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The Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar According to Luther

NORMAN NAGEL

The great feature of the 450th celebration of the Reformation is the extent of ecumenical participation. It might almost be said that our Roman Catholic brethren have taken over the show. Luther studies provide an index of the growth in mutual understanding, but what help is Luther at the heart of Christian unity, the doctrine of the Lord's Supper?

Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper, it is said, is so enmeshed in the philosophy and scholasticism of the late Middle Ages that it is no longer viable in our day. To test this assertion, we shall go to what some regard as the worst incident of this enmeshedness: Luther's use of the Nominalist categories of presence — circumscriptive, definitive, and repletive. These are adduced in the *Large Confession* of 1528. We shall note where they are raised and the function they are intended to serve and shall ask to what extent they are necessary for his doctrine of the Lord's Supper. This may also shed some light on the question whether the presence of Christ's body and blood rests on the ubiquity of Christ's human nature.

That these are no mere academic mat-

ters has been made clear by Sasse and Sommerlath.¹ They are of very considerable ecumenical importance. Misunderstandings here may obscure the doctrine of the presence of Christ's body and blood and have it appear as entangled in a bygone system of thought. This is ecumenically most harmful, for the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar is the place where the divisions of Christendom can alone be finally healed.

The apostolic and catholic doctrine of the presence of Christ's body and blood Luther never questioned, although he admits that he once thought of the practical advantage of making a common front against the pope with those who, as something of a novelty in Christian tradition,²

¹ Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), pp. 134 ff. Ernst Sommerlath, "Luthers Lehre von der Realpräsenz im Abendmahl im Zusammenhang mit seiner Gottesanschauung (nach den Abendmahlsschriften von 1527—1528)," *Das Erbe Martin Luthers, Festschrift für Ludwig Ihmels*, ed. R. Jelke (Leipzig: Dörfpling & Franke, 1928), pp. 320—38.

² Martin Luther, "Das diese Wort Christi 'Das ist mein leib' noch fest stehen, wider die Schwärmgeister" [1527]. *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1901), XXIII, 129, 4. Hereafter cited as WA. Cp. *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 38, 54. Hereafter cited as AE. Cf. Ernst Kinder, "Zur Sakramentslehre," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie*, III (1961), 165, n. 41.

Norman Nagel is preceptor of Westfield House, Cambridge. He served as guest professor at Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Ind., during part of the 1967—68 academic year. As this article was being put into galleys, word was received that Dr. Nagel had accepted the appointment as Dean of the Chapel at Valparaiso University.

denied the presence of Christ's body and blood. It is from this body that the church is the body of Christ and hence arises the crucial ecumenical importance of this doctrine.³

Luther's great service to Christendom here was to confess the fact and revere the mystery of the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar and to resist any categories and principles under and into which that fact and mystery might be squashed. Yet is he not guilty of this very thing when he adduces the Occamist categories of presence?

To be fair, however, we ought not to begin at that place but approach it by way of what went before. Luther was not a man content to say things once—he was too much the preacher and pastor for that—and least of all in what Sasse calls the Great Controversy, even though his first statement is often his best. Peters points to the *Sermon on the Body and Blood of Christ against the Enthusiasts* (1526) as the example of this in the great controversy.⁴ Here omnipresence comes as the last of seven points, and Luther is not in the habit of leaving his best point until last.

In *That These Words* (1527) the argument revolves around the *Verba* and the Right Hand. The Right Hand does not

establish the sacramental presence. Christ's presence everywhere is not yet His gracious bestowing presence "for you" (*dir da*).⁵ Luther expounds the Right Hand to demolish Zwingli's insistence on only a circumscriptive presence as possible for the body of Christ. He is in fine fettle when he depicts the enthusiasts with lantern and skeleton key climbing stealthily at midnight into heaven and there hunting through all the drawers and cupboards where God keeps His power, but finding none that weighs heavy enough on their precise little scales to manage a body simultaneously in heaven and the Supper.⁶ His major omnipresence excursion he, however, calls *uberflus*.⁷ The dam is full and the water that flows over is not necessary to keep it full, and yet this water plainly flows from the dam.

The case against Zwingli's "right hand" is drawn from what Scripture says about God's right hand. God's power is everywhere creating and preserving. Where His right hand is at work, He must be present, and where He is, Christ is, and apart from Christ there is no God. Luther quotes "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool" and mocks the Zwinglian spatial limitation and expansion: "Come on, guess what happens to his head, arms, chest, and body when he fills the earth with his feet and heaven with his legs?"⁸

"Wherever and whatever God's right

³ Cf. The discussion of Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Cyril of Alexandria in Werner Elert, *Abendmahl und Kirchengemeinschaft in der alten Kirche hauptsächlich des Ostens* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1954), pp. 27 to 30; also *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), pp. 27—30.

⁴ Albrecht Peters, "Luthers Turmerlebnis," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie*, III (1961), 212.

⁵ WA XXIII, 151, 14; AE 37, 68.

⁶ WA XXIII, 119, 1; AE 37, 48.

⁷ WA XXIII, 139, 24; AE 37, 61.

⁸ WA XXIII, 131, 18—135, 33; cf. AE 37, 56—59. Occam would seem to qualify for similar mockery. Cf. Erwin Iserloh, *Gnade und Eucharistie in der philosophischen Theologie des Wilhelm von Ockham* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1956), p. 206.

hand is and is called, there is Christ, the Son of man."⁹ Luther, however, is not contending for infinite attributes. His opponents draw him into discussion of omnipresence, but his soteriology pulls him back home to the certain and specific place assured by Christ's words.

Though he is in your bread, you will not grasp him there unless he binds himself there for you and appoints a particular table 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.¹⁰

That Word and that bestowing presence are what matter. God binds Himself to our humanity, wine and bread through His Word and words to give Himself and His salvation into our grasp. Luther's basis for this is simply the fact that this is what God has done and does. He will therefore allow nothing that He sees as a diminution or disruption of this. The heart of His concern is not some notional omnipresence, but what God has said, done, and gives. Here is the contingency of what God does and says which cannot survive in any philosophical system.

Why then ubiquity? The Real Presence does not need it, nor is it Luther's basis for

⁹ WA XXIII, 145, 1; cf. AE 37, 64.

¹⁰ WA XXIII, 151, 29; AE 37, 69. Cf. WA XX, 400, 25; XXXI/1, 223, 28.

the Real Presence. It posits too much and has in it indeed the danger of flattening the peculiar character of the presence of the body and blood of Christ. Luther flows on so voluminously beyond what might be thought necessary to establish the sacramental presence that this is quite clearly not the point for which he is seeking a foundation. This stands whether Zwingli can demolish ubiquity or not.¹¹ His home ground is the *Verba*, and here he feels confident no attack can score against him, but he does go off to rout his opponents on their ground. He borrows their bat to punish them with,¹² but it is not really their kind of cricket at all, nor his either.

The Swiss would allow only one way for Christ's body to be present. This would permit it to be in only one circumscribed place¹³ and so would catastrophically sunder the Personal Union. Their local Right Hand Luther rejects for an omnipresent one of God's power that is at work everywhere, creating and sustaining all things.¹⁴ He insists that Christ has more than one way of being present. He gives examples *zum uberflus*, and if these are disallowed, God doubtless has yet other ways.¹⁵ He is not to be fenced in.¹⁶

However, Zwingli was not intent on fencing God in but rather Christ's human

¹¹ WA XXVI, 319, 4; AE 37, 208 f.

¹² Actually Goliath's sword. WA XXIII, 143, 25; AE 37, 62.

¹³ WA XXIII, 133, 23; AE 37, 57.

¹⁴ WA XXIII, 133, 21; 135, 12; 143, 10; XXVI, 339, 25; 333, 20; AE 37, 57, 58, 63, 227 f., 219.

¹⁵ WA XXIII, 139, 4; 145, 33; XXVI, 319, 7; 329, 34; 331, 30; 336, 28; 338, 9; AE 37, 61, 65, 208 f., 216, 217, 223, 226.

¹⁶ WA XXIII, 152, 15; XXVI, 339, 36; AE 37, 69 f., 228.

body. The whole crux is that he could think of this separately while Luther could not. It is impossible, Zwingli affirmed, for this body to be in more than one place. Luther expends much hot ink to show this possibility. But this does not provide a foundation for the positive affirmation. For this Luther has to return home to the *Verba*. To them every notion and category of ours must be brought into subjection.

In the *Large Confession* the battle thunders over much the same country, and Luther, who is a poor strategist, allows his opponents to choose the ground. Instead of staying dug in in the *Verba* he charges out against their various positions throwing at them whatever he can lay his hands on. After lengthy bombardment of their local Right Hand he confesses that his aim is not to prove Christ everywhere but in the Supper.¹⁷ The former does not really belong here.¹⁸ We are now, at last, nearing the point where he picks up Occam and throws him in, too.

He has just said for the umpteenth time that the words "This is my body" say what they say.¹⁹ He will give ground to no alloecosis, synecdoche, or trope.²⁰ Then he defines the position on which he stands, and the order is significant.²¹ The first is this article of our faith that Jesus Christ is essentially, naturally, truly, and completely God and man in one inseparable and undivided person. Second, God's right hand is everywhere. Third, there is no falsehood or lie in God's word.

¹⁷ WA XXVI, 318, 1; 329, 34; AE 37, 207, 216.

¹⁸ WA XXVI, 320, 25; AE 37, 210

¹⁹ WA XXVI, 325, 22; AE 37, 213.

²⁰ WA XXVI, 326, 26; AE 37, 214.

²¹ WA XXVI, 326, 29; AE 37, 214 f.

Fourth, God has many a way and manner of being in a place, and not only that single way which the enthusiasts pull out of their hats and which the philosophers term "local." The sophists²² are justified in speaking of three ways of being in a place: local or circumscriptive, definitive, and repletive. *Local* presence is as wine in a barrel or straw in a sack or Jesus of Nazareth in a boat. Here a body displaces the amount of air required by its mass. This can be measured and grasped. *Definitive* presence is when something is in a place but where there is no congruence between it and the limits of space, as an angel in a room, house, town, or even a nutshell. Thus Christ rose through the stone and passed through a door without

²² Occam, *Super quatuor libros sententiarum quaestiones*, IV, q. 4C (London: Gregg, 1962). *Quodlibet* I, q. 4. *De Sacramento Altaris*, ed. T. Bruce Birch (Burlington: Lutheran Literary Board, 1930), pp. 188—97.

Biel, who is in substantial agreement with Occam, quotes at length from this chapter. *Canonis Misse Expositio*, ed. H. A. Oberman and W. J. Courtenay (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1965), II, 146. *Collectorium*, IB, d, x, q. 1, art. 2, concl. 2. Biel clarifies his logic by establishing the third category of repletive presence and so has a definitive presence that, in contrast with Occam, is demarcated against repletive suffusion. Friedrich Loofs finds in Occam a bent toward a virtual presence. *Leitfaden zum Studium der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th ed. (Halle: Niemeyer, 1906), p. 619. Cf. Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 276. Oberman and Courtenay, p. 158. Reinhold Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 5th ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgemeinschaft, 1953), III, 789 f., IV/1, 471—75. Rudolf Damerau, *Die Abendmahlslehre des Nominalismus insbesondere die des Gabriel Biel* (Giessen: Schmitz, 1963), pp. 179—97. Albrecht Peters, *Realpräsenz* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1960), pp. 79—86. Sasse, pp. 155 to 158. For Usingen see Otto Scheel, *Martin Luther* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1917), I, 194 f.

displacing any stone or door.²³ This cannot be measured or grasped. This is the way Christ's body is and can be in the bread (WA XXVI, 329, 2), and yet He can also show Himself tangibly wherever He wishes. The Easter stone and door remained stone and wood. Bread and wine

²³ Luther does not follow Occam's definition of definitive presence. *Quando aliquid est in loco sic quod totum est in toto et totum est in qualibet parte, tunc per se et vere in loco diffinitive, sic est de quantitate corporis Christi sub illis speciebus, igitur non est ibi per concomitantiam naturalem.* Quoted by Iserloh, p. 174, n. 1. Luther follows a more general use of the term. E. g. Aquinas, *Summa* I, 52, 2c. Cf. Ludwig Schütz, *Thomas-Lexikon* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1881), p. 91; 2d ed. (1895), p. 450.

Occam's definition is vital to his argument, which intends to demonstrate a metaphysical miracle. Luther's purpose, on the other hand, is to remove obstacles from taking Christ's words as saying what they say.

Biel is dominated by Occam's definition. He also would use the rules of logic to furnish proof, and adduces Occam's examples from *De Sacramento*, vi [Birch], p. 193, plus the Easter stone. Oberman and Courtenay, p. 147.

Occam there lists soul, angels, Easter door, the Virgin's closed womb and the ascension. This last is significantly not used by Luther. For Occam the ascension is definitive and the session circumscriptive with ubiquitous possibilities. To put it no stronger, Occam (for Occam's alloecosis see Iserloh, pp. 32—35), Biel, and Zwingli accept at least theoretically a presence of Christ apart from His human nature. This is utterly repugnant to Luther, for it threatens his Christology, soteriology, and theology. For Occam's *extra Calvinisticum* see *Super IV libros sententiarum* IV, q. 4N. The relation of the two natures is said to be that of subject and accident, and hence *potest natura divina et verbum esse et est alicubi ubi non est natura assumpta*. When such a Christ was commended to Luther by Oecolampadius, he recoiled from it.

Oberman, pp. 264 f., finds *extra Calvinisticum* in Biel and *kenosis* as well, but his evidence is not compelling. *Kenosis* is far from Biel, for the divine nature is for him of predominant importance. *Extra Calvinisticum*, on the other hand, is inimical to the human nature. Damerau, p. 165 f., presents Biel as orthodox regarding the

are not changed from bread and wine when Christ's body is in them. They are measurably long and wide, but not He. The *repletive* presence can only be ascribed to God who fills all in all. This must be held by faith alone in the word.

Then a sort of analogy comes to Luther's mind, and unfortunately it is not the last. The sight of our eyes is present to all places up to 20 miles and more. If this is so, cannot God's power find a

personal union and excuses passages that sound like separation as due to merely logical distinctions. While we must be as fair to Biel as to Luther and acknowledge that he also works as a devout servant of the church, this plea of Damerau does not quite cover *Lectio* 46P, where the *extra Calvinisticum* is stated. Oberman and Courtenay, p. 206. And milk that has color but is not white will not really wash.

It is also worth noting that when Luther speaks of the bread and the presence of Christ's body there, he says, "is and can," (WA XXVI, 329, 2; 332, 21; AE 37, 216, 218) and not with Occam, "can and is." When Luther says only "can" we may well suspect that he is ploughing with Occam's heifer of the *potentia absoluta*, as when with Scotist voluntarism he mentions in passing the possibility of a multiple circumscriptive presence. This last is unequivocally expressed in a section (WA XXVI, 336, 28; AE 37, 223 ff.) following *meine sachen*. Not content with that he goes over the three modes again and then charges off, throwing anything he can lay his hands on. These missiles, however, are leftovers from the time before gunpowder. There are broken pieces of mirror and a crystal. Angels and spirits reappear together with other odds and ends. But then like a naughty boy who has rather enjoyed clouting the other boy, who was not nice to him, he feels somewhat ashamed—though not too much—and so we then get the usual excuses: He started it, so I can speculate too. I am not now speaking from Scripture. I do not hold this idea as certainly so, but such things are not impossible, and they do help to show what a fool he is.

On this *potentia absoluta* line it is indeed impossible to disprove that God has bacon and eggs for breakfast every morning.

way by which all creatures can be present and permeable to Christ's body? Sensing the weakness of his argument here, Luther has his opponents interpose the objection that nothing is proved in this way. He has no better rejoinder than that they cannot prove such a thing impossible to God's power.²⁴ Occam would do no worse. However, he does return to what matters to him (*meine sachen*).

Our faith holds that Christ is God and man. The two natures is [!] one person. . . . He can indeed show himself in the bodily apprehensible way in whatever place he wishes as he did after the Resurrection and will do at the Last Day . . . but he can also use the second way that cannot be grasped as we have proved from the Gospel as he did at the grave and the locked door.²⁵ . . . Since, however, he is

²⁴ Unfortunately Elert's telling observation does not apply here. *Es steht hier nicht die Wunderbarkeit, sondern die Tatsächlichkeit eines Geschehens in Frage.* (It is not the marvellous character of the event but its factuality that is at issue.) Werner Elert, *Der Christliche Glaube* (3d ed., Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1956), p. 383. When it does apply, Luther is back at home with the *Verba*. See n. 46.

²⁵ Here Luther has no weapon of a definition and the only examples are two Scriptural instances which serve to demonstrate that Christ can be present in a way that cannot be rationally grasped. This last is just what Occam would demonstrate. He is certain that by using the rules of logic he can furnish a proof. Birch, p. 191.

The disappearance of the angels is significant. Biel could not so easily do without them. For him they show the kind of presence which Christ uses in the Eucharist. It is not a mediate presence. Zwingli could agree with this but certainly not Luther. *Lectio 46Q: Unio corporis Christi non est specialis ad species panis, non enim est alia quam angeli ad corpus cui assistit.* Oberman and Courtenay, p. 107. Here Luther is more Thomist than Nominalist. Cf. Leif Grane, *Contra Gabrielem* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962), p. 76.

such a man who is supernaturally one person with God and outside of this man there is no God, it must follow that he also is and may be everywhere where God is according to the third supernatural way. . . . Where you can say, "Here is God," there you must also say, "Then Christ the man is also there." If you would point to a place where God is and not the man, then the person would already be divided. Then I could in truth say, "Here is God who is not man and never became man." None of that God for me please! From this it would follow that space and place sundered the two natures from one another and divided the person, which indeed death and all devils could not part or tear asunder. That would leave me a sorry Christ. . . . He has become one person and does not separate the humanity from himself.²⁶

Only in this humanity is God graciously there for us, and this saving fact may never be put in doubt by any question of "how" which can think only of extension and circumscriptively. It is nonsense to talk of Christ as high up there or way down here,²⁷ as up and down or hither and thither,²⁸ or as small or big.²⁹ He is not subject to any such dimension, category, or criterion.³⁰ Luther repudiates the

²⁶ WA XXVI, 332, 12; see also trans. in AE 37, 218—19.

²⁷ WA XXIII, 115, 36; AE 37, 46 f.

²⁸ WA XXIII, 147, 25; XVIII, 206, 17; XIX, 489, 24; 492, 1; AE 37, 66.

Cf. Biel's exhaustive treatment of the question *utrum corpus Christi localiter mutetur*. Oberman and Courtenay, pp. 206—10; Damerau, pp. 193 f. He decides for a *mutatio localis* and against a *motus localis*. His general presuppositions are also those of Zwingli.

²⁹ WA XXIII, 137, 8; XXVI, 339, 33; AE 37, 59.

³⁰ WA XXIII, 137, 25; XXVI, 333, 22; AE 37, 60, 219.

imposition of these categories, which are the preoccupation of Occam, Biel, and Zwingli.

We need not follow the argument farther. Luther finds his opponents captive to their terms and categories in which they would confine Christ. This he will not allow, but is he not compromised by the way he puts the case against them? He cannot do without words, and some of the words he uses certainly do arouse suspicion. The critical question is whether they have more than a negative function for him.

The infinite attributes of omnipotence and omnipresence that he contends with against the Swiss are more theirs than his, more of the kingdom of power than the kingdom of grace. He fights desperately for them for the kingdom of grace, but Saul's armor does not make it easier for him, and one can only regret that he did not stay with the shepherd's lowly sling.

When Luther uses *potentia absoluta* against the Swiss, he is not sufficiently aware of his proximity then to the *deus absconditus*. There he is not at home, and the *potentia ordinata* has been clarified for him by the distinction between the Law and the Gospel. God's *potentia* is then no longer the ultimate reference that it is in Augustine and his disciples.³¹ *Potentia ordinata* belongs rather under the heading of the Law and the *opus alienum*. The Gospel and *opus proprium* proclaim the

³¹ Among whom was the young Luther. Cf. Erich Vogelsang, *Die Anfänge von Luthers Christologie nach der ersten Psalmenvorlesung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1929), p. 47, n. 2; Adolf Hamel, *Der junge Luther und Augustin* (Gütersloh: Evangelischer Verlag, 1934), I, 175, n. 5.

lowly Christ who suffers Himself to be rejected, there for us upon the arms of Mary and the cross and on the altar.³²

This last Luther here passionately affirms, but this positive affirmation has to be seen through the dust of his negative attack upon Swiss obstructions. An alliance between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* offers him doubtful advantage. For Biel they are in cordial entente.³³ For Luther, however, their equipment has changed. These terms are indeed not formally used here but their Nominalist content lies behind what Luther says in the passages where he speaks about "possibility." Yet what appears is not quite that content either, but that content transformed by his prior given understanding of Christ and the Gospel — a transformation that is here at times rather blurred.

In Luther's defense it must be acknowledged that he points out his excursions, but not always. A book or two would be needed to deal with this *potentia absoluta* and *ordinata* and also the Scotist-sounding voluntarism which enables Luther to assert the absurdity of Biel's multiple circumscriptive presence.³⁴ If the absurdity is God's, it must stand, but this is sheer speculation. The best that can be said for Luther is that this is an excursion to harass his opponents.

³² WA IV, 649, 6; XXV, 107, 5; XXVIII, 136, 19; XXXIII, 160, 32; XXXVII, 42, 33; XL/1, 76, 9.

³³ Cf. Damerau, pp. 188, 90; Oberman, pp. 36 f.

³⁴ Oberman and Courtenay, pp. 196 ff., 206; Damerau, pp. 188, 190. See above, n. 23. Cf. Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), pp. 88 to 93. Unfortunately Rupp's "grateful quotations" do not include the modes of presence.

The remarkable thing, however, is not that Luther used Occamist terms of presence against those whom he regarded as rationalists. At various points he makes the bluff confession that he is speculating. The terms are those for the problem of the quantity and extension of the body of Christ in the Eucharist.³⁵ This was a preoccupation of his opponents. The really remarkable thing is that he uses this terminology in his repudiation of any such preoccupation. This does not rest on any Occamist theory about *substantia* and *quantitas*, but on the fact that Christ does what He says He does, and what He says and does is all of a piece with the sort of person He is.

So often when Luther sounds like an Occamist, closer examination reveals a radical difference. In this matter Occam's reasoning does not take him beyond possibility—Luther is aware of this.³⁶ It is integrally bound up with his (Occam's) distinction between *substantia*, *quantitas*, and *qualitas*. Without this it would collapse. Not so for Luther. The basis for definitive presence is supplied for him by instances of a noncircumscriptive presence of Christ, and for them it provides a label. Not the term or its philosophical presuppositions but these instances prove his point that Christ may not be restricted to a circumscriptive presence.

The presence of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine is also an instance that is not proved by any theoretical necessity but is affirmed on the basis of the contingent words of Christ. This affirmation does not rest on the validity of Oc-

cam's categories of definitive or repletive presence. In the Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles he has no use for them; nor in his final *Short Confession*. Much of the *uberflus* is indeed superfluous.

Luther's argument about divine possibilities does indeed sound rather Occamist, but its use is in getting at his opponent and is only of negative value. Omnipresence is not his point of departure and the one present in bread and wine is not first of all the omnipresent, majestic God but the gracious and incarnate God who appoints the place and means where He is there for us, bestowing His body and blood, forgiveness, life, and salvation. Words, wine, and bread give the location without which the God who is everywhere is as good as nowhere. Omnipresence as such fits better with the majestic God on a velvet cushion upon a golden throne, uninvolved with our condition.³⁷ Luther is not at home with the merely omnipresent God, for He is the dread *deus nudus*.³⁸ He insists on seeing the omni-

³⁷ WA XXIII, 131, 12; 155, 16; 705, 25; AE 37, 55 f., 70 f.

³⁸ Cf. WA XXV, 107, 2: *Neque enim coram Maiestate quisquam consistere potest, sed in solum Christum est respiciendum*. XXV, 106, 30; XL 1, 75, 9; 76, 9; 77, 11; XL 2, 330, 1; IV, 649, 6; VII, 369, 20; 371, 14; 358, 31; XVIII, 684, 37; 685, 6; L, 647, 6; 628, 16; XXIX, 669 ff. Theodosius Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1927), I, 41 ff. Somerlath, p. 326: "An den Anfang der Auseinandersetzung mit den "Schwärmern" fällt in zeitlichem Zusammentreffen die Abfassung seiner Schrift 'De servo arbitrio.'" Cf. Hellmut Bandt, *Luthers Lehre vom Verborgenen Gott* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1958), pp. 186—90. Alfred Adam seems to labor under the equation *revelatus*=*misericors*. "Der Begriff *Deus absconditus* bei Luther nach Herkunft und Bedeutung," *Luther-Jahrbuch*, XXX (1963), 105 f. Cf. Bandt, p. 191.

The above cited statements of Luther must

³⁵ Cf. Iserloh, pp. 174—253.

³⁶ Iserloh, p. 77. WA XXVI, 337, 23; XXIII, 267, 29; AE 37, 225, 140.

presence of God in Christ, and there he is at home. There it does not terrify, for there is God for us. The assertion of impossibility based on the incapacity and unfitness of words, wine, bread, and humanity Luther rejects with the statement of the *Verba*, and by allowing here nothing less than Christ, God and man. Nothing less may be confessed of Christ than we confess of God, for what we confess of God is above all given in Christ. Disparity here would disintegrate Christ and also the achievement and bestowal of salvation.³⁹

Luther uses the scholastic terms, but they do not hold sway, and their content he finds in Scripture. What he strives to say with the borrowed and burst terms is connected with the heart of his understanding of Christ. He recoils from any God outside of Christ. Where God is, there is Christ, and He is inseparably God and man. Therefore this presence is not a ubiquity of spatial extension but simply and soteriologically "Where God is, there

control the weight we attach to such statements as the following adduced by Peters, who seems at times a little too philosophically allured by Metzke, p. 169: *Mibi est facile credere in pane esse, imo credo in corde omnium tyrannorum. Si est ubique et super omnes creaturas, ergo est in vino et pane.* WA XX, 383, 8. Here the logic actually moves from the less to the greater. The really staggering thing about God is not His omnipotence but His grace, as Luther knows very well.

³⁹ WA XXXIII, 160, 3; XL 1, 76, 13; XXVI, 420, 20; AE 37, 280. Cf. Georg Merz, "Zur Frage nach dem rechten Lutherverständnis," *Zwischen den Zeiten*, VI (1928), 439: "Dass in Christus und nur hier Gott nahe ist, darin liegt das Pathos der lutherischen Predigt." ("That in Christ and only here God is near: therein lies the *Pathos* [emotion, solemnity?] of Luther's preaching.")

He [Christ] must be also, otherwise our faith is false."⁴⁰

The presence of Christ in bread and wine comes under definitive presence and not the repletive presence which is Christologically rather than sacramentally important.⁴¹ This terminology is, however, incapable of conveying the magnitude of the issue at stake just as the failure of the Marburg Colloquy was more than a disagreement about the 15th point. There two theologies confronted each other.⁴²

⁴⁰ WA XXVI, 336, 18; AE 37, 223. Cf. Paul Gennrich, *Die Christologie Luthers im Abendmablsstreit 1524—1529* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929), p. 61. But it is not for the joy of metaphysical speculation, nor for the sake of a secondary foundation for his doctrine of the Lord's Supper that Luther argued the God-manhood of Christ with the aid of scholastic categories; rather this followed necessarily from his religious interest in the unity and the separation of the two natures in Christ, which provide the foundation of salvation. This combined view of the two sides of the Redeemer is crucial; everything depends on the complete Christ.

⁴¹ This tends to be undervalued by those who favor a Christological and systematic foundation for the doctrine of the Lord's Supper rather than an exegetical one. Cf. Hans Grass, *Die Abendmablslehre bei Luther und Calvin*, 2d edition (Gütersloh: C. Bertelmanns Verlag, 1934), pp. 60 f. Seeberg, pp. 427 f., makes a valid distinction (p. 479, n. 2) in opposition to Otto Ritschl, but this applies to the repletive presence as well as to the definitive, and so he does not touch Ritschl's assertion that the *esse repletive* is not the sacramental presence for Luther. Significant also is Seeberg's observation that "in, with, and under" are used of the definitive presence and not the repletive. The Nominalist line of argument leads to a circumscriptive presence of the body of Christ in the Sacrament. Cf. Damerau, p. 188.

⁴² Cf. Barth's famous dictum: "Luther would have said it quite differently from Zwingli, even if he had not found the problem-posing *est* in the Bible." "Ansatz und Absicht in Luthers

For the one the point of departure was the infinite attributes together with the philosophical incubus of restrictive finitude and its incapacities. For the other it was the lowly incarnate God there for us upon the arms of Mary and the cross and on the altar. The protagonists talked past each other, for the Swiss were quite happy with a detached, divine Christ and did not share Luther's insistence on no God apart from the whole Christ.⁴³

Here then, we have no Occamist zest for spinning out divine possibilities.⁴⁴ Luther is first of all an exegetical theologian. What Christ says He does, He does. This is Luther's fortress. Although he makes excursions into alien waters, he never surrenders this rock. His line is not: God can, therefore He may or does. If he goes over to this in order to get at his opponents, his heart is not really in it, and to those who are expert at it he does not appear to do it ther is first of all an exegetical theologian. well. He promises not to speculate and to stay with the *Verba*. Yet to get to grips with his opponents he does not hesitate to dive in with them and splashes about so lustily that one cannot help wondering whether he does not get a little

Abendmahlslehre," *Die Theologie und die Kirche, Gesammelte Vorträge* (Zurich: Zurich-Zöllikon Verlag, 1928), II, 50. Cf. Otto Fricke, *Die Sakramente in der Protestantischen Kirche* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1929), p. 12; Werner Elert, "Luther in Marburg," *Zeitschrift*, V (1929), 315—24; Sasse, pp. 187—294.

For the necessary qualification of Barth's dictum see Sommerlath, "Das Abendmahl bei Luther," *Vom Sakrament des Altars*, ed. H. Sasse (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1941), p. 101. Quoted and disagreed with by Peters, p. 164.

⁴³ Cf. Peters, p. 69; "Zwingli's confidence rests ultimately in the divinity alone." The same could be said of Occam and Biel. See above, n. 23.

⁴⁴ Cf. Oberman, p. 34, n. 16.

too carried away and does not return soon enough to his towel and *terra firma*.

To the extent that he is drawn into the ocean of the infinite attributes, he is pulled away from the heart of his theology. This holds the tension between the infinite God and His condescension to us in the earthly things of our humanity, words, wine, and bread. For him there is conjunction and identification here.⁴⁵ The finitude of the earthly things is not set against the infinite God and not allowed to set him bounds.⁴⁶ Seeing this conjunction threatened, Luther does not shrink

⁴⁵ Cf. Gennrich, p. 20. Iserloh, p. 74, points the contrast with Occam.

⁴⁶ Here Luther is with Occam. *Tanta est enim divina potentia quod de creaturis suis poterit facere quicquid sibi placuerit*. Birch, p. 220. Luther, however, does not propound a philosophical demonstration. His conclusion is that the fact which the words of Christ state is not impossible, while Occam concludes, "If He makes a cause of a natural object, He is not bound to make the effect." Iserloh finds Occam's demonstration fraught with unresolved difficulties. Pp. 207 ff.

Zwingli is with the Realists here. He shares his view of the Right Hand with the schoolmen. Their shared *theologia gloriae* cannot accept the lowly earthly element as capable of the conjunction. It must either be risen above or displaced. The *unitas finiti et infiniti* (WA XXXIX, 112, 9) is as abhorrent to most schoolmen as to the Swiss. Cf. Grass, pp. 58 f. Peters, pp. 90 f.: "A scholastic just as a reformed separation of the two components from each other would only endanger the mystery." *Contra* Erich Seeberg, *Luthers Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1937), II, 346; "Der Gegensatz zwischen Zwingli, Schwencckfeld und Luther," *Reinhold Seeberg Festschrift*, ed. W. Koepf (Leipzig: Deichertsche Verlag, 1929), p. 80; Franz Hildebrandt, *Est, das lutherische Prinzip* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931), p. 83.

The magnitude of Luther's achievement can be seen against the background of what Heimsoeth says of the long regnant notion of finitude. Heinz Heimsoeth, *Die sechs grossen Themen der abendländischen Metaphysik und der Ausgang des Mittelalters*, 4th ed. (Darmstadt: Wissen-

from absurdity in its defense. The absurdity is born of the terms rather than the theology, and by it he would crack the terms to serve the *deus incarnatus*, who is graciously there for us according to the appointment and action of his words.

When Oecolampadius urged Luther to raise his thoughts away from the human to the divine Christ, Luther replied with the heart of his theology. He neither knows nor worships any other God than Him who became man. He would have no other apart from him, for there is no other who can save. Hence he could not bear that the humanity be treated as of so little worth and cast aside.⁴⁷

Luther will have no God apart from Christ, no gap between God and Christ, no gap between his two natures, no gap between his body and the bread, no gap between Christ and us, or a part of us, and no gap between any of these and God's words.⁴⁸

schaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1958), pp. 61 ff. "Where there are no limits, there there can be no all-embracing understanding." P. 68.

To the Wittenberg "Professor of the Old Testament" the living God is Lord of His creation in which He does wondrous things. This marveling recognition leads to a more glorious *dignificare naturam* than Vignaux dreams of when he sets a gloomy Luther in opposition to the Nominalists and their *dignificare naturam*. Paul Vignaux, *Philosophy of the Middle Ages* (London: Burns & Oates, 1958), pp. 211—13. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther's Works*, Companion Volume, *Luther the Expositor* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), pp. 45—47.

⁴⁷ WA XXX/3, 132, 23. Elert calls these the most important words Luther uttered in Marburg. *Luther in Marburg*, p. 317. WA XXVIII, 135, 15.

⁴⁸ WA XX, 603, 28; XXX 1, 53, 24; XXVI, 437-445; XXIII, 147, 24; 239, 8; XXVI, 317, 1; 420, 20; XXIII, 181, 36; AE 37, 294—303, 66, 121, 206, 280, 87 f.

This insistence of Luther's on wholeness — *Lasse das Sacrament gantz bleiben*⁴⁹ — applies also to Christ and to man. His understanding of these is also not informed by any philosophical principle but by Scripture. His theology breaks the bondage of philosophy. The analyzing and unifying philosophers and philosophical theologians are more available for his opponents' use than for his. Their labels will not stick to him. When he uses their weapons, it is for a negative purpose, and his use of them is rather left-handed.

The labels make a curious picture. The Nominalist sophists he cites held to a local "Right Hand" and had no joy in the lowly earthly element. Their empirical principle belongs rather with Luther's opponents. They also thought of higher and lower parts in Christ and in man, as did Biel.⁵⁰ Occam's inductive method is not at home with Luther here, and certainly not his comfortably held immediate presence.⁵¹ Luther is more Thomist than Nominalist in his understanding of the role of the *Verba*.⁵² He is more a Realist in the insistence on the identity of Christ at the Right Hand and in the Sacrament,⁵³ although he is innocent of their Realist basic, absolute universals. His rejection of these is not that of the Nominalists. He has no use for the distinctions of substance, quantity, and quality that are basic for distinguishing the modes of presence, nor for the philosophical definition of these. He throws them to his opponents

⁴⁹ WA XXX/1, 55, 19.

⁵⁰ Cf. Oberman, pp. 58 f.; Grane, pp. 79 to 82, 363.

⁵¹ Cf. Iserloh, p. 197.

⁵² Cf. Damerau, pp. 196 f.

⁵³ Cf. Damerau, p. 181.

as nuts on which to crack their rationalizing teeth. This, however, is not all. They are also put to break our narrow and rigid categories and to enlarge our wonder at Christ's gracious works and ways. As Peters puts it, they would "teach us to marvel."⁵⁴

Labels of philosophical theology do not help us to the heart of the matter. That does business in an inflated currency while Luther is a doughty protagonist of the gold standard. His is not a theology of postulate, proof, and conclusion, but of the received data. If God does or says something, it is sheer impertinence to question its possibility or fitness or to prescribe its manner. Nor is there any need of proving it. When Luther speaks of "proof," this may not be understood as being contrary to the whole data character of his theology.

⁵⁴ Peters, p. 83. Cf. Rudolf Hermann, "Zu Luthers Lehre vom unfreien Willen," *Greifswalder Studien*, No. 4 (1931), p. 21: "An den in Christus offenbaren Gott glauben, heisst lernen Geheimnisse stehen zu lassen."

If God had done or said otherwise in any case, Luther would "prove" that, too.

The answer in the *Small Catechism* to the question "What is the Sacrament of the Altar" needs no dephilosophizing. It stands there in its data character with the same confidence as do the Words of Institution in the *Large Catechism*. They say what they say. The fact is confessed and the mystery revered. It is the attempts to modify, explain, and qualify that betray philosophical infiltration.

It is His will to make His gift to you through the humanity, through the word, and through the bread in the Communion. What an arrogant and ungrateful devil you are that dares to ask why He did not do it otherwise and not in this way! Would you decree and choose manner and measure for Him? You ought to leap for joy that He does it by whatever way He wishes. What matters is that you receive it.⁵⁵

Cambridge, England

⁵⁵ WA XXIII, 269, 3; AE 37, 140.

CORRIGENDUM

David W. Lotz has called to our attention an editorial error in his article in the January 1968 (XXXIX) issue of this journal. We had changed to a question what had been an affirmative statement. The paragraph on page 32 should read:

Can the "historical problem" really be dismissed in such summary fashion? For one thing, why should faith be *in any sense* concerned with history? It is not logically absurd, for example, to hold that "authentic existence" is possible through confrontation with a fictional story. Put otherwise: how does faith in the crucified and risen Lord differ from faith in a mythical Christ, if what is primary is my existential involvement, my reception of a new self-understanding?

We apologize to Mr. Lotz for unintentionally changing his meaning.