

## Why Sacred Mysteries: The Sacraments and Why We Practice Them

### *Week Four & Week 5 Handout*

#### V. The Lutheran Understanding of Holy Communion

##### A. Holy Communion

1. Is it a sacrament? Yes
2. The divine promise: Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26
3. A visible/physical element: unleavened bread and wine
4. Authorized and Instituted by Christ

##### B. The Context of a Meal

1. Passover: Exodus 12
2. An actual meal: 1 Corinthians 11, Jude 12, Acts 2:42-47
3. Sustaining us physically and spiritually; spiritual food and spiritual drink
4. Bread and Wine—basic food that everyone eats
5. Do the elements matter?
6. You are what you eat
7. What distinguishes Communion from a regular meal? The Words of Institution

##### C. Differences from the Catholics

1. The centrality of the mass
2. The aberration of the private mass
3. Communion in one kind
4. Effectiveness based upon ritual performance by approved hierarchy
5. Substances and accidents; Luther's rejection of transubstantiation
6. The real presence: true body & blood in, with, and under the bread & the wine
7. The adoration of the host, or, when do the elements stop being the body & blood?

##### D. Differences from other Protestants

1. The Big Difference: Zwingli and Luther
  - a. The big split: the Marburg Colloquy of 1529
  - b. Zwingli's: because Christ has ascended to heaven, he cannot be physically present
  - c. The meal is a pious remembrance of his death made effective by faith
  - d. Symbolic rather than sacramental
  - e. "In Zwingli's view, participation in the Lord's Supper is a good work as a response of faith" (Bartels, 154) A commemorative meal, not a means of grace. Zwingli called Lutherans flesh eaters and said that their communion was a baked god. Luther said that Zwingli was not a Christian.
2. Calvin's middle road: Christ is "spiritually", but not physically present in the supper
3. Luther's response: You are of a different spirit
  - a. What makes the sacrament is the divine promise given in the Words of Institution, not the worthiness of the minister or the piety of the pious
  - b. God's promise creates the new reality, the new creation, and continues to do so every time the word is preached, every time we remember our baptism, and every time we gather in community to partake of His body and blood in the supper
  - c. God is found where he says he is
4. The Christological implications of Zwingli's and Calvin's view of the Lord's supper
  - a. Attempts to make Christ spiritually present in the Supper led to distinctions between the divine and human natures.
  - b. "The finite cannot bear the infinite"-- The problem is that if we believe this to be true about the supper, we need to believe it to be true about Christ. Christ cannot truly be God.

##### E. The Question of Time

1. Past (Passover and Christ's death on the cross)
2. Present (we are in him right now, a new creation)

3. Future (a foretaste of the feast to come)
- F. Eating Unworthily
1. The context of 1 Corinthians 11
  2. Recognizing the body
  3. Examining ourselves
    - a. Remembering our baptism
    - b. At FOF, the four questions:
      - i. Do I believe I am a sinner?
      - ii. Do I trust in Jesus as my Lord and Savior for the forgiveness of my sins?
      - iii. Do I believe Christ is coming to me in this community of believers and meal?
      - iv. Do I repent of any sins that stand before God?
  4. So who's allowed and who's not allowed to take communion?
    - a. Open and closed/close: does the question even matter?
    - b. Baptism
    - c. Ideally, one should have a basic understanding
    - d. No minimum age
    - e. Communicants from other church bodies

In common with Zwingli and other renaissance humanists, Luther was convinced that the key to papal claims to supremacy was the sacrifice of the mass. Identifying themselves as by office standing in an historical succession stretching back to the first bishop of Rome, the Apostle Peter, the popes asserted the right to legitimize all forms of Christian ministry. This legitimization was necessary, as it remains in Roman Catholicism, for the administration of a valid sacrament. God will only accept the sacrifices of those whom he has appointed, who stand in the properly defined relationship to Peter's successors. By the same token, God will only confer his grace through the channels he has established. Thus, as Christ's vicar on earth the papacy controlled traffic both directions, whether heavenward or earthbound. This entire conception of Christianity was fundamentally ritualistic and hierarchical.

Zwingli and company attacked papal claims by challenging what they saw as the underlying premise, Christ's physical presence in the Eucharist, the appropriate name for the sacrament when it is understood sacrificially as an act of thanksgiving. In a simple but direct argument, Zwingli held that because Christ has ascended into heaven, he cannot be physically present in earthly elements like bread and wine. Rather, Christ is present in the hearts and minds of the faithful who gather in common memory of the night in which he was betrayed. Since Christ is not physically present, the legitimizing authorization of the papacy is not necessary to affect the sacrament. The sacrament becomes effective in the faith of the participants.

Luther attacked at the same point but predictably, his argument was not ontological—a matter of being, as in both medieval Catholicism itself and Zwingli—but eschatological. The crucified and risen Christ who is even now reclaiming all things joins his people in the present through the external Word, whether that Word be preached or administered sacramentally. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is therefore no sacrifice directed toward God; neither is it an act of pious remembrance. Rather, it is God's act in Christ in his ongoing restoration of creation and creature. The physical nature of Christ's presence “in, with, and under” the bread and wine is thus crucial. He comes down to earth, gathering the godless as his very own. His presence is assured by his promise and therefore stands independent of any theory or explanation attempting to ascertain it. At the same time Christ's promise makes the sacrament independent of personal perception, he is there, whether apprehended in faith or unknown to unbelief. Neither a hierarchy of offices nor the piety of the pious but God's Word makes the sacrament.

*References:*

- Arand, Charles, Kolb, Robert, & Nestingen, James. (2012). *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of The Book of Concord*. Fortress Press.
- Bartels, Ernest. 2004. *Take Eat, Take Drink: The Lord's Supper through the Centuries*. CPH
- McCain, Paul, ed. 2006. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions. A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*. CPH.