

THE SACRAMENTAL PRESENCE IN THE THEOLOGY OF THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE

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Outline

Introduction: The Synodical Conference and its concerns;
Representatives of the Synodical Conference: C.F.W. Walther and Adolph Hoenecke.

- I. THE *VERBA*: The teaching of the sacramental presence in the Lutheran Church is the teaching of Scripture because it takes the *VERBA DEI* at face value.
- A. The words of institution in the Lord's Supper are to be taken in their plain literal sense as they read
 - a. Hermeneutical and textual reasons for taking the *VERBA* in the literal sense
 - b. Reasons for rejecting the figurative sense
 - B. The material in the Lord's Supper is, according to the Scripture, a double one: the earthly (bread and wine) and the heavenly (body and blood).
 - a. The sacramental presence
 - b. The mode of Christ's presence
 - C. Eating the body and drinking the blood in the Lord's Supper under the form of bread and wine is as real, true, and oral a partaking as partaking of the bread and wine.
 - a. Real presence in partaking
 - b. The manner of eating and nourishment
 - c. The sacramental union
- II. THE *ACTIO*: The essence (*Wesen, forma*) of the Supper is in the entire action which Christ Himself instituted for all times, so that the Supper is only truly celebrated when the three formal acts of consecration, distribution, and reception take place.
- A. The consecration
 - a. Setting apart and blessing the elements as part of the entire action.
 - b. The sacramental union as part of the entire action: questions of time and use.
 - B. The distribution.
 - a. Breaking bread is not of the essence.
 - b. The formula of distribution: sacramental presence, not mere historical remembrance.
 - C. The reception.

Concluding words: two foci
The *VERBA* and the *ACTIO* and God's blessing

Introduction

This topic assigned by the symposium committee adds an important dimension to the anniversary celebration of the Wittenberg Concord. The issues that brought about the great sacramentarian controversy in the 16th century have been repeatedly debated throughout the church to the present time.

As an historical study, this presentation will operate with historical tools. And we trust that we will not fall into the devil's trap which C.S. Lewis fittingly described as "the horror of the Same Old Thing" -- at least not where the Word of God is at stake. Respect for God's Word was a hallmark of the Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America from its foundation in 1870. The Synodical Conference fathers held to their confession, not because it was Lutheran, but because the Lutheran confession was in agreement with God's Word and therefore belonged to the church catholic.

When President Walther of the Synod of Missouri took steps which led to the formation of the Synodical Conference, he did so firmly convinced that God's Word does not lie and that the Lutheran confession was theologically and hermeneutically faithful to that Word. Faithfulness to the *VERBA DEI* remained a leitmotiv in his preaching and teaching. The church's confession was not there to mold God's Word but to be molded by it; nor was confession to be taken lightly or indifferently, because God cared. "If someone is seeking worldly honor because of his religion," Walther announced to an 1876 convention, "he should by no means become a Lutheran! Because the Lutheran religion will not bring worldly honor; it gives all honor to God alone and gives man nothing except shame."¹ Those words served as an introduction to an essay on "The Means of Grace."

Walther's younger colleague in the Synodical Conference, Professor Adolph Hoenecke, took the same stand along with the Synod of Wisconsin, which he represented. Two years prior to the founding of the Synodical Conference, the state Synod of Wisconsin had formally acknowledged the parting of the ways with the Langenberg and Berlin Mission Societies which had sponsored it. The Langenburg Society terminated its relations with the Wisconsin Synod because of what they considered its "unjustified protest against the Union."² At issue in the protest was unionism, manifested particularly in the wording of the communion liturgy in the Prussian Union Agenda. The government-sponsored wording allowed the *VERBA DEI* in the Supper to be taken as a mere memorial meal to the exclusion of the sacramental presence.

When this lecture was assigned, the committee recommended a study of these two men, of Walther's and Hoenecke's position on the sacramental presence. We will honor that request by allowing the writings of these two churchmen to represent the position of the Synodical Conference on the sacramental presence. What did they teach and why did they hold so firmly to the Lutheran understanding?

I. THE *VERBA*

The Teaching of the sacramental presence in the Lutheran church is the true Christian teaching because it takes at face value the *VERBA DEI* in the Holy Scriptures.

A. In a major subtopic on "The Sacrament of the Holy Supper" in his *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatics*, Hoenecke highlights the importance of the *VERBA* in the Supper by affirming simply: "The words of institution are to be understood in their real literal sense (*eigentlich*), exactly as they read."³ The WORDS here meant are more than a literal understanding of Christ's mandate "This do in remembrance of me." The WORDS specifically refer to "This is My body, this is My blood," which make the elements a sacrament. The sacramental presence of the body and blood rest on these words of God. Both Walther and Hoenecke go to great lengths to give reasons why the *VERBA* of the institution must be understood in their literal sense.

¹ C. F. W. Walther/A. Suelflow, *Convention Essays* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), article from "Western District Convention, 1896," p 132.

² J. P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* (St. Cloud, Minnesota: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1970) p 114.

³ Adolf Hoenecke, *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1909), Vol IV, p 100.

First of all, it would be hermeneutically unsound to depart from the literal meaning. The general rule of logic demands that one hold to the closest and intrinsic meaning of a word unless there is a compelling reason to resort to a figurative meaning, or if a figurative understanding is expressly called for.⁴ If no reason exists to abandon the literal meaning of the words of institution, the interpreter should take them at face value. The burden of proof lies with the person who departs from the literal sense to demonstrate that this or that meaning lies in the words used. Walther writes, "Anyone who is not guided in his interpretation of a text by the words of the text but by his preconceived notions, who does not follow the expressions of the author but his own impressions, in short, who departs from the words, such a person considers the text to be nothing, and leaves it, changes it and wants to correct it instead."⁵

A second reason why Bible interpreters must not depart from the Bible words as written in the text is that the text is God's inspired Word, whose divine origin serves a divine purpose. "For what good are the Holy Writings if we cannot rely on every word?" Walther contended. God's Word itself in both Testaments earnestly warns against departing from a letter or word because Satan from way back has misled people in order to destroy their life and salvation.⁶

Thirdly, the biblical records of the words of institution give no indication of anything but their natural meaning. "Although the three Evangelists and Paul mention the Sacred Supper at different times and places," Hoenecke observes, "yet none of them indicate, not even with one word, that we are to suppose a figurative sense of the Word, so that a person is to believe that, not the body but only a sign of the body is being eaten, not the blood but only a sign of the blood is being drunk." Take Paul's record in 1 Corinthians 10 & 11, for example. There an unworthy guest is called guilty of [sinning against] the body and blood of Christ as he receives both in an unworthy manner, because bread and wine are a communion of the body and blood of Christ. This communion is not an empty relationship, but a real uniting.⁷

A final indication of the meaning of the words is the peculiar character of a testament, which the Supper is. A testament by its very nature calls for clarity of words in which the literal meaning is most important lest the beneficiaries continually squabble over the meaning of the will. All ambiguous words are to be avoided. The words of Christ's testament are to be taken at face value. He would hardly have left the meaning open, subject to endless speculation.⁸ So Christ's WORDS of institution are to be understood exactly as they stand. The sacramental presence of the body and blood rests on them.

Taking the WORDS in any figurative sense, therefore, is hermeneutically and textually unsound. Why? For one reason, there are admittedly times when the Scriptures speak in a parabolic manner. In these cases the words are to be taken as a rhetorical device or figure of speech. They are to be understood figuratively or symbolically. What something represents cannot be taken in a real, literal sense. Examples of this would be that Christ is a rock, a lamb, the door, the vine, and the like.⁹

But in such cases, the figure lies in the predicate and is decided by the word itself, not by the connecting verb "is" meaning "represents." Christ is not an ordinary rock, an ordinary lamb, an ordinary door or vine. Those words are evidently pictures, and thus the rule applies: In a parabolic statement when the metaphor lies in the predicate, the "is" cannot be "represents" at the same time. The same holds true when the figure of speech is in the subject of the sentence.¹⁰

But in the case of the words of institution, Christ's body is a body. The context indicates that the words must be taken in the ordinary sense, because He said, "This is my body which is broken for you," and "This is

⁴ *Ibid*, p 101. Compare also C. F. W. Walther, *Der Lutheraner* (St. Louis, Missouri) Vol 4, p 100. Hereafter the publication is cited as Walther, *Der Lutheraner*.

⁵ Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 38.

⁶ *Ibid*, 4, p 38f. In this section Walther quotes Dt 4:2; Jos 1:7; Mt 5:18f; 1 Tm 6:3,4. See also Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 142 ("Ein dritter Grund ...").

⁷ Hoenecke, IV, p 101; Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 156.

⁸ Hoenecke, IV, p 101; Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 118 ("Alle Zweideutigen Ausdruecke werden vermieden...").

⁹ Hoenecke, IV, p 101f. Walther/H. Eggold, *Selected Sermons* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1981), "How Important and Necessary It Is That We Also Henceforth Hold Fast to the Pure Doctrine of the Lord's Supper with Constant Faithfulness," p 62f.

¹⁰ Walther, *Selected Sermons* p 63. Hoenecke, IV, p 102.

my blood which is shed for you." Think of it, says Walther, "It was not Christ's spiritual, figurative body, or a sign of it, but His real, true body which was given for us." Those who doubt it depart from Christ's clear words.¹¹

If, on the other hand, the figure of speech lies in the subject, as is the case in the statement "The seed is the Word of God," there must be a prior indication that it is so, in order that the meaning might be evident to everyone. To interpret the words of institution, it does not help to appeal to the Old Testament passover as such a prior indication because the passover foreshadowed Christ's death. "If the Lord had desired to institute only symbols or signs, He had done better to keep the passover, which indeed pictured the death of Christ much more clearly. In that case, the New Testament would be governed by the Old."¹² But there is "a great difference between the sacraments of the Old and New Testaments in regard to the constitution and content. Those of the Old had only the pattern, the New now have the real thing. The latter have the shadow, the former the body itself."¹³

But could one then not explain the WORDS of institution according to the rhetorical device called metonymy, in which one word is used for another in a name exchange? In a metonymy, a sign is used for the thing signified, the container for the thing contained, the effect for the cause or the cause for the effect. So the designation body and blood would only be a *sign* of the body and blood by metonymy. Walther answers: "Body and blood cannot be taken as a sign of the body and blood, because Christ expressly states concerning the first, 'which is given for you,' and concerning the latter, 'which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.' Not a sign of Christ's body, but His true body has been given for us, and not a sign of Christ's blood, but His true blood has been shed for us."¹⁴

One last question remains to be asked: what is then meant by "this" in the words of institution. It is certain that bread and wine are meant, for the Lord says, "Take eat, this is my body." "This" refers to what is being taken and eaten, namely, the bread. But not only the bread and wine are meant with "this." Paul's words in 1 Cor. 10:16 further our understanding. There Paul does not say "this" as the subject but bread and wine. Nor does he say: The bread is the body, but, "The bread which we break is that not the communion of Christ's body?"

"Where does Christ say, 'The bread is My body'?" Walther exclaims, "Nowhere! He says, 'This,' namely, this which I am giving you with that which you see 'is My body.' In 1 Cor. 10:16, the Apostle indeed expressly names the bread and the cup, but he does not say that this is the body and blood of Christ, but only the 'communion' of Christ's body and blood."

"Paul is teaching us," Hoenecke clarifies, "that the bread is not the body, but bears the body and is united with it in such a way, that the one who partakes of the bread also partakes of the body. Therefore when the Lord says, "'This is My body,' the 'this' is bread and body together in sacramental union. Why then doesn't the Lord Himself say, "This bread?". Answer: the disciples see that it is bread which the Lord was giving to them according to the passover ordinance. The new instituted by Christ is that He imparts His body at the same time in a mysterious manner."¹⁵

¹¹ Walther, *Selected Sermons* p 63.

¹² Hoenecke, IV, p 102. Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 142.

¹³ Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 142.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 157.

¹⁵ The discussion of 1 Cor 10:16 is found in Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 158, and Hoenecke, IV, p 111f. In part two of his treatises against Mr. Nast, entitled "Warum sind die Einsetzungsworte: 'Das ist mein Leib; das ist mein Blut' eigentlich zu verstehen?" (*Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 118f), Walther lists seven reasons why the words of institution are to be understood in their simple, literal sense:

1. It is Christ's testament (p 118f);
2. It is the new testament (p 141f);
3. It is a clear and certain testament (p 142f);
4. Christ's omniscient providence (p 150);
5. The words of institution in 1 Cor 10:16 (p 150f);
6. The words concerning "eating to judgment" in 1 Cor 11:29 (p 156);
7. Figurative interpretation results in all sorts of meanings (p 157f).

Thus the focus of the Lord's action is on imparting His body as the most important part of the institution. He doesn't call attention to the bread by saying, "This is the bread and My body," but rather He points to the body by saying, "This (what I am giving you) is My body." Such a manner of speaking is called a synecdoche, a grammatical figure of speech common to all languages. Yet, because it is a form of speech, does not this manner of speaking take away from the plain, literal sense? By no means, for a synecdoche, though it is a figure of speech, is not a figurative way of speaking which takes away the literal sense of the words.

The analogy of a glass of medicine may help to explain. I may say to a person, "This is belladonna," even though only a few drops of medicine have been thinned with water. I should really have said, "This water is belladonna," or, "This water contains belladonna" or better yet, "In and under the water is belladonna." So Christ's manner of speaking when He says, "This is My body," is a usual one. Yet the material is far different.¹⁶

B. The material in the Lord's Supper, according to Scripture, is a double one: the earthly material (bread and wine) and the heavenly material (body and blood).

In the Lord's Supper, both are present. The presence of bread and wine as the earthly material and body and blood as the heavenly material is based on the words of institution in their plain, literal sense, as already explained.¹⁷

To describe this kind of presence, the term "sacramental presence" is used. Descriptions of this presence are all inadequate. Walther comments, "Concerning the manner of the presence of Christ's body in the Holy Supper, the Lutheran church at all times has confessed that this is known to God alone, is inexpressible, mysterious and unsearchable, and therefore called sacramental, because such a presence, by virtue of which Christ's body and blood is present under certain outward signs in an incomprehensible and yet true manner, occurs only in the holy sacrament."¹⁸ So it is a real and true presence, an essential presence, a mystical, supernatural, incomprehensible presence. But at bottom we cannot describe it. At best we can ward off false impressions or accusations.

1. There is, first of all, the accusation that Lutherans construct the doctrine of the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper only on basis of the doctrine of the person of Christ.

Answer. If that were so, it would not be incorrect according to its content, because the Lutheran teaching concerning Christ's person is firmly based on Scripture. Yet the Lutheran church, out of obedience to the Scripture, which requires all teaching to be founded on statements of Scripture, has by no means based the certainty of the sacramental presence on conclusions drawn from the doctrine concerning Christ's person.

In this regard, Hoenecke says, one must distinguish two questions: I. Did Christ will to be present according to His body and blood? Yes, Christ's will is certain and known from the words of institution. For this reason Lutherans cite these *VERBA*, above all, for the sacramental presence. II. Whether Christ is able to be present according to His body and blood is another question. One can rightly judge the possibility of the sacramental presence from the scriptural doctrine of Christ's person. But even that is not necessary. "For when the Lord, the faithful witness, says, 'This is My body,' this promise is not only a guarantee for His will to be present, but also for His ability to do so. Lutheran theologians have in no way based the doctrine of the Lord's Supper on Christology or deduced it from the same, but rather in the christological debates they used the presence of Christ in the sacrament as a witness for the scripturalness of their Christology."¹⁹

2. Another objection states: How could Christ give to His disciples His body, which certainly was visible to the disciples at the first Supper, and say it was really present in the bread?

Answer. "We are not to assume a double body of Christ," Hoenecke writes, "but a twofold manner of presence of Christ's body. In the Supper we do not have the natural, earthly body of Christ, as He walked the earth, but a transfigured, heavenly body, as is common Lutheran teaching . . . It can neither be doubted that Christ is able to impart His glorified body, nor can it be considered something unspiritual that He really

¹⁶ Hoenecke, IV, p 112f.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p 115.

¹⁸ Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 28.

¹⁹ Hoenecke, IV, p 117f.

imparted it (John 3:13)." If someone objects that Jesus would be giving His body in view of His future death, it should be noted that Christ has one and the same body before, in, and after His crucifixion, after His resurrection and glorification. And because Christ has His body for the purpose of giving it into death, it is a redemptive body already before His death. And before the offering really takes place, Christ is able to give with His transfigured body everything which He is about to earn on the cross.²⁰ Walther clarifies, "At the first celebration the holy apostles partook of Christ's body, which (different from the condition in which He was) has been given and crucified, and which (different from Him) has been glorified, and we also partake of that same body; and in this same mysterious way as He now is present, He was also present in the first Supper."

3. An objection to the sacramental presence that has been frequently raised is a philosophic observation: A body occupies space and therefore cannot be in several places at one time. Hoenecke simply dismisses the objection by stating: Philosophy does not decide teachings of faith. Granted the spatial principle is self-evident on a purely physical plane. But Christ's body is not a natural one in the usual sense.²¹

Walther, however, in his essays and editorials comments at length on the matter by referring to Luther's exposition of the three modes of being, found in "The Great Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper" (1528), namely, (a) the local or circumscribed which occupies a space and fits into the same measurements, as when people walk the earth; (b) the definitive or uncircumscribed, which is not palpably in one place and not measurable according to the dimensions of the place where it is, as is the case with angels; and (c) the repletive or supernatural which fills all places wholly and entirely without measure or circumscription and which belongs alone to God's being.

Then, following Luther and the Formula of Concord, Walther applies these modes to the presence of Christ, in which He possesses: (a) a corporeal presence which vacates space, as when Jesus walked the earth; (b) a spiritual presence which neither occupies nor yields space but passes through everything created at will, as in the bread and wine; and (c) the divine, heavenly mode of His presence in the Godhead itself.²²

To these distinctions, Walther comments: "Luther could not have expressed more clearly how he wanted the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper taught than by saying, as he does here, that the body and blood of Christ are in the consecrated elements not locally but definitively. Hence he merely wanted to affirm the 'where,' that is, the reality of the presence with the exclusion of all spatial forms of existence; just as, for example, man's spirit, an angel, a glorified body, heaven and hell have their 'where,' or are definitely somewhere without possessing space or extension. To them belongs illocality, even though they are indeed somewhere."

What does definitive mean with regard to the sacramental presence? Walther continues, "Thus, when Luther says that Christ's body is there definitively, he by no means intends to define the manner of the sacramental presence and consider it to be a definitive one in the sense in which it applies to angels. Here the point of comparison is solely illocality, the taking away of size, weight, extension, in short, of every way of being somewhere as it obtains in the world of senses."²³

Why then must we, like Hoenecke, dismiss the philosophic argument and with the church confess ignorance on this point? Walther summarizes in an apologetic outpouring of the Lutheran confession:

So that the Word of the eternal Son of God remain true, this church has at all times insisted that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are there, but has never claimed to be able to explain the how, the manner of the presence. For that reason the church has called the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament one that is supernatural, mystical, hidden from reason, incomprehensible, unsearchable, completely unaccustomed (*inusitata*, something for which there is no full analogy, no second species of the same genus). But the church has also explicitly

²⁰ *Ibid*, p 118f. Walther clarifies the same point in the quotation following Hoenecke's explanation: Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 128.

²¹ Hoenecke, IV, p 119.

²² *Luther's Works*, American Edition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), Vol 37. p 222f (also p 215). See also, Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, Vol 35, p 57f.

²³ C. F. W. Walther/H. Bouman, *Editorials from "Lehre und Wehre"* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p 18f.

rejected and condemned all those crass, crude, carnal, Capernaite (John 6:59-64) conceptions of an earthly, physical, spatial presence, that is, a presence that yields or takes up space. All ways of speaking employed by our church have the single purpose of acknowledging and affirming the reality and verity of the presence of the heavenly gifts of the Sacrament and at the same time excluding those unworthy conceptions hatched by reason. When the church calls the presence substantial or real, or at times also corporeal, it does not mean to define the mode of presence but to insist on nothing more than that the presence is a true one, that is, that the body of Christ is really there.²⁴

4. That important discourse for the understanding of the sacramental presence prepares the way for answering the fourth objection which claims: Christ ascended into heaven; therefore, he left the earth and will first return to it on the Judgment Day. Hoenecke answers succinctly: Heaven is, strictly speaking, not a place, and the ascension into heaven is not to be thought of crassly as a change of places, but a change of status in which the Lord comes into the full use of His divine majesty. Walther adds:

Yes, indeed, Christ's ascension with its resultant sitting on the throne of majesty in heaven (Heb 8:1), shows indeed not so much a change in Christ's residence as His entering into the full use of His divine majesty, His entrance into glory also as mediator, as the Son of Man. Had Christ not ascended into heaven, one might doubt whether He is also omnipresent. But after He had taken over the kingdom of heaven, we are able to rejoice the more comforted [knowing that] He is with us all our days, even to the end of the world.²⁵

5. Objection five to the sacramental presence states: Since, according to Lutheran teaching, Christ is already present everywhere according to His humanity, that leaves no room for a special presence in the Supper.

Answer: To reason this way is to confuse the sacramental presence and the general presence of Christ. As a parallel thought, consider that the Holy Spirit is present everywhere, and yet at Christ's baptism He appeared in the form of a dove. Or was the Holy Spirit not in Christ before that? Certainly, God is intimately and essentially present in all things, and yet He wills to dwell first and foremost in believers. The presence of Christ's body is the same body in the Supper as in the general presence, only the mode differs.

6. Other objections, such as: If Christ's body is really present, there would have to be as many bodies as there are wafers; or, every material is depleted by its use, so Christ's body would have been used up long ago; or, what benefit should one receive from eating the body, such ridicule should be dismissed as nothing but vulgar rationalism.²⁶

C. Observations ridiculing the eating of Christ's body and blood raise the question of the nature of partaking of Christ's body and blood. In accordance with the Lutheran confession and biblical understanding, Walther and Hoenecke both testify: that eating the body and drinking the blood in the Lord's Supper under the form of bread and wine is as real, true, and oral a partaking as partaking of bread and wine.

The real partaking is based on the sacramental presence of Christ's body and blood and on Christ's command, "Take, eat, This is My body," and "Drink of it, all of you. This is My blood of the New Testament." Partaking of the heavenly material is therefore not a figurative, metaphysical, but a real, true, and oral partaking, because it is impossible for the same words, "eat and drink," to be taken in two senses in the same sentence. The distinction, therefore, between a spiritual eating and an oral eating is a valid one.

Spiritual eating occurs in John 6, and there it is a spiritual eating alone. Spiritual eating also occurs in the Supper, but it is not a mere spiritual eating. The Supper is also an oral partaking which is exclusively

²⁴ *Ibid*, p 17.

²⁵ Hoenecke, IV, p 119; Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 111.

²⁶ Hoenecke, IV, p 199f.

peculiar to the Supper. As Chemnitz says, "Christ therefore instituted a new and distinctive eating of His body in the Supper."²⁷

The most conclusive reason for an oral partaking of Christ's body and blood is 1 Cor. 11:27-30. In this passage Paul asserts the circumstance under which sinning against Christ's body occurs. The basis of the offense is an unworthy attitude; the sinful action is the partaking. Furthermore, the grounds for punishment is non-recognition of the body of the Lord. "Now," Hoenecke observes, "the grounds for punishment and the sinful action always coincide." So even the unworthy, who do not eat of Christ's body spiritually by faith, really and orally partake of Christ's body and sin against it.²⁸

Another reason for objecting to a mere spiritual eating in the Supper as occurs in John 6 is this: According to John 6, spiritual eating, that is, faith in Christ, is necessary for salvation. If one applied this to the Supper, it would mean that nobody could be saved without partaking of the Supper. This is not so.

As certain as the oral partaking of Christ's body and blood is, yet the manner or mode of partaking of the earthly and the heavenly element are distinct. A person takes the bread and the wine into the mouth in a different way than a person takes the body and blood into the mouth. Bread and wine are received without means in a natural way; Christ's body and blood are received with means and in a supernatural way, as the Formula of Concord states.²⁹

If the question is asked which substance in the human being is nourished through partaking of Christ's body and blood, the Scripture gives no answer. Some have answered it nourishes our resurrection body. But in John 5 the Lord speaks of His Word, not the Supper, as the pledge of resurrection. Christ gave the Supper as a surety, not of the resurrection, but of the forgiveness of sins. Our inability to determine the reason for imparting the real substance of Christ's body and blood does not affect the sacramental presence.³⁰ After all, as Walther says, "The Supper is a powerful sign and seal of the covenant, according to which the disciples received simultaneously the entire power, the full effect and blessing of His atoning death, the redemption through His blood, namely, the forgiveness of sins, and the present and future blessedness coming from the new relationship of reconciliation to God."³¹

With reference to the sacramental union, the uniting of Christ's body and the bread, Christ's blood and the wine, is likewise certain. But the mode of the sacramental union is also indefinable, as previously stated. So we must turn aside all false explanations, such as, transubstantiation, consubstantiation, a local or continuing inclusion of Christ's body and blood, impanation, a natural union, or a personal union as in the personal union of the two natures of Christ.

To explain the latter, Hoenecke notes: "For not the entire Christ unites with the bread and wine, but only Christ's body and blood. We must distinguish the fact that the entire Christ is present in the Supper, and the fact that the heavenly thing (that is, Christ's body and blood) is united sacramentally with bread and wine." In this way, Christ's general presence is distinguished from His specific sacramental presence, as recorded in the Scriptures.³²

²⁷ *Ibid*, p 121-123.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p 123f.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p 124.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p 125.

³¹ Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, 4, p 21.

³² Hoenecke, IV, p 125f.

II. THE ACTIO

As important as all that has been said about the sacramental presence is for the understanding of the sacrament, yet the logical genus of the sacrament is the "action." **The essence of the supper is the entire action which Christ himself designed in view of the earthly and heavenly material and then instituted for all times, so that the supper is only truly celebrated when the three formal acts of consecration, distribution, and reception take place.** These formal acts need to be considered as individual parts of the entire action.³³

A. The Consecration. According to the Scripture references concerning the institution of the Supper, the consecration itself consists of three distinct actions: setting apart the elements (the separation); blessing the elements by designating them for use in the Supper with festive prayer and petition (the benediction); and the sacramental union, that is, effecting the union of bread and wine with Christ's body and blood, so that the bread offered is a communion of the body and the wine a communion of the blood. This union occurs through the words of institution and only in connection with the distribution. The words of Christ indicate this when He says: "Take, eat, This is My body." For this reason the uniting which occurs in the consecration is called preclusive, that is, its result first takes place in connection with the action of eating and drinking.³⁴

As far as the act of separation and benediction is concerned, it is a definite apostolic custom, as seen from 1 Cor 10:16, "The cup of blessing which we bless." But Paul does not identify the words with which we are to bless, nor are we told the words with which the Lord blessed in the first Supper. The Supper bore the name "Eucharist" after the prayers of thanksgiving that accompanied the Supper. Paul may have referred to this when he mentions the blessing. The early church used the Lord's Prayer. The church fathers, however, placed this prayer after the words of institution, while we, following Roman church custom, reverse the order. But the uniting does not take place already in the prayer portion in the Supper called the Prefation. The preclusive uniting takes place in the actual consecration through the words of institution.

Whatever order is followed, the words of institution should not be left out, according to Hoenecke, for three reasons: (1) In obedience to the mandate of Christ, "This do"; (2) To stir, strengthen, and assure the faith of the audience concerning the essence and benefit of this sacrament through Christ's words; (3) To sanctify and bless the elements, so that with them through the recitation of the words of institution Christ's body and blood are offered for eating and drinking.³⁵

Walther, following John Gerhard, enlarges on the reasons for the consecration. The recitation of the words is not a mere historical repetition of what Christ did. What happens in the consecration is: (1) A testimony. "By means of the festive repetition of the words of institution, the public servant openly attests that he wishes to celebrate the most holy Testament of Christ according to His institution, ordinance and command, and therefore not according to his own devising, but as a caretaker of God's mysteries." (2) A separation. "By this very action, he separates the external symbols of bread and wine from their common use, so that they are no longer mere bread and wine but instruments, carriers and means through which Christ's body and blood are to be distributed." (3) An invocation. "[The minister earnestly prays that Christ might be present in the sacramental action by virtue of His promise, and, by means of these external symbols, Himself distribute His body and blood to the communicants." (4) A witness. "The minister gives testimony that, by virtue of the ordinance and institution of the truthful and almighty Christ, the consecrated bread is the communion of His body and the consecrated wine is the communion of His blood." (5) An admonition. The minister admonishes all participants to come forward in true faith and repentance, true fear and reverence, and with an earnest desire to amend their life.³⁶

³³ *Ibid*, p 126f.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p 127.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p 127f.

³⁶ C. F. W. Walther *Pastoraltheologie* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1897), p 170f.

By contrast, it is important to consider what the consecration is not. It is not, on the one hand, a magical charm or spell which changes the bread into body and the wine into blood by the power of certain words. Nor, on the other hand, is it a mere historical repetition of the institution. "We believe and confess," Walther writes, "that the presence of Christ's body and blood are exclusively dependent on the will and promise of Christ and on the ongoing effectiveness of the original institution." Thus the repetition of the original institution is not merely historical, but consecrational, by which Christ's ordinance and the external symbols are truly and effectually appointed for sacred use, so that in the distribution they are a communion of Christ's body and blood, as the Apostle expressly states in 1 Cor. 10:16.³⁷

If one were to ask, what in the act of consecration is really the efficacious cause of the sacramental presence, Hoenecke states, we must give a twofold answer. The Lutheran confessional writings emphasize, on the one hand, the importance of the original institution for our present celebration when they say: "For the truthful and almighty words of Jesus Christ which he spoke in the first institution were not only efficacious in the first Supper but they still retain their validity and efficacious power in all places where the Supper is observed according to Christ's institution and where his words are used, and the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed and received by the virtue and potency of the same words which Christ spoke in the first Supper." (FC:SD VII:75)

On the other hand, the formal actions of the Supper are important because of Christ's institution. The Formula of Concord continues by observing: "But this blessing or recitation of Christ's words by itself, if the entire action of the Lord's Supper as Christ ordained it is not observed (if, for instance, the blessed bread is not distributed, received, or eaten but is locked up, offered up, or carried about) does not make a sacrament." (FC:SD VII:83) Here the rule applies: "Nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ, or apart from the divinely instituted action." (FC:SD VII:85)

Thus the original institution and the present actions are not in contradiction to one another. In accord with our confessions, Hoenecke explains,

We ascribe, on the one hand, everything to the words of institution (in the consecration), and, on the other hand, we (ascribe) likewise with equal right the reality of the Supper to the first institution of the Supper. For our Supper is a real and true continuation of the former. But that it is possible for it to be a continuation is brought about by the words of institution. Therefore the words of institution do not bring about the union of the heavenly with the earthly elements as a magical formula; but by virtue of the words of institution, with which the church complies out of obedience to the Lord's command, Jesus is present, faithful to His promise, expressed in those very words of institution, and He unites His body and blood with the earthly elements.³⁸

In his Pastoral Theology, Walther sharpens the consequences of the relationship between the original institution and our celebration of the Supper. He points out that, although the recitation of the words of institution are not magical, yet they are necessary to satisfy Christ's command, "This do," and to complete the action by which Christ promised the sacramental presence of His body and blood. But it would be incorrect to conclude that the sacrament is realized by the mere recitation of the words, for the sacrament is not yet realized unless there is added to the consecration the distribution and partaking of the blessed elements. Both axioms must be taken together and not torn apart: "The Word is added to the element, and it becomes a sacrament" indicates the importance of the consecration; "Nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by God" indicates the importance of the entire action of consecration, distribution and reception.³⁹

At this point Walther quotes Martin Luther's observation: "Just as baptism is nothing else as mere water if no infant is present (to be baptized), so we also maintain as most certain that where no people are

³⁷ *Ibid*, p 171.

³⁸ Hoenecke, IV, p 129f.

³⁹ Walther, *Pastoraltheologie*, p 174.

present to eat or drink, according to Christ's institution, nothing else except bread and wine are present." (Walch 2, XXI, 1589) On this basis Walther discusses questions of casuistry.⁴⁰

If we keep in mind the entire action ordained by Christ, it serves no purpose to be concerned about fixing the point in time when the sacramental presence and union occur other than in the formal actions of consecration, distribution and reception. The sacrament is not a permanent thing, but an action. This can be seen on four counts: (1) From the way in which Christ handled the Supper; (2) From the words of 1 Cor. 10:16: "The bread which we break. .," that is, distribute for eating; (3) From the words: "Take, eat"; (4) From the lack of any sort of ordinance of Christ for carrying the elements about [for adoration].⁴¹

The essence of the Supper, therefore, is in the command of action, that is, according to Scripture it belongs to the things for whose essence a specific action, a specific use, is designated. In the case of the sacrament, essence and use are one; and outside of the use, the essence is not there nor is Christ's body and blood. Hoenecke explains: The fact that for the partakers the bread and wine are bearers of Christ's body and blood at the moment of eating and drinking is established through the consecration effected by the words of institution. That is also what our Confessions want to say when they declare in one place that the words of institution cause Christ's body and blood to be present, and at the same time also repeat that there is no sacrament without eating and drinking. Thereby they say clearly that, by virtue of the words of institution, at the moment of partaking bread and wine Christ's body and blood are present under them. If one construed the matter any differently, one would arrive at a kind of impanation.⁴²

All this points up the importance of the consecration. "If the words of institution are not spoken over the elements," Walther indicates, a logical chain results: "the elements are not blessed and consecrated thereby; one is not doing what Christ commanded; (Christ) does not therefore fulfill what He has promised; accordingly one does not celebrate the meal instituted by Christ; thus Christ's body and blood are not present, and one distributes and eats nothing but bread and wine."⁴³

That is exactly what happens if one makes the sacrament into a mere historical memorial of the original ordinance. By such false teaching the essence of the sacrament is lost. It is true that neither the unworthiness, nor faith or lack of it, nor the false intention of either the minister or the partaker nullifies the efficaciousness of the sacrament. Yet false teachers who publicly pervert the words of institution with consent of their congregation and attach a meaning to them according to which the Lord's body and blood are not really present, distributed, and received in the holy Supper, these do not celebrate the Lord's Supper even if they allegedly keep the consecration; they distribute only bread and wine.⁴⁴

B. THE DISTRIBUTION. For this reason, the formula for distribution is so important. The distribution belongs to the essence of the sacrament. A change in the formula for distribution was the reason why the confessional Lutheran church objected so strenuously to the formula of the Union Agenda of the Prussian church.

What is the formula for distribution? Those who insist that breaking of the bread for distribution is essential for the celebration of the Supper are in error. To say this is not to deny that Christ broke the bread at the original Supper. Certainly we could break the bread, Hoenecke contends, yet it is an adiaphoron. It remains a custom for us, as it also was for the Lord. But it becomes a matter of confession to resist the custom if someone insists on taking away our liberty in the matter. Only the formal actions of consecration, distribution, and reception are essential.⁴⁵ In his book on Pastoral Theology, Walther states: "To a genuine administration of the holy Supper belongs the consecration, distribution and reception of bread and wine."⁴⁶

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Hoenecke, IV, p 130f.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p 131.

⁴³ Walther, *Pastoraltheologie*, 172.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p 181.

⁴⁵ Hoenecke, IV, p 132.

⁴⁶ Walther, *Pastoraltheologie*, p 168.

The charge that the Lutheran church added to God's Word in the formula for distribution when it says, "This is the true body" rests on a confusion of the Word of God which constitutes the sacrament and the church's confession in the celebration. "As the words of consecration are God's Words which constitute the sacrament," Walther explains, "so the words of distribution contain the confession of the church."⁴⁷

The formula of distribution for the Union church was lacking in this regard. It put the Supper merely in its historical setting as a memorial act by saying at the time of distribution, "Jesus says, This is My body," or "Christ, in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, gave thanks, gave it to His disciples and said: Take and eat, etc." But this formula only served the cause of doctrinal indifference on which the Union was founded. To the unionists, the sense of the formula was: let each person interpret it according to his faith.

In response to the use of this open formula, it should be stated: Christ's words "This is My body" at the original Supper were a testimony in the Lord's mouth. Correspondingly, therefore, they must be a confession in our Supper. As little as we baptize a child with the formula, "Go and baptize," so little do we distribute the bread and wine with the mere narrative formula: "In the night in which He was betrayed, etc." Such a formula only causes an indifferent attitude toward the sacrament.⁴⁸

To be sure, there is no single prescribed formula for distribution. But a formula that does not confess that Christ's body and blood are present, distributed and received should be rejected. This is the case with the United church's formula for distribution, "Take and eat, Christ said, This is My body." It is much like the Jews who could not abide the inscription on the cross, "This is the King of the Jews" because they did not believe this to be true. Therefore they wanted to have substituted the historical words, "He said, I am the King of the Jews."⁴⁹

C. THE RECEPTION. Concerning the reception, Hoenecke observes, there may be differences in the manner of taking, eating and drinking in the Protestant church. But these likewise are matters of adiaphora and should be considered that way without in the least overlooking the great error of the church of Rome with regard to receiving communion in one kind only.

The essential act in the reception is doubtless the eating. Anyone who objects to a reception in which a person receives only in his mouth without the bread and wine being given into his hands first does so without grounds. There have been good reasons for giving the bread and wine directly into the mouth. On the other hand, it does not detract from the essentials of the sacrament if the communicant takes the bread and cup from the hands of the preacher and in this way eats and drinks.⁵⁰

With the reception the formal actions of the sacrament instituted by Christ come to an end. But the benefits of the forgiveness of sins continue for the believer. Hoenecke closes with praise to God for this marvelous means of grace:

The sublime blessing of the grace of forgiveness is received in the Supper through means. We partake of the Lord's body and blood and thereby possess both the covenant fellowship and the covenant blessing, the forgiveness [of sins]. And as we receive the blessing of grace besides under visible signs, so the Supper is a means of grace which certifies the forgiveness of sins in a very special way. But this end is really attained only by those who eat the Supper in faith. The Supper does not first create faith, as Baptism [does], but presupposes it. Faith secures the blessing by partaking of the Supper, but faith does not effect the sacramental presence nor the essence of the Supper.⁵¹

That is alone God's gracious institution.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p 183.

⁴⁸ Hoenecke, IV, p 133.

⁴⁹ Walther, *Pastoraltheologie*, p 183.

⁵⁰ Hoenecke, IV, p 133f.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p 137.

In the holy Supper, therefore, the **WORDS** and the **ACTION** coincide as God's institution: "Take, eat, This is My body. Drink from it, This is My blood." And together they bring God's blessing "for you for the forgiveness of sins," to God's glory and our good.

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