

11-1-1971

## Luther and the Principle: Outside of the Use There Is No Sacrament

Edward F. Peters

*Lutheran Academy and College, Selma*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Peters, Edward F. (1971) "Luther and the Principle: Outside of the Use There Is No Sacrament," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 42, Article 63.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol42/iss1/63>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

---

Luther and the Principle: Outside of the Use  
There Is No Sacrament

EDWARD F. PETERS

The Meaning of Advent: Implications for Preaching

FRANK C. SENN

Adolf Stoecker: A Christian Socialist Advocate  
of the "Free Folk Church"

RONALD L. MASSANARI

The Reformation as a Youth Movement

JOHN W. CONSTABLE

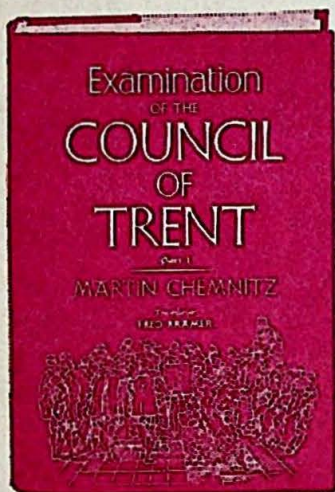
Homiletics

Book Review

Vol. XLII

November

Number 10



# FOR THE MODERN THEOLOGICAL WORLD...

...THE UNABRIDGED EXAMEN CONCILII TRIDENTINI,  
PART I, IS NOW AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH.

Now the modern scholar has an authoritative English translation of the great classic that has influenced hundreds of years of dialog between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Chemnitz' polemic against the canons and decrees of Trent is the standard Lutheran answer to the claims of Rome as set forth at Trent. Part I of this monumental 4-volume work sets forth the Lutheran interpretation of Sacred Scripture, Free Will, Original Sin, Justification, and Good Works.

The translator is Dr. Fred Kramer, professor of systematics at Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Ill. He used as the basis of his translation the 1578 Frankfurt edition, the last supervised by Chemnitz, with which he compared the original 1566 edition. To make the translation more usable, Dr. Kramer corrected erroneous references where possible, and quoted from the RSV, supplying both chapter and verse. An index of citations, Biblical texts, and subject matter has been compiled.

**\$12.00, Order No. 15U2113**

**CONCORDIA**  
PUBLISHING HOUSE  
3558 SOUTH JEFFERSON AVENUE  
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI 63118

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

---

Volume XLII

November 1971

Number 10

---

*A Theological Journal of*  
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

*Edited by*  
THE FACULTY OF CONCORDIA SEMINARY  
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY is published monthly, except July-August bimonthly, by Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63118, to which all business correspondence is to be addressed. \$3.50 per annum, anywhere in the world, payable in advance. Second-class postage paid at St. Louis, Mo. © 1971 Concordia Publishing House. Printed in U. S. A.

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE  
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

# Contents

Luther and the Principle: Outside of the Use There Is No Sacrament EDWARD F. PETERS	643
The Meaning of Advent: Implications for Preaching FRANK C. SENN	653
Adolf Stöcker: A Christian Socialist Advocate of the "Free Folk Church" RONALD L. MASSANARI	660
The Reformation as a Youth Movement JOHN W. CONSTABLE	671
Homiletics	682
Book Review	693

---

## EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

ROBERT W. BERTRAM, JOHN S. DAMM, ALFRED O. FUERBRINGER, GEORGE W. HOYER  
(Homiletics Editor), EDGAR KRENTZ, HERBERT T. MAYER (Managing Editor)  
ARTHUR C. PIEPKORN (Book Review Editor), GILBERT A. THIBLE, JOHN H. TIETJEN  
WALTER WEGNER, DAVID C. YAGOW (Assistant Managing Editor)

---

*Address all communications to the Editorial Committee in care of  
Herbert T. Mayer, 801 De Mun Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63105*

<p>PASTE YOUR OLD ADDRESS LABEL IN THIS BOX</p>	<p>Signed _____</p>
	<p>New address _____</p>
	<p>(city) _____ (state) _____ (ZIP) _____</p>

**MOVING?** The United States Post Office Department requests that complete and accurate change of address information should be sent promptly and directly to Subscription Department, Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63118.

# Luther and the Principle: Outside of the Use There Is No Sacrament

EDWARD F. PETERS

*The author is assistant professor at Alabama Lutheran Academy and College, Selma, Ala.*

ON THE BASIS OF A THOROUGH SEARCH OF THE WEIMAR EDITION AND OTHER PERTINENT materials the author argues that Luther taught that a valid celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar requires the acts of consecration, distribution, and reception, but that the presence of Christ's body and blood is not limited to the moment of reception.

## I. THE AGE OF DIALOG

FOUR hundred and fifty years after the Reformation the church is in the midst of a vibrant ecumenical movement. During recent years Christians throughout the world have been seriously engaged in dialog with one another to discuss differences both in doctrine and in practice. Among the most fruitful of these dialogs have been those between Lutherans and Roman Catholics; and one of the areas most intensely discussed is that of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. Among the questions that theologians are currently asking is, "What is the *usus* of the sacrament?" Roman Catholics have traditionally had one answer,<sup>1</sup> and Lutherans have had not one but several answers to this

<sup>1</sup> The Council of Trent (Session 13, Canon 4) says: "If anyone says that after the consecration is completed, the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are not in the admirable Sacrament of the Eucharist, but are there only *in usu*, while being taken and not before or after, and that in the hosts of consecrated particles which are reserved or which remain after communion, the true Body of the Lord does not remain, let him be anathema." H. J. Schroeder, ed., *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis: Herder, 1941), p. 79.

question. It is important especially in the present era of ecumenical discussions to know where Lutherans stand on such questions and why they take their stand where they do. No one can fruitfully participate in such discussions unless he knows where his particular denomination stands and why.

The Sacrament of the Altar is one of the most important of all Christian doctrines, as well as one of those matters on which there is much disagreement. A clear understanding of what the sacrament is and what it is not is undoubtedly of very great importance. Many Christians today, including many Lutherans, are once again taking more seriously than ever before Christ's ardent desire that His church manifest its oneness. It is the task of every Christian to do whatever he can to bring our Lord's plea to fulfillment.

## II. "OUTSIDE OF THE USE"

Ever since the 16th century Lutheran theologians, in speaking of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, have taken for granted that "there is no sacrament outside of the use." Often theologians

have put this principle into the form of an axiom: "Nothing has the character of a sacrament outside of the use instituted by Christ" (*Nihil habet rationem sacramenti extra usum a Christo institutum* — or *extra actionem divinitus institutam*.) No Lutheran author from the 16th or 17th centuries denies the validity of this axiom. The Book of Concord, the official confession of the Lutheran communion, explicitly affirms it.<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, too, on several occasions states his approval of this principle.

It is apparent, however, when one reads the major Lutheran theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries, that there is considerable difference of opinion as to what is "within" and "outside of the use" of the sacrament. Some Lutherans from the past have a very broad concept as to what the "use" of the sacrament is; others, following the lead of Philip Melancthon, who first popularized the formula, understand the "use" of the sacrament in a narrower sense. Generally speaking, Melancthon considers the "use" of the sacrament the distribution and reception and nothing more.<sup>3</sup> Martin

<sup>2</sup> The Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration, Article VII, 86) says: "'Use' or 'action' does not primarily mean faith, or the oral eating alone, but the entire external and visible action of the Supper as ordained by Christ: the consecration or words of institution, the distribution and reception, or the oral eating of the blessed bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ." *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, and Arthur C. Piepkorn (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), pp. 584—85.

<sup>3</sup> For example, *Corpus Reformatorum. Philippi Melancthonis opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider (Halle: C. S.

Luther, who, incidentally, is not the author of the axiom,<sup>4</sup> interprets it differently, and much more broadly, from the way that Melancthon and the majority of later Lutheran writers do.

In order better to understand the question, one ought first to look at the word "use." As it is employed in the axiom, "Nothing has the character of a sacrament outside of the use," the term "use" is somewhat ambiguous. A synonym that one finds repeatedly in Lutheran theology is the word "action": nothing outside of the action has the character of a sacrament. The question is: What is this action? Which actions are to be included in the term "sacrament," and which are not part of the essence of the sacrament? Such questions are not just exercises in academics, for the sacrament is an essential part of the life of the church. It is an entity which confronts every Christian and every Christian congregation with constant frequency. It is, therefore, important for every Christian to know what the sacrament is and what it is not, what the "use" of the sacrament is and what is "outside of the use." When theologians say that "nothing has the character of a sacrament outside of the use instituted by Christ," they raise questions that are important to the life of every parish. And, of course, since Martin Luther is the most important of the Lutheran reformers, it is essential to the understanding of the axiom to know how he interpreted it.

Schwetschke et Filius, 1843 ff.), VI, 48; VII, 877; VIII, 660—61; IX, 99; XXIII, 61—62, 418.

<sup>4</sup> The Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration, VII, 87, *The Book of Concord*, p. 585) merely affirms that Luther provided an explanation of this "rule and norm."

### III. LUTHER'S CONCEPTION OF THE SACRAMENTAL PRESENCE OF CHRIST'S BODY AND BLOOD

In order to appreciate Luther's position concerning the *usus* of the sacrament, one first has to recall his strong emphasis on the objective presence of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament. Few Lutheran theologians have ever had a more realistic understanding of the sacramental presence than Martin Luther. The Wittenberg reformer affirms that in the Sacrament of the Altar the bread and the wine *are* the body and blood of Christ and nothing less.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, he strongly emphasizes that this bread and this wine *are* the body and blood of Christ through the power of the words of institution which Christ Himself spoke at the first celebration of the eucharist.<sup>6</sup> On several occasions he speaks of the bread and wine being "changed" into the body and blood of Christ.<sup>7</sup> In fact, in many ways, Luther's consistent understanding of the presence of Christ's body and blood is not much different from what it was before the Reformation. It is true that Luther rejects transubstantiation,<sup>8</sup> but his objection to this doctrine is on the basis of its having been defined as dogma, when it should have been relegated to the category of philosophical opinion. In one instance Luther expressly says that he is really not

<sup>5</sup> For example, Smalcald Articles, Part Three, 6, 1.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 47 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1912), 219. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *WA*.

<sup>7</sup> For example, *ibid.*, 30/1, 122; 2, 749—50; 7, 437—38; 38, 201, 242; 39/, 168.

<sup>8</sup> Transubstantiation was proclaimed a dogma at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.

much concerned as to whether one believes in transubstantiation or not.<sup>9</sup> On the opposite end of the spectrum, Luther is completely opposed to the Zwinglian view of the sacrament and specifically says that he is closer to Rome than to the Zwinglians on this question: "Sooner than have mere wine with the fanatics I would agree with the pope that there is only blood."<sup>10</sup>

With great consistency, Luther again and again insists that Christ's words, "This is My body," and, "This is the new testament in My blood," are to be understood in their proper literal sense. To a great degree because of this emphasis, Luther looks upon the sacrament chiefly as an objective entity, as "that which is," rather than as an action or series of actions. His great principle is, *Hoc EST corpus meum*.

Nevertheless, even though Luther is primarily interested in the sacramental presence of Christ's body and blood, one should not assume that he is completely uninterested in the question, "What actions make up the sacrament?" For in addition to insisting that bread and wine are the body and blood, Luther also demands that the sacrament be celebrated as Christ instituted it. He says that the body of Christ is to be "taken, given, received, and eaten."<sup>11</sup> Unless one celebrates the sacrament according to Christ's institution, Luther seriously doubts that there is a valid sacrament. The consecration is not an act performed in

<sup>9</sup> De transubstantiatione reiicimus inutilem et sophisticam disputationem, nihil morati, si quis eam alibi credat vel non. *WA*, *Briefwechsel* 10, 331.

<sup>10</sup> Und ehe ich mit den schwermern wolt eytel wein haben, so wolt ich ehe mit dem Bapst eitel blut halten. *Ibid.*, 26, 462.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 38, 299.



isolation, but it is for reception by the communicants that the sacrament exists. Luther defends this principle most clearly when he writes concerning solitary masses (*missae privatae*).

#### IV. LUTHER AND SOLITARY MASSES

On several occasions Luther expresses the opinion that the solitary masses as they were celebrated in the medieval church were not a sacrament, since there was no congregation present and no distribution. At times he merely expresses doubt if this is a sacrament.<sup>12</sup>

As early as his *Misuse of the Mass* of 1521, Luther writes, "If it is to conform to the institution and example of Christ, no mass should be held unless the sacrament is broken and distributed among many by the priest."<sup>13</sup>

Luther's principal work concerning the question is his sharp criticism of solitary masses, *Concerning the Private Mass and Papal Ordination*, 1533. Here he says that the bread is not the body of Christ unless it is eaten according to Christ's institution.

The institution comprises three aspects:

1. The material cause, that there be bread and wine, 2. the formal cause, that words are pronounced, and [the elements] be offered or eaten in the church with thanksgiving and the preaching of God's benefits, 3. the final cause, that we arouse our faith against our consciousness of sin. . . .

The followers of the pope, who hold private masses, have nothing of the institution except the whole material cause; however, they do have part of the formal cause,

<sup>12</sup> For example, *ibid.*, 39/1, 142—44.

<sup>13</sup> Si ergo missa institutum et exemplum Christi referre debet, necesse est ut nulla unquam fiat, nisi Eucharistia frangatur et multis distribuatur per sacerdotem. *Ibid.*, 8, 438.

that is, the recitation of the words, but who knows if they always recite them, since they whisper them to themselves silently and do not say them openly. It follows, therefore, that they do not have the true sacrament, because the sacrament was not instituted so that a solitary mass-priest might offer a new sacrifice for himself and for others. . . .<sup>14</sup>

In another passage from the same work Luther distinguishes between what is a misuse and what is not a sacrament:

If there were nothing more in the private mass than a misuse or a sin, then I would hold that the body and blood of Christ were there anyway. For the abuse does not annul the substance, but the substance tolerates the abuse. So if someone who is unworthy receives the sacrament, even though he is sinning and misusing the sacrament in doing so, he still receives the true body and blood of Christ.

But in the private mass there is not only a misuse or sin, which the priest handles and receives unworthily, but even if the priest were holy and worthy, still the very substance of Christ's institution is left out. They take away the essential ordinance and institution of Christ, and they make their own ordinance. Christ's ordinance and meaning is that one should

<sup>14</sup> Institutio complectitur tria: Causam materialem, ut sit panis et vinum; Causam formalem, ut pronuncientur verba, porrigatur vel sumatur in ecclesia cum gratiarum actione et praedicatione beneficii dei; Causam finalem, ut erigamus fidem nostram contra conscientiam peccati. . . .

Papistae, qui privatas missas habent, nihil habent de institutione praeter causam materialem totam, formalem autem parcialem, nempe recitationem verborum, quae tamen quis scit an semper recitent, cum ea taciti secum mussitent, non pronuncient aperte. Sequitur igitur non habere eos verum Sacramentum, Quia Sacramentum non est institutum privato Sacrificio in hunc usum, ut novum sacrificium offerat pro se et pro aliis. . . . *Ibid.*, 38, 191—92.

distribute the sacrament and preach about it, in order to strengthen faith. But they take this ordinance away and change everything. They celebrate the sacrament for themselves alone and distribute it to no one.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, Luther also maintains that when the sacrament is celebrated in the Roman Church and is distributed, it is a true, if truncated, sacrament.<sup>16</sup>

In a few instances Luther has reservations about his assertion that a solitary mass is no sacrament,<sup>17</sup> but his basic opinion is that it is not. A solitary mass does not follow the instructions which Christ gave, that is, there is no distribution.

#### V. LUTHER AND THE AXIOM

Luther's opinion concerning solitary masses is one indication of what he considers essential to the action or *usus* of the sacrament.<sup>18</sup> Even more definitive, how-

<sup>15</sup> Wenn nicht mehr jnn Winckel messe were denn misbrauch odder sunde, so wüste ichs wol zur halten, das dennoch der leib und blut Christi da were, Quia abusus non tollit substantium, Sed substantia fert abusum, Misbrauch, nimpt das wesen nicht, sondern das wesen leidet den misbrauch, Als wer unwirdig das Sacrament empfeheth ob er wol da mit sundigt und misbraucht des Sacraments, noch empfeheth er den waren leib und blut Christi.

Aber jnn der winckel messe ist nicht allein der misbrauch odder sunde, das der Priester unwirdig handelt und empfeheth, Sondern wenn schon der Priester heilig und wirdig were, tamen ipsa substantia institutionis Christi sublata est, die wesentliche ordnung und einsetzung Christi nemen sie weg, und machen eine eigen ordnung. Nemlich, Christus ordnung und meinung ist die, das man das Sacrament ordnung heben die auff und kerens alles umb. Sie behalten das Sacrament allein für sich einzelen, und reichens niemand. Ibid., 38, 235.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 38, 244.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 39/1, 142—44.

<sup>18</sup> In order to have a complete picture of

ever, is his discussion of the axiom itself: "Nothing has the character of a sacrament outside of the use instituted by Christ." Such references are comparatively few, but when one considers Luther's strong emphasis on the sacrament as an objective entity, rather than as an action, it is not surprising to find that he refers to this axiom only on rare occasions, in contrast to Philip Melancthon, who sees the sacrament primarily as an action and who repeatedly insists that there is no sacrament outside of the "use" or "action."<sup>19</sup>

There are two instances in which Luther merely alludes to this principle. In one of the Table Talks Luther allegedly says that one can delay the reception of the sacrament for at least several hours after the celebration or that one can carry the sacrament to the sick or to another altar, and it is still the body of Christ "as long as it is in the action," that is, as long as it is eventually received.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, he chides those who believe that it is a sacrament "only while it is in use," that is, those who deny that what is carried to the sick is actually the body and blood of Christ.<sup>21</sup> But he does not spell out what he means in detail.

The two instances in which Luther refers to the principle in more detail are the cases of Simon Wolferinus and Adam Besserer.

what Luther considers the "use" or "action" of the sacrament, one also has to examine what he says about such things as the elevation of the sacrament, reservation, and adoration.

<sup>19</sup> See Edward F. Peters, "The Origin and Meaning of the Axiom: 'Nothing Has the Character of a Sacrament Outside of the Use,' in Sixteenth-Century and Seventeenth-Century Lutheran Theology," unpublished doctoral thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1968.

<sup>20</sup> *WA, Tischreden* 5, 55.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

### A. *The Case of Simon Wolferinus*

Simon Wolferinus (Wolframm, Wolfrum) was pastor of St. Andrew's Church, Eisleben, from 1540 to 1546. Soon after he arrived in Luther's native city, a pronounced animosity arose between Wolferinus and Frederick Rauber, the pastor of St. Peter's Church. The point of the controversy was the question as to when the sacramental action is completed. Rauber was of the opinion that the action lasted until all of the elements had been consumed, and Wolferinus believed that the sacramental union was in effect only when the elements were being distributed and received. In an attempt to settle the question, Valentine Weigel, the superintendent of the churches in Eisleben, decreed that the contents of the chalice hereafter be consumed by one of the communicants and the chalice rinsed out, so that there would be no problem concerning what remained of the consecrated wine.

This decision did not settle the controversy, however. Wolferinus was decidedly opposed to Weigel's decree and continued to attack Rauber's position that what is left over of the consecrated elements is a sacrament. In June of 1543 Wolferinus wrote a set of theses on the subject, which he wanted to debate. He sent the theses to Rauber, and Rauber immediately took them to Wittenberg to get the advice of the theologians there.<sup>22</sup> Thereupon Luther wrote to Wolferinus on July 4, 1543. He castigated him sharply for his contentious attitude and for his refusal to be reconciled to Rauber. Luther then took up the problem of the sacrament specifically:

<sup>22</sup> *WA, Briefwechsel* 10, 336—39.

What is this strange rashness of yours that you refuse to stop doing that which looks evil? You know it is a scandal, namely, that you mix the remains of [consecrated] wine and bread with [unconsecrated] bread and wine. By what example do you do that? Indeed, do you not see what dangerous questions you are raising, if you contend so for this opinion of yours that when the action ceases, the sacrament [also] ceases? Perhaps you want to be considered a Zwinglian. Am I to believe that you are afflicted with the insanity of Zwingli, when you are so proudly and contemptuously irritating, with this peculiar and magnificent wisdom of yours? Was there no other way for you to avoid giving the suspicion to the weak and to the enemy that you are a despiser of the sacrament, than to cause offense with this evil appearance that what is left of the sacrament is to be mixed and poured in with [unconsecrated] wine? Why do you not imitate the other churches? Why do you alone want to be considered a new and dangerous innovator? . . .

You can do what we do here [in Wittenberg], namely to eat and drink the remains of the sacrament with the communicants, so that it is not necessary to raise these scandalous and dangerous questions about when the action of the sacrament ends, questions on which you will choke unless you come to your senses. For with this argument you are abolishing the whole sacrament, and you do not have anything with which to answer those who are making false accusations, who say that in the action of the sacrament there is more cessation than action. Then we would come to the monstrosities of [Plato's] *Cratylus*, so that we would be forced to have a sacrament only in the action, and not in what happens in between, and finally time and the moment will be the causes of the

sacrament, and many other absurdities will follow.<sup>23</sup>

Luther's angry letter still did not quiet the contentious voice of Wolferinus. Thereupon Luther wrote a second letter on July 20, 1543:

We shall define the time or the sacramental action in this way: that it starts with the beginning of the Our Father<sup>24</sup> and lasts until all have communicated, have emptied the chalice, have consumed the hosts, until the people have been dismissed and [the priest] has left the altar. In this way we shall be safe and free from the scruples and

---

<sup>23</sup> Sed quae est ista singularis tua temeritas, ut tam mala specie non abstineas, quam scire te oportuit esse scandalosam, nempe quod reliquum vini vel panis misces priori pani et vino? Quo exemplo id facis? Non vides certe, quam periculosas quaestiones movebis, si tuo sensu abundans contendes, cessante actione cessare Sacramentum? Zuinglianum te forte vis audiri, et ego te Zuinglii insania laborare credam, qui tam superbe et contemtim irritas cum tua illa singulari et gloriosa sapientia? Non erat alia via, ut simplicibus et adversariis non daretur suspicio, te esse contemtorum sacramenti, quam ut mala specie offenderes reliquum Sacramenti miscendo et confundendo cum vino priori? Cur non imitaris alias Ecclesias? Cur solus vis novus et periculosus autor haberi? . . .

Poteris enim ita, ut nos hic facimus, reliquum Sacramenti cum communicantibus ebibere et comedere, ut non sit necesse, quaestiones istas scandalosas et periculosas movere de cessatione actionis sacramentalis, in quibus tu suffocaberis, nisi resipiscas. Nam hoc argumento tolles totum Sacramentum, nec habes, quod respondeas calumniatoribus, qui dicent, inter agendum plus cessat Sacramentum, quam exercetur. Tandem deveniemus ad Cratylus portenta, ut dogamur actione tantum habere Sacramentum, non intermissione accidentium, et tandem erit tempus et momentum Sacramenti causa, et alia multa absurda sequentur. Ibid., 10 340—41. The Cratylus referred to in the text was a pupil of Heraclitus and the teacher of Plato.

<sup>24</sup> It was customary in the Lutheran rites of the time that the Our Father followed immediately the words of institution.

scandals of such endless questions. Dr. Philip [Melancthon] defines the sacramental action in relation to what is outside of it, that is, against reservation of and processions with the sacrament; he does not split it up within [the action] itself, nor does he define it in a way that it contradicts itself. Therefore see to it that if anything is left over of the sacrament, either some communicants or the priest himself and his assistant receive it, so that it is not only a curate or someone else who drinks what is left over in the chalice, but that he gives it to others who were also participants in the body [of Christ], so that you do not appear to divide the sacrament by a bad example or to treat the sacramental action irreverently.<sup>25</sup>

As far as what is "outside of the use of the sacrament" is concerned, this is Luther's most important statement. Here he defines what he means by the axiom. He clearly does not agree with Wolferinus' opinion that the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ only at the moment of distribution and reception. Such an idea is dangerously close to Zwinglianism. To avoid such dangerous opinions, the

---

<sup>25</sup> Sic ergo definiemus tempus vel actionem sacramentalem, ut incipiat ab initio orationis dominicae, et duret, donec omnes communicaverint, calicem ebiberint, particulas comederint, populus dimissus et ab altari discessum sit. Ita tuti et liberi erimus a scrupulis et scandalis quaestionum interminabilium. D. Philippus actionem sacramentalem definit relative ad extra, id est, contra inclusionem et circumstationem Sacramenti, non dividit eam intra se ipsam, nec definit contra se ipsam. Quare curabitur, si quid reliquum fuerit Sacramenti, ut id accipiant vel aliqui communicantes vel ipse sacerdos et minister, non ut solus diaconus vel alius tantummodo bibat reliquum in calice, sed aliis det, qui et de corpore participati fuerint, ne videamini malo exemplo Sacramentum dividere aut actionem sacramentalem irreverenter tractare. Ibid., 10, 348—49.

best solution is that all of the elements be consumed.

### B. *The Case of Adam Besserer*

Adam Besserer was a curate in the parish of Friessnitz, under the jurisdiction of the superintendent of Weida in Thuringia. On the Third Sunday in Advent (Dec. 13), 1545, he preached and administered the sacrament in the villages of Rohna and Neuendorf, both of which belonged to the Friessnitz parish. In one of these villages he administered the sacrament to 17 communicants, and as he was about to give the host to the last communicant, he suddenly noticed that he had no more on the paten. He had counted the correct number of hosts before the celebration and had lost one. In his confusion he took an unconsecrated host out of the pyx and gave it to the last communicant. Later one of the women of the church saw the missing host lying on the floor and picked it up. The curate put it into the pyx along with the unconsecrated hosts, since, as he later explained, he did not know whether it had fallen from the paten before or after the consecration. After the service one of the parishioners reproached him for doing this, and Besserer answered that it did not make any difference, that it was all the same thing. The parishioner told this to another pastor, and eventually the bishop of Naumburg, Nicholas von Amsdorf, sent the question to the theologians in Wittenberg. Luther answered in their names. In the meantime, von Amsdorf ordered Wolf Goldacker, the bailiff in Weida, to hold the curate in custody. Goldacker did this, but he immediately reported it to the elector John Frederick, who approved the measures which had

been taken and ordered more exact details as to what had been done.

Bishop von Amsdorf wrote to Wolfgang Möstel, superintendent in Weida, that Besserer "was not to be put up with in our Christian churches," because he was a "despiser of the sacrament." He was not to be allowed to have another position in the church, and would have to stay away "from the fellowship of all Wittenberg Christian churches." In the meantime Möstel had undertaken the task of conducting an investigation among all those involved, as the elector had ordered. He was able to report that Besserer did not entertain any Zwinglian error and was sorry for his unintended mistake. Thereupon, von Amsdorf changed his mind and on Feb. 3 suggested that Besserer should undergo "strict penance" in the church at Friessnitz and then be moved to another place. Melanchthon advised that Besserer should be punished with two weeks' confinement and, if improvement was to be hoped for, then left in his position. On Feb. 28 the elector decreed that the imprisonment which Besserer had already undergone was sufficient and that he should be sent elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

On Jan. 11 Luther had written to von Amsdorf and expressed his opinion about the case:

It is not [mere] negligence, but wickedness, extraordinary wickedness, that this curate, a despiser of God and of men, dared in public to consider consecrated hosts and unconsecrated hosts the same thing. Therefore, he is simply to be thrown out of our churches. Let him go to his Zwinglians. . . . As far as the mixed hosts are concerned, that was well taken

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 258—59.

care of, in that they were burned, although actually it would not have been necessary to burn them, since outside of the use nothing is a sacrament, just as the water of baptism is not a baptism outside of the use. Christ is active in the sacrament for those who eat and believe. But the parish priest did well in burning [the hosts] to avoid scandal.<sup>27</sup>

This is Luther's most puzzling letter concerning the question of what is "outside of the use of the sacrament." He vigorously condemns Besserer for having considered consecrated and unconsecrated hosts alike. He labels such an opinion Zwinglian and vehemently asserts that Besserer is to be deposed for such blasphemy. Luther also approves the fact that the mixed hosts were reverently burned, in order to avoid scandal. Then he seems to contradict himself by stating that burning the hosts was not really necessary since "outside of the use nothing is a sacrament." He seems to envision the possibility that what has been validly consecrated but has not been consumed is mere bread.

There are several possible explanations for this statement. When one considers some of Luther's other statements on the subject, one might conclude that he would have reconsidered this opinion if the con-

<sup>27</sup> Non est negligentia, Sed nequitia, Eaque insignis istius Diaconi, Qui contemptor Dei & hominum in publico ausus est hostias consecratas ac non consecratas pro eodem habere. Ideo simpliciter est eijciendus extra nostras Ecclesias. Vadat ad suos Zuinglianos. . . . De particulis mixtis bene factum est, quod combustae sunt, Quamuis re ipsa nihil fuisset opus exurere, cum extra vsum nihil sit sacramentum, sicut Aqua Baptismi extra vsum non est Baptisma. Edentibus & credentibus operatur Christus in sacramento. Sed propter scandalum recte fecit parochus exurendo. Ibid., 11, 259.

tradition had been pointed out to him. Certainly one could validly say that if this host was no longer the body of Christ, Adam Besserer's deposition would not have been necessary. However, Luther's vehemence is also directed at Besserer's action of administering the unconsecrated host. It is because of the scandal given to the laity, too, that Luther insists on Besserer's deposition. One must look, however, at the particular circumstances in this one case. There are several factors which make it a unique situation. First of all, the consecrated host which was left over after the celebration in this instance was not identifiable. In a normal situation a pastor would easily be able to know what he has consecrated. But in Besserer's case, this was not true. The consecrated host had been irretrievably lost. One might also conclude that it was to comfort the innocent layman that Luther says "nothing is a sacrament outside of the use." As far as this particular host is concerned, there was no distribution. But this is not usually true of elements that remain after the celebration. In Luther's view, they were either to be used for the communication of the sick or to be consumed by the communicants. One cannot then come to the conclusion, on the basis of what Luther says here, that he held that it would be true in every case that what remains is not a sacrament.

## VI. SUMMARY

It is less Martin Luther than Philip Melancthon who emphasized the idea that "outside of the use there is no sacrament." But it must also be said that Luther did not deny that such an idea has validity. Luther's understanding of this axiom, how-

ever, allows for a very broad understanding of the length of the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament. It seems that Luther's broader and more "ontological" understanding is largely due to his emphasis on the objective sacramental presence of Christ's body and blood, upon which he insists in opposition to the Zwinglian denial. Consequently, Luther does not see the sacrament merely as an action. Nevertheless, Luther is of the opinion that if there is to be a sacrament, there must also be a complete action: consecration, distribution, and reception of the elements. He has strong doubts that there

is a sacrament in the solitary masses because there is no distribution.

When the complete action is there, however, as far as Luther is concerned, the bread and the wine are the body and blood of Christ, not just at the distribution, but from the time that they are consecrated until they are completely consumed either by priest or other communicants. To assume that there is no essential difference between consecrated and unconsecrated elements is in Luther's mind the heresy of Zwingli.

Selma, Ala.