

# Communion Frequency in the Lutheran Confessions and in the Lutheran Church



Luther Administering Communion, Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Buchbrunn bei Kitzingen, 16th century

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*Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples saying: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me." In the same way also He took the cup after supper, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying: "Drink of it all of you; this cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins. This do as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."*<sup>1</sup>

I.

During the past couple decades, questions about the frequency of Holy Communion have been raised quite often in conservative Lutheran circles.<sup>2</sup> One example is in the "Lord's Supper" issue of the *Good News* journal, where we read in the "Questions & Answers that Clarify" column:

*Question:* How often should one attend the Lord's Supper? *Answer:* At the time of the Reformation, the Lutherans continued the universal practice of the Church since Biblical times of celebrating the Sacrament at least every Sunday and holy day. (AC XXIV 34)<sup>3</sup>

The *Good News* editors draw our attention to Augsburg Confession XXIV:34. This passage, and the two sections that come after it (35 and 36), read as follows:

Now since the Mass is not a sacrifice for others, living or dead, to take away their sins but should be a Communion where the priest and others receive the sacrament for themselves, we celebrate it in this fashion. On holy days and at other times when communicants are present, Mass is celebrated, and those who desire it receive the sacrament. Thus, the Mass remains among us in its proper use, as it was observed formerly in the church. This can be demonstrated from St. Paul (1 Cor. 11[:23-33]) and from many writings of the Fathers. For Chrysostom tells how the priest stands every day and invites some to receive the sacrament, but forbids others to approach.<sup>4</sup>

It is highly commendable for Lutherans to seek guidance from the Book of Concord on a topic as important as this one is for the life of the church, and for the life of each individual Christian. We subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions "because they accurately reflect the teaching of Scripture. They are relevant today because they reflect the unchanging and ever timely word of God."<sup>5</sup> The Confessions certainly do speak to the issues that are involved in the current discussions on Communion frequency, and we should not be afraid to learn anew from the Confessors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as they unfold for us the teaching of Holy Scripture. In this way we can humbly apply to ourselves the directives of Hebrews 13:7, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as Joseph A. Seiss would remind us,

The Symbols of the orthodox Church of Christ are the matured fruits of the deepest devotion, experience and learning of its greatest and wisest members in its most trying ages; and as we may practically learn much from the biographies of the good, so we may learn much more from the Spirit-moved biography of the Church and the principles and testimonies which mark her life of faith. They are the sign-posts set up by the faithful along the King's highway of salvation to designate the places of danger to those who come after them, to warn and admonish us where we would otherwise be liable to err and miss the goal of our high calling in Christ Jesus. They are not laws to rule our faith, for the Word of God alone is such a Rule; but they are helps and tokens to enable us the more surely to find the true import of the Rule, that we may be all the more thoroughly and sincerely conformed to that Rule. They are the human tracks which the best of the

saints have left, by which we may the better detect the way which God has laid out and opened for the fallen and sinful children of men to travel, that they may fill their Christian vocation and come to everlasting life.<sup>7</sup>

In their deliberations on the frequency of Holy Communion, Confessional Lutherans have not, however, always approached the subject in a consistently “Confessional” way. For example, the members of a congregation have sometimes asked, “How often should we have the Lord’s Supper?,” with the assumption that such a decision may or should be made collectively and/or by a majority vote. The quotation from *Good News* with which we opened our discussion also seems to be freighted with this assumption, in that it answers a question about how often an *individual* should *attend* the Lord’s Supper, with a statement about how often a *congregation* should *celebrate* the Lord’s Supper. But from the viewpoint of the Lutheran Confessions, such an assumption should not be carried into this debate.

As we consider (or reconsider) the subject of Communion frequency, it is important for us to realize that the Lutheran Confessions actually guide us to ask, and answer, two closely-related but distinct questions: 1. How often should the Lord’s Supper be offered?; and 2. How often should the Lord’s Supper be received? These are separate questions, and they need to be considered separately.

## II.

We confess, in the Book of Concord, that when Jesus instituted his Holy Supper, “he distributed natural bread and wine to his disciples and called them his true body and his true blood. Then he said, ‘Eat and drink.’”<sup>8</sup> Therefore “we confess our judgment that in the Lord’s Supper, the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present and are truly distributed with those things that are seen, the bread and wine, to those who receive the sacrament.”<sup>9</sup> This is so because “when we follow his institution and command in the Supper and say, ‘This is my body,’ then it is his body, not because of our speaking or of our declarative word, but because of his command in which he has told us to speak and to do and has attached his own command and deed to our speaking.”<sup>10</sup> “For wherever what Christ instituted is observed and his words are spoken over the bread and cup and wherever the consecrated bread and cup are distributed, Christ himself exercises his power through the spoken words, which are still his Word, by virtue of the power of the first institution.”<sup>11</sup>

As already noted from the Augsburg Confession, the Reformers believed that our Lord’s gracious institution should in fact be repeated whenever “communicants are present.” Practically speaking, this would usually mean, in the words of the Apology, that “the Mass is celebrated every Lord’s day and on other festivals, when the sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it...”<sup>12</sup> The Apology also quotes a statement by St. Epiphanius of Salamis, that “Assemblies for Communion were appointed by the apostles to be held on the fourth day, on Sabbath eve, and on the Lord’s day.”<sup>13</sup> As we have already seen, the Augsburg Confession refers to the fact that Holy Communion was offered “every day” in the time of St. John Chrysostom. And in the Large Catechism, Martin Luther similarly describes the Sacrament as a great treasure “which is daily administered and distributed among Christians.”<sup>14</sup>

Luther had recommended in 1523 that the daily masses in Wittenberg be discontinued, but he immediately added that “if any should desire the sacrament during the week, let mass be held as inclination and time dictate; for in this matter one cannot make hard and fast rules.”<sup>15</sup> When the city of Nürnberg, through Lazarus Spengler, sought Luther’s guidance on these matters in 1528, he offered this response:

Should anyone request my counsel in this way, then I would give this advice: ... that you should celebrate one or two Masses in the two parish churches on Sundays or holy days, depending on whether there are few or many communicants. Should it be regarded as needful or good, you might do the same in the hospital too. ...you might celebrate Mass during the week on whichever days it would be needful, that is, if any communicants would be present and would ask for and request the Sacrament. This way we should compel no one to receive the Sacrament, and yet everyone would be adequately served in an orderly manner. If the Ministers of the Church would fall to griping at this point, maintaining that they were being placed under duress or complaining that they are unfitted to face such demands, then I would demonstrate to them that no merely human compulsion is at work here, but on the contrary they are being compelled by God Himself through His Call. For because they have the Office, they are already, in virtue of their Call and Office, obliged and compelled to administer the Sacrament whenever people request it of them, so that their excuses amount to nothing; just as they are under obligation to preach, comfort, absolve, help the poor, and visit the sick as often as people need or ask for these services.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the early Lutheran Church Orders also stipulated that “the weekly celebration of the Sacrament be supplemented by weekday celebrations following the daily offices, whenever the people so desire.”<sup>17</sup>

We have noted the claim of the Augsburg Confession, that the Lutherans’ evangelical approach regarding the celebration of Mass is in accord with the apostolic pattern, which “can be demonstrated” from St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians. John Gerhard, the seventeenth-century dogmatician, also considered the Biblical testimony regarding the observance of Christ’s Supper:

Because therefore it has been accepted as a practice in the Christian church, that in the public assemblies of the church after the preaching and hearing of the Word, this Sacrament is celebrated, therefore this custom must not be departed from without urgent necessity. ...it is...clear from Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 11:20,33, that when the Christians did gather at one place, they were accustomed to celebrate the Eucharist.<sup>18</sup>

St. Luke reports in Acts 20:7, in regard to the congregation at Troas: “On the first day of the week when we gathered for the breaking of bread, Paul preached to them.”<sup>19</sup> In 1 Corinthians 11:20,33, St. Paul simply assumes that when Christians “come together” as a church, it is, or should be, “to eat the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>20</sup> An authoritative source from within the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod acknowledges that

There is a great deal of evidence from the history of the church that supports an every-Sunday communion in addition to an every-Sunday sermon. That the early Christians received the supper whenever they gathered on the Lord’s day is obvious as one reads in the Acts and 1 Corinthians.<sup>21</sup>

In the ancient church, services without the Sacrament were sometimes held on weekdays. The Augsburg Confession notes that, “As the *Tripartite History*, Book 9, indicates, in Alexandria Scripture was read and interpreted on Wednesday and Friday, and all these worship services were held without the Mass.”<sup>22</sup> Still, as the nineteenth-century Missouri Synod liturgiologist Friedrich Lochner emphasizes,

On the basis of Acts 2:42 and I Cor. 11 and according to the example of the ancient Church, the Lutheran Church regards the Communion Service as the most glorious and important of all public services. ... She therefore distinguishes between the Main Service

and Minor Services. A divine Service becomes the Main Service not by virtue of the significance of the Sunday or the holy Day, nor because of the season of the year, nor through liturgical elaboration, but, as given by the Scriptural relation of Word and Sacrament, by virtue of the fact that the action of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ immediately follows upon the proclamation of the Word of the Gospel, and thus represents the seal of the Word, the aim and conclusion of the Service. All other services, in which the action of the Sacrament is not intended from the onset, become Minor Services, no matter how rich their liturgical appointments.<sup>23</sup>

In accordance with this apostolic and catholic principle – at least in regard to the church’s observance of the Lord’s Day and of major Christian festivals – Henry Eyster Jacobs states that “There is no proper Service, without the preaching of the Word; there is no complete Service, without Word and Sacrament.”<sup>24</sup>

An inseparable bond between gospel and sacrament has in fact always characterized any genuine expression of New Testament Christianity. Hermann Sasse reminds us that the gospel that Christ commissioned his church to preach to all nations

was to be not only a message of what had happened in the past and what was going to happen in the future; the proclamation of the message was to be accompanied by the celebration of that Sacrament, which in itself was a showing of the Lord’s death till he come. ... Both the Gospel and the Sacrament contain one and the same gift, forgiveness of sins – not only a message that there is forgiveness, and not only a ceremony which would illustrate that message, but rather the forgiveness itself, which no one can give except him who died as the Lamb of God for the sins of the world, who will come again in glory, and who is present in his Gospel and his Sacrament.<sup>25</sup>

Bringing his observations forward into the succeeding generations of Christian history, Sasse goes on to point out that

This close connection between the proclamation of the Gospel and the Sacrament of the Altar explains the fact that at all times the Eucharist has been the centre of the church’s worship and life. At the Lord’s Table the church has been gathering since the days of the apostles. There, at Holy Communion, it experiences the ‘communion of saints’. There it is one in the unity of the one body and one Spirit in the bond of peace, each member partaking of the one bread which is the body of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Sasse summarizes his historical and theological reflections on the importance of the Lord’s Supper for a proper Christian ecclesiology, in noting that

this Sacrament was in every respect the life of the church. It was never to be separated from the Gospel. The church of the first centuries was the church of the Eucharist. A Sunday, a Lord’s Day, was unthinkable without the Lord’s Supper. But if ever the church was a preaching church, the church of the apostles and the Church Fathers was. The same is true of all great periods of the church. The sacrament and the sermon belong together, and it is always a sign of the decay of the church if one is emphasized at the expense of the other.<sup>27</sup>

### III.

By the time of the Reformation, a serious decay in this respect had in fact settled into the religious life of western Christendom. Philip Melancthon observes in the Apology that among the Lutherans’ papal opponents “there are many regions where no sermons are delivered during the entire year except during Lent,” and that even when sermons are preached, the papal clergy

“talk about human traditions, about the devotion to the saints and similar trifles.”<sup>28</sup> In the Augsburg Confession, he describes the erroneous but influential teaching

that our Lord Jesus Christ had made satisfaction by his death only for original sin and had instituted the Mass as a sacrifice for other sins. Thus, the Mass was made into a sacrifice for the living and the dead for the purpose of taking away sin and appeasing God. Thereupon followed a debate as to whether one Mass celebrated for many people merited as much as a special Mass celebrated for an individual. This resulted in the countless multiplication of Masses, and with this work people wanted to obtain from God everything they needed. Meanwhile, faith in Christ and true worship of God were forgotten.<sup>29</sup>

Luther reacted to these abuses and distortions, but he did not overreact. Herman A. Preus reminds us that

It would be a mistake to regard Luther’s tangle with Rome on the Sacrament of the Altar as an effort to minimize the importance of it. He did indeed accuse the Romans of de-emphasizing the Word. And his concern was to restore the Word to its proper place beside the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. ... At the same time it must be said that Luther maintained the church’s reverence for the Sacrament. And what is more, he gave it back to the people. He rejected as unbiblical the idea that the priest could celebrate Mass for the people while they sat in their pews praying with their rosaries instead of partaking of the body and blood of the Lord. And both in his preaching and writing he impressed on the people the necessity of frequent Communion for the sustaining and strengthening of their Christian life.<sup>30</sup>

From the Lutherans’ perspective, the abuses of the Roman Church were not the only problems that needed to be addressed in the sixteenth century. The Lutheran Reformers considered the teaching and practice of the Zwinglians and Calvinists also to be examples of an unacceptable ecclesiastical decay. Preus continues:

The balance between Word and Sacrament must be maintained. While the Romans tipped the balance to the Sacrament at the expense of the Word, Luther saw the Swiss reformers and the enthusiasts as reversing this and de-emphasizing the sacraments to the point of neglect. Most serious of all to him was their rejection of the real presence of the body and blood in the Sacrament. This was taking the very heart out of the Supper and was a blatant denial of the clear words of Christ.<sup>31</sup>

Among the Reformed, “This is my body” means “This represents my body” or “This is a symbol of my body.” John Calvin (of Geneva) and Heinrich Bullinger (Ulrich Zwingli’s successor in Zürich) certainly have the Lutherans in mind when, in the *Consensus Tigurinus* of 1549, they jointly “repudiate as preposterous interpreters those who in the solemn words of the Supper, ‘This is My body, this is My blood,’ urge a precisely literal sense, as they say. For we hold it to be indisputable that these words are to be accepted figuratively, so that bread and wine are called that which they signify.”<sup>32</sup> The Reformed confess, in effect, “that the body of Christ, because it had ascended into heaven, is not truly and essentially present here on earth in the sacrament.”<sup>33</sup> Luther minces no words in describing such theologians as “enemies of the sacrament” who “change God’s Word and ordinance and misinterpret them,” so that “They, indeed, have only bread and wine, for they do not also have the words and instituted ordinance of God but have perverted and changed it according to their own imagination.”<sup>34</sup> In the face of such denials of an objective real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the bread and wine of the Supper, Luther declares with the utmost seriousness:

I regard them all as being part of the same cake..., as indeed they are. For they do not want to believe that the Lord's bread in the Supper is his true, natural body which the godless person or Judas receives orally just as well as St. Peter and all the saints. Whoever (I say) does not want to believe that should not trouble me...and should not expect to have fellowship with me. That is final.<sup>35</sup>

The Reformed abandonment of weekly Communion in favor of a quarterly observance or something similar was a predictable and natural consequence of their abandonment of Biblical sacramental theology. G. S. Seaman articulates the general principle that, in any given church tradition,

The *doctrine* of the Lord's Supper decidedly affects its *administration*. Consequently in those branches of the Protestant Church in which the Supper is viewed as only a memorial, little importance attaches to the manner of its administration and the Sacrament itself falls into neglect. ... Where the spiritualizing tendencies are very marked, the objective means of grace are but lightly esteemed. The Quakers have no sacraments, and many others are in danger of losing theirs, even if their false doctrine had not already practically destroyed them.<sup>36</sup>

The authentically catholic and evangelical approach of the great Wittenberg Reformer stands in marked contrast to both the Roman and the Swiss aberrations. Luther D. Reed explains that in the liturgical reforms that were introduced by Luther and the other Lutheran Reformers in the sixteenth century,

The ancient balance of the Word and Sacrament was...restored. Believing with all his soul in the "given-ness" of the gospel, Luther attached an almost sacramental authority to the uttered word which proclaims God's will and mercy. At the same time veneration for the Sacrament as the seal of forgiveness and a means of grace in which "Christ and his saints come unto thee," kept him in accord with the historic church in concluding the chief service of every Lord's Day and festival with the Lord's Supper. The custom which became general in Lutheran churches two centuries later of reducing the Sunday morning service to a preaching service and only infrequently celebrating Holy Communion, as in the Zwinglian and Calvinistic churches, must not be laid at Luther's door. He would be stirred to indignation by the infrequent observance of the Sacrament in many Lutheran churches today.<sup>37</sup>

Luther did recognize the possibility of the Lord's Supper being celebrated in some parishes only once in a month, but this would be because no one desired to commune on the other Sundays, and not because it had been decided beforehand that the sacrament would be unavailable to those who might wish to receive it. In the context of opposing the daily celebration of endowed masses, without communicants, he wrote:

I wish, and it ought to be so, that no mass at all would be celebrated except at such times as the people were present who really desired the sacrament and asked for it, and that this would be only once a week or once a month. For the sacrament should never be celebrated except at the instigation and request of hungry souls, never because of duty, endowment, custom, ordinance, or habit.<sup>38</sup>

#### IV.

Luther's beliefs about Christ's real and substantial presence in the Lord's Supper, and about the crucial importance of this Supper for the faith and devotion of God's people, were not merely his private theological opinions or personal judgments. They were and are the convictions of the whole orthodox Lutheran Church. Charles Porterfield Krauth – who by this

time in his life was writing from within a deeply-formed personal conviction regarding these matters – observes that

Men have talked and written as if the doctrine of our Church, on this point, were a stupid blunder, forced upon it by the self-will and obstinacy of one man. The truth is, that this doctrine, clearly revealed in the New Testament, clearly confessed by the early Church, lies at the very heart of the Evangelical system. Christ is the centre of the system, and in the Supper is the centre of Christ's revelation of Himself. The glory and mystery of the incarnation combine there as they combine nowhere else. Communion with Christ is that by which we live, and the Supper is "*the Communion.*" Had Luther abandoned this vital doctrine, the Evangelical Protestant Church would have abandoned him. He did not make this doctrine – next in its immeasurable importance to that of justification by faith, with which it indissolubly coheres. The doctrine made him. The doctrine of the Lord's Supper is the most vital and practical in the whole range of the profoundest Christian life – the doctrine which, beyond all others, conditions and vitalizes that life, for in it the character of faith is determined, invigorated, and purified as it is nowhere else. It is not only a fundamental doctrine, but is among the most fundamental of fundamentals.<sup>39</sup>

John R. Stephenson correctly states that "The Reformer's longing for frequent Communion to be restored to the heart of the Church's life proceeds directly from his understanding of the Person and Work of Christ, which is the central theme of his whole theology."<sup>40</sup> The profoundly important Christological dimension of the Lord's Supper is testified to also by the Formula of Concord, when it confesses that

Christ...is present especially with his church and community on earth as mediator, head, king, and high priest. He is not halfway present, nor is just half of him present. The entire person of Christ is present, to which belong both natures, the divine and the human. He is present not only according to his deity, but also according to and with the assumed human nature, according to which he is our brother and we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone [Eph. 5:30; cf. Gen. 2:23]. He instituted his Holy Supper as a certain assurance and confirmation of this, that also in the nature according to which he has flesh and blood he wants to be with us, to dwell in us, to work in us, and to exert his power for us.<sup>41</sup>

From such a perspective, the blessed sacrament of our Lord's body and blood is not, and cannot be, an appendix to the gospel that exists only at the periphery of our Christian experience. For Luther, and for all who are able to find an expression of their own faith in his Large Catechism, "the whole gospel and the article of the Creed, 'I believe in one holy Christian church...the forgiveness of sins,' are embodied in this sacrament..."<sup>42</sup> As the Apology reminds us, whenever we discuss the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar, "we are talking about the presence of the living Christ, for we know that death no longer has dominion over him [Rom. 6:9]."<sup>43</sup> With a gentle admonition, and with a warm invitation, Luther in the Large Catechism reminds us also that our living Savior, in his Holy Supper,

offers us all the treasures he brought from heaven for us, to which he most graciously invites us in other places, as when he says in Matthew 11[:28]: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Surely it is a sin and a shame that, when he so tenderly and faithfully summons and exhorts us for our highest and greatest good, we regard it with such disdain, neglecting it so long that we grow quite cold and callous and lose all desire and love for it. We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine that aids you and gives life in both soul and body. For where the soul

is healed, the body is helped as well. Why, then, do we act as if the sacrament were a poison that would kill us if we ate of it?<sup>44</sup>

This Holy Supper, in its own special way, offers and bestows everything that the gospel offers and bestows.<sup>45</sup> As we confess in the familiar words of the Small Catechism, the benefit of our sacramental eating and drinking is told to us by Jesus himself in the words “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” which “show us that the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.”<sup>46</sup> The operative refectational analogy to the Lord’s Supper in the earthly life of the Christian is not the occasional banquet that marks only “special” events or anniversaries, but is instead the regular, daily meal that sustains us in our normal human existence. According to the Large Catechism, this sacrament

is appropriately called food of the soul, for it nourishes and strengthens the new creature. For in the first instance, we are born anew through baptism. However, our human flesh and blood...have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and attacks of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint and at times even stumble. Therefore the Lord’s Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may be refreshed and strengthened and that it may not succumb in the struggle but become stronger and stronger. For the new life should be one that continually develops and progresses. But it has to suffer a great deal of opposition. The devil is a furious enemy; when he sees that we resist him and attack the old creature, and when he cannot rout us by force, he sneaks and skulks about at every turn, trying all kinds of tricks, and does not stop until he has finally worn us out so that we either renounce our faith or lose heart and become indifferent or impatient. For times like these, when our heart feels too sorely pressed, this comfort of the Lord’s Supper is given to bring us new strength and refreshment.<sup>47</sup>

In the munificence of God and according to his divine economy, the complete forgiveness of all our sins, together with every blessing that flows from this forgiveness, is repeatedly layered on us through the means of grace. The Lord’s Supper is very much an integral component of this economy of the gospel, which – as the Smalcald Articles confess – “gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world...; second, through baptism; third, through the holy sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers...”<sup>48</sup>

The means of grace that Christ has instituted for his church do not come to us at random or in a haphazard fashion, but according to a certain divine design. Kurt E. Marquart elaborates:

If the Means of Grace were mechanically interchangeable, rather than organically ordered, it would make sense to say: “Today we have Baptism and, therefore, we do not need Communion.” Such an argument, however, is quite impossible. It should be equally impossible to argue: “As long as we have preaching regularly, and the Lord’s Supper occasionally, the Means of Grace are in action, and all the rest is adiaphora.” What must be seen is that in the Lutheran Confessions as in the New Testament the Eucharist is not an occasional extra, an exceptional additive for especially pious occasions, but a regular, central and constitutive feature of Christian worship. Preaching and the Sacrament belong together not anyhow, or helter-skelter, by statistical coincidence, but as mutually corresponding elements within one integrated whole.<sup>49</sup>

With Wilhelm Loehe we might say, therefore, that

A morning service on Sundays or festivals without communion is like a broken column... God is rich toward all who seek him, and those who come to his table shall be satisfied with the abundance of his house. Nor ought anyone to say that frequent celebration serves to bring the Sacrament into contempt, for those who are rightly prepared will always hunger for this bread and thirst for this drink; and the more frequently that they commune, the firmer becomes the persuasion that all of the earthly life is only a preparation for the celebration of the great Supper on High. ... It should not often occur that the Communion is altogether omitted from the morning service.<sup>50</sup>

According to Melanchthon it did not often occur, at least not in Wittenberg during those years when the Reformation movement was exercising its most vigorous influence. In 1531 he wrote to the Margrave of Brandenburg: "As to your Highness' inquiry how it is held here, I would say that we hold no Mass when there are no communicants; and here at Wittenberg and at many other places there are always many communicants on Sundays, and the Churches are full."<sup>51</sup>

## V.

And yet, as Marquart bemusedly acknowledges, "In respect of the Lutheran Confessions," and in respect of what the Confessions teach regarding the propriety of an every-Sunday and every-festival offering of the Lord's Supper, "an extraordinary development seems to have taken place" in the Lutheran Church – even among those who unreservedly identify themselves as orthodox, traditional Lutherans. He explains:

Even those sections of world Lutheranism which have cultivated a strong consciousness of Article X of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, are hardly aware of its practical implementation and ramifications in Article XXIV. The tendency has been to maintain the Sacramental Presence as a matter of doctrine, but to let the practice of the Sacrament drift from its central position in the church to a more peripheral, supplementary status, as in the Reformed pattern. The strong corporate, communal implications (I Cor. 10:17) have been largely lost. This is not the view of the Lutheran Confessions. Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confession and of the Apology sees the Mass or Liturgy as consisting of preaching and the Sacrament, and as something to be done every Sunday and holy day. Nor is this merely a temporary accommodation. Luther himself, for instance, in his Latin Mass of 1523, defined the mass as consisting, "properly speaking," of "using the Gospel and communing at the Table of the Lord." In fact, he rejects, in the same work, the Roman custom of omitting the Consecration on Good Friday, and says that this is "to mock and ridicule Christ with half of a mass and the one part of the Sacrament."<sup>52</sup>

Reed recounts that at the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century,

The Lutheran Church restored the "primitive synthesis" of the early church by including in balanced proportion the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacrament in the principal service of the day. This service was held in its entirety on appointed Sundays and all great festivals. Some orders recognized that on certain days in towns and villages there might be no communicants. Permission was given in this event to conclude the Service with appropriate prayers and the Benediction. This exceptional provision later became the regular use. In the beginning, however, it was part of a plan to maintain the historic order of the Mass and to encourage the faithful to communicate. ... This was the Service as Luther and the conservative Reformers knew it. ... Luther and his associates never would have approved of the "half-mass" commonly found among us today as the normal Sunday worship of our congregations. For two hundred years..., the normal Sunday service in Lutheran lands was the purified Mass, or *Hauptgottesdienst*, with its twin peaks of Sermon and Sacrament. There were weekly

celebrations and the people in general received the Sacrament much more frequently than before. The ravages of war, the example of Calvinism, the later subjective practices of Pietistic groups in a domestic type of worship, and the unbelief of rationalism, however, finally broke the genuine Lutheran tradition.<sup>53</sup>

The Pietists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not deny the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. But they did tend to minimize the importance of sound doctrine in the life of the church. The Pietist movement also contributed toward a diminishing of the sort of liturgical and sacramental piety that the Reformation of the sixteenth century considered to be normative, via its distinctive emphasis on an interior and experiential spirituality, and its opposition to any attitudes and practices that – in the Pietists' estimation – smacked of superficial religious formalism. Martin Schmidt summarizes the character of the movement:

Its avowed purpose was to bring about a second reformation. After a good start, so Pietism asserted, the Reformation had stranded in orthodoxism and was stuck in the shoals of institutionalism, dogmatism, and polemics. Favorite pietist concepts and slogans were: "Life versus doctrine," "Holy Spirit versus the office of the ministry," or "Reality versus the appearance of godliness"... Faith, the chief element in the teachings of the Reformation, was more clearly defined as "living faith"; and the evidence that faith is "living" was sought in the "fruits of faith"..., i.e., in sanctification of life, above all in the exercise of love. ... The reformers and the orthodox theologians had given central place to the Word of God and the doctrine of justification. But Pietism's central subject was regeneration (conversion, rebirth). ... Pietism focused its attention on man, on individual man. ... As a result, Pietism also modified the concept "church." The church is no longer the community of those who have been called by the Word and Sacraments, but the association of the reborn, of those who "earnestly desire to be Christians." ... Only little weight is attached to the ministry of the Word, to worship services, the Sacraments, to confession and absolution, and to the observance of Christian customs; a thoroughly regenerated person does not need these crutches at all. Pietism stressed the personal element over against the institutional; voluntariness versus compulsion; the present versus tradition, and the rights of the laity over against the pastors.<sup>54</sup>

We are accordingly not surprised by Reed's historical observation that as the spirit of Pietism "entered into the established church, the services of the latter became more and more subjective and emotional. The struggle for personal consciousness of conversion and regeneration led to an undervaluation of the objective means of grace."<sup>55</sup> What this meant specifically for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, during the time of Pietism's ascendancy, is also described by Reed:

The sacrament was surrounded with an atmosphere of awe and fear; excessive emphasis was placed upon personal and intensely introspective preparation; and there grew up in the people's minds a dread of possibly being unworthy and of "being guilty" of the body and blood of Christ. These morbid and exaggerated emphases upon preparation for the Sacrament, rather than upon the Sacrament itself, are still occasionally in evidence.<sup>56</sup>

As a result of these Pietist anxieties, the laity in general were reluctant to put themselves through the spiritually exertive and demanding process of preparing for communion, and receiving it, very frequently. And the Pietist clergy did not force them to. Reed reports that "The Communion in most districts was administered quarterly, in conformity with the Calvinistic and Zwinglian program."<sup>57</sup>

Pietism distorted the people's understanding of the Lord's Supper, and of its divinely-intended role in their life of faith. But Rationalism, as it arose in the wake of Pietism in the eighteenth century, brought about a total destruction of sacramental theology in all places where it held sway within the institutional Lutheran Church. John A. W. Haas summarizes the horrid effects of this insidious movement:

Rationalism...changed the whole appearance and life of the Church. Churches were made lecture-rooms, the pulpit became the desk above the altar, which dwindled into insignificance. From the hymns all distinctively Christian thought was removed, and commonplace rhymes of the shallowest order were added, which praised reasonable virtue, delight of nature, and care of the body. Sermons were long-winded moral treatises on the utility of things. The old Church Orders and Agenda were mutilated, Baptism and the Lord's Supper robbed of their meaning, Private Confession totally abolished, and Confirmation degraded into a promise of virtue. Catechisms contained natural religion and shallow morality on the happiness of man.<sup>58</sup>

Together with their casting aside of the classic Lutheran theology of the sacrament, the Rationalists also cast aside the old liturgical formulations. There was no pretense on their part that their beliefs were the same as the beliefs of the Lutheran Reformers. Examples of communion distribution formulae from the period of Rationalism are:

Eat this bread; may the spirit of devotion rest upon you with all its blessings. Drink a little wine; moral power does not reside in this wine, but in you, in the teaching of God, and in God.

Use this bread in remembrance of Jesus Christ; he that hungereth after pure and noble virtue shall be filled. Drink a little wine; he that thirsteth after pure and noble virtue shall not long for it in vain.<sup>59</sup>

And J. F. Ohl describes what may be the worst liturgical blasphemy of this period:

In the Agenda by Sintenis we read in the Order for Public Confession and Absolution: "Let us do as the Apostles did, and not come to the Altar to receive a sacrament, but to bring our sacrament(!) thither," viz., "the obligation to hold fast His teachings, which bring us so much happiness, and always and everywhere to show public spirit, as He did."<sup>60</sup>

Günther Stiller concedes that "in the earliest Christian times as well as in the Reformation era we occasionally find something we might call 'neglect of Holy Communion,' yet it cannot even remotely be compared with the neglect of Holy Communion that appeared so obviously when rationalism invaded the liturgical life of the Lutheran Church, a neglect that has not been overcome decisively down to our own time."<sup>61</sup> Insofar as the Lutheran Confessions can serve as a guide for sacramental belief and practice in the Lutheran Church, Stephenson observes that in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology "at least weekly eucharistic celebration is proposed as normative." But he also observes that this proposal, "since Pietism and Rationalism exerted their destructive effect on the worship life of our Church, has represented a sadly unfulfilled *desideratum* of the Lutheran Confessions."<sup>62</sup>

Rationalism as a defined movement did not endure for long. Its vacuousness soon became obvious to almost everyone. But the effects of Rationalism on the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper did endure in many ways. Quite often now, "Lutherans" who were influenced by Rationalism more than they may have realized, no longer believed in the Lutheran doctrine of the Real Presence, but felt more comfortable with the eucharistic theology of Calvinism or Zwinglianism. At the very least, they now considered the question of the mode by which "Christ" is "present" in the Lord's Supper to be an open and non-divisive question.

These influences were also evident among the Lutherans in the new world. Several leaders within the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States declared in 1845: “The distinctive views which separate the old Lutherans and the Reformed Church we do not consider essential...”<sup>63</sup> Samuel Simon Schmucker, the first president of the General Synod’s seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, stated that the professors there would “defeat the design of the institution” if they were “to inculcate on their students the obsolete views of the old Lutherans, contained in the former symbols of the church in some parts of Germany, such as...the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the eucharist...”<sup>64</sup>

Many Lutherans, shocked by the frivolous infidelity of Rationalism in its extreme form, fell back onto the ideas of Pietism as an antidote to that infidelity, rather than returning all the way to the purer evangelical principles of the Reformation. And among Lutherans in America, notions and practices that emerged from the Revivalism of the Second Great Awakening also found their way into the mix. The way in which such Lutherans celebrated the sacrament reflected this. In Virginia, for example, during the late 1840s and early 1850s, Beale M. Schmucker (the son of Samuel Simon) was serving as pastor of the Shepherdstown-Martinsburg parish, at the same time as the young Krauth was serving as pastor of the neighboring Winchester parish. In later years, as Beale reminisced about his friendship with Krauth – and about the manner in which the Lord’s Supper was observed in those days – he offered a picture of the hybrid Pietist-Revivalist sacramental piety of the General Synod at that period in history:

There was at that time a delightful usage among some neighboring congregations in Virginia, that each semi-annual administration of the Lord’s Supper should be preceded by evening services for three days, in which another pastor assisted, remaining over Sunday, often closing his own church. In such services on sundry occasions I was united with him in his charge and in my own. On one occasion...at Winchester, the services continued for a week, Mr. Seiss, I myself and others assisting; to this extent protracted meetings for the simple, earnest administration of the Word and Sacraments were held in Mr. Krauth’s time.<sup>65</sup>

The Lord’s Supper was celebrated only twice per year. And on those relatively rare occasions, it was not made available to the people until they had first been put through three days of hortatory sermons and special penitential services. We should realize, too, that these men in particular were among the more promising figures in that generation of General Synod pastors, as far as a future recovery of Confessional Lutheran doctrine and practice in the “Muhlenberg tradition” of east coast Lutheranism was concerned!

A conscientious minority of Lutherans in nineteenth-century America did deliberately endeavor to return both to the Reformers’ sacramental *theology*, and to their sacramental *practice*. Among the Loehe *Sendlinge* in Michigan – who became a part of the Missouri Synod when it was organized in 1847 – the Lord’s Supper was not necessarily *received* by communicants on every Lord’s Day and festival, but it was *available and offered*. As Pastor Johann Heinrich Philip Graebner looked back on his ministry in the Saginaw Valley, he recalled:

In general our public worship services and also our daily Matins and Vespers followed the liturgical method as given in the Loehe agenda. According to the constitution which Rev. Loehe sent along with us, all Sunday as well as all special festival services, on the first day thereof, holy communion shall be observed and the exclusive use of private confession shall be practised. During the six years that I was in Frankentrost it was very rare that there were no Communicants on Sunday or high festivals.<sup>66</sup>

Apart from such notable exceptions, however, the distortions in Lutheran sacramental piety that we have been discussing remained in place among most Lutherans in the nineteenth century – including among those in the “Confessional Revival” who were trying to distance themselves as much as possible from the theological errors that originally inspired those distortions!

And, ironically, these distortions are still embraced as normative by many in the more “conservative” branches of Lutheranism in our time. Frederick R. Webber addressed the problem more than half a century ago, but much of what he says has a sadly contemporary ring to it:

One of the most serious relics of Rationalism and Pietism, and the age of indifferentism that followed, is our deplorable practice of infrequent celebrations of Holy Communion. ...the reformers of the sixteenth century certainly intended that there would be a celebration of Holy Communion once a week, as the old rubrics so clearly show, as well as additional celebrations on all festival days within the week. This was carried out at first, although Helvetic influence soon crept in, then the turmoil of the Thirty Years’ War, then the blight of Pietism and Rationalism. ... After a century or two of such disorder, the practice of infrequent Communion has taken on an air of respectability, and men who point to the deplorable record of certain church bodies in this respect, are spoken of as pro-Romanists, and enemies of the liberty which is ours under the Gospel. In a gathering of church leaders, when the custom of infrequent Communion was mentioned, several of the older men became terribly upset, declaring that if Communion be celebrated more than say six times a year, the people will lose all respect for it. But who would advocate four to six sermons a year, lest the people lose respect for the preaching of the Word?<sup>67</sup>

The infrequent offering of the holy sacrament represents a significant departure from the liturgical norms of the Lutheran Reformation. This sacramental/liturgical abnormality has, in turn, engendered some basic misunderstandings of the relationship between the Lord’s Supper and the liturgy in the worship life of the church. Marquart notes that a well-ordered “variety-principle” is “built into” the historic liturgy, in the form of

the rhythm of the church-year. The basic units of this gentle, natural rhythm are the week and the year. This cycle is...broken by the false off-on or even off-off-off-on *staccato* of “Communion Sundays” and “non-Communion Sundays.” The proper change from Sunday to Sunday should be in the specific meaning and application of the Sacrament, not in having or not having it. The Eucharist is the whole Gospel in action. This one Gospel, like a precious diamond, has many facets or aspects, of which one or two are especially highlighted in each Sunday’s or festival’s Gospel pericope. And through whatever concrete facet the full Gospel is celebrated on a given day, that is the specific meaning, or the mode of application of the Sacrament on that day. The Sacrament is always the full Gospel-gift, of course. But on Christmas Day we receive it under the aspect of the Lord’s Nativity, on Epiphany in celebration of His Baptism, on Laetare Sunday as the Divine Bread of Life revealed in the miraculous feeding of the multitude, and so on. In other words, the Sacrament, like the Gospel itself, must never be seen as some one narrow aspect or some unvarying “standard ration” in the feast that is Christianity. It is rather the whole reality, under many wonderful aspects, each especially observed and celebrated at various times. Each time it is as new and fresh as are the daily mercies of God. We have here the Kaleidoscope of God, which, at each weekly or seasonal tilt, exhibits the same divine generosity in ever new and exciting configurations.<sup>68</sup>

As a way of reorienting the attitudes and expectations of the people in the pews, Webber had suggested that the rubrics in future worship books and hymnals

might well be reworked in such a way that a weekly celebration is regarded as the normal, rather than the exceptional procedure. It can be made clear that a service which ends abruptly with a prayer and a hymn after the sermon is an incomplete service. The opinion now seems to be that this is the normal thing, and everything from the Prefatory Sentences onward is something added. The laity too often speak of the first half of the service as the “regular service,” and the second half as “the Communion Service.” This is highly incorrect. The regular, normal service is the Holy Communion, from the Introit to the end of the Post Communion. If it be broken off with a prayer and hymn after the sermon it is a truncated service.<sup>69</sup>

In North America today, the rubrics for the main Sunday Service in most Confessional Lutheran hymnals still give directions about what to do when there is “no Communion.” This is true of *Lutheran Worship* (used in some congregations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and of the Lutheran Church – Canada),<sup>70</sup> *Lutheran Service Book* (used in many congregations of the LCMS and the LCC),<sup>71</sup> and *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (used in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod).<sup>72</sup> This is not true, however, of the hymnal of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, where directions are given instead about what to do when there are “no communicants.”<sup>73</sup> This shows a marked improvement in theological and liturgical understanding, and a very welcome return to the thought patterns of the Lutheran Reformation. The day may come when this understanding is reflected throughout the orthodox Lutheran world, and when there will no longer be any such thing as a “non-Communion Sunday” for Lutheran parishioners

who hunger for Christ’s body and blood and who are prepared to receive it. The fact that some of those present do not wish to receive should not prevent others from receiving. ... The Eucharist Service is to be the chief Sunday service as a matter of course, and the people are to be encouraged to commune.<sup>74</sup>

## VI.

The point about communicants being “prepared” to receive the Lord’s Supper is an important point, and the Reformers were very careful always to emphasize that the administration of this sacrament is to take place within the context of a comprehensive pastoral ministry. From the perspective of the Confessions, the offering of the Lord’s Supper is to be accompanied by the offering of the kind of pastoral care that addresses the spiritual needs of a communicant. What this means, in practice, is that a Lutheran pastor’s offering of Christ’s body and blood to the members of his congregation is to be preceded by examination and absolution.

The Apology describes this kind of pastoral care in a statement that has already been quoted in part: “Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord’s day and on other festivals, when the sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it, *after they have been examined and absolved.*”<sup>75</sup> And we read in the Augsburg Confession that

The people have grown accustomed to receiving the sacrament together – all who are fit to do so. This also increases reverence and respect for public ceremonies. For people are admitted only if they first had an opportunity to be examined and heard.<sup>76</sup>

The examination of which the Reformers speak is directly related to the catechetical instruction that necessarily precedes admission to the altar. The Lutherans declare in the Apology:

Among our opponents there is no catechesis of children whatever, even though the canons prescribe it. Among us, pastors and ministers of the churches are required to instruct and examine the youth publicly, a custom that produces very good results.<sup>77</sup>

In his (shorter) Preface to the Large Catechism, Luther says that his effort in preparing the catechism “has been designed and undertaken for the instruction of children and the uneducated.”<sup>78</sup> He adds that

It contains what every Christian should know. Anyone who does not know it should not be numbered among Christians nor admitted to any sacrament, just as artisans who do not know the rules and practices of their craft are rejected and considered incompetent. ... I well remember the time when we found ignorant, old, elderly people who knew nothing of these things – in fact, even now we find them daily – yet they still go to baptism and the sacrament [of the Altar] and exercise all the rights of Christians, although those who come to the sacrament certainly should know more and have a deeper understanding of all Christian teaching than children and beginners in school.<sup>79</sup>

In his typical hyperbolic style, Luther gives these directions to pastors in the Preface to the Small Catechism:

To begin with, teach them these parts: the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, etc., following the text word for word, so that they can also repeat it back to you and learn it by heart. Those who do not want to learn these things – who must be told how they deny Christ and are not Christians – should also not be admitted to the sacrament, should not be sponsors for children at baptism, and should not exercise any aspect of Christian freedom, but instead should simply be sent back home to the pope and his officials and, along with them, to the devil himself. Moreover, their parents and employers ought to deny them food and drink and advise them that the prince is disposed to drive such course people out of the country.<sup>80</sup>

Luther makes the same point, with gentler language, in the Large Catechism, where the Sacrament of the Altar is treated catechetically under three headings,

stating what it is, what its benefits are, and who is to receive it. All this is established from the words Christ used to institute it. So everyone who wishes to be a Christian and go to the sacrament should know them. For we do not intend to admit to the sacrament, and administer it to, those who do not know what they seek or why they come.<sup>81</sup>

Martin Chemnitz touches on the “church fellowship” dimension of why communicants are expected to demonstrate that they know the faith of the church – and of why they are expected collectively to confess that faith as their own – in his observation that “fellowship at the Lord’s table is a testimony of consensus, harmony, and unity in doctrine and faith, as Paul says: ‘We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread’ (1 Cor. 10:17).”<sup>82</sup>

The Reformers do not think that the pastor’s duty to instruct the people from God’s Word, especially in regard to the Lord’s Supper, is limited to a one-time catechetical course. According to the Augsburg Confession,

The people are instructed more regularly and with the greatest diligence concerning the holy sacrament, to which purpose it was instituted, and how it is to be used, namely, as a comfort to terrified consciences. In this way, the people are drawn to Communion and to the Mass. At the same time, they are also instructed about other, false teaching concerning the sacrament.<sup>83</sup>

The directives of the 1533 Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order concerning an examination of communicants are typical for the period. As epitomized by Edward T. Horn, this church order stipulates that

Those who intend to commune shall give notice to the pastor or one of the ministers the day before, or before Mass in the morning. The ministers shall ask of them in a discreet way whether they know the Ten Commandments, Creed and Lord's Prayer, whether they know and hold the right doctrine concerning the Sacrament, what fruit they expect from a worthy use of it, and especially whether they hold enmity or wrath against any one. Thus may they discover how the people understand these matters, how much profit they derive from sermon and catechism, and how much they need kind instruction. But they must be careful not to mortify either young or old by their examination and thus for a long time keep them from the Sacrament. They shall diligently admonish the people to seek Absolution in preparation for the Sacrament. ... Those are to be excluded from the Communion who live in willful error and heresy, or in open undeniable vice, or scorn the express Word of God. Also the irrational and fools, children who cannot understand, and those who neither know nor will learn the Ten Commandments, the Creed nor the Lord's Prayer.<sup>84</sup>

As indicated in this church order, children who were too young to be catechized and examined were not communed in the Lutheran Church – although the Reformers were aware of the fact that this was done among the Hussite Bohemian Brethren. Luther discusses this in a 1523 letter to Nicholas Hausmann:

Right now I do not think badly about the Bohemian Brethren, having heard from their own representatives their faith concerning the Sacrament of the Eucharist. I do not approve of the Bohemians who commune little children, although I do not regard them as heretics in this matter. I have been thinking daily about prescribing a form for doing Mass and giving Communion, but so far I have not been able to release it. Nevertheless, it ought to be proposed that *in the days to come no one be admitted to Communion unless he has been examined and has responded rightly concerning his faith; we should exclude the others.*<sup>85</sup>

The Lutherans of the next generation concurred in Luther's views on this matter. Chemnitz writes:

It is clear that one cannot deal with infants through the bare preaching of repentance and remission of sins, for that requires hearing (Rom. 10:17), deliberation and meditation (Ps. 119), understanding (Matt. 13:51), which are not found in infants. With regard to the Lord's Supper Paul says: "Let a man examine himself" [1 Cor. 11:28]. Likewise: "Let him discern the Lord's body" [1 Cor. 11:29], a thing which cannot be ascribed to infants. Moreover, Christ instituted His Supper for such as had already become His disciples. In the Old Testament infants were circumcised on the eighth day, but they were admitted to the eating of the Passover lamb when they were able to ask: "What do you mean by this service?" (Ex. 12:26). There remains therefore [for infants] of the means of grace in the New Testament only the sacrament of Baptism.<sup>86</sup>

In their 1577 correspondence with the Patriarch of Constantinople, Lucas Osiander, Jacob Andreae, and Martin Crucius summarize the policy of the Lutherans in Württemberg on the question of infant communion:

We often exhort our people who have repented to partake frequently of the Lord's Supper. However, we do not commune the infants, for Paul says: "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the Lord's body, eats and drinks judgment upon himself" [1 Cor 11:28-29]. And since the children are not able to examine themselves and, thus, cannot discern the Lord's body, we think that the ceremony of the baptism is sufficient for their

salvation, and also the hidden faith with which the Lord has endowed them. For through this faith they spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, even if they do not, in the communion of the supper, physically eat it.<sup>87</sup>

At the time of the Reformation in Europe, there was a special need for diligence among the pastors in regularly offering religious instruction to the people – in conjunction with their regular offering of the Lord’s Supper to them – since the people had been so poorly catechized in the past, if at all. We recall Luther’s description in the Preface to the Small Catechism of what he had found in Electoral Saxony and Meissen in 1528 and 1529:

The deplorable, wretched deprivation that I recently encountered while I was a visitor has constrained and compelled me to prepare this catechism... Dear God, what misery I beheld! The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers. Yet supposedly they all bear the name Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, even though they do not know the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments! As a result they live like simple cattle or irrational pigs and, despite the fact that the gospel has returned, have mastered the fine art of misusing all their freedom.<sup>88</sup>

These circumstances help us to understand why faithful Reformation-era pastors usually wanted to meet personally with individual communicants, before their communion. They knew that the people, by and large, still had a very limited understanding of law and gospel, and of the other chief articles of Christian doctrine. As the “stewards of the mysteries of God”<sup>89</sup> who “must give account”<sup>90</sup> for the souls entrusted to them, the early Lutheran pastors recognized the discipline of pre-communion examination as a very useful means by which they could guide communicants in their own self-examination, and in their preparation for a worthy reception of Christ’s body and blood, mindful of St. Paul’s warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 that

whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.<sup>91</sup>

In this context, Melancthon writes in the Apology:

With respect to setting a specific time, it is certain that most people in our churches use the sacraments – absolution and the Lord’s Supper – many times during the course of a year. Moreover, those who instruct the people about the worth and fruits of the sacraments do so in such a way as to invite the people to use the sacraments frequently. ... Also, excommunication is pronounced on the openly wicked and on those who despise the sacraments. These things are thus carried out according to both the gospel [Matt. 18:17] and the ancient canons. However, we do not prescribe a set time because not everyone is prepared in the same way at the same time. In fact, if everyone rushed in at the same time, they could not be heard or instructed in an orderly way. ... Christ says [1 Cor. 11:29] that “all who eat and drink unworthily, eat and drink judgment against themselves.” Our pastors, accordingly, do not force those who are not ready to use the sacraments.<sup>92</sup>

We do know, however, that a pastoral examination of those who wished to commune was not always obligatory for every person on every occasion. In 1523 Luther laid out his plan for how this whole process should be carried out:

Here one should follow the same usage as with baptism, namely, that the bishop be informed of those who want to commune. They should request in person to receive the Lord's Supper so that he may be able to know both their names and manner of life. And let him not admit the applicants unless they can give a reason for their faith and can answer questions about what the Lord's Supper is, what its benefits are, and what they expect to derive from it. In other words, they should be able to repeat the Words of Institution from memory and to explain that they are coming because they are troubled by the consciousness of their sin, the fear of death, or some other evil, such as temptation of the flesh, the world, or the devil, and now hunger and thirst to receive the word and sign of grace and salvation from the Lord himself through the ministry of the bishop, so that they may be consoled and comforted; this was Christ's purpose, when he in priceless love gave and instituted this Supper, and said, "Take and eat," etc. But I think it enough for the applicants for communion to be examined or explored once a year. Indeed, a man may be so understanding that he needs to be questioned only once in his lifetime or not at all. For, by this practice, we want to guard lest the worthy and unworthy alike rush to the Lord's Supper, as we have hitherto seen done in the Roman church. There they seek only to communicate; but the faith, the comfort, the use and benefit of the Supper are not even mentioned or considered.<sup>93</sup>

## VII.

Private confession and absolution, closely associated with the pre-communion examination, also played an important role in the preparation of Reformation-era Lutherans for their participation in the Lord's Supper. This, too, was a part of what pastors were offering to their people on a regular basis, when they were offering to them the Lord's Supper – and all that pertains to it – on a regular basis. On the subject in general, the Augsburg Confession states

that private absolution should be retained and not abolished. However, it is not necessary to enumerate all misdeeds and sins, since it is not possible to do so. Psalm 19[12]: "But who can detect their errors?"<sup>94</sup>

According to the Large Catechism, this "third sacrament, formerly called penance," is "really nothing else than baptism," since repentance "is nothing else than a return and an approach to baptism, to resume and practice what has earlier been begun but abandoned."<sup>95</sup> Confession and absolution function essentially as the semi-sacramental "bridge" between Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar in the life of the Christian. Regarding this pastoral application of the "third sacrament," the Augsburg Confession tells us that

Confession has not been abolished by the preachers on our side. For the custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved.<sup>96</sup>

The Apology focuses on the personal evangelical comfort that is offered to the penitent sinner through the pastor's pronouncement of God's absolution, when it states that

we also retain confession especially on account of absolution, which is the Word of God that the power of the keys proclaims to individuals by divine authority. Therefore it would be unconscionable to remove private absolution from the church. Moreover, those who despise private absolution know neither the forgiveness of sins nor the power of the keys.<sup>97</sup>

The use of private confession and absolution is an intrinsically helpful and beneficial component of any pastor's relationship with the members of his congregation. It is not, however,

an absolutely necessary component (as was maintained by medieval popes and councils). In the Large Catechism, Luther writes:

Concerning confession we have always taught that it should be voluntary and purged of the pope's tyranny. We have been set free from his coercion and from the intolerable burden and weight he imposed upon the Christian community. Up to now, as we all know from experience, there has been no law quite so oppressive as that which forced everyone to make confession on pain of the gravest mortal sin.<sup>98</sup>

And according to Luther, what cannot be required in general likewise cannot be required in the specific context of preparation for the Lord's Supper:

Now concerning private confession before communion, I still think as I have held heretofore, namely, that it neither is necessary nor should be demanded. Nevertheless, it is useful and should not be despised...<sup>99</sup>

In his own preparation for going to communion, Luther usually sought and received private absolution. But he also declared as a matter of principle: "And I, Doctor Martin Luther myself, sometimes go unconfessed, just so that I shall not myself make it a necessary habit in my conscience."<sup>100</sup>

As a pastor, Luther would encourage those who came to him for confession and absolution to unburden themselves of the sins that were especially troubling to them. He would also explain to them, however, that

To confess sin does not mean (as among the papists) to recite a long catalog of sins, but to desire absolution. This is in itself a sufficient confession, that is, acknowledging yourself guilty and confessing that you are a sinner. And no more should be demanded and required, no naming and recitation of all or some, many or a few sins, unless you of your own accord desire to indicate something that especially burdens your conscience and calls for instruction and advice or specific comfort, such as young, plain folk and also others often require.<sup>101</sup>

Out of this principle evolved the practice of a general confession and general absolution, in the public assembly of the congregation, which took place either on Saturday (at Vespers) or on Sunday morning before the celebration of the Sacrament.<sup>102</sup> Many sixteenth-century Lutheran Church Orders explicitly call for such a usage.<sup>103</sup> Veit Dietrich's *Agendbüchlein für die Pfarrherrn auff dem Land*, published by the Nürnberg City Senate in 1543, specifies that in the Saturday Vespers service the Sermon is to be followed by the Public Confession, with Absolution and Retention.<sup>104</sup> A general confession and general absolution were included as a part of the Sunday morning Communion Service in the churches of Württemberg, as described in 1577 by Osiander, Andreae, and Crucius:

The church assembles at an appointed time. Hymns are sung. Sermons are preached concerning the benefits of Christ for mankind. Again, hymns are sung. An awesome exhortation is read, which in part explains the words of institution of the Most-Holy Supper, and in part demands that each person should prepare for a worthy communion. A general but sincere confession of sins is made. Forgiveness is publicly pronounced. With devout prayers we ask the Lord to make us partakers of the heavenly gifts and benefits. The words of institution of the sacrament are read, after which the congregation approaches with reverence and receives (offered by the holy minister) the body and the blood of Christ. Again we give thanks to God in prescribed words for the heavenly gifts. Finally, the holy minister of God says the blessing over the assembled congregation, and all are dismissed to go to their homes.<sup>105</sup>

## VIII.

For good or for ill, the general confession has now supplanted private confession with the pastor as the most common method through which Lutheran communicants prepare themselves spiritually for their sacramental participation. This does not mean, however, that Lutheran ministers are no longer obligated to administer the sacrament in a pastorally responsible manner. Whenever possible, pastors should still utilize some kind of pre-service announcement or registration process so that they will have at least a basic idea of who intends to commune, and they should still make themselves available to those who desire individualized pastoral attention before their communion. As we read in the Treatise,

The gospel bestows upon those who preside over the churches the commission to proclaim the gospel, forgive sins, and administer the sacraments. In addition, it bestows legal authority, that is, the charge to excommunicate those whose crimes are public knowledge and to absolve those who repent.<sup>106</sup>

This is, after all, the *Lord's* Supper, and *not our* supper. And a pastor who administers it in accordance with the teachings of our Lord and his apostles – in our time just as in the time of Chrysostom – “invites some to receive the sacrament, but forbids others to approach.” Whether it is done in private or in public, in the confessional or in the pulpit, the Formula of Concord affirms that it is always necessary for pastors

to explain with great diligence who the unworthy guests at this Supper are, namely, those who go to the sacrament without true contrition or sorrow over their sins and without true faith or the good intention to improve their lives. With their unworthy eating of Christ's body they bring down judgment upon themselves, that is, temporal and eternal punishments, and they become guilty of Christ's body and blood. The true and worthy guests, for whom this precious sacrament above all was instituted and established, are the Christians who are weak in faith, fragile and troubled, who are terrified in their hearts by the immensity and number of their sins and think that they are not worthy of this precious treasure and of the benefits of Christ because of their great impurity, who feel the weakness of their faith and deplore it, and who desire with all their heart to serve God with a stronger, more resolute faith and purer obedience. As Christ says, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” [Matt. 11:28], and, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” [Matt. 9:12]. “God's power is made mighty in the weak” [2 Cor. 12:9], and Romans 14[:1,3], “Welcome those who are weak in faith...for God has welcomed them.” For “whoever believes in the Son of God,” whether weak or strong in faith, “has eternal life” [John 3:16]. Moreover, this worthiness consists not in a greater or lesser weakness or strength of faith, but rather in the merit of Christ, which the troubled father with his weak faith (Mark 9[:24]) possessed, just as did Abraham, Paul, and others who have a resolute, strong faith.<sup>107</sup>

The Lutheran laity are similarly obligated to make sure that this venerable sacrament is administered in their midst only by qualified “spiritual fathers”<sup>108</sup> who have been properly “called to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments to the people.”<sup>109</sup> They must never forget what they as Lutherans confess in the Apology – that “the church has the mandate to appoint ministers, which ought to please us greatly because we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it.”<sup>110</sup> When the Lutheran Church is true to its own standards, its candidates for the ministry of Word and Sacrament are not ordained to this office until they have been carefully tested and examined “as to whether they are legitimately called, whether they rightly hold the fundamentals of salutary doctrine and reject fanatic opinions, whether they are endowed with the gifts necessary to teach others sound doctrine, and whether they can prove their lives to be

honorable, so that they can be examples to the flock”<sup>111</sup> – to quote Chemnitz. The conviction expressed in the Augsburg Confession “that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call”<sup>112</sup> means in part – in the words of Jasper Rasmussen Brochmand – that “The only administrators of the Holy Communion are the ministers of the Word, who have been legitimately called, like Aaron, Heb. 5:4; also because those alone should administer this Sacrament who are able to examine the faith of the men using this Sacrament.”<sup>113</sup> John F. Brug reflects the classic Lutheran understanding and practice when he writes:

It is clear that the Lord’s Supper should be administered by the pastor. It is not our practice to have a layman officiate at the Lord’s Supper. Even when congregations were quite isolated and some did not have a pastor present every Sunday, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated only when the pastor was present. Proper administration of the Lord’s Supper involves more than being able to read the right words. It involves pastoral responsibility for the souls of those who attend.<sup>114</sup>

In regard to the Sacrament of the Altar, as it is administered according to the Lord’s institution by the church’s called ministers, the Formula of Concord quotes a statement by Luther – made on behalf of all humble and faithful pastors – that “it is not our work or speaking but the command and ordinance of Christ that make the bread the body and the wine the blood, beginning with the first Lord’s Supper and continuing to the end of the world, and it is administered daily *through our ministry or office*.”<sup>115</sup> Brug elaborates:

The power of the sacraments is not dependent on ordination or on the person of the administrator, but the pastor is responsible for how the sacraments are administered. The administration of the Lord’s Supper involves spiritual judgment. Decisions commonly need to be made by the administrator about who is properly prepared to receive the Sacrament, both in public worship services and in the visitation of shut-ins. At times, there is a responsibility to exclude some from receiving the Sacrament. This requires a shepherd’s knowledge of the sheep, and it is definitely the work of spiritual oversight. This means that administration of the Lord’s Supper will normally remain with the pastor, even if others are trained to assist him with the distribution. The kind of disorder that arose in the Lord’s Supper at Corinth is most easily prevented if the administration is in the hands of properly prepared pastors.<sup>116</sup>

And so, how often should the Lord’s Supper be offered? It should be offered whenever there are communicants, defined Confessionally as baptized Christians who have been properly instructed, who confess the faith of the church, who have examined themselves, who have repented of their sins, and who in faith seek the forgiveness, life, and salvation that Jesus gives us in this holy sacrament.<sup>117</sup> If there are within a congregation at least some people like this on every Lord’s Day and festival who wish to receive Holy Communion, then Holy Communion is to be offered on every Lord’s Day and festival – except on those occasions when there is no pastor present. This is the clear and unambiguous teaching of the Lutheran Confessions.

## IX.

But how often should the Lord’s Supper *be* received? How frequently should an individual Christian *wish* to partake of the body and blood of Christ? This is a different question, and the Lutheran Confessions answer it in a different way.

Infrequent participation in the Lord’s Supper on the part of the laity was one of the problems that the Lutheran Reformers inherited from the medieval era. Johann Andreas

Quenstedt reminds us, however, that it was not always like this: “As to the frequency of the reception, in the primitive church the Christians at first used to communicate daily.”<sup>118</sup> And Sasse notes that

In the ancient church all who took part in the Mass of the Faithful received communion. This later came to an end when masses of people came streaming into the church... In the Middle ages Communion was very infrequent. To receive Communion four times a year – at the three high festivals and at one lesser one – was a sign of the highest piety.<sup>119</sup>

Church leaders over the centuries did recognize this as a problem, but they often responded to it in a legalistic way. According to Canon XVIII of the Council of Agde, held in the year 506, “Laymen who do not commune at Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost shall not be considered or reckoned as Catholics.”<sup>120</sup> Pope Innocent III, at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, required all the faithful to commune at least once per year, at Easter.<sup>121</sup> At this council he also required the faithful – under threat of excommunication – to confess their sins to a priest at least once per year, in preparation for their Easter communion. The Provincial Synod at Toulouse in 1229 increased this requirement by insisting on a compulsory confession and communion three times per year – not only at Easter, but also at Christmas and Pentecost – as the Council of Agde had done in the sixth century.<sup>122</sup>

When Luther addressed this situation, he took a totally different approach. For him the solution to the problem lay not in the enforcement of ecclesiastical rules and conciliar canons, but in focused law-gospel preaching. As we read in his Preface to the Small Catechism,

we should not compel anyone to believe or to receive the sacrament and should not fix any law or time or place for it. Instead, we should preach in such a way that the people make themselves come without our law and just plain compel us pastors to administer the sacrament to them. This can be done by telling them: You have to worry that whoever does not desire or receive the sacrament at the very least around four times a year despises the sacrament and is no Christian, just as anyone who does not listen to or believe the gospel is no Christian. For Christ did not say, “Omit this,” or “Despise this,” but instead [1 Cor. 11:25], “Do this, as often as you drink it. ...” He really wants it to be done and not completely omitted or despised. “*Do this,*” he says. Those who do not hold the sacrament in high esteem indicate that they have no sin, no flesh, no devil, no world, no death, no dangers, no hell. That is, they *believe* they have none of these things, although they are up to their neck in them and belong to the devil twice over. On the other hand, they indicate that they need no grace, no life, no paradise, no heaven, no Christ, no God, nor any other good thing. For if they believed that they had so much evil and needed so much good, they would not neglect the sacrament, in which help against such evil is provided and in which so much good is given. It would not be necessary to compel them with any law to receive the sacrament. Instead, they would come on their own, rushing and running to it; they would compel themselves to come and would insist that you give them the sacrament. For these reasons you do not have to make any law concerning this, as the pope did. Only emphasize clearly the benefit and the harm, the need and the blessing, the danger and the salvation in this sacrament. Then they will doubtless come on their own without any compulsion.<sup>123</sup>

A large part of the problem was, of course, the false and misleading beliefs regarding the Mass that had been current in pre-Reformation times, and that had obscured the true meaning and purpose of Christ’s institution. Luther recounted his own experience in this respect in a sermon from 1534:

Formerly under the papacy we were deterred by Paul's word: "He who receives it unworthily, receives it to his own condemnation" [1 Cor. 11:29]. For the teachers and interpreters of this passage did not themselves understand what receiving it "unworthily" actually meant. Consequently, the Holy Sacrament suffered the dishonor of the people shunning it like poison. And so it ceased to be a meal which ministered comfort and became instead a fearsome ordeal. The false preachers are responsible for this... For so the teaching went: You should first make a full confession of sins and make restitution for them. In this we have been instructed to do the impossible, to first be pure of all evil. And when we felt our uncleanness and unworthiness, we were less than anxious to come forward, because we thought we would be feeding on death. This is exactly what happened to me: because I felt myself impure, I dreaded the Sacrament, fearing that I would receive it unworthily.<sup>124</sup>

Lutherans must not, however, be content simply to congratulate themselves that their sacramental theology is more Biblical and correct than that of the medieval Scholastics. As we read in the Large Catechism,

now that we have the right interpretation and teaching concerning the sacrament, there is also great need to admonish and encourage us so that we do not let this great a treasure, which is daily administered and distributed among Christians, pass by to no purpose. What I mean is that those who want to be Christians should prepare themselves to receive this blessed sacrament frequently. For we see that people are becoming lax and lazy about its observance. A great number of people who hear the gospel, now that the pope's nonsense has been abolished and we are freed from his compulsion and commands, let a year, or two, three, or more years go by without receiving the sacrament, as if they were such strong Christians that they have no need of it. Others let themselves be kept and deterred from it because we have taught that none should go unless they feel a hunger and thirst impelling them to it. Still others pretend that it is a matter of liberty, not of necessity, and that it is enough if they simply believe. Thus the great majority go so far that they become quite barbarous and ultimately despise both the sacrament and God's Word. Now it is true, as we have said, that no one under any circumstances should be forced or compelled, lest we institute a new slaughter of souls. Nevertheless, it must be understood that such people who abstain and absent themselves from the sacrament over a long period of time are not to be considered Christians. For Christ did not institute the sacrament for us to treat it as a spectacle, but he commanded his Christians to eat and drink it and thereby remember him. Indeed, true Christians who cherish and honor the sacrament should of their own accord urge and constrain themselves to go.<sup>125</sup>

Luther's reference here to a "slaughter of souls" hearkens back to the situation that obtained before the Reformation had restored the pure gospel of the sinner's justification by faith alone to its proper, central place in the church – and along with it, an understanding that a believer's "worthiness" before God consists in the imputed righteousness of Christ as received by faith, and not in the inherent righteousness of the Christian himself. In the 1534 sermon, Luther comments on this too, stating that – in regard to the Lord's Supper – the pope made

a bad situation even worse, and commanded that at least once a year everyone must receive it, regardless of whether the people feared the Sacrament or not. And those who refused to go once a year were excommunicated. Isn't that a deplorable outrage and a terrible Supper, in which the recipients were unwilling, but were compelled to go? ...the Lord's Supper could not bring forth the desired fruit among the people under the papacy. But because it was received with this attitude, the heart had to conclude: You are not clean, you are not worthy of this food, you cannot properly enjoy it. Nevertheless, they

were compelled to receive it, or, as disobedient children of the church, suffer excommunication. It is not difficult to understand then that there was neither comfort nor joy in it.<sup>126</sup>

Communicants in pre-Reformation times had been inadequately instructed in the true nature of justification and faith. These communicants – who were fearfully aware of the apostolic warnings against an unworthy reception of the sacrament, but who were ordered to commune on pain of excommunication anyway – felt themselves quite literally to be in a “damned if you do and damned if you don’t” situation. We can understand why Reformation-era Lutheran pastors would realize that it might take some time for people who had been spiritually traumatized in this way to be brought around to a proper evangelical understanding of the true comforting purpose of the Lord’s Supper. In the Large Catechism, Luther accordingly emphasizes the need to be patient and empathetic with those of tender conscience, who need some gentle encouragement in regard to their communion participation:

But suppose you say, “What if I feel that I am unfit?” Answer: This is my struggle as well, especially inherited from the old order under the pope when we tortured ourselves to become so perfectly pure that God might not find the least blemish in us. Because of this we became so timid that everyone was thrown into consternation, saying, “Alas, you are not worthy!” Then nature and reason begin to contrast our unworthiness with this great and precious blessing, and it appears like a dark lantern in contrast to the bright sun, or as manure in contrast to jewels; then because they see this, such people will not go to the sacrament and wait until they are prepared, until one week passes into another and one half-year into yet another. If you choose to fix your eye on how good and pure you are, to wait until nothing torments you, you will never go. For this reason we must make a distinction here among people. Those who are impudent and unruly ought to be told to stay away, for they are not ready to receive the forgiveness of sins because they do not desire it and do not want to be righteous. The others, however, who are not so callous and dissolute but would like to be good, should not absent themselves, even though in other respects they are weak and frail. ... People never get to the point that they do not retain many common infirmities in their flesh and blood. People with such misgivings must learn that it is the highest art to realize that this sacrament does not depend upon our worthiness. For we are not baptized because we are worthy and holy, nor do we come to confession as if we were pure and without sin; on the contrary, we come as poor, miserable people, precisely because we are unworthy. The only exception would be the person who desires no grace and absolution and has no intention of improving.<sup>127</sup>

In the sixteenth century, a primary pastoral issue in dealing with communicants and would-be communicants was the need to encourage those who *should* commune, to *do* so; and to help them get over whatever hesitancy they may have had in this respect, due to a misunderstanding of what constitutes “worthiness” for communion. In our time, however, one suspects that a more common problem would involve dealing with communicants who thoughtlessly, and as a matter of habit, partake of the Lord’s Supper whenever it is celebrated, without adequately reflecting beforehand on their sinfulness and need for forgiveness; without a heartfelt despising of their sins; and without a reverent recognition of the true and miraculous presence of the divine-human Christ in the sacrament. Faithful pastors today often need to guide a nonchalant individual “who desires no grace and absolution and has no intention of improving” toward a proper seriousness and earnestness – regarding his embracing of the Christian faith in general, and regarding his participation in the Lord’s Supper in particular.

As a Lutheran pastor in such circumstances preaches the law, so as to instill a genuine contrition for sin in his hearers, he will remember that

contrition is the genuine terror of the conscience that feels God's wrath against sin and grieves that it has sinned. This contrition takes place when the Word of God denounces sin... In these terrors the conscience experiences the wrath of God against sin, something that is unknown to those who walk around in carnal security. It sees the rottenness of sin and deeply grieves that it has sinned.<sup>128</sup>

An immediate follow-up to this kind of preaching – when it has had this kind of humbling effect – will, of course, be a proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, since,

in the midst of these terrors, the gospel about Christ (which freely promises the forgiveness of sins through Christ) ought to be set forth to consciences. They should therefore believe that on account of Christ their sins are freely forgiven. This faith uplifts, sustains, and gives life to the contrite, according to the passage [Rom. 5:1]: “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God.” This faith receives the forgiveness of sins. This faith justifies before God...<sup>129</sup>

And this faith also properly yearns for the deeper and more intimate comfort of divine pardon and sustaining grace that is offered and received in the sacrament of Jesus' body and blood.

Luther gives us a basic summary of his views on when penitent and believing Christians should commune, in his exegesis of a crucial phrase in Christ's Words of Institution:

Indeed, precisely his words, “as often as you do it,” imply that we should do it frequently. And they are added because he wishes the sacrament to be free, not bound to a special time like the Passover, which the Jews were obligated to eat only once a year, precisely on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first full moon, without variation of a single day. He means to say: “I am instituting a Passover or Supper for you, which you shall enjoy not just on this one evening of the year, but frequently, whenever and wherever you will, according to everyone's opportunity and need, being bound to no special place or time” (although the pope afterward perverted it and turned it back into a Jewish feast).<sup>130</sup>

In a similar vein, Chemnitz writes that it is

wholly certain and clear from the institution of Christ that, as partaking of the Lord's Supper is not bound to a certain or fixed time of the year, so also it is not to be used only once a year. For Christ sets the words “as often as you drink,” etc., over against the Jewish Passover, which was celebrated only once a year, and at a fixed time of the year. Nevertheless, He did not want to permit believers to use Communion arbitrarily, so that it would make no difference whether they used it occasionally or not at all or when they pleased, as one does in matters indifferent. For He does not say: “When it pleases you,” as in indifferent matters, but says: “As often as you do this.” It is not the same as with Baptism; we are baptized only once, but it is not sufficient to use the Lord's Supper only once. For He says: “As often as,” in order that we may eat of that bread and drink of that cup as often as we recognize and feel that that medicine and remedy which our Good Samaritan pours into our wounds is useful and necessary to us, so long only as we examine ourselves lest we receive it to judgment.<sup>131</sup>

As a matter of principle, Luther refuses to get specific in telling believers how often they should receive the Lord's Supper. If pressed he would probably say, no more than “daily,” and no less than “around four times a year,” but he would not go beyond that.<sup>132</sup> Because of his conviction that we “should not fix any law or time or place for it,” Luther was opposed to the papal and conciliar decree of 1215 which said, in effect, that Easter is the correct “time” for

people to commune. He would certainly also be uncomfortable with any congregational “communion schedule” that artificially limited the members’ opportunities for communion to a certain Sunday of the month, thereby implying that the other Sundays of the month are *not* the correct “time” for people to commune. The sentiment that “We are to come to it as often as it is celebrated,”<sup>133</sup> though well-intentioned, is likewise not fully compatible with the Reformers’ basic conviction that no trace of coercion or “law” is to be present in the consideration of this question, either explicitly or implicitly. Again, to quote the Apology, “we do not prescribe a set time because not everyone is prepared in the same way at the same time.” From the perspective of the gospel, he who is both Gift and Giver in this holy Supper graciously *invites* us to come. He does not order us to go. Through his Word he lovingly *draws* us to his body and blood, and to the forgiveness that they have won for us. He does not push us.

Nevertheless, the Reformers did continually admonish and encourage the people to “prepare themselves to receive this blessed sacrament frequently.” As a result, they were able to say two things: First, that “most people in our churches use the sacraments – absolution and the Lord’s Supper – many times during the course of a year”; and second, that “Every Lord’s Day many in our circles use the Lord’s Supper, but only after they have been instructed, examined, and absolved.”<sup>134</sup> And so, in the words of Stephenson,

While the Reformer can enjoin weekly celebration of the Sacrament on the clergy, he noticeably refrains from ordering the laity to commune weekly. His reticence here perfectly parallels his softly-softly approach toward accustoming the laity once again to receive the Supper in both kinds. Age-old custom can be overcome only gradually, and just as it would take time for the laity to get used to receiving the Chalice, so likewise gentle pastoral care and unremitting instruction would be needed in order to make inroads into the medieval habit of communing only once or thrice a year. But Luther’s refusal to dragoon the laity to the altar must not be so interpreted that we fail to mark his clear longing for frequent Communion to be the rule and not the exception of congregational life.<sup>135</sup>

One of the main hurdles that a pastor who wishes to introduce the weekly offering of communion in his congregation often faces, is the common assumption among modern Lutherans that they are all expected to participate in the Lord’s Supper every time the Lord’s Supper is celebrated. Lutheran laymen frequently resist the introduction of every-Sunday communion, because they do not want to feel pressured to commune every Sunday if this has not been their custom. And they anticipate that if they were to refrain from communing on an occasion when others are going forward to the altar, their fellow congregants would notice that they are remaining in the pew, and would entertain critical thoughts about their spirituality and religious devotion.

Originally, when the Lord’s Supper was offered in the Lutheran Church on every Sunday and festival, no one had the idea that every member was obligated to commune on every Sunday and festival. Each member went to communion according to the guidance of his own conscience, in keeping with his own sense of his spiritual need, and in the context of his own personal discipline of preparation through self-examination and confession of sins. As long as an individual communed at least three or four times a year, his pastor would not probe him concerning any perceived shortcoming in his faith or sacramental piety. Later, however, in the age of Pietism, preparation for communion became an elaborate “group” activity, and a congregation’s receiving of the Lord’s Supper likewise became a planned-out “group” activity. This was when most Lutherans became accustomed to the practice of communing whenever the Lord’s Supper was celebrated, because it was not celebrated very often any more. If an individual for some reason might refrain from receiving communion on those four Sundays per year when it was offered, then he would not be able to receive it at all. So, Lutherans got used

to making themselves ready for the sacrament, and receiving it, at those times when it was actually going to be available. And if they wanted to commune four times per year, they would accordingly prepare for the sacrament, and receive it, each time it was available.

A pastor today who seeks to increase the availability of the sacrament in his congregation needs to find a way to disentangle that availability from any unintended implication or impression that every member is supposed to commune every time. It is well and good if some or all of his members *want* to commune every time. But if some of them do *not* want to, it should be made clear to everyone that no judgments are to be made concerning the spiritual life of such members, simply on the basis of how often those members choose to participate in the sacrament. It also needs to be made clear to each communicant that, as he prayerfully considers the question of the frequency with which he will partake of the Lord's Supper, his perception of what other people may think about his sacramental piety is not one of the factors that he should take into account.

## X.

At the time of the Reformation "Many Wittenbergers received the Lord's body and blood each week."<sup>136</sup> And how often did Luther himself commune? Before we answer that question we must remind ourselves that Luther would likely object very strenuously to any desire on our part to imitate him in our own sacramental life. He would probably scold us with words like these:

What is Luther? After all, the teaching is not mine. Neither was I crucified for anyone.<sup>137</sup>

Yet it is a historically interesting question that can teach us something about Lutheran sacramental piety. In any case, it is reported of Luther, during the time of his sojourn at Coburg Castle in 1530, "that he went to the Lord's Table every fortnight; and that he followed up this custom also in after years."<sup>138</sup> Dietrich reports that "it was Luther's practice always that he generally went to the sacrament every 14 days or at least every 3 weeks and desired absolution beforehand..."<sup>139</sup>

Many aspects of Luther's sacramental devotion seem strange to people whose religious sensibilities have been molded by the post-Enlightenment world in which we now live. His retention of the elevation,<sup>140</sup> his profound concern over spilled or dropped communion elements,<sup>141</sup> his disapproval of mixing *reliquiae* with unconsecrated elements,<sup>142</sup> and similar ideas are often dismissed as insignificant remnants of Luther's superstitious Roman past that need not be taken seriously by us. This may or may not be true. We do know, however, that Luther did identify one feature of his sacramental devotion very definitely as an undesirable carry-over from his monkish days, which he was never able fully to shake. It was his hesitancy to receive communion as often as he might, due to his feeling of personal unworthiness. As quoted above, Luther describes this as his own continuing "struggle," which he "inherited from the old order under the pope when we tortured ourselves to become so perfectly pure that God might not find the least blemish in us." And yet, in spite of this lingering "thorn in the flesh," he received the body and blood of his forgiving and loving Savior, on average, every other week.

With reference to the earlier centuries of Christian history, Chemnitz describes, ideally, the kind of gospel-induced communion frequency that he would no doubt hope to see someday in the renewed Church of the Reformation. He writes that

the rule about when and how often one should go to Communion must be taken: I. From the teaching about the fruit and power of the Eucharist, namely, when and as often as we recognize that we have need of this power; II. From the teaching about self-examination, lest we receive it unworthily. On this basis people are to be taught, admonished, and exhorted to more diligent and frequent use of the Eucharist. For

because Christ says: "As often as you do this," it is wholly His will that those who are His disciples should do this frequently. Therefore those are not true and faithful ministers of Christ who in any manner whatever lead or frighten people away from more frequent use and reception of the Eucharist. There are beautiful examples of frequent use of the Eucharist from the true antiquity. Some had the custom of receiving the Eucharist daily, some twice a week, some on the Lord's day, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, some only on the Lord's Day.<sup>143</sup>

C. F. W. Walther builds on this observation, historically and devotionally, by explaining that

The first Christians celebrated it almost daily; especially in times of persecution, in order to be daily ready for death. ... The Holy Supper was regarded as the most glorious divine Armory, in which one receives the most invincible weapons for the spiritual battle. ... The holy Supper with the body and blood of Jesus Christ is the new Tree of Life, which stood in Paradise, which Christ has now again planted in His kingdom of Grace. ... O adorable, comforting mystery! The holy flesh of God, which the angels adore and the archangels reverence, becomes a Food for sinners! Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, but still more the believing soul, which enjoys such great gifts!<sup>144</sup>

And so, how often should the Lord's Supper be received? In the words of the Large Catechism, it should be received "frequently, whenever and wherever you will, according to everyone's opportunity and need, being bound to no special place or time." Chemnitz elaborates:

Therefore, you ask, how often would be enough to have been a guest of this Supper? 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 by consideration of how necessary [and] likewise how salutary and profitable the use of this Supper is for us.<sup>145</sup>

And in the words of Gerhard, "How often this sacrament should be taken every year, cannot be prescribed definitely and by some general rule, but must be left free for the approval of each one's conscience and for his piety."<sup>146</sup> This, too, is the clear and unambiguous teaching of the Lutheran Confessions.

## XI.

Most of the people in Confessional Lutheran circles who have raised the issue of Communion frequency in recent years have done so in the interest of stimulating a renewed appreciation of the central importance of this sacrament – in the life of the church, and in the life of each individual Christian – especially in reaction to those enduring influences within Lutheranism that have not emphasized this. The present writer wholeheartedly concurs in this sentiment. He concurs furthermore in Paul Zeller Strodach's opinion – expressed many decades ago – that

The infrequent use of this holy privilege is not only to be deplored, but an effort should be made to correct it, since it is [a] part of the congregation's life which needs a "reformation." But this must be done in one way only, by creating a fervent desire for it, and not by compulsion or legislation. The practice of the Early Church was to gather for Holy Communion: that and the hearing of the Word were their prime objectives. This practice continued in every land and age where the Gospel was carried and disciples were made. Neither the Reformers nor the Reformation Movement attacked or objected

to its use every Lord's Day, but only to the superstitions and abominations of the Mass practices. Celebration of the Holy Communion every Lord's Day is still found in some parts of the Church of the Reformation to this day. Whatever good or indifferent reasons may have brought about the once or twice or four or six times a year practices in this country in years gone by, they hardly obtain now.<sup>147</sup>

There truly is no good reason for "conservative" Lutherans to conserve the dubious sacramental *practices* of seventeenth-century Pietism and eighteenth-century Rationalism, while at the same time attempting to conserve the sound sacramental *theology* of sixteenth-century Confessionalism! Simply put, in those places in the world where the Lutheran Church is being newly established or re-established, this sacramental incongruity should not be introduced. And in those places in the world where the Lutheran Church has inherited this sacramental incongruity from generations past, it should indeed, in an evangelical manner, be corrected.

To pastors who would like to introduce the weekly availability of Holy Communion in their parishes, the present writer would recommend something akin to the approach that he has used in all three of the parishes he has served during his ministry, in accomplishing that goal. In each case, he arrived in a congregation that did not offer the sacrament every week. But also in each case, he made it known at the beginning of his ministry in that place that, as a Lutheran pastor, he understood himself to be obligated by his Confessional subscription to administer the sacrament to properly-prepared communicant members of the church who desired to receive it, regardless of which Sunday of the month it may be. And so he announced that on those Sundays when the Lord's Supper was not scheduled in the public service, it would nevertheless still be available in a brief spoken service after the (public) service of the Word, for any communicants who wished to receive it on those days. In this way, a "high mass / low mass" pattern was established in each church. In all three of these churches, the Lord's Supper was initially celebrated in the main public service approximately half the time – every other week – and was offered in a brief spoken service after the main public service approximately half the time – again, every other week. It was always announced in the bulletin on the "off" Sundays that the Supper would be available if there were communicants present who wished to receive it. And so, the "low mass" observance of the Sacrament, when it did occur, was still a *public* observance, theologically speaking.

In the present writer's first church, during the two years he was there, people asked to commune on an "off" Sunday on only two occasions. When he arrived at his second church, however, there were immediately about a dozen people who stayed for communion on those Sundays, and the average number had increased to about 18 or 20 by the time he left seven years later. Under his successor in that church, as the number of communicants staying for the spoken service continued to grow, the congregation took the natural step of beginning to celebrate the sacrament in the main public service every week. There were no protests, because by that time the number of people staying for communion on the "low mass" days – almost approaching the numbers who were communing on the "high mass" days – had made it obvious that this was the proper thing to do. Now, in the present writer's third congregation, he is following this "high mass / low mass" practice once again. There are at present usually somewhere between 10 and 15 people who remain for the Supper on the Sundays when it is not offered in the main part of the service. Sometimes there are more.

The present writer has never given the members of any of his churches the impression that a congregational voters' assembly or a board of elders have the authority to determine whether or not he, as the called steward of the mysteries of God, will administer communion to congregational members in good standing who ask for it. The majority may not properly interpose themselves between a minority and their Savior in such a way, or impose on the minority the majority's personal devotional preferences regarding the frequency of sacramental

reception. But in taking the patient and pastorally-sensitive approach that he has taken in regard to the *form and manner* of making the sacrament available on a weekly basis, the present writer has also not insisted that this needs to be done, immediately, in the main public part of the service. He has allowed his churches to grow into that over time, according to their own natural pace, as more and more people would decide to stay for communion on the “low mass” Sundays. And in the meantime, in his preaching and teaching on both “high mass” days and “low mass” days, he has sought to orient his people toward a deeper appreciation of the blessings of communion, and toward a properly-motivated desire for a more frequent reception of communion.

A Lutheran worshiper anywhere in the world should ordinarily be able to receive the Lord’s Supper from his pastor whenever he in his conscience senses a need for it, regardless of which Sunday of the month it may be. The questions posed by Edgar S. Brown are really the questions posed by the conscience of the church, as she continually craves the grace and blessing of her divine Head in both Word and Sacrament:

To be sure, God’s grace comes equally in both sermon and communion, not to mention baptism, absolution, counseling. This our confessions make quite clear. Concerning Word and sacrament, they say, “The effect of both is the same.” Still, if a worshiper who has moved through the stages of worship – confession and absolution, praise and thanksgiving, instruction and admonition, prayer and offering – is then dismissed without an opportunity to receive the assurance of God’s presence in the form instituted by the Savior, isn’t something wrong? One who feels this matter keenly cannot help but know frustration. To be sure he may not wish to commune every Sunday, but shouldn’t the opportunity be there?<sup>148</sup>

*O Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You, that of Your infinite mercy You have instituted this Your Sacrament, in which we eat Your body and drink Your blood: Grant us, we beseech You, by Your Holy Spirit, that we may not receive this gift unworthily, but that we may confess our sins, remember Your agony and death, believe the forgiveness of sin, and day by day grow in faith and love, until we obtain eternal salvation; through You, who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.*<sup>149</sup>

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## ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup>The Words of Institution, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (Saint Louis: MorningStar Music Publishers, Inc., 1996), pp. 54, 78-79, 102-03.

<sup>2</sup>This subject was previously addressed in a brief article by the present writer, with special reference to his own church body, in David Jay Webber, “Communion Frequency in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod: A Re-Evaluation,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3 (September 1991), pp. 53-65.

<sup>3</sup>*Good News*, Vol. 2 (1996), No. 3, p. 17. In the original, there is a typographical error in the Confessional reference (a missing “X”). This has been corrected here.

<sup>4</sup>Augsburg Confession XXIV:34-36 (German), in *The Book of Concord*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 70. The John Chrysostom reference is to *Homilies on Ephesians*, Homily 3.

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<sup>5</sup>Lyle W. Lange, in *Our Great Heritage*, edited by Lange (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), Vol. 1, p. 326.

<sup>6</sup>New American Standard Bible, © 1995, The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph A. Seiss, "Our Confessions in English," *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. I, No. 3 (July 1882), p. 216.

<sup>8</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:64, Kolb/Wengert p. 604.

<sup>9</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession X:1, Kolb/Wengert p. 184.

<sup>10</sup>Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper" (1528); quoted in Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:78, Kolb/Wengert p. 607.

<sup>11</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:75, Kolb/Wengert p. 606.

<sup>12</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV:1, Kolb/Wengert p. 258.

<sup>13</sup>St. Epiphanius, *Heresies* III:22; quoted in Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV:8, Kolb/Wengert p. 259.

<sup>14</sup>Large Catechism V:39, Kolb/Wengert p. 470.

<sup>15</sup>Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 13.

<sup>16</sup>Martin Luther, Letter to Lazarus Spengler (August 15, 1528); quoted in John R. Stephenson, "The Holy Eucharist: At the Center or Periphery of the Church's Life in Luther's Thinking?", in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus* (edited by Kurt E. Marquart, Stephenson, and Bjarne W. Teigen) (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985), pp. 161-62. Another translation of this letter is "To Lazarus Spengler," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 49 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 204-10.

<sup>17</sup>John R. Stephenson, "The Holy Eucharist: At the Center or Periphery of the Church's Life in Luther's Thinking?", p. 158. Stephenson cites as examples the 1586 Church Order for Saxony and the 1526 Church Order for Schwäbisch-Hall.

<sup>18</sup>Martin Chemnitz, John Gerhard, and Polycarp Leyser, *Harmonia Quatuor Evangelistarum* (Frankfort and Hamburg, 1652), Vol. II, p. 1085; quoted in Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* (corrected edition) (Fort Wayne, Indiana: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1995), p. 200.

<sup>19</sup>New American Bible, © 1970, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

<sup>20</sup>New King James Version, © 1985, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

<sup>21</sup>*Christian Worship: Handbook* (edited by Gary Baumler and Kermit Moldenhauer) (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), p. 44.

<sup>22</sup>Augsburg Confession XXIV:41 (German), Kolb/Wengert p. 72.

<sup>23</sup>Friedrich Lochner, *Der Hauptgottesdienst der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1895), p. 6; quoted in Kurt E. Marquart, "The Word As Life," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (Spring 1968), p. 51.

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<sup>24</sup>Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The Lutheran Movement in England* (revised) (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1908), p. 305. See also Joseph Stump, *The Christian Faith* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), p. 358.

<sup>25</sup>Hermann Sasse, *This is my body* (revised edition) (Adelaide, South Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), p. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Hermann Sasse, *This is my body* (revised edition), p. 2.

<sup>27</sup>Hermann Sasse, *This is my body* (revised edition), p. 2.

<sup>28</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XV:42, Kolb/Wengert pp. 229.

<sup>29</sup>Augsburg Confession XXIV:21-23 (German), Kolb/Wengert pp. 68, 70.

<sup>30</sup>Herman A. Preus, *A Theology to Live By* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), pp. 156-57.

<sup>31</sup>Herman A. Preus, *A Theology to Live By*, p. 157.

<sup>32</sup>*Consensus Tigurinus* (1549), Article XXII; quoted in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 295.

<sup>33</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:9, Kolb/Wengert p. 594.

<sup>34</sup>Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper" (1528); quoted in Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:32, Kolb/Wengert p. 598.

<sup>35</sup>Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper" (1528); quoted in Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:33, Kolb/Wengert p. 598.

In the second half of the twentieth century, many professedly Lutheran church bodies have formally declared altar and pulpit fellowship with the Reformed, via the *Leuenberg Agreement* in Europe, the *Formula of Agreement* in the United States, and similar instruments in other parts of the world. The documents which established these fellowship relationships are, for the most part, characterized by a deliberate ambiguity in wording on the historically decisive points, so that each side can read its own opinions into the text.

The *Leuenberg Agreement* of 1973 has served as the template for such documents. At the very beginning of its text it is asserted that "the churches assenting to this Agreement – namely, Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe along with the Union churches which grew out of them, and the related pre-Reformation churches, the Waldensian Church and the Church of the Czech Brethren – affirm together the common understanding of the gospel elaborated below. This common understanding of the gospel enables them to declare and to realize church fellowship" (*Leuenberg Agreement*, in *The Leuenberg Agreement and Lutheran-Reformed Relationships: Evaluations by North American and European Theologians* [edited by William G. Rusch and Daniel F. Martensen] [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989], p. 144). The specific formulation that purports to settle the deep dispute between the Lutherans and the Reformed on the Sacrament of the Altar is this: "In the Lord's Supper the risen Jesus Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thus gives himself unreservedly to all who receive the bread and wine: faith receives the Lord's Supper for salvation, unfaith for judgment. We cannot separate communion with Jesus Christ in his body and blood from the act of eating and drinking. To be concerned about the manner of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in abstraction from this act is to run the risk of obscuring the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Where such a consensus exists between the churches, the condemnations pronounced by the Reformation confessions are inapplicable to the doctrinal position of these churches" (p. 149).

Where we would want to see an acknowledgment that all communicants – both the worthy, and the unworthy and impious – orally receive the true body and blood of Jesus Christ in the consecrated bread and wine, we see instead an acknowledgment that "the risen Jesus Christ" gives "himself" to all

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who receive the bread and wine. When the body and blood of Christ *are* mentioned, it seems to be more a reference to what was given up for all on the cross, than to what is objectively received by all in the bread and wine of the sacrament. And in the sacrament, the body and blood of Christ are not tied to the consecrated bread and wine as much as they are tied to the act of eating and drinking. Historically, the Reformed were always willing to say, in a general and vague way, that “Jesus” is in the Lord’s Supper; that those who partake of the Lord’s Supper in faith receive “Jesus” by means of their faith; and even that those who do have a true faith are somehow connected to the *body and blood* of Jesus – distant though they are from this earth – by means of their connection to the *Spirit* of Jesus. What they would never say – and what the *Leuenberg Agreement* does not say – is that the body and blood of Jesus are specifically and objectively present *in the consecrated bread and wine of the sacrament*. The confession of orthodox Lutheranism is herein surrendered. Any church that subscribes the *Leuenberg Agreement*, or any similar agreement based upon it, as a genuine settlement of Lutheran-Reformed differences, thereby ceases to be an orthodox Lutheran church.

Such a way of proceeding is obviously not compatible with the theology or ecumenical principles of the Formula of Concord. The Formula rejects the teaching both of the crass and explicit Zwinglians, and of those Reformed “sacramentarians” who employ Lutheranesque terminology, but who still deny what is at the heart of the dispute – namely, a real and objective presence of the real body and blood of Christ, in the blessed bread and wine of the Supper. The Formula accordingly recognizes the fact “that there are two kinds of sacramentarians. There are the crude sacramentarians, who state in plain language what they believe in their hearts: that in the Holy Supper there is nothing more than bread and wine present, nothing more distributed and received with the mouth. Then there are the cunning sacramentarians, the most dangerous kind, who in part appear to use our language and who pretend that they also believe in a true presence of the true, essential, living body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, but that this takes place spiritually, through faith. Yet, under the guise of such plausible words, they retain the former, crude opinion, that nothing more than bread and wine is present in the Holy Supper and received there by mouth. For ‘spiritually’ means to them nothing other than ‘the spirit of Christ’ that is present, or ‘the power of the absent body of Christ and his merit.’ The body of Christ, according to this opinion, is, however, in no way or form present, but it is only up there in the highest heaven; to this body we lift ourselves into heaven through the thoughts of our faith. There we should seek his body and blood, but never in the bread and wine of the Supper” (Formula of Concord, Epitome VII:3-5, Kolb/Wengert p. 504).

The *Leuenberg Agreement*, and other ecumenical instruments that have been drafted in its spirit and style, are not “crude sacramentarian” documents. That we will concede. But they *are* “cunning sacramentarian” documents.

<sup>36</sup>G. S. Seaman, “The Administration of the Lord’s Supper in Different Ages of the Church,” *Memoirs of the Lutheran Liturgical Association, Vols. I-VII* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: The Lutheran Liturgical Association, 1906), Vol. III, p. 6. Emphases added.

<sup>37</sup>Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (revised edition) (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), pp. 79-80.

<sup>38</sup>Martin Luther, “Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament,” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 36 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 256-57.

<sup>39</sup>Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1871), p. 655. Emphasis in original. Punctuation slightly revised. See also Henry Eyster Jacobs, *A Summary of the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1905), pp. 366-67; Robert D. Preus, *Getting into The Theology of Concord* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), p. 71; and Herman A. Preus, *A Theology to Live By*, p. 166.

<sup>40</sup>John R. Stephenson, “The Holy Eucharist: At the Center or Periphery of the Church’s Life in Luther’s Thinking?”, p. 158.

<sup>41</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VIII:78-79, Kolb/Wengert p. 631.

<sup>42</sup>Large Catechism V:32, Kolb/Wengert p. 470.

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- <sup>43</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession X:4, Kolb/Wengert p. 185.
- <sup>44</sup>Large Catechism V:66-68, Kolb/Wengert pp. 473-74.
- <sup>45</sup>See Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper* (translated by J. A. O. Preus) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), especially pp. 185-94.
- <sup>46</sup>Small Catechism VI:6, Kolb/Wengert p. 362.
- <sup>47</sup>Large Catechism V:23-27, Kolb/Wengert p. 469.
- <sup>48</sup>Smalcald Articles III, IV, Kolb/Wengert p. 319.
- <sup>49</sup>Kurt E. Marquart, "Liturgical Commonplaces," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (October 1978), p. 335.
- <sup>50</sup>Wilhelm Loehe, *Agenda for North American Congregations*; quoted in *Christian Worship: Handbook*, p. 44.
- <sup>51</sup>Philip Melancthon, Letter to George, Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach (1531) (CR II:538); quoted in Edward T. Horn, "The Reformation of Worship in the City of Nürnberg," *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (April 1892), p. 138.
- <sup>52</sup>Kurt E. Marquart, "Liturgical Commonplaces," pp. 335-36. The quotations are from *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53, p. 24.
- <sup>53</sup>Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (revised edition), p. 244.
- <sup>54</sup>Martin Schmidt, "Pietism," in *Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* (edited by Julius Bodensieck) (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), Vol. III, pp. 1898-99.
- <sup>55</sup>Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (revised edition), p. 146.
- <sup>56</sup>Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (revised edition), pp. 244-45.
- <sup>57</sup>Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (revised edition), p. 245.
- <sup>58</sup>John A. W. Haas, "Rationalism," in *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (edited by Haas and Henry Eyster Jacobs) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 402.
- <sup>59</sup>Wilhelm Friedrich Hufnagel, *Liturgische Blätter*; quoted in J. F. Ohl, "The Liturgical Deterioration of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Memoirs of the Lutheran Liturgical Association, Volumes III-VII* (Pittsburgh: Lutheran Liturgical Association, 1906), Vol. IV, p. 77.
- <sup>60</sup>J. F. Ohl, "The Liturgical Deterioration of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," p. 75. The quotations are from Christian Friedrich Sintenis, *Agende* (Leipzig: 1808).
- <sup>61</sup>Günther Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), pp. 131-32.
- <sup>62</sup>John R. Stephenson, "The Holy Eucharist: At the Center or Periphery of the Church's Life in Luther's Thinking?," p. 158.
- <sup>63</sup>"Aus Amerika," *Zeitschrift fuer Protestantismus und Kirche*, Vol. 11 (1846), pp. 263-64; quoted in E. Clifford Nelson, editor, *The Lutherans in North America* (revised edition) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 220.

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<sup>64</sup>S[amuel]. S[imon]. Schmucker, *The American Lutheran Church* (Springfield, Ohio: D. Harbaugh, 1851), p. 270.

<sup>65</sup>B[eale]. M. Schmucker, "Charles Porterfield Krauth"; in J. C. Jensson, editor, *American Lutheran Biographies* (Milwaukee: 1890), p. 423.

A semi-annual observance of the Lord's Supper seems to have been the standard practice in the east coast tradition of American Lutheranism during this timeframe. The present writer owns a transcript of a nineteenth-century church register of his home congregation, Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germantown, New York. This transcript includes a record of communicants from 1818 to 1859. Except for occasional administrations of communion in the homes of the sick, and except for one year (1853) when communion was also celebrated on Christmas, the Lord's Supper was held only twice per year during these four decades: once in the spring, and once in the autumn. The congregation was a member-church of the New York Ministerium, which belonged to the General Synod during much of this period. During the years when the present writer was growing up in this congregation, in the 1960s and 1970s (at which time it was affiliated with the Lutheran Church in America), the Lord's Supper was celebrated on the second Sunday of each month and on Maundy Thursday. This may have fallen short of the Confessional ideal of offering the sacrament on every Sunday and festival, but when compared to the practice of that church a century earlier, it represented a marked improvement.

<sup>66</sup>Johann Heinrich Philipp Graebner, *Die frankischen Colonien des Saginaw Thales, im Staate Michigan* [The Franconian Colonies of the Saginaw Valley, in the State of Michigan] (1890) (translated by Esther Meyer Stahlke). Online at <http://andrsn.stanford.edu/jhpgbio.html>

Kenneth W. Wieting notes, on the basis of the reminiscences of Ludwig Fuerbringer, that Fuerbringer's "home congregation in Frankenmuth, Michigan, celebrated the Lord's Supper every Sunday in the 1880s," and that the four Missouri Synod congregations that existed in Saint Louis during that same period – all of which had been founded by C. F. W. Walther – "celebrated the Lord's Supper every second week" (*The Blessings of Weekly Communion* [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006], p. 145).

<sup>67</sup>F[rederick]. R. Webber, *Studies in the Liturgy* (Erie, Pa.: Ashby Printing Company, 1938), pp. 205-06. The present writer is not related to the author of this book.

Most of the Lutheran Church Orders of the sixteenth century called for the Lord's Supper to be made available to the people according to the pattern Webber describes, but not all of them. The 1597 *Kirchenordnung* for Amsterdam (where Dutch Reformed influence was strong) called for the Lord's Supper to be administered on the first Sunday of each month and on "Easter, Whitsunday and Kirmess" (B[eale]. M. Schmucker, "The Lutheran Church in the City of New York During the Second Century of its History," *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. III, No. 4 [October 1884], p. 284). This Church Order (in its various revisions) was normative among the Dutch and Palatine Lutherans in colonial New York and New Jersey, and it also served as the basis for the Church Order that was used by the Lutheran Salzburgers in eighteenth-century Georgia. See David Jay Webber, "Berkenmeyer and Lutheran Orthodoxy in New York," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Spring 1987), pp. 19-31. See also David Jay Webber, "Church and State, Congregation and Synod: ... With Special Reference to the Church Polity of the Lutheran Church in the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (December 2003), pp. 360-400. Closer in spirit to the Confessional pattern were the directives of the *Grosse Kirchenordnung* of Württemberg (1559): "At the start, the Supper of Christ shall be held in the principal cities every month and, where possible, every fourteen days; yes, it shall be held in the churches often and frequently on the Sundays and other festival days, so often as communicants are present and have announced themselves for the sacrament, as stipulated above. The ministers shall earnestly admonish the people and diligently teach them the value and need for receiving this sacrament, so that they gladly and frequently take part" (quoted in Lowell C. Green, "Apology 24 As Illuminated by the Communion Rules and Practices of Sixteenth-Century Lutheranism" [unpublished ms., 1996], p. 20; see also Lowell C. Green, "How Frequently Was Communion Available in the 16th Century?," *Concordia Review*, Vol. I, No. 2 [July 1975], p. 3).

<sup>68</sup>Kurt E. Marquart, "Liturgical Commonplaces," pp. 343-44.

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Joseph Herl reminds us that among the early Lutherans, “the Lord’s Supper was the center around which all other services revolved. Except for a few areas in the south that were influenced by the Swiss Reformation, the Supper was offered every Lord’s day and holy day throughout Lutheran Germany. Several practices highlighted the importance of the sacrament: 1. Private confession before each reception of the sacrament was required in nearly all Lutheran territories. ... This practice not only assured the pastor that communicants were prepared for the sacrament, but also enabled him to count the communicants before consecrating the bread and wine. Thus the problem of what to do with the body and blood of Christ that remained after all had communed was avoided, as only enough for the announced communicants was consecrated. 2. The traditional vestment for Mass, the chasuble, was retained in many Lutheran churches. 3. With few exceptions, the Consecration, as it was called in the sixteenth century, was always sung. This practice was new with Luther; prior to his time in western Christianity, the priest said the Consecration softly so the people could not hear it. 4. Many Lutherans retained the Elevation, in which the priest raised the consecrated body of Christ aloft for the people to view. 5. In many Saxon churches, according to a contemporary report, the ringing of the Sanctus bell at the consecration of the bread and cup was retained into the eighteenth century. 6. Only ordained pastors distributed the sacrament. 7. Some churches used a houseling cloth to catch any crumbs that might fall from the host while it was being distributed. It was carried by an assistant and held underneath the chin of each communicant” (“Seven Habits of Highly Effective Liturgies: Insights from the Sixteenth through the Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Thine the Amen: Essays on Lutheran Church Music in Honor of Carl Schalk* [edited by Carlos R. Messerli] [Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2005], pp. 144-45).

<sup>69</sup>F[rederick]. R. Webber, *Studies in the Liturgy*, p. 206.

<sup>70</sup>*Lutheran Worship* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), pp. 144, 167, 187.

<sup>71</sup>*Lutheran Service Book* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), pp. 160, 176, 193.

<sup>72</sup>*Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), p. 20.

<sup>73</sup>*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, pp. 49, 72, 97.

<sup>74</sup>Norbert H. Mueller and George Kraus, editors, *Pastoral Theology* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), p. 97.

*Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House; and Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), prepared by the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (formerly the Canada District of the ALC), the Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, became the hymnal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada when that body was formed by the 1985 merger of the ELCC and the LCA – Canada Section. It also became the hymnal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America when that body was formed by the 1987 merger of the ALC, the LCA, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (an LCMS breakaway). The rubrics for the orders of service in *Lutheran Book of Worship* give directions about what to do when there is “no Communion” (pp. 65, 85, 106). *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006) is a more recent hymnal produced by the ELCA, and used also in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. The Introduction to this hymnal expresses a “commitment to gathering regularly around both God’s word and the holy supper” (p. 8). It offers ten different settings of the order for Holy Communion, but only one order for the Service of the Word (without Communion). The rubrics for that one non-sacramental Sunday service state: “Although a weekly celebration of the Lord’s supper is the norm, a service of the word of God is also celebrated regularly or occasionally in many places” (p. 210). The inclusion of this service is obviously a concession to churches that would be understood to have an abnormal liturgical and sacramental practice. It would seem, however, that the increased frequency of the Lord’s Supper in the ELCA (and in similar liberal or “mainstream” Lutheran churches in other parts of the world) is not the result of a return to classic Confessional patterns of belief and practice. The ELCA’s full altar and pulpit fellowship relationships with the Episcopal Church, the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, the Moravian Church, and the United Methodist Church clearly testify to the dominant influence of a new kind

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of ecumenical eucharistic theology that does not presuppose or require an unflinching conviction that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the consecrated bread and wine of the sacrament, and are really received – orally – by all communicants.

<sup>75</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV:1, Kolb/Wengert p. 258. Emphasis added.

<sup>76</sup>Augsburg Confession XXIV:5-6 (Latin), Kolb/Wengert p. 69.

<sup>77</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XV:41, Kolb/Wengert p. 229.

In the Lutheran churches of the sixteenth century, the pastor was not the only person responsible for the catechizing of children. Among the “ministers of the church,” he might share this duty with the schoolmaster in the boys’ school, with the schoolmistress in the girls’ school, and with the parish sexton/sacristan. It was also understood that the God-given duties of fathers and mothers included the catechizing of their children.

<sup>78</sup>Large Catechism, Preface: 1, Kolb/Wengert p. 383.

<sup>79</sup>Large Catechism, Preface: 2,5, Kolb/Wengert p. 383.

<sup>80</sup>Small Catechism, Preface: 10-12, Kolb/Wengert pp. 348-49.

<sup>81</sup>Large Catechism V:1-2, Kolb/Wengert p. 467. Punctuation slightly revised.

<sup>82</sup>Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II (translated by Fred Kramer) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), p. 302.

This leads to a practical question: “Do we hold that the exercise of church fellowship, especially...altar fellowship, can be decided in every instance solely on the basis of formal church membership, that is, on whether or not the person belongs to a congregation or synod in affiliation with us? No. Ordinarily this is the basis on which such a question is decided since church fellowship is exercised on the basis of one’s confession to the pure marks of the church, and ordinarily we express our confession by our church membership. There may be cases in the exercise of church fellowship where a person’s informal confession of faith must also be considered. This is especially true regarding the weak. But whether one is guided by a person’s formal or informal confession of faith, in either instance it must in principle be a confession to the full truth of God’s Word. In addition, special care must be exercised so as not to cause offense to others or to interfere with another man’s ministry. Further, we are not to judge harshly concerning the manner in which a brother pastor after much agonizing handles such difficult cases” (“A reply of the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations and of the ELS Board of Theology and Church Relations based on their synods’ public confession on the doctrine of church fellowship to a question regarding church fellowship raised by pastors from the Conference of Authentic Lutherans,” *Lutheran Sentinel*, Vol. 59, No. 14 [July 22, 1976], pp. 220-21).

<sup>83</sup>Augsburg Confession XXIV:7 (German), Kolb/Wengert p. 68.

<sup>84</sup>Edward T. Horn, “Liturgical Work of John Brenz,” *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. I, No. 4 (October 1882), pp. 281-83.

<sup>85</sup>Martin Luther, Letter to Nicholas Hausmann (1523); quoted in “Whether the Eucharist Should be Given to Children?,” *Lutheran Forum*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter 1996), p. 13. Emphasis added.

<sup>86</sup>Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II, pp. 165-66.

<sup>87</sup>Jacob Andreae, Martin Crucius, and Lucas Osiander, Correspondence with the Patriarch of Constantinople (1577); in George Mastrantonis, translator and editor, *Augsburg and Constantinople* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1982), p. 143. Translation slightly revised.

The earliest testimony in Christian history to the practice of infant communion (without preceding instruction) is in the writings of St. Cyprian, the third-century bishop of Carthage. But a contemporary

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document from Syria indicates that this was not the practice in the Near Eastern churches of that time. The *Didascalia Apostolorum* tells Christians to “honour the bishops, who have loosed you from sins, who by the water regenerated you, who filled you with the Holy Spirit, who reared you with the word as with milk, who bred you up with doctrine, who confirmed you with admonition, and made you to partake of the holy Eucharist of God, and made you partakers and joint heirs of the promise of God. These reverence...” ([edited by R. H. Connolly] [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929], p. 39). The church in Syria was culturally and geographically closer to the apostolic origins of Christianity than was the Latin church of North Africa. Among the Syrian Christians in the third century, one who had been baptized in infancy was then, over time, “reared” with the word, “bred up” with doctrine, and finally “confirmed” with admonition, before he was admitted to the eucharist. The sequence of episcopal ministrations as listed in the *Didascalia* indicates that this ecclesiastical writing is not chiefly referring to the baptism, and admission to communion, of adult catechumens and converts. If that were the case, then their being loosed from sins, their being regenerated in the water, and their being filled with the Holy Spirit, would come *after* their having received instruction in the word and in Christian doctrine, not before. See also Roger T. Beckwith, “Age of Admission to the Lord’s Supper,” *The Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2 (Winter 1976), pp. 125-27. And since we are speaking here of *Semitic* Christianity – which had likely preserved a greater consciousness of its Jewish roots than had other branches of the early church – it can be helpful to recall that “The *Mishnah* (M. Avot 5.21; M. Niddah 5.6) states that thirteen is the age when one’s vows become legally binding and when one must fulfill one’s religious and ethical duties” (William M. Cwirla [unpublished]). It is possible, then, that thirteen may also have been the approximate age at which children who had been raised from infancy in the Christian church in Syria were first admitted to the Lord’s Supper.

The Lord’s New Testament sacraments are constituted and defined by the divine words through which he originally instituted each sacrament, and through which he indicated the proper use of each sacrament. The Words of Institution for Baptism were *not* addressed to the *recipients* of the sacrament, but to its *ministrants*. In his institution of Baptism, Jesus told his disciples what they were to say as they baptized people from all nations. In contrast, the Words of Institution for Holy Communion, in the first celebration of that Supper, were addressed to the disciples *as communicants*, to whom the body and blood of Christ were being offered. The character of the baptismal institution allows for Baptism to be received passively, such as by an infant, whose intellect is not being directly engaged by the baptismal Words. But the character of the eucharistic institution does not allow for that sacrament to be received passively, by one who is not listening to, and reflecting on, the eucharistic Words that are addressed to him, and that require his attention. Martin Chemnitz picks up on this when he observes that “Paul shows (1 Cor. 11:23-34) *from the rule of the institution* that some among the Corinthians were eating unworthily. And when he wants to show how they could eat the Lord’s Supper worthily and with profit, he sets before them *the institution itself* as he had received it from the Lord. ...the mind, from the words of institution, understands, believes with firm assent, and in the use of the Lord’s Supper reverently ponders what this sacrament is, what its use is, and what the nature of this whole action is – that here the Son of God, God and man, is Himself present, offering and imparting through the ministry to those who eat, together with the bread and wine, His body and blood, in order that by means of this most precious testimony and pledge He may unite Himself with us and apply, seal, and confirm to us the New Testament covenant of grace. And this faith, resting on the words of institution, excites and shapes reverence and devotion of mind as this sacrament is used. ...*the institution itself shows that this is necessary and required for worthy eating...*” (*Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II, p. 317. Emphases added.).

Contrary to classic Lutheran faith and practice, and contrary to classic Lutheran standards for spiritual oversight and pastoral care in conjunction with admission to the Lord’s Supper, infants and small children are now communed in many liberal or “mainstream” Lutheran church bodies – such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. This practice was introduced – predictably – after many years of an “open communion” practice for adults in those churches. If adults with no Lutheran catechesis were now allowed to admit themselves to the altar in a Lutheran congregation, then why not allow the uncatechized children of members likewise to be admitted?

<sup>88</sup>Small Catechism, Preface: 1-3, Kolb/Wengert pp. 347-48.

<sup>89</sup>1 Corinthians 4:1, New King James Version.

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<sup>90</sup>Hebrews 13:17, New King James Version.

<sup>91</sup>New King James Version.

<sup>92</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XI:3-5, Kolb/Wengert pp. 186.

<sup>93</sup>Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53, pp. 32-33.

<sup>94</sup>Augsburg Confession XI:1-2 (German), Kolb/Wengert p. 44.

<sup>95</sup>Large Catechism IV:74,79, Kolb/Wengert pp. 465-66.

<sup>96</sup>Augsburg Confession XXV:1 (German), Kolb/Wengert p. 72.

<sup>97</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XII:99-101, Kolb/Wengert p. 204. See also Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion* (translated by Luther Poellot) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), pp. 136-37; and C. H. Little, *Lutheran Confessional Theology* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), p. 67.

<sup>98</sup>Large Catechism, Confession: 1, Kolb/Wengert p. 476.

<sup>99</sup>Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," p. 34. See also P[aul]. H. D. Lang, "Private Confession and Absolution in the Lutheran Church: A Doctrinal, Historical, and Critical Study," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (October 1992), pp. 251-52.

<sup>100</sup>Martin Luther, a later addition to Philip Melancthon's *Unterricht der Visitatorn* [Instructions for Visitors] (1528) (WA 26:216); quoted in Hans Preuss, "Luther as Communicant," *Lutheran Church Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, No. 2 (April 1941), p. 195.

<sup>101</sup>Martin Luther, *Am Oster Dinstage. Evangelium Luc. xxiii. Ein ander Predigt*. [On the Festival of Easter. The Gospel according to Luke, 24. Another Sermon.] (1531) (*Crucigers Sommerpostille*, 1544) (WA 21:263); quoted in *What Luther Says: An Anthology* (compiled and edited by Ewald M. Plass) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), Vol. I, p. 331.

<sup>102</sup>There was also historical precedent for such a practice in the so-called *Offene Schuld* of the medieval church. See Fred L. Precht, "Confession and Absolution: Sin and Forgiveness," in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (edited by Precht) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), pp. 365-66.

<sup>103</sup>These would include the Church Orders for Wittenberg (1524 and 1559), Nürnberg (1524), Sweden (1531), Hamburg (1537), Naumberg (1537), Mecklenburg (1540 and 1552), Reformation of Cologne (1543), Schwäbisch-Hall (1543), Celle (1545), Hesse-Cassel (1566), Herpf (1566), Meiningen (1566), Austria (1571), Aschersleben (1575), Dresden (1578), Saxony (1581), and Amsterdam (1597) ("Bugenhagen's Order of Service of 1524," *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. X, No. 4 [October 1891], pp. 289-90; Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* [revised edition], p. 258; Fred L. Precht, "Confession and Absolution: Sin and Forgiveness," pp. 363, 377-78, 384; B[eale]. M. Schmucker, "The Lutheran Church in the City of New York During the Second Century of its History," pp. 284-85).

<sup>104</sup>Edward T. Horn, "The Reformation of Worship in the City of Nürnberg," p. 143.

<sup>105</sup>Jacob Andreae, Martin Crucius, and Lucas Osiander, Correspondence with the Patriarch of Constantinople (1577); in George Mastrantonis, translator and editor, *Augsburg and Constantinople*, p. 144.

The Lutheran Reformers had originally lacked a consensus among themselves concerning the appropriateness of the practice of general confession and absolution. Such a consensus did eventually emerge, especially in the wake of a controversy that had occurred in Nürnberg in 1533 and that had

involved such notables as Johannes Brenz, Andreas Osiander, and eventually the theological faculty at Wittenberg University. Henry Eyster Jacobs notes that when the new Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order was issued in that year, it “discontinued the practice hitherto prevalent at Nürnberg, where the pastor, after the sermon, read a general confession of sins followed by an absolution to the entire congregation. Brenz and Osiander urged that such an absolution to a mixed assembly ‘in which are unbelievers, fanatics, impenitent persons, adulterers, licentious usurers, drunkards, murderers, none of whom wants the absolution, and much less has an earnest purpose to reform his life,’ was without Scriptural warrant or precedent in the Ancient Church. The general feeling at Nürnberg opposed the two theologians mentioned. The city council interfered. All the pastors but Osiander yielded. ... Upon an appeal to the Wittenberg theologians, Luther and his colleagues advised a compromise, allowing the use of both the private and the so-called ‘general absolution’ (DeWette’s *Luther’s Briefe*, IV. 480 sqq.). The correspondence shows that Osiander’s excessive controversial spirit had led to extravagant positions, and that Luther felt not only that the cause of the gospel was being disgraced by the bitterness that was prevailing, but especially that Osiander’s course involved the necessity of private absolution, which Luther could not admit. ‘We cannot and will not burden consciences so heavily as though, without private absolution, there were no forgiveness of sins. For from the beginning of the world to the times of Christ, they did not have private absolution, but had to console themselves with the general promise and build their faith thereon. Although, because of his fall, David had private absolution, nevertheless with respect to other sins, before and afterwards, he had to hold to the general absolution, and preaching, as also Isaiah and others’” (“Confession of Sins,” in *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, pp. 128-29). Martin Luther’s letter was also signed by Philip Melancthon, Johannes Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas, and Caspar Cruciger (P[aul]. H. D. Lang, “Private Confession and Absolution in the Lutheran Church: A Doctrinal, Historical, and Critical Study,” p. 253). For the full text of the letter, see “To the Council of the City of Nürnberg” (April 18, 1533), *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 50 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 76-78. See also *Augsburg and Constantinople*, pp. 132-33, where the Württemberg theologians defend the practice of their churches with similar arguments.

<sup>106</sup>Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 60, Kolb/Wengert p. 340.

<sup>107</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:68-71, Kolb/Wengert pp. 605-06.

<sup>108</sup>Large Catechism I:158, Kolb/Wengert p. 408. Martin Luther says here that “the name of spiritual father belongs...to those who govern and guide us by the Word of God.”

In the “Table of Duties” appendix to Luther’s Small Catechism, where the responsibilities of “Bishops, Pastors, and Preachers” are described on the basis of St. Paul’s Pastoral Epistles, we read that “A bishop is to be above reproach, *the husband of one wife*, temperate, virtuous, moderate, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not vicious, not involved in dishonorable work, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not stingy, one who manages his own household well, who has obedient and honest children, not a recent convert, who holds to the Word that is certain and can teach, so that he may be strong enough to admonish with saving teaching and to refute those who contradict it. From 1 Timothy 3[:2-4,6a; Titus 1:9]” (Small Catechism, Table of Duties: 1-2, Kolb/Wengert p. 365. Emphasis added.). When Luther here quotes the Pauline directive that a bishop is to be “the husband of one wife,” he is citing a verse that he understands to be a divine requirement that bishops or pastors must be *men*, and not only that they must be monogamous in their marital life. In his 1539 treatise “On the Councils and the Church” – after mentioning Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, the Word of God, and the Keys – Luther states that “There must be bishops, pastors, or preachers, who publicly and privately give, administer, and use the aforementioned four things or holy possessions in behalf of and in the name of the church, or rather by reason of their institution by Christ...” According to Luther, “The people as a whole cannot do these things, but must entrust or have them entrusted to one person,” and “he alone should be allowed to preach, to baptize, to absolve, and to administer the sacraments.” Luther then adds this Scriptural restriction: “It is, however, true that the Holy Spirit has excepted women, children, and incompetent people from this function, but chooses (except in emergencies) only competent males to fill this office [*Wahr ist’s aber, daß in diesem Stück der Heilige Geist ausgenommen hat Weiber, Kinder und untüchtige Leute, sondern allein tüchtige Mannspersonen heizu erwählet (ausgenommen die Noth)*], as one reads here and there in the epistles of St. Paul [I Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:6] that a bishop must be pious, able to teach, and *the husband of one wife* – and in I Corinthians 14[:34] he says, ‘The women should keep silence in the churches.’ In summary, *it must be a competent and chosen man*. Children, women, and other persons

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are not qualified for this office, even though they are able to hear God's Word, to receive Baptism, the Sacrament, absolution, and are also true, holy Christians, as St. Peter says [1 Pet. 3:7]. Even nature and God's creation makes this distinction, implying that women (much less children or fools) cannot and shall not occupy positions of sovereignty, as experience also suggests and as Moses says in Genesis 3[:16], 'You shall be subject to man.' The Gospel, however, does not abrogate this natural law, but confirms it as the ordinance and creation of God" ("On the Councils and the Church," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 41 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966], pp. 154-55. Emphases added.).

Luther's commitment to the Biblical and catholic belief that the "fatherly" office of a pastor is, by God's design, restricted to men, was shared by Lutherans the world over until the twentieth century. At that time – largely under secular cultural and political pressure – the mainstream Lutheran churches of Europe and North America began authorizing the ordination of women pastors. In North America, the first women pastors were ordained in 1970, in the American Lutheran Church and in the Lutheran Church in America. Today, a majority of professing Lutherans in the world belong to church bodies that ordain women to the pastoral ministry. The Kenyan Lutheran bishop Walter Obare Omwanza would remind us, however, that "the majority of *Christians* worldwide do *not* practice women's ordination. The Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox, and many Protestant churches in both the south[ern hemisphere] and the north[ern hemisphere] do not believe in this doctrine." He describes "the doctrine of women's ordination" as "an idiosyncratic teaching of a few liberal, northern Protestant churches," and adds – from the vantage point of his own distasteful experience with the Lutheran World Federation – that "it is largely enforced through the domination of a powerful elite that brooks no dissension" ("Choose Life!", *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 69, Nos. 3-4 [July/October 2005], p. 310. Emphases added.). In North America today, women are ordained as pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Two recently-formed ELCA breakaway groups, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (organized in 2001) and the North American Lutheran Church (organized in 2010), likewise approve of the ordination of women. The more conservative Lutheran church bodies in North America (including the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, the Lutheran Church – Canada, the American Association of Lutheran Churches, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Church of the Lutheran Confession, the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, and the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America) do not allow women to serve as pastors.

<sup>109</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XIII:9, Kolb/Wengert p. 220.

<sup>110</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XIII:12, Kolb/Wengert p. 220.

<sup>111</sup>Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, pp. 26-27.

The Lutheran Church maintains with equal conviction that "wherever the church exists, there also is the right to administer the gospel. Therefore, it is necessary for the church to retain the right to call, choose, and ordain ministers. This right is a gift bestowed exclusively on the church, and no human authority can take it away from the church, as Paul testifies to the Ephesians [4:8,11,12] when he says: 'When he ascended on high...he gave gifts to his people.' Among those gifts belonging to the church he lists pastors and teachers and adds that such are given for serving and building up the body of Christ. Therefore, where the true church is, there must also be the right of choosing and ordaining ministers, just as in an emergency even a layperson grants absolution and becomes the minister or pastor of another. So Augustine tells the story of two Christians in a boat, one of whom baptized the other (a catechumen) and then the latter, having been baptized, absolved the former. Pertinent here are the words of Christ that assert that the keys were given to the church, not just to particular persons: 'For where two or three are gathered in my name...' [Matt. 18:20]. Finally this is also confirmed by Peter's declaration [1 Peter 2:9]: 'You are a...royal priesthood.' These words apply to the true church, which, since it alone possesses the priesthood, certainly has the right of choosing and ordaining ministers" (Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 67-69, Kolb/Wengert pp. 340-41). The pastoral acts described here as having been performed in the foundering boat were not, strictly speaking, performed by "laymen" as such, but by laymen serving temporarily as "emergency pastors." A layman "becomes the minister or pastor of another" when he, in a time of need, steps into the role of pastor in order to perform a necessary pastoral act – such as baptism or absolution, as mentioned specifically in this account.

"However, Lutheran teachers have debated throughout the years whether or not a lay person should ever consecrate and administer the Lord's Supper. The orthodox dogmaticians generally said that

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even in the case of emergency it should not be done. [Johann Wilhelm] Baier wrote: ‘When there is a lack of ordinary ministers, and a faithful man anxiously desires this sacrament, it is better for him to be persuaded that spiritual eating is sufficient and to show the danger of other temptations which could arise if the sacrament were administered by another without a legitimate call and therefore with a dubious mind and result’” (Thomas P. Nass, “The Pastoral Ministry as a Distinct Form of the Public Ministry,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 91, No. 4 [Fall 1994], p. 261). On the other hand, as noted by Johann Friedrich Cotta, “In a case of such necessity, where death seems immediately impending, if a pastor cannot be procured, and the dying person earnestly desire to enjoy the Sacrament, many of our theologians maintain that the Holy Eucharist can be administered even by a layman. Let it suffice that I mention, among these, Jn. Gallus and Tileman Hesshuss” (an editorial notation in Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* [edited by Cotta] [Tübingen: Johann Georg Cotta, 1762-87], Vol. X, p. 21; quoted in Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* [translated by Charles A. Hay and Henry Eyster Jacobs] [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961], p. 578).

<sup>112</sup>Augsburg Confession XIV (German), Kolb/Wengert p. 46.

<sup>113</sup>Jasper Rasmussen Brochmand; quoted in “Lay Celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar,” *Logia*, Vol. II, No. 1 (Epiphany/January 1993), p. 55. Brochmand served as Bishop of Zealand (Denmark) in the seventeenth century.

<sup>114</sup>John F. Brug, *The Ministry of the Word* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), p. 221.

<sup>115</sup>Martin Luther, “The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests”; quoted in Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:77, Kolb/Wengert p. 607. Emphasis added.

<sup>116</sup>John F. Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, p. 118.

<sup>117</sup>The Small Catechism declares that “a person who has faith in these words, ‘given for you’ and ‘shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,’ is really worthy and well prepared. However, a person who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, because the words ‘for you’ require truly believing hearts” (Small Catechism VI:10, Kolb/Wengert p. 363).

<sup>118</sup>Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia didacticopolemica sive systema theologicum* (Wittenberg, 1685), Vol. IV, p. 185; quoted in Friedrich Kalb, *Theology of Worship in 17th-Century Lutheranism* (translated by Henry P. A. Hamann) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), p. 123.

<sup>119</sup>Hermann Sasse, “Word and Sacrament: Preaching and the Lord’s Supper,” *We Confess the Sacraments* (translated by Norman Nagel) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), p. 32.

<sup>120</sup>Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia didacticopolemica sive systema theologicum*, Vol. IV, p. 185; quoted in Friedrich Kalb, *Theology of Worship in 17th-Century Lutheranism*, p. 123.

<sup>121</sup>Among the early Lutheran laity the “Easter Communion” continued to be a deeply ingrained custom. Apparently there were many people in Wittenberg who did not desire to commune very often in the course of the year, but who were eager at least to receive the sacrament in conjunction with this festival. In 1531 Martin Luther responded to the practical difficulties associated with this by telling the people that those who wished to receive communion according to this custom could do so at any time during the Easter season, and not only during Holy Week or on Easter Sunday itself. From the pulpit on Palm Sunday he announced that “After this, the people should come to the Supper by rows. And not all should come on one and the same day, because they have enough time to commune from now until the Feast of Pentecost. There is no need to burden the pastors [deacons] in this way that they must give communion at two or three altars, since they have another chance or even at a private mass” (*Predigt am Psalmsonntag, nachmittags* [Sermon on Palm Sunday, in the afternoon] [1531] [WA 34/1:189]; quoted in Lowell C. Green, “Apology 24 As Illuminated by the Communion Rules and Practices of Sixteenth-

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Century Lutheranism,” p. 11). Luther was not discouraging frequent Communion, but was dealing very practically with a situation that involved people who had no intention of communing frequently anyway. But just to make sure they would not think they were being told that they may not have the Lord’s Supper on or very near the Festival of Easter, even if they really wanted to have it then, Luther supplemented his previous instructions three days later. On Wednesday of Holy Week he “delivered an exhortation that all should come to the sacrament by rows and not all at once, lest the pastors be confused by the multitude, since there is time enough for everyone to come. ‘I am happy that you are very diligent about coming. But all cannot come at once. Therefore, communion will be given daily the next seven days’” (*Predigt am Mittwoch nach Palmarum, nachmittags* [Sermon on the Wednesday after Palm Sunday, in the afternoon] [WA 34/I:199]; quoted in Lowell C. Green, “Apology 24 As Illuminated by the Communion Rules and Practices of Sixteenth-Century Lutheranism,” p. 11).

<sup>122</sup>[Johann Heinrich] Kurtz, *Church History* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1889), Vol. II, p. 111.

<sup>123</sup>Small Catechism, Preface: 21-24, Kolb/Wengert pp. 350-51. Emphases in original.

Martin Luther speaks to the question of the minimum number of times in a year that a pastor would expect his parishioners to commune, also in a 1539 letter concerning the communing of the sick in their homes: “With reference to your question concerning the communication of the sick, ...I wish and am of the opinion that private Communion should be abolished everywhere – namely, that the people should be told in sermons to receive Communion three or four times a year in order that, strengthened by the Word, they may afterward fall asleep, no matter what the cause of death may be. For private Communion will increasingly impose an intolerable and impossible burden, especially in time of pestilence. And it is not right that the Church should be required to peddle the Sacraments, particularly in the case of those who have despised them for a long time and who then expect the Church to be ready to be of service to them, although they never rendered it a service of any kind. However, since this practice has not yet been established, you must do what you can. Meanwhile, ...you should explain that you are doing this as a temporary expedient and that you will not continue to do this for them forever inasmuch as something will certainly be decided about this matter” (Letter to Anthony Lauterbach [Nov. 26, 1539], in *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* [translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert] [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960], p. 305). Modern methods of transportation make it easier for a pastor to visit the sick and shut-in members of his church than was the case in Luther’s time, in order to administer Holy Communion to them. We would therefore probably not consider Luther’s advice about the frequency (or infrequency) of such pastoral calls to be applicable to a minister in the twenty-first century who owns an automobile.

<sup>124</sup>Martin Luther, Sermon for “Easter Wednesday,” *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), Vol. 6, pp. 41-42.

<sup>125</sup>Large Catechism V:39-43, Kolb/Wengert pp. 470-71.

<sup>126</sup>Martin Luther, Sermon for “Easter Wednesday,” pp. 42-43.

<sup>127</sup>Large Catechism V:55-61, Kolb/Wengert pp. 472-73.

<sup>128</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XII:29,32, Kolb/Wengert pp. 191-92.

<sup>129</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XII:35-36, Kolb/Wengert p. 192.

<sup>130</sup>Large Catechism V:47-48, Kolb/Wengert pp. 471-72.

<sup>131</sup>Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II, p. 330.

<sup>132</sup>In the Lutheran Church of the seventeenth century “some desired Holy Communion on certain Sundays in the year, others desired it daily” (Friedrich Kalb, *Theology of Worship in 17th-Century Lutheranism*, p. 123, referring to Abraham Calov, *Systema locorum theologicorum* [Wittenberg, 1655-57], Vol. IX, p. 407).

<sup>133</sup>Robert D. Preus, *Getting into The Theology of Concord*, p. 71.

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<sup>134</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession XV:40, in *The Book of Concord*, edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 220. The original Latin of this sentence reads as follows: *Apud nos utuntur coena Domini multi singulis Dominicis, sed prius institute, explorati et absolute (Concordia Triglotta [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921], p. 324)*. The Kolb/Wengert translation renders this sentence in this way: “Many among us celebrate the Lord’s Supper after Lord’s day after they are instructed, examined, and absolved” (p. 229). But “celebrate” is not an accurate translation of *utuntur*. And besides, in eucharistic parlance “celebrate” is a technical term that describes the action of the presiding minister, in his *consecrating* of the elements and in his *overseeing* of the administration of the sacrament. The term is not properly to be used to describe the action of the laity, in their *receiving* of the sacrament.

<sup>135</sup>John R. Stephenson, “The Holy Eucharist: At the Center or Periphery of the Church’s Life in Luther’s Thinking?,” p. 158.

<sup>136</sup>Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), p. 241.

<sup>137</sup>Martin Luther, “A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion,” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 45 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), p. 70.

<sup>138</sup>Christian Heinrich Schott, *The Unaltered Augsburg Confession ... and the Three Chief Symbols of the Christian Church* (New York: H. Ludwig & Co., 1848), p. 55.

<sup>139</sup>Veit Dietrich, *Trostsprüche* (1548) (quoted in *D. Martin Luthers Werke [Weimarer Ausgabe]* 48:326) (translated by Mark DeGarmeaux). See also Hans Preuss, “Luther as Communicant,” p. 198.

<sup>140</sup>Martin Luther writes: “This, too, would be a fine interpretation, if the priest would with the elevation of the sacrament do nothing other than illustrate the words, ‘This is my body,’ as if he wished to express by means of his action: Look, dear Christians, this is the body which is given for you. Thus the elevation would not be a symbol of the sacrifice to God (as the papists foolishly imagine) but an admonition directed toward men, to provoke them to faith, particularly since he immediately elevates the bread right after speaking the words: ‘This is my body which is given for you’” (“Brief Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament” [1544], *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 38 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971], p. 314).

<sup>141</sup>In 1542, in Wittenberg, “a woman wanted to go to the Lord’s Supper, and then as she was about to kneel on the bench before the altar and drink, she made a misstep and jostled the chalice of the Lord violently with her mouth, so that some of the Blood of Christ was spilled from it onto her lined jacket and coat and onto the rail of the bench on which she was kneeling. So then when the reverend Doctor Luther, who was standing at a bench opposite, saw this, he quickly ran to the altar (as did also the reverend Doctor Bugenhagen), and together with the curate, with all reverence licked up [the Blood of Christ from the rail] and helped wipe off this spilled Blood of Christ from the woman’s coat, and so on, as well as they could. And Doctor Luther took this catastrophe so seriously that he groaned over it and said, ‘O, God, help!’ and his eyes were full of water” (Johann Hachenburg, *Wider den Jrrthumb der neuen zwinglianer notige unterrichtung* [Erfurd: Marten von Dolgen, 1557], fols. Fii-a&b; quoted in Edward Frederick Peters, *The Origin and Meaning of the Axiom: “Nothing Has the Character of a Sacrament Outside of the Use”* [Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1993], p. 191).

<sup>142</sup>In a 1543 letter to Simon Wolferinus, Martin Luther admonishes a pastor on account of his offensive actions relative to the sacramental *reliquiae* in his church: “There is no doubt that it is not we who got it from you, but you who got it from us, that Sacraments are actions, and not persistent manufactures. But what is this peculiar rashness of yours that you would rather not abstain from this evil appearance which you know is a scandal, namely, that you mix the remains of [consecrated] wine and bread with [unconsecrated] bread and wine? By which example do you do that? Indeed, do you not see what dangerous questions you are raising, if you contend so much in this opinion of yours, that when the action ceases, the Sacrament [also] ceases? Perhaps you want to be considered a Zwinglian, and am I to

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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, poured in with [unconsecrated] wine? Why do you not imitate the other churches? ... For 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 in which you will choke unless you come to your senses" ([WA Br. X, 340-41], in Edward Frederick Peters, *The Origin and Meaning of the Axiom: "Nothing Has the Character of a Sacrament Outside of the Use,"* pp. 207-08).

In a 1546 letter to Nicolaus Amsdorf, Luther gave his opinion on two acts of malfeasance or negligence on the part of Deacon Adam Besserer, which Amsdorf (Besserer's superior) had reported to him. The first offense was that, after dropping a consecrated host during the administration of the Lord's Supper, and not being able to find it, Besserer had given an unconsecrated host to a communicant. Luther wrote in response to this that "it is not a matter of negligence but evil and indeed extreme evil on the part of this deacon, who as a despiser of God and men publicly dared to regard consecrated hosts and unconsecrated as one and the same. Therefore he must by all means be expelled from our church; let him go to his Zwinglians." The second offense was that, after the dropped consecrated host had been found, Besserer had placed it with other unconsecrated hosts in the sacristy. When the senior pastor of the church learned of this, he saw to it that all the hosts were burned. Luther wrote in response to this: "As for the mixed particles it was good that they were burned, although in this situation it would not have been necessary to burn them, since outside the use nothing is a Sacrament as the water of Baptism outside the use is not Baptism. ... But on account of the offense the pastor did what was right with the burning" ([WA Br. XI, 258], *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 4 [December 1988], pp. 72-73).

<sup>143</sup>Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II, pp. 330-31.

<sup>144</sup>C. F. W. Walther, *Gnadenjahr* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1890), pp. 209 ff.; quoted in Kurt E. Marquart, "The Word As Life," pp. 51-52.

<sup>145</sup>Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, p. 128.

<sup>146</sup>Johann Gerhard, *Loci theologici*, edited by Edward Preuss (1863), Vol. V, p. 243; quoted in Friedrich Kalb, *Theology of Worship in 17th-Century Lutheranism*, p. 123.

<sup>147</sup>Paul Zeller Strodach, *A Manual on Worship* (revised edition) (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 232.

More recently, John F. Brug (of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod) has written: "Formerly, many Lutheran churches in America celebrated the Lord's Supper once a month or less. This relatively infrequent celebration was at least in part a reaction to Catholicism's overemphasis on the sacrament at the expense of preaching. Lutheran churches tended to center on preaching as the 'source and summit' of Christian worship. Recently, however, WELS congregations have tended to celebrate the Lord's Supper more frequently. Many congregations now have communion twice a month. A small percentage observe it weekly" ("How we practice communion," *Northwestern Lutheran*, Vol. 85, No. 1 [January 1998], p. 32).

<sup>148</sup>Edgar S. Brown, Jr., *Living the Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 95.

<sup>149</sup>Veit Dietrich's Collect for Maundy Thursday, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 154.

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