird das Letzte offenbar, und je mehr von verschiedenen Seiten her ein Angriff erfolgt, desto mehr kommt es zum inneren Ausgleich und zu letzten Entscheidungen."⁴⁶ Christ is central and therefore in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper Luther feels compelled to reject every statement that deprives him of his Incarnate Lord. He has no patience with or intrinsic interest in explanations or formulas inserted between him and his Lord; he has only faith for the revealed facts.

The central fact is God come all the way to me in my humanity and things. This is accomplished by the Word of God *ἐνωσθησθε* and *ἐκτισθησθε*. Its power is none the less for being framed in human creaturely terms. It is this Word, in which God is operative, that brought to pass the Incarnation and the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

Gabriel der Engel bringt das wort 'Sihe du wirst schwanger werden yn leibe und einen son geperen' etc. Mit diesen worten kompt Christus nicht allein yn yhr hertz, sondern auch yn yhren leib,

⁴⁶Ernst Sommerlath, "Luthers Lehre von der Realpräsenz im Abendmahl im Zusammenhang mit seiner Gottesanschauung nach den Abendmahlschriften von 1527-1528," Das Erbe Martin Luthers und die gegenwärtige theologische Forschung, ed. Robert Jelke (Leipzig: Dörffling and Franke, 1928), p. 324.

als sie es horet, fasset und glewbet. Da kan ihr niemand anders sagen, denn das die krafft durchs wort kompt.⁴⁷

Denn so bald Christus spricht 'das ist mein Leib' so ist sein Leib da durchs wort und krafft des heyligen geists. Wenn das wort nicht da ist, so ist es schlecht brod; aber so die wort da zu komen, bringen sie das mit, davon sie lauten.⁴⁸

It is difficult to overemphasize the decisive importance of Scripture for Luther. Whatever his conjugation of doctrine, the verb was of Scripture. Not by any theory, philosophical or otherwise, did he decline. The insertion of a principle or formula was the interposing of an impediment between man and the Truth.⁴⁹ The principle, via creatureliness alone, which this paper seeks to elucidate in its dual embodiment in Luther's doctrine of the Incarnation and the Lord's Supper, does not come under this condemnation, for Luther grasped this as Scripture's description of the way of God to men. If it were shown to be unscriptural, he would be the first to reject it.

Some would object that one cannot equate the Word of God with Scripture. While the discussion of this problem is not here our business, it might be mentioned in passing that the notion of another word differing from the written word was foreign to Luther. He had no such facile artifice for evading the blunt meaning of the text, some canonical misgivings as James notwithstanding. Wherever he opened his Bible, he knew that he was being addressed by God. His statement, "Wo Gottes

⁴⁷W. A., XIX, 490.

⁴⁸W. A., XIX, 491.

⁴⁹Cf. Werner Elert, Die Morphologie des Luthertums (München: C. Beck, 1931), I, 268.

Wort ist, da ist Christus,⁵⁰ is not a mere one equals one; Christ is mediated by Scripture.⁵¹

⁵⁰W. A., XVII, No. 2, 132.

⁵¹Marburg is given as the great example of Luther's being bound by a single word of Scripture. Objections have been made to this interpretation of Luther's stand, and Elert for one is not content with it. In his endeavour to defend Luther against the charge of biblicism he admits that Luther did write the est on the table; "es lag aber eine Decke darüber." He points out that the discussion of individual passages was introduced by the Swiss party. Their admissibility Luther denied, to which the Swiss cried out that it were scandalous to hold a doctrine without being able to point to Scripture. Whereupon "hub Luther die Sammaten deck auff und zaiget Im den spruch, das ist mein leyb, den er mit der kreyden hett fñr sich geschryben, und sprach: 'alhie steht unser schrift'. Es war die Reserve, die er zurñckgehalten hatte. Gewisz, nach seiner Überzeugung ein Edelstein, hart wie Diamant, doch nur ein Moment in seiner Gesamtauffassung von Gott und Welt, von Christus und Sündenvergebung, von Kirche und Sakrament, der Gesamtauffassung, die aus der innersten Nötigung seines Glaubens geboren war." If there is no special emphasis on the est, then the comment is surely valid, and yet his shying at individual words and passages looks suspiciously like a man somewhat offended at God's so crassly putting Himself into human vocables. That God should do this is surely no more offensive than His being made of a woman. Rather is the inscripturation thoroughly consistent with the Incarnation.

Elert is perhaps led to this by the desire to defend the Lutheran doctrine from the possible embarrassment of the charge that it is constructed on an est which the Aramaists assert our Lord never spoke. Besides, to stake all on a single word of Scripture would require verbal inspiration, and that, Elert feels, is of the Calvinists. Luther, it seems, was not troubled by such misgivings. "Ein Wörtlein macht mir die Welt zu klein." He was colossally stubborn about the est, and refused to concede that it could mean anything else but est. His stand was not on a theory but on the Word of God, a word of Scripture. "Luther in Marburg;" Zeitwende (October, 1929), p. 315.

Althaus remarks, "Es ist bezeichnend, dass Luther bei dem Marburger Gespräche, wo die Gegner von ihrer Lokalisierung Christi im Himmel schwiegen, seine Lehre von der Rechten Gottes garnicht entwickelt, sondern immer wieder sich einfach auf den Text beruft." Althaus wonders why Luther was not freer in his treatment of Scripture, and then concludes, a bit redundantly, that it was because Scripture said what Luther found it to say. Die Lutherische Abendmahlslehre in der Gegenwart (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1931), p. 11. Luther seems to have been rather clearer about the matter. "Man soll nicht weichen von den Worten, wie sie lauten, noch von der Ordnung, wie sie dasteht, es zwingt

With Scripture as Ausgangspunkt, the parallel of the Incarnation with the Eucharist is not hard to discern. The man born of Mary is man for me until the word comes to His humanity and declares Him God. One might say accedi verbum ad carnem et fit Christus.

Si non secundum verbum revelatum fuisset, quis unquam credidisset, quod hic homo in curis iacens ne habet wintel in quo iacet sit salvator, ratio dicit esse mendicum.⁵²

Alle nu die Christum fleischlich ansehen und kennen, müssen sich an ihm ergern, wie den Juden ist geschehen, denn weil fleisch und blut nicht weiter dencket, denn es sihet und fulet, Und sihet, das Christus als ein sterblich mensch gekreuzigt wird, mus es sagen: das ist aus, da ist widder leben noch selickeit der ist dahin, der kan niemand helfen, Er ist selbs verloren. Wer sich aber nicht sol an yhm ergern, der mus über das fleisch faren und durchs wort aufgericht werden, das er ym geist erkenne, wie Christus eben durch sein leiden und sterben recht lebendig und herlich wird, Und wer das recht tut und tun kan, der ist ein neue Creatur ynn Christo mit newen geistlichen erkenntnis begabt.⁵³

"Humanitas Christi si esset sine verbo, esset res vana."⁵⁴ The

denn ein ausgedrückter Artikel des Glaubens, die Worte anders zu deuten oder zu ordnen." W. A., VI, 511. "Ich bin gefangen, kann nicht heraus, der Text ist zu gewältig da und will sich mit Worten nicht lassen dem Sinn reizen." W. A., XV, 394.

For such a stand, Luther received nothing but harmonious support from his grasp of the Incarnation. Karl Barth's remark, quoted by Althaus, is most true in this connection. "Alles, was er sonst für seine These vorgebracht hat . . . ist nur Paraphrase des Hoc est corpus meum, mit dem für ihn alles erledigt war. . . . So steht es geschrieben und so musste es geschrieben stehen. Luther würde das ganz andere als Zwingli gesagt haben, auch wenn er das problematische est nicht in der Bibel gefunden hätte." Paul Althaus, *op. cit.*, p. 11. That his interpretation of the est was informed by the analogy of Scripture surely does not belittle, but rather elevates the single words and passages. The especial debt we owe Elert here is for his calling attention to Luther's Christological apprehensions which were counterpoint to his doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

⁵²W. A., XXIII, 734.

⁵³W. A., XXVI, 312.

⁵⁴W. A., X, No. 2, 246.

humanity remains the humanity, but through the word it is the medium of God. By the words the humanity of Christ is for me no longer merely res externa, but now res spiritualis. This spiritualis means in no way a spiritualizing away of the reality of the humanity in a Docetic direction. Spiritualis for Luther means of the Holy Spirit, and indicates no withdrawing from crass things.

Alles ist und heiszt Geist, geistlich und des Geistes Ding, was aus dem heiligen Geiste kommt, es sei wie leiblich, äusserlich, sichtbarlich es immer sein mag. Wiederum Fleisch und fleischlich alles, was ohn Geist aus natürlicher Kraft des Fleisches kommt, es sei wie innerlich und unsichtbar es immer sei.⁵⁵

Luther is at pains to show that there is to be no diffidence about a thoroughly earthly medium. "Si deus verbum sum hat gesteckt in ein strohalm, dicerem in culmo esse salutem non propter ipsum, sed verbum quod ubi adest, adest deus ipse cum omni sapientia etc."⁵⁶ The word spoken of the concrete reality makes it the conveyor of God to me. Apart from that word it is res vana. This implies no disdain of the thing. It and the word together are God's instrument. "Gott gibt uns kein wort noch gebot fur, da er nicht ein leiblich eusserlich ding ein- fasse und uns furhalte."⁵⁷ Yet it is the word that is primary, for even without the thing the word's power would be none the less. There is no worthiness in the thing, whether the thing be human flesh, words, wine or bread, but ambivalently Luther declares, if bread is unworthy,

⁵⁵W. A., XXIII, 203.

⁵⁶W. A., XX, 387.

⁵⁷W. A., XXIII, 261.

so is our flesh and there can have been no Incarnation.

Sage ich: Gott fragt nicht nach der weszen wirdickeit. Man must sonst auch sagen, Gott were nicht mensch, syntemal menschlich weszen des gottlichen weszens nicht werdt ist, also ist das brod Christus leybs weszen nicht werd, aber darumb folget nicht, das es nicht da es nicht da sey.⁵⁸

Word and thing must not be wrest apart and when the Real Presence goes, with it goes the Incarnation. "Sicut in Christo res se habet, ita et in sacramento."⁵⁹

For the Doctrine of the Lord's Supper, Scripture is equally decisive. "Ich las mir den leib Christi vom Wort nicht scheiden."⁶⁰ Of the words of Scripture it is the Words of Institution that are the center of Luther's attention.⁶¹ "Es ligt alles an den Worten disses sacraments."⁶² It is impossible to follow Luther in his discussion of the Lord's Supper without an appreciation of the dread earnestness with which he takes these words, an earnestness equal to that with which he takes the words which make the Babe of Bethlehem his Lord. He Who said, "This is my body" is the same as He Who by His words created the sun and the moon. His words are "schöpferische Tatworte"⁶³; they bring and achieve what

⁵⁸W. A., X, No. 2, 249.

⁵⁹W. A., VI, 511.

⁶⁰W. A., XXIII, 257.

⁶¹Cf. Paul Althaus, op. cit., p. 10. "Er selber beruft sich am entscheidenden Punkt immer wieder auf die Einsetzungsworte in ihrem klaren Wortlaufe." See also R. Seeberg, op. cit., p. 326.

⁶²W. A., VI, 360.

⁶³Cf. Erich Sommerlath, op. cit., p. 326. W. A., XXVI, 282. "Er spricht, so stehets da."

they declare. Hoc est corpus meum "ist nicht von Menschen, sondern von Gott selbst aus seinen eigen Munde mit solchen Buchstaben und Worten gesprochen und gesetzt."⁶⁴ His almighty power, presence and operation via these things of words. "Ob es auch nur ein paar 'arme elende Worte' sind, so musz man auch einen tuttel und buchstaben gröszer achten denn die gantze welt und dafur zittern und furchten als fur Gott selbs."⁶⁵ Only in creaturely forms can God come to man; apart from these God is a nameless horror.⁶⁶ "Wenn ich Gott nicht ergreife durch Euszerliche ding, wie kan ich jn denn antreffen."⁶⁷

Accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum.⁶⁸ Luther was not much occupied in defending the integrity of the thing. His battle was fought more on the other front. To these enemies he even declared in exasperation that he would rather surrender the integrity of the thing than the Real Presence.

Ehe ich mit den Schwärmen wollt eitel Wein haben, so wollt ich eher mit dem Pabst eitel Blut haben. Wie ich oftmals bekennet habe, soll mirs kein Hader gelten, es bleibe Wein da oder nicht: mir ist genug, dasz Christi Blut da sei, es gehe dem Wein wie Gott will.⁶⁹

⁶⁴W. A., XXVI, 446.

⁶⁵W. A., XXVI, 450.

⁶⁶Supra, p. 2.

⁶⁷W. A., XXVIII, 576.

⁶⁸The force of St. Augustine's dictum for Luther was that it recognized the formative role of the word, but yet did not exhaust the dynamic wealth of his creaturely understanding of the Sacrament. Verbum visibile was more sufficient for Melancthon than for Luther, as Erich Sommerlath points out. "Das Abendmahl bei Luther," Vom Sakrament des Altars, p. 107.

⁶⁹W. A., XXVI, 462.

This was, however, not his considered judgment over against transubstantiation, which he explicitly rejected. In his Sermon on the Lord's Supper in 1519, he still clearly taught transubstantiation.⁷⁰ In 1524 he wrote how sorely tempted he was in 1519 to accept the purely symbolical interpretation in order to make a more thoroughgoing break with Rome, but he was bound by the Words of Institution. However, from 1520 he explicitly rejected transubstantiation,⁷¹ though without vehemence, for his energies were directed chiefly against the more dangerous error of the Schwärmer. Luther's chief repudiations of Rome here were the opus operatum and the mass as enacted propitiatory sacrifice.

In rejecting transubstantiation, Luther was removing that which called the Incarnation in question. That he had this precisely in mind, I have found no evidence to demonstrate.⁷² He was quite simply listening to Scripture, and it is not surprising therefore that he achieved a harmony between the Incarnation and the Eucharist, a harmony lost to both camps of his opponents by the rejection on the one hand of the thing, and on the other of the Divine.

Behind transubstantiation there is a balking at the conjunction of God and thing. The thing must surely be absorbed, transmuted if there is to be an operation of God. Such thinking is of a piece with Docetism

⁷⁰W. A., II, 749.

⁷¹Cf. R. Seeberg, op. cit., p. 325.

⁷²Of the parallel he was most certainly aware. "Denn ich kan wol sagen: 'das brod ist meyn leyb', gleych wie ich sage von Christo: 'Der Mensch ist Got', das dennoch nicht nott sey die menscheyt tzu verschwynden und eytel Got da bleyben, alsoz hie auch 'das ist mein leyb' kan wol der leyb da seyn, das dennoch brot bleybe." W. A., X, No. 2, 246.

and its kindred heresies.⁷³ It is a condemnation of the creation in harmony with neo-platonic contemptus mundi and antithetical to that Lutheran Weltfreudigkeit which is begotten of the faith that takes the Incarnation entirely seriously. If God was born into creation as Mary's baby, we cannot say that it was no true baby, that it merely had the accidents of a baby. Similarly it cannot be said that the bread and wine must lose their essence if God is to impart Himself to us in them.

While recognizing other presuppositions of the Roman mass, it would surely seem that the thinking which rejects the essence of the bread calls for a consequent rejection of the essence of baby. If transubstantiation thinking were consistently pursued, it would arrive at a Docetic denial of the Incarnation. While logical difficulties are no ultimate compulsion in the formulation of doctrine where Scripture has spoken, logical difficulties when Scripture has not spoken or spoken to the contrary should give pause, and most certainly to a communion that prides itself on its logic.

Luther stuck quite simply to Scripture and so evinces a quite remarkable harmony between Eucharist and Incarnation. Implicit in his stand is the disavowal of the rejection of the conjunction of God and thing. If God puts Himself into a thing that we may apprehend Him, that does not require the repudiation of the thing which is yet a creature of God. Herein the thing comes into its own, as it were,

⁷³W. A., VII, 14 and XX, 1053.

exalted to its Maker's gracious purpose, even if that thing were only a wisp of straw, a donkey or dung.⁷⁴ Luther's biggest battles were fought, however, on the other front, in defense not of the thing but of God's putting Himself into the thing within our grasp.

In passing to the other front we may note in the position defended by Luther a striking parallel to the great Christological controversies. The questions "Is Mary's baby God?", "Is Christ man?", and "How are the two natures related?" are parallel to "Is the consecrated host Christ's Body?", "Is the Sacrament still bread?", and "What is the relationship of the bread and the body of Christ?" Luther's answers to the latter questions are parallel to the answers of the Catholic Church to the Christological questions. By this we see the heterodoxy of the opponents, who on the one hand reject the bread, and on the other the Real Presence, and Luther's own Catholic orthodoxy.

The first wave of assault was by the Schwärmer. With their vaulting spiritualizing they scorned the lowly word, wine and bread. To them God spoke directly. That God should bind Himself to things was an insult to their spiritualizing. It also cramped their style. With breath-taking vehemence Luther attacked these people for they would wrest salvation from our grasp.⁷⁵ Luther knew that only as God comes to us in things can we know Him. If God scorned the things of His creation, then

⁷⁴W. A., II, 132; XXIV, 254; XXVIII, 202 and 262; XXX, 116.

⁷⁵Cf. Karl Jäger, Luthers religiöse Interesse an seiner Lehre von der Realpräsenz (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1900), p. 1. "Theologische Streitigkeiten von solcher Heftigkeit werden niemals um blosse dogmatische Formeln geführt."

He scorns us also for we are irrevocably involved in the creation, for we are creatures too. Only via creatureliness, only by placing Himself into things can God come to us.⁷⁶ We have grasp and certainty of God only as He has put Himself into flesh, words, water, wine and bread. The denial of this casts us out into the empty darkness, where there is only the dread fear of the deus absconditus, and few men have known the meaning of that more keenly than Luther.⁷⁷ Therefore with all the enraged fire of his embattled faith he cries out against the Schwärmer that they

. . . sthen steiff auff dem kopff: Externa res non. Cavete ab illorum furore, quia res externa quando apprehenditur per verbum dei, est salutaris. Humanitas Christi si esset sine verbo, esset res vana. Sed iam per sanguinem corpus eius salvamur, quia adiunctum verbum.⁷⁸

The consequences for Christology are not hard to find. Luther saw that the Enthusiasts' view of the Lord's Supper would replace Christ with a concocted Christ, a Christ who does not come all the way to us where we are, a Christ that is not truly incarnate, and there is an end of hope.⁷⁹

Ipsae fingunt alium Christum esse quam est. Judei: deus est qui creavit omnia. Bene, ey non habet filium. Schwermeri sic: Christus, qui redemit nos, qui dat spiritum sanctum nobis sed nullus est Christus, qui habet corpus et sanguinem in pane et vino. Et talis Christus, qui fingitur ab illis, non est, cuius caro sit inutilis.⁸⁰

⁷⁶W. A., XXV, 128.

⁷⁷Cf. Erich Sommerlath, op. cit., p. 120.

⁷⁸W. A., XXV, 64.

⁷⁹Cf. Erich Sommerlath, op. cit., p. 120 and W. A., XVIII, 143.

⁸⁰W. A., XX, 682.

And to complete the circle, the deprivation of Christ calls consequently for a derogation of the Sacrament. "Hunc Christum, quem habent Schwermeri, nolo, qui habent talem, ut oporteat contemnere Evangelium et sacramenta pro symbolis."⁸¹ The problems here raised will be discussed in connection with the Swiss, but already we can see the Incarnation and the Eucharist in unmistakable contiguity.

The second wave of attack was from the Swiss, though Luther lumped them all together with the Schwärmer, and not without justification, for basic to both was the rejection of things as the way of God to men.⁸² Luther saw this as the only way, and in humble creaturely faith laid hold of God where God has placed Himself in things. Where He has placed Himself, we must seek Him; to search elsewhere is to be lost.⁸³ In all this Luther's concern was soteriological. "Quanta consolatio sit habere Deum non nudum in spiritu sed incarnatum et Baptismo ac Eucharistia indutum."⁸⁴ The above was quite offensive to the Swiss. In many ways their position is only a refinement of that of the Schwärmer and Schwenkfeld,⁸⁵ so it will not be amiss to use the occasion of the Swiss to draw together those items illustrative of our parallel.

As seen already in the Schwärmer, the basic error was the rejection

⁸¹W. A., XXVI, 65.

⁸²Cf. Paul Wilhelm Gennrich, Die Christologie Luthers im Abendmahls-Streit 1524-1529 (Königsberg: Otto Kummel, 1929), p. 59.

⁸³Supra, p. 3.

⁸⁴W. A., XXV, 128.

⁸⁵Cf. R. Seeberg, op. cit., p. 380.

of the thing as a medium of God. Zwingli's point of departure in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper was John 6:63, "The flesh profiteth nothing."⁸⁶ He was prompted to a positive formulation of the Eucharist, he wrote Melanchthon, by Erasmus. His static, scholastic Christology had no place for a powerful, personal, dynamic understanding of the Personal Union. This is exemplified in his localization of the body of Christ at a local Right Hand. Such presuppositions led naturally to the rejection of God in things and so also of the body of Christ in the bread. Hence the est means significat and the Sacrament is purely symbolical. Christ is in the Sacrament only contemplatione fidei and not per essentiam et realiter. "Tunc editur corpus Christi, cum pro nobis creditur caesum."⁸⁷ Here was a spirit of static, rational detachment quite other than Luther's dynamic involvement with the living God, Who deals with men in things, in words, humanity, water, wine and bread.⁸⁸

In his spiritualizing away from crass things, a basic harmony with the Roman aberration is discernable in Zwingli. It is the same old antipathy to things,⁸⁹ and misunderstanding of God's gracious way to man.

When at Marburg Scripture and the Fathers failed to establish agreement, Oecolampadius attempted to correct Luther's Christology and so demonstrate his error in the Sacrament, but here he was running

⁸⁶For Luther's radically different understanding of flesh, see p. 16.

⁸⁷Cf. R. Seeberg, op. cit., p. 378.

⁸⁸Supra, p. 2.

⁸⁹P. Althaus, op. cit., p. 26.

against Luther's central bastion. The concession that Christ was present according to His deity meant nothing, for they refused to acknowledge it in re. We have seen Luther's insistence on the total Christ and emphasis on the humanity. Therefore when Oecolampadius suggested that Luther raise his thoughts above the human to the divine Christ, Luther with unwavering consistency and conviction declared:

'Er kenne noch verehere keinen andern Gott als der Mensch gewordenen: auszer diesem wolle er keinen andern haben. Denn es gebe keinen andern, der retten könne. Deshalb könne er nicht ertragen, dasz die Menschheit Christi so geringschätzig und wegwerfend behandelt werde.' Es sind die wichtigsten Worte, die Luther in Marburg überhaupt gesprochen hat. Sie führen in das Zentrum seiner Theologie. Und sie bilden den Schlüssel zu seiner Abendmahlslehre.⁹⁰

Christ cannot be divided.⁹¹ To remove the humanity is to remove God, for only via humanity does God come to us. "Leib und Blut sind der Inbegriff der vollendeten Menschlichkeit des Gekreuzigten."⁹²

But humanity is a spatially circumscribed thing. The Swiss placed the humanity of Christ at a local and circumscribed Right Hand, and declared that it obviously could not be all over the place in many Eucharists. "Wirsts ouch nimmermeer erhalten, dass die menschheit Jesu Christi mee dann an einem ort sye."⁹³ This was a consequence of Zwingli's Christology for he did not take the Incarnation with entire seriousness.⁹⁴

⁹⁰Werner Elert, op. cit., p. 317.

⁹¹W. A., XX, 541. "Ubi video Christum, video integrum, wo ich ihn ergreife, ist er gantz in baptismo, sacramento."

⁹²Werner Elert, op. cit., p. 320.

⁹³R. Seeberg, op. cit., p. 379.

⁹⁴Cf. Werner Elert, Der christliche Glaube (Berlin: Furche, 1941), p. 402.

God "hat die menschliche Natur an sich genommen", and the Incarnation for Zwingli amounted to no more. Hence he does violence to the Personal Union, and unashamedly divides the natures with his alioiosis,⁹⁵ and by all this denies the communication idiomatum and the kyávero of John 1:14.

To Luther this alioiosis was "des Teufels Larven"⁹⁶ for he took the kyávero with entire seriousness. "Aus einem unendlichen gott ist ein endlicher und beschlisslicher mensch geworden."⁹⁷

When the Swiss maintained that a body not limited in space was no body, Luther called this mathematics and inadmissable. To this he was compelled by the Personal Union and his understanding of faith.

Christus nach der gottheit, wo er ist, da ist er eine naturliche göttliche person, und ist auch naturlich und personlich deshalb, wie das wol beweiset sein empfangnis ynn mutterleibe: denn solt er gottes son sein, so muste er naturlich und personlich ynn mutter leibe sein und mensch werden. Ist er nu naturlich und personlich, wo er ist, so mus er daselbs auch mensch sein, denn es sind nicht zwo zurtrennete personen, sondern ein einige person; wo sie ist, da ist sie die einige, unzutrennete person; und wo du kanst sagen: Hie ist Christus, da mustu auch sagen: So ist Christus, der mensch auch da . . . alles durch und durch vol Christus sey auch nach der menscheit.⁹⁸

It is significant that it is the Incarnation that means all this to Luther and the post-resurrection body of our Lord here plays no large part in his thinking.⁹⁹ In the State of Humiliation Christ was omni-

⁹⁵Ibid. "Es ist eine rhetorische permutatio, qua de altera in Christo natura loquentes alterius vocibus utimur."

⁹⁶W. A., XXVI, 321.

⁹⁷W. A., XLVII, 263.

⁹⁸W. A., XXVI, 332.

⁹⁹W. A., XXIII, 199.

present according to His human nature.¹⁰⁰ The session at the Right Hand can bring no increase of omnipresence. The Right Hand was for Luther God's almighty power and therefore without limit or circumscription. "Sol er macht haben und regieren, mus er freilich auch da sein gegenwertig und wesentlich durch die rechte hand Gotts, die allenthalben ist."¹⁰¹ This is a little more than mathematics can comprehend. We may not prescribe categories to God. "Was wollen wir den Gotts gewalt spannen und messen?"¹⁰² "Wiltu yhm weise und mas setzen und welen?"¹⁰³ "Weil Gotts gewalt kein mas noch zal hat, und solche ding thut, die keine vernunft begreyffen kan."¹⁰⁴ Mathematics grasps only the tangible; faith grasps the spiritual. Mathematics which man projects upon things grasps nothing more than the things. The faith of a man also cannot but operate with things, but in apprehending the things, to which the word is joined, it apprehends what God has placed into the things. Only faith apprehends God in Mary's baby, only faith knows that it receives the body and blood of Christ, for faith believes the vital words of God.¹⁰⁵ This is no passing from the possible to the impossible, but simply taking God at His words. It is not that the finite is capable of

¹⁰⁰W. A., XXIII, 117.

¹⁰¹W. A., XXIII, 115.

¹⁰²W. A., XXVI, 417.

¹⁰³W. A., XXIII, 268.

¹⁰⁴W. A., XXIII, 117.

¹⁰⁵W. A., XX, 520. "Das er aber sich wil finden lassen ym brod und wein, macht sein almechtig wort."

containing the infinite, but that the infinite is capable of placing
itself in the finite.

Luther saw the problem in relation to the omnipresence of God. In
the controversy Luther does not tire to emphasize that God is every-
where in His creatures.¹⁰⁶ If He were not, they would not exist.¹⁰⁷
Yet man does not have God merely in having the thing.¹⁰⁸ It all de-
pends on God. God acts. God comes. He comes all the way and appoints
the place.

Ein anders ist, wenn Gott da ist, und wenn er dir da ist. Denn
aber ist er dir da, wenn er sein wort dawr thut und bindet sich
damit an und spricht: Hie soltu mich finden. . . . Er ist nu
auch unbegreiflich worden, und wirst yhn nicht ertappen, ob er
gleich yn deinem brot ist, Es sey denn, das er sich dir anbinde
und bescheide dich zu einem sonderlichen tisch durch sein wort
und deute dir selbs das brot durch sein wort.¹⁰⁹

This is the hallowing of things as the Incarnation hallows the creation.
It is the gracious God Himself who comes to us in things, and it is
faith believing the words which apprehends. That which faith apprehends
is not calculable for it is the apprehension of God. In the Eucharist
God is dir da, mediated by the humanity of Christ, which is His body and
blood. Therefore to ask Luther to rise above the humanity, to conceive

¹⁰⁶W. A., XXVI, 339. "Nichts ist so klein, Gott ist noch kleiner,
Nichts ist so gros, Gott ist noch gröszer, Nichts ist so kurz, Gott ist
noch kürzer, Nichts ist so lang, Gott ist noch lenger, Nichts ist so
breit, Gott ist noch breiter, Nichts ist so schmal, Gott ist noch
schmaler und so fort an. Ists ein unaussprechlich wesen uber und auszer
allem, das man nennen odder dencken kan."

¹⁰⁷W. A., XIX, 492.

¹⁰⁸W. A., XXIII, 151.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

of it as circumscribed at the Right Hand, was to ask him to surrender God.

The omnipresence of the humanity of Christ, or ubiquity as the Reformed with insulting intent called the Lutheran position, was no deduction forced on Luther by his stand against the Swiss, but rather an emphatic statement of his implicit Christology drawn forth by controversy.¹¹⁰ The denial of the omnipresence of the humanity, Luther feared, would lead consequently to the denial of the deity. "Ich sorge, es werde noch die zeit komen, das unser Rottengeister mit yhrer vernunft Christum noch gar werden austilgen wollen und yhn kein ewigen waren Gott lassen seyn."¹¹¹ If the humanity is not there and cannot mediate the deity, then the deity is lost to me. Conversely, if the deity is mediated by the humanity, the humanity is present with the deity. However, "gegen Zwingli beruft er sich nicht auf die Logik, sondern auf die Grammatik."¹¹² The humanity, i.e., the body and blood, are given to us with the bread and the wine. Our Lord said so.¹¹³

Since the humanity of Christ is in so many places in the Eucharist, we may not confine it to a local Right Hand as to some celestial swallow's nest.¹¹⁴ It is omnipresent, and if omnipresent then there is no

¹¹⁰It was already held by him in 1525. Cf. W. A., XVIII, 206.

¹¹¹W. A., XX, 522.

¹¹²E. Seeberg, op. cit., p. 362.

¹¹³W. A., XXVI, 446.

¹¹⁴W. A., XXVIII, 141.

reason why not in bread and wine.¹¹⁵ Thus Luther sought to demonstrate the possibility of the Real Presence; for the doctrine His foundation was the Words of Institution.

The same conclusion is arrived at by a consideration of the Personal Union.¹¹⁶ The Ascension did not, as Zwingli maintained, nullify the Incarnation. Christ did not become less a man thereby, for in Him God and man are utterly and indissolubly united.

Parallel with the question of the relationship of the two natures in Christ is the relationship of the bread and the body. As God was truly in Jesus of Nazareth, so truly is the body of Christ in the bread. Yet both are blessedly apprehendable only to faith, and not to sight and touch. Not that any human action puts them there. They are there irrespective of man's belief or disbelief. Of the certain comfort of this fact we shall speak later. The point here is that what the shepherds saw was an ordinary baby. Their eyes did not behold any divine attribute in the infant. It was just a common baby, but with their faith's embrace of that baby they grasped God. The only attributes they saw were most human and creaturely.¹¹⁷ Only thus can God come to men, via creatureliness.

¹¹⁵W. A., XX, 384. "Si est ubique et super omnes creaturas, ergo est in vino et pane.

¹¹⁶Supra, p. 27.

¹¹⁷Supra, p. 5

Now Luther thought it necessary to distinguish modes of the presence of the humanity of Christ and we can be sure that Luther will not make distinctions which virtually remove the humanity of Christ, for he knew that if the humanity is gone, God is lost to us.

He distinguishes three modes and for these he is indebted to Occam and Biel.¹¹⁸ There are "dreyerley weise an ein ort zu sein: localiter odder circumscriptive, diffinitive, repletive."¹¹⁹ Localiter is as wine is in a barrel or straw in a sack or Jesus of Nazareth in a boat, "da er raum nam und gab nach seiner grösse." A physical body displaces air by its mass. This is measurable, begreiflich. Diffinitive is when something is in a place, but where there is no perceptible congruence between it and the limits of space, e.g., an angel in a room. An angel displaces no air. This cannot be measured; it is unbegreiflich. In this manner Christ rose through the stone and passed through a door.¹²⁰ He did not displace any door and yet he did not cease to be fully man. Repletive is as only God is in all. As we have seen Luther also ascribes this last mode of presence to the humanity of Christ also. However, as R. Seeberg points out, Luther's intention in these distinctions was to show Zwingli that there are other possible modes of presence than his crass physical conception.

Luther's interest lay with the diffinitive for this is the mode of the presence of the humanity of Christ in the Eucharist. He gives the

¹¹⁸Cf. R. Seeberg, op. cit., pp. 386 f.

¹¹⁹W. A., XXVI, 327.

¹²⁰W. A., XIX, 490.

smiles of a man's face being present at a distance from its local presence because it is apprehendable, and that even if a mirror be smashed into pieces, yet in each piece the image reflected is complete and present. However, he admits that in these he is speaking not from Scripture but only for illustration. To the reproach of Zwingli that the body of Christ is not graspable in the bread Luther agrees, but the grasping here is that of Zwingli, i.e., of the measuring reason, whereas the grasping of which Luther is wont to speak is that of faith. "Wir können yhn nicht ynns brod fassen, odder beschweren, wie sie felschlich von uns deuten."¹²¹ "Das er aber sich wil finden lassen eygendlich ym brod und wein, macht sein almechtig wort."¹²² It is then the diffinitive, unbegreiflich mode of presence which faith, trusting in the words, apprehends.

Er ist nu auch unbegreiflich worden und wirst yhn nicht ertappen ob er gleich in deinem brod ist, Es sey denn, das er sich dir anbinde und bescheide dich zu eim sonderlichen tisch durch sein wort.¹²³

There is only hope then for man when God binds Himself by His words to a thing.

Logically transubstantiation rejects the thing; the symbolical interpreters reject Christ. Luther, loyal to catholic Christology and the Words of Institution, rejects neither, for Scripture speaks of the presence of both.

¹²¹W. A., XX, 520.

¹²²W. A., XX, 521.

¹²³W. A., XIII, 151.

That he would not allow himself to go beyond Scripture, no matter how striking the parallel, we see in his clear distinction between the Personal Union of God and man in Christ and what he called the sacramental union of the bread and the body of Christ.

Warumb solt man denn nicht vielmehr auch ym abendmal sagen "das ist mein leib", ob gleich brod und leib zwey unterschiedliche wesen sind, und solch "das" auff brod deute? Denn hie auch Einickeit aus zweyerley wesen ist worden, die wil ich nennen Sacramentlich Einickeit, darumb das Christus leib und blut uns allda zum sacrament werden gegeben, denn es ist nicht eine natürliche odder personliche einickeit wie ynn Gott und Christo.¹²⁴

He contrasts also the coming of the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove with the Incarnation and likens it to the sacramental union.¹²⁵ He does not blithely identify or theorize and yet he draws the parallel of the Incarnation and the sacramental union as scripturally close as possible, and that is very close. The flesh of Christ is "ein Gottesfleisch, ein Geistfleisch", and of the sacramental union he can say,

Beide brot und leib bleibe, und umb der sacramentlichen einickeit willen recht gered wird: "das ist mein leib", mit dem wörtlein "das" auff brod zu deuten, denn est ist nicht mehr schlecht brod, das ist ein brod, das mit dem leibe Christi ein sacramentlich wesen und ein ding worden ist.¹²⁶

Most illustrative of the foregoing is Luther's distinction between sign and symbol which makes abundantly clear the profound harmony of Incarnation and Eucharist. He rejects every symbolical interpretation,

¹²⁴W. A., XXVI, 442.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶W. A., XXVI, 445.

for they would remove Christ from the place to which He has come to us, i.e., in things.¹²⁷

To say that Christ is symbolized by humanity or bread and wine not only denies His actual, apprehendable presence and the clear words of Scripture, it is patently foolish. For anything to symbolize something, it must have a likeness in itself to the thing symbolized.

Das ist die allergrößte Torheit, das er spricht: das brod bedeute odder sey ein gleichnis seines leibes für uns gegeben, Und der Becher odder wein sey ein gleichnis seines blutes für uns gegossen. Lieber, wo ist solcher gleichnis ym brod und becher weins? Denn wo eine figur, symbolum odder gleichnis sein sol, da eins das andere bedeuten sol, da mus etwas gleichnis ynn beiden angezeigt werden, darauff die gleichnis stehe.¹²⁸

What thing then can possibly symbolize the living God? Here we see the honour given God by Luther, who, his opponents declared, had God act unworthy of Himself. They prescribed to God and sought to press Him into "mathematical" categories. They refused to permit the Almighty to come in a thing, and by this they thought to have a more exalted conception of God. It is, however, Luther that magnifies the grace and honour of God by recognizing that no thing can contain or symbolize Him, and yet, and this the incredible, the unbegreiflich that only faith can grasp, the Holy and Living God, Whom worlds cannot contain, is pleased to be born of a woman and impart Himself to us in bread and wine. To

¹²⁷Though Luther later used different terms, the distinction remained intact. "Symbol" becomes "philosophical sign". W. A., IV, 666. "Duplicia sunt signa: Philosophica et theologica. Signum philosophicum est nota absentis rei, signum theologicum est nota praesentis rei."

¹²⁸W. A., XXVI, 391.

lessen the full extent of God's coming down to us is to rob Him of His honour.¹²⁹

If God had wanted symbols, He need not have been born as Mary's baby; a Docetic body would have done just as well; and there would have been no need to change the Passover.

Wenn nu Christus wolt ein abendmal einsetzen, da nicht sein leib und blut sondern gleichnis seins leibs und bluts yamen were, so hette er billig uns das alte Moses abendmal mit dem Osterlamb gelassen, welchs an der massen und rund umb, durch und durch, allenthalben auff feinst seinen leib fur uns gegeben und sein blut fur uns vergossen zur vergebung der sunden deutet und eine figur odder gleichnis ist, wie alle welt wol weis. Was narret er denn und hebt solch fein abendmal des alten testaments auff und setzt dagegn ein solch abendmal ein, das doch gar nichts ist gegen ihenes widder mit weuten noch mit wesen?¹³⁰

Therefore not symbols but signs, and such signs that he who grasps the signum grasps the res signata, for the vital words of God have spoken it there.

In a sense the Eucharist is a symbol, but this rather to the heathen, for they see only the externals. "Sacramenta, quibus segregamur ab omnibus populis, qui non sunt Christiani ut per zeichen."¹³¹ To the believer, who grasps the words of God, there is infinitely more. "Verbum dei est nobis veritas. Si est verbum in sacramento, lasz mir auch leben und warheit drin bleiben."¹³² Of the words, in turn, the thing is the guarantee and seal.

¹²⁹Supra, p. 7.

¹³⁰W. A., XXVI, 395.

¹³¹W. A., XXVII, 2.

¹³²W. A., XX, 387.

Er hat von anfang an so gehandelt: wenn er das Euangelion gibt, lesset ers nicht bey dem worte bleiben, sondern thut ein zeichen dazu, Als wir ym newen Testament haben das wort "Wer da gleubt" etc. Dazu auch das zeichen "Wer getaufft wird". Des gleichen haben wir Christus leib und blut ym brot und wein neben dem wort. Also thut er wie ein fromer trewer man, der ein brieff schreibet und sein sigel darauff drückt.¹³³

That these are all objectively there, and in no way derive their validity from me, is the basis of assurance and comfort.

Sic Iesus: video hominem, sed fides ostendit invisibilem rem etc. Non habemus articulum fidei, qui non habeat zum furpild ein euserlich ding. Sed distingue de externis qui deus et homo hat gestellt. Dominus steck etwas hinders brod, das ich mit dem wort und glauben fassen mus. Hoc ideo, ut arripiamus locos contra Schermeros. Fides proponit aliquam rem invisibilem quae tamen est in re visibili. Quicquid est praeceptorum dei, das ist gefast in externam rem. Sic fides heret am verborgen et tamen oculis videt externe. Sic iam Elizabeth non inspicit matrem ut aliam, sed aliis oculis quia agnoscit se ancillam. Ita iudicat externum corpus secundum fidem. 'Mater domini mei': hoc non dicit ratio, sed fides. Fides non unum articulum, es mus ein leiplich ding gestellt sein, Ideo ut hafften an dem quod non visibile. Ideo missus Christus: deus non potuit comprehendi, ideo misit filium in quo tamquam signo wir hafften und gelockt werden ad hoc quod invisibile.¹³⁴

Both the Incarnation and the Eucharist are a sign. Here is the closest convergence of the two in Luther.¹³⁵ Yet nothing is farther from him than theorizing. Here is a sinner who has trembled to despair before the deus absconditus, and then been raised to vital faith by the God Who reached out and took hold of him in things, humanity, words, water, wine and bread. Burning through all his theology is a life and death concern for the certainty of salvation, a salvation that is ours only

¹³³W. A., XXIV, 204.

¹³⁴W. A., XXVII, 234.

¹³⁵W. A., XXIII, 23. "Er will uns ja so nahe sein leiblich als er ihnen gewest ist." See also p. 256.

in the actuality of God's coming to man in things. Therefore not symbols but signs. As surely as the fullness of the Godhead was in Jesus of Nazareth bodily, so surely is the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine. We see the movement of his faith in his words:

So fassen die Wort erstelich das Brod und den Becher zum Sakrament, Brod und Becher fassen den Leib und Blut Christi, Leib und Blut Christi fassen das Neue Testament, das Neue Testament fasset Vergebung der Sünden, Vergebung der Sünden fasset das ewige Leben und Seligkeit.¹³⁶

Through anguished struggle his faith had laid hold of the gracious God and he would not let Him go, nor suffer his grip to be emptied by those who would deny that God has come all the way to him in humanity, words, water, wine and bread. It was his salvation that was at stake, his hold on Christ, true man born of the Virgin Mary and true God begotten of the Father from eternity.¹³⁷

Because of the solus Christus of his faith he grasped the glorious parallel of the Incarnation and the Lord's Supper. He gives glory to God Whose honour is the depth to which He comes down that worthless men may have hold on Him and live. To save His creatures the Son of God became a creature, and took for His gracious purpose the most common things of the creature world. Men could not move toward God. God came all the

¹³⁶p. Althaus, op. cit., p. 31.

¹³⁷"Sieht man den Kampf Luthers am das Abendmahl im Zusammenhang mit seiner gesamten Theologie und ihrem Kernstück der Christologie, so versteht man die Leidenschaft und die Erbitterung, mit der er sich für seine Auffassung einsetzte. Es ging hier eben nicht um theologische Meinungsverschiedenheiten, sondern um in ihrem tiefsten Grund verschiedene gerichtete Weltanschauungen und um ganz verschiedenem Boden erwachsene Glaubensüberzeugungen." P. Gennrich quoted in Kirchliche Zeitschrift, LIV, 58 f.

way to man. "Ipse mihi venit. Ego non ad eum ascendi."¹³⁸ He exposed Himself to the contempt of men. His body was flogged by soldiers and is given into the mouths of unbelievers. Of all imaginable gods, such a God is the most obnoxious to men who would have a part in earning their salvation, who would take some steps at least toward God. Yet if God be gracious, if we are saved by grace alone, then His "No" to every effort of man is categorical. It is the same iugulum attacked by the sacramentarians as was attacked by Erasmus. Sola gratia was at stake and Luther could concede not an inch, or his salvation was imperiled. No supposed movement of man to God could be a part of salvation. Salvation is alone in God coming all the way to man, all the way into creatureliness, all the way into things. Such is His coming in the Incarnation and the Lord's Supper. Thus alone He comes and thus the gracious ways of God to man are one.

¹³⁸W. A., XXXIV, No. 2, 494.

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