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# Presence and Sacrifice: Obstacles and Inroads in Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue

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The very nature of the modern Lutheran Church is ecumenical. This has been demonstrated in a number of ways in the past few years but notably in the dialogues which have taken place between theologians of the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Anglican Churches. Both European and North American dialogues have borne the fruit of mutual understanding and appreciation. This, of course, has not always been so. The charged atmosphere and nature of sixteenth century polemics led theologians into extreme positions which would, in later more amenable times, be difficult to defend. The Roman Catholic response to the *Augsburg Confession* in the form of the *Confutatio Pontificia*<sup>1</sup> is a case in point.

Also known as the *Roman Confutation*, the *Confutatio* is a fairly significant document in the history of Lutheran theological development. It is significant because it was the official Catholic response to the *Augsburg Confession* and, therefore, the catalyst for the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*. Yet it was never, as a whole, accepted as representative of Roman Catholic teaching. By and large the work of Johannes Eck, it reflects a school of thought from the University of Paris and the Roman Catholic theologians at the imperial diet in Augsburg on June 25th, 1530. Had there been no difficulties with the *Confutation*, it would have been a simple matter fifteen years later for the fathers of the Council of Trent to defend or uphold the positions taken in it. Yet no reference is made to the *Confutation* either as a previous authority or as an historical document. But this is not surprising as the conciliar fathers were concerned not only with condemning those practises outside the church's jurisdiction which seemed either heretical or

contrary to approved formulae, of which the Lutherans were only one part, but also they were aware of the need for reform within the church itself. In this latter instance, the *Confutation* posed its own difficulties.

Surprisingly a number of serious concerns were exacerbated by the *Confutation*. As a consequence several of the positions adopted by it were in fact denied or corrected by the Council even though no direct reference was made to the document. One such error was the matter of the private mass and the consequent problem of indulgences. Seeing monetary gain in the private mass as a primary motivating factor the reformers had abolished it entirely. Contrarily, the *Confutation* argued: "... worthy of censure... is the discontinuance of the private mass... as though those having fixed and prescribed returns are sought not less than the public masses on account of gain... If they [the reformers] regard one mass advantageous, how much more advantageous would be a number of masses, of which they nevertheless have unjustly disapproved" (Pt. II, Art. 3). This was hardly an earnest effort to address the problem.

The conciliar fathers seemed not to agree with the approach taken in the *Confutation* although their corrective measures were significantly different from those of the reformers. Whereas the German theologians overcame the problem by discontinuing the practise altogether, the Council rehabilitated the private mass by taking prohibitory action against the traffic of indulgences. In Session XXII strict censure of usury was installed and the church was directed to "... absolutely forbid conditions of compensation of whatever kind..."<sup>2</sup> If Johannes Eck had taken the same stand against the practice of indulgences, rather than apparently upholding it, one wonders what direction the reformation might have taken. In some respects it is unfortunate that so much of foundational Lutheran theology, *vis à vis* Philip Melancthon and *The Apology*, was based on a reaction against the sort of Catholic doctrine portrayed in the *Confutation*. Thankfully current dialogues strive to celebrate commonly held beliefs and practices rather than emphasize differences and divergences. It is now possible to see agreement on fundamental issues where in the past there was only mistrust and censure. What follows is a contribution to the ecumenical spirit of these dialogues on the critical issue of the Sacrament of the Table in Catholic and Lutheran understanding.

It cannot be denied that Lutherans understand the documents of *The Book of Concord*,<sup>3</sup> and previously to these, Luther himself, to maintain a doctrine of the real presence in the elements of the Eucharist. In fact the point need hardly be argued, as this was the one issue over which Luther was willing to split the ranks of the reformers. It is noteworthy that if forced to choose between Zwingli's view and the doctrine of transubstantiation, Luther would choose transubstantiation: "Sooner than have mere wine with the fanatics, I would agree with the pope that there is only blood" (LW 37:317).<sup>4</sup> He explains:

... the wine has become Christ's blood, it is no longer ordinary wine but a "blood-wine" to which I may point and say, "This is the blood of Christ."... What is drunk in the Supper does not come from the vine like other ordinary wine. Although it is surely wine also it has not come by ordinary processes of growth to be what it now is... The wine in the supper is no longer a fruit of the vine, for the fruit of the vine is assuredly nothing but ordinary wine (LW 37:317).

Nevertheless Luther explicitly attacks the doctrine of transubstantiation in *The Babylonian Captivity*. This attack, however, is not launched at the expense of doctrine of real presence. He argues: "... it is real bread and real wine, in which Christ's real flesh and real blood are present in no other way and to no less a degree than the others assert them to be under their accidents" (LW 36:29). In order to affirm this proposition, it was necessary to deny any relational dependency—as argued by late medieval Catholic theologians—between the doctrine of real presence and the doctrine of transubstantiation. Luther maintained that neither Scripture nor reason require transubstantiation to sustain real presence: it simply is "... not necessary in the sacrament that the bread and wine be transubstantiated and that Christ be contained under their accidents in order that the real body and real blood may be present" (LW 36:35).

Luther did not see his position as unique, maintaining that many before 1520 held fast to the same view. In reporting the views of the Cardinal of Cambrai (Pierre d'Ailly, 1450–1520) Luther observed: "He argues with great acumen that to hold that real bread and wine, and not merely their accidents, are present on the altar, would be much more probable and require fewer superfluous miracles—if only the church had not

decreed otherwise.” He concluded: “... I saw that the opinions of the Thomists, whether approved by pope or council, remain only opinions...” (LW 36:35). He believed the doctrine of transubstantiation had no other purpose and no support other than the authority of the church. Notwithstanding this severe criticism, Luther can still make a surprising admission: “At the same time, I permit other men to follow the other opinion, which is laid down [referring here to the doctrine of transubstantiation]... , only let them not press us to accept their opinions as articles of faith” (LW 36:35).

Luther is obviously not proscribing the doctrine of transubstantiation at this point, but rather, is attempting to establish that transubstantiation is not the only means whereby real presence can be affirmed. James McCue notes in this regard:

In posing the problem as he [Luther] does he brings to the surface a problem that had been latent in scholasticism at least since the time of Scotus: Is it a legitimate exercise of papal or conciliar authority to define as true and a *sine qua non* of communion a proposition which is admittedly not required by Scripture or reason and which seems to make no difference whatsoever to anything?<sup>5</sup>

Luther’s view of real presence is generally sustained in the documents of *The Book of Concord*. Lutherans are able to commit themselves to a position which recognizes that Christ is present not only spiritually, in memory, and symbolically, but also, they are able to acknowledge their full commitment to the doctrine that the crucified and risen Lord is wholly, truly, and personally present in the sacrament in both his human and divine natures.<sup>6</sup> Thus, among other things, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist signifies that Christ’s sacrifice is effectively present so that it can be said there exists a positive relationship between the historical sacrifice and the real presence of Christ in the species. Even so, Lutherans must point out: “Christ’s eternally valid sacrifice offered once for all, can be referred to and made present in the Eucharist, but this is not the same as to speak about a continually sacrificing [sic].”<sup>7</sup>

The position of both sixteenth century and modern Catholicism is surprisingly similar and uses much the same language as found in Lutheran explication. Before and since the Council of Trent it has been maintained that there is a definite relationship between the sacrifice of Christ and the real presence of Christ. In this regard the Council specifically articulated that

the mass is not merely a “sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving”, nor is it a “mere commemoration” (Ses. XXII, can. 3).<sup>8</sup> In it Christ himself is really contained and, therefore, he himself offers “... up to God the Father his own body and blood under the form of bread and wine, and under the forms of those same things [which he] gave to the Apostles... and their successors” (Ses. XXII, dogmatic decree, ch. 1). Thus the doctrine of the mass as sacrifice is intimately related to the doctrine of real sacramental presence.

For the conciliar Fathers, the Eucharist was both sacrament and sacrifice; it is the re-presentation to the Father of Christ’s unique saving sacrifice on the cross precisely because the body and blood of Christ are substantially present under the elements of bread and wine (Ses. XXII, dogmatic decree, ch. 2), a re-presentation that by no means is a creation or work of humanity but an offering by Christ himself, a re-presentation given to the church through the Apostles at the last supper when “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’ ” (Matthew 26:26b–28).

In *The Babylonian Captivity* Luther rejects what he understands to be a continual or re-sacrifice on the Eucharistic altar. However, the evidence of such an outright rejection in the Lutheran confessional documents of *The Book of Concord*, as one contemporary Lutheran scholar, Kent S. Knutson contends, is a little puzzling.<sup>9</sup> In neither of his two *Catechisms* does Luther use the term sacrifice. This, admittedly, is not surprising as both of these books are concerned more with positive exposition of the Lutheran than they are with Lutheran-Catholic controversy. However, even in *The Smalcald Articles*—here surely would have been the opportunity to expose the papal errors as previously listed in *The Babylonian Captivity*—Luther does not specifically attack the concept of sacrifice. Neither do mature reformation polemics dwell at length on the doctrine; the *Formula of Concord*, primarily directed against “the Sacramentarians”, restricts itself to an ever so brief denial by simply stating, “... we also reject and condemn all other papistic abuses of this sacrament, such as the abomination of the sacrifice of the Mass for the living and the dead” (BC 588:109).

It is, then through the *Augustana* and the *Apology*—Melanchthon's contribution—that a definitive position can be established in the Lutheran Confessions. But even here, in his explanation of the Lord's Supper in article X of the *Confession*, Melanchthon refrains from using the term "sacrifice". As he later admits in the *Apology*, "... we purposely avoided this... because of its ambiguity" (BC 251:14).

The Latin rendition of article XXIV of the *Confession* uses the word *oblatio*; the German version, *Opfer*. Here the reformers explicitly state that "... the abominable error... [is] condemned according to which it... [is] taught that our Lord Christ had by his death made satisfaction only for original sin, and had instituted the Mass as a sacrifice for other sins" (BC 58:21/G). Against these remarks the writers of the *Confutation* argue: "... their insinuation that in the mass Christ is not offered must be altogether rejected, as condemned of old and excluded by the faithful" (*Confutation*, Pt. II, Art. 3). The *Confutation* affirms: "... no pure offering has already been offered to God in every place, except in the sacrifice of the altar of the most pure Eucharist." The authors conclude: "The daily sacrifice of Christ will cease universally at the advent of the abomination—i.e. of Antichrist..." (Pt. II, Art. 3).<sup>10</sup> Their rationale is based on an understanding that "... since the external priesthood has not ceased in the new law, but has been changed to a better, therefore even today the high priest and the entire priesthood offer in the Church an external sacrifice, which is only one, the Eucharist" (Pt. II, Art. 3).

Melanchthon's reply to the *Confutation* in the *Apology* provides an overall survey of his understanding of the mass. He makes a number of points: first and foremost is the assertion that the mass does not confer grace *ex opere operato* (BC 250:9), nor can merit be transferred to others, either living or dead (BC 251:11). Having established this principle he admits only two types of sacrifice: propitiatory sacrifice and eucharistic sacrifice (BC 252:19). In the case of the former it is understood as "... a work of satisfaction for guilt and punishment that reconciles God or placates his wrath or merits the forgiveness of sins for others" (BC 252:19). While the latter form of sacrifice "... does not merit the forgiveness of sins or reconciliation" it does provide the means through which those who have been reconciled can "... give thanks or show their gratitude

for the forgiveness of sins and other blessings received" (BC 252:19). This distinction allows him to maintain that there has been really only one propitiatory sacrifice and that is the death of Christ (BC 252:22).

The only sacrifice in which the faithful can participate is, therefore, the Eucharistic sacrifice, that is, the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (BC 253:25). What humanity is capable of offering God in the way of sacrifice is very limited: only prayer, thanksgiving, and confession, validated and made effective through faith, are recognized as authentic (BC 254:26). Thus it is a sacrifice of praise, not a re-humiliation of the incarnate Son, which is offered to God. This praise must necessarily include the proclamation of the Word (BC 255:33). The new external priesthood cannot be understood in terms of an extension of the life or a re-presentation of the crucifixion of Christ; it is maintained that the only priest who sacrifices for sin is Christ himself, and this was a once-only event accomplished and completed at Calvary (BC 259:56).

As we have seen, the Council of Trent understands the mass in multidimensional terms. It upholds the doctrine that the mass is a visible sacrifice and that the sacrifice on the cross is made present in the mass. The Council also understands, however, that the mass serves as a memorial, for all time, of the historical sacrifice. Through the mass, the salutary power of the historical sacrifice is applied for the remission of sins. Christ is contained and offered in the elements of the Eucharist. Therefore, as with Christ in the historical event, so with Christ in the Eucharist: the remission of sins, or more properly, the remission of the punishment for the commission of sin, is effected. The Eucharist can, therefore, be considered as a propitiatory sacrifice, rightly offered for the dead as well as the living.

The reformers contested both of these points. Firstly, it was denied that the mass can be considered as a propitiatory sacrifice, and secondly, that the mass can be offered for the dead as well as for the living. However, the *Confession* and the *Confutation* both agree that when the faithful participate in the Eucharist, they also participate in Christ's once-only sacrifice and, just as in Baptism, the promise of grace is offered. Thus the passion event is understood by both as Christ's offering of himself on the altar for eating and drinking, so that



humanity can believe in his offer of salvation and in him receive salvation in its fullness.

The Eucharistic dispute centres on the nature of the sacrifice *per se* and the way in which the faithful and the clergy (Catholic understanding will differentiate between the two) participate in the historical event. For much Lutheran polemic, the humiliation of Christ has taken place in its totality; it has been completed; that which had been promised has been offered and effected; it is a *fait accompli*.<sup>11</sup> Humanity's participation and sacrificial offering in the Eucharist can only be, therefore, a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Although both Lutherans and Catholics affirm that it is Christ who effects propitiatory merit through his once-only sacrifice, the Catholic theologian sees the Lutheran position as somewhat limiting. It is agreed that the soteriological event has historically taken place; that which had been promised has been offered. From the Catholic viewpoint, however, there is a sense in which the full significance of the event is not bracketed into a once-only time frame. The sacrifice instituted at the last supper and offered on the cross is an ongoing action in time.

For the Catholic, the concern centres on the manner in which the faithful come before God the Father. As the Church is the body of Christ, the Eucharist, or the sacrifice of the altar, must be a participation by the Church in the historical sacrifice. As the body and blood of Christ are truly present in the elements, participation of the faithful is more than simple remembrance of his suffering. If Christ is indeed present, then he is present physically as well as spiritually. This presence is identified with his life, death, and resurrection. According to this position, through identification of the elements with Christ's offering of himself, the people of God are also offered; in offering his humanity, humanity is offered as sacrifice, both at Calvary and in the Eucharist. Here then is the positive identification, in the Eucharist, of Christ with humanity: as humanity is offered at the altar—and this offering can also be understood in terms of the Lutheran formula of praise and thanksgiving—so too is Christ, because he as the head, and the faithful as the body, constitute together the one, holy, Catholic Church. James McCue observes in this regard: "... the Roman Catholic understanding of the Mass as a sacrifice is rooted in the community or fellowship of Christians with Christ, in the

doctrine of the Church as the body—the spiritual or mystical body—of Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

Catholics are much surprised when they see similar identification in Lutheran writings. In *The Blessed Sacrament* Luther observes:

When Christ instituted the sacrament, he said, “This is my body which is given for you, this is my blood which is poured out for you. As often as you do this, remember me.” It is as if he were saying, “I am the Head, I will be the first to give himself for you. I will make your suffering and misfortune my own and will bear it for you, so that you in your turn may do the same for me and for one another, allowing all things to be common property, in me, and with me (LW 35:54f.).

There is, of course, one major distinction. Luther does not go on to talk about the sacrifice of the altar in terms of a re-presentation of the historical sacrifice. This, however, is the case with the bishops at Trent. They affirm that, at the last supper, Christ left “... His beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice... whereby that blood sacrifice once to be accomplished on the cross might be represented, the memory thereof remain even to the end of the world...” (Ses. XXII, dogmatic decree ch. 1). The sacrifice of the altar is not a new sacrifice, but a participation of the faithful in the old. The reformers, on the other hand, felt that the once-only nature of the historical event could not be sufficiently safeguarded if identification of the sacrificial nature of the mass—here, as we have said, the mass is admitted as sacrifice in terms of praise and thanksgiving—is made with the sacrifice of the cross. The tendency, the reformers argued, would be to attribute to humanity that which God alone has offered. That is, although Christ has directly participated in humanity through the incarnation, humanity cannot participate in the divinity of Christ without his assistance. They believed that the identification of sacrifice and sacrament (a well-founded fear) might lead to the belief (albeit contrary to Roman Catholic teaching) that humankind is able to perform works in order to effect its own salvation independent of conferred grace.

The *Apology* argues this point, first, by making a distinction between sacrifice and sacrament, and second, by offering a distinction between propitiatory sacrifice and the sacrifice of praise, that is, the Eucharistic sacrifice. The sacrament is

understood as an offer of grace by God. Therefore, humanity can in no way participate or take credit for such an offer. Like Baptism, the Eucharist is not a work the faithful offer to God, but a work whereby God, through representation, grants the faithful forgiveness of sins according to the gospel promise. Sacrifice, then, is a ceremony or act which is rendered to honour God. So understood, it is possible to distinguish between that sacrifice which Christ has offered and that which faith can now offer. That which humanity offers is not satisfaction for misdeeds, and as such, cannot be transferred as merit for others, either living or dead. Rather, those who so offer are already reconciled and are offering only praise and thanksgiving for that which they have received. The sacrifice of the new covenant is, therefore, radically different from that of the old law. According to 1 Peter 2:5 and Romans 12:1, the new sacrifice can only be spiritual and is effected solely through the operation of the Holy Spirit in the faithful. Defined as an act by which God is honoured this understanding of spiritual sacrifice is rendered valid specifically through faith in Christ (BC 252–254).

From the Catholic point of view, the full significance of the church's genuine sacrifice of thanksgiving seems not to be wholly established in the *Apology*. The distinction in the *Apology* between sacrifice and sacrament is understood as narrowing the proclamation of the Lord's death to preaching alone, thus denying the positive identification and participation of the church in the Passion event. On the other hand, for Lutherans, if the mass is understood as a work offered by humanity to God and not the work of Christ as mediator, then the Catholic position must be rejected.

The latter view—that the mass obtains forgiveness of sins and release from guilt and punishment for the priest and for those for whom it is offered (*ex opere operato* as understood by the reformers)—is utterly rejected in the *Apology* (BC 250:9; 256:35). However, that which is rejected by the reformers is not upheld in Catholic doctrine. Erwin Iserloh and Vilmos Vajta note in this regard:

The crowd of scholastics against which the *Apology* polemicizes cannot be the Catholic opponents of the 1520's or the theologians of the Diet of Augsburg, i.e., the authors of the *Confutation*, because they did not represent such views. At best, it would have had reference

to the Nominalists of the outgoing Middle Ages, who represented "Scotist" teachings about the sacraments as seen through the spectacles of Gabriel Biel.<sup>13</sup>

Neither party seemed to grasp the distinction between the sacraments as efficacious cause (the conferral of grace) and the necessary disposition of the recipient requisite for an effective consequence (fear and faith for the reformers, preparatory grace and works for the Catholics). As a result, the reformers are understood by the Catholics to put too much emphasis on faith, while the Catholic position is understood by the reformers not to be concerned with faith at all. In as much as neither Catholics nor Lutherans seem to deny that the sacrament attains its goal—that in the Sacrament of the Altar the body and blood of Christ are truly offered and sins are forgiven—it seems necessary to admit that for both Roman Catholics and Lutherans the sacrament is solely and indisputably understood as the work of God. Unbelief is recognized as a barrier by both parties. The primacy of faith is not disputed and it is worth noting that the Council of Trent presupposes that the sacraments do not function mechanically. In all fairness, *ex opere operato* cannot be understood in the terms charged by the reformers. Indeed, the sacraments seem to function in conformity with the believing devotion of the recipient. It appears that it is this presupposition that led the Council to prohibit the series of masses to which some during the Middle Ages attributed (though not officially) a guaranteed efficacy.<sup>14</sup> Erwin Iserloh and Vilmos Vajta observe:

Insofar as the doctrine of *opus operatum* attempts to represent the sacraments as actions of Christ and in the *opus operantis* requires faith as a requisite to a fruitful effect in the recipient, it does not stand in contradiction to the intention of the Reformation; rather, it actually represents its concerns. For indeed, Luther and Melanchthon did not want to deny the objective character of the means of grace.<sup>15</sup>

The polemic against *ex opere operato* in the *Apology*, Erwin Iserloh and Vilmos Vajta argue, was a stand against something which the Catholic theologians did not advocate, "... but which the Reformers, nevertheless, perceived on the basis of the practice of the private masses and of popular theology."<sup>16</sup> Although we cannot here discuss the role of faith in Catholic theology, it must be pointed out, at least as far as the canon of the mass

is concerned, that the effective power of grace is dependent on the faith of the recipient, which, in turn, is itself a divine gift. Indeed, the prayer for the living in the canon of the mass first assumes that those who receive the benefits are those "... whose faith is known to Thee and likewise their devotion..."<sup>17</sup> This is also true of the departed when the assumption is made that it is those of faith for whom prayers are offered: "Be mindful [of those] who have gone before us with the sign of faith..."<sup>18</sup> The canon presumes, therefore, that it is not by the work of humanity that salvation is effected, but through the unmerited gift of grace: "... we implore thee to admit us [into the company of saints] not weighing our merits, but freely granting us pardon. Through Jesus Christ our Lord..."<sup>19</sup> So, for both the living and the dead—the latter of course the object of severe Protestant criticism—it is not a matter of justification and forgiveness of sins but rather, "... it is a matter of the strengthening and realization of the communion with Christ and of cleansing and release from the punishment for sins."<sup>20</sup>

Although there are a number of unsolvable discrepancies, it must also be recognized that the sixteenth century nature of debate and discussion hardly facilitated mutual recognition of apparent agreement. Rather, it emphasized divergent expressions of faith. James McCue observes: "... we must reckon with the *possibility* that adversaries would not listen to each other's refinements, clarifications, and extenuations with quite the openness which the seriousness of the subject would seem to require."<sup>21</sup>

There is real danger in making the claim that the Reformation was only a matter of mutual misunderstanding. All the same, it must be admitted that there is a surprising amount of accord in fundamental theological positions. However, as would be expected, these agreements were often not recognized, or at least not conceded.

For instance, both Catholics and Lutherans affirm that in the Eucharist, the Christ who is present is the same Christ who lived, died, and rose again for our justification. Karl Rahner's observation is appropriate here, "... it seems to me that with regard to the real presence in the sacrament itself, otherwise than with regard to transubstantiation, there is no essential difference between the Catholic and the Lutheran faith."<sup>22</sup> Both Catholics and Lutherans also understand the sacrifice on the

cross as a once-only event for the sins of the world.<sup>23</sup> They both confess that the celebration of the Eucharist is the church's sacrifice of praise and self-offering; each church can make the following statement its own:

By him, with him and in him who is our great High Priest and Intercessor we offer to the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, our praise, thanksgiving, and intercession. With contrite hearts we offer ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice, a sacrifice which must be expressed in the whole of our daily lives.<sup>24</sup>

The controversy seems to revolve around whether or not the faithful "offer Christ" in the sacrifice of the mass. This particular articulation of the sacrifice is resisted (and often denied) by Lutherans as it appears to threaten the once-only sacrificial nature of Calvary and facilitate the understanding of the Eucharist as a human supplement to God's saving work.

However, Catholics as well as Lutherans affirm the unrepeatable nature of the passion event (for the purpose of continued discussion, Lutherans must accept this Catholic affirmation at face value, just as Catholics must accept Lutheran affirmation of real presence). As well, both can agree that not only are past events recalled, but they are also made effectively present in the Eucharist.<sup>25</sup> The Catholic emphasis in this regard is:

The members of the body of Christ are united through Christ with God and with one another in such a way that they become participants in his worship, his self-offering, his sacrifice to the Father. Through this union between Christ and Christian, the eucharistic assembly "offers Christ" by consenting in the power of the Holy Spirit to be offered by him to the Father.<sup>26</sup>

Both affirm, therefore, that apart from Christ we have no gifts of our own, no sacrifice, which we can offer to God.

Both Catholics and Lutherans confess a manifold presence of Christ, the Word of God and Lord of the world: he is present in prayer, in Baptism, in the reading of Scripture, and the proclamation of the Word. Indeed, he is present in the Lord's Supper. Thus both agree to a real and substantial presence of Christ in the supper; both reject a spatial manner of presence as well as an understanding of the sacrament as a commemorative or figurative articulation only; and both see the sacrament of the Eucharist as an effective sign which communicates what it promises: "... the action of the Church becomes the effective

means whereby God in Christ acts and Christ is present with his people.”<sup>27</sup>

Both Catholics and Lutherans can affirm that the Eucharist is Christ’s gift to humanity and that we participate in offering worship to the Father. Both agree that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is to be worshipped, praised and adored and that as long as his presence remains, such worship, adoration, and reverence are appropriate.

Both agree that the presence of Christ is not dependent on the faith of the participants nor is it evoked through any human consideration or merit. It is solely through the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word, that such effectiveness is possible. Further, it is generally agreed, although not universally affirmed by all Lutherans, that the presence of Christ is not restricted to the moment of reception but continues throughout the Eucharistic action.

However, there is no little debate in Lutheran circles as to how long the Eucharistic action actually prevails. Answers to this question will necessarily determine the bounds by which divine presence is understood. Views span from denial of presence after reception of the species, to reservation or reverent disposal of the elements remaining after distribution. In some instances Lutherans do understand that presence is sustained and reservation is possible for distribution to the sick. In fact, the *Lutheran Occasional Services* book provides for distribution of communion to those in special circumstances.<sup>28</sup> Thus the Eucharistic action of the worshiping community is extended beyond the service itself to those faithful who cannot, for whatever reasons, attend the Eucharist at a specified time and place. This seems to suggest that there is an understanding of continued presence beyond the service itself. Though extremely cautious and guarded in his approach, Philip H. Pfatteicher, in the *Commentary on the Occasional Services*, explains:

Reservation is simply the practice of keeping, or reserving, the eucharistic elements from one celebration to the next so that they are available for those such as the sick and dying between celebrations of the Holy Communion. The celebration of the Holy Communion was always intended as a congregational act.<sup>29</sup>

Professor Pfatteicher points out that the objection of the reformers had more to do with the abuses of the practice of reservation than it did with reservation itself.<sup>30</sup> He continues:

The statement of "one Eucharist," formulated by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches meeting at Accra in 1974, recommends that differences over the reservation and disposal of the consecrated elements be treated in the light of the fact that the elements remain the sacramental reality which they have become for the sake of being consumed.<sup>31</sup>

It needs to be pointed out that communing the sick and the dying is the primary purpose of reservation of the elements in the Catholic Church. This is made clear in an explanatory instruction to a Vatican II decree. Here it is emphasized that adoration of the presence of Christ in the elements is a secondary end.<sup>32</sup> As such, adoration must in some way be derived from the liturgy, "since the eucharistic sacrifice is the source and summit of the whole Christian life..."<sup>33</sup>

Lutherans reject the Council of Trent's understanding of the mass as a propitiatory sacrifice for either the living or the dead. Here, although the propitiatory nature of the sacrifice of the cross—that once-only event at Calvary—can be granted, there remains a problem in terms of the identification of that event with the present-day Eucharist.<sup>34</sup>

The matter of transubstantiation is still a problem of deep concern for Lutherans. Any attempt at definitive explanation of the true presence is resisted. Although early confessional documents do not insist on the abolition of the doctrine of transubstantiation, there is the insistence that other alternative explanations be accepted. However, it is also recognized that "when Lutheran theologians read contemporary Catholic expositions, it becomes clear to them that the dogma of transubstantiation intends to affirm the fact of Christ's presence and the change which takes place and is not an attempt to explain how Christ becomes present."<sup>35</sup> As with early Lutheran criticism of transubstantiation, contemporary Lutheran theologians can at least accept transubstantiation as a legitimate alternate articulation of the mystery "... even though they continue to believe that the conceptuality associated with 'transubstantiation' is misleading and therefore prefer to avoid the term."<sup>36</sup>

The series of "dialogues" between Catholic and Lutheran theologians continues to be a lively and dynamic exercise. Recent Canadian dialogues have begun the process of reviewing questions and concerns in terms of their unique cultural heritage. These dialogues are witness to the intensity and seriousness with which current discussions are undertaken. There



is no illusion that inter-communion is a probability in the immediate future; however, inter-communion is now at least a possibility which the heirs of this generation can bequeath to the sons and daughters of the next. For those who grieve the absence of Christian unity and abhor the tragedies inflicted by one Christian on another in the name of Christ the eternal Redeemer and Saviour, there is both hope and comfort in the words "... the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23).

## Notes

- 1 M. Reu, trans., "*Confutatio Pontificia*, August 3, 1530," in *The Augsburg Confession A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930) 348-383.
- 2 "Decree Concerning the Things to be Observed and Avoided in the Celebration of the Mass," Chapter IX, 22nd Session of the Council of Trent, September 17, 1562 in *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. Rev. H.J. Schroeder, O.P. (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Publishers, 1978) 151.
- 3 Theodore G. Tappert (trans. and ed.), *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). Henceforth references to this publication will appear in the text as "BC pp:ss" where "pp" is the page number and "ss" is the specification number.
- 4 *Luther's Works*, American Edition. Henceforth references to this publication will appear in the text as "LW vv:pp" where "vv" is the volume number and "pp" is the page number.
- 5 Paul C. Empie and Austin T. Murphy (eds.), *The Eucharist as Sacrifice, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue*, Vol. III (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967) 113.
- 6 *Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue III*, "Joint Statement," 15.
- 7 Bertril E. Gartner, "The Eucharist as Sacrifice in the New Testament," *Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue III*, 34.
- 8 Rev. H.J. Schroeder, O.P. (trans.), *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Original Text with English Translation (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Publishers, 1959). All references to this publication will appear in the text as "Ses. n, can. n" where "Ses. n" indicates session number and "can. n" indicates canon number.
- 9 "Contemporary Lutheran Theology and the Eucharistic Sacrifice," in *Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue III*, 168.
- 10 Cf. Tappert, p. 258, n. 5.
- 11 Editor's Note: Here is a point where Lutheran polemic has not necessarily understood the fullness of Luther's own thought. For Luther

the cross is not bracketed into a once-only time frame, but is made real in the present by the action of the Holy Spirit in, with, and under Word and Sacrament. The altar-piece of the City Church in Wittenberg by Cranach illustrates the point: Between the preacher in the pulpit and the listening congregation is Christ dying on the cross, present to the hearers. In, with, and under Word and Sacrament the Spirit makes Christ's cross the Christian's cross and we actually participate in Jesus' death and resurrection. Cf. Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator: Luther's Concept of the Holy Spirit*, Trans. John M. Jenson (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953); and Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, Trans. Herbert J.A. Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976).

- 12 *Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue III*, 53.
- 13 George Wolfgang Forell and James F. McCue (eds.), *Confessing One Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982) 218.
- 14 The Council of Trent, Ses. XXII, "Decree Concerning the Things to be Observed and Avoided in the Celebration of the Mass" in *Confessing One Faith*, 219.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 Rev. John P. O'Connel and Rex Martin (eds.), *The Missal* (Chicago: Catholic Press Inc., 1960 [*Imprimatur*, 1953]) 25. See also *Living With Christ—Sunday Edition*, 52/9, November 8 to December 20, 1987 [or any current Sunday Missalette]. Eucharistic Prayer I, p. 19: "You know how firmly we believe in you and dedicate ourselves to you."
- 18 *The Missal*, 31. Cf. *Living With Christ*, 23: "Remember, Lord, those who have died and have gone before us marked with the sign of faith..."
- 19 *The Missal*, 33. Cf. *Living With Christ*, 23: "Though we are sinners, we trust in your mercy and love. Do not consider what we truly deserve but grant us your forgiveness. Through Christ our Lord you give us all these gifts..."
- 20 Erwin Iserloh and Vilmos Vajta, "The Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper," in *Confessing One Faith*, 220.
- 21 In *Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue III*, 48.
- 22 Karl Rahner, "The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II," Vol. VI of *Theological Investigations* (Baltimore: Helican Press, 1969) 294.
- 23 A Lutheran-Catholic Statement in *Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue III*, 188f.
- 24 The Fourth World Council of Faith as quoted in *Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue III*, 188f.
- 25 A Lutheran-Catholic Statement in *Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue III*, 189.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Occasional Services—A Companion to Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983) 76.

- 29 Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Commentary on the Occasional Services* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 122.
- 30 Ibid. 123.
- 31 Ibid. Prof. Pfatteicher's source here is *One Baptism, One Eucharist, and a Mutually Recognized Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975).
- 32 Vat. II, *Sacrosanctum concilium* and Instr. S.C.D.W., *Eucharistiae Sacramentum*, item 5, June 21, 1973 in *Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue III*, 195.
- 33 Ibid. item 79.
- 34 Ibid. 196. The Lutheran participants here refer specifically to Karl Rahner, "The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," in *Theological Investigations* 4:287-311.
- 35 Ibid. 196.
- 36 Ibid. 19.