

# **A Reaffirmation of the Scripture-Based Teaching of the Synodical Conference on the Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper**

*by Wilbert R. Gawrisch*

## **Introduction**

In recent years there has been considerable discussion concerning the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The issue has not been whether the communicants in a Supper administered according to Christ's institution receive his true body and blood. The point of discussion has been, rather, whether his body and blood are present before the entire action of the sacramental rite is completed. When Jesus commanded, "Do this in remembrance of me," he was referring to the sacramental actions of the consecration, distribution, and reception. To make clear that we have not departed from the Scripture-based doctrine of our forefathers in the Synodical Conference we reaffirm what Dr. Adolf Hoenecke and Dr. Francis Pieper, the outstanding dogmaticians of the Synodical Conference, wrote in their books of biblical doctrine, *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik* and *Christian Doctrine*.

### **Dr. Adolf Hoenecke**

While noting that the sacramental union of the bread and wine with Christ's body and blood takes place through the words of institution, Dr. Hoenecke of our Wisconsin Synod emphasizes that the Lord's Supper according to Christ's institution is an activity and writes:

Bread and wine are not vehicles of the body and blood of Jesus Christ before they are eaten and drunk. That this is correct is proven by the word of Christ, "*Take, eat; this is my body*" (IV, 127, translated).

Hoenecke expresses his agreement with the 17th century Lutheran teacher Quenstedt and writes:

In the moment of eating and drinking Christ's body and blood are under the bread and wine. That is also fully substantiated by the words, "*Take, eat; this is my body. Drink from it, all of you; this is my blood.*" And that in the moment of eating and drinking, bread and wine are vehicles of the body and blood of Christ for the recipient, that is brought about by means of the consecration, which takes place through the words of institution (IV, 130, translated).

### **Dr. Francis Pieper**

Rejecting a Catholic theologian's contention that the sacramental union has taken place before the reception of the sacrament, Dr. Pieper of the Missouri Synod quotes Quenstedt's answer as appropriate:

Christ does not say absolutely of the consecrated bread that it is His body, but of the bread broken and given to eat. For first He said, “Take, *eat*”; thereupon He said, “This is My body” (III, 373).

Pieper also quotes Dr. C. F. W. Walther, the Missouri Synod’s leading theologian in its early years. In his book on pastoral theology Walther cites Aegidius Hunnius, another early Lutheran dogmatician, who writes:

As the bread is the communion of the body of Christ only in the act of eating and not before, so, too, the bread is not sacramentally united with the body till this communion and this reception takes place (III, 373).

### **Our Lutheran Confessions**

Both Hoenecke and Pieper call attention to our Lutheran Confessions. The *Formula of Concord* states:

However, this blessing, or the recitation of the words of institution of Christ alone, does not make a Sacrament if the entire action of the Supper, as it was instituted by Christ, is not observed (as when the consecrated bread is not distributed, received, and partaken of, but is enclosed, sacrificed, or carried about), but the command of Christ, “This do” (which embraces the entire action or administration in this Sacrament, that in an assembly of Christians bread and wine are taken, consecrated, distributed, received, eaten, drunk, and the Lord’s death is shown forth at the same time) must be observed unseparated and inviolate, as also St. Paul places before our eyes the entire action of the breaking of bread or of distribution and reception, 1 Cor. 10:16. (FC, SD, VII, 83,84; *Concordia Triglotta*, 1001).

### **Luther**

Although Luther at various times expressed a variety of personal opinions on the question, not to be overlooked is what he says about Augustine’s statement, “Let the Word be added to the element, and it becomes a sacrament”:

To avoid these [Catholic] errors one must know that Augustine is not speaking only about the recitation of the words of Christ, but rather is including the command about taking and eating the bread. Later he adds: *hic est corpus meum* [here is my body], which is as much as to say, Apart from this use my body and my blood are not united with these outward signs (St. Louis ed., XXIb, 3457f., translated).

First both the elements, bread and wine, must be present. Then all the words of the testament must be recited. Finally, the proper use must be added, that is, the eating and drinking (St. Louis ed., XXIb, 3548, translated).

### **Conclusion**

We base our belief, of course, on Scripture, not on human authorities. When we see, however, that our forefathers also based their teaching on the clear words of Scripture, it is fitting that we take to heart the admonition of the inspired writer, “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you...and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7).

On the basis of Scripture we can assert with certainty that when we have eaten the bread and drunk the wine in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as Jesus instituted it, we have also received Christ’s true body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.