

1-1-1959

A Lutheran Contribution to the Present Discussions on The Lord's Supper

Hermann Sasse

Immanuel Seminary, North Adelaide

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sasse, Hermann (1959) "A Lutheran Contribution to the Present Discussions on The Lord's Supper," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 30, Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol30/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

A Lutheran Contribution to the Present Discussions on the Lord's Supper

BY HERMANN SASSE

I

THE Lord's Supper has again become one of the main issues among the churches of Christendom as well as within individual denominations. This is the result of two movements which, though deeply rooted in the 19th century, have shaped the life of all Christendom since the beginning of this century: the Liturgical and the Ecumenical Movement. Since the deepest motive underlying both is what has been called "the awakening of the Church in the souls," future church historians may regard them as branches of one great movement which, like all great movements in the Western Church (Reformation, Pietism, Rationalism, etc.), sweep through the whole of Christendom, regardless of national or denominational borderlines.

The modern Liturgical Movement in the Roman Church began with Pius X. It is certainly not accidental that the "pope of the Eucharist" was also the staunch fighter against Modernism. He started the fight in 1903, a few weeks after his great reform of the liturgy had begun. The longing of the best minds of the Roman Church for a closer contact with, and a greater influence on, modern man (which at that time could not be satisfied in the fields of Biblical studies and dogmatics) found an outlet in the field of the liturgy. Whilst theological scholarship turned from the danger zone of doctrinal Modernism to the less dangerous fields of liturgiology and there achieved surprising results, the devotional life of the entire Roman Church, since the end of World War I, underwent a profound change, the characteristic feature of which is an astonishing renewal of the Eucharistic life at the expense of lower forms of devotion.

The parallels in the Protestant churches are evident. They can by no means be explained by Roman influence, though the impact of the Roman movement has become strong in the course of time.

For even outside the churches there are most interesting parallels indicative of a deep change in the inner life of modern mankind. This change may be called the turn from subject to object. At the same time when in Roman Catholic churches the high altar began to be replaced by the mensa of the ancient church, the priest saying Mass facing the people, it could happen that in a "Scoto-Catholic" church the Reformed table was replaced by a high altar. In either case the ecclesiastical authorities had great difficulties in turning the minister around. It may be a consolation to other churches that Rome even today, 30 years after the constitution *Divini cultus* and despite the rules laid down in *Mediator Dei* (1947), has to combat "certain misguided enthusiasts" who "interfere with the liturgy in an unauthorized way," as Archbishop Simonds of Melbourne has put it in May 1958. Pius XII, continuing the work of his predecessor, has strongly emphasized that the rule of Celestine I, "*Legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*" (Denzinger 139 and 2200) must also be inverted: The rule of faith constitutes the rule of prayer. It is most significant that the present pope in *Humani generis* (1952) had to defend even the Real Presence against certain trends in modern Catholicism which would make "the consecrated species . . . merely efficacious signs of the spiritual presence of Christ."

Similar difficulties that have arisen in many Lutheran churches are due to the neglect of the truth that the rule of faith must remain the rule of prayer. It is a deplorable fact that some Lutheran theologians, while accepting Roman, Eastern, and meaningless Anglican elements, have left it to Roman Catholic scholars to discover Luther's greatness as liturgist and the importance of the old Lutheran liturgy. A liturgical movement which is not based upon the confession of the church is bound to go astray. A renewal of the Sacrament of the Altar in the Lutheran Church must go hand in hand with a new understanding of the doctrine of the sacrament.

If, thus, the Liturgical Movement was bound to provoke new discussions of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, the Ecumenical Movement has had the same effect. It is true that this movement, as long as it was dominated by Anglican theology, was interested in the practical issues of intercommunion rather than in doctrinal discussions on the sacrament. The Eucharist, so we are told, has been instituted to be celebrated, not to be speculated on. Nowhere

did the *lex orandi lex credendi* play a greater part than in the Anglican churches after they had practically abandoned the Thirty-nine Articles with their definitely Reformed doctrine on the Lord's Supper. The modern union churches that follow more or less the Anglican pattern (South India, Ceylon, the proposals for North India-Pakistan and for Australia) determine the liturgical requirements and the *minister sacramenti* but leave the understanding of the presence of Christ and of the gift of the sacrament to the individual minister and communicant.

However, as soon as Lutherans or serious Presbyterians and Reformed are invited to join such a union, doctrinal discussions become inevitable. This is also the experience of the European churches. When in 1933 the Federation of the Evangelical Churches in Germany (Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenbund) of 1922 was transformed into the German Evangelical Church (Deutsche Evangelische Kirche), a discussion of the problem of the Lord's Supper was not envisaged, though the question of intercommunion had become urgent. Even when in the following year the Confessional Synod of Barmen, under the leadership of Karl Barth, gave its interpretation of the new body in the Barmen Declaration, no mention was made of the sacrament, since "the controversy was not about the Lord's Supper" (Barth).

But soon the question came up and divided the Confessing Church. When a confessional synod of the Prussian Union in 1937 declared full intercommunion among the various denominations, a new discussion of the Sacrament of the Altar began, with the result that when after the war the German Evangelical Church was to be replaced by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKiD), an "obligatory discussion of the Lord's Supper" (*verbindliches Abendmahlsgespräch*) was demanded to settle the question that had divided Protestantism since 1529. Several official meetings of theologians were held, but no result has been reached. However, the literary discussion is going on in Germany as well as throughout the world.

II

It is one of the great tragedies of Lutheranism that this challenge comes to it at a moment when it may be least able to meet it. What a revelation is contained in the words which were spoken by

Dr. H. W. Gensichen of Heidelberg, formerly of Madras, at Minneapolis ("The Unity of the Church in Christ," *Messages of the Third Assembly* [Minneapolis: The Lutheran World Federation, 1957], p. 48):

On the one hand, we Lutherans claim that our doctrine of the Lord's Supper approaches most closely the intentions of the Lord, and we have in the course of history drawn very sharp lines of distinction over against those who disagree with our doctrine. But, on the other hand, we ourselves are today perhaps farther than ever removed from complete agreement on the traditional Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Today there is at least one Lutheran Church which has reached agreement on the Lord's Supper with its Calvinistic neighbor church, not to mention various types of "emergency" intercommunion practiced in diaspora regions or in young churches. There are Lutheran Churches which "really see no obstacle to intercommunion with the Anglican Church." Some present-day Lutheran exegetes assert that the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper, as stated in the Confessions, does not do full justice to the Biblical witness. And then there are many other Lutherans who view all this as deplorable apostasy from the faith of the fathers.

The proper way to redeem this situation would seem to be a thorough re-examination of the doctrine that every Lutheran has learned from the Catechism and every pastor has solemnly pledged to teach upon his ordination. How can Lutheranism speak to other churches without having first reached agreement within its own ranks? It is most disappointing that the corresponding thesis of Minneapolis (II, 6, p. 106) does not envisage an attempt to heal this wound of our own church. Rather it pushes on the problem to an ecumenical level:

In an ecumenical study of the Scriptures we find the most helpful means towards a fuller realization of the unity in Christ and towards a fuller realization of our faith as found in and behind our confessional statements. On this basis also the question of intercommunion and the nature of the Sacraments can be brought out of the present deadlock. For our Lutheran Churches it is a congenial and timely task to participate in and initiate such ecumenical studies — on the highest theological, as well as on the parish level. [Emphasis added]

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, the present author wants to emphasize that he has no objection against an "ecumenical study of the Scriptures" — to his knowledge all true Biblical scholarship since the Reformation has been a constant exchange of thought between the theologians of various churches, including Rome. He himself confesses that he has learned much, and precisely with regard to the sacraments, from other churches and that he has never published anything on that subject, including this article, without having talked it over with Reformed and Roman Catholic colleagues. He does object to the superficial methods of modern conferences in which the profoundest questions are briefly debated and hurriedly decided, and to the superstitious belief that if Christians of different persuasions are gathered around the Bible, the Holy Spirit will certainly guide them into truth. He *can* do that, but *ubi et quando visum est Deo*, and He will most certainly not do it if on the "parish level" Lutherans, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, and Quakers meet in order to bring "out of the deadlock" insoluble problems, especially if they do not realize that they have quite different ideas of the authority of Holy Scripture and that they do not understand one another's language when using terms like "Gospel," "church," "sacrament," "Real Presence." Such methods will not lead to another Pentecost but to a Babylonian confusion of tongues.

III

Under these circumstances, what can the Lutheran contribution to the worldwide Eucharistic discussions of our time be? If the present generation of Lutherans cannot speak because the *magnus consensus* of the Confessions has been lost, we could perhaps learn something from the fathers and ask: What do the controversies of the 16th century teach us? Why were the discussions of that time bound to fail? We should never forget that they failed to reach the much-desired unity, although the participants were nearer to one another than we are to them.

When in 1929 at Marburg the fourth centenary of the great colloquy was celebrated, it was the delegate from Zürich, Emil Brunner, who called the attention of that big meeting, composed of representatives of many Protestant churches of Europe and America, to the necessity of first reaching that amount of agreement

which existed among the Reformers before we could hope to solve the problems they had not been able to solve.

How can we hope to reach agreement on the Lord's Supper as long as we are not agreed on the authority of the Word of God? May I be allowed to make clear what this means by relating a personal experience. When the great discussion on the Lord's Supper was going on after the last war in Germany, I met an outstanding New Testament scholar whose personal piety, learning, and character are held in high esteem by all who know him. As we both had written on the Eucharist in the New Testament and were continuing our studies, our conversation soon turned to that problem. I asked him whether he still maintained that the Last Supper must be understood as a parabolical action of our Lord and the words of institution consequently must be taken in a figurative sense. He replied in the affirmative. To the question whether 1 Cor. 10:16 f. and 11:27 taught clearly that the bread *is* the body, because partaking of the blessed bread is partaking of the body, and unworthy eating and drinking involves a sinning against the body and blood of the Lord, he answered that he had not yet reached a full explanation of the latter passage but was convinced that Paul, on the whole, had a parabolical and figurative understanding. The question whether somewhere in the New Testament the literal and realistic understanding was present was answered again in the affirmative. This was to be found John 6:51 b—58, where Jesus speaks no longer of His person but suddenly of His flesh as the bread of life. This passage, with its realistic understanding of the Eucharist, however, ought to be regarded as an insertion into the original text of the Fourth Gospel, he added, a view held by many scholars, e. g., Bultmann. He knew, of course, that this is a mere hypothesis without any basis in textual evidence. The theological objection that for the Lutheran Church the text, as contained in the best manuscripts, is the normative Word of God was pushed aside, and the question what, then, the normative authority was, met with the answer "the words of the historic Jesus." This had been the answer given by Harnack at the beginning of the century.

This episode reveals more than anything else the tragedy of much modern Lutheran theology. No revival of Biblical studies, no rediscovery of the Reformation, no Luther renaissance, has been

able to restore the *sola Scriptura*. We should not have mentioned that episode, were it not characteristic of the discussions that have been going on since 1937. Many scholars, even very critical scholars, find somewhere in the New Testament that realistic concept of the sacrament which is, as St. Ignatius shows, present in the liturgy of Antioch at the beginning of the second century. Some found it with St. Paul (Heitmüller, Weinel, Lietzmann, Käsemann), others with St. John (Bultmann, Jeremias, and many others). Lohmeyer in his commentary on Mark realizes that in 14:22 "is" cannot mean "signifies."

Just as in the 16th century the adversaries of the Lutheran doctrine were agreed on the rejection of the literal understanding of the words of institution, but disagreed as to what they actually meant, so today the exegetes are not able to find agreement as to what the alleged parable contained in those words actually means. In the 16th century Luther and Zwingli, Oecolampadius and Bucer, Melancthon and Calvin, Andreae and Beza, the Anglican and, in this case, even the Roman theologians, were convinced that there is one doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament, that St. Paul's commentary on the words of Jesus cannot contradict our Lord Himself. This common conviction was the basis of all debates. Modern Protestantism has lost that basis. There is a doctrine of Jesus, a doctrine of Paul, and of John — but where is the doctrine of the New Testament? Along with the authority of the Scriptures, with the *sola Scriptura*, the Bible itself is destroyed.

Nobody denies the achievements of exegetical and historical scholarship. We know better than anyone in the 16th century was able to know the linguistic and historic background of the New Testament passages, the Jewish and Old Testament presuppositions, the eschatology of the New Testament and the liturgy of the earliest church. But all these great achievements, instead of helping us to reach a fuller understanding of the sacrament, lead us away from the main issue, because we are so remote from an understanding of the authority of Holy Scripture that the question must arise whether this authority has not been better preserved by Rome than by modern Lutheranism.¹ There is no possibility of bringing "out of

¹ Another example is the discussion of the problem of ordination of women. One of the oldest Lutheran churches has put the question, after its bishops failed to reach unanimity on that issue, to the LWF, the WCC, and even to

the present deadlock" the question of the sacrament unless we have first rediscovered what for our fathers was "the only judge, rule, and standard according to which, as the only test stone, all dogmas must be discerned and judged."

IV

The second thing we have to learn from our fathers is the clear statement of the *status controversiae*. The issue is not whether the Lord's Supper is a remembrance of Christ's atoning death. All churches of Christendom are agreed on that. One has only to think of the anamnesis in the various liturgies or the doctrine of Trent on the Mass as the *memoria* of the sacrifice of Calvary. Gratefully we accept what modern linguistic scholarship has discovered concerning the Biblical meaning of ἀνάμνησις as something more than a mere remembrance of a historic event or person. But we all agree that to remember Christ means more than to remember Socrates. That is the reason why all churches teach a presence or even a real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

Nor is the issue the understanding of this sacrament as "communion." How much Luther made use of the beautiful old imagery of the bread made from many grains, the wine made from many grapes, his sermons on the sacrament show. This side of the sacrament could have been stressed more in the Confessions, but it is there, as the quotation from St. Cyril of Alexandria on John 15 in the Apology (X 3) shows. In the Middle Ages also this aspect of the sacrament is not dealt with in the doctrinal works (e. g., Aquinas' *Summa theologica*), but in the devotional literature. Even the eschatological aspect of the sacrament is present in the old doctrine and in the liturgy. The "Come, Lord Jesus" has always belonged to this sacrament, in which our Lord anticipates His coming in glory on the "Day of the Lord" (cf. Rev. 1:10 and Amos 5:18) by coming in the Lord's Supper to His church: "Benedictus, qui

secular organizations. Even if it were technically possible for the ecumenical organizations to give a reply—the LWF comprises churches which have no objection against such ordinations, and others which have, to say nothing of the WCC—the fathers would have consulted Holy Scripture. For them the question would have been definitely settled by the apostolic injunction 1 Cor. 14:34 ff., especially since St. Paul, who in such cases clearly distinguishes between his counsels and the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 7:10 ff.), in this case expressly states that "the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." This is the answer Rome would give.

venit in nomine Domini." Thus the future glory becomes in a way a present reality, the Lord's Supper becoming "heaven on earth (*Le ciel sur la terre*, as S. Bulgakow has described it in harmony with Scriver's prayer, *Dass dein Abendmahl mein Himmel auf Erden werde*).

Also as to the fruits of the sacrament there is hardly any difference, except that the Lutheran Church, with the Eastern Church, emphasizes the importance of this sacrament for our eternal life (see the understanding of the *caro vivifica* of John 6, Formula of Concord, SD VIII 59, 76; Large Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar, 68; cp. Catalog of Testimonies III).

There is much more agreement on the Sacrament of the Altar between the churches than generally is assumed, and such agreement may be stated for encouragement. Such statements, however, should never be made for the purpose of minimizing or concealing the real point at issue. The *status controversiae* is today, as it was in the 16th century, the question whether the consecrated bread *is* the body, the consecrated wine *is* the blood of Christ. This all-important issue should not be obscured by employing terms like "Real Presence" or "eating the body in a spiritual manner" before their meaning is clarified. For these terms are used by various churches in various meanings. The *status controversiae* must be as clear as it was at Marburg when Luther at the beginning of the colloquy took chalk and wrote on the table the words *Hoc est corpus meum* and covered them with the tablecloth to produce them at the decisive moment of the debate.

V

It is not customary today, when speaking of the Eucharistic controversies of the 16th century in view of a continuation of those discussions, to look first at Marburg. There Luther and Zwingli met. The present Reformed churches are not Zwinglian but Calvinist. They even reject Zwingli. However, it must be asked whether Calvin's negative verdict on Zwingli was wholly justified. Has the Reformer of Geneva, who was not able to read Zwingli's German, done full justice to the Reformer of Zürich? Since the second volume of W. Köhler's standard work *Zwingli and Luther* has appeared in 1953 (ed. by E. Kohlmeyer and H. Bornkamm), and since Zwingli research on the basis of the new edition of

Zwingli's works in the *Corpus reformatorum* in Switzerland has produced remarkable results, the encounter between Luther and Zwingli can no longer be regarded as a mere prelude to what used to be regarded as the real controversy between Calvin and his Lutheran opponents. On the contrary, these later controversies appear as tragic attempts to unmake a decision definitely made in 1529.

It has been stated that Luther went to Marburg with the result in his pocket. This is an impermissible simplification. Luther, it is true, had first refused the colloquy. His reason was that every possible argument had been brought forward already in the preceding literary controversy. In addition to that, he disliked the political aspect of the enterprise. In either respect he was right.

Philip of Hesse was a great politician. He was not so much interested in the truth. What he wanted was an alliance between all those estates that had signed in April 1529 the "Protestation" of Speyer and the "Protestant" cantons of Switzerland. "The Marburg Colloquy was largely a political action, born of the situation after the Diet of Speyer, which made an alliance of all Protestants imperative," as W. Koehler (*Huldrych Zwingli*, 1943, p. 199) puts it.

For Zwingli, too, it had this aspect. To save the Gospel, he had made his alliance in Switzerland over against the Papalist cantons and Ferdinand and had in June even started his war, which to his great disappointment at Kappel was terminated by a negotiated peace. He could not see how the cause of the Reformation in Europe could be saved except by an alliance of all anti-Habsburg powers, including the King of France, who persecuted the Protestants, and even the Sultan. At Marburg on the last days of September, before the Lutherans arrived, he had come to a full political agreement with Landgrave Philip. For the sake of such a political alliance he was prepared to tolerate Luther's doctrine of the Sacrament of the Altar, though he strongly disagreed with him. The colloquy should lead, if not to an agreement, to a *syncretismus* (the technical term for what we would call "union"), a formula of compromise or a statement that a disagreement on such a matter was not church-divisive. To Luther this was not acceptable, not only because to him a dogma of the church was at stake on which

compromise was not permissible, but also because the idea that the Gospel could be defended by political means was contrary to the Word of God. In this connection he always quoted Isaiah 7 with its serious warnings against political confederations in the alleged interest of the church: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

What, then, was the theological issue at Marburg? To understand that, one must try to get rid of the old prejudices which still play a great role, not only in historical works whose authors have no understanding of theology but also in the accepted textbooks on church history. It was not Luther who started the controversy. For a long time he ignored the attacks from Zürich. However, the controversy had become unavoidable because it was a real *contentio de fide*. "Today it is generally acknowledged that it is not permissible to speak of obstinacy, of stubborn insistence on the letter of the Bible on the part of Luther. What to him was at stake was the root of our communion with God, which cannot be separated from the Lord's Supper and its gift. It must, on the other hand, be admitted that we owe also to Zwingli the recognition that his conviction was formed under an inner compulsion, and we should cease to reproach him with superficial rationalism" (W. Koehler, *Zwingli und Luther*, II, 133).

In point of fact, in these two men two different concepts of Christianity met. While Luther's faith in Christ was bound up with a strong sacramental realism, Zwingli was the representative of a spiritual concept of Christianity which was no longer able to understand the sacrament. As a reaction against certain doctrinal and devotional exaggerations of the Middle Ages this spiritualistic movement accompanies as an undercurrent the main stream of medieval theology and piety. It becomes visible first in the "dialectic," rationalistic doctrine of Berengar in the 11th century. In the era of late scholasticism it reappears in Wycliffe. It becomes manifest in some kinds of German mysticism, in aspects of the *devotio moderna* of the Lowlands, in the more radical forms of the Hussite movement, in the piety of the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren, in much Christian humanism, and in the various Spiritualist and Anabaptist movements at the time of the Reformation. There is always a radical wing (e. g., in the "Pickards" or "Beg-

hards" in the Lowlands and in Bohemia who rejected all sacraments) and a moderate one which retains the sacraments with a different understanding. Thus Zwingli persecuted the Anabaptists, although he was not able to defend infant Baptism.

It is this great movement whose representative Zwingli was at Marburg. Luther, on the other hand, became the defender of the Catholic dogma. It is a strange spectacle to see these two men and their companions at the great debate. One must never forget that this was not a discussion between churches, as later colloquies were. There was at that time, before the Augsburg Confession was written, neither a Lutheran nor a Reformed Church. The colloquists at Marburg considered themselves Catholic Christians, though excommunicated. But no one at that time doubted that the unity was only temporarily lost and would be restored by an ecumenical council which was generally demanded. The Marburg Colloquy was an event within the Catholic Church of the West.

Thus the doctrine which Zwingli defended was not "Reformed" in the later sense. It was, strictly speaking, not even Zwinglian. For Zwingli had taken it over from the Dutch humanist Hoen. Nor was the doctrine of Luther "Lutheran." It was simply the dogma of the entire church since the days of the apostles which Luther defended against Zwingli, just as Nicholas II and Gregory VII had defended it against Berengar. This sounds strange, but it is true. Luther has always praised Pope Nicholas for his most Christian action against the French Modernist. Here lies the deeper reason for Melancthon's request that a few "decent papists" should participate, while there was agreement on both sides that no Anabaptist could be admitted. Against this historic background it is to be understood that Luther chalked on the table of Marburg the words containing the *status controversiae* as well as the dogma on which there could not be a compromise: *Hoc est corpus meum*.

VI

"This is My body." That the consecrated bread in the Lord's Supper *is* the body and the consecrated wine *is* the blood of Christ, this is the doctrine of Luther in which he agrees with the entire orthodox church throughout the ages. All thoughts and theories which he developed in connection with this fundamental dogma

are only explanations of this doctrine, which he had to put forward as answers to questions asked by his opponents.

In the centuries before the Reformation there had always been people who doubted the Real Presence. There have always been theologians who wanted to know too much and, while trying to explain what defies all explanation, have suffered shipwreck in the faith. Even some of the church fathers, especially those who were influenced by Neoplatonism, have given false or insufficient answers which later were used by the deniers of the Real Presence. But the dogma of the church was not affected by that. It was and is binding on all Christians because it is the doctrine of the apostles and the explanation of the sacrament given by our Lord Himself at the institution. Either He meant what He said, or He has left to His church a puzzle which thus far nobody has been able to solve.

This dogma was contained and expressed in all liturgies, Eastern and Western. It had to be defined by the church only when it was attacked. This was the case in the East when the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 had to refute the decision of a synod of 754 that the consecrated bread and wine are symbols, images of the body and blood of Christ. In the Western Church the dogma had to be defined against Berengar and his followers almost 300 years later. For the controversies of the Carolingian Age were theological discussions only. As the dogma was contained in the liturgy, it was taught in the catechetical instruction, either immediately before or, as, e. g., in the case of the *Mystagogical Catecheses* of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, after Baptism and first Communion.

Since the Eucharist was celebrated behind closed doors, the dogma was not taught publicly. Only when the rumors about cannibalism had become too dangerous, St. Justin Martyr felt constrained to tell the public in his Apology what was going on in that service and to state, in a somewhat involved sentence, what "we have been taught," namely, that the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ. He referred to the words of institution as recorded by the apostles in the gospels.² His statement of the doc-

² Apol. I, 65 f. — There can be no doubt *Θυέστεια δέλτα* and *Οιδιπόδεια μίξις* (Athenagoras, 3, 1) refer to the Eucharist, the latter reproach being a misinterpretation of the "holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14), which preceded the Communion. The strict rule that men and women have their places on different sides so that "brothers" and

trine is confirmed by Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.*, IV, 18, 5). Much confusion has later been caused by the fact that Augustine was never able to reach clarity in regard to the Sacrament of the Altar. His attempt to build up a theory of the sacraments in terms of Neoplatonism and to apply it to the Lord's Supper was most unfortunate.

The Reformed theologians could, indeed, refer to Augustine as their authority, as Berengar and Wycliffe had done. They could do so also with regard to another fateful heritage which the great father left to the Western Church: the idea that the body of Christ, since it is in heaven, cannot at the same time be here on earth. It is noteworthy that this argument is the basis not only of the Reformed doctrine but also of the doctrine of transubstantiation. Since Christ's body, as a true body, must be in heaven, it can be on

"sisters" could not exchange the liturgical kiss was not sufficient to suppress the rumor of incest. It is always connected with the reproach that a child is killed in the service and its flesh and blood are eaten and drunken, a misinterpretation of John 6:53. All apologists from Aristides to Origen had to reject these reproaches. They go back to the first century and are probably willful slander on the part of the Jews, whose burning hatred against the Christians who had apostasized from the synagog caused the persecutions. This hatred was especially strong in Asia (Acts 21:27). This explains how John speaks of the Jews in his Gospel and passages like Rev. 2:9; 3:9. Those terrific experiences in Asia still resound in the Eastern Church. When antisemitism spread in the West in the 13th century, the old slander of ritual murder and eating of children was turned back upon the Jews. We mention all this here because (1) it confirms indirectly the sacramental realism of the earliest church (it is worth noticing that throughout the 16th century the old word *Thyestes* was used in the polemics against the Lutheran realism. Cp. WA 54, 156: *Uns biessen sie Fleischfresser, Blutsäufer, Anthropophagos, Capernaiten, Thyestas, etc.*) and because (2) it is important for the understanding of John 6. This chapter was originally understood as dealing with the mystery of the Eucharist. The way John relates a discourse of our Lord on the "bread from heaven," which in the first part is He Himself, in the later part His flesh, and the way this discourse is brought into connection with the miracles of the feeding of the 5,000 (multiplication of the bread, the *reliquiae sacramenti*, vv. 12 f.) and Jesus walking on the water (His body not necessarily obeying the laws of a natural body), furthermore the use of εὐχαριστεῖν (vv. 11, 23), the dispute with the Jews, and the offense which even "many of His disciples" took at the "hard saying," have always been suggestive of the Eucharist, until Origen, Eusebius, and Augustine introduced a different interpretation. How the early Christians understood such texts is shown by the earliest representation of the *fractio panis* in the Capella Graeca (2d century) of the catacomb of St. Priscilla in Rome. John could not include a narrative of the institution of the Lord's Supper in his Gospel, which was written not only for Christian readers who had gone through a course of catechetical instruction (Luke 1:4) but obviously for a wider public. Instead he inserted that discourse which seems to indicate that Jesus had prepared His disciples for their first Holy Communion

the altar, and on so many altars simultaneously, not by a change of its place (*per motum localem*) but only by the conversion of the substance of the bread into the substance of the body (*per conversionem substantiae panis in ipsum*), as Thomas (*Summa theol.*, III, qu. 75, art. 2) points out. Although Augustine was never able to solve the problem of the relation between the body in heaven and the body in the sacrament theologically, he kept his belief in the Real Presence as it was expressed in the liturgy. The formula of distribution in Africa was the same as in the Eastern churches: *Corpus Christi*, whereupon the communicant answered Amen. The cup was given with the words *Sanguis Christi*, which also was answered by Amen. This Amen was always understood as a confession: Yes, I believe that. Can one imagine a man like Augustine for so many years distributing the sacrament without firmly believing what he said and made his people confess? There is a lack of clarity, a gap between his faith and his theological thinking, as it is often to be found in the history of the church.

But it is impossible to claim Augustine with his neoplatonic mysticism for a rationalizing or merely spiritualistic understanding of the Lord's Supper. He emphasized, it is true, the spiritual manducation, e. g., in the famous *Crede et manducasti*. It must not be overlooked that this word is to be found in his exposition of John 6:27.

But in addition to this *manducatio spiritualis* he knows and emphasizes, especially in his later years, the sacramental eating to such a degree that he teaches — and this distinguishes him from the Reformed churches — a *manducatio oralis*, the *manducatio impiorum*, and even the necessity of this sacrament for salvation. The Jews who at Pentecost were converted were now eating the body which they had killed. Even Judas had received the body of Christ. The sacrament is necessary even for infants. Hence the early practice of giving the Holy Eucharist to the children after Baptism, as the Eastern Church still does. But even if Augustine's doctrine had not this other side, even if he were a mere symbolist like Origen, this would not alter the dogma of the church. This was the same in the liturgies Eastern and Western and had been proclaimed by the Second Council of Nicea for the East and in *Ego Berengarius* of 1079 (Denzinger, 355) for the medieval Latin Church.

Luther, like others, had his misgivings concerning the later dogma of 1215. By introducing the idea of "transubstantiation" this dogma tried to give a theological and even a philosophical answer to the question *how* the elements after consecration could be the body and blood of Christ. The simple declaration of 1079 was never rejected; even Wycliffe accepted it, though he did not quite understand it. It is this doctrine which is expressed in the medieval German hymn "Gott sei gelobet und gebenedeiet," which Luther accepted and enlarged. It is the conviction that after consecration the bread is truly the body of our Lord that hung on the cross and is now on the right hand of the Father, the wine the true blood of Christ that was shed at Calvary. No mention was made any longer of the statement of 1059 that the body is crushed by the teeth, this being against the view (which meanwhile had been generally accepted) that this would be an overstatement, because the presence is not a local one in the sense that Christ's body can be divided when the host is divided. The entire body is present "in, with, and under" each particle of the host.

VII

It was this doctrine of the entire church of almost 1,500 years which Luther at Marburg defended against Zwingli and Oecolampadius. Over against their objection that Jesus could not have meant the Eucharistic words literally because God does not propose to us incomprehensible things (*Deus non proponit nobis incomprehensibilia*) he could simply answer that all great truths of God's revelation are incomprehensible, as the incarnation, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection, etc.

Zwingli, of course, never doubted such doctrines. He even maintained the ecclesiastical tradition of Mary's perpetual virginity. He was not a rationalist but rather what later has been called a supranaturalist. He was a Biblicist. But his understanding of Scripture was, to a greater extent than he was able to realize, determined by his humanism and that amount of rationalism that is inherent in all humanists and that was bound to produce the rationalistic philosophy and theology of the later 17th and 18th centuries. "God is Light and leads into light" was his answer to Luther's "One must close one's eyes when God speaks," as Abraham hid himself in the darkness of faith when God commanded him

34 CONTRIBUTION TO DISCUSSIONS ON THE LORD'S SUPPER

to sacrifice his son, thus obviously making impossible the fulfillment of His own promise. Over against the old Augustinian argument (which plays such a great role with Zwingli and Calvin) that the body of Christ cannot be on earth, since it is in heaven, "it being against the truth of Christ's natural body to be at one time in more places than one" (1662, *Book of Common Prayer*), Luther pointed out that he would not listen to mathematical arguments, for "God is beyond all mathematics" (we would today use the word *physics*). He was, however, prepared to enter this field, if that was desired, not to prove with "mathematical" arguments what no human reason can prove but rather to show that mathematics cannot disprove the Real Presence.

Perhaps the deepest motive of Zwingli's view is to be found in the objection based on John 6:63 ("The flesh profiteth nothing"): "Spirit eats spirit, it does not eat flesh." It is, in other words, the problem what should be the use of such eating even if it were possible. It was easy for Luther to show that John 6:63 could not mean that Christ's flesh profiteth nothing. Otherwise the entire doctrine of the incarnation would break down. The passage could only be a warning against the "Capernaite" misunderstanding of the sacramental eating, as if Christ's body were eaten like ordinary food. But here the real issue became quite clear. When Oecolampadius asked Luther not to stick to the humanity of Christ, but rather to lift up his mind to His divinity in heaven—who is not reminded of Calvin's use of the *sursum corda*?—the reply was that he could not separate the divine and the human nature in Christ in such a way. How could space separate that which had become one in the hypostatic union? Besides, he knew of no other God but Him who has become flesh, and he wanted to have no other God.

Here the two ways of understanding Christianity met: on Luther's part the realistic understanding of the incarnation and of the sacrament as the continuation of the incarnation, on Zwingli's part the idealistic separation of body and soul, the visible and the invisible, the finite and the infinite, and, consequently, of the human and divine natures of Christ. Zwingli, of course, did not want to be, and was not, a Nestorian. He could still, in contrast with Calvin, speak of Mary as the mother of God, which has

always been the test of orthodox Christology. And yet such language given by theological tradition, was actually, as he called it, *ἄλλοίωσις*, a mode of speech in which, when speaking of one nature of Christ, we use words which properly can be applied only to the other nature.

When reading Luther's criticism of this *ἄλλοίωσις*, one has the impression as if Luther anticipated the future development which was bound to lead to that modern Protestantism that can no longer understand that the Person of Christ is the eternal Son, who has accepted our human nature without ceasing to be true and real God. Such Protestantism can, of course, no longer understand and preserve the sacrament in Luther's sense. This modern Protestantism must see in Luther's doctrine a regrettable relapse into Romanism, though it should not be forgotten that the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation is more spiritual than we are inclined to believe. This is at least the opinion of Eastern Orthodox theologians, who maintain that after all Aquinas is perhaps not very far from Calvin, owing to their common Augustinian heritage. In some respects Luther is nearer to the Eastern Church, which has never formulated a dogma concerning the *how* of the Real Presence.

But Luther could never accept the understanding of the Eucharist as a propitiatory sacrifice, which was to him the great corruption of the sacrament, far worse than transubstantiation. The medieval doctrine of transubstantiation he rejected as "a sophistic subtlety" meant to explain philosophically that which defies any explanation. Besides, "it is in perfect agreement with Holy Scripture that there is, and remains, bread, as Paul himself calls it, 1 Cor. 10:16: 'The bread which we break.' And 1 Cor. 11:28: 'Let him eat of the bread'" (Smalcald Articles, Part Three, VI, 5). Luther has no doctrine on the *how* of the Real Presence. Neither "consubstantiation" nor "impanation" is the doctrine of the Lutheran Church. These are medieval theories. If Luther in *De captivitate Babylonica* refers to Peter d'Ailly, he does so in order to show that even this distinguished cardinal had his doubts concerning transubstantiation and would prefer consubstantiation if that were possible. Nor does Luther teach an *inclusio* or any kind of "local" presence. Luther has never demanded from anyone the acceptance of his theory of omnipresence, which he had developed only to show

that the philosophical, mathematical arguments of his opponents could be refuted. Even the medieval terms "in," "with," "under" are by no means characteristic of the Lutheran doctrine. Just as Luther in his Last Confession (1544—45), referring to Aquinas and the medieval church, rejected the idea of a "local" presence or *inclusio*, so Nicholas Selnecker, one of the authors of the Formula of Concord, in harmony with Luther's *Last Confession*, points out: "Though our churches use the old words 'In the bread, with the bread, under the bread the body of Christ is received,' they do not thereby teach an *inclusio* or *consubstantiatio*. . . . They rather intend to say not more than this, that Christ is veracious and that when giving us the bread in His Supper, He gives us simultaneously His body to eat, as He Himself says. Whether one says 'in the bread,' 'with the bread,' 'under the bread,' we do not care if only we keep the Lord's body in the Supper. That we would not allow anyone to take from us. . . ." (*Vom Heiligen Abendmahl des Herrn. . . . Wiederbolete kurze und letzte Bekenntnis und Testament D. Nicolai Selneckeri* [Frankfurt-am-Main: 1591], fol. E 3)

It was this simple understanding of the Sacrament of the Altar which is contained in the last offer Luther made after the Marburg Colloquy had failed. The Marburg Colloquy was bound to fail because Zwingli could not accept the Real Presence, and Luther could not accept a compromise which left the question open.

But would Zwingli not perhaps be prepared to accept the Real Presence if formulated in such a way that no Capernaïtic misunderstanding was possible? The formula suggested by Luther and his colleagues was: "We confess that by virtue of the words 'This is My body, this is My blood' body and blood of Christ are truly — *hoc est: substantive et essentialiter, non autem quantitative vel qualitative vel localiter* — present and distributed in the Lord's Supper." *Substantive et essentialiter* means the true body and blood in the sense of the old hymn "Gott sei gelobet und gebenedeiet": "Herr, durch deinen heiligen Leichnam / Der von deiner Mutter Maria kam / Und das heilige Blut . . ." (see *Ego Berengarius*, Denzinger 355). Body and blood are present not quantitatively or qualitatively. This means that Christ's body in the sacrament has not the extension, weight, and the other properties of a natural, earthly body. Luther and the Lutheran fathers (e. g., Johann

Gerhard, *Loci XXI*, cap. 26; ed. Preuss V, 252) could refer to Aquinas' *Adoro devote* with the words: "*Visus, tactus, gustus / In te fallitur / Sed audito solo in te creditur / Credo quidquid dixit / Dei filius / Verbo veritatis nihil verius.*" The body of Christ is present in the *usus*—which is not identical with *sumptio*.³ It is there where the bread is. But this *ibi eucharisticum* is not a local *ibi*. The connection between the elements on the one hand and the body and blood on the other is rather the true *unio sacramentalis*. And this presence is effected through the words of Christ which, once spoken at the institution, are effective at all times when spoken by the minister of the sacrament *ex persona Christi*.⁴

All this is contained in the Lutheran formula which was the last possible offer Luther could make. It was not accepted by Zwingli. Köhler has shown why he could not accept this offer. Even in this form the doctrine of the Real Presence was unacceptable to him. He could not return to Zürich with a formula that contradicted everything he had taught in the previous years, espe-

³ Neither Luther nor the Lutheran Confessions have identified *usus* with *sumptio*. When explaining the rule, "Nihil habet rationem sacramenti extra usum a Christo institutum" or "extra actionem divinitus institutam," the Formula of Concord (SD VII 85 ff.) gives the definition: "The use or action here does not mean chiefly faith, neither the oral participation only, but the entire external, visible action of the Lord's Supper instituted by Christ, the *consecration* or words of institution, the *distribution* and *reception* (Latin text: *consecratio seu verba institutionis, distributio et sumptio*), or oral partaking. . . ." This is important for the problems of the "moment of consecration" and the "duration" of the Real Presence. They cannot be defined. All attempts to give an exact definition are bound to fail because nothing has been revealed to us concerning these questions. This must be said also of the view of later orthodox theologians who limited the Real Presence to the moment of the *sumptio*. This is not the view of the Lutheran Confessions. The Formula of Concord, in harmony with Luther and the entire Western Church, teaches that the words of consecration are the words of institution. The view of some schoolmen that the consecration at the institution was effected by the eucharist Christ spoke before the words of institution should not be accepted by Lutherans. Therefore the introduction of an ἐπικλησις of the Holy Spirit upon the elements should be avoided in a Lutheran liturgy. The alternative form of consecration in the new *Service Book of the Lutheran Church in America* is a strange mixture of Western (*benedictione coelesti et gratia repleamur*) and Eastern elements (ἐπικλησις of the Logos and of the Holy Spirit).

⁴ Here lies the reason why the denial of the Real Presence on the part of the officiating minister is, according to Luther, a destruction of the institution of Christ. He speaks not *ex persona Christi* who does not mean what Christ meant by His words. If these words could be used without this meaning, they would be a sort of magic formula. Nor do the words effect the presence but Christ, who speaks them through His minister.

cially since the words "by virtue of the words of Christ" could be understood only in the sense of a consecration. The words of institution were addressed in the liturgy of Zürich, as in all Reformed liturgies, to the people, as a proclamation of the Gospel. "Consecration" in the Reformed liturgies and confessions means "setting apart for a sacred use by prayer." The "consecration," even where the word is retained, does not effect the Real Presence. One must keep this in mind in order to do justice to Zwingli. He could not accept this offer.

VIII

It is in this last offer made by Luther and in its rejection by Zwingli that the real result of the Marburg Colloquy is to be found, and not in the Marburg Articles, which used to be regarded as the real outcome, a promise for a future understanding which, though not reached in the 16th century, should be possible today. The 15 (not 14, as in older printings) articles which Luther drafted at the request of the Landgrave (on the basis of the articles that the Lutheran theologians formulated in summer 1529 and that the Lutheran estates formally adopted after the Marburg Colloquy at Schwabach) show how far Luther could go in the interest of the true union that he was still hoping for despite the failure of the colloquy.

At the same time they are a testimony to the political cleverness of Philip of Hesse. Only a great politician was able to interpret an obvious failure as a seeming success. He wanted a result, a statement of agreement, even if only of a partial agreement. The colloquy was originally planned for a week. The negotiations began on Friday, October 1; the formal discussions were held on Saturday and Sunday. The colloquy broke down on Sunday afternoon. In the evening the Lutheran proposal was made and discussed. The reason for the hurry in which everything had to be done was the appearance of an epidemic, the *sudor Anglicus*, at Marburg. The Landgrave wanted his guests to depart safely as soon as possible, as he himself wanted to leave Marburg. He was the first to depart on Tuesday morning.

Thus the articles were formulated and discussed on Monday. It is not surprising that they proved to be insufficient, since no full and proper consideration could be given to them in so short

a time. Otherwise it would have become apparent at Marburg already what became obvious when Zwingli published them with his *notae* (WA 30, III, 160 ff.), that important passages were understood differently by either side. Article XI, to take an example, deals with "confession or seeking of counsel and consolation from one's pastor or neighbor," and speaks of the comfort "of the absolution or consolation of the Gospel, which is the true absolution." Luther understood this in the way of real confession and real absolution, while Zwingli thought of the fraternal seeking of counsel and consolation and not of an absolution in the sense of the proclamation of divine forgiveness through a human mouth.

The masterpiece of diplomacy was Article 15, probably formulated by Philip himself. This deals with the Lord's Supper and states that there is agreement in five points, which indeed were recognized by either side. Two of them could even be accepted by the pope ("that the Sacrament of the Altar is the sacrament of the true body and blood of Christ"—it all depends on what one understands by the word "sacrament," whether a mere sign of grace or a means of grace—and that the spiritual manducation is necessary for every Christian).

Among all these real or alleged agreements there disappears almost the one point of disagreement, namely, that "*at present* we are not agreed whether the true body and blood of Christ are bodily present in the bread and wine," but both parties should "earnestly implore Almighty God to confirm us by His Spirit in the sound doctrine." Agreement in 14 out of 15 articles, agreement in five out of six points of the 15th Article, Zwingli almost a 99 per cent Lutheran—what a marvelous achievement! Already at Marburg it had become quite clear what the controversies and negotiations of the subsequent 400 years have time and again confirmed and what Luther had seen from the beginning: There is no middle road between *est* and *significat*, between *is* and *is not*, between *yes* and *no*.

It is the tragedy of Protestantism that this was not realized. All attempts to find such a middle road were and still are bound to fail. One must have high respects for Calvin's endeavor to solve the problem how a real reception of the true body and blood of Christ, which are in heaven, can be reconciled with the view that

what we orally receive is only bread and wine. From Bucer he had learned to teach a reception of the body and blood by faith. But the New Testament as well as the church of all ages teach that we receive Christ's body and blood orally and that they are received by all communicants. Even Augustine had taught the *manducatio oralis* and the *manducatio impiorum*.

Calvin attempted to solve the problem of bridging the distance between heaven and earth, between Christ's body in heaven and the believer on earth, by his interpretation of the *sursum corda* and by the idea of the Holy Spirit as the *transporteur* who brings Christ's body to us. But this attempt has no Biblical foundation. He was unable to reconcile the *est* and the *significat*. The same is true of all later attempts, also of many formulas suggested today.

What can we do in this really tragic situation? What can and must the Lutheran contribution toward the present Eucharistic discussions be? It cannot be a continuation of the fruitless attempts to reach a compromise or to take up and improve the 15th Article of Marburg. What we can and ought to do is rather to renew the offer which Luther made on the evening of October 3, 1529. Zwingli could not accept it. But the time has come when there has to be asked again the question whether this is not the only possible solution and whether it is not acceptable to many Protestant churches also outside the orbit of Lutheranism: "We confess that by virtue of the words 'This is My body,' 'This is My blood,' body and blood of Christ are truly — *hoc est: substantive et essentialiter, non autem quantitative vel qualitative vel localiter* — present and distributed in the Lord's Supper." This is not a specifically Lutheran doctrine, not the doctrine of one of the many Christian denominations. It has been the doctrine of the entire Christian Church for 1,500 years and is still the doctrine of the vast majority of Christendom today. It is, as we are convinced, the doctrine of the apostles and of our Lord Himself. It is in its simplest form stated in the answer to the question, "What is the Sacrament of the Altar?" and in the Lutheran formula of distribution. In this sense we enter the discussion of the Lord's Supper, writing, with Luther, on the table the *status controversiae: Hoc est corpus meum*.

Adelaide, South Australia