

# **Luther and the Lord's Supper: The *Verba Domini* as the Mandating Words**

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## **Introduction**

Hermann Sasse observed back in 1951 that the Lord's Supper had been impoverished in the Lutheran Church around the world in both doctrine and administration because the result of the Prussian Union had never been resolved but in fact had been worsened by the ecumenical movement.<sup>1</sup> Theologically speaking, many Lutheran church bodies still exist today within the ecclesiastical environment in which Reformed theology triumphs over Lutheran confessions. In addition, there is an inroad of the liturgical movement of the Roman Catholics and Anglican Churches of the twentieth century. Many Lutherans have been attracted by it in their liturgical thinking and practice, while their own remarkable liturgical renewal movement that followed the confessional revival in the nineteenth century seems to have been forgotten. Dr. Norman Nagel has often commented as an observation of Peter Brunner that we ignore to our impoverishment and peril such heroes of confessional and liturgical revival as Theodosius Harnack and Theodor Kliefoth.

The Lutheran heritage of the Lord's Supper is represented most marvelously by the way Dr. Luther drafted his Small and Large Catechisms. The first thing he wrote was a simple quotation of the *verba domini* without adding clever elaborations or statement about the Lord's Supper. "Was ist das Sacrament des Altars?" "Es ist der wahre Leib und Blut unsers Herrn Jesu Christi, unter dem Brot und Wein uns Christen zu essen und zu trinken von Christo selbst eingesetzt." "Wo stehet das geschrieben?" "So schreiben die heiligen Evangelisten Matthäus, Markus, Lukas und S. Paulus . . ." The point of departure for Luther was the *verba domini*. He

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<sup>1</sup> Hermann Sasse, "Worldwide Lutheranism on the Way to Hanover," trans. Andrew Smith, in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, volume I, ed. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 418–19. Sasse writes: The struggle in the 16<sup>th</sup> century ended with the victory of Gnesio Lutheranism in the Formula of Concord. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, orthodoxy overcame syncretism, whose concerns were successfully taken up by Pietism. Unionism, rooted in Pietism and demanded by the Enlightenment, was still rejected at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but came into power one hundred years later in large areas of German Lutheranism. The reaction of the Lutheran Awakening and the Lutheranism of the American Midwest, which was bound up with this Awakening, enabled the existence of the Lutheran Church to be rescued in those places in which it had not yet been swallowed up by the union. But unionism, which in Germany came to the church, remained unconquered, inasmuch as no union was actually reversed. Unionism allied itself with ecumenism, which was rooted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (mission) and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century organized itself powerfully. By 'ecumenism' we understand a certain perversion of the Ecumenical Movement, which not only works toward a reordering of mutual relations of the Christian churches and toward their cooperation while yet respecting the different confessions, but rather which strives to ignore and remove confessional differences, exactly as unionism wants unification while setting aside the question of truth, instead of the true union, which is a unification in the truth."

called them as the chief thing of the Lord's Supper and confessed them as the Lord's mandate and institution.<sup>2</sup>

Such a conviction was not only Luther's. When the preface of the Book of Concord was drafted by Jakob Andreae and Martin Chemnitz in 1580, the only false doctrine it mentioned was the Lord's Supper while there were quite many controversies that the church needed to deal with after the death of Dr. Luther. The preface declares as of the confession of the theologians in the Book of Concord that in the treatment of the Lord's Supper Christians must be directed to *no other basis and foundation than the Words of Institution of Christ's testament*.<sup>3</sup> We know that the Augsburg Confession was as *the* creed of their time (and of our time!),<sup>4</sup> and that the documents that appear after the *Augustana* in the Book of Concord, that is, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, and even Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, are further expositions of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>5</sup> The Formula of Concord positions itself as the final definitive repetition of the doctrine that was confessed by the Augsburg Confession.<sup>6</sup> No new doctrine was added that was not confessed in the *Augustana*. The Word of God as the only *Richtschnur*, the Formula faithfully performed what Titus 1:9 urge as the duties of the Office of the Holy Ministry, that is, the sound, or literally, the healthy doctrine (*ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ ὑγιαينوῦσθαι*) *to παρακαλεῖν* (urge, exhort, appeal, as Paul spoke in 2 Cor 5:20 as God's appeal through the apostolic office), and to *ἐλέγχειν* (reprove) those who were speaking against it (*τοὺς ἀντιλέγοντας*).<sup>7</sup> Yet, the Augsburg Confession is not really a confession of the Lutheran Church that was supposedly started in the sixteenth century. The *Augustana* itself is an exposition of the ecumenical creeds.<sup>8</sup>

All this means that Luther's understanding of the *verba domini* as the chief thing of the Lord's Supper and as the dominical mandate in his Catechisms was not his invention at all. Rather, it was the repetition of the confession of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

The implications of this is enormous. First, any questions on the Lord's Supper in doctrine and administration are answered by our Lord in His words. What the Lord does not answer there are not good questions. Secondly, we recognize that there is a priority of the

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<sup>2</sup> LC V, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Preface to the Book of Concord, 18. "So erkleren sich unsere Theologen inhalts des Concordien Buchs und der darinnen begriffenen Norma lauter, das unser und des Buchs bestendiger meinung nach die Christen im handel von des Herren Abendmal auff keinen andern, sondern auff diesen einigen grundt und fundament, Nemlich auff die wort der stiftung des Testaments Christi gewiesen warden sollen, welcher Allmechtig und warhafftig und demnach zuverschaffen vermag, was er verordnet und in seinem Wort verheissen hat, und do sie bey diesem grundts unangefochten bleiben, von andern gründen nicht disputiren, sondern mit einfeltigem glauben bey den einfeltigen worten Christi verharren, welches am sichersten und bey dem gemeinen Leyen auch erbäulich, der diese disputation nicht ergreifen kan." Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche, Vollständige Neuedition, ed., Irene Dingel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 20, 26–36.

<sup>4</sup> Preface to the Book of Concord, 3, SD Preface, 4, 5, SD Rule and Norm, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Preface to the Book of Concord, 23, SD Preface, 6–8, 11.

<sup>6</sup> SD Title, Preface, SD Rule and Norm, 20.

<sup>7</sup> The Title of the Book of Concord, SD Rule and Norm, 14–20.

<sup>8</sup> Preface to the Book of Concord, 3.

administration over the doctrine. Before there was a teaching about the Lord's Supper, it had long been administered in the church. The Lord's mandate is carried out by administration, not by teaching about it. Thirdly, because the Lord's Supper is mandated and instituted by the Lord, its administration is not subordinated to but coordinated with the proclamation of the Word. The Lord's Supper is not an appendix to the Word. The Lord did not say, for example, "This is the visible Word in my body given for you." The Protestant's thesis of "the church of the Word only" has no support in the Scripture, because the argument there is that a sacrament can only be another form of the Word or the confirmation of the Word. Fourthly, the Lord's Supper is not subordinated to a definition of what a sacrament is, as in the Roman Catholics or in the Calvinistic tradition. The Formula of Concord declares the Lord's Supper as an *inuitata*, the absolute uniqueness that has no analogy in our experiences in the world. SD VII, 38. Werner Elert observed that "the New Testament does not even contain a common expression for the actions of Baptism and Communion."<sup>9</sup> There is no christological deduction to arrive at the doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the Confessions. It is not deduced from the doctrine of creation, justification or ecclesiology. Fifthly, to begin with the mandating words of our Lord also means that Luther refused temptation of defining the Lord's Supper out of popular themes such as fellowship, unity, love, celebration, or real presence. In our day, we hear the Lord's Supper as a "congregation's sacrament of unity," or "sacrament of victorious love." Following the ecumenical consensus of the Lord's Supper, not of doctrine but of a common ritual pattern in the "classical shape" of the liturgy,<sup>10</sup> the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* of 2006 continues to use their traditional overarching title of the service of the sacrament as the Meal (as a part of the fourfold scheme of Gathering-Word-Meal-Sending). Finally and most importantly, to start with the mandating words confesses that this is not Christians' supper but the *Lord's* Supper. The Reformed prefer to use the word Eucharist.<sup>11</sup> Hearing the Large Catechism where Luther diagnosed all the heretical teaching and administration of the Lord's Supper as "something that we do" (LC V, 7), the nineteenth century Lutheran liturgical scholars had dismissed the word Eucharist as the definitive word for the Lord's Supper. Luther left the following words in his *That These Words of Christ "This Is My Body," etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics 1527*: "We know, however, that it is the LORD's Supper, and is called thus, not the Christians' supper. For the Lord not only instituted it, but also prepares and administers it himself, and is Himself cook, waiter, food, and drink."<sup>12</sup>

The Lutheran heritage of the Lord's Supper is that we submit ourselves to what the Lord says. Where the Lord's words come first, there is the Lord's Supper. Something goes wrong in the Lord's Supper when we put someone else's words or thoughts ahead of the Lord's words. Only when one rejects the words of our Lord do various theories of the Lord's Supper emerge. The Lord's Supper as confessed by the Book of Concord is a record of continuous battles against diminishing Jesus and His words and against those who subordinate them under some principles.

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<sup>9</sup> Werner Elert, *The Lord's Supper Today* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Cf., John T. Pless, "Can We Participate Liturgically in the Atonement?" *Logia* 19 (Eastertide 2010), 41.

<sup>11</sup> Theodor Kliefoth, *Die ursprüngliche Gottesdienstordnung in den deutschen Kirchen lutherischen Bekenntnisses: ihre Destruktion und Reformation* (Rostock and Schwerin: Stiller, 1847), 27.

<sup>12</sup> AE 37: 142; WA 23:271.8–11.

Such battles continued after the sixteenth century, as the church faced Pietism, Rationalism, Romanticism, individualism, unionism, ecumenism, American Evangelicalism, neo-Pentecostalism, and more. The Reformation's 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary year did not lack additional occasions to observe the same.

Rather than evaluating every instance of diminishing the *verba domini*, our intention is to focus our attention to the problem that was identified by Luther and the Book of Concord, particularly by the Formula. It is hoped that by this procedure we may observe one of the common theological roots of the battles against the dominical mandate of the Lord's Supper.

### *Verba Domini*

To begin with, we will briefly hear the *verba domini* as recorded in 1 Corinthians 11, particularly concerning the "remembrance" or anamnesis of verse 24.

“**τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.**” Τοῦτο ποιεῖτε was what Yahweh spoke when He instituted the Divine Service of the Old Testament. Ex 29:38. Jesus repeated the words because He as the incarnate Yahweh, ὁ κύριος, is instituting the Divine Service of the New Testament here. The Lord's Supper is not something we do or offer up (as typically mistranslated in Ex 29:38). The Lord's Supper is not our celebration but Jesus' pastoral care toward us and for us. The present tense of this imperative indicates that what He instituted here is to be repeated ongoingly. What is the meaning of εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν? If one follows the Augustinian understanding of the Lord's Supper, he would speak of a sacrament of the sacrifice here. He runs both sacrament and sacrifice by way of a sign theory. The *res* of the sacrifice is Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary. The Old Testament sacrifices were *signa* that point to the *res*, and the New Testament sacrifice is also a *signum* that points back to the *res*. While the Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed Christ's atonement, the New Testament sacrifice, that is, the Lord's Supper commemorates the cross. Who is then remembering? Is it the church or the communicants? According to those who follow this Augustinian theory of sacrament and sacrifice, it is the church who does the remembering. The Roman Catholics and those who are sympathetic to the liturgical movement of the twentieth century continue in this way.

Is the Lord's Supper a memory of the atoning sacrifice of Christ? Was Jesus afraid to be forgotten? Was He so insecure? Do we need to conduct heavily emotional and spiritual exercises to have burning remembrance of Christ in our hearts and passionate tasting of the sufferings of Christ, as Karlstadt recommended to Luther? AE 40:213 ff. Biblically speaking, this phrase εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν shows that it is Jesus who remembers His testament and His people.<sup>13</sup> To remember in a biblical language, both Hebrew and Greek, is not a mere mental activity to think about or reflect on something. It always involves concrete actions. Yahweh remembered His covenant/testament when He acknowledged the suffering of His people. Ex 2:24. So, He did something about it! At the Passover meal, the words which the head of the household spoke did the *zakaring*. Ex 12:3–14. God did it through the words of the father. To remember did not take

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<sup>13</sup> Cf., AE 13:377.

place by personal devotions. The words of institution cannot be reduced to a narrative, as both Zwingli and the proponents of the modern liturgical movement claim. *Verba* do not merely tell what happened once long ago. We are not to come near Him by remembering Him. Jesus is the one who remembers His testament and His people, as He does something for His people. He dishes out His body and His blood for us to eat and to drink so that we may be forgiven.

**“26 ὁσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ.”** The Lord’s Supper that is instituted by our Lord Jesus will continue until He comes again. In contrast to the Reformed’s emphasis on encountering with the risen Christ in the Lord’s Supper and the Roman Catholics’ stress on the natural body and blood to be elevated to the mystical body of Christ that is at the right hand of God, Paul speaks of the death of the Lord, the Calvary point. The proclamation of the Lord’s death takes place at the mouth point, as καταγγέλλετε is adverbial to ἐσθίητε and πίνητε. *Manducatio oralis*, and not *manducatio spiritualis* nor *manducatio fideris*.

### **The Consensus Tigurinus and the Formula of Concord**

The second sacramental controversy prompted the Lutherans to confess the Lord’s Supper in the Formula of Concord articles VII and VIII. The confessors identified the same issue that had come from Zwingli and Oecolampadius within the churches of the Augsburg Confession. SD VII quoted the Article XXV of the Consensus Tigurinus of 1549 to articulate the issue: “We say that the body and blood of Christ are so far from and distant from the signs as the earth is from the very highest heaven.” By quoting a common confession between Calvin of Geneva and Bullinger of Zurich, it pointed out that such an understanding is permeated among some of the Lutherans.

The Consensus Tigurinus is full of Augustinian sign theory. It claims that the Lord’s Supper was instituted for spiritual communion (Art VI). The purpose of the sacraments (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper) is to be the believers’ marks and badges of Christian profession, as it states: “For although they signify nothing that is not announced by the word, yet it is a great benefit that there is cast before our eyes, as it were, living pictures which influence our senses in a deeper way, as if leading up to the thing itself, while they recall to our memory the death of Christ and all the benefits so that our faith may better be exercised” (Art VII). The signs and the things signified must be distinguished (Art IX). It speaks against the Lutherans in several articles: “It is particularly necessary to reject every idea of a local presence. For as the signs are present in this world and are perceived with the eyes and touched with the hands, so Christ, as man, is nowhere but in heaven and is to be sought in no other way than by the mind and understanding of faith” (Art XXI). “We reject therefore those ridiculous interpreters who insist on what they call the precise literal sense of the solemn words of the Supper—This is my body, this is my blood. For without question we hold that they are to be taken figuratively, so that the bread and wine are said to be that which they signify” (Art XXII). “Because Christ feeds our souls through faith by virtue of his Spirit, by the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood which are here figured, it is not therefore to be understood as though there was an intermingling or transfusion of substance” (Art XXIII).

What permeates in the Consensus Tigurinus as well as those who were sympathetic to it among the Lutherans was a sign theory that had come from Augustine. Hermann Sasse observed: “In the case of Augustine, it is obvious that his understanding of the sacrament is determined by his neo-Platonism. The distinction between *signum* and *res*; the fact that he places all the emphasis on the invisible reality which underlies the visible sign; his idea that not outward signs, but solely the Spirit of God in his direct influence on man can bring salvation: all these belong to his neo-Platonic convictions.”<sup>14</sup>

### Neo-Platonism and Augustine

While Plato (427–347 BC) divided the world between empirical world (visible, lower) and metaphysical world (invisible, higher), Plotinos (204–70) established still higher world, the ultimate principle, which he called the One (τὸ ἓν). The One does not need another world because it is sufficient in itself. Plotinos’ explanation of the existence of the world is by way of emanation. The One is unlimited. From it the world is emanated. The One is like a well. Because the well is full, it has to have an emanation. And because this well is unlimited, the emanation will not stop. Just as the light becomes weaker and weaker as it distances away from the sun, so what is emanated will become weaker and weaker as it distances away from the well. The human body exists in darkness and evil because the natural world has the movement of becoming and disappearing. The purpose of man is to return to the One to become united with it. To be in the movement to return to the One is to be like God. The divinization of oneself is man’s life’s purpose. This upward movement was exercised by the internal process.

Plotinos said: “I often sense that I am away from my body and travelled deep in my inmost being and there see the astonishing beauty, but there is no other moment when I was convinced that I was a part of the higher being. There I had the best life, and found my place in unity with the divine, which is beyond all intellect can reach.”

Augustine too said similarly to Plotinos when he wrote: “Do not go out but return to your inside. The truth resides in the inmost being of man.” “Go deep into your heart, because there you will find unchanging light.” Albrecht Peters articulated Augustine’s understanding of *Credere in Deum (Christum)* as “a neoplatonic and mystical yearning for God” by citing Augustine: “a movement of the will toward God (or Christ) . . . , in order to bring about a stirring of love in Him, guided by hope, in order to become completely one with Him.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther’s Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar*, revised edition (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1975), 23.

<sup>15</sup> Albrecht Peters, translated by Thomas H. Trapp, *Commentary on Luther’s Catechisms: Creed* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 27. “Quid est ergo credere in eum? Credendo amare, credendo diligere, credendo in eum ire, et eius membris incorporari (What is it then to believe in Him?: By believing, to love; by believing, to be diligent, by believing, to come into Him, and to be incorporated as one of His members).” Augustine, In *Iohannis evang. Tractatus*, 29.6. PL 35:1631.

## Augustine on the Sacrament

When Augustine returned to North Africa he initiated an enquiry into the theory of language. Using his neo-Platonic background he was able to create a distinction between sign (*signum*) and the reality behind those signs (*significabilia*). “Signs (*signa*) are things (*res*) which are used to signify (*significandum*) something.” *De Doctrina Christiana* I. 2. 2, 11 f. “A sign (*signum*) is a thing (*res*) which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses.” *De Doctrina Christiana* II. 1. 1, 5–7. Augustine found this sign theory of language quite useful to his sacramental theology.

While *signum* points to that which it signifies, i.e., *res*, *signum sacrum* is a pointer toward something divine. Here is Augustine’s definition of a sacrament. The *signum* finds its completeness in the *res* which is the internal and spiritual element. The *res signata*, in turn, after being identified and understood, becomes the *signum* for the next *res signata*. As a result of this neo-Platonic thought, Augustine’s *signum* theory (*signum-res* progression) permits him to see all things as *signa* which move upward to the ultimate *res signa* (God). *Sacramentum* (*signum sacrum*) can be audible, visible, tangible, smellable, and tastable. The word is an audible *sacramentum* (*signum sacrum*), water is visible *sacramentum* (*signum sacrum*), and bread and wine are also visible or tastable *sacramentum* (*signum sacrum*). By this definition of a sacrament, Augustine could find sacraments in both Old and New Testaments.

Luther and the Confessions picked up the Augustinian definition of a sacrament from the following words: “Take away the word, and the water is neither more nor less than water. The word is added to the element, and there results the sacrament, as if itself also a kind of visible word.” *On the Gospel of St. John* 80.3.<sup>16</sup> Here, both water, word, and water joined with the word, all of them are still *signa*, although the water moved upwardly from a mere *signum* to *signum sacra*. For the *signum sacra* (water + word) delivers *res* only when Christ/Holy Spirit adds power to it. Such baptism is received only by faith. Augustine said: “And whence has water so great an efficacy, as in touching the body to cleanse the soul, save by the operation of the word; and that not because it is uttered, but because it is believed.” *On the Gospel of St. John*, 80.3.<sup>17</sup> In Luther’s early sacramental writings in 1519, these words of Augustine are everywhere. Christ remains the one who gives power to the *signum sacra*. Christ is also the giver of faith. Yet, Augustine does not say that Christ does it through the word. For Augustine, everything in creation signifies God. But the real sacraments of the church are those which offer the grace that they signify. These are: (1) the sacrament of the word (sermons, prayers, reading of the Scriptures), and (2) the sacraments of action (water, bread/wine, benedictions, rituals).

When *signum* (bread/wine) is pulled by the external power to the *res signata* (body/blood), this *res signata* then becomes another *signum* (body/blood) toward the higher reality of *res signata* (communicants’ unity with Christ). It is important to note that for Augustine, the body of Christ is not the flesh of His crucifixion but of His resurrection. For

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<sup>16</sup> NPNF 7:344.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Augustine, therefore, the Lord's Supper is not Christ descending to His church but the church's ascension to Christ at the Right Hand. This was his interpretation of *sursum corda*.

Since the body of Christ cannot be recognized by our earthly eyes, Augustine talks about two kinds of eating in the Lord's Supper: (1) eating with faith—higher eating, and (2) eating without faith—lower eating. Augustine speaks of three kinds of eating too: (1) physical eating of the *signum*—*external* eating (bread/wine), (2) spiritual eating of the *res*, (3) sacramental eating—receiving Christ's body and blood (*res*) through bread and wine (*signa*). The sacramental eating may be done by everyone physically, but without faith the body and blood of Christ are not eaten spiritually. For Augustine, the most important point regarding the Lord's body and blood is that the believers become one with Christ and with each other. In the Lord's Supper, the fruits of the unity of Christ and Christians (another *signum*) push upwardly to the ultimate unity in the Triune God (*res*). Augustine called this upward movement as a sacrifice. In this mystical union, what is on the altar is seen as the communicant's own mystery embodied in Christ. Augustine says that in the Lord's Supper *the faithful receive what they are. On the Gospel of John 26.15.*<sup>18</sup> The *corpus mysticum* (ecclesial body of Christ) receives *corpus verum* (the glorified Christ). The participation in the true body and blood of Christ is possible only when one is a member of the *corpus mysticum*, among whom Christ dwells.

### **Augustine and the Sacrifice**

Just as with the sacrament, the term sacrifice is also presented by Augustine within the paradigm of *signum-res*. The (visible) sacrifice is a sacred sign (sacrament) of an invisible sacrifice.<sup>19</sup> Augustine employs the term, sacrifice, in a threefold way: (1) sacrifice as foreshadowed—OT animals (*signum*), (2) sacrifice as accomplished—Christ (*res*), and (3) sacrifice as commemorated—sacrament (*signum*). This sacrificial idea of Augustine is also neo-Platonic. The sacrifice of the altar is a *signum* that points to the *res* of Christ's body. But again, this body of Christ is not the body of the flesh but the body of His majesty.<sup>20</sup> The identification of which body is sacrificed on the altar is the basic clue to our understanding of Augustine's theology of the sacrifice. His doctrine of the sacrifice is nothing other than a memorial, *sacramentum memoriae*, because the external *signum* (bread/wine) cannot be identified with the *res signata* (body/blood of the resurrection, and not of Calvary). Therefore, on the one hand, the sacrifice of the altar cannot be a repetition of Christ's death but only a celebration of a *sacramentum memoriae* of the blessings which His death brought to the faithful. On the other hand, it is the sacrifice of the glorified body of Christ with which the whole church is united in the celebration of this memory. In short, for Augustine, the sacrifice of the altar is not the propitiatory sacrifice, but the remembrance of this act.

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<sup>18</sup> NPNF 7:173.

<sup>19</sup> NPNF 2:183.

<sup>20</sup> NPNF 7:370, 282–83.



From the point of view of the faithful, the sacrifice of the altar means thanksgiving, because this sacrifice is the celebration of Christ's sacrifice.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, this memorial is not merely a figurative one but it brings about what it signifies (*signum* theory!), the mystical union between Christ and his church. In other words, the sacrifice of the altar (eucharistic sacrifice) is the sacrifice of the church (*corpus mysticum*) through which Christ's mysteries are externally received. It is through this sacrifice that the believer seeks communion with the whole church and with Christ. This is the place where the believer's spiritual progress is advanced.<sup>22</sup> *Communio* is very important for Augustine's theology of the sacrifice. It is precisely in the *communio* that the term *sacrificium* finds its true and deepest meaning. This unity between Christ and the church is reached by way of the eating and drinking of the bread and wine. Through this oral receiving, the true body of Christ proceeds to the higher reality, the church.

In Augustine's theology, there is no dichotomy between sacrament and sacrifice. Through the sacrament, God reveals Himself and offers His grace to give salvation. Through the sacrificial action, man is drawn with Christ to offer the invisible sacrifice that is the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Finally, the sacrifice of the church does not occur by the simple participation in the Table of the Lord, but only he who participates and receives the fruits of the true sacrifice through faith dwells in his mystical body.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Signum Is Res* in Luther and the Lutheran Confessions**

From the foregoing, we observe firstly that Augustine failed to rejoice in the *externum verbum*. His basic movement was upward which was at the same time internal. He looked at divine things inwardly through the external signs. Secondly, he had little to speak of the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper. That which occupied his thinking was the unity with Christ together with all the Christians, which also moved toward the unity with the Holy Trinity. The problem he saw in man was distance away from God in a neo-Platonic manner rather than sinfulness. His understanding of original sin as love and concupiscence toward the created things is solved by the gradual process of healing. Thirdly, in Augustine, the visible word stayed *signum sacrum* until there was a pulling power of the Lord. In this way, he left the door open for Zwingli, Calvin, and Bullinger to deny *unio sacramentalis*, *manducatio oralis*, and *manducatio indignorum*. Fourthly, we do not hear much about the body and blood of our Lord because the focus of attention is Christ and the unity with Him. Finally, in Augustine, the point of departure was not the *verba domini*, the mandating words of Jesus.

Even before 1533, Melancthon paid less attention to explaining the relationship of the bread and wine to the Lord's body and blood. He based his understanding of Christ's sacramental presence on his general presence in his church. His *Loci communes* of 1535 contained no

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<sup>21</sup> NPNF 2:446.

<sup>22</sup> NPNF 2:183.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

discussion of the *communicatio idiomatum*.<sup>24</sup> The *Variata* of 1540 drastically weakened the way the Lord's Supper was confessed in Augsburg Confession Article X. The added preposition "with" weakened the confession of the sacramental union. What came first was the bread and wine and not the body and blood of Christ. Eating and drinking were also separated from the body and blood so that it remained ambiguous as to what the communicants were eating and drinking.<sup>25</sup>

Luther, on the other hand, was an Augustinian monk. In reading Luther, therefore, we encounter echoes of Augustine, particularly in his early years. But as the Gospel came clear to him, the Augustinian understanding of the *signum* theory receded. If we illustrate theological development in Luther as: (1) at the time of the Ninety-five Theses—internal contrition, (2) "Everything Depends of Faith"—full-blown *signum* theory with faith, (3) "Everything Depends on the Word"—overemphasis of the Word, (4) Appreciation of the *proprium* of the Lord's Supper—Appreciating the *proprium*, and (5) "Let the Sacrament Remain Whole"—the Lord's Supper received as the Lord's Supper, we are able to demonstrate his sacramental thinking in each stage.<sup>26</sup> Oswald Bayer articulated that Luther's "Reformation discovery in the strictest

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<sup>24</sup> Charles P. Arand, James A. Nestingen, and Robert Kolb, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 229–30.

<sup>25</sup> The *Variata*'s text is: "De coena domini docent, quod cum pane et vino vere exhibeantur corpus et sanguis Christi vescentibus in coena domini," that is, "Concerning the Lord's Supper they teach that with bread and wine the body and blood of Christ are truly exhibited to those who eat in the Lord's Supper."

<sup>26</sup> The following selected words of Luther may serve as illustrating his theological maturity:

**(1) At the time of the Ninety-five Theses—internal contrition**

- Thesis 1: When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' [Mt 4:17] (do Penance), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance. AE 31:25.
- It is evident, however, that this recovery or hatred of oneself should involve one's whole life. *Explanation of the Ninety-five Theses, 1518*. AE 31:84.
- Thesis 2: This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy. AE 31:25.
- Thesis 3: Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortifications of the flesh. AE 31:25.
- Thesis 40: A Christian who is truly contrite seeks and loves to pay penalties for his sins; the bounty of indulgences, however, relaxes penalties and causes men to hate them—at least it furnishes occasion for hating them. AE 31:29.
- Thesis 94: Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their head, through penalties, death, and hell. AE 31:33.
- Thesis 95: And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace [Acts 14:22]. AE 31:33.
- *Explanation of the Ninety-five Theses, 1518*, Thesis 11: Perfect contrition does not need his absolution. . . . AE 31:117.

**(2) "Everything Depends of Faith"—full-blown *signum* theory with faith**

- "The holy sacrament of the altar, or of the holy and true body of Christ, also has three parts which man must know. The first is the sacrament, or sign [*Zeichen*]. The second is the significance [*Bedeutung*] of this sacrament. The third is the faith of this two. These three parts must be found in every sacrament. The sacrament must be external and visible, having some material form or appearance. The significance must be

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internal and spiritual, within the spirit of the person. Faith must bring both of them together to benefited and useful.” *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhood*, 1519. AE 35:49.

- “The sacrament, or external sign, consists in the form or appearance of bread and wine, just as baptism has water as its sign; only the bread and wine must be used in eating and drinking, just as the water of baptism is used by immersion or pouring.” AE 35:49.
- “The significance or effect of this sacrament is fellowship [*Gemeinschaft*] of all the saints. From this it derives its common name *synaxis* [Greek] or *communio* [Latin], that is, fellowship. And the Latin *communicare* [commune or communicate], or as we say in German, *zum sacrament gehen* [go to the sacrament], means to take part in this fellowship. Hence it is that Christ and all saints are one spiritual body, just as the inhabitants of a city are one community and body, each citizen being a member of the other and of the entire city. All the saints, therefore, are members of Christ and of the church, which is a spiritual and eternal city of God.” AE 35:50–51.
- “To receive this sacrament in bread and wine, then, is nothing other than to receive a sure sign [*gewiß tzeichen*] of this fellowship and incorporation with Christ and all saints. It is as if a citizen were given a sign, a document, or some other token to assure him that he is a citizen of the city, a member of that particular community.” AE 35:51.
- “Whoever is in despair, distressed by a sin-stricken conscience or terrified by death or carrying some other burden upon his heart, if he would be rid of them all, let him go joyfully to the sacrament of the altar and lay down his woe in the midst of the community [of saints] and seek help from the entire company of the spiritual body—just as a citizen whose property has suffered damage or misfortune at the hands of his enemies makes complaint to his town council and fellow citizens and asks them for help. The immeasurable grace and mercy of God are given us in this sacrament to the end that we might put from us all misery and tribulation [*anfechtung*] and lay it upon the community [of saints], and especially on Christ. . . .” AE 35:53–54.

### (3) “Everything Depends on the Word”—overemphasis of the Word

- “With all his (Karlstadt’s) mouthing of the words, ‘Spirit, Spirit, Spirit,’ he tears down the bridge, the path, the way, the ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come to you. Instead of the outward order of God in the material sign of baptism and the oral proclamation of the Word of God he wants to teach you, not how the Spirit comes to you but how you come to the Spirit. They would have you learn how to journey on the clouds and ride on the wind. They do not tell you how or when, whither or what, but you are to experience what they do.” *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, 1525. AE 40: 147.
- “Our teaching is that bread and wine do not avail. I will go still farther. Christ on the cross and all his suffering and his death do not avail, even if, as you teach, they are ‘acknowledged and meditated upon’ with the utmost ‘passion, ardor, heartfeltness.’ Something else must always be there. What is it? The Word, the Word, the Word. Listen, lying spirit, the Word avails. Even if Christ were given for us and crucified a thousand times, it would all be in vain if the Word of God were absent and were not distributed and given to me with the bidding, this is for you, take what is yours.” AE 40:212–13.
- “We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world.” AE 40:213–14.

### (4) Appreciation of the *proprium* of the Lord’s Supper—Appreciating the *proprium*

- “It is one thing for God to be there (*da ist*) and quite another for Him to be there for you (*dir da ist*). (*Das ein anders ist, wenn Gott da ist, und wenn er dir da ist*). He is there for you when He sets His word there and binds Himself to that place saying, ‘Here you are to find me.’ (*Denn aber ist er da ist, da, wenn er sein wort dazu thut und bindet sich damit an und spricht: Sie soltu mich finden.*) Now that you have the word, you can grasp and hold Him with certainty, and say ‘Here I have you, as you say.’ In the same way I say of God’s Right Hand that it is everywhere, and we may not deny this. At the same time, because it is then nowhere, as has been said, you cannot truly grasp it anywhere, unless it binds itself for your good and appoints you a place. This it does by placing itself in the humanity of Christ and dwelling there. There you find it with certainty. Otherwise you may run through all creation, groping here and there and yet never

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finding it, although it is there all the time. It is not here for you.” *That These Words of Christ, “This Is My Body,” etc., Still Stand Firm against the Fanatics, 1527.* AE 37:68–69; WA 23:151.13–24.

- “Though He is in your bread, you will not grasp Him there unless He binds Himself there for you and appoints you a particular table with His word, and Himself points out the bread with His word where you are to eat Him. This He has done in the Sacrament saying ‘This is my body,’ as if to say, ‘You may also eat bread at home where I am indeed present enough, but this is the true “touto,” “This is my body.” When you eat this, you eat my body and nowhere else. Why? Because here I would fasten myself with my word so that you are not to flutter about and desire to seek me all over the place, where I am. That would be too much for you. You are too small for grasping me there without my word.” AE 37: 69; WA 23:151.29-153.4.
- “Our God, however, has His honor in this: that for our sakes He gives Himself down to the utmost depth, into flesh and bread, into our mouth, heart, and bosom, and more, for our sakes He suffers Himself to be dishonorably treated both upon the cross and altar.” AE 37:72; WA 23:157:30–33.
- “We know, however, that it is the LORD’s Supper, and is called thus, not the Christians’ supper. For the Lord not only instituted it, but also prepares and administers it Himself, and is Himself cook, waiter (the one who serves the table), food, and drink, as we have demonstrated our faith above” *Wir aber wissen, das es des HERNN abendmal ist und heist, nicht der Christen abendmal. Denn der Herr hats nicht alleine eingesetzt, sondern machts und helts auch selbs und ist der koch, kelner, speise, and tranck selbs, wie wir unsem glauben droben beweiset haben.* AE 37: 142; WA 23:271.8–11.
- “Here, too, if I were to say over all the bread there is, ‘This is the body of Christ,’ nothing would happen, but 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 our declarative word, but because of his command in which he has told us so to speak and to do and has attached his own command and deed to our speaking.” *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper, 1528.* AE 37:184.
- “Where now are all the others who babble that there is no forgiveness of sins in the Supper? St. Paul and Luke say that the new testament is in the Supper, and not the sign or figure of the new testament. Figures or signs of the new testament belonged to the old testament, among the Jews. He who admits that he has the figure or sign of the new testament admits that he does not yet have the new testament; he has taken a backward step and denied Christ and has become a Jew. Christians ought to have the new testament itself, without figure or sign. They may have it hidden under an alien form, but they must have it truly present. Now if the new testament is present in the Supper, then forgiveness of sins, Spirit, grace, life and salvation must be there. All these are embraced in the Word. For who would know what was in the Supper if the words did not proclaim it? See, then, what a beautiful, great, marvelous thing this is, how everything hung together and is one sacramental essence. The words are the first thing, for without the words the cup and the bread would be nothing. Further, without bread and cup, the body and blood of Christ would not be there. Without the body and blood of Christ, the new testament would not be there. Without the new testament, forgiveness of sins would not be there. Without forgiveness of sins, life and salvation would not be there. Thus the words first connect the bread and cup to the sacrament; bread and cup embrace the body and blood of Christ; body and blood of Christ embrace the new testament; the new testament embraces the forgiveness of sins; forgiveness of sins embraces eternal life and salvation. See, all this the words of the Supper offer and give us, and we embrace it by faith. Ought not the devil, then, hate such a Supper and rouse fanatics against it?” AE 37: 338.

**(5) “Let the Sacrament Remain Whole”—the Lord’s Supper received as the Lord’s Supper**

- Let the Sacrament remain whole! *Catechism Sermon, 1528* (WA 30, I, 55. 19).
- LC 5, 7: This must always be emphasized, for thus we can thoroughly refute all the babbling of the seditious spirits who, contrary to the Word of God, regard the sacraments as something that we do.
- LC 5, 21–22: This is clear and easily understood form the words just quoted: “This is my body and blood, given and poured out FOR YOU for the forgiveness of sins.” That is to say, in brief, that the reason we go to the sacrament is that there we receive that great treasure, by means of which and in which there comes to us the forgiveness of sins. Why so? Because the words stand there and give us this. For this reason he bids me eat and drink, that it is mine and avails for me as a certain pledge and sign—indeed, as the very gift he has provided for me against my sins, death, and all evils.
- LC 5, 28–29: For in itself bread is bread—but of that bread and wine that are Christ’s body and blood and that are accompanied by the Word. There and no other, we say, are the treasure through which such forgiveness is obtained. This treasure is brought to us and made ours in no other way than as the words say,

sense” was that “the *signum* itself is already the *res*, that the linguistic sign is already the matter itself.<sup>27</sup>

### Formula of Concord Articles VII & VIII

The Formula of Concord follows the mature Luther in rejecting the Augustinian *signum* theory as it was found among the Lutherans at that time. Instead, it repeats the sound confession that was professed by the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, Small and Large Catechisms, and the Smalcald Articles (SD VII, 9–33). The Formula begins with the *verba domini* and articulates the *unio sacramentalis* (SD VII, 34–53), *manducatio oralis* (SD VII, 54–60), and deals with Christological issues behind the errors of the opponents by articulating the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* (SD VIII, 31–87), particularly *genus maijesticum* (SD VIII, 48–86). The Lord’s Supper is the Lord’s Supper not because of incarnation. *Unio sacramentalis* does not derive from *unio personalis* (SD VIII, 5–30). It derives from the words of our Lord. Sacramental union is *inusitata* (SD VII, 38). The omnipresence of Christ depends on the *communicatio idiomatum*. But the presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper does not depend on the *unio personalis* but on the *verba domini*.

The articulation of the comfort that the Lord’s Supper brings in the Formula of Concord remains as jewel and treasure for us:

He [Christ] is present especially with his church and congregation 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 human. He is present not only according to his deity, but according to and with the assumed human nature, according to which he is our brother [Heb 2:17] and we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone [Eph 5:30, 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 be effective in us. SD VIII, 78–79.

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‘give and shed for you.’ There you have both: that it is Christ’s body and blood, and that it is yours as a treasure and gift. Christ’s body cannot be an unfruitful, useless thing that does nothing and helps no one.

- LC 5, 65: “This is my body, given FOR YOU,” “This is my blood, shed FOR YOU for the forgiveness of sins.” . . . Ponder, then, and include yourself personally in the “YOU” so that He may not speak to you in vain.
- LC 5, 66, 72: For in this sacrament He 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 Mt 11:28, “Come to me, all you that weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will enliven you.” . . . If you are burdened and feel your weakness, go joyfully to the sacrament and let yourself be enlivened, comforted, and strengthened.
- LC 5, 68: We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, comforting medicine that aids you and gives life in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body is helped as well.

<sup>27</sup> Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, trans. Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 129.

## Conclusion

Luther said of the Lord's Supper: "For I am very fond of the precious, blessed Supper of my Lord Jesus Christ in which he gives me his body and blood to eat and to drink even bodily with my own mouth along with these exceedingly sweet and kind words: 'Given for you, shed for you,' etc."<sup>28</sup> He also wrote: "The words 'for you' should impel you gladly to walk over a hundred thousand miles for this sacrament."<sup>29</sup> The second Martin is no different: "But in our case, the more we love it (the Lord's Supper), the more diligently we will defend it and the more tenaciously we will retain the proper, simple, and natural meaning of the words of Christ's last will and testament, so that these sweet consolations are not snatched away from us."<sup>30</sup>

These solid confession of the Lord's Supper in both "Martins" derived from their faithful hearing and confession of the *verba domini*. The Lord's Supper is a pure treasure, the gift, and the Gospel. Jesus brings to our lips His body to eat, which He has given into death in the place of us so that we receive forgiveness and that we do not die. He brings to our mouth His blood to drink, one drop of which does more than the death of all men. Even if our faith is weak, the body and blood of Jesus are still ours to hang on to. Therefore we gladly join our voice to Andreae and Chemnitz to declare that there is *no other basis and foundation* of the Lord's Supper *than the Words of Institution of Christ's testament*. May our ongoing battle against diminishing the Lord's Supper less than what Jesus has given us ever be sustained by Him for the comfort and consolation of the people entrusted to us in the *Gnadenmittelamt*.

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<sup>28</sup> AE 38:227. *A Letter of Dr. Martin Luther concerning his Book on the Private Mass, 1534.*

<sup>29</sup> AE 38:125. *Admonition concerning the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord, 1530.*

<sup>30</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, transl J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979), 194.