

The Angels Are Aware . . . and We Are Too

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The angels are aware of the miraculous, glorious thing that is happening on and around our altars when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. The Proper Preface closes each Sunday with the words: "Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising Thee and saying . . ." Where are the angels and archangels worshipping if not at our altar? Are they as far removed from us as heaven is from earth? Do we ascend spiritually to worship where they are? No, they worship with us where Christ is, on our altars. Chrysostom said the very angels tremble before the Sacrament.¹ Albrecht Durer fashioned a woodcut portraying angels hovering above the altar where the Sacrament is being celebrated. The angels are aware of Christ's presence in the Sacrament, and they give him their adoration there accordingly.

But what does it mean for human beings to adore Christ in the Sacrament? Luther describes it as proving our "inward worship by outwardly bowing, bending, and kneeling with the body."² Chemnitz echoes these sentiments: "The simplest and safest rule with respect to these external marks of reverence is that they are testimonials to the inner faith concerning the Eucharist, according to the Word, and that they correspond to that faith."³ A contemporary Lutheran theologian says that among Lutherans adoration or veneration of the Sacrament was evidenced by the communicants' bending their knees after they have risen from kneeling and receiving the Sacrament.⁴ Chemnitz quotes two scriptural rules for evaluating acts of adoration: (1) Outward appearance without inward faith does not please God. (2) Ways of worship chosen by men are not pleasing to God.⁵

Adoring Christ in the Sacrament expresses externally and bodily the faith that is in the heart. The term *adoration* does not refer to faith in the heart that does not so express itself. Our heart may bend low before Christ in the Sacrament, but unless our bodies do too we are not adoring Christ as the term is historically used.

Why are most Lutherans, whether pastors or laymen, reluctant to adore Christ in the Sacrament? Many are afraid of idolatry. The Formula of Concord rejects and condemns the notion "that the external visible elements of the bread and wine should

be adored in the Holy Sacrament" (Ep VII, 40). This was included to assure the Sacramentarians that we did not believe that created elements should be worshiped. Chemnitz makes this same point in the *Examination of the Council of Trent* when he says, "the substance or form of the elements of bread and wine should not be worshiped lest, beside the Creator, we worship also the creature (Rom 1:25)."⁶

In the corresponding article of the Solid Declaration, however, the Sacramentarian view is condemned and the adoration of Christ in the Sacrament is defended: "However, no one, unless he be an Arian heretic, can and will deny that Christ Himself, true God and man, who is truly and essentially present in the Supper, should be adored in spirit and in truth in the true use of the same, as also in all other places, especially where his congregation is assembled" (SD VII, 126). We can see Chemnitz's hand behind this Declaration even as we could see it behind the Epitome. In the *Examination*, immediately preceding the above quote warning against idolatry, we read this: "Christ, God and man, present in His divine and human nature in the action of the Supper, should be worshiped."⁷

Certainly no Lutheran wants to be idolatrous. The point, however, is that there is more present on our altars than merely the created elements of bread and wine. The Reformed, on the other hand, do not know or believe that more than bread and wine are present. We can understand, therefore, their fear of adoration. The "Black Rubric" in the *Book of Common Prayer*, 1662, explains the case from their point of view:

That thereby [kneeling] no adoration is intended or ought to be done, either to the sacramental Bread and Wine there bodily received, or unto any Corporal Presence of Christ's natural Flesh and Blood. For the Sacramental Bread and Wine still remain in their very natural substance, and therefore may not be adored (for that were idolatry, to be abhorred by all faithful Christians); and the natural Body and Blood of our Savior Christ are in heaven, and not here.⁸

Even Roman Catholics have a fear of being idolatrous. Thomas Aquinas insisted that the bread could not also be present because the veneration of the Sacrament would be impossible if bread, a created substance, were present.⁹ Perhaps we would do

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well to stop thinking in terms of four things being present: body, bread, blood, wine. Luther in his *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528) says, "Now I have taught in the past and still teach that . . . it is of no great consequence whether the bread remains or not" (AE 37:296). Luther in fact never abandoned the view that bread and wine *become* the body and blood of Christ.¹⁰ Even Francis Pieper, though a receptionist, believed that once the body and blood were united to the elements they became "one entirely new thing, they lose their distinction as far as that new unity is concerned and in so far as they become and are one thing . . . [I]t is no more common bread in the oven, but flesh bread or body bread."¹¹

The Roman Catholic error was that they adored Christ where he had not promised to be.

Adoration would not make us so uneasy if we focused more on the body and blood being present than on the bread and wine. But the opposite is the case in practice. We traditionally speak of the elements according to their natural nomenclature rather than their divine. We say in America that the pastor distributes bread and wine. Yet in Lutheran liturgies of the years 1533–1559 the consecrated host and chalice are always called body and blood.¹²

In addition to being afraid of idolatry, we have been afraid of the "Catholic" errors. In the mass the adoration of the Sacrament is focused on the elevation. The elevation is that point in the service where the consecrated elements are raised up to be adored by the faithful. In the medieval mass the elevation, not Holy Communion, became the climax. Adoration replaced communing. Liturgies spoke of communing with the eyes.¹³ Also, the elevation came to be associated in the popular mind and in some medieval theologies with the idea of the mass as a propitiatory sacrifice that the church was offering to God.¹⁴ The elevation was regarded as the actual offering *up* of the victim. Another Roman Catholic error Lutherans find repulsive is the Corpus Christi Festival, where the Communion host is paraded through the streets for people to adore.

The Formula of Concord rejects adoration in the ways just mentioned, stating that "apart from the use, when the bread is laid aside and preserved in the sacramental vessel [the pyx], or is carried about in the procession and exhibited, as is done in popery, they do not hold that the body of Christ is present" (SD VII, 15). Chemnitz states specifically where the problem is: "[O]ur dispute with the papalists is about their reserving, shutting in, carrying about, and displaying the consecrated bread for worship and adoration, *apart from distribution and reception*."¹⁵ The Roman Catholic error was not that they adored Christ in the Sacrament but that they adored him where he had not promised to be, making the adoration an end in itself.

This making adoration an end in itself is what prejudices many Lutherans against adoration. Indeed, it is what Luther initially reacted against. In *The Adoration of the Sacrament*, 1523, Luther spoke his sharpest words against adoration.

But he is present in the sacrament and in the hearts of believers not really because he wants to be worshiped there, but because he wants there to work with us and help us; just as he also came to earth in the flesh not that men should worship him, but to serve us as he himself said (AE 36:294).

Luther wrote here that "the most secure and the best" communicants are

those whose entire interest is in the words of this sacrament, so that they feed their faith. . . . They probably seldom descend so low as to bother themselves about worshipping and adoring, for they pay attention to the work God does to them and forget about the works they do for the sacrament (AE 36:296).

Luther even gets to the point of saying that it is better not to adore than to adore:

Nevertheless, you can see that adoration of this sacrament is a dangerous procedure if the Word and faith are not inculcated; so much so that I really think that it would be better to follow the example of the apostles and not worship, than to follow our custom and worship. Not that adoration is wrong, but simply because there is less danger in not adoring than in adoring; because human nature tends so easily to emphasize its own works and to neglect God's work, and the sacrament will not admit of that (AE 36:296–97).

Luther penned these words before Zwingli attacked his doctrine of the real presence in 1524. *The Adoration of the Sacrament* is Luther's reaction to the Roman abuses. The position he takes here will be modified after his confrontations with the Zwinglians. It is noteworthy that when the Formula of Concord directs us to use Luther's writings to shed light on the doctrine of the Sacrament it presents, it does not mention *The Adoration of the Sacrament* (1523). The Formula does, however, direct us specifically to *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525), *This is My Body* (1527), and both catechisms (1529). If the Formula had intended to reject adoration completely, all it would have had to do is quote from Luther's work on that specific subject.

If we do not reject *The Adoration* as being only an early Luther view, are its arguments against adoration sound? Admittedly, Christ did not give us the Sacrament so he could be worshiped there, even as he did not become incarnate to be served but to serve. All who recognized Christ even in his humiliation, however, did not do wrong by worshipping, did they? Whenever they realized whom they really were meeting, they worshiped.

Obviously, Christ is not in the Sacrament so we might do something for him. But to say that we should not adore him there because that is being too concerned about what we do rather than what Christ does for us goes too far. Such reasoning would do away with ornate churches, lavish vestments, costly Communion ware, and high church liturgies. Luther, while not requiring these, kept them.

Finally, can we really make as much as Luther tried to out of the example of the apostles at the first Lord's Supper? Can anyone deny that the apostles did worship and adore Christ in that first celebration? Does anyone really want to argue where the focus of their adoration was? All we can say is that it had to be Christ. But we cannot argue from the one Lord's Supper where Christ was present both incarnationally and sacramentally to our Lord's Supper. If we want to "follow the example of the apostles," we must follow St. Paul. He is the one the Lord selected to deliver the Lord's Supper to the church. Paul warns us in 1 Corinthians against treating the Holy Communion as if it were ordinary bread, failing to discern the body of Christ.

It is true that a fear of idolatry, the Roman Catholic errors, and the attitude of a "young" Luther toward adoration have made many Lutherans hesitant about adoring Christ in the Sacrament. But far more may be hesitant because they hold the receptionist error. Receptionists believe that the bread and wine are not the body and blood until they are received by the communicant. They believe the words of institution do not effect the real presence, but are a mere consecrating, a setting aside, of these elements to be used by Christ in the distribution and reception. Christ therefore is not present on our altar and may or may not be present in the hand of the pastor. Where can Christ be adored with such an understanding? As Dr. Teigen points out, "If the consecration did not effect the Real Presence of Christ, Chemnitz and all those who agreed with him would be guilty of gross idolatries."¹⁶

This receptionist error is very popular among us, bequeathed to us by such notable theologians as Pieper¹⁷ and Walther.¹⁸ But its roots go back to the seventeenth and even the sixteenth century. Melancthon taught that Christ's presence coincides with the action of distributing and receiving the Sacrament.¹⁹ Quenstedt, called "the bookkeeper of the Wittenberg Orthodoxy,"²⁰ says, "this sacramental union itself does not take place except in the distribution."²¹ According to one contemporary conservative Lutheran theologian, Bjarne Teigen, present-day conservative Lutheran books quote from the receptionist theologians, but not a one surveyed quoted from Chemnitz.²²

Wherever Christ's presence was recognized, he was worshiped.

The receptionist view is not Lutheran. Writing in 1952, Hermann Sasse states, "The consecrated bread is the body of Christ also when it lies on the altar or when the pastor holds it in his hand. This is the Lutheran view."²³ At a Free Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1857, there were forty-eight participants, twenty-two of whom belonged to the Missouri Synod. All agreed that the body and blood were present in the hands of the one administering the Holy Communion.²⁴ The Formula of Concord rejects the receptionist view, using the words of Luther: "This his command and institution have this power and effect that we *administer* and receive not mere bread and wine, but his body and blood" (SD VII, 77, emphasis added). Again, "Not the word

or work of any man produces the true presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper, whether it be the merit or recitation of the minister, or the eating and drinking or faith of the communicants; but all this should be ascribed alone to the power of Almighty God and the Word, institution, and ordination of our Lord Jesus Christ" (SD VII, 74).

The receptionist error is only fueled by a misunderstanding of the Lutheran confession that there is no sacrament or real presence apart from its use. This was never intended to mean that the use of the Sacrament effects the real presence, but rather that Christ is not present when his institution is altered for a different use from the one he intended. Luther employed the terms *action* and *use* rarely when speaking of the Lord's Supper. The Roman Catholics, the Sacramentarians, and the Gnesio-Lutherans liked to use these terms.²⁵ Melancthon, fearing the materialism of Luther's doctrine of the Sacrament and wishing to retain the pure spirituality of the Sacrament, emphasized Christ's presence in the celebration, in the action, in the use instead of in the elements.²⁶ If Christ is not present on the altar but somewhere in the celebration, where is he to be adored?

WHY ADORATION SHOULD BE RESTORED

The practice of adoring Christ in the Sacrament should be restored. The practice is biblical, it is Lutheran, and it is catholic.

Biblical

There is no command in the Bible that Christ should be adored or worshiped in the Sacrament. But the preincarnate Christ was worshiped when he took the form of an angel, a human, a cloudy presence, or burning bush. Wherever Christ's presence was recognized, he was worshiped.

The fathers of the Lutheran Church and of the early church correlate appearances of Christ, both preincarnate and incarnate, with his presence in the Supper. Chrysostom says, "On the altar that body is present which the wise men worshiped in the manger. . . . Let us at least imitate those Barbarians, we who are citizens of heaven."²⁷ In *On the Priesthood*, Chrysostom says the Eucharist is a greater miracle than what the people witnessed in Elijah's day when fire came from heaven.²⁸ The people fell on their faces in adoration at that mighty miracle.

Chemnitz admits that Jacob, Moses, and Elijah had no command to worship God at some of the places they did:

[They] doubtless did not have a special commandment that they should worship God in these places; but because they had a general commandment that they should worship God everywhere, and were sure that God is truly present under these external and visible signs and that He there reveals Himself by a peculiar mode of grace, they certainly worshiped that God whom they believed present there.²⁹

Probably the best example of all is how God's people treated the ark of the covenant. Chemnitz writes, "So the Israelites worshiped, not the wood, not the gold, not the cherubim of the ark of the covenant, but God Himself only, who had promised His presence there."³⁰

They were not being superstitious, they were not being idolatrous when they bowed before what looked like wood and gold. They were not “chancel prancing” when they moved the ark with such incredible care. Their God had promised to be with them, to come to them by means of this ark. The word, the promise of God, called forth their behavior even as the word and promise of Christ about his presence in the Sacrament calls forth ours.

The ark is an outstanding example, because apart from the use God had instituted for the ark, he did not appear present. The sons of Eli superstitiously carried the ark to war to have the presence of God help them, but this was to no avail, even though the ark was present at other victories of Israel. The Philistines could treat the ark like a war trophy, and God did not strike any of them dead as he did Uzzah, an Israelite, who merely took hold of the ark to steady it when the oxen nearly upset it. God did not reward superstition, nor did he judge those who knew no better, but he expected his people to honor his presence in the ark rightly.

Lutheran

That Christ should be adored wherever believers know him to be present is biblical. It is also Lutheran. Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confession says, “The Mass is retained among us, and celebrated with the highest reverence. Nearly all the usual ceremonies are preserved, save that the parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns” (AC XXIV, 1–2). The “usual ceremonies” were those found in the Roman mass, which would have included the elevation where the faithful express their adoration of Christ.

“Thus it is good that the Sacrament of the Altar is honored with bended knees; for the true body and blood of the Lord are there”

In Luther’s *Brief Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament* he is inclined to drop the elevation in opposition to the papists, but to retain it to defy the Zwinglians (AE 38:315). Both of Luther’s liturgies, the *Formula Missae* (1523) and the *Deutsche Messe* (1526), however, keep the elevation.³¹ When a Lutheran pastor elevated the Sacrament in Luther’s day, the faithful would have bowed in adoration. That is what they had been taught their whole lives. In his work specifically about the adoration of the Sacrament, even though he gives all the reasons mentioned above against it, still Luther says he favored it (AE 36:271). Actually, Luther’s words are quite strongly in favor of the practice:

But where worship is offered from the heart, there follows quite properly also that outward bowing, bending, kneeling, and adoration with the body (AE 36:293).

But he who does believe, as sufficient demonstration has shown it ought to be believed, can surely not withhold his adoration of the body and blood of Christ without

sinning. For I must always confess that Christ is present when his body and blood are present (AE 36:294).

While Luther specifically says he would not condemn or accuse a person of heresy because he does not adore the Sacrament, he says the opposite as well:

On the other hand, one should not condemn and accuse of heresy people who do adore the sacrament. For although Christ has not commanded it, neither has he forbidden it, but often accepted it (AE 36:295).

Even outside the work quoted above, Luther praises the practice. During the last calendar year of his life, 1545, in his *Lectures on Genesis*, he says, “Thus it is good that the Sacrament of the Altar is honored with bended knees; for the true body and blood of the Lord are there” (AE 8:145).

George Anhalt (d. 1553), Luther’s close friend, gives testimony to just how the practice of adoration was embraced among Lutherans. Chemnitz and co-authors Selnecker and Kirchner published Anhalt’s sermons on the Lord’s Supper “as an eternal witness of the teaching about the sacrament [held] in the churches of this land, which has been [held] after the death of Dr. Luther.”³² One of the sermons published in *Historie des Sacramentstreits* said:

Although our dear Lord Jesus Christ did not institute His holy Supper for the purpose of adoring it and worshipping it, nor yet is it forbidden nor to be accounted as an excess or as idolatry, but much rather just and right, that this holy Supper might be administered according to its institution by our Lord Jesus Christ . . .³³

Bjarne W. Teigen, a formidable Chemnitz scholar, shows that Anhalt’s attitude toward the adoration of Christ in the Sacrament continued to be represented in Lutheran circles by Chemnitz. “There could be no question for him [Chemnitz] that if one accepts these truths [the personal union, the special modes of Christ’s presence, the creative power of the words of institution when spoken at Christ’s command], an external adoration of the Sacrament could follow because these truths called for true faith in the heart.”³⁴ Furthermore, Teigen shows that Chemnitz believed he was representing Luther’s attitude as well. Chemnitz believed that “Luther regarded the adoration of the Sacrament as a normal result of one’s belief that the consecration effects the presence of the body and the blood of Christ in the elements.”³⁵

Chemnitz’s own writings bear out Teigen’s conclusions. Chemnitz says if we believe that Christ “truly and substantially imparts His body and blood to those who eat . . . it neither can nor should happen that faith would fail to venerate and worship Christ, who is present in this action.”³⁶ Again, “For it belongs to a genuine confession that we also bear witness publicly both with the voice and with outward signs to the faith, devotion, and praise of which we have just spoken.”³⁷

In Chemnitz’s *Enchiridion*, written for the examination of pastors, he asks and answers the question: “With what outward reverence is this Sacrament to be observed in [its] true use?” After rejecting the idea that bread and wine are to be worshiped,

Chemnitz answers, “But if the heart truly believes according to the words of institution that Christ is present in that action and offers and distributes to us His body and blood, [then] outward rites joined with all reverence and honor, as is proper and as it becomes Christians, will follow of themselves.”³⁸

To prove that Chemnitz’s view has come down to our times as well, I cite my personal copy of the *Concordia Triglotta*. It is a copy of the original edition. A note at the top of the title page says, “The *Triglotta* was introduced in the Seminary on the 17th of October, 1921, at 11:15 o’clock by Prof. F. Bente.” On page 1015 at the end of Thorough Declaration VII, “Of the Holy Supper,” is this handwritten note: “Not the bread but X is to be adored in the Lord’s Supper.”

Catholic

The practice of adoring Christ in the Sacrament is biblical, Lutheran, and catholic. Chemnitz, of the Lutheran fathers probably the most well-read in the church fathers, says that “the ancients venerated and worshiped Christ the God-man, indeed the very flesh of Christ, not only in the Supper [Latin *coelo*, “in heaven”]³⁹ but also on the altar where the mystery took place. . . .”⁴⁰ He quotes Ambrose’s comment on Psalm 98:5, saying that today we worship the flesh of Christ in the mysteries (i.e., the Sacrament).⁴¹

The Coptic version of the *Apostolic Constitutions* compares the reverence the sons of Aaron and Eli ought to have had with the reverence we should have for the Lord present on the altar. Earlier the *Constitutions* advise that communicants should “approach with reverence and holy fear, as to the body of their King.”⁴²

Chrysostom writes, “Reverence now, oh reverence, this Table whereof we all are partakers! (1 Cor 10:16–18). Christ, who was slain for us, the Victim that is placed thereon.”⁴³

The Lutheran Hymnal preserves for us testimony of the early church’s adoration of Christ in the Sacrament. The 1938 work *Studies in the Liturgy* says, “There is no question that the Agnus Dei is specifically a prayer of adoration to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world . . . The Agnus Dei is certainly not a joyous hymn of praise. It was rejected only by those who feared that it might lead to an adoration of the Host, rather than of the Saviour Himself.”⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that, given this background, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, published in 1941, retained the Agnus Dei.

It can be asserted that the early church universally adored Christ in the Sacrament. Augustine, speaking to the issue of whether or not to celebrate the Eucharist on Maundy Thursday, and Chemnitz, speaking against the practice of withholding the cup from the laity,⁴⁵ both use the catholicity of a practice to argue for its being accepted. Chemnitz, probably paraphrasing Augustine, writes, “If any one of these things, namely, rites which the authority of the divine Scriptures does not prescribe, is frequently done by the whole church throughout the world, then it is an act of the most insolent madness to argue that it should not be done.”⁴⁶

WHY ADORATION IS NEEDED NOW

The adoration of Christ in the Sacrament has a long history. In the beginning of the Reformation, the practice was not emphasized because of Roman abuses. Over against the Zwinglians, however, and later the Sacramentarians, the practice is defended and even suggested. In our day, I believe the practice of adoration should be restored now for four reasons: (1) To confess against the

Sacramentarians inside and outside of Lutheranism, (2) to help in resolving our ongoing debate about fellowship, (3) to emphasize the physical benefits of the Lord’s Supper, and (4) to honor the Lord Jesus Christ rightly.

To Confess Against the Sacramentarians Inside and Outside of Lutheranism

The error of the Sacramentarians, the real absence of Christ from the Holy Communion, is an ever-present error. The Formula of Concord says that what distinguished a Sacramentarian is that he uses the same words but believes the true and essential body and blood of Christ are absent from the consecrated bread and wine as far as heaven is above the earth (SD VII, 2).

It is very easy to spiritualize the Lord’s Supper, to believe that while we are receiving the Lord’s Supper our spirits should ascend to heaven and there bow before Christ. But when we bow in body here, we confess that Christ is present right before our eyes on the very altar. Chemnitz says that outward veneration is a confession of “what food we believe we receive there. With such external confession we separate ourselves from the Sacramentarians and from the Epicurean despisers of these mysteries.”⁴⁷

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There is a real need today to confess boldly and clearly against “Sacramentarians and Epicurean despisers” of the Sacrament. Sasse observed in 1959 that the disease of crypto-Calvinism (i.e., hidden Calvinism; Calvinists are also Sacramentarians) is chronic in the Lutheran church.⁴⁸ The Sacramentarian position is so palatable to human reason in its assertion that Christ is only spiritually present, only present according to his divine nature. It is the position towards which all people, in accordance with their fallen human reason, will naturally gravitate. Furthermore, the true doctrine is so unpalatable to natural man. Charles Porterfield Krauth observed in 1871: “The offense of the Master’s cross now rests upon his Table.”⁴⁹ Luther said, “This is the very devil; he can never quit abusing the blood of Christ” (AE 35:197). The early church had to defend herself against the charge of cannibalism. The Reformers had to prove they were not talking about a Capernaite eating of the body and blood of Christ. And I have heard Baptist army chaplains deride Catholic chaplains as “blood drinkers.”

The devil, the world, and our own flesh make us want to give up the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament. By bowing or kneeling before the consecrated elements, by elevating them, we confess that we are not Sacramentarians, that we believe contrary to what our eyes tell us that the real Christ is present before us with those visible elements. We are confessing that we reject the common error of both the Reformed and Rome that the finite is not capable of the infinite. In Jesus’ words “This is my body,” Rome refused to take the word “this” literally, and the Reformed

refused to take the word “body” literally.⁵⁰ By adoring our Lord Jesus Christ, while admitting that bread and wine are still visibly present, we are confessing that most sacred scriptural truth, the finite *is* capable of the infinite!

Only a Sacramentarian would refuse to bow before the consecrated elements. That is what Martin Chemnitz said: “No one, therefore, denies that Christ, God and man, truly and substantially present in His divine and human nature in the action of the Lord’s Supper, should be worshiped in spirit and in truth, except someone who, with the Sacramentarians, either denies or harbors doubt concerning the presence of Christ in the Supper.”⁵¹

Crypto-Sacramentarians are not going to be smoked out into the open unless we adopt practices that expose their error.

According to Luther in his *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, a Sacramentarian would say, “Christ is not with us in a certain form, therefore he is not with us at all” (AE 37:196). How is this any different from saying that Christ is not present in a certain form, therefore I will not adore him? Such seems to be the modern Sacramentarian position.

Crypto-Sacramentarians are not going to be smoked out into the open unless we adopt practices that expose their error. Also, with a large segment of Lutheranism pursuing full communion with the Sacramentarians, we need to testify to the Reformed how we differ from them. The elevation and accompanying adoration will testify to one and all that the celebrant and the congregation believe in the real presence of Christ. Luther wrote his *Brief Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament* (1544) in response to rumors that the elevation had been dropped at Wittenberg because of a new understanding of the Sacrament and because an agreement between Lutherans and Zwinglians had been reached (AE 38:283). If dropping the elevation was taken as a sign of agreement, what would its restoration today be but a sign of our disagreement with the Zwinglians inside and outside of Lutheranism?

The Sacramentarian position is on the move from another front too. Those enamored with church growth theology have been downplaying the sacraments for years. Their way of worship particularly draws attention away from the real presence, away from Christ.

If Pope Celestine I (422–432) was right in saying that each dogma of the church actually occurs in the liturgy before it is defined,⁵² it is but a short time before church-growth Lutherans plainly deny the real presence. Some church-growth pastors are preaching mini-sermons as the faithful come forward to commune; mood music is played during the distribution; families are brought forward to hold hands at the Communion rail. Like the Sacramentarians of old, they are focusing everything on the action rather than on the simple, real presence of the body and blood of Christ. The Sacramentarians liked to talk of action rather than presence, processes rather than things, effects rather than being.⁵³ Adoration, on the other hand, emphasizes the objec-

tive reality of the body and blood of Christ. It adores Christ, his body given for us, his blood shed for us. Adoration focuses on Christ as the reason we are gathered together.

Restoring the adoration would also establish a beachhead of sorts against the onslaught of Calvinism from the Church Growth Movement. In *The Controversy Concerning Predestination* C. F. W. Walther relates a story about a Lutheran duchess. She was attending a service conducted by the court chaplain. He was apologetic because he knew some could criticize it for being “popery.” The duchess responded that she remembered what Luther had told her father and for that reason did not want him to discontinue the ceremonies. It was her hope that “So long as such ceremonies continued, Calvinistic temerity would be held back from the public office of the church.”⁵⁴

To Resolve The Ongoing Fellowship Dispute

A second reason for restoring the ancient practice of adoration is that it would help in resolving the ongoing debate in our churches as to who is in fellowship with whom. Sasse observed about thirty-four years ago: “Every disease of the church becomes manifest at the Lord’s Table.” In the Missouri Synod, our fellowship disease has manifested itself at the Lord’s Table. On the surface, the disease appears to be who should come to the Lord’s Table. Should our altars be open or closed? But the question of who comes to the Lord’s Table can only be answered once the question of what is on the Lord’s Table is answered. Historically, those churches who believed in the real presence practiced closed Communion. Those who did not believe in the real presence or did not see it as all that important practiced open Communion. We have been debating for years *who should come* to the Lord’s Table. The real point at issue is *what is on* the Lord’s Table.

Luther saw from the very beginning of his controversy with the Zwinglians that since the words of institution are the gospel, a difference in the understanding of the Sacrament meant nothing less than a difference in the understanding of the gospel. What we have failed to comprehend in Missouri is that there is not a disagreement over who should come to the Lord’s Table without there also being a disagreement over what is on the Lord’s Table, which therefore signifies, according to Luther, that there is a difference in understanding the gospel itself.⁵⁶ To put it more succinctly, differences about who goes to the Lord’s Table ultimately and essentially mean there is a difference about what is on the Table. Furthermore, differences about what is on the Table mean there is an existing difference over what the gospel is.

In my opinion, there is a variety of views as to what is on the Lord’s Table. One Communion announcement I read from a Missouri Synod church instructed those taking Communion to treat the bread and the wine “as if it were the body and blood of Christ.” I transferred a family to a Missouri Synod congregation in another city. The family contacted me, saying their new pastor on two occasions had forgotten to say the words of institution. If it happened again, they wanted to know, should they receive the Sacrament?

Even among “conservative” Lutherans I believe there is no unanimity as to what is on the Lord’s Table. Hermann Sasse, writing in *This Is My Body*, makes an insightful observation about the Hussites: “Not a common understanding of the Lord’s Supper, but the demand for the chalice, kept the various branches of Hus-

sitism together.⁵⁷ Is this the present situation among us? Is it that the demand for closed Communion and a rejection of unionism, not a common understanding of what the Lord's Supper is, keeps various branches of Lutheranism together?

How do we confess publicly what is on the Table? Luther warned that if a person knows his preacher teaches Zwinglian doctrine he should "rather go without the sacrament as long as he lives than receive it of him."⁵⁸

How might Zwinglian Lutherans be exposed today? The answer may be, through restoration of the practice of adoring outwardly the real presence of Christ on his altar. Adoration confesses in no uncertain terms what we believe to be on the Lord's Table. In the same Anhalt sermon quoted above we read, "Where outward reverence is neglected knowingly and sacrilegiously out of contempt, then there is a certain sign, that it [the real presence] is not so in the heart."⁵⁹ We can all agree, for example, that if a pastor should allow a clown in his full regalia to mime the words of institution, he either does not believe what Communion is or he has contempt for it. In either case, his altar should be avoided.

To Emphasize the Physical Benefits of the Lord's Supper

A third reason the adoration of Christ in the Sacrament through physical actions should be restored is to emphasize the physical benefits of the Sacrament. The Lord's Supper benefits us physically. The early church taught this. Ignatius in his *Epistle to the Ephesians* writes of the Lord's Supper that it "is the medicine of immortality and the antidote that we should not die but live for ever in Jesus Christ."⁶⁰ Some of the ancients viewed the Lord's Supper as the means by which God prepared these physical bodies for everlasting life. Chemnitz quotes Bernard favorably: "The body of Christ is to the sick a medicine, to pilgrims a way; it strengthens the weak, delights the strong, heals weariness, preserves health."⁶¹ Luther in his Large Catechism says the Sacrament will "give you life both in soul and body. For where the soul has recovered, the body also is relieved" (LC VI, 68).

If a person will not bow before Christ on the altar, he ought to examine what he is bowing before.

Lutheranism, as we have seen, glories in the stupendous truth that the infinite God comes to us by means of what is finite. Luther was very incarnational. For him the Sacrament of the Altar was "an extension of the incarnation into our time and into our lives."⁶² "The real presence meant that the incarnation was more than a historical fact of the past."⁶³ The real presence meant that the incarnation was a reality right now at this moment, at this place, right before our eyes.

But as Teigen remarks, "There is a constant tendency to spiritualize what Christ really offers in the Sacrament and to turn one's thoughts from the Supper observed in our midst to a meditation of Christ in heaven."⁶⁴ This is what happened in Lutheranism. Martin Bucer, who tried to find a middle way between Luther and

Zwingli, but always came down on the Zwinglian side when it came to the real presence, believed that nothing material could help the soul.⁶⁵ From the beginning of the seventeenth century, with some notable exceptions, the idea of a connection between the Sacrament and our physical bodies was all but given up. "It becomes evident from the doctrine of late Orthodoxy that the Sacrament no longer had the profound meaning for the lives of the Christians that it had a hundred years earlier. This is one of the reasons why people could no longer see a real difference between the Lutheran and the Reformed churches."⁶⁶

This is true of our day too. We have lost or at least downplayed the physical benefits of the Lord's Supper probably because we sense what Sasse observed in 1959: the most criticized element of Luther's doctrine of the Sacrament was that the Sacrament has bodily effects.⁶⁷ But this then is precisely what we should confess loudest, not only because it is a very comforting doctrine, but because it distinguishes us from the Reformed.

By bowing before his real presence, by elevating the consecrated elements for all to adore, we confess the truth that the Sacrament is not only a physical (incarnational) reality, but that it has physical effects. Here is Christ in our midst to feed us not only spiritually but physically; to revive bodies, not just souls; to touch our earthly lives, not only our eternal ones. To confess that we cannot rise to where he is, but he has come down to where we dwell, we bow where we are because here is where we meet him.

To Honor Christ Rightly

The fourth reason the practice of adoration should be restored is to honor Christ rightly. I am aware that most Lutherans regard adoration as an adiaphoron. One can find passages in Luther that say it is not a sin if one does not adore or elevate the consecrated elements (AE 36:296; 38:316) and to bind consciences with a necessity not imposed by the Word of God is of the antichrist, as Chemnitz states.⁶⁸ Elsewhere he says, "Things which do not have a commandment of God in Scripture must not be laid on conscience as necessary."⁶⁹

Therefore, I do not want to be understood as saying that a person is not rightly honoring Christ unless he by outward actions adores Christ in the Sacrament. I do, however, believe it is a godly way to honor him. Moreover, I believe that if a person will not bow before Christ on the altar, he ought to examine what he is bowing before. Most communicants give a slight bow upon rising from receiving the body and blood. What are they bowing before? Certainly not the pastor! Are they merely reverencing the altar, a symbol of God's presence on earth? Behold, God himself is before them! Again, we religiously teach our acolytes to bow before empty altars at the beginning of service. What is wrong with bowing before Christ? Likewise, the pastor who will not elevate the consecrated elements for adoration should examine what he is elevating in the service. In 1938 it was observed, "Where the old-time priest elevated the Host, the present-day parson elevates the coins."⁷⁰

Bowing, reverencing, even elevating are not strange things in our service. But we feel strange when we think of making the consecrated elements the object of such actions. Perhaps we are being caught up mistakenly in the spiritual bliss of it all. Chemnitz cautions, "But in the Lord's Supper the spiritual eating must not so turn our mind and faith away from this celebration of the

Supper which is taking place in the gathering of the congregation that in our meditations we are carried beyond the heaven of heavens, as our adversaries imagine.”⁷¹

The Communion liturgy in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, which dates back to the early church, focuses attention on what is taking place on earth, not in heaven. After the Proper Preface, we sing in the Sanctus, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” Our King is coming down to us. Once the words of institution are said, we sing the Agnus Dei, which, as was pointed out, is sung in adoration of the Lamb of God who is now present in our midst, on our altar.

We rightly honor Christ in our midst when we adore his presence in the Sacrament.

Only to the eyes of faith, however, is there any miracle, any Christ to bow before. As we sing in “An Awe-full Mystery Is Here,” “The Word, not sense, must be our guide, / And faith assure since sight’s denied” (*TLH* 304:5). The adoration of the presence of Christ flows from faith that he *is* there and the reason *why* he is there. This is why Luther said more honor had to be given to the word that to the Sacrament itself (*AE* 36:277). Without the word no one would know what the Sacrament was or why Christ gave it to us. From faith grounded in the word flows adoration focused on Christ in the earthly elements. As Luther said, “But if you first exercise faith rightly, at the most important point, namely, with respect to the words, then the adoration of the Sacrament will afterwards follow beautifully in its own place” (*AE* 36:296). Chemnitz echoes Luther’s sentiments: “Men must first of all be taught from the Word of God how they ought to worship Christ, God and man, in the true use of the Eucharist with a true, inner, and spiritual worship. Thereafter the true external indications of inward reverence finally and rightly follow.”⁷²

The word tells us that this bread before us is the body of Christ, this wine before us is the blood of Christ. Luther said that just as at the baptism of Christ someone could have pointed at the dove and said, “This is the Holy Spirit,” so we can point at the bread and say, “This is Christ’s body.” “What one does to the bread is rightly and properly attributed to the body of Christ by virtue of the sacramental union” (*AE* 37:299, 300).

In 1534, Luther gave Melancthon instructions concerning ongoing negotiations with the Zwinglians after the Marburg Colloquy:

Our opinion is that the body is in such a way with or in the bread that it is truly received with the bread. Whatever the bread suffers or does is also true of the body. Thus, it is rightly said of the body of Christ that it is carried, given, received, eaten, when the bread is carried, given, received, eaten. That is the meaning of “This is my body.”⁷³

If this is our faith, will we not bow down before the consecrated bread and wine? If whatever happens to the bread happens

to the body of Christ, if whatever the bread receives the body receives, is it not proper then to honor Christ in the Sacrament by adoring him?

Other fathers of the church had the same realistic, down-to-earth understanding of the presence of Christ in the Sacrament. From this understanding, from this faith based on the words of institution, came their treatment of the Sacrament. Chemnitz compares God’s presence in the ark to his presence in Holy Communion.⁷⁴ How did Israel treat the ark? Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catechetical Lectures* said that the Sacrament should be physically treated as more precious than gold or gems.⁷⁵

Chrysostom, in *Homilies on Ephesians*, directs worshipers to the altar before their eyes: “Look, I entreat: a royal table is set before you, angels minister at that table, the King Himself is there . . . Everyday He cometh in to see the guest, and converseth with them all.”⁷⁶ In another homily, he compares the reverence people have for kings with the reverence due the body of Christ. If people do not inconsiderately receive the robe of a king, though it is nothing but cloth and dye, how much more the body of the king, Christ Himself! He beseeches his congregation, “Let us not I pray you, let us not slay ourselves by our irreverence, but with all awfulness and purity draw nigh to it.”⁷⁷

The realization that Christ is truly, substantially, essentially present in our very midst has led men and women to express their adoration of that reality by their actions. But it has not only affected their view of worship, it has affected the place where they worship. As Sasse observes, “It would be as incorrect to understand medieval cathedrals primarily as a display of an amazing knowledge of mathematics and statistics.” He goes on to say, “The medieval church was built for the celebration of the mass and the adoration of Christ as present in the Sacrament.”⁷⁸

We rightly honor Christ in our midst when we adore his presence in the Sacrament, and how we treat Christ in the Sacrament reflects our attitude toward his person and work. C. P. Krauth observed over a hundred years ago: “All theology without exception, had views of the atonement which were lower or higher, as its views of the Lord’s Supper were lower or higher.”⁷⁹ Centuries before Krauth, Luther observed: “All the ridicule that Karlstadt [a Sacramentarian] heaps on the sacrament, he has to direct also to the deity of Christ in the flesh, as he also surely will do in time” (*AE* 40:216). The Reformed, beginning with the spiritual brothers of Karlstadt and Zwingli, fulfilled Luther’s prophesy with their dictum that the finite is not capable of the infinite.

CONCLUSION

To a large part of Christendom it does not matter whether Christ physically became man, physically arose, or physically ascended into heaven. For many, Christianity need not have any physical reality at all; it is all in the heart, in the spirit, somewhere “up there.” But Christianity is incarnational. God is with us in time. Our Lord’s Supper is tied to a particular night in time, the night he was betrayed. Our Lord deals with us only through physical elements: the written Word, the waters of baptism, and the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Through these physical elements our Christ comes to us at points in time. But in the Holy Communion he places his body and blood at a point in time and space. We do well to pause and bow before him there. The angels are. LOGIA

NOTES

1. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 13 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), p. 63.
2. *The Adoration of the Sacrament*, 1523 (AE 36:290).
3. Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 2, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), p. 284.
4. Bjarne W. Teigen, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz* (Brewster, MA.: Trinity Lutheran Press, 1986), pp. 209–10.
5. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 281.
6. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 280.
7. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 279–80.
8. Quoted in Herman Sasse, *This Is My Body* (Adelaide, S. A.: Lutheran Publishing House, 1959), p. 248, n. 19.
9. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 37.
10. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 139.
11. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3, trans. Walter Albrecht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 301.
12. Teigen, p. 196, n. 32.
13. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 54.
14. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 84.
15. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 301, emphasis added.
16. Teigen, p. 104.
17. Pieper, vol. 3, p. 434.
18. C. F. W. Walther, *Pastorale* (St. Louis: Concordia-Verlag, 1897), p. 175.
19. Teigen, p. 182.
20. Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 670.
21. Schmid, p. 573.
22. Teigen, p. 184. But *Pastoral Theology*, ed. George Krause and Norbert Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), does say that the words of institution are the creative words of the Lord (p. 104).
23. Herman Sasse, *We Confess The Sacraments*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), p. 136.
24. *Der Lutheraner* 14, no. 4, p. 84.
25. Teigen, p. 11.
26. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, pp. 256–57.
27. *Nicene Fathers*, vol. 13, p. 143.
28. *Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9, p. 47.
29. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 277.
30. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 280.
31. Cheslyn Jones et al., eds., *The Study of Liturgy*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 297.
32. Teigen, p. 111, citing *Historie des Sacramentsstreits*, p. 545.
33. Teigen, p. 110.
34. Teigen, p. 107.
35. Teigen, p. 105.
36. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 277.
37. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 283.
38. Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, trans. Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p. 132.
39. Apparently, *coelo* was mistaken for *coena*. The error was discovered by Bjarne W. Teigen.
40. Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), p. 160.
41. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 278.
42. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 7 (reprint Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 491, n. 7; p. 422.
43. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 11, p. 394.
44. F. R. Webber, *Studies in the Liturgy* (Erie, PA.: Ashby Printing Co., 1938), p. 153.
45. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 302.
46. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 364.
47. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, pp. 283–84.
48. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 272.
49. Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1913), p. 619.
50. Teigen, pp. 53–54.
51. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 279.
52. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 10, n. 1.
53. Teigen, p. 178.
54. C. F. W. Walther, *The Controversy Concerning Predestination*, trans. August Crull (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1881), p. 77.
55. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 2.
56. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 227.
57. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 60.
58. Quoted in C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, trans. J. T. Mueller (reprint St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), p. 117.
59. Teigen, p. 109.
60. Ignatius, *Ephesians 20.2*, in J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, part 2, vol. 2 (reprint Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 87.
61. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 234.
62. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 123.
63. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 328.
64. Teigen, p. 178.
65. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 246.
66. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 314, n. 46.
67. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 149.
68. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 299.
69. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 328.
70. Webber, p. 199.
71. Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, pp. 63–64.
72. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 281.
73. Quoted in *This Is My Body*, p. 250.
74. Chemnitz, *Examination*, vol. 2, p. 260.
75. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, p. 156.
76. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 13, p. 63.
77. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 12, p. 142.
78. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p. 48.
79. Krauth, p. 619.