

Thurs. 11<sup>th</sup> - 9:30

CONCORDIA  
THEOLOGICAL  
QUARTERLY

CTQ

Volume 56: Number 1

JANUARY 1992

Ministry: Rethinking the Term <i>Diakonia</i> Karl Paul Donfried .....	1
Eternal Bringer of Breath James Winsor .....	16
Philosophical Presuppositions in the Lutheran-Reformed Debate on John 6 Lowell C. Green .....	17
Book Reviews .....	39
Books Received .....	67
Indices to Volume 55 (1991)	
Author Index .....	69
Title Index .....	74
Scripture Index to the Homiletical Studies .....	77



# Philosophical Presuppositions in the Lutheran-Reformed Debate on John 6

Lowell C. Green

The Lutheran and Reformed branches of the Reformation came to a division in their debate over the Lord's Supper. This paper will investigate a small segment of the debate—their use of John 6, with special attention to verse 63: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." In his controversy with Luther, Zwingli tended to rest his case upon those words as he interpreted them. The Lutheran party reacted by insisting that John 6 did not refer to the Supper at all.<sup>1</sup>

The approach to John 6 on the part of Zwingli and his supporters came from Neo-Platonism and a world-view characterized by the duality of the material and the spiritual. We shall therefore have to look into the philosophical roots of the sacramental controversy in due course. First, however, I want to point out how drastically this view separated the Reformed from the Lutheran position. As much as possible, I want to avoid the term "real presence," because even Zwingli used that term occasionally. The three shibboleths for the Lutheran position are the *unio sacramentalis* or sacramental union, the *communio oralis* or reception with the mouth, and the *communicatio indignorum* or the fact that also those who lack faith receive the body and blood of Christ. At each of these three points, the Reformed and Lutheran positions came to a stalemate which even twentieth-century rhetoric has not resolved. In each case it was the Platonic assumptions of Zwingli which marked the dividing line. The sacramental union of the visible earthly elements with the very body and blood of Christ was unacceptable to Zwingli because a natural body could not be in two places at once, and Christ had ascended into heaven; the finite could not contain the infinite, Zwingli insisted. The concept of oral communion was rejected because Zwingli thought that an earthly substance could not convey a spiritual gift; eating the body of Christ could only be done spiritually, that is, by faith.

The third sore point was the Lutheran teaching that the body and blood of Christ were so surely present under the bread and wine that also unbelievers partook of Christ's body, but unto judgment. Zwingli did not believe that the body was objectively present in the bread, and he thought that communion could only take place by

faith. By faith the believer rose to heaven and communed with the risen and ascended Christ. Thus, in the debate with Martin Chemnitz, that sturdy Lutheran was accused of abandoning the *sola fide*; his Reformed opponents insisted that salvation could be received by faith alone, and not through the mouth.<sup>2</sup>

Zwingli cherished Neo-Platonic thinking long before he came to reject the doctrine of the sacramental union. But after he reached the latter point, it seemed as though John 6:63 had all the answers when it said: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." We cannot take the time to show how notions of the distinction between the universal and the individual gave rise to the idea of a covenant, the social contract, popular sovereignty, theocratic separatism, millennialism, and neo-pentecostalism, or typological hermeneutics in biblical interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the thrust of this essay will be to concentrate upon the use of John 6:63: "It is the spirit which quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." Other statements of John 6 will be handled from time to time.

## I. A Reformed Position: John 6:63 as the Key to Understanding the Holy Supper

### A. *Philosophical Roots of Reformed Thought*

The great Greek philosopher Plato (427-347 B.C.) placed spirit above matter. The things which we can see are only shadows of unseen realities. One cannot learn the truth from things which the eye can see or the hand can grasp. Only when one lays aside all knowledge gained from the senses and proceeds by intuition or reason can one penetrate to those ideas, types, or universals which represent the nature of true knowledge.

It was not genuine Platonism but a later revision known as Neo-Platonism which was widely known in the Middle Ages and which exerted its strong influence upon the humanists and reformers, including Reuchlin, Erasmus, Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin. Whereas the pure idealism of Plato had made an unbridgeable gap between the celestial and the terrestrial, and between the spiritual and the bodily, much Neo-Platonism tried to work in Christian ideas and to discover means of bridging the gap

---

between heaven and earth, and between God and man. Chief of all the Christian Neo-Platonists was the great church father, Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), whose writings were of crucial importance to Luther and Zwingli alike. It is no accident that one of the chief representatives of Augustinianism at Wittenberg had been Carlstadt, who later left the Lutheran camp and taught a strongly spiritualized view of the Holy Supper.<sup>4</sup>

Next to Augustine, the most influential Neo-Platonist was likely the unknown Greek philosopher of the fifth century who published his works under the pseudonym of "Dionysius the Areopagite."<sup>5</sup> His thought might have remained obscure except for a quirk of history. About the middle of the ninth century, when western Europe was deeply ensconced in the "Dark Ages" and when Irish scholars were the only ones in the West who could read Greek, Emperor Charles the Bald called the Irishman John Scotus Erigena to teach at his palace school in Paris. At about the same time, during a lull in the usual hatred between the Eastern and Western emperors of Christendom, Emperor Michael Balbus sent Charles a copy of the Areopagite, written, of course, in Greek. Undaunted, Charles the Bald sent the book to John Scotus to have it translated. John Scotus supplied the requested translation, which became a medieval classic. Partially under the influence of the Areopagite, Scotus developed his own system of thought. At first, the papacy was unhappy; Pope Nicholas I complained to the emperor that the book had not been submitted to him for prior censorship and that it contained heretical materials. As a matter of fact, there was some pantheism in the thought of Scotus. (Pantheism is a common pitfall of Neo-Platonists.) But Scotus became the most important philosopher between Augustine and Anselm, and his thinking left its imprint on such later thinkers as Zwingli and Calvin.

The beautiful cathedral city of Chartres was home to a group of Neo-Platonic scholars known as the "School of Chartres." Out of their number came another thinker who influenced Reformed theology. He was an apocalyptic writer, mystic, and purveyor of political enthusiasm called Joachim of Floris.<sup>6</sup> Joachim of Floris (d. 1202) taught a kind of dispensationalism which was, in turn, rooted in his doctrine of the Trinity. Since his view of the Holy Trinity as

well as his philosophy of history influenced the Reformed, we need a brief glance at them. He spoke of the Trinity as a collective unity of the three persons (*collectio trium personarum*), a statement which won him the charge of teaching tritheism rather than trinitarianism.<sup>7</sup> Joachim developed an interpretation of history as an ascent through three successive ages.<sup>8</sup> Each of these was presided over by one of the persons of the Trinity, and each marked an upward movement, in which the Age of the Spirit rose above the Age of the Son as the Age of the Son arose above the Age of the Father. The Age of the Father was the Old Testament period, and the Age of the Son was the New Testament period, but the Age of the Spirit would rise above its predecessors as summer compared with winter and spring. In the Age of the Spirit, which would begin in the thirteenth century, the teachings of the New Testament would be replaced with the "Everlasting Gospel" heralded in Revelation 14:6. Whereas the first age had been characterized by the law, fear, and servitude, and the second age had been one of faith and filial submission, the new dispensation would be one of love, joy, and freedom. The knowledge of God would no longer be mediated but would come in direct revelations from God to the hearts of men.<sup>9</sup>

Like Joachim of Floris, the followers of Zwingli and Calvin tended to see the Holy Trinity as a collective rather than a unity; however, they began the third period at Pentecost, rather than in the thirteenth century. For example, the Reformed theologians based their case for the "real absence" of Christ in the Holy Supper on the notion that the work of Christ had ended at the ascension, and that they were living under the dispensation of the Holy Ghost. As one Lutheran polemicist put it rather ironically, the Reformed cherished the thought that Christ, following the rigors of the earthly ministry and the pains of the passion, entered in His exaltation "a well-deserved retirement." As the tired football player is relieved by a fresh substitute, God had withdrawn Christ, who was now quite literally "out of it"; while He sits in a locally circumscribed place in heaven, the Holy Spirit replaces Him. Zwingli cited several Scripture passages to prove that Jesus was now absent from His followers according to His humanity: "I shall be no more in the world" (John 17:11). "For ye have the poor always with you; but Me ye have not always" (Matthew 16:11). But most often Zwingli

---

came back to John 6:63: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." He understood *pneuma* as referring to the Holy Spirit, and *sarx* as referring to the "real presence" of the body and blood of Christ under the bread and wine.<sup>10</sup>

"The flesh profiteth nothing." Zwingli understood these words as a man who came from Augustine and the Areopagite. There was a strong dualism between the body and the soul, with the flesh as the source of sin and the soul as good.<sup>11</sup> In terms of Plato, God is the Supreme Mind, Intelligence,<sup>12</sup> the First Principle.<sup>13</sup> In the system of dualism held by Zwingli<sup>14</sup> and later by Calvin, the body and soul seemed almost divorced from each other rather than working together in harmony. Man should rise from the visible to the invisible by a Neo-Platonic technique.<sup>15</sup> As in Pythagoras or Plato, the body was only the prison-house of the soul, so that death was the release of the soul from the body. Zwingli and Calvin alike followed a sharp Platonic distinction of body and soul. Calvin unfortunately used this distinction as an analogy of the distinction between the divine and human natures in Christ.<sup>16</sup> He called the body the prison-house of the soul, from which only death released it, and he described the incarnation as divinity "hiding itself in the prison-house of the body."

It was small wonder, then, that Calvin rebuked the Lutherans for their doctrine of the Holy Supper in these words: "They place Christ in the bread, while we do not think it lawful for us to drag Him down from Heaven."<sup>17</sup> (A Lutheran might counter that in a sense, then, heaven had become the prison-house of the body of Christ.) Since Christ in His humanity could not be present in the bread and wine, the believer, using the technique of Plato and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, could and should rise to heaven to commune with the humanity of Christ there. For Calvin, even the incarnation was only partial. Calvin felt that it would be unseemly for the Second Person to vacate heaven completely, for that would leave the Trinity incomplete; therefore, when Jesus was born of Mary, part of the divinity remained in heaven (*extra calvinisticum*). Accordingly, the Logos was both united with the man Jesus and was also independent of Him.<sup>18</sup>

Since "the flesh profiteth nothing," Zwingli and his followers

could have no real doctrine of the means of grace. In his *Commentary on True and False Religion* (1525) Zwingli held that the material and the spiritual were of two different realms; hence, the spirit could not be helped by the body or the flesh. In the *Ratio Fidei*, which Zwingli prepared as a confession to the Diet of Augsburg of 1530, he stated it even more clearly: "As the body cannot be nourished by a spiritual substance, so the soul cannot be nourished by a corporeal substance."<sup>19</sup> Zwingli evidently had no place for the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:7: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us."

Zwingli rejected the concept of the means of grace and held that the Holy Spirit worked directly—without means.<sup>20</sup> Thereby, Zwingli was teaching a view which is called *Schwärmerei* or Enthusiasm by Lutherans. ("Enthusiasm" comes from two Greek roots and depicts the deity breathing into the believer directly, without any outward means.) This view placed him in an historical line with Joachim of Floris, Amaury (Amalrich of Bena, d. 1206), the "Free Spirit" or "Spiritual Liberty" movement of the Middle Ages, and the views of the Anabaptists, some of whom were his own disciples. It was not surprising that Calvin followed Zwingli in this regard by teaching the inward voice of the Holy Spirit; he held that the Spirit speaks to the heart of the believer without the external work (*testimonium spiritus sancti internum*). It was only surprising that Lutheran dogmaticians, who came from the tradition that the Holy Ghost comes only through means of grace, should have taken over this teaching from Calvin and incorporated it into their systems.<sup>21</sup> This development is unfortunate, because it was only one more step to the position of modern Neo-Pentecostalism, with its notions of special revelations and direct prophecies, speaking in tongues, picking up snakes, drinking poison, "faith healing," and so on.

### *B. The Spiritualistic Understanding of the Holy Supper in Reformed Thinking*

Elsewhere I have devoted much attention to the reformational concept of grace. I have shown that, before Melancthon and Luther, grace was a medicinal substance that was infused into the

---

Christian by the Holy Ghost. Melancthon and Luther rejected this concept and went back to the scriptural teaching that grace means the *favor Dei*, the good will or favor of God. Zwingli rejected the medieval concept of the sacraments as channels for infusing grace, but it is unclear whether he rejected the medieval understanding of grace as a substance, as Melancthon and Luther did. In Zwingli grace preceded baptism or the eucharist, which were signs of the covenant.<sup>22</sup> This relationship makes it clear that the sacraments were not *media salutis*, "means of grace," or better, "means of salvation." In his *Ratio Fidei*, prepared as his own Augsburg Confession in 1530, he wrote:

I believe, therefore, O Emperor, that a sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing, that is, of grace already accomplished [*factae gratiae*]. I believe that it is a visible figure or form of invisible grace which has been accomplished and given by the generosity of God, that is, a visible sample which is exactly a certain analogy of the original thing done previously through the Spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Zwingli added: "Receiving the Holy Ghost is not the work of baptism, but baptism is the work of having received the Holy Ghost."<sup>24</sup>

We have just seen that Zwingli understood baptism not as the cause of faith but as its result; in other words, baptism, as well as the Holy Supper and preaching, belonged to good works as the response of faith, rather than to means by which the Holy Ghost carried out His divine service to us. Accordingly, the Holy Supper, which Zwingli liked to call the "eucharist" (a giving of thanks), was not so much the gift of God as an act of the believing congregation commemorating the sacrifice of Jesus:

In sacraments two factors in general must be considered, the thing [*res*] and the sacrament or sign of the thing [*signum rei*]. The thing is that for the sake of which the sign is instituted, which we call a sacrament . . . In the eucharist the thing is the giving of thanks out of faith for Christ given to us by God and crucified for our sins; however, the sacrament is the giving of bread and wine with the sacred words



of the Lord.<sup>25</sup>

Modern ecumenical liturgics stands remarkably close to many of Zwingli's ideas: the attitude is a giving of thanks (eucharist) rather than a receiving of something; the direction is from man to God rather than God to man; in accord with Zwingli's biblicism or primitivism the attempt is made to reconstruct a family meal with the breaking of bread; and the *epiclesis* invokes the Holy Spirit to mediate the missing Christ. Terms such as the "re-presentation," "re-enactment," and "celebration" of Christ's passion, fashionable in the modern liturgical movement, accord well with the sacramentology of Zwingli.

It is obvious how this view differs from the position of Luther, with his distinctions of the work of God and the work of man and of law and gospel. In Lutheran thinking it is God who works, with the pastor serving as the tool of God; the word of God, in the recitation of the words of institution, effects the real presence of Christ. Every communicant receives the very body and blood of Christ, whether he has faith and is worthy or not. But in Reformed thinking much attention is given to human responsibility; without faith there is no communion. The believer becomes certain of his predestination in the growth of his sanctification, virtue, and good works. In the vow and declaration of the believer as he approaches the Lord's table and in his faith lie the forces which give the sacrament existential meaning and validity.<sup>26</sup> Faith is not given by the sacraments, as by means, but by the Holy Spirit, directly and without means. In the Holy Supper there is faith first; one gives thanks for the kindness, deliverance, and pledge of eternal blessedness, while one partakes of the bread and wine as symbols of the body and blood of Christ. This action Zwingli called "sacramental eating."<sup>27</sup> The noted Swiss Zwingli researcher, Fritz Blanke, summed up Zwingli's view as follows: "Das ist Zwinglis revolutionäre Umdeutung der Sacramente: Aufgabe, nicht Gabe." "That was Zwingli's revolutionary interpretation of the sacraments: a task, not a gift."<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, it was to be expected that the term *diatheke* ("testament") in the words of institution would be translated as "covenant." For a testament is a gift, whereas a covenant is a two-

---

way agreement involving obligation on both sides. A legal concept, the idea of covenant was drawn from the Old Testament. It harmonized with the Reformed understanding of the equality of the Old Covenant and the New Testament and provided the basis for developing the doctrine of the Holy Supper from the Old Testament passover. The Old Testament was said to have a twofold covenant—a *foedus legale*, a covenant of law, and a *foedus gratiae*, a covenant of grace. The concept of covenant became increasingly central in Reformed doctrine in the seventeenth century as theologians tried to counteract the quietistic effects of the doctrine of double predestination by increasing the sphere of human responsibility.<sup>29</sup> It was said that God had established His covenant with the individual in baptism; this implied that the baptized person had a responsibility to fulfill, a task to accomplish. Likewise, the Holy Supper, as the "antitype" of the passover, which had been the sign of the Old Covenant, took a corresponding position in relation to the "New Covenant."<sup>30</sup>

Thus, it was natural to understand the words of institution as referring to a "covenant" rather than a "testament." The Vulgate had translated the words of Christ thus: "This cup is the new testament in My blood" ("Hic calix novum testamentum est in meo sanguine"); Luther followed suit when he rendered them as follows: "Dieser Kelch ist das neue Testament in meinen Blut" (1 Corinthians 11:25). The Authorized Version of 1611 continued this interpretation with these words: "This cup is the new testament in My blood." But in recent translations the Reformed tradition has taken over. Thus, the interdenominational Revised Standard Version and the strongly Calvinistic New International Version prefer "covenant" to "testament."

It is surprising that both the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod have approved the use of the New International Version (NIV), published in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Missouri Synod commission producing a new edition of Luther's Small Catechism has inserted NIV verses which differ sharply from Luther's biblical quotations and has approved NIV renditions for memorization by children. Meanwhile, the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church

adopted a Statement on Communion Practices in 1978 which opined that the theme of the covenant was "central" to the biblical understanding of the people of God and offered this definition: "Holy Communion is the covenant meal of the new people of God who are called to be the body of Christ in the world." Perhaps the readiness of these Lutherans to recognize the Reformed sacrament and practice fellowship with the Reformed comes because they have forgotten the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions. At any rate, Reformed thinking has also made inroads into both Missouri and Wisconsin.<sup>31</sup>

## II. A Lutheran Position: The Denial of the Presence of the Sacrament in John 6 from Luther to the Present

It is commonly held that a good Lutheran will instantly agree that John 6 cannot be used in reference to the doctrine of the Holy Supper. The arguments that are used to support this interpretation were thoroughly enunciated long ago.<sup>32</sup> Notwithstanding my own opinion of these arguments, this is not the place to evaluate them. They were attempts to counter what the Lutherans considered false teachings on the part of their opponents. Yet the Lutheran Church cannot afford to reduce its interpretation of John 6 to a consideration of issues raised by Reformed thinkers. Accordingly, we turn to Luther to seek a more balanced understanding of his position.

It is commonly agreed by Lutherans that the disagreement on the sacraments was only secondary and that the real issue which divided the Lutherans and the Reformed was the doctrine of christology. This assessment is correct. But Lutherans have not always understood what was at stake for Luther. Later Lutheran dogmaticians sometimes became so involved in niceties that they temporarily lost sight of the distinction of law and gospel, that is, of God hidden in majesty and revealed in the humiliation of His Son.

Accordingly, let us start with the assertion that God remains hidden, *Deus absconditus*, in any kind of self-disclosure other than the child of Bethlehem and the man of Calvary, where God is fully revealed, *Deus revelatus*. This God, who became flesh for our sake, was fully present in the God-Man, Jesus Christ. No part of Him remained behind in heaven (*extra calvinisticum*) or remained aloof when "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself"

---

(2 Corinthians 5). In becoming flesh the infinite God became finite man. After the ascension the humanity of Christ shared in the ubiquity of the divine nature, so that Christ, the God-Man, could declare: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28). And this Christ chose to be present and accessible to His people in the form of "earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7). In contrast to Zwingli's dualism Luther insisted that the heart of the gospel is that God became fully present in the incarnate Son and that this presence has continued in the means of grace, better called the instruments of salvation—the preached word and the sacraments.

Again and again Luther objected to those who sought to learn about God by what later theologians called "natural theology." In his beautiful *Wochenpredigten* (weekday sermons) on John 6 he brought out his thoughts on the matter. God could never be found by man searching Him out. No one can see God and live (Exodus 33:20). Luther came out very strongly against "natural theology" (even though it later became very strong in Lutheran dogmatics). God remained hidden and unknown in the law and in His majesty (*Deus absconditus*) until He made Himself known in His incarnate Son. Luther declared: "One must not search after God nor find Him, outside the person who was born of Mary and had true flesh and blood, and was crucified. For one must grasp God alone through faith and receive Him in His flesh and blood . . ." <sup>33</sup>

For Luther, John 6 was not a "proof passage" of the Holy Supper, but it was a central source of christology. He continues: "The chief article of our Christian faith stands upon this, that this flesh, which He calls *His* flesh [emphasis Luther's], must be enshrined by every Christian in his heart. For it is not ordinary meat such as veal or beef, which could do nothing, but it is His flesh. There human flesh is bound up with the Godhead and is made divine . . ." <sup>34</sup> Luther points out that, because of our sinful nature and the temptation of the devil, we see Christ as a majestic being or an angry judge, so that we are tempted to turn to good works or to the invocation of the saints. <sup>35</sup>

Christ calls us to Himself and promises: "He that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). "See that you only come to Me and that you have grace. See to it that you have and

hold in your heart, that you are certain and believe, that I was sent into the world for your sake, that I carried out My Father's will, that I gave Myself for your atonement, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, and that I have taken on Myself all punishment for your sake. When you believe this, fear not. I will not be your judge or hangman or stockmaster. But I am your Saviour, your Mediator, yes, your brother and your friend. Leave all your work-righteousness and abide with Me in a strong faith."<sup>36</sup> But the poor sinner might say in his heart, "I am not afraid of Christ, but how about the Heavenly Father, the judge of heaven and earth?" Luther replies: "If you see the Son, you see the Father Himself. And if you have My will (as He would say), you have the Father's will also and shall not fear before the Father. Your heart must not say: Yes, Lord Christ, I believe your words, that you will not cast me out, but how is it if the Father is ungracious to me and would cast me out? No, He answers. There is no more wrath in heaven, when you become united with Me. For the Father brought Me to you and taught you to know Me and to believe in Me, and the Father has exactly the same will as I have."<sup>37</sup>

Luther called his teaching "practical," because it was focused on the needs of lost sinners. He felt that the sacramentarians failed to address this need. Instead, they were lost in philosophical questions, such as whether Christ was confined to heaven. Luther called their approach "speculative." This differentiation must be understood in the light of his total view of law and gospel. To deduce God by means of reason is to come upon the hidden God, *Deus absconditus*, God not made known in Jesus Christ, God disclosed in the law. The law can only kill. "Speculation" misses the sacrament. Over and over Luther called people away from God hidden in the law to God revealed in the gospel. "Flee all speculation, all power of reason, all human opinion! Rush to the babe of Bethlehem and the man of Calvary! There and there alone you will find forgiveness, help, and comfort, and strengthening of your faith."<sup>38</sup>

What is it that the Reformed are missing? They separate the divine working from the human agent in the means of grace in two related ways: Firstly, the Reformed teach that faith is given by the Spirit without any outward means or human instrumentality and that

---

faith precedes the sacrament or the preached word. Secondly, the Reformed teach that without faith the sacramental bread is not Christ's body; nor is preaching God's word, but only human words.

Luther commented: "We are not willing to give them room or to yield to this metaphysical and philosophical distinction and differentiation, as it was spun out of reason—as though man preaches, threatens, punishes, gives fear and comforts, but the Holy Ghost does the work; or a man baptizes, absolves, and hands out the Supper of the Lord Christ, but God purifies the heart and forgives the sin. Oh no, absolutely not! But we conclude thus: God preaches, threatens, punishes, gives fear, comforts, baptizes, hands out the Sacrament of the Altar, and absolves Himself."<sup>39</sup>

Luther heard "the flesh profiteth nothing" being used to deny the real presence, not only from Oecolampadius and Zwingli, but also from his former colleague Carlstadt. In a letter of January 29, 1528, Luther objected: "I am sufficiently acquainted with John 6, and I know that it teaches that the body of Christ or rather the flesh of Christ is food for souls. Over and over you do that which should not be done and you fail to do that which should be done. You carry in the exclusive out of the particular . . ."<sup>40</sup> Luther criticized Carlstadt for wrongly inferring that there is only a spiritual manducation. Although he made a distinction between eating the flesh of Christ and eating His body (*carnaliter seu corporaliter*), Luther left room for the notion of a dual manducation, spiritual and bodily (*spiritualiter seu corporaliter*), which was to emerge later among his disciples as the distinction between a spiritual and a sacramental manducation (*manducatio sacramentaliter seu spiritualiter*).

Jesus said: "Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54). Is this eating and drinking a spiritual or a sacramental kind of manducation? Ever since Augustine the prevailing interpretation has been that it refers to spiritual eating, to faith. Both Zwingli and Luther followed this interpretation. Zwingli interpreted John 6 as saying that the body and blood of Christ are not given in the sacrament except to faith. Luther followed the spiritual interpretation too—saying that John 6 dealt with spiritual eating through faith, but not with receiving the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament.

Writing in the Swabian-Saxon Concord, David Chytraeus composed the lines which ultimately became Solid Declaration VII:61, where it is stated: "Thus there are two kinds of eating of the flesh of Christ: the one spiritual, which Christ discussed in John 6, which is nothing other than what takes place when the preaching and meditation upon the gospel is done with the Spirit and faith, as it also takes place in the Holy Supper, and in itself is useful and wholesome and needful unto salvation for all Christians at all times. Without this spiritual manducation, the sacrament or oral eating in the Supper is not only unwholesome, but also harmful and damnable."<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, Zwingli himself used a similar argument to support his own teaching. He wrote in his *Exposition of the Faith* (1531): "So then, when you come to the Lord's Supper to feed spiritually upon Christ, and when you thank the Lord for His great favor, for the redemption whereby you are delivered from despair, and for the pledge whereby you are assured of eternal salvation, when you join with your brethren in partaking of the bread and wine which are the tokens of the body and blood of Christ, then in the true sense of the word you eat them sacramentally. You do inwardly that which you represent outwardly, your soul being strengthened by the faith which you attest in the tokens. But of those who publicly partake of the visible sacraments or signs, yet without faith, it cannot properly be said that they eat sacramentally. By partaking they call down judgment upon themselves, that is, divine punishment . . ."<sup>42</sup>

The teaching of the *communicatio indignorum* is a concept which clearly shows whether or not one is dealing with a "real" presence in the sacrament. It asserts that the very body and blood of Christ are not merely subjectively present to faith alone (Calvin), but are truly present whether faith is there or not. If the Lutheran position is correct, then it naturally follows that, since those who come to the sacrament unprepared will eat and drink judgment to themselves (1 Corinthians 11:29), the Lutheran church has been justified in her historic position of close communion. But is the case strengthened by the dialectic of a twofold eating and drinking, spiritual and sacramental? Zwingli employed this argument like Chytraeus, but Zwingli wanted to show that only faith effected the presence of

---

Christ in the Holy Supper. Those who do not believe were not guilty of eating and drinking the body and blood of the Lord unworthily. They did not receive the body at all. "They do not honor the body of Christ, that is, the whole mystery of the incarnation and passion and indeed the church of Christ . . ."43

Since the "real presence" of Christ in the sacrament is not *carnaliter* or *capernaliter*<sup>44</sup> but *spiritualiter*,<sup>45</sup> it could be confusing to speak of a "real presence" that is not spiritual, or to hear that the faith of the believer elevates the "merely sacramental" to a "spiritual level," whereas the unbelief of the non-believer fails to accomplish this result. The problem is, however, effectively addressed in the Solid Declaration (VII:105): "When Dr. Luther or we use the word 'spiritual' in this discussion, we understand thereby the spiritual, supernatural, heavenly manner, after which Christ, who is present in the Holy Supper, works not only comfort and life in the believers, but also works judgment in the unbelievers. Thereby we reject the *capernaitic* thoughts of a coarse, fleshly presence, which are attributed and forced upon our churches by the sacramentarians contrary to all our public and manifold testimonies. Also in that understanding we say that the body and blood of Christ are received, eaten and drunk spiritually in the Holy Supper; although such eating takes place with the mouth, the manner is spiritual."<sup>46</sup>

### ENDNOTES

1. This article is a revision of the lecture under the same title delivered at the Ninth Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, on January 23, 1986. The writer apologizes for the fact that, due to limited availability of the Zwingli sources, some works have been cited in English translations. A word of thanks is due to the librarians at the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library for their helpfulness in placing their set of the Weimar Edition of Luther's works at the writer's disposal.
2. See Martin Chemnitz, *Fundamenta Sanae Doctrinae, de Vera et Substantiali Praesentia, Exhibitione, et Sumptione Corporis et Sanguinis Domini in Coena* (Frankfurt am Main and Wittenberg:



Heirs of D. Tobias and Elerd Schumacher, 1683), p. 81, column a.

3. A theological pathway leads from Plato and Augustine, via Zwingli and Calvin, to American Enthusiasm.
4. There is an immense literature dealing with the relationship of the humanists and reformers to Neo-Platonism, which can be located through the standard bibliographies. Neo-Platonism in the young Luther was traced in a largely-forgotten work of great significance. See August Wilhelm Hunzinger, *Lutherstudien*. Erstes Heft: *Luthers Neuplatonismus in der Psalmenvorlesung von 1513-1516* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1906). An excellent study of the relationships between Melancthon and the Neo-Platonists is available in Wilhelm Maurer, *Der junge Melancthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation*, Volume 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1967).
5. A useful description of Neo-Platonism in the early church, including Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, is available in Bernhard Geyer, *Die patristische und scholastische Philosophie*, Part 2 of *Friedrich Ueberwegs Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, thirteenth edition (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1958). The Neo-Platonic hierarchism of Pseudo-Dionysius, which influenced both Roman Catholic church polity and doctrine is conveniently summarized in the hymn, "Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones" (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, 175; *Lutheran Worship*, 308; *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 475). This catalogue of "seraphs, cherubim, thrones," of "dominions, principedoms, powers," and of "archangels, virtues, angel choirs" represented the nine steps between earth and heaven. They were useful for three reasons: they explained "mystical contemplations," the steps taken when the soul, by its own reason and strength, ascended to heaven to bring itself into touch with the Universal Mind of God; secondly, they provided the pattern for the hierarchical structure of the medieval Western church; thirdly, they provided a model for solving such theological problems as the relationship of heaven and earth in the sacraments.
6. A convenient description of Joachim and the movements which followed in his wake is given in Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961). Many Franciscans of the thirteenth century followed his teachings, and

---

no less a theologian than Bonaventure attempted to build on the philosophy of history of Joachim. See Herbert Grundmann, *Geschichtsschreibung im Mittelalter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1974), p. 74.

7. Geyer, op. cit., p. 249.
8. Cohn, op. cit., p. 100.
9. The connecting lines between Joachimism and such recent theological currents as covenant theology, dispensationalism, tritheism, Reformed christology and the eucharistic *epiclesis*, enthusiasm in American political theory, and the like can easily be traced.
10. See Zwingli, *An Exposition of the Faith* (1531), printed in *On Providence and other Essays*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and William John Hinke (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1983), p. 285. Zwingli later eliminated this section, but Bullinger restored it in an appendix.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
14. It is significant that Zwingli quoted with approval this description of Plato's thought by Seneca: "God has within Himself these patterns of all things and comprehends in His mind all the numbers and measurements of the universe as they must be carried out. He is filled with these forms which Plato called ideas—immortal, immutable, indefatigable. Therefore, men indeed perish, but this same humanity from which an individual man is copied is imperishable, and although individual men labor and die, the universe does not suffer anything" (Schuler, 4:93-94; Jackson, p. 151). Here we see that Zwingli in his doctrine of God was so strongly philosophical that he could identify with the position of the pagan philosophers Plato and Seneca, as he understood them. Luther, on the other hand, saw God as *Deus absconditus* and unknown prior to His self-disclosure in His Son, Jesus, *Deus revelatus*. The extent of Zwingli's Platonism came out in the manner in which he dissociated God from anything visible, material, or palpable. In his discussion of Hebrews 11:1 he asserted: "'Things visible' is a periphrasis for God": *res invisibiles periphrasis* [not *peraphrasis*] *est Dei* (Schuler, 4:121;

Jackson, p. 196).

15. It is a quality of the human mind that it partakes in the Supreme Mind or Intelligence, which is God. "Whatever is true, holy, and infallible is truly divine. Certainly, God alone is truthful. He therefore who speaks the truth speaks from God. And he who by this system ascends with his intellect from the things which are sensed to the contemplation of the invisible God does—as Paul testified—a thing worthy of God and himself, profitable and not without the light of the Deity" (Schuler, 4:95; Jackson, p. 154). This statement is found in *De Providentia Dei*. A similar statement is found in the *Fidei Christianae Expositio* (1531): "The visible things in the world have been constituted by God in such an order that the human mind is able to ascend from these to the knowledge of the invisible" (Schuler, 4:64; Jackson, p. 270). The material in notes 14 and 15 gives us an idea of the characteristically Neo-Platonic world-view dominating Zwingli's theology—the doctrine of universals, the dualism of visible and invisible, earthly and divine, together with the technique of the human mind ascending from the visible or material world to the spiritual or divine. The latter paradigm, of course, is synergistic, in spite of double predestination or determinism elsewhere in Reformed thinking.
16. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, xiv, 1.
17. ". . . dum circumferemus carcerem corporis nostri," *Institutes*, II, vii, 13. This expression is also used in the following places in the *Institutes*: III, vi, 5; III, ix, 4; IV, xv, 11. Compare the synonymous formula ". . . quamdiu carnis ergastulo sumus inclusi . . .": III, xxv, 1; also in IV, xvi, 19, and IV, xvii, 30. In the latter passage it is significant that Christ's incarnation is described as ". . . in ergastulo corporis se abderet . . .," "that He might hide in the debtor's prison of the body." The context of this passage is a searing attack on the Lutheran doctrine of the Holy Supper, with the famous comment regarding the Lutherans: "They locate Christ in the bread, whereas we do not think it divinely lawful to drag Him down from heaven," IV, xvii, 31.
18. The *extra* of the *extra calvinisticum* referred to a Logos or divine nature which was not bound to the human nature of the Son but had another existence aside from Christ. See the presentation by Hans Emil Weber, *Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismus*,

---

Erster Teil: *Von der Reformation zur Orthodoxie*, Zweiter Halbband (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1940). I:2: 131-135. It is disturbing that Calvin and his followers leave us with a Son who was not fully involved in the incarnation and atonement and with the question whether Christ's expiation was sufficient. "In a marvelous way the Son of God descended indeed, but in such a way that He did not relinquish heaven. In a marvelous way He willed to be carried about in the virgin's womb, to stay on the earth, and to hang on the cross. Yet He at all times filled the world even as from the beginning." *Institutes*, II, xiii, 4.

19. "Ut corpus re spirituali pasci nequit, sic neque anima re corporali," in *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*, Band VI:ii, *Corpus Reformatorum* (CR), 93:810. Jackson, p. 53.
20. Zwingli therefore rejected church music as a form of the proclamation of the word. Theologians today who downgrade church music and liturgical forms seem to be following in the footsteps of Zwingli rather than Luther.
21. On the penetration of this Reformed concept into Lutheran thought, see the study by Martin R. Noland, "The Doctrine of the *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti Internum* as a Calvinistic Element in Lutheran Theology" (Master of Divinity thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, 1983).
22. *Ratio Fidei*. CR, 93: 804-805; Jackson, p. 47.
23. CR, 93: 805; Jackson, p. 48.
24. Schuler, 4: 34; Jackson, p. 114.
25. Schuler, 4: 30; Jackson, p. 107. Zwingli's position was based on the formula of Augustine: "Sacramentum est sacrae rei signum." One can find a good older presentation in *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, third edition, s.v. "Sakrament," by Ferdinand Kattenbusch (RE, 17: 360).
26. Hans Emil Weber 1:2:75.
27. *Expositio Fidei*. Schuler, 4: 54; Jackson, p. 253.
28. Blanke is cited in Fritz Schmidt-Clausing, *Zwingli*, p. 72.
29. It is necessary from the Lutheran standpoint to distinguish between the concept of covenant in the Old Testament and the

Reformed "theology of covenant" or federalism developed by Cocceius and others. See Gottlob Schrenk, *Gottesreich und Bund im älteren Protestantismus vornehmlich bei Johannes Cocceius. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Pietismus und der heilsgeschichtlichen Theologie*, first edition, 1923 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967). J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980).

30. The Reformed notion of deriving the Holy Supper from the Old Testament passover, often echoed by Lutheran writers, has strong support in the Missouri Synod. "To help increasing numbers of Lutheran congregations experience a Passover meal, the 'root' of the Lord's Supper [sic!], the Synod's Board for Evangelism Services offers two resources, 'A Guide to the Celebration of a Christian Passover,' with a participant's guide . . . The leader's guide explains the elements of the Passover meal and how the Lord's Supper is similar. It gives directions on how to have a Passover meal, including the Lord's Supper if the congregation desires." *The Reporter*, 13 (No. 10), March 16, 1987, page 4.
31. A poorly informed biblicism in some conservative Lutheran circles fails to recognize "covenant theology" in Lutheran thought, but see Martin R. Noland, "The Origins and Significance of the Concept of 'Covenant' in Calvin's Theology," a paper written in a course taught by Heino Kadai at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1983. See also Hans Emil Weber 1:2:49-55, 74-75. Compare Paul Althaus, *Die Prinzipien der deutschen reformierten Dogmatik im Zeitalter der aristotelischen Scholastik* (Leipzig: Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1914; reprinted in Darmstadt, 1967). Althaus sharply profiles the Reformed principles in contrast to those of Lutheran thought.
32. WA, 6:502. David Hollatz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (Stargard: Johann Nikolaus Ernst, 1707; reprinted in Darmstadt, 1971), III. II. V. q. 5.3.b.
33. WA, 33: 190, 33-39.
34. WA, 33: 193, 10-19.
35. WA, 33: 87, 23-37.

- 
36. WA, 33: 85, 6-22.
  37. WA, 33: 91, 14-29.
  38. WA, TR, 3: 658 (no. 3849; Lauterbach text).
  39. WA, TR, 3: 673 (no. 3868; Lauterbach text).
  40. WA, *Briefwechsel*, 4: 365 (no. 1214).
  41. *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1930, etc.), p. 993.
  42. The *Exposition* is cited here from *The Library of Christian Classics*, 24: 259.
  43. *Exposition*, LCC, 24: 260.
  44. Solid Declaration, VII: 126.
  45. Solid Declaration, VII: 104-105.
  46. This assertion was an addition to the Torgau Book, coming not from Chytraeus but from the followers of the stricter Brenz in Württemberg, Baden, and Henneberg; materials are to be found in Heinrich Heppe, *Geschichte des deutschen Protestantismus in den Jahren 1555-1581*, Volume 3 (Marburg: N. G. Elnertlicher Druck und Verlag, 1857), p. 367.