

THEOLOGY  
AND  
PRACTICE OF  
THE  
LORD'S  
SUPPER



A Report of the  
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AC—Augsburg Confession  
Ap—Apology of the Augsburg Confession  
Ep—Epitome of the Formula of Concord  
FC—Formula of Concord  
LC—Large Catechism  
SA—Smalcald Articles  
SC—Small Catechism  
SD—Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord

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## Contents

I. Theology of the Lord's Supper	5
A. Prologue	5
B. The Setting in Holy Scripture	5
C. The Testimony of Holy Scripture	6
1. The Real Presence	6
2. The Atonement	7
3. The Lord's Second Coming	8
4. The Church	8
5. The Scriptures	9
D. A Brief Excursus on Communion Practice in the Early Church	10
E. The Confessional Witness	11
II. Practice of the Lord's Supper	13
A. Prologue	13
B. Practice in Accord with the Words of Institution	13
1. Consecration	13
2. The Elements	15
a. The Bread	15
b. The Wine	16
c. Post-Communion Reverence	17
C. Practice in Accord with the Doctrine of the Office of the Public Ministry	17
1. The Pastoral Office	17
2. Confession and Absolution	18
D. Practice in Accord with the Doctrine of the Church	19
1. Fellowship Considerations	19
2. Close Communion	20
3. Extracongregational Services	23
III. Questions and Answers	25

## I. Theology of the Lord's Supper

### A. Prologue

The true Christian church is brought into being by the Gospel (1 Cor. 1:18-31, cf. especially vv. 21-24). Apart from the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, the church cannot exist.<sup>1</sup> The Lutheran Church believes, teaches, and confesses this truth: The Holy Spirit works through the Gospel in calling each of us from the darkness of the law's condemnation into the light of Christ's saving work (1 Cor. 12:3; Matt. 16:17).

Further, when one is called into Christ's kingdom by the Gospel, he/she is incorporated into Christ's community—the church (1 Cor. 12:12-31). This whole action occurs without any merit on the believer's part. The sole glory is God's for so graciously changing us from dead creatures to new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Thus the Gospel, which no human intellect could ever formulate (Gal. 1:11-12), creates saving faith. Such faith incorporates us into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 1 and 12). Even as God calls out a people for Himself by means of the Gospel, He guides that people by the Scriptures. The person whom God has redeemed and addressed in the Gospel now joyfully seeks God's guidance in Christ's word—the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures (John 8:31-32).

It is in Christ's word that the Christian Church receives the Lord's invitation: "Take and eat; this is my body."<sup>2</sup> Since the Gospel has kindled faith in Christ, the church gladly obeys this command. In order rightly to follow the Savior's guidance, one must understand the setting and the words of the Lord's Supper.

### B. The Setting in Holy Scripture

The Lord's timing in instituting the Lord's Supper is most significant. He selected the night of the Passover meal as the setting for this action. The Passover festival commemorated God's deliverance of His people from a prideful Pharaoh and recounted how God had provided a means to spare the firstborn sons of the Israelites as the angel of death passed over the land slaying every firstborn son. A lamb was to be slain in each

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<sup>1</sup> Luther writes in his Large Catechism: "But outside the Christian church (that is, where the Gospel is not) there is no forgiveness, and hence no holiness. Therefore, all who seek to merit holiness through their works rather than through the Gospel and the forgiveness of sin have expelled and separated themselves from the church" (LC II, 56; cf. AC V).

<sup>2</sup> "Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom'" (Matt. 26:26-29; cf. Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

household and its blood sprinkled upon the doorpost. When the angel saw the blood, he would "pass over."<sup>3</sup>

This blood of the lamb redeemed the life of the firstborn even as it was a part of that action by which God led the children of Israel to freedom. This great deliverance of the past was to point Israel to that future deliverance which would be won by the Lamb of God—the Messiah (Is. 53; 1 Cor. 5:7).

Jesus' selection of the Passover, therefore, clothes the institution of the Lord's Supper with Israel's history. In fact, as Christ now distributes His own body and blood, God's redemptive purpose in Israel achieves its fulfillment and goal. The blood of the New Testament (Matt. 26:28; Jer. 31:31; 1 Cor. 11:25) now replaces that of the Old (Ex. 24:8). Christ's sacrifice on Golgotha for the sins of all people is the final and complete sacrifice (Heb. 8—10). Through His death for sin, all people may now be free from sin's curse and may live for God (Rom. 2—3).<sup>4</sup>

### C. The Testimony of Holy Scripture

#### I. The Real Presence

The clear claim of Christ in Holy Scripture is that His true body and blood are truly present and distributed to those who eat.<sup>5</sup> All four Scriptural accounts (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Cor.

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<sup>3</sup> Ex. 12:2-13. The Lutheran fathers were confident that the sacraments were present, in prefigured form, in the Old Testament. Martin Chemnitz writes: "God in all ages of the world, by giving a certain Word, revealed His will concerning the mystery of redemption to the human race, concerning the gratuitous reconciliation and acceptance of believers to life eternal through faith, because of the sacrifice of His Son as Mediator. He also added to the Word, by His own divine institution, certain external signs, by which to seal and confirm more clearly the promise of righteousness by faith. The institution and use of Sacraments did not, therefore, first begin in the time of the New Testament; but the fathers in the time of the Old Testament, even before the publication of the Law, had their certain signs or Sacraments divinely instituted for this use, which were the seals of the righteousness of faith. Rom. 4. But though it is the same God, the same Mediator, the same grace, righteousness, promise, faith, salvation, etc., yet those external signs or seals are sometimes changed for others, substituted in their place by divine institution, so that the mode of revelation was constantly rendered more clear, which at first was like a lamp shining in a dark place; afterwards the morning star succeeded, until at length, the night being past, the Sun of righteousness arose" (*Examination of the Council of Trent*, Vol. II, First Topic, Section II, par. 1, quoted in H. Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961], p. 536; cf. Charles P. Krauth's "The Passover Is a Type of the Supper," in *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963], pp. 592—97).

<sup>4</sup> Even those scholars of critical persuasion find overwhelming evidence for this Passover setting. For example, Joachim Jeremias writes: "The fourteen observations that have been made above concern not only the framework of the narrative but also its substance. It cannot be said therefore that only later embellishment has made the Last Supper a passover meal. It is much more the case that the passover character of the last meal of Jesus is unanimously supported..." (*The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* [London: SCM Press, 1964], pp. 61—62).

<sup>5</sup> The doctrine of the Real Presence is succinctly confessed in Article X of the Augsburg Confession.

11:23-26) assert: "This is my body." "This is my blood of the covenant" (Matthew and Mark). "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke and Paul).<sup>6</sup>

Scriptural passages other than the words of institution forthrightly teach the Real Presence. St. Paul writes in I Cor. 10:16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" Or, again, in 1 Cor. 11:27: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord."

A Biblical view of the Real Presence rejects two aberrations. On the one hand, it is wrong to reject Christ's clear words simply because our fallen human reason cannot fully understand *how* it comes to pass. Any effort to make the "This is" something less than a clear word, as Reformed theology does by denying the real presence of the body and blood of Christ on earth, is a departure from Christ's words. On the other hand, it is also fruitless to engage in theories about how the body and blood are present in, with, and under the bread and wine. A dogma such as transubstantiation, as generally taught by Roman Catholicism, is not set forth by Scripture.

## 2. The Atonement

The institution of the Lord's Supper is based on Christ's atonement. By His work of atonement the Lord sacrificed Himself for the sins of all people. This action was completed in its entirety when our Lord uttered the words "It is finished!"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> One study stands out in the secondary literature, namely, Hermann Sasse's *This Is My Body* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), passim. Commenting on Luther's confession of the Real Presence, Sasse writes: "His belief in the Real Presence rests solely on the words of Christ. . . . It was not stubbornness that moved Luther to retain the words 'This is my body' in their literal sense. It was simply reverence for Him who spoke these words and neither gave nor commanded to give another explanation" (p. 107). Other studies which convincingly demonstrate Lutheranism's reliance upon the *verba* of Christ include: Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent—Part II*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), pp. 217—548; Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), passim; Werner Elert, *The Lord's Supper Today*, trans. M. Bertram and R. Norden (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), pp. 5—43; Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 300—21; Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), pp. 184—205; Charles P. Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), pp. 585—830.

<sup>7</sup> John 19:30. The Greek grammars appropriately stress the perfect tense of *tetelestai*. Cf., for example, C. D. F. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 16; and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Volume III—Syntax, James Hope Moulton, ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), pp. 81—89, for a thorough discussion of the perfect and its force in the New Testament period.

In the words of institution Jesus openly asserts that His blood is being "poured out" (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20) and that His body is being "given" (Luke 22:19). Both terms underscore the sacrificial nature of His death. Further, the words of institution contain the important reference "for many" (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24) or "for you" (Luke 22:19). Jesus now presents His body and blood in bread and wine as the means of divine grace "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). With His body and blood in the sacrament, He thereby bestows all the blessings and benefits of the atonement (Heb. 9:14-16).

### 3. The Lord's Second Coming

Jesus clearly states the significance of the Lord's Supper for His return in glory. In Matthew we read: "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29; cf. Mark 14:25). St. Paul also links the institution of the Lord's Supper with the second coming of Christ: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Thus the communicant confesses or "proclaims" confident faith in the Lord's promised return when he partakes of the Lord's Supper.

### 4. The Church

The Lord's Supper is a corporate meal. Jesus used plural verbs and pronouns as He spoke to the disciples in the upper room (Matt. 26:26-29 and parallels). St. Paul wrote to the whole church at Corinth when he learned of abuses in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.<sup>8</sup> Thus there is both a vertical and a horizontal dimension to proper preparation for the Lord's Supper. Each communicant must examine himself before God (1 Cor. 11:28) and must also conduct himself in a Christian manner over against his fellow Christians (1 Cor. 11:17 ff.). To partake of the Lord's Supper with malice toward a fellow communicant is sinful (Matt. 5:23-24). To commune without faith in Christ's promise is to eat and drink judgment upon oneself (1 Cor. 11:29).<sup>9</sup>

The Lutheran Confessions underscore the corporate nature of Holy Communion when they address the question of private self-communion:

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. 11:27-34. The public nature of the sacrament and also the implications of doctrinal confession are stressed by the Lutheran Confessions' exegesis of 1 Cor. 11:26 in Ap IV, 210, and Ap XXIV, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Franzmann, in commenting on "in an unworthy manner" (1 Cor. 11:27), aptly combines these two dimensions when he writes: "As 29 makes plain, the 'unworthiness' lies in not *discerning the body* in its sanctity and significance for man, eating and acting as if the present Lord were not present but had failed to keep His promise, as if His redemptive death did not signify, as if His 'Drink of it, all of you,' did not bind all His disciples together" (*Concordia Bible with Notes* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971], p. 310).

Somebody may seek to justify himself by saying that he wishes to communicate himself for the sake of his own devotion. This is not honest, for if he really desires to commune, he can do so most fittingly and properly in the sacrament administered according to Christ's institution. To commune by himself is uncertain and unnecessary, and he does not know what he is doing because he follows a false human opinion and imagination without the sanction of God's Word. Nor is it right (even if everything else is in order) for anyone to use the sacrament, which is the common possession of the church, to meet his own private need and thus trifle with it according to his own pleasure apart from the fellowship of the church (SA II ii, 8-9).<sup>10</sup>

## 5. The Scriptures

Christ's Word is authoritative for His church (Eph. 2:19-20). The Lord's instruction to celebrate Holy Communion, as well as the Words of Institution, are communicated to us in Holy Scripture. Indeed, our Lord chooses to speak to us concerning Himself, the Holy Supper, and the whole counsel of God not directly but through His select prophets and apostles: "These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:25-26; cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12).

The church articulates its view of the Lord's Supper "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20).

The *Sola Scriptura* principle means that there is no authority in the church which is to be heeded with equal reverence. The voice of Christ through His inspired spokesmen is the final word on every question. No ecclesiastical tradition—whether of the early church or the Reformation church—merits a place beside Holy Scripture. Nor do reason, science, or philosophy possess an authority which is equal to Scripture.

Thus, in gladly obeying Christ's guidance on the nature and meaning of Holy Communion, the church also confesses the authority and truthfulness of every word of Christ mediated to us in the Holy Scriptures. Our fathers eloquently confessed:

On the contrary, in accord with the simple words of Christ's testament, we hold and believe in a true, though supernatural, eating of Christ's body and drinking of his blood, which we cannot comprehend

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<sup>10</sup> The confessors direct these words to the case of *private* self-Communion. They would not preclude *public* self-Communion where the pastor has no assistant. Martin Scharlemann underscores the corporate aspect of the sacrament by focusing on the word *koinonia*: "When reference is made to the Lord's Supper, it is spoken of as having both a vertical and horizontal dimension, as is evident from the use of the word *koinonia* at 1 Cor. 10:16; for this term signifies a sharing in something with others; in this case, in the body and blood of the Lord" (*Some Remarks Regarding the Celebration of the Lord's Supper*, Faculty Forum Paper, March 2, 1976).

with our human sense or reason. Here we take our intellect captive in obedience to Christ, as we do in other articles also, and accept this mystery in no other way than by faith and as it is revealed in the Word (FC Ep VII, 42).

#### **D. A Brief Excursus on Communion Practice in the Early Church**

Long before St. Augustine's *City of God*, the church fathers reflected in their writings the conviction that the Christian community was *in* but not *of* this world. They were convinced that God was best honored and the church best served when this distinction was held before the faithful.

Thus, in dealing with Communion practices, the fathers everywhere underscored the importance of preparing for the sacred meal and distancing oneself from the salads which the secularism of that day served up. The earliest reference to Communion practice, *Didache* 9, breathes this spirit when it pointedly distinguishes between "the church" and "the dogs":

As this piece [of bread] was scattered over the hills and then was brought together and made one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your Kingdom. For yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.

You must not let anyone eat or drink of your Eucharist except those baptized in the Lord's name. For in reference to this the Lord said, "Do not give what is sacred to dogs."<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, as one reads further, this document from the early second century distinguishes between those *within the fellowship* as to the times when Communion could be rightly received and those instances where Communion would be improper:

On every Lord's Day—his special day—come together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. Anyone at variance with his neighbor must not join you, until they are reconciled, lest your sacrifice be defiled. For it was of this sacrifice that the Lord said, "Always and everywhere offer me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is marveled at by the nations."<sup>12</sup>

It is necessary to first "confess your sins," so that one's participation in the Eucharist might be "pure." It is also required that no lurking grudge within the heart of the believer profane the Holy Supper.

As one moves from this earliest material into the subsequent patristic literature, there is great continuity in theological attitude and emphasis. Repeated comments on the administration of Holy Communion sup-

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<sup>11</sup> *Early Christian Fathers*, trans. and ed. Cyril L. Richardson, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. I (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 175.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

port a restrictive admission policy with respect to Eucharistic fellowship.

Two themes run throughout the patristic treatises and tracts. First, a life which manifests clear rebellion against the Gospel by "willful and gross" sins constitutes a wall to God-pleasing fellowship. Secondly, teaching which detracts from Christ's person and work or fails to heed His voice in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures is similarly regarded as a fracture of fellowship.<sup>13</sup>

An excellent summary of the church fathers' writings relative to Communion practices is given in Werner Elert's *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*. This study repeatedly demonstrates that the early church perceived Communion fellowship as confession of a common faith. It was unthinkable, from their perspective, that one who taught false doctrine could be admitted to the Lord's Table.<sup>14</sup>

### E. The Confessional Witness

The Lutheran Confessions are a superb repository of Biblical exposition and teaching concerning the Lord's Supper. Our symbols dwell at length on the manifold benefits of Holy Communion.

#### I. The Lord's Supper offers and conveys forgiveness of sins.

By these words forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there are also life and salvation (SC VI, 6).

The people are also admonished concerning the value and use of the sacrament and the great consolation it offers to anxious consciences, that they may learn to believe in God and ask for and expect whatever is good from God (AC XXIV, 7).

#### 2. The Lord's Supper offers the truly present body and blood of Christ.

It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are

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<sup>13</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, III, 51, 10. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, 41:1 ff. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses Mystagogicae*, I, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 133. The procedure of excluding the heretics from the Eucharist meant that the early church had devised a means of dealing with the anonymous heretic. The local congregation or bishop personally could indeed impose the regular restrictions. But the anonymous heretic, particularly the layman, was not known locally. As a defense against this sort of thing, the church developed a system of written credentials that were presented. In the year 306, the Council of Elvira used the term "letters of fellowship." These were certificates intended for travelers to give proof of their identity as they came to another place and there sought to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist. The Council of Carthage (345—48) directed that no person, clerical or lay, could commune in another congregation without a letter from his bishop. Two things were involved in these certificates or letters: first, a declaration that there was no impediment to a man's being received and that he enjoyed full church fellowship in his home congregation, thereby permitting his admission to the celebration of the Eucharist, and secondly, by presenting his certificate he came under the care of the bishop of the new congregation.

really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received. The contrary doctrine is therefore rejected (AC X).

### 3. The Lord's Supper strengthens faith.

Thus the Lord's Supper was instituted in the church so that as this sign reminds us of the promises of Christ, the remembrance might strengthen our faith and we might publicly confess our faith and announce the blessings of Christ, as Paul says (1 Cor. 11:26), "As often as you do this, you proclaim the Lord's death" (Ap IV, 210).

### 4. The Lord's Supper imparts power for Christian living.

For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils (LC V, 70).

### 5. The Lord's Supper is an act of thankful adoration.

The principal use of the sacrament is to make clear that terrified consciences are the ones worthy of it, and how they ought to use it.

There is also a sacrifice, since one action can have several purposes. Once faith has strengthened a conscience to see its liberation from terror, then it really gives thanks for the blessing of Christ's suffering. It uses the ceremony itself as praise to God, as a demonstration of its gratitude, and a witness of its high esteem for God's gifts. Thus the ceremony becomes a sacrifice of praise (Ap XXIV, 73-74).

### 6. The Lord's Supper is a celebration of Christian fellowship.

After the Last Supper, as he was about to begin his bitter passion and death for our sin, in this sad, last hour of his life, this truthful and almighty Lord, our Creator and Redeemer Jesus Christ, selected his words with great deliberation and care in ordaining and instituting this most venerable sacrament, which was to be observed with great reverence and obedience until the end of the world and which was to be an abiding memorial of his bitter passion and death and of all his blessings, a seal of the new covenant, a comfort for all sorrowing hearts, and a true bond and union of Christians with Christ their head and with one another (FC SD VII, 44).

## II. Practice of the Lord's Supper

### A. Prologue

How does one address the many practical questions that arise in conjunction with the celebration of Holy Communion? As Lutherans we approach such a task from a unique theological posture. In submitting to the full authority of Holy Scripture as correctly expounded in the Lutheran Confessions, Lutheranism avoids both that legalism which negates the Gospel by binding consciences with human ordinances (Galatians) and that libertarianism which would destroy good order in the church (1 Corinthians).

A marvelous treatment of the perimeters of evangelical practice is set forth in the Formula of Concord. Its tenor will be assumed in our subsequent discussion.

We further believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church. Paul instructs us how we can with a good conscience give in and yield to the weak in faith in such external matters of indifference (Rom. 14) and demonstrates it by his own example (Acts 16:3; 21:26; 1 Cor. 9:10) (FC SD X, 9).

### B. Practice in Accord with the Words of Institution

#### 1. Consecration

It is clear from our review of the Scriptural passages and their confessional exposition, that the church must follow the Lord's guidance in speaking the Words of Institution over the elements in Holy Communion (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Thus the pastor seeks to "do this" in accord with the Lord's instructions (1 Cor. 11:24-25). It would not be proper, then, to distribute the bread and wine as the sacramentally present body and blood of Jesus without first pronouncing Jesus' words over the elements.<sup>15</sup> Nor, if the

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<sup>15</sup> Hermann Sasse writes: "Perhaps nothing reveals the profound difference between Luther's and Zwingli's understanding of the sacramental words more than the fact that for Luther and the Lutheran Church the words of institution have always been also the words of consecration, while Zwingli and all Reformed churches reject the idea that the elements are consecrated by reciting the words of Christ" (*This Is My Body*, p. 164). In keeping with the centrality of the sacramental *verba*, the consecration should be spoken over all the elements. To separate, by distance or liturgical action, a portion of the bread or of the wine from consecration moves in the direction of a Protestantism wherein the *verba* need not be held in sacramental proximity to the elements (cf. FC SD VII, 75-84).

supply of consecrated elements has been exhausted, should the officiant distribute a replenished supply until Jesus' consecratory words have first been spoken.

Because the Words (*verba*) of Institution are the very heart of the sacramental action, they should always be employed. It is through Christ's word and its power, not through the action of the celebrant, that Christ's body and blood are present in the bread and wine.

The practice of taking consecrated bread and wine from the congregation's altar for distribution to those absent must always include the Words of Institution in the presence of the communicant. Christ's word, the elements, and the distribution are to be Biblically held together (Mark 14:22-25).<sup>16</sup>

Two quotations from the Formula of Concord are most pertinent:

In the administration of Communion the words of institution are to be spoken or sung distinctly and clearly before the congregation and are under no circumstances to be omitted. Thereby we render obedience to the command of Christ, "This do." Thereby the faith of the hearers in the essence and benefits of this sacrament (the presence of the body and blood of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and all the benefits which Christ has won for us by his death and the shedding of his blood and which he gives to us in his testament) is awakened, strengthened, and confirmed through his Word. And thereby the elements of bread and wine are hallowed or blessed in this holy use, so that therewith the body and blood of Christ are distributed to us to eat and to drink, as Paul says, "The cup of blessing which we bless," which happens precisely through the repetition and recitation of the words of institution (FC SD VII, 79-82).

Likewise, [we reject and condemn] the doctrine that it is not the

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Chemnitz's reply to the question of whether the body and blood of Christ are present in the consecrated elements if they are laid up, enclosed, or carried about, and not used and distributed, is most appropriate: "Christ did not institute this Sacrament in such a way that, even if no one uses it, or if it is changed into something else than He Himself commanded, it nevertheless is His body and blood, but in the very words of institution He prescribed the form of that which was commanded, how it is to be observed and used, and that not only for a time but to the end of the world, 1 Co 11:26. And use surely does not make a Sacrament, but the Word, ordinance, and institution of Christ. And there is a difference between the essence of a Sacrament and its use. But Christ so ordered and arranged the words of institution in the form of a testament, as He wanted this Sacrament to be an act in which bread and wine are taken, blessed, or consecrated, as they say, then offered, received, eaten, and drunk. And Christ says of that which is blessed, which is offered, received, eaten and drunk: This is My body; this is My blood. Therefore when the bread is indeed blessed but neither distributed nor received, but enclosed, shown, and carried about, it is surely clear that the whole word of institution is not added to the element, for this part is lacking: He gave [it] to them and said, Take and eat. And when the word of institution is incomplete there can be no complete Sacrament. In the same way it is also no true Baptism if the Word is indeed spoken over the water, but if there is no one who is baptized" (*Ministry, Word, and Sacraments*, trans. Luther Poellot [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981], p. 121).

words and the omnipotence of Christ but faith that achieves the presence of the body of Christ in the Holy Supper, whence some omit the words of institution in the administration of the Supper. For while we justly criticize and condemn the papistic consecration which ascribes to the word and work of the priest the power allegedly to effect a sacrament, the words of institution cannot and should not in any case be omitted in the administration of the Supper, as shown above in a previous exposition (FC SD VII, 121).

As the celebrant consecrates the elements, he should do so in a reverent manner. To hurry through the *verba* as though he were watching the clock or to insert some personal idiosyncrasy into the consecration is to detract the people's attention from the sacrament. The congregation's focus is to be on Christ's word and invitation. The celebrant is a servant to sharpen that focus.

Again the Formula of Concord eloquently states:

Concerning the consecration we believe, teach, and confess that no man's work nor the recitation of the minister effect this presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, but it is to be ascribed solely and alone to the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But at the same time we believe, teach, and confess with one accord that in the celebration of the Holy Supper the words of Christ's institution should under no circumstances be omitted, but should be spoken publicly, as it is written, "the cup of blessing which we bless" (I Cor. 10:16; 11:23-25). This blessing occurs through the recitation of the words of Christ (FC Ep VII, 8-9).

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).

## 2. The Elements

There is scholarly consensus that our Lord employed the earthly elements of bread and wine in His institution of Holy Communion.<sup>17</sup>

### a. The Bread

The Greek word for bread in the New Testament texts, *artos*, is

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<sup>17</sup> Representative of such a consensus are the following commentaries: A. Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1948), pp. 741—45; William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 504—09; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 792—807; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 264—70; Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. Norman Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 41—88.

generic. It applies to bread in general.<sup>18</sup> While Greek has a more restricted term, *azumos*, for unleavened bread, it is not found in any of the New Testament accounts of the Lord's Supper.

The fact that unleavened bread was used in the Passover and that the three evangelists set the time for the Lord's Supper "on the first day of [the Feast of] Unleavened Bread" would strongly suggest the use of unleavened bread in our Lord's original action (Matt. 26:17; cf. Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7). Therefore we have reason to conclude that unleavened bread should also be used today.

Since the Scriptures are silent on the source of the bread, it may be baked from the flour of wheat, rye, barley, or other grains. While the form of distribution should reflect reverence for the elements, there is no specific guidance on the size or shape of the wafer or portion.

#### b. *The Wine*

All four accounts of the Lord's Supper speak of "the cup." The content of this cup was most definitely wine. The references in Matt. 26:29 and parallels to the "fruit of the vine" would not have suggested anything else to Jesus' listeners than the grape wine of the Jewish Passover ritual.<sup>19</sup> In 1 Cor. 11:21 there is corroboration that the early Christian church understood wine for "fruit of the vine." Some of the Corinthians, sadly, had abused the Holy Supper by becoming drunk.

The color, type, or origin of the grape wine is a matter which Christians can select in accord with their situation.

In the oft-cited pastoral circumstance of an alcoholic communicant, the counsel of foregoing Communion for a period of time or the action of diluting the wine with water (perhaps done at the Lord's Supper itself) are preferable. In the extreme situation where even greatly diluted wine may lead to severe temptation, no fully satisfactory answer, in the opinion of the CTCR, can be formulated. The counsel of completely foregoing Communion is clearly unsatisfactory. In this situation, too, the actions of diluting the wine with water or intinction would be preferable. The substitution of grape juice raises the question of whether the Lord's instruction is being heeded. Luther's openness to Communion in one kind<sup>20</sup> is difficult in view of confessional texts which strongly urge the

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<sup>18</sup> Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 110.

<sup>19</sup> "Fruit of the vine" is, exegetically, synonymous with wine. Cf. H. Büchsel, "genēma," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, I (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), p. 164; W. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 508—09; H. Seesemann, "oinos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, V (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), p. 164; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1966), p. 547.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 36 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 231.

Biblical paradigm of both kinds, though the Confessions do not address the extreme situation.

A similar pastoral problem is posed by those rare instances where a severe physical reaction is caused by the elements (as, for example, when the recipient is concurrently taking certain medications, or is simply allergic to one or the other of the elements). The pastor, in such cases, will surely stress the Gospel's power and total effectiveness in the individual's life and patiently seek a practical solution that both honors Christ's word and satisfies the desire to partake in the Lord's Supper.

*c. Post-Communion Reverence*

The consecrated elements which remain after all have communed should be treated with reverence. This reverence has been expressed by Lutherans in various ways. Some have followed the ancient practice of burning the bread and pouring the wine upon the earth. Others have established a basin and drain—*piscina*—specifically for disposal of the wine. The elders or altar guild may also return the consecrated bread and wine to specific containers for future sacramental use, or the elders and pastor can consume the remaining elements. All of these practices should be understood properly. The church is not, thereby, conferring upon the elements some abiding status apart from their use in the Lord's Supper itself.

Biblical practice keeps the elements in their sacramental setting. Our Lutheran Confessions, quoting from the *Wittenberg Concord* (1536), are lucid in their rejection of any view which would confer some extraordinary status upon the elements apart from their sacramental use:

They confess, in accordance with the words of Irenaeus, that there are two things in this sacrament, one heavenly and the other earthly. Therefore they maintain and teach that with the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ are truly and essentially present, distributed, and received. And although they deny a transubstantiation (that is, an essential change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ) and do not believe that the body and blood of Christ are locally enclosed in the bread, or are in some other way permanently united with it apart from the use of the sacrament, they grant that through sacramental union the bread is the body of Christ, etc. For they do not maintain that the body of Christ is present apart from the use, as when the bread is laid aside or reserved in the tabernacle or carried about and exposed in procession, as happens in the papacy (FC SD VII, 14-15).<sup>21</sup>

**C. Practice in Accord with the Doctrine  
of the Office of the Public Ministry**

**1. The Pastoral Office**

The regularly called and ordained pastors of the church are to offici-

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<sup>21</sup> The problem with the "consecrationist-receptionist" discussion is that each side runs the risk of separating in one direction or the other what has been Biblically joined together.

ate at the administration of Holy Communion. God's Word describes both the universal priesthood and the office of the public ministry as divine institutions (1 Peter 2:9-10; Titus 1:5-9;). Edmund Schlink, writing on the confessional view of church and ministry, succinctly states:

The Confessions do not permit us to place the universal priesthood as a divine institution over against the public ministry as a human institution. The idea of a transfer of the rights of the universal priesthood to the person of the pastor is foreign to the Confessions. The church does not *transfer* its office of preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments to individuals in its membership, but it *fills* this office entrusted to it by God, it *calls* into this office instituted by God. In this office the pastor therefore acts in the name and at the direction of *God* and in the stead of *Jesus Christ*. He acts with authority not on the basis of an arrangement made by believers but on the basis of the divine institution.<sup>22</sup>

The Augsburg Confession underscores the importance of a regularly called pastor for the administration of Holy Communion:

It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call (AC XIV).

Our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments (AC XXVIII, 5).

Accordingly, the Apology explains:

But let us talk about the term "liturgy." It does not really mean a sacrifice but a public service. Thus it squares with our position that a minister who consecrates shows forth the body and blood of the Lord to the people, just as a minister who preaches shows forth the gospel to the people, as Paul says (I Cor. 4:1), "This is how one should regard us, as ministers of Christ and dispensers of the sacraments of God," that is, of the Word and sacraments; and II Cor. 5:20, "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (Ap XXIV, 80).

## 2. Confession and Absolution

Article XXV of the Augsburg Confession emphasizes the value of confession and absolution in preparing for reception of the Sacrament:

Confession has not been abolished by the preachers on our side. The custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and

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<sup>22</sup> Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 245.

absolved. At the same time the people are carefully instructed concerning the consolation of the Word of absolution so that they may esteem absolution as a great and precious thing. It is not the voice or word of the man who speaks it, but the Word of God, who forgives sin, for it is spoken in God's stead and by God's command. We teach with great diligence about this command and power of keys and how comforting and necessary it is for terrified consciences. We also teach that God requires us to believe this absolution as much as if we heard God's voice from heaven, that we should joyfully comfort ourselves with absolution, and that we should know that through such faith we obtain forgiveness of sins (AC XXV, 1-4).

It is common practice in our Eucharistic worship to provide for confession and absolution. Normally this occurs in the public service where the congregation corporately confesses its sin and the pastor pronounces the forgiveness of sins. Lutherans also provide for private confession and absolution in those cases where a terrified conscience seeks consolation from God's holy Word. Through confession and absolution, whether private or corporate, the Gospel is clearly articulated in a manner which properly prepares the communicant for the Lord's Supper.

#### **D. Practice in Accord with the Doctrine of the Church**

##### **1. Fellowship Considerations**

Inasmuch as Communion fellowship Biblically embodies the confession of a common faith (1 Cor. 10:17; Acts 2:42)—for it is a theological definition of the one true faith, not a sociological-empirical description of whatever faith a group finds itself agreed in—it is necessary for the church to guard itself from doctrinal fractures of that fellowship (1 Tim. 1:3-11). To indiscriminately admit even well-intentioned people to Holy Communion is neither to honor God nor love our fellowmen (1 Cor. 11).

Scripture requires both a knowledge of the Lord's Supper sufficient for its proper reception and a contrite faith which trusts Jesus' word. It is neither loving nor responsible for a pastor or church to sacrifice theological considerations for social pressure or custom. If, for example, an individual is admitted to Holy Communion simply because he is a relative or friend of a member, and that person participates in the sacrament to his/her judgment (1 Cor. 11:29),<sup>23</sup> the officiant will one day be asked to give an account of his sacramental stewardship (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1-8).

Lutherans vigorously reject a view of the Lord's Supper which would

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<sup>23</sup> The Greek word in 1 Cor. 11:29 is *krima*. The term used by Paul of wrongful participation in the Lord's Supper is the equivalent of our English "condemnation." Cf. Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, pp. 450-51. For additional material on the force of this word see Friedrich Büchsel, "krino," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, III (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 921-54.

claim divine blessings for those who receive the Lord's Supper in a merely ritualistic fashion:

St. Paul taught that we obtain grace before God through faith and not through works. Manifestly contrary to this teaching is the misuse of the Mass by those who think that grace is obtained through the performance of this work, for it is well known that the Mass is used to remove sin and obtain grace and all sorts of benefits from God, not only for the priest himself but also for the whole world and for others, both living and dead (AC XXIV, 28-29).

Also rejected by the Scriptures and the Confessions is that observance of the sacrament which would use it merely as a tool toward closer human fellowship rather than as a thankful celebration of that Christian fellowship which God has given. St. Paul in 1 Corinthians details the abuse which occurred when men sought to serve their social goals rather than the Lord who instituted the Sacred Supper.

Our Confessions state:

Some clever people imagine that the Lord's Supper was instituted for two reasons. First, it was supposed to be a mark and witness of profession, just as a certain type of hood is the mark of a particular monastic profession. In the second place, Christ was supposed to be very pleased with a mark that took the form of a meal symbolizing the mutual union and friendship among Christians because banquets are symbols of agreement and friendship. But this is a secular idea that ignores the chief use of what God has instituted. It talks only about the practice of love, which even profane and secular men understand; it does not talk about faith, whose true meaning very few understand (Ap XXIV, 68; cf. FC SD VII, 59).

Thus there is great continuity of concern from our Lord's words of guidance to His apostles, through Paul's admonitions in the epistles, through the practice of the early church, to the practices of the Reformation church and of confessional Lutheranism today.

The catechetical enterprise, whether of the *Didache* or Luther's Catechism, is not non-Biblical legalism but rather Biblical realism (1 Cor. 11:17 ff.). Its aim is not the exclusion of certain individuals from the sacrament, but the honoring of God's Word and the true benefit of a fallen humanity.

## 2. Close Communion<sup>24</sup>

The practice of refusing Communion to certain Christians and the

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<sup>24</sup> While the term "closed Communion" has a longer history (cf. W. Elert, ch. 7) and is regarded by some as theologically more proper than "close Communion," the latter term, which has been used in more recent history by writers in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, may also properly be employed as a way of saying that confessional agreement must precede the fellowship of Christians at the Lord's Table. Whatever term is used, it is clear that the LCMS' official practice is consistent with the historic practice of the church, which has regarded unity of doctrine as a prerequisite for admission to the sacrament (cf. 1967 Res. 2-19).

general population at Lutheran altars is called *close Communion*. This practice serves the Gospel, and even those refused, by its reverence for our Lord's last will and testament.

Martin Chemnitz, in his magisterial work on the Lord's Supper, writes:

Moreover, those words, because they are the words of the last will and testament of the very Son of God, must not be treated in a frivolous or light manner but must be pondered with reverence and great devotion. Since "Scripture is not of private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20), I have shown on the basis of the sure and continuous analogy of the interpretation of Scripture and by a comparison of those passages in which the doctrine of the Lord's Supper is treated and repeated in Scripture the compelling, sure, certain, and clear reasons why the simple, proper, and natural meaning of the words of institution of the Supper must not be given up or rejected but rather must continue to be held and adhered to in the simple obedience of faith.<sup>25</sup>

Precisely. It is a desire to honor and obey the word of Christ which has led Christians to reserve the sacrament for those who share that desire and understanding. Chemnitz, with Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, specifically defends the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper against the errors of human interpretation in various Christian fellowships of his day.

Since fellowship at the Lord's Table is also confession of a common faith, it would not be truthful for those who affirm the Real Presence and those who deny it to join one another. Their common Communion would indicate to the non-Christian community that the last will and testament of Christ could be interpreted in contradictory ways. Indeed, the non-Christian might rightly ask whether it was Jesus' word which determined the church's position and practice or simply a human consensus.

Therefore it is true that "No one who truly accepts the Real Presence as the very Word of God can grant a person the right to deny it and to commune with him at the same table. Just so, no Presbyterian, for example, who declares that there can be no real eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ, could really want to receive the Supper at an altar where just this impossible thing to him is confessed and taught."<sup>26</sup>

Close Communion seeks to prevent a profession of confessional unity in faith where there is, in fact, disunity and disagreement. It would be neither faithful to the Scriptural requirements for admission to Holy Communion (1 Cor. 11:27 ff.; cf. 10:16-17) nor helpful to fallen humanity if the Christian church welcomes to its altars those who deny or question clear Scriptural teachings.

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> H. P. Hamann, *Studies in Holy Communion* (LCA, S. A. District: Church Development Committee, 1977), p. 12.

The reasons for the practice of close Communion are often misunderstood by Christians who have been accustomed to an "open Communion" policy. In a tract entitled "Why Close Communion?" the rationale for the practice of close Communion is explained in this way:

So it is not that a Lutheran congregation wants to bar fellow-saints from the blessings of the Eucharist when they practice Close Communion. It is not that they want to be separatistic, or set themselves up as judges of other men. The practice of Close Communion is prompted by love and is born of the heartfelt conviction, on the basis of Scripture alone, that we must follow Christ's command. This means refusing the Lord's Supper to those whose belief is not known to us. It is not showing *love* to allow a person to do something harmful, even though he may think it is for his own good. It also means if they are members of a Christian body which departs from the full truth of Scripture in some of its doctrines, that we must not minimize the evil of this false teaching by opening our fellowship to any and all Christians who err in the faith.<sup>27</sup>

In keeping with the principle that the celebration and reception of the Lord's Supper is a confession of the unity of faith, while at the same time recognizing that there will be instances when sensitive pastoral care needs to be exercised, the Synod has established an official practice requiring "that pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, except in situations of emergency and in special cases of pastoral care, commune individuals of only those synods which are now in fellowship with us."<sup>28</sup> By following this practice whereby only those individuals who are members of the Synod or of a church body with which the Synod is in altar and pulpit fellowship are ordinarily communed, pastors and congregations preserve the integrity of their witness to the Gospel of Christ as it is revealed in the Scriptures and confessed in the Lutheran confessional writings.

As congregations practice close Communion, much care should be taken and energy expended in articulating the rationale of this practice. An evangelical and winsome effort should be made to present the

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<sup>27</sup> Donald Deffner, "Why Close Communion?" Berkeley, Calif., 1955, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> 1967 Res. 2-19. See also 1969 Res. 3-18 and 1981 Res. 3-01. Cf. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, III, p. 381. Pieper begins his discussion concerning who is to be admitted to the Lord's Supper by stating: "Christian congregations, and their public servants, are only the administrators and not lords of the Sacrament. . . . On the one hand, they are not permitted to introduce 'Open Communion'; on the other hand, they must guard against denying the Sacrament to those Christians for whom Christ has appointed it." To be sure, a heavy responsibility rests on pastors in making decisions as they evaluate those exceptional cases of pastoral care where persons who are members of denominations not in fellowship with the LCMS desire to receive the Lord's Supper. However, part of the pastor's responsibility in such situations involves informing individuals desiring Communion also of *their* responsibility regarding an action which identifies them with the confessional position of the church body to which the host congregation belongs and their willingness to place themselves under the spiritual care of the pastor in that place.

Biblical claims, so that the church's posture does not appear to be a mere institutional accrument. Procedures for admitting guests to the Lord's Table should be such that the appearance of unknown communicants at the altar is minimized as much as possible.<sup>29</sup>

Further, the Office of the Keys is less than faithfully exercised when admission to the sacrament is granted to all who come to the altar regardless of their faith and congregational and/or denominational affiliation. The practice of "open" Communion renders it difficult, if not impossible, for church discipline to be exercised in a way that honors the ministrations being carried out by those to whom the responsibility of spiritual care for a member of God's flock has been entrusted (Heb. 13:17; cf. John 20:22-23; Acts 20:27-28; 1 Cor. 4:1-2).

### **3. Extracongregational Services**

The New Testament (1 Corinthians) assumes that Holy Communion will be celebrated in a context where the faith and life of the communicants are known. The congregational setting, under normal circumstances, is the locus where the following, Scripturally mandated Communion practices can be carried out in an evangelical manner and in accord with the doctrines of church and ministry, and where the mutual responsibility of pastors and members to each other is safeguarded.

- a. God-pleasing participation in Holy Communion requires an understanding of the reality of the sacrament sufficient to examine oneself (1 Cor. 11:27-29). This justifies the Lutheran practice of youth and adult instruction prior to Communion.
- b. Further, the church has a Scriptural responsibility to refuse those with adequate knowledge when they, without repentance, engage in public sin or in party spirit which denies the Gospel (Matt. 5:23-24; 1 Cor. 5:13).
- c. Inasmuch as instruction and supervision are necessary concomitants of Holy Communion, the church must exercise these responsibilities in an orderly and evangelical fashion (1 Cor. 14:40; Titus 1:5).

If under special conditions it is desired that an occasional transparochial service be held, the following steps would preserve the observance of the above Scriptural guidelines and also provide for good order.

- a. Requests for extracongregational Communion services on a Circuit, District, Synodical level should be discussed first of all with the pastoral adviser of the group. Consideration should be given to these questions:

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<sup>29</sup> An announcement in the service folder may request those who wish to commune as guests to speak with the pastor prior to the service. Elders or ushers may be instructed to provide guidance to visitors regarding the Communion practices of their congregation. Members of the congregation should be instructed to encourage relatives and friends to indicate in advance their desire to commune.

1. Is the reason for a Communion service consonant with the Scriptural and Confessional meaning and intent of the sacrament? (cf. Ap XXIV, 68; FC SD VII, 59).
2. Will the sacrament be offered only to members affiliated or in fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in an atmosphere where confessional integrity can be preserved?
  - b. The counsel of the District President should be sought.
  - c. A host congregation should be secured, and the pastoral adviser should work closely with this congregation in making the necessary preparations.
  - d. The celebrant at the service of Holy Communion should ordinarily be the pastor of the host congregation.

### III. Questions and Answers<sup>30</sup>

1. Is it proper for a Lutheran to attend the Lord's Supper at the altars of churches not in doctrinal agreement with the church body of which he/she is a member?

In accordance with the confessional nature of participation in the Lord's Supper (cf. pp. 19—23), and in agreement with Lutheranism's historic position, it is inappropriate to attend the Lord's Supper at non-Lutheran altars. Since participation in Holy Communion, Scripturally and confessionally understood, entails agreement in the Gospel and all its articles, it would not be appropriate to attend the Lord's Supper in a church with which such agreement is not shared.

2. Is it proper to celebrate Communion as a device for furthering or attaining pulpit or altar fellowship?

No. The Confessions rightly teach that Eucharistic fellowship is a thankful celebration of that unity which God has bestowed in the Gospel rather than a device to advance Christian fraternity (Ap XXIV, 68-69; cf. discussion above on pages 10—11 and 19—23).

3. Is it appropriate to have Holy Communion in private homes or other settings and at times other than Sunday's congregational worship?

The early church often worshiped in the homes of its members. Similarly, many contemporary mission congregations originate in the home of a consecrated layperson. More important than the setting is the manner in which the Lord's Supper is celebrated. If a mission congregation finds a home the most suitable setting for worship, and perhaps can only have a pastor come on Sunday night to celebrate the Lord's Supper, then such a service surely would be fitting.

At the same time, when groups *within* a congregation desire to have Holy Communion in special settings, care should be taken to avoid this practice. Dr. C. F. W. Walther's counsel in this regard is well taken:

In order that the Word of God may have full scope in a congregation, the congregation should lastly tolerate no divisions by way of conventicles, that is, of meetings for instruction and prayer aside from the divinely ordained public ministry, 1 Cor. 11:18; Jas. 3:1; 1 Cor. 12:29; Acts 6:4; Rom. 10:15: "How shall they preach except they be sent?"<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The questions which follow have been selected in response to the specific assignment given to the commission to deal with the questions of close Communion and extra-congregational Communion services, and in response to inquiries often received from members of the Synod on other matters of concern.

<sup>31</sup> Thesis 25 in C. F. W. Walther's *Proper Form of a Lutheran Congregation* in *Walther and the Church*, trans. Th. Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 101; also found in *Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther*, Aug. R. Suelflow, Series Editor, *Walther on the Church*, trans. John M. Drickamer (CPH, 1981), p. 140.

Since the Lord's Supper is the church's confession of its unity in faith and practice, the *whole* congregation, in keeping with responsible pastoral care and established practices for admission to the sacrament, is properly invited and welcome at the Lord's Table. To be avoided are tendencies to regard the sacrament as more meaningful when partaken of in a beautiful setting, such as a mountain retreat or with one's own family or close friends.

The manifold benefits of the Lord's Supper are offered to the communicant on the basis of Christ's word and promise. The church's focus should remain on the gracious promise of the Savior as He comes in bread and wine to His people.

4. Is it appropriate to have Holy Communion on synodical campuses?

There are no Scriptural or confessional texts which would preclude such a practice. In the case of a seminary or college community, the church in the form of a local congregation can provide for Holy Communion. The same need for pastoral care, for confessional agreement, and for good order exists which was stipulated for any extracongregational service (cf. pp. 23—24).

5. Is it proper to celebrate Communion at a wedding?

While there are no explicit passages of Holy Scripture which would preclude a nuptial Communion, there are weighty reasons to discourage such celebrations under normal circumstances. First, it is clear that the Lord's Supper is at the center of the public worship of the Christian congregation (cf. discussion on pages 8—9, 23, 28—29). Inasmuch as the marriage ceremony, in the popular mind, would frequently replace the sacrament as the center of the worship, it would not be fitting to multiply settings where this would be a probable attitude. Secondly, it would be logistically difficult to preserve confessional integrity at such a celebration of the Lord's Supper, since family and friends frequently come from a variety of Christian and even non-Christian backgrounds.

6. When is private Communion appropriate?

Private Communion is the administration of Holy Communion to an individual or group of individuals who cannot attend the regular Eucharistic worship of the congregation. The poor health of those involved or a variety of extenuating circumstances may lead the pastor and congregation to provide these special Communion services. Such worship is to be a miniature of the congregational Communion service, with a devotion from God's Word, confession and absolution, consecration, distribution, prayers, and benediction.

7. May the elders take the consecrated elements to the sick and to shut-ins after the Communion service?

The chief consideration regarding such a practice is that the

role of the pastor in the sacramental life of the church should not be displaced. The opportunity to conduct a brief service of confession and absolution, to involve other family members in the private Communion, and to be a shepherd for the flock suggests that whenever possible the pastor will distribute the elements to the communicants (cf. pp. 13–15).

8. What constitutes worthy reception of the Lord's Supper?

Luther's words are as Scriptural and as concise as any which could be written on this point:

Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training; but he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." But he that does not believe these words, or doubts, is unworthy and unprepared; for the words "for you" require all hearts to believe (SC VI, 10; quoted from 1943 *Intersynodical Catechism*, p. 21).

Martin Chemnitz amplifies in a pastoral manner as he writes in answer to the question "How, then, should a man examine or look into himself, so that he might eat and drink worthily in the holy Supper?":

This worthy eating does not consist in a man's purity, holiness, or perfection. For they who are healthy do not need a doctor, but they who are not healthy (Mt 9:12). But, by way of contrast with the unworthy, one can understand very easily how that examination or exploration is to be undertaken, namely:

First, let the mind consider of what nature the act of this Supper is, who is present there, [and] what kind of food is offered and taken there, so that one might prepare himself with due humility and piety for its reception.

Second, let a man about to approach the Lord's Table be endowed with the kind of heart that seriously acknowledges his sins and errors, and shudders at the wrath of God, and does not delight in sin, but is troubled and grieved [by it], and has the earnest purpose to amend [his life].

Third, that the mind sincerely give itself to this concern, that it might not perish in sins under the wrath of God, and therefore with ardent desire thirst for and long for the grace of God, so that by true faith in the obedience, passion, and death of Christ, that is, in the offering of [His] body and shedding of His blood it seek, beg, lay hold on and apply to itself the grace of God, forgiveness of sins, and salvation. He that examines and prepares himself in this way, he truly uses the Sacrament worthily, not unto judgment, but unto salvation. And though all these things are still weak, infirm, and sluggish, yet one should not for that reason abstain from the holy Supper. Rather on the contrary, this very reason will

rouse and impel us the more to partake of it more frequently, especially since we know that the Son of God gradually kindles, increases, and strengthens repentance and faith in us more and more through this means. For this medicine has been prepared and provided for the sick who acknowledge their infirmity and seek counsel and help.<sup>32</sup>

9. Is it appropriate to commune infants?

No. St. Paul says: "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor. 11:28). Since infants cannot examine themselves, it is inappropriate to commune them. The precise age at which a child can examine himself is not determined in the Scriptures. For the sake of order and to avoid confusion, the practice of a church body should be as uniform as possible in this matter.

10. What special considerations should be taken into account regarding the participation of mentally impaired persons in Holy Communion?

Caution should be employed so that the mentally impaired not be required *to communicate* their faith in the usual manner. Family, friends, social workers, and others can greatly assist the pastor in communicating with the mentally impaired. It should be kept in mind that there are those individuals who may lack only the usual avenues of expression and therefore may be unable to communicate fully a confession of their faith. When there is in the mentally impaired trust that the body and blood of the crucified and risen Lord is sacramentally present in the elements of the Lord's Supper, a basic understanding of what the Sacrament offers the communicant, and an ability to examine one's life (1 Cor. 11:17-34), participation in Holy Communion is to be encouraged.

11. How often should the Lord's Supper be offered in a congregation?

No fixed number can be given in response to this question. However, it should be remembered that the Lord's Supper is not to be regarded as an "extra" or an "appendage" to regular Christian worship. While some churches relegate the Lord's Supper to an incidental and occasional role in the church's worship, the Scriptures place "the breaking of bread" at the center of worship (Acts 2:42; 20:7; cf. 1 Cor. 11:20, 33).

Similarly, the Confessions regard the Sacrament of the Altar as a regular and constitutive feature of the worship of Christ's church:

To begin with, we must repeat the prefatory statement that we do not abolish the Mass but religiously keep and defend it. In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals, when the sacrament is offered to those

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<sup>32</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments*, pp. 131–32.

who wish for it after they have been examined and absolved (Ap XXIV, 1).<sup>33</sup>

Thus the spoken Word of the liturgy and sermon and the signed Word of Baptism and the Lord's Supper constitute the two foci of Lutheran worship.

12. How often should one participate in the Lord's Supper?

The following counsel by Dr. Martin Chemnitz is appropriate:

Christ did not want the use of this Sacrament to be bound either to a certain time or to certain days, except that Paul says that the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated when the church gathers to commemorate the death of the Lord, 1 Co 11:18-26. But it is certain that God wants us to use this Sacrament not only once, as we are baptized once, but often and frequently, 1 Co 11:26. . . . It is not for any man to give a specific answer to this, either with a number or with a certain measure, other than as often as a troubled conscience feels and recognizes that it needs those benefits that are offered in the Supper for comfort and strengthening. Consciences are therefore not to be forced but aroused to frequent use of this Supper by earnest admonition and consideration of how necessary [and] likewise how salutary and profitable the use of this Supper is for us. But he that does not attend this most holy table thereby clearly shows that he is a Christian in name rather than in fact, namely that he is one who neglects and despises the command of his Savior, who says: Eat, drink, and do this as often etc.<sup>34</sup>

13. Can a qualified male assist with the distribution of the elements in the service of Holy Communion?

Yes. A pastor and congregation can mutually designate that a qualified male(s) member of the congregation assist the pastor. Great care should be taken in such cases to educate such an assistant(s) in the proper execution of this function.<sup>35</sup> Adequate instruction will provide the theological rationale for the church's liturgical traditions. As is appropriate for those who handle holy things, reverence should mark the manner of anyone associated with the administration of the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>33</sup> The term "Mass" was used in the Reformation period to designate the service of Holy Communion. The Confessions, of course, removed all the connotations of propitiatory sacrifice in their usage of the term.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments*, p. 128.

<sup>35</sup> With respect to the distribution of the sacrament, attention may be called to Rubric 28 in the *Altar Book of Lutheran Worship*, pp. 31–32. For instance, it may be well to point out that "Since the administration of the Lord's body is the decisive act of admission to the Sacrament, the presiding minister, as the responsible minister of the Sacrament, distributes the body of the Lord. The assisting minister(s) may distribute the blood."

14. May women serve as assistants in the distribution of the Lord's Supper?

While some might argue that assisting the presiding minister in the distribution of the elements is not necessarily a distinctive function of the pastoral office, the commission strongly recommends that, to avoid confusion regarding the office of the public ministry and to avoid giving offense to the church, such assistance be limited to men.

15. Is it fitting that noncommunicating children join their parents at the Communion rail?

The propriety of this practice is best decided by the local congregation. While it provides an excellent opportunity for parents to educate their children in the meaning of the Lord's Supper and permits the entire family unit to approach the altar, the practical concerns of decorum and appropriateness for the entire congregation should be considered. The key question should be whether, in a given context, the congregation's focus on the sacrament is sharpened or blurred by the presence of children. If a blessing is pronounced, perhaps it could be tied to the child's baptism, lest the impression be given that the benefits of the Sacrament of the Altar are received apart from the reception of the elements.

16. Is Communion in which the communicant receives only the bread or only the wine an adiaphoron in the church?

No. The Lord invites us to partake of both His body and His blood in the bread and wine. The Confessions speak directly to this question when they assert:

There can be no doubt that the use of both kinds in the Lord's Supper is godly and in accord with the institution of Christ and the words of Paul. For Christ instituted both kinds, and he did not do so only for part of the church, but for all of the church (Ap XXII, 1).

We also hold that it is not to be administered in one form only. We need not resort to the specious learning of the sophists and the Council of Constance that as much is included under one form as under both. Even if it were true that as much is included under one form as under both, yet administration in one form is not the whole order and institution as it was established and commanded by Christ. Especially do we condemn and curse in God's name those who not only omit both forms but even go so far as autocratically to prohibit, condemn, and slander the use of both as heresy and thus set themselves against and over Christ, our Lord and God, etc. (SA III, vi, 2-4).

17. Does it matter whether a congregation uses individual glasses or the common cup to distribute the consecrated wine?

In the absence of a specific Scriptural mandate, either method of distribution, when performed in a reverent manner, is acceptable. Many Christians prefer the use of the common cup because of its symbolism as representative of the oneness of the body of Christ—the church—and because there is reason to believe that Christ used this method of distribution. Any decision in this area is to be marked by Christian liberty and charity.

18. What is the propriety of intinction?

Intinction refers to the dipping of the consecrated bread into the consecrated wine prior to distribution. While the consecrated elements offer Christ's body and blood to every communicant, regardless of the method of distribution, our Confessions and practice preserve the model of our Lord's distribution of the bread and then the wine (Matt. 26:26-29).

19. Is a particular posture to be assumed in the reception of Holy Communion?

No. More important than physical posture is a penitent heart and faith which trusts in the word of Christ.

20. Does the celebration of Holy Communion require a specific liturgical setting?

Lutherans refuse to be bound by the customs of men (Galatians), while at the same time they support good order in the church (1 Corinthians). Clearly, good order in the church is not served when each congregation or organization drafts a different liturgy. Perhaps, especially in this age when novelty is often sought for its own sake, care should be exercised to value highly the worship practices of the church through the ages. The confessors demonstrate great respect for the liturgical traditions of the church when, in the Introduction to Part II of the Augsburg Confession, they write:

However, it can readily be judged that nothing contributes so much to the maintenance of dignity in public worship and the cultivation of reverence and devotion among the people as the proper observance of ceremonies in the churches (AC, Introduction to Part II, 6).

Accordingly, Melancthon said of the purpose of ceremonies that they are observed "that men may learn the Scriptures and that those who have been touched by the Word may receive faith and fear and so may also pray" (Ap XXIV, 3). Thus all liturgical practices having the appearance of frivolity and causing offense are neither useful nor edifying and should therefore be avoided.

21. How appropriate is a seder meal in conjunction with Holy Communion?

The seder—a ceremonial dinner which is held on the first evening of the Passover—can on occasion remind Christians of the Old Testament background and historical setting in which Christ instituted the Lord's Supper (cf. pp. 5—6). At the same time the pastor should stress the distinctive theological meaning of the Lord's Supper, for, while the meal probably occurred in the historical setting of the seder, that of which the disciples partook was the very body and blood of the incarnate Lord. The new covenant had now replaced the old.

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