

Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue
October 1, 1967

As a result of our conversations on the eucharist, we Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians wish to record, chiefly and first of all, our profound gratitude to God for the growing unity on this subject which we see in our day.

Our responsibility is to try to articulate and explain this increasing agreement to the people and leadership of our churches, so that they may test for themselves what we have discussed and draw whatever conclusions in thought and action they find appropriate.

What we have to report is not so much original with us as simply one manifestation of a growing consensus among many Christian traditions on the Lord's supper.¹

Ours, however, is a specifically Roman Catholic-Lutheran contribution. It attempts to go beyond the more general ecumenical discussion of the eucharist to an examination of the particular agreements and disagreements of our two traditions. While we have considered the biblical and patristic sources of eucharistic doctrine and practice in our preparatory conversations, this statement deals with problems that have become particularly acute for Lutherans and Roman Catholics as a result of the sixteenth-century controversies. It does not try to treat the sacrament of the altar comprehensively.

Our attention has focused on two issues: the eucharist as sacrifice, and the presence of Christ in the sacrament. These issues have been especially divisive in the past and are involved in most of our historical disagreements on eucharistic doctrine and practice. For this reason it seems to us important to enunciate our growing agreement on these two points, even though there are other aspects of the sacrament of the altar we have not yet discussed.

I. THE EUCHARIST AS SACRIFICE²

With reference to the eucharist as sacrifice, two affirmations have not been denied by either confession; four aspects of the problem have been major points of divergence.

1. a) Lutherans and Roman Catholics alike acknowledge that in the Lord's supper "Christ is present as the Crucified who died for our sins and who rose again for our justification, as the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world who gives himself to the faithful."³ On this Lutherans insist as much as Catholics, although, for various reasons, Lutherans have been reticent about speaking of the eucharist as a sacrifice.

b) The confessional documents of both traditions agree that the celebration of the eucharist is the church's sacrifice of praise and self-offering; or oblation. Each tradition can make the following statement its own: "By him, with him and in him who is our great High Priest and Intercessor we offer to the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, our praise, thanksgiving and intercession.

With contrite hearts we offer ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice, a sacrifice which must be expressed in the whole of our daily lives."⁴

2. Historically, our controversies have revolved around the question whether the worshipping assembly "offers Christ" in the sacrifice of the mass a general, Lutherans have replied in the negative, because they believed that only thus could they preserve the once-for-all character and the full sufficiency of the sacrifice of the cross and the eucharist from becoming a human supplement to God's saving work, a matter of "works-righteousness."

a) First of all, we must be clear that Catholics as well as Lutherans affirm the unrepeatable character of the sacrifice of the cross. The Council of Trent, to be sure, affirmed this, but Lutheran doubts about the Catholic position were not resolved. Today, however, we find no reason for such doubt, and we recognize our agreement in the assertion that "What God did in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, he does not do again. The events are unique; they cannot be repeated, or extended or continued. Yet in this memorial we do not only recall past events: God makes them present through the Holy Spirit, thus making us participants in Christ (I Cor. 1:9)."⁵

b) Further, the Catholic affirmation that the church "offers Christ" in the mass has in the course of the last half century been increasingly explained in terms which answer Lutheran fears that this detracts from the full sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. The members of the body of Christ are united through Christ with God and with one another in such a way that they become participants in his worship, his self-offering, his sacrifice to the Father. Through this union between Christ and Christians, the eucharistic assembly "offers Christ" by consenting in the power of the Holy Spirit to be offered by him to the Father.⁶ Apart from Christ we have no gifts, no worship, no sacrifice of our own to offer to God. All we can plead is Christ, the sacrificial lamb and victim whom the Father himself has given us.

c) Another historically important point of controversy has been the Roman Catholic position that the eucharistic sacrifice is "propitiatory." Within the context of the emphases which we have outlined above, Catholics today interpret this position as emphatically affirming that the presence of the unique propitiatory sacrifice of the cross in the eucharistic celebration of the church is efficacious for the forgiveness of sins and the life of the world. Lutherans can join them up to this point.⁷ They reject, however, what they have understood Trent to say about the mass as a propitiatory sacrifice "offered for the living and the dead,"⁸ even though the Apology of the Augsburg Confession concedes with respect to prayer for the dead that "we do not forbid it."⁹ We have not discussed this aspect of the problem; further exploration of it is required.

d) In addition to the growing harmony in ways of thinking about the eucharistic sacrifice, there is a significant convergence in the actual practice of eucharistic worship. Doctrine is inevitably interpreted in the light of practice, as well as vice versa, and consequently oppositions on this level can negate apparent doctrinal agreement. For example, the Reformers and later Lutherans have believed that the multiplication of private masses and the associated systems of mass intentions and mass stipends are evidence that Roman Catholics do not take seriously the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, and this suspicion has been reinforced by such statements of Catholic theologians as "the sacrificial worth of two Masses is just double the sacrificial worth of

one Mass."¹⁰ Now, however, the Second Vatican Council in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy has declared that the nature of the mass is such that the communal way of celebrating is to be preferred to individual and quasi-private celebrations.¹¹ As the liturgical renewal progresses in this and other respects, each group in these discussions finds it increasingly easy to understand and approve what the other says about the eucharist in general and its sacrificial aspects in particular.

The question of eucharistic sacrifice is closely related to other issues. The problem of the "real presence" has been the first to claim our attention. Do we, in the eucharist, genuinely encounter Christ in the full reality of his person and sacrificial action? It is therefore to this subject that we now turn.

II. THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

Here, too, there are areas in which this group believes that Roman Catholics and Lutherans can make the same affirmations, and others in which our agreement is not yet complete.

1. a) We confess a manifold presence of Christ, the Word of God and Lord of the world. The crucified and risen Lord is present in his body, the people of God, for he is present where two or three are gathered in his name (Mt. 18:20). He is present in baptism, for it is Christ himself who baptizes.¹² He is present in the reading of the scriptures and the proclamation of the gospel. He is present in the Lord's supper.¹³

b) We affirm that in the sacrament of the Lord's supper Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is present wholly and entirely, in his body and blood, under the signs of bread and wine.¹⁴

c) Through the centuries Christians have attempted various formulations to describe this presence. Our confessional documents have in common affirmed that Jesus Christ is "really," "truly" and "substantially" present in this sacrament.¹⁵ This manner of presence "we can scarcely express in words,"¹⁶ but we affirm his presence because we believe in the power of God and the promise of Jesus Christ, "This is my body. . . . This is my blood."¹⁷ Our traditions have spoken of this presence as "sacramental,"¹⁸ "supernatural" and "spiritual."¹⁹ These terms have different connotations in the two traditions, but they have in common a rejection of a spatial or natural manner of presence, and a rejection of an understanding of the sacrament as only commemorative or figurative.²⁰ The term "sign," once suspect, is again recognized as a positive term for speaking of Christ's presence in the sacrament.²¹ For, though symbols and symbolic actions are used, the Lord's supper is an effective sign: it communicates what it promises; ". . . the action of the Church becomes the effective means whereby God in Christ acts and Christ is present with his people."²²

d) Although the sacrament is meant to be celebrated in the midst of the believing congregation, we are agreed that the presence of Christ does not come about through the faith of the believer, or through any human power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit through the word.²³

e) The true body and blood of Christ are present not only at the moment of reception but throughout the eucharistic action.²⁴

2. In the following areas our historical divergences are being overcome, although we are unable at present to speak with one voice at every point.

a) In reference to eucharistic worship:

a. We agreed that Christ gave us this sacrament in order that we might receive him and participate in his worship of the Father.²⁵

b. We are also agreed that the Lord Jesus Christ is himself to be worshiped, praised and adored; every knee is to bow before him.²⁶

c. We are further agreed that as long as Christ remains sacramentally present, worship, reverence and adoration are appropriate.²⁷

d. Both Lutherans and Catholics link Christ's eucharistic presence closely to the eucharistic liturgy itself. Lutherans, however, have not stressed the prolongation of this presence beyond the communion service as Catholics have done.

e. To be sure, the opposition on this point is not total. Following a practice attested in the early church, Lutherans may distribute the elements from the congregational communion service to the sick in private communion, in some cases as an extension of this service, in some cases with the words of institution spoken either for their proclamatory value or as consecration.

f. Also in harmony with a eucharistic practice attested in the early church, Roman Catholics have traditionally reserved the consecrated host for communicating the sick, which, according to the Instruction of May 25, 1967, is the "primary and original purpose" of reservation.²⁸ The adoration of Christ present in the reserved sacrament is of later origin and is a secondary end.²⁹ The same Instruction repeats the insistence of the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy that any adoration of the reserved sacrament be harmonized with and in some way derived from the liturgy, "since the liturgy by its very nature surpasses" any nonliturgical eucharistic devotion.³⁰

b) In reference to the presence of Christ under both species, a divergence of practice concerning the cup for the laity has been one of the most obvious signs of disunity between Roman Catholics and other Christians. Catholics of the Eastern rites in union with the Roman See have always retained the practice of communion under both species. The Lutheran confessions emphasize the desirability of communion in both kinds in obedience to "a clear command and order of Christ"³¹ but do not deny the sacramental character of communion administered to a congregation in one kind only. At Vatican II the Roman Catholic Church reintroduced, to a modest but significant extent, communion under both kinds for the Western church.³² The Council thereby recognized that this practice better expresses the sign of the mystery of eucharistic presence. Recent liturgical directives have explicitly acknowledged this principle and have extended this usage.³³

c) Lutherans traditionally have understood the Roman Catholic use of the term "transubstantiation" to involve:

a. An emphatic affirmation of the presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament. With this they are in agreement.

b. An affirmation that God acts in the eucharist, effecting a change in the elements. This also Lutherans teach, although they use a different terminology.³⁴

c. A rationalistic attempt to explain the mystery of Christ's presence in the sacrament. This they have rejected as presumptuous.

d. A definitive commitment to one and only one conceptual framework in which to express the change in the elements. This they have regarded as theologically untenable.

It can thus be seen that there is agreement on the "that," the full reality of Christ's presence. What has been disputed is a particular way of stating the "how," the manner in which he becomes present.

Today, however, when Lutheran theologians read contemporary Catholic expositions,³⁵ it becomes clear to them that the dogma of transubstantiation intends to affirm the fact of Christ's presence and of the change which takes place, and is not an attempt to explain how Christ becomes present. When the dogma is understood in this way, Lutherans find that they also must acknowledge that it is a legitimate way of attempting to express the mystery, even though they continue to believe that the conceptuality associated with "transubstantiation" is misleading and therefore prefer to avoid the term.

Our conversations have persuaded us of both the legitimacy and the limits of theological efforts to explore the mystery of Christ's presence in the sacrament. We are also persuaded that no single vocabulary or conceptual framework can be adequate, exclusive or final in this theological enterprise. We are convinced that current theological trends in both traditions give great promise for increasing convergence and deepened understanding of the eucharistic mystery.

CONCLUSION

There are still other questions that must be examined before we Catholic and Lutheran participants in these conversations would be prepared to assess our over-all agreements and disagreements on the doctrine of the sacrament of the altar. To mention two important omissions, we have not yet attempted to clarify our respective positions on the roles of the laity and the clergy, the "general" and "special" priesthood, in sacramental celebrations, nor have we discussed the pressing problem of the possibilities of intercommunion apart from full doctrinal and ecclesiastical fellowship.

On the two major issues which we have discussed at length, however, the progress has been immense. Despite all remaining differences in the ways we speak and think of the eucharistic sacrifice and our Lord's presence in his supper, we are no longer able to regard ourselves as divided in the one holy catholic and apostolic faith on these two points. We therefore prayerfully ask our fellow Lutherans and Catholics to examine their consciences and root out many ways of thinking, speaking and acting, both individually and as churches, which have obscured their unity in Christ on these as on many other matters.

NOTES

1. Various terms are current in the different Christian traditions for this sacrament: e.g., eucharist, holy communion, sacrament of the altar, mass. We shall use them interchangeably. Further, in order to mark the way our statement shares in the

growing ecumenical consensus, we shall, on occasion, use language from the documents of the ecumenical movement to express our own convictions.

2. Scripture and the history of theology contain many ways of describing Christ's sacrifice and therefore also the sacrificial character of the memorial of that sacrifice which is the eucharist. The most general meaning of "sacrifice" is broader than any current in contemporary usage-or in that of the sixteenth century. Thus, according to the Second World Conference on Faith and Order (Edinburgh, 1937), "If sacrifice is understood as it was by our Lord and His followers and in the early Church, it includes, not His death only, but the obedience of His earthly ministry, and His risen and ascended life, in which He still does His Father's will and ever liveth to make intercession for us" (L. Vischer, ed., *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1963* [St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1963] p. 57). In what follows, however, no particular theory of "sacrifice" or of related terms such as "propitiation" is presupposed.
3. *Consultation on Church Union: Principles* (Cincinnati: Forward Movement Press, 1967) p. 50. See also the Montreal Faith and Order affirmation: the Lord's supper is "a sacrament of the presence of the crucified and glorified Christ until he come, and a means whereby the sacrifice of the cross, which we proclaim, is operative within the church" (P.C. Rodger, ed., *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order: Montreal, 1963*, p. 73).
4. Rodger, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74. See also the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* XXIV, 30-88, esp. 33, 35, 74-75, 87. References to the Lutheran Confessions are based on *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche* (5th ed.; Göttingen, 1964.)
5. Rodger, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
6. Luther says: "not that we offer Christ as a sacrifice, but that Christ offers us"; but he also holds that this involves a sense in which "we offer Christ": "Through it (faith), in connection with the sacrament, we offer ourselves, our need, our prayer, praise and thanksgiving in Christ, and thereby we offer Christ. . . I also offer Christ in that I desire and believe that he accepts me and my prayer and praise and presents it to God in his own person" (*A Treatise on the New Testament*, in *Luther's Works* 35 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961] 98-101). This agrees with the testimony of the Second Vatican Council, which, quoting St. Augustine, says that the "aim" of the sacrifice offered in the eucharist is that "the entire commonwealth of the redeemed, that is, the community and the society of the saints, be offered as a universal sacrifice to God through the High Priest who in His Passion offered His very Self for us that we might be the body of so exalted a Head" (*Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, no. 2; tr. W.M. Abbott and J. Gallagher, eds., *The Documents of Vatican II* [New York: Guild Press, 1966] pp. 535-36; quotation from Augustine's *City of God* 10, 6). The continuation of this quotation is paraphrased in the 1947 encyclical *i, no. 125*: "in the sacrament of the altar which she [the church] offers, she herself is also offered." The contemporary Catholic theologian Karl Rahner explains this point by saying that the eucharistic offering of Christ inseparably involves "the believing, inner 'yes' of men to the movement of loving obedience of Christ to the Father." He goes on to speak

directly to the fears which Protestants have expressed regarding the notion of the "sacrifice of the mass": "The sacrifice of the mass creates no new gracious and saving will in God vis-a-vis the world which did not already exist through the cross (and only through the cross!)." "We can speak of 'moving' God to forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy and assistance through the sacrifice of the mass only in the sense that the gracious will a God, founded exclusively on the reconciliation of the cross, becomes visible in the sacrifice of the mass, comes to man ... and takes hold of him"-producing, Rahner goes on to suggest, manifold effects in the worshipers and, through their actions and prayers, in the world ("Die vielen Messen und das eine Opfer," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 71 [1949] 267 and 288).

7. A question can still be raised whether the word "propitiatory," given its usual connotations, correctly describes the Father's action in Christ on Calvary. Cf. C.F.D. Moule, *The Sacrifice of Christ* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1964), pp. vi-viii, 33 f., and the literature cited on p. 46.
8. Denzinger-Schönmetzer 1753 (950).
9. XXXIV, 94.
10. A. Vonier, *Collected Works 2* (London, 1952) 343. It should be noted that Vonier does not regard such a statement as irreconcilable with his own insistence on the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice.
11. Cf. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, nos. 26 and 27.
12. Cf. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 7; St. Augustine, *Treatise on the Gospel of John* 6, 1, 7 (PL 35, 1428).
13. Cf. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 7; *Instruction on Eucharistic Worship* (May 25, 1967) no. 9; FC (= *Formula of Concord*) SD (= *Solid Declaration*) VIII, 76-84.
14. 1 Cor. 11:27. Cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzer (hereafter DS) 1636, 1640 f., 1651, 1653. Writing of the eucharistic presence, E. Schlink states: "The divine nature of Christ is not without the human nature and the human nature is not without the divine nature" (*Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* [Philadelphia, 1961] p. 158.) See also FC SD VII, 60; VIII, 76-84.
15. Cf. DS 1636; Ap (= *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*) X, 1, 4; FC Ep (= *Epitome*) VII, 6, 34; SD VII, 88, 126.
16. DS 1636. Cf. FC SD VII, 38.
17. Cf. DS 1636; FC Ep VII, 16 f.; SD VII, 97-103, 106.
18. DS 1636. Cf. FC Ep VII, 15; SD VII, 63.
19. FC Ep VII, 14 f. In the context of the *Formula of Concord*, it is clear that "spiritual" here is not opposed to "real." Cf. SD VII, 94-106, 118.
20. Cf. AC (= *Augsburg Confession*) X; Ap X, 1 ff.; FC Ep VII, 6 f., 26 ff., 34; SD VII, 2-11, 38, 48 f.; DS 1636, 1651.
21. Cf. DS 1651; FC SD VII, 7, 49, 116; *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, nos. 33, 59; *Instruction on Eucharistic Worship*, no. 6.
22. *Consultation on Church Union: Principles*, p. 49.
23. Cf. LC (= *Large Catechism*) V, 9f., 14; FC Ep VII, 9, 35; SD VII, 73-82, 89, 121; DS 1636 f.; 1640. See also DS 1612; FC Ep VII, 8; SD VII, 16, 32, 89; LC IV, 52, and V, 4 ff., 15-18. Catholics see in these affirmations of the Lutheran

Confessions the essential content of the Catholic doctrine of the *ex opere operato* working of the sacraments. In some of the pre-Tridentine Confessions, Lutherans rejected a concept of *opus operatum* which Catholics do not recognize as their own. Cf. DS 1606 ff., 1612.

24. Cf. AC X, 1; FC SD VII, 14; Ep VII, 6: "We believe ... that in the holy supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and essentially present and are truly distributed and received (*wahrhaftig ausgeteilet und empfangen werde*). . ." In his *Sermon on the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ* (1526; WA [= Weimar edition] 19, 491, 13), Luther declared: "As soon as Christ says: 'This is my body,' his body is present through the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit" (tr. F. Ahrens, American edition 36, 341). Cf. WA 30/1, 53, 122.-Trent (DS 1654) refers to Christ's presence before reception as "ante (usum)." For Trent *usus* means the actual reception by the communicant: "in usu, dum sumitur" (*ibid.*). Lutherans speak of the whole liturgical action as *usus*: the consecration, distribution and reception (*sumptio*) of the sacrament (FC SD VII, 85 f.). If, therefore, Lutherans do not speak of Christ being present before or apart from "use," this is not to be understood as contradicting Trent; for the Lutheran Confessions agree that Jesus is present (*adesse*) in the sacrament before he is received (*sumi*), that is, *ante sumptionem*. It is "the body and blood of Christ" which "are distributed to us to eat and to drink.. ." (SD VII, 82).
25. DS 1643: "(sacramentum) quod fuerit a Christo Domino, ut sumatur, institutum."
26. Cf. Phil 2:10.
27. Cf. DS 1643, 1656; FC SD VII, 126: one must not "deny that Christ himself, true God and man, who is truly and essentially present in the Supper when it is rightly used, should be adored in spirit and in truth in all places but especially where his community is assembled" (ed. T.G. Tappert). See also Luther, WA 11, 447 (Amer. ed. 36, 294); St. Augustine, *On Psalm 98*, 9 (PL 37, 1264).
28. *Instruction on Eucharistic Worship*, no. 49.
29. Cf. *ibid.* As Dom Lambert Beauduin has expressed it, the eucharist was not reserved in order to be adored; rather, because it was reserved, it was adored (cf. *Melanges liturgiques . . . de Dom L. Beauduin* [Louvain, 1954] p. 265). It should be noted, however, that adoration of the reserved sacrament has been very much a part of Catholic life and a meaningful form of devotion to Catholics for many centuries.
30. *Instruction on Eucharistic Worship*, no. 58; cf. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 13.
31. AC XXII, 1.
32. Cf. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 55. It should be noted that some scholars hold that communion under both kinds has not always been the practice within the church even in ancient times. For example, J. Jeremias (*The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* [New York, 1964] p. 115) suggests that "the breaking of the bread" in the New Testament refers to communion under one species. Other scholars disagree.
33. Cf. *Instruction on Eucharistic Worship*, no. 32.
34. Lutherans traditionally speak of the change that takes place in the elements as involving a sacramental union with the body and blood of Christ analogous to the

hypostatic union of the human and divine natures in Christ; cf. FC SD VII, 36 f Coupled with this affirmation is the statement that the bread and wine are essentially untransformed (*unvorwandelten*); cf. SD VII, 35 In Ep VII, 22 the Roman Catholic affirmation of transubstantiation is understood to involve an annihilation (*zunicht werden*) of the bread and wine. It should be noted, however, that Trent's understanding of transubstantiation has nothing to do with the idea of annihilation of the elements. Catholic theologians emphasize today that the substantial change of bread and wine is a sacramental change which involves no change in "the chemical, physical or botanical reality of bread and wine" (E. Schillebeeckx, "Transubstantiation, Transfinalization, Transignification," *Worship* 40 [1966] 337). Further, on the basis of Ap X, 2, which cites with approval the Greek tradition that the bread is truly changed into the body of Christ ("mutato pane"; "panem...vere mutari"), there is a certain sense in which "one can stand on Lutheran ground and talk about a transformation of the elements (*Verwandlung der Elemente*). Cf. Fr. Brunstaed, *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften* (Guetersloh, 1951) p. 156.

35. Cf. K. Rahner, "The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," in *Theological Investigations* 4 (Baltimore, 1966) 287-311; E. Schillebeeckx, "Christus tegenwoordigheid in de Eucharistie," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 5 (1965) 136-72.