

Consubstantiation in Luther's Theology

OTTO W. HEICK

AMONG NON-LUTHERAN SCHOLARS it seems to be a foregone conclusion that Luther's doctrine of the Real Presence is a survival of the medieval teaching of consubstantiation. This inference seems to be justified, since Luther used, in addition to the two prepositions *in* and *sub*, the preposition *cum* to designate the relationship of the body and blood of Christ to the earthly elements of bread and wine. Surprisingly, however, Luther never used the term consubstantiation, nor does the Formula of Concord (1577) use it to interpret the Reformer's view.¹ The said confession is known for its strong anti-Calvinistic tenor. Concordia Lutheranism is a type of "high Lutheranism," rejecting Calvin's interpretation of both the Eucharist and predestination. The document was drawn up, in part, to protect the Lutheran church from further inroads made by Calvinism. The Palatinate, the free city of Bremen, and other territories, had been lost to Calvinism. In Germany the adherents of the Genevan reformer declined to be known as Calvinists. They regarded themselves as the legitimate heirs of the original Reformation as represented by Melancthon.² Calvin himself signed the Augsburg Confession, albeit the altered version prepared by Melancthon in 1540.³ In the eyes of many, Calvin was an Upper German Lutheran. Hence his followers preferred to be known as the Reformed, and they referred to their church as "die nach Gottes Wort reformierte Kirche" (the church reformed according to the Word of God). They proceeded on the assumption that the Lutheran church was not thoroughly reformed, that

1. "The Formula of Concord," Art. VII, in Theodore G. Tappert (ed.), *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959 [E.T. of critical text in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1952)]). The Articles are presented in an "Epitome" and in the form of an extended discussion (the "Solid Declaration").

2. In the nineteenth century this view was staunchly defended by Heinrich Heppe at Marburg. He maintained that the German Reformed Church, whose doctrinal position was delineated in the Heidelberg Catechism, is the legitimate heir of the original Reformation, keeping clear (as it does) of both extremes: Luther's teaching on the Supper and Calvin's view of double predestination.

3. The only English translation known to the writer is to be found in H. E. Jacobs, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publishers, 1883), Vol. II, pp. 103ff. The changes were made by Melancthon in the Latin text only. In the "Unaltered Version" of 1530, Article X on the Lord's Supper reads as follows: "Of the Supper of the Lord they [the churches of the Wittenberg Reformation] teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present (*vere adsint*), and are distributed (*distribuantur*) to those who eat in the Supper of the Lord; and they disapprove (*improbant*) those who teach otherwise." In the edition of 1540 the wording is as follows: "Of the Lord's Supper they teach that, together with (*cum*) the bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ are truly tendered (*exhibeantur*) to those that eat in the Lord's Supper." Calvin uses the same verb (*exhibere*), for example in *Institutes*, IV, xvii, 11. Unless fortified by the two other prepositions, *in* and *sub*, *cum* may be interpreted as "alongside of"; i.e. Christ is present, but not attached to the elements.

they were called to reform it and thus to put the finishing touch to the Reformation.

Like Calvinist theologians, the authors of the Formula of Concord⁴ used the term "sacramental union" in defining the Real Presence. Yet the two differed in their understanding of the term.

For clarification a number of factors must be kept in mind. First, Augustine, Zwingli, and Calvin were moved by the Platonic view of reality. The divine is the absolutely transcendent: *universalia ante rem*. A thing in the material world can only be an image, not actually a bearer of reality: *finitum non est capax infiniti*. The sacramental bread is the body of Christ by analogy, not by identity. It is efficacious in the believer to set his mind on things spiritual. "Pious souls are to be elevated to heaven."⁵ The Thomistic and Lutheran emphasis bear a resemblance to Aristotle: *universalia in re*. The Finite is capable of the Infinite (*finitum capax infiniti*). The Logos with all his divine attributes dwelt fully in the incarnate Lord, and in his fullness Christ is present in his church. Secondly, although Augustine, Rome, Zwingli, and Calvin subscribed to the creed of Chalcedon, that the divine and human natures of Christ are "inseparably and indivisibly" united in one person, they all maintained that the body of Christ is contained in a heaven far remote from this world.⁶ They did not teach a transfer of the attributes of the one nature to the other. They taught only a *koinonia onomaton* (communion of names), not an *antidodis idiomaton* (exchange of properties).⁷ Omnipresence may be predicated of the one person, but not of the human nature, of Christ. In their view of the personal union of the two natures they did not go beyond that which in later Lutheran theology was called the "idiomatic" and "apotelesmatic" genera. The former genus means "that such things as are peculiar to the divine or to the human nature are truly and really ascribed to the entire person of Christ."⁸ The latter is said to be that genus "by which, in official acts, each nature performs what is peculiar to itself, with the participation of the other." The first genus then refers to the nature of Christ, the other (which in Lutheran dogmatics is listed as the third genus) to the acts of Christ. Luther was mistaken when he assumed that the second, the "majestic genus," "by which the Son of God truly and really communicates the idiomata of his divine nature to the assumed human nature" had been

4. Cf. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950), p. 597. The Formula of Concord rejects the Calvinistic understanding of the term in Article VII (cf. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, pp. 572 [para. 18], 589 [para. 117]), but affirms the use of the term if interpreted to mean that in the Supper the communicants receive the body and blood of Christ "not only spiritually, by faith, but also orally—however, not in a Capernaic manner (John 6: 26, 52), but because of the sacramental union in a supernatural and heavenly manner." Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 483 (para. 15), 482 (para. 7), 572 (para. 14), 575 (para. 35), 576 (para. 38).

5. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xvii, 36.

6. Cf. *ibid.*; Zwingli and Bullinger (*Library of Christian Classics* Vol. XXIV; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 216.

7. Cf. *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Vol. XX, p. 182.

8. Cf. Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), pp. 294ff.

“fleissig gelehrt” (diligently taught)⁹ in the ancient church. On the contrary, Charles Hodge is right when he maintains that “at the time of the Reformation the Reformed adhered strictly to the doctrine of the early church.”¹⁰ Although in the East John of Damascus’ illogical view of heaven¹¹ pointed in the direction of the Lutheran majestic genus, in the West Augustine’s local view of the right hand of God remained a potent factor in the thinking of the Middle Ages, in the theologies of the Reformed, and also in that of the older Melancthon.

Augustine emphasized that the *totus Christus* is present in the universe. “He is everywhere in his entirety. He comes when he is manifested and departs when he is concealed.”¹² However, this applies only to Christ’s divinity. Concerning his humanity Christ is “in a certain place of heaven *propter veri corporis modum* (on account of the mode of a true body).”¹³ “According to the presence of his glory and divinity he is always with the Father, according to the corporal presence he is now above the heavens at the right hand of the Father, but according to the presence of faith he is in the midst of all Christians.”¹⁴

In the Middle Ages the doctrine of transubstantiation caused much perplexity to the theologians who were concerned with the problem of the presence of the body of Christ. Unaware of its implications, Hugh of St. Victor, for example, maintained, like Augustine, that according to his humanity Christ is in heaven; he is omnipresent only according to his divinity.¹⁵ Peter Lombard, Thomas, and others seized on the distinction made by John of Damascus between the *totus* and the *totum* in Christ. The *Christus totus*, i.e. his person, is present everywhere; but not the *totum*, i.e. all that is in him, his humanity. Peter Lombard distinguished between the omnipresence of Christ’s divinity (*ubique est*), a presence of his body in one place in human form, and the very presence of his body upon every altar where the mass is to be celebrated, i.e. he maintains the omnipresence of Christ’s divinity, the “unipresence” of his glorified body, and the “multipresence” of his sacramental body. In his eyes, the Real Presence is contingent upon the will of Christ. This is the concept of the “multivolipresence” of Christ in the sacrament.¹⁶ In the age of the Reformation Luther made use of the doctrines both of the ubiquity and of the presence of Christ’s

9. *Luthers Werke*, Erlangen Edition, Vol. XLVI, p. 365.

10. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1874), Vol. II, p. 405.

11. Cf. *On the Orthodox Faith*, IV, 2 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., Vol. IX, p. 74).

12. *Ep.* 137, 7 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st ser., Vol. I, p. 475).

13. *Ep.* 187, xii, 41, quoted by Reinhold Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Vol. II (Leipzig: Deichert, 1923), p. 461. See also Augustine’s statement in the *Tractatus in Ioannem*, to the effect that, in the body assumed of the Virgin, seized by the Jews, nailed to the tree, let down from the cross, enveloped in a shroud, laid in a sepulchre, manifested in the resurrection, “he ascended into heaven and is no longer here” (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st ser., Vol. VII, p. 282).

14. Quoted from Reinhold Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Vol. II, p. 461.

15. Cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis*, II, i, 13.

16. Cf. *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie and Kirche*, Vol. XX, p. 183.

body conditioned by his gracious will. The older Melanchthon, followed by some later Lutherans, based his argument solely on the multivolipresence, for Melanchthon above all held fast to the scholastic view of the locality of heaven.¹⁷

If the body of Christ is circumscribed in heaven, how can it be present upon every altar? What is the relationship of the eucharistic body of Christ to his glorified body? To answer this question, the scholastics referred to the analogy of light. While the sun occupies a definite space in the firmament, the light radiating from the sun is present in its totality on earth. A beam of light is not a multiplication of the sun; instead it is a manifestation of the one luminary body. Thus the eucharistic body is a manifestation of the glorified body. Christ's body is not multiplied in many masses; it rather becomes manifest on every altar. The eucharistic body has its own dimensions. In the wafer the parts of Christ's body exist not side by side, but *pars sub parte* (the one part under the other).¹⁸

Although transubstantiation has been the official dogma of the Church since 1059, it had its rival in the late Middle Ages in the teaching of consubstantiation. Already in the eleventh century pupils of Berengar had come forth with the theory of impanation or companation. Alger of Liège, for example, said that "Christ is personally impanated in the sacrament as he was personally incarnated in human flesh."¹⁹ As the substance of Christ's human nature was not annihilated in the Incarnation, so the substance of bread and wine is not destroyed through the consecration of the sacramental elements. They coexist in the eucharistic Christ as they coexist in the incarnate Christ.

Under the cloak of orthodoxy Duns Scotus and William Ockham discussed a similar view. The former says that the body of Christ contained in heaven enters into a local relationship with the sacramental elements whose substance is not necessarily annihilated. This is a modified version of the doctrine of consubstantiation. In order to escape the charge of heresy he called his teaching *transubstantiatio adductiva*, not a change of one substance into another substance—as the Thomistic teaching of *transubstantiatio productiva* implies—but rather the view that the body of Christ enters those parts of the bread that have ceased to exist. Duns Scotus enters upon a subtle threefold distinction concerning the relation of a quantum to space. First, we may consider a quantum without relation to space as a quantity per se, the order of the single parts to the whole body (*positio intrinseca*). From this internal relation he distinguishes the external, the relation of a quantum to space (*positio extrinseca*). This position in turn may be considered from two different angles. A quantum may exist in space with or without extension. If the former is the case, the thing and its

17. Cf. Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 417ff.

18. This is the theory of "subintraion." Cf. Friedrich Loofs, *Leitfaden zum Studium der Dogmengeschichte* (Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1906), p. 581.

19. Cf. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Vol. III (1913), p. 203.

space are commensurable. Coexistence involves coextension. This cannot be predicated of the second alternative for a thing and space may coexist without being coextended. This happens by the almighty will of God in the Eucharist. The bread and the body of Christ coexist in the Eucharist, but the two are not commensurable. As is evident, Duns Scotus injects a metaphysical meaning into a merely logical distinction.²⁰

It was William Ockham who undermined the subtleties of Duns Scotus' distinctions. According to Ockham, quantity is not an ontological category. Quantity is an accident of quality. "A point is not some positive and absolute thing really distinct from quantity and especially from a line."²¹ The quantity of a thing does not alter its quality. The Body of Christ may be "condensed" to a mathematical point and yet be present in its totality in every particle of the host. It is present in an unextended form.

In the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), Luther repudiated the doctrine of transubstantiation as a Thomistic opinion conditioned by Aristotelian metaphysics, saying that Pierre d'Ailly (d. 1420) had given him much food for thought. "He argues with great acumen," Luther continues, "that to hold that real bread and real wine, and not merely their accidents, are present on the altar, would be much more probable and require fewer superfluous miracles—if only the church had not decreed otherwise."²² In the *Larger Confession of the Lord's Supper* (1528), Luther defends the ubiquity of the body of Christ by following Ockham's distinctions between a circumscriptive, a definitive (or diffinitive), and a repletive presence. Christ's body was present in a circumscriptive way when he walked bodily on earth. "He can still employ this presence when he wills to do so, as he did after his resurrection and as he will do on the Last Day."²³ But Christ also possesses the incomprehensible, spiritual, definitive presence according to which "he neither occupies nor vacates space, but penetrates every creature, whenever he wills." According to this mode, he is present in the sacramental elements. Finally, since Christ is one person with God, he possesses also the divine, heavenly mode of presence (*representia repletiva*). According to this mode, he transcends all creatures and at the same time is in all creatures. Luther used this kind of argument against Zwingli, who said that the ubiquity of the body of Christ is impossible. The authors of the Formula of Concord repeated these words of Luther against Calvin, who likewise thought of the right hand of God in a local sense. In the Incarnation the eternal Logos lost none of his divine attributes, but imparted them to his human nature. Although God is everywhere, he cannot be found everywhere, at least not as the God of love and grace. There is a significant difference between the omnipresence implied in his

20. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 466f.; *Realencyklopädie*, Vol. XX, pp. 69f.

21. Ockham, *De Sacramento Altaris* (ed. T. Bruce Birch; Burlington, Iowa: Lutheran Literary Board, 1930), p. 9.

22. *Luther's Works*, Vol. XXXVI (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 29.

23. These ideas are fully developed in the "Larger Confession concerning Christ's Supper" (*Luther's Works*, Vol. XXXVII, pp. 151ff.).

divine nature, and "his presence for us." As the God of mercy he is to be found only where he wants to be found, in the manger, on the cross, in his Word, and in the sacramental elements. Thus the two concepts of ubiquity and multivolipresence are stressed side by side.

Luther and the Lutherans teach that the body of Christ is present *in, sub* (under), and *cum* (with) the sacramental bread. Are we therefore justified in calling the Reformer's teaching consubstantiation? Kattenbusch says, "Luther never used the term consubstantiation."²⁴ Neither does the Formula of Concord ever use the term. Kattenbusch raises the question whether the term was ever used by the scholastics. However, Kattenbusch adds that consubstantiation is the term that expresses Luther's view most appropriately. Yet a fundamental difference remains between Luther and Ockham, of which Kattenbusch is well aware. Luther uses the terms "substance," "being" (*Wesen*), and "nature" interchangeably. So also does the Formula of Concord. Christ's body is no longer a material thing or substance. Substance means in Luther, as Genrich²⁵ has shown, "ens in actu" (being in action). "In usu, non in objecto, spiritus est";²⁶ spirit is not a static thing, but a dynamic force. When Luther says that Christ is substantially present, he means that he is personally present. Bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ instrumentally. Sacramental union means functional union. Nowhere has Luther entered upon such a discussion as found in Duns Scotus and Ockham concerning the relation of a quantum to space. There is an affinity between Luther's teaching and the Greek Fathers' doctrine of "transformation" (*metapoïēsis*). "Forma" is the Latin translation of the Aristotelian term "entelechy," i.e. the power imparting to a subject a characteristic peculiarity. Thus the body of Christ imparts to the bread the quality of a means of grace, as under the proclamation of the Word in the sacrament both believers and unbelievers alike are confronted with the challenge of the gospel to repent and to believe. The nature of the sacrament is not contingent upon the spiritual condition of the communicant. The effects, however, differ. The one will receive the sacrament to salvation, the other to condemnation.

24. Ferdinand Kattenbusch, in *Festschrift für Johannes Ficker* (Leipzig, 1931), pp. 62ff.

25. Cf. P. W. Genrich, *Die Christologie Luthers im Abendmahlsstreit* (Göttingen, 1929), p. 71: "Substantia dicitur quaelibet essentia actu ens."

26. *Luther's Works*, Vol. XXXVII, p. 92.