

Bjarne Wollan Teigen: Friend or Foe of the E.L.S.?

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## Bjarne Wollan Teigen: Friend or Foe of the E.L.S.?

Upon learning that I served an Evangelical Lutheran Synod parish in northern Minnesota last year, many of the people acquainted with the goings of that synod over the past few years ask me about the discussion in that synod concerning the Lord's Supper. While most of the people who asked those questions were genuinely concerned over what was going on in that synod, I still have to wonder about the true motives behind one question a local pastor asked me. After realizing that I had vicared in an ELS parish, his remark was, "Oh, so you vicared in the ELS. Did you figure out who the bell-ringers were?"

It seems as if most of those who have read Bjarne W. Teigen's book, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz* have him pegged to be just the sort of person that that local WELS pastor thought he was. Those who happened to agree with Teigen fell under suspicion as well (there was talk at one time of taking some sort of action against those pastors sympathetic to B. W. Teigen's point of view), and a dispute arose which has only been settled within the last year.

With all the furor created after Teigen's book was printed and critiqued, the center of his concern may very well have been lost in the shuffle. People may wonder why he wrote a book such as this which, he surely must have realized, would create such a stir. Did he do it simply to attract attention and to make a fuss? I can't believe that anyone who has spent his life faithfully studying and teaching God's Word could think of using it as a ruse to gain some sort of attention for himself.

Did B. W. Teigen write the book because he really wanted to convince others that we should and must point out the exact syllable, second or microsecond when Christ's body and blood are present in the Lord's Supper? I don't believe that was his purpose any more than he does, and he has said any number of times that such was not the case.

Well then, you ask, what was his purpose? It's my contention that B.W. Teigen wrote the articles, papers, and book that he did simply because he was concerned that as time went on, something might be lost from the Lord's Supper. Initially, Teigen simply wanted to be sure that nothing was overlooked or excluded from the Scriptural and orthodox Lutheran point of view concerning the Lord's Supper. This is evident not only from the articles and papers he wrote, but also from his book, which probably did the most to spark the spat that eventually arose.

The first article Teigen published that deals with the subject was printed in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* in 1977. The article deals especially with the doctrine of the real presence as it is found in the Book of Concord. He begins the article with clear concern that the doctrine of the Lord's Supper continue to be taught faithfully:

"Because of the fact that the Lord's Supper is 'by mystery surrounded,' the temptation to stray from the Scriptural doctrine is unusually strong as is evidenced by the false positions that have arisen over the course of the centuries. One apparently is tempted to say too much or too little; and too often, because of the controversies which have swirled around this doctrine, one overlooks the fact that it was instituted by our Savior, for our good."<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, The Real Presence in the Book of Concord--B. W. Teigen. Volume 41, Number 2, pp 41-57.

Teigen's concern for his fellow Christians is again demonstrated when he writes later of Luther, "...he warns us not to be swayed by the fanatics who are certain that the bread and wine cannot be Christ's body and blood."<sup>2</sup>

Again, to emphasize the importance of understanding and believing the doctrine of the real presence in the Lord's Supper, Teigen cites the Book of Concord then continues:

"Since there is nothing in the context that indicates that they are 'flowery, figurative, or metaphorical expressions,' the words must be understood in a literal sense (SD, VII, 45)... The force of these words of the Formula, it appears to me, is often overlooked and unexamined. But they set forth some very shocking propositions. It is a presence of Christ that is not merely the presence which Christ promised in the words 'where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'(Sasse, p. 368). Rather, in the consecrated elements we receive, as Luther sings in his hymn on the Lord's Supper, 'Thy holy body, Lord, the same which from Thine own mother Mary came' (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 313). In the Lord's Supper it is Christ's body and blood which He once gave and shed on Calvary and which He now as the exalted Christ gives to us; not only the Christ who was on the cross, but also He who sits at the right hand of God the Father is present in the Lord's Supper."<sup>3</sup>

A few paragraphs later Teigen again shows his concern that the correct doctrine be taught when he restates the Lutheran doctrine of the real presence and how it is attacked by Reformed churches. "An objection that had also been raised against the Lutheran doctrine of the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper was that since 'Christ is at the right hand of God the Father,' He could not at the same time be in the bread of the Lord's Supper."<sup>4</sup> Thereafter, he goes on to explain in an orthodox

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2. Ibid., p. 42.

3. Ibid., p. 43.

4. Ibid., p. 44.

manner, the Lutheran doctrine and how and why it clearly refutes the Reformed idea.

In the section following, Teigen again quotes the Solid Declaration as it presents the clear teaching of the real presence in the Lord's Supper by rejecting transubstantiation. Immediately following, he again quotes from the Book of Concord as it rejects the error of the Sacramentarians, and points out how it spells those errors out in detail, "because they are inconsistent with, opposed to, or contrary to the doctrine set forth above, based as it is on the word of God."<sup>5</sup>

Teigen's concern that the teachings of the Book of Concord be followed is evident from the way in which he consistently uses it and shows how it disproves arguments for false doctrines which are still among us today. His concern is that no teachings from the Book of Concord be lost, especially, in this paper, the doctrine of the real presence.

The second portion of his article concerns itself with how the real presence is effected. There Teigen expresses his concern that the confessions be properly represented. He believes that Luther felt that it began with the words of the consecration and ended when the communion service was over. He also contends that this is what the Solid Declaration teaches in paragraphs 73-90, and also what the Augsburg Confession teaches. He realized that Luther would not specify at what time the sacramental union takes place, but he is not willing to surrender anything the confessions say, as is obvious from his article: "It would

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5. Ibid., p. 46.

appear to me that F. E. Mayer does not quite represent the Lutheran confessions when he says that: 'The Lutheran Confessions refrain from entering on the precise moment when the sacramental union begins and ends,'...It seems to me that a fairly definite time is here set forth and that the confessions do not limit the sacramental union to the instant of distribution and reception."<sup>6</sup>

His genuine concern that the Confessions be adhered, instead of taking the easiest way out, becomes obvious when he continues, "While this latter theory [Mayer's comment] may possibly eliminate some practical problems regarding the spilling of the elements, what to do with what is left over after all have been communicated, etc, it seems to me that it raises some hard questions about the creative power of God's words of institution and the promise."<sup>7</sup>

Teigen unquestionably isn't afraid to deal with some difficult practical questions for the sake of adhering to the Confessions. That such is the case becomes even clearer when he expresses his distress at what he feels has happened to the Confessions over the years: "Apparently something strange happened to the Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper, especially with regard to the consecration, on its way to being formulated by the seventeenth century Lutheran dogmaticians. It is no secret that the view of consecration set forth in the second part of this paper would not coincide with the general view in our circles."<sup>8</sup>

After making such a bold comment, he explains that believes

6. Ibid., p. 53.

7. Ibid., pp. 53-54.

8. Ibid., p.54

that the difference between the current view and the view he believes was held at the time the Confessions were written may have come to<sup>3</sup> through Walther and Pieper, who might have received them from Egidius and Nicholas Hunnius. <sup>9</sup>

Perhaps even more convincing than anything that has been said to this point concerning Teigen's motives for fomenting the discussion which arose is this quote from his article:

"Confessional Lutheranism today should not be afraid to examine the formulations of the seventeenth century dogmatists in the light of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions...

There is, of course, another reason why we must devote our studies to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper at this time, and that is the pressing fact that the Reformed and Lutherans, both in Europe and this country, have today moved very close together on their views of the Lord's Supper. The words of institution as having consecratory power do not figure in these agreements. Why? Sasse has set forth the fact that there existed a profound difference between Luther and Zwingli on the power of Christ's words of institution. Luther accepted Augustine's statement that the Word causes the element to become a sacrament, while Zwingli could not do that...

We also need to be driven back to this Lutheran doctrine that the Word of God is a creative Word and the only channel of the Holy Spirit, in view of the tremendous tidal wave of Reformed Enthusiasm that is sweeping over us in the Evangelistic youth movements and the Charismatic movement which downgrade the power of the Word, no matter whether it is read, preached, or administered as the Visible Word of our gracious God."<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, Teigen was not interested in starting some sort of controversy. Rather, he expresses his concern that the Confessions be taught clearly and thoroughly so that Lutherans might better retain their orthodoxy in this day.

Instead of putting an end to Teigen's desire to make his

9. Ibid., p. 55.

10. Ibid.

views on the subject known, it seems as if the 1977 *Concordia Theological Quarterly* article only spurred Teigen to more study and to a deeper desire that others also restudy the doctrines of the Lord's Supper in the light of the Confessions. His care for the Confessions is shown by the fact that the article concerns itself with a reference missing from the Tappert edition of the Book of Concord.

His care was shared by the original writers of the Confessions, who wanted to be sure that they confessed "completely the doctrine of Luther on the Lord's Supper and the Person of Christ because they were convinced that his doctrine expressed what the Word of God teaches."<sup>11</sup>

In this article, Teigen not only wants to defend the Confessions as he sees them, but also wants to make it clear once more that that is his only purpose. He doesn't want to create a ruckus, he only wants to be sure the Confessions are followed. In fact, he wants to make that point so clear that he himself mentions the issue which might cause a problem and shows that agrees with Luther: "...this letter of Luther's clearly sets forth what is often contested in this regard; Luther teaches that the bread becomes the body of Christ at the consecration..." Teigen's next sentence shows that he understands the type of controversy that could arise, and shows that he wants to avoid that argument when he continues, "But Luther makes clear it that neither he nor any true Lutheran would want to be drawn into the old argument from the Middle Ages as to the exact point in

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11. *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, The Case of the Lost Luther Reference--B. W. Teigen. Volume 43, Number 4, p. 295.

in the syllables of the words of institution at which the body of Christ is present.

Teigen asserts in his article that the reference missing in the Tappert edition of the Book of Concord, i.e., "Tom. IV, Jena," is from the Solid Declaration, Article VII, paragraph 87. The Latin edition of that reference, according to Teigen, provided some interesting information:

"This letter of Luther to Wolferinus gives the definition of the time or the action of the Lord's Supper. The writer examined volume four of the Latin Jena edition (published in 1583) in the rare book room of the Concordia Theological Seminary Library, Fort Wayne. The temptation was strong to pursue a side-trail to discover the provenance of this particular volume, because the words that are underlined in the translation above were heavily underlined in the Latin text with a large "N.B." written on the margin. The pages were otherwise free from markings. Some theologian, apparently several hundred years ago, had caught the significance of this definition of the time or the action as set forth by Luther and referred to in SD VII, 87.

There can be no doubt that this is the lost Luther reference of SD VII, 87, because it clarifies beyond question what the authors of the formula had in mind."<sup>12</sup>

Teigen's closing comments in the article give further evidence to his dedication to preserving the Confessions and to encouraging others to study the Confessions:

"If we, in conclusion, assess the theological damage done because of the lost Luther reference, it is evident that by the omission of the Luther reference in SD VII, 87, in the Tappert edition, Luther's doctrine of the consecration has been seriously maimed. And then by supplying in the footnote to this passage totally misleading information as to Luther's doctrine with regard to a consecration done in accord with Christ's command, the Tappert edition has given this section of the Formula a definite Melancthonian twist. This may not be so serious for those Lutherans who today look upon the Book of Concord merely as an historically conditioned response to problems that confronted

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12. Ibid., p. 299.

four hundred years ago. But it should be of great concern to those who today make a quia subscription to the Book of Concord. They should be moved to make a fresh but careful, independent, objective study of the doctrine of the Book of Concord."<sup>13</sup>

When one reads Teigen's closing comments, he is again reminded of Teigen's concern that the Confessions be understood in the way that were originally meant to be. Again, his purpose in writing these articles wasn't to try and start a controversy, but to encourage others to restudy the Confessions for themselves.

While these articles clearly show B.W. Teigen's desire that the Confessions be studied, they were not the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back" as far as inciting the discussion within the ELS. That came only after B. W. Teigen published his book, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz*.

While it's true that the book was the single factor most responsible for the discussions which took place in the ELS in the last few years, it is also true that it more than any other factor achieved the result that B. W. Teigen had been advocating since 1977. The result? That God's Word and the Confessions once again be restudied concerning the Lord's Supper.

The final upshot of the whole thing is that Thesis Nine of the Theses on the Lord's Supper adopted by the Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1981 has been qualified in such a way that it certainly neither overlooks nor excludes anything from the Scriptural and orthodox Lutheran point of view concerning the Lord's Supper. It achieves the goal which B. W. Teigen seems to have set some time ago, that Doctrine of the

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13. Ibid., p. 307.

Lord's Supper be studied. At the same time, it says no more about the moment when Christ's body is present than Scripture and the confessions allow us to say.

Whether or not the work B. W. Teigen did has any undesirable side effects on the Evangelical Lutheran Synod remains to be seen. It seems however, that his work has had a positive effect, even if no one outside of that synod realizes it.

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