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Should Lutherans Reserve the Consecrated Elements for the Communion of the Sick?

Roland F. Ziegler

The universal custom in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy is for the priest to commune the sick and shut-ins with previously consecrated elements.¹ These churches do not know of a consecration of the elements outside the liturgical order of the eucharistic celebration. In Lutheranism the traditional practice is to consecrate the elements in the presence of the communing person(s), be it home, hospital, or nursing home. Lately, however, this practice seems to be changing. Students at the seminary find themselves in situations where they are required, on vicarages or even before as field workers, to bring elements that had been previously consecrated by the pastor to those who can no longer attend the communal worship at church. Practical reasons seem to be at the root of this practice: a large number of shut-ins plus numerous other pastoral duties are the apparent compelling justification for using a vicar or field worker as a relief for an all too pressing schedule.

There are also other occasions where such a change in practice (the reservation of the consecrated elements for later communion) is observed because of its practicality. For example, when a pastor is away for the Sunday, and the summer vicar is in charge of the communion service. The pastor consecrates the elements before he leaves, so that the vicar can distribute them and the congregation can celebrate communion. Or, a pastor, having accepted a call and in order to help the congregation that faces a certain period in which she is vacant, consecrates a rather substantial amount of hosts and wine, so that the elders have sufficient supply to provide holy communion to the congregation from the reserved sacrament.²

¹For the Eastern Orthodox church see *Book of Needs of the Holy Orthodox Church with an Appendix Containing Offices of the Laying on of Hands, Done into English* by G. V. Shann (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 123-127; for the Roman Catholic Church see *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum [The Roman Ritual. Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and published by Authority of Pope Paul VI]* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 49-71.

²Here is a certain ecumenical convergence—due to the lack of Roman Catholic priests, deacons or laypeople are increasingly being commissioned as “Extraordinary

Rev. Roland F. Ziegler is Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary.

As convenient as such solutions to the issues of clergy shortages and overwhelming workloads are, it especially befits a church like The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which is proud of her strong confessional tradition and her emphasis on sound doctrine, to examine this solution carefully. Is such a change in practice just that, a mere change in *practice*, in which the church deals with the shifting practical demands in a congregational setting by adapting herself to minister more effectively, shedding outdated customs? Or, is such a change also a change in *doctrine*, so that the new practice includes a new or changed understanding of the theological position that had informed the customary practice?³

A first observation to that issue is the basic fact that the communion from the reserved elements is an innovation in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. A short survey of the textbooks on pastoral theology demonstrates this. In his classical treatment, C. F. W. Walther gives detailed advice on how the pastor is to celebrate the Lord's Supper at the home of the sick, including the remark that the pastor should at least wear preaching tabs (if he does not wear his preaching gown, including tabs, which Walther seems to presume as the regular case), but any idea that anybody else but the pastor should commune the sick with the reserved sacrament is absent.⁴ That Walther did not simply forget this option is obvious from his quotation of Deyling's *Institutio prudentiae pastoralis* in his section on consecration: "The holy elements, consecrated by the pastor, can neither be reserved nor sent to those absent, which was a bad habit of some in the early church."⁵

ministers of Holy Communion" to preside at the liturgy (a service of the word), which then includes communion at the end out of the tabernacle. See *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary* (New York; Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1985), Canon 230 §3, 910 §2 (167-169; 649-651).

³A similar change, but not out of such practical considerations, happens when, immediately after the service is over, the pastor or commissioned lay person brings the consecrated elements to the home-bound. This is done to include the shut-ins more intimately into the congregational celebration of the Lord's Supper.

⁴C. F. W. Walther, *Amerikanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie*, fifth edition (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1906), 291-292; see also C. F. W. Walther, *Pastorale, That Is American Lutheran Pastoral Theology* (New Haven, Missouri: Lutheran News, 1995), 212-213. "Tabs" are essentially the same as clerical collars.

⁵"Die vom Pastor consecrirten heiligen Elemente können weder aufbewahrt, noch den Abwesenden zugesendet werden, was eine üble Gewohnheit Einiger in der alten Kirche war." (Author's translation) Walther, *Pastoraltheologie*, 187, emphasis in the

In his *Pastoral Theology*, John H. C. Fritz also presupposes that when the sick are communed, the elements are consecrated immediately before the communion.⁶ Like Walther, he explicitly rejects the idea that the sacrament be reserved.⁷

Proceeding in time, in 1960, *The Pastor at Work* was published, a collective effort of pastors and professors in the Missouri Synod. It explicitly states that elements that have been consecrated in the congregational service and have not been consumed can be used for the communion of the sick, but they have to be "reconsecrated."⁸

Thirty years later, this solid consonant view in the Missouri Synod was weakened somewhat in the latest textbook, *Pastoral Theology* by Kraus and Mueller. Though there is no reference to the reservation of elements in the

original. See also Walther, *Pastorale*, 144. On Deyling, see Walther, *Pastorale*, 17-18, where Walther praises Deyling. See also the short biographical sketch in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, volume 5 (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1968), 108-109. Walther's practice here is in accordance with that of other confessional Lutherans of the nineteenth century. For Wilhelm Löhe, see his *Agende für christliche Gemeinden des lutherischen Bekenntnisses*, 2. Theil, second enlarged edition (Nördlingen: Druck und Verlag der C. H. Beck'schen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1859), 94-99 (his liturgical order for the communion of the sick) and Hans Kressel, *Löhe als Liturg und Liturgiker* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1952), 205-207.

⁶John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, second edition (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945), 183.

⁷"g. *Bread and Wine to be Consecrated Whenever Used in the Sacrament.* - Some in the early Church sent the consecrated elements to those who were absent for the purpose of administering the Sacrament. This must not be done, since consecrating, administering, and receiving the bread and wine must be *uninterrupted acts*, even as was the case when the Lord first instituted and administered the Sacrament. If for some reason the administration of the Sacrament has been interrupted for a longer period (fire), the elements should again be consecrated. The same should be done if a person receiving Communion suddenly faints after he has received the bread and remains unconscious for a longer period." Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, 128.

⁸Richard R. Caemmerer, and others, *The Pastor at Work* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 173. "After the Communion service the remaining elements should be disposed of in an appropriate manner. They ought not to be 'retained' in the manner obtaining churches which teach transubstantiation. In sick Communion the unused elements may well be distributed. In that event the elements should be reconsecrated before the eyes of the person to be communed. If they are not to be so used, any left-over wafers may be stored for future congregational use. Wine remaining in the flagon and cup should be poured away, preferably into a place in the ground or into a piscina."

section on the treatment of consecrated bread and wine that remain at the end of the Sunday service, nevertheless in the treatment of the communion of the sick, the practice that the consecration happens in the presence of the communicant is called "ordinarily," with a reference to exceptions with precedence by "some of the earliest church orders."⁹

At this place these church orders are not identified. It might be safe to assume first that the author is thinking of church orders of the Reformation era, not any documents from the early church. One order that actually has such a practice is the Church Order for Brandenburg of 1540. Another document that ordered the life of the nascent Lutheran church with such a provision is the decree of the Diet at Ansbach of the Markgravate of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach in 1526.¹⁰

The influence of Luther's writings in the territory of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, an offshoot of the House of Hohenzollern, started in the early 1520s.¹¹ Three brothers were the princes of this territory. The oldest of them, Margrave Kasimir, was in actual charge of affairs, whereas his brother Friedrich (who lived in Spain) had little influence

⁹Norbert H. Mueller and George Kraus, editors, *Pastoral Theology* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), 106, *Setting of Sunday communion*: "And therefore the unused elements should be treated with fitting reverence so that the Lord may be honored and that none of his children may be offended or caused to stumble. Therefore, what remains of the consecrated bread and wine, if individual cups are used, may be consumed or stored for future sacramental use. If a large amount of wine is left in the chalice, it may be poured into the *sacrarium* / *piscina* or poured out on bare earth. It is the responsibility of the presiding or a delegated assisting minister to supervise the disposal of the elements."

¹⁰Theodor Kliefoth, the most knowledgeable nineteenth-century expert in sixteenth-century liturgical matters, calls the Brandenburg Church order singular (Th. Kliefoth, *Die ursprüngliche Gottesdienst-Ordnung in den deutschen Kirchen lutherischen Bekenntnisses, ihre Destruction und Reformation* 2, beträchtlich erweiterte Auflage, volume 5 [Schwerin: Verlag der Stiller'schen Hof-Buchhandlung (Didier Otto), 1861] [Liturgische Abhandlungen, volume 8], 157). A hundred years after him, E. F. Peters corrected Kliefoth by adding the decree from the Diet of Onolzbach (the old name of Ansbach in Franconia) 1526 (Edward Frederick Peters, "The Origin and Meaning of the Axiom: 'Nothing Has the Character of a Sacrament Outside of the Use,' in Sixteenth-century and Seventeenth-century Lutheran Theology," [Th. D. dissertation, Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, 1968], 312-314).

¹¹For the historical context, see also Emil Sehling, editor, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, continued by the *Institut für evangelisches Kirchenrecht der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland zu Göttingen*, volume II: Bayern, part 1 (Franken, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1961), 62-71.

and died early. Georg, who later was one of the first signers of the Augsburg Confession, was also excluded from daily business. Kasimir at first supported the Reformation, but in the fall of 1525 he changed his position, partly because the bishops who had the churchly oversight in his territory tried to sue him because he had secularised the monasteries to pay off his debts and partly to appease the catholic estates, which were now, after the peasant revolt, rather hostile towards the Reformation movement. Thus in 1526 he mandated the restoration of the Corpus Christi procession and allowed communion under both kinds only "secretly and quietly."¹² The decree of the diet, published October 10, 1526, is a document of compromise and ambiguity.¹³ For example, the words of institution should be proclaimed with loud voice, but in Latin, as Latin in general should be retained in the mass.¹⁴ Communion under both kinds is allowed, German can be used in the baptismal rite, but the festival of Corpus Christi is retained and marriage of priests is still forbidden and prosecuted.¹⁵

Regarding the reservation of the consecrated elements and the communion of the sick, the decree states: "And if at the times and days, when the communicants receive the holy, most reverend sacrament, something of the sacrament remains, then it shall not be disrespectfully discarded, but with due reverence retained in the tabernacle for the communing of the eventual sick or other communicants."¹⁶

After Kasimir had died September 21, 1527, his brother Georg, who was a personal friend of Luther, succeeded him. Georg now sided with the Lutheran Reformation. He convened a diet, again at Ansbach, and the decree, dated February 20, 1528, emphasised that the gospel should be preached purely, that the sole authority in the church is Holy Scripture, and that all ceremonies that are not grounded in God's word or even against it, are not binding on anybody.¹⁷

The next step in the reformation in Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach was a visitation. This was a joint enterprise with the free imperial city of

¹²"heimlich und stille," *Kirchenordnungen*, II, 1, 68.

¹³The text is published *Kirchenordnungen*, II, 1, 88-97.

¹⁴*Kirchenordnungen*, II, 1, 90.

¹⁵*Kirchenordnungen*, II, 1, 91-94.

¹⁶*Kirchenordnungen*, II, 1, 91.

¹⁷*Kirchenordnungen*, II, 1, 102-104.

Nuremberg. For this purpose a guideline was written that summer, the Brandenburg-Nuremberg Church Order of 1528.¹⁸ This church order is an unapologetically Lutheran document. Regarding the communion of the sick and the reservation of the sacrament, it mandates that the sick are to be explored regarding their spiritual state; if they lack knowledge of the basic doctrine of the faith, they are to be catechised. The communion itself is to be in German, including preface, consecration, admonition, communion under both kinds, concluding with a prayer of thanksgiving. Regarding the reservation, the theological argumentation against such a practice is founded on the command by Christ to eat and to drink. Christ did not mandate to carry the sacrament around or reserve it. The consecration should be in the presence of the communicants. Additionally, practical reasons against reservation are mentioned: the sacramental elements may spoil when they are kept for a longer time.¹⁹

Concluding, we can say that the provision of the Diet of Ansbach 1526 was the product of a transitional stage in the history of the introduction of the Reformation in of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach. Once all tactical considerations to appease the Roman Catholic bishops or estates were cast off, the regulation regarding communion of the sick with preconsecrated elements and other remnants of Roman Catholic practices were abolished.

The church order for Brandenburg, published 1540, gives the following provisions for the communion of the sick.²⁰ Normally, a pastor is instructed to carry the sacrament (after consecration) to the sick at the same time as the congregation communes. Obviously, it assumes that there is more than one pastor at a church, and, as it becomes clear afterwards, it is assumed that it is in the setting of a city. When the sacrament is brought to the infirm in such a manner, the pastor is to be

¹⁸*Kirchenordnungen*, II, 1, 135-139.

¹⁹*Kirchenordnungen*, II, 1, 138. See also the much more detailed church order that replaced the order of 1528, Brandenburg-Nuremberg 1533, which has the same views regarding reservation (184) and regarding the communion of the sick (199-200). In Nuremberg, the two provosts of the main churches, Saint Sebald and Saint Lorenz, had abolished the communion of the sick with preconsecrated elements already in 1524. In its stead, either a mass was read in the house of the sick or, in an emergency situation, a priest should simply consecrate and distribute the elements (44).

²⁰Emil Sehling, editor, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, III (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1909), 77-81.

vested in cassock and surplice, and he is proceeded by the sacristan who carries a lamp and a bell (77). If there is a sudden emergency, the pastor is to go to the church. Then, with those present, he first prays for the sick, continues with the Lord's prayer, and ends this little service with consecration. The consecrated elements are then likewise taken to the sick person. For the communion of the sick, prayers and psalms and a short order are provided, but the words of institution are not repeated.

In a rural setting, where the roads are bad and the pastor has no sacristan to accompany him, or even when the pastor drives a carriage or rides on horseback at night, there might be dangers and scandals. So, the church order prescribes that the consecration should be in the houses of the sick.²¹

The Brandenburg church order of 1540 is unique and has not had any impact on the further development of the Lutheran liturgical life. It is unique because it was the deliberate effort to create a mediating position between the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Church. The instigator behind it was Elector Joachim II.²² He was connected through his wife, Hedwig, with the royal house of Poland, which remained faithful to Rome. After his accession in 1535, bound by his father with an oath to uphold the Roman Catholic faith, he tried to become the mediator among the German princes to solve the ecclesiastical problems, since the ecumenical council was postponed several times by the pope. The Reformation made great inroads among the people of Brandenburg and the bishop of Brandenburg, Matthias von Jagow, had embraced the Lutheran doctrine. Joachim II decided to reform his church—without separating himself from the catholic church, a “Christian reformation of some ceremonies and church orders,” as he wrote to his father-in-law, King Sigismund of Poland.²³ Joachim was personally involved in the drafting of the church order. Doctrinally, the *sola fide* is confessed, but liturgically many Roman catholic customs were retained, though not as many as were originally intended.²⁴ Also, the Augsburg Confession is not mentioned. It is, therefore, the only church order that was approved by the Emperor Charles V—doubtlessly because of political reasons, since

²¹*Kirchenordnungen*, III, 80 “zufellig ferligkeit, ergernis und hindernis.”

²²Compare Georg Kawerau, “Joachim II,” *Realencyclopädie für Theologie und Kirche*, third edition, (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1901), 9:223-227.

²³Kawerau, *Joachim II*, 234, 52-53.

²⁴*Kirchenordnungen*, III, 43.

it was not acceptable to the Apostolic See dogmatically. Yet, even this maneuver shows that it could be interpreted detached from the Lutheran Reformation. But Joachim II cultivated his distance to Luther and the Wittenberg Reformation also after 1540. At the colloquy of Worms 1540-1541 his delegates sat with the Roman Catholics, not with the Lutherans, he approved of the Augsburg Interim of 1548, which was co-authored by his court preacher, Johann Agricola. In 1549 he said: "As little as I want to be bound to the Roman church, as little I want to be bound to the church in Wittenberg. For I do not say: I believe in the holy Roman or Wittenbergian, but catholic church, and my church here in Berlin and Cölln is just as well a right Christian church as the one of those in Wittenberg."²⁵ All of this leads Robert Stupperich to question whether Joachim II had ever understood what the Reformation was all about.²⁶ Joachim II subscribed to the Augsburg Confession only at 1555, after the Peace of Augsburg. There it was decided that the only legal religions in the empire were Roman Catholicism or the Church of the Augsburg Confession. Joachim had to make the choice he had tried to avoid until then. In the age of confessionalisation, mediating positions like his had outlived themselves. The Elector did nothing to revise the church order so that it reflected this move. Changes were introduced immediately after his death by his successor Johann Georg in 1572, who eliminated the provisions about carrying the sacrament in procession to the sick.²⁷

Before the church order was published, it was sent to Wittenberg for an opinion, and there are two letters in which Luther gave his view on certain points.²⁸ In the first letter to Elector Joachim II, Luther approves of the preface, but he critiques three points that seem to him to indicate the influence of Georg Witzel.²⁹ First, that the consecrated elements

²⁵Robert Stupperich, *Die Eigenart der Reformation in der Mark Brandenburg*, "Dem Wort nicht entgegen . . ." Aspekte der Reformation in der Mark Brandenburg, edited by Hans-Ulrich Delius, Max-Ottokar Kunzendorf, and Friedrich Winter (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988), 13-30, 25.

²⁶Stupperich, *Die Eigenart*, 25.

²⁷*Kirchenordnungen*, III, 101.

²⁸Luther to Elector Joachim II of Brandenburg, 4 (5?) December 1540, WA Br 8, 620-624; Luther to Georg Bucholzer, 4 (5?) December 1540, WA Br 8, 624-626, the latter letter translated in Martin Luther, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 305-307.

²⁹Georg Witzel (1501-1573) sympathized with the Reformation at the beginning, but later opposed it and represented a humanistic reform catholicism. He cooperated in

should be carried in processions (a Corpus Christi procession under both kinds, so to speak). The procession under one kind is idolatry, and the new procession under both kinds would cause ridicule. Also, he disapproved of the fact that extreme unction was maintained, although he allowed that it might be done, just not in the popish way. The same is said about the carrying of the reserved sacrament to the sick. But Luther knew that this was a point dear to the heart of Joachim, so that he gave the advice that it might be done, but it should not be put into writing, since "it is a regulation of human piety, not of divine command, therefore one may do it, but without superstition, until one can do it in a better way."³⁰ Luther is here willing to tolerate a custom, although he does not think it is the best way to solve the practical question. He obviously envisions it as a transitional provision, therefore he gave the advice not to put it into the official text, and his remark that it might be done "until one can do it in better way" shows that he intended to change the practice. In his letter to Georg Buchholzer, Luther does not refer to the rite of the communion of the sick — it seems as if that was not a problem for Buchholzer — but deals with the elaborate ritual Joachim II wanted to maintain, including many processions. Regarding this and the elevation, Luther counsels him to yield here, as long as certain practices are abolished (daily masses, invocation of the saints, vigils for the dead, blessing of water, salt, and herbs), the word is preached purely and clearly, and the sacraments are administered in conformity with their institution.³¹ These liturgical ceremonies are free and they pose no danger to the Christian faith.

Luther shows here how he wants to solve the theological problem of liturgical forms retained from Roman Catholicism that might have connotations that are not necessarily Lutheran or seem to be an expression of ecclesiastical pomp. As long as they are not doctrinally wrong he is willing to tolerate them, until they might be changed at some time in the future. Bringing the reserved sacrament to the sick is in his opinion not heretical, although it is definitely not his preferred practice. It may be tolerated during the transition from Roman Catholicism to Lutheranism.³²

the writing of Joachim II's church order, see Stupperich, *Die Eigenart*, 21.

³⁰WA Br 8,623,55-57.

³¹Luther, *Letters*, 306.

³²The topic came up again in a conversation of Luther with Cordatus, who

Melanchthon had a more positive view of this custom. In his letter of December 5, 1540 to Joachim II, he approved of this practice, because it is still inside the institution. Only the practical question of how to bring both kinds to the sick, is not yet solved for him.³³ This contrasts with his rejection of theophoric processions, since this contradicts his axiom, "Sacramenta sunt in instituto usu sacramenta."³⁴

The two orders of the time of the Reformation, therefore, can hardly be cases of precedent to change the present practice of the Lutheran Church. They are obviously documents of transition of limited force that were abolished once the Lutheran Reformation was firmly established.

Since the reservation of the sacrament was a marginal practice of a transitional time that died out rather quickly in Lutheranism, it was

participated in the introduction of the reformation in Brandenburg, between October 19 and November 5, 1540. "When the doctor was asked whether the sacrament can be carried to the sick, he replied, 'We don't think it should be done. To be sure, one must allow it for a while. The practice will probably be dropped, if only because they have no ciborium.'" (WA TR 5,55, 5314; J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, editors, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 volumes [Saint Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986] 54: 407-408). Luther continues that the sacramental union continues, even when the sacrament is carried over the street, or one or two hours pass between consecration and distribution. His dislike of the practice in Brandenburg is therefore not rooted in a narrow definition of the "extra usum." Luther allowed for the reservation of the sacrament in 1522, although he did not think that there was really a necessity since communion of the dying was optional: "I shall continue to allow the practice of reserving the sacrament for the sick in pyxes; but if the proper use of the mass were to come into general acceptance simply through a clear understanding of the gospel, people would realize that the elements of the sacrament at the time of death are not essential. Since the words of the sacrament are present, on which its power entirely depends, it is enough that a person should receive the elements while he is healthy, and not despise them when he is dying" (WA 10 II, 32,4-9; AE 36,257). In an opinion on the church order of Brandenburg-Nürnberg, written by Luther, Jonas Bugenhagen, and Melanchthon in 1532, the reservation of the sacrament is simply rejected: "Concerning the reserving of the sacrament in the ciborium, we think that even though it might still be the custom to reserve the sacrament and lock it up, this custom ought to be abolished; for sacrament and Word ought to be together. We know, of course, that this sacrament has been instituted for the purpose of being used and not for the purpose of making a special worship of God with [one] piece of the sacrament apart from the usage of the sacrament and the Word" (WA Br 6,341,86-91, 1959 AE 50,66).

³³CR III, 846.

³⁴CR III, 846.

therefore not explicitly discussed in the Formula of Concord, whose scope was primarily against the Cryptocalvinistic tendencies in the Lutheran Church. However, because the Council of Trent had asserted the traditional Roman Catholic position in its seventh session, Martin Chemnitz had to discuss it in his voluminous *Examination of the Council of Trent*.³⁵ The fathers of Trent had decreed in the sixth chapter of the thirteenth session:

The custom of reserving the eucharist in a sacred place is so ancient that even the age of the council of Nicaea recognised it. In addition, the practice of carrying the holy eucharist to the sick, and hence its careful reservation for that purpose in the churches, is not only consonant with right and proper understanding, but can be shown to be enjoined by many councils, and has been observed by long-standing custom of the catholic church. And so this holy council rules that this salutary and necessary practice is to be universally retained.

The pertaining canon 7 states: "If anyone says that it is unlawful to reserve the holy eucharist in a sacred place, but that it must of necessity be distributed to those present immediately after the consecration; or that it is unlawful for it to be carried with due honour to the sick, let him be anathema."³⁶

Chemnitz's treatment of this chapter and the canon belonging to it are a fine example of how he deals with a controversial question. He first states what the issue is: should the consecrated wine and bread be at once distributed, or can they be "inclosed, reserved, carried about, displayed, and put to other uses, so that finally, after a number of days, weeks, months, or years the taking and eating may follow"?³⁷ Chemnitz also discusses questions he had previously touched on in his chapters on the

³⁵Norman P. Tanner, editor, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume 2: Trent to Vatican II* (London: Sheed & Ward; Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University, 1980), 696 (decree); 698 (canon). On the history of the decree on the eucharist compare Hubert Jedin, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, volume 3 (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, no date), 268-285. Chemnitz is quoted according to the following editions: Martin Chemnitz, *Examen Concilii Tridentini* (Berlin: Gustav Schlawitz, 1861), 326-334; Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 4 volumes (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 2:293-313.

³⁶*Decrees*, 696. p. 698: can. VII: "Si quis dixerit, non licere sacram eucharistiam in sacrario reservari, sed statim post consecrationem astantibus necessario distribuendam; aut non licere, ut illa ad infirmos honorifice deferatur: a. s."

³⁷Chemnitz, *Examination*, 293; Chemnitz, *Examen*, 326.

cult of the sacrament and the festival of Corpus Christi.³⁸ In our context, we will concentrate on the statements that directly pertain to the question of the reservation of the sacrament for the sick.

Chemnitz first states that the Council of Trent only claims tradition, namely a canon of the Council of Nicaea, for this practice.³⁹ A custom of the church, though, can never be binding on the Christians without command or example in Scripture [§6, 296]. The institution of Christ shows that there was no long delay between consecration and eating and drinking. Discussing the evidence of the practice of the early church, he shows that there existed a certain variety. On the one hand, there are documents that show that the elements were consumed immediately after the end of the divine service. His array of testimonies does not only cover the early church, but calls up such unlikely witnesses in his favour as Gabriel Biel.⁴⁰ On the other hand, there is the aforementioned stipulation

³⁸Chemnitz, *Examination*, 276-292; Chemnitz, *Examen*, 320-326.

³⁹*Canones et Decreta*, 57 refers, in an annotation, to canon 13 of the Council of Nicaea, which treats the communion of those close to death. It does not speak explicitly of the reservation of the sacrament (see Norman P. Tanner, editor, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume I: Nicaea I to Lateran V* [London: Sheed and Ward; Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University, 1980], 12). From Chemnitz's discussion (*Examination*, 300; *Examen*, 328-329) it is obvious that his partners in the dialogue quoted canon 18 in a form of which Chemnitz was rightfully suspicious. This canon deals with the issue that deacons are not supposed to give communion to priests. Since deacons are lower in the hierarchy, priests have to be communed by bishops or other priests. In one Latin translation, this canon (numbered as 14) has the addition: "Quod si non fuerit in praesenti vel episcopus, vel presbyter, tunc ipsi proferant, & edant" (Mansi, 2, 690). From the fact that the deacons commune themselves when no priest is present, it follows necessarily that the eucharist was reserved. Unfortunately, this is a later addition and not part of the original canon of Nicaea.

⁴⁰Chemnitz quotes, among others, *Corpus juris canonici, De consecratione, dist. 2. Ch. Tribus gradibus* (ch. 23, *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Aemilius Friedberg, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1959, vol. I, col. 1321: "Tribus gradibus commissa sunt sacramenta diuinorum secretorum, id est presbitero, diacono, et ministro qui cum tremore et timore clericorum reliquias corporis domini custodire fragnetorum. *Idem*: § 1. Tanta in altario certe holocausta offerantur, quanta populo sufficere debeant. Quod si remanserint, in crastinum non reseruentur. sed cum timore et tremore clericorum et diligentia consumantur. Qui qui autem residua corporis Domini que in sacrario relicta sunt, consumunt, non statim ad accipiendos communies cibos conueniant." Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 5,8 (PG 12, 458f), esp. 459: "Nam et Dominus panem, quem discipulis dabat, et discebat eis: 'Accipite et manducate,' non distulit, nec seruari iussit in crastinum." Council of Matiscona II (Macon), 585, canon 6, Mansi 9,952, Humbert of Sylva Candida, *Contra Nicetam* 23,

of Nicaea and numerous accounts that show that the consecrated elements were retained for a later communion. In examining the historical evidence Chemnitz first questions the authenticity of the Nicene canon, since it is missing in several editions.⁴¹ But he admits that there are examples from antiquity whose authenticity cannot be denied. Consecrated elements were exchanged as a sign of fellowship between churches.⁴² They were reserved for the sick.⁴³ There was also the reservation of the elements in private homes, for example, hermits, who did not have access to the eucharist at all times, took the blessed elements to their cells. This practice was later forbidden. Of the reservation for the communion of the sick in the strict sense, Chemnitz knows only one true example (Eusebius, 6,34) from the very special situation of the Novation schism, where communion for those schismatics who wanted to be reconciled with the catholic church before their death was made available also on those days where there was no celebration of the sacrament.⁴⁴

Chemnitz's conclusion from the historical evidence is that the custom was not universal and that the reservation of the sacrament was "free

PL 143, col. 994; and: Gabriel Biel, 26th lecture on the canon (recte 36th lecture, compare Gabriel Biel, *Canonis Missae expositio*, edited by Heiko A. Oberman, William Courtenay, volume II (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1965), 45. His cloud of witnesses spans the time from the Early Church to the late Middle Ages, thereby trying to establish another chain of tradition than the one the Roman Catholics claimed for their position.

⁴¹Rightfully so, compare footnote 35.

⁴²Chemnitz refers to the practice of Irenaeus as mentioned in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* V ,24,14 (Eusèbe de Césarée, *Histoire Ecclésiastique II, Livre V-VII*, Paris: Éditions Le Cerf, 1955 [SC 41], 70;Engl. translation: Eusebius, *Church History*, in: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers II,1*, 243).

⁴³Chemnitz quotes Eusebius and the account of how a presbyter in Alexandria who could not bring the eucharist to the dying Serapion, since this presbyter himself was sick, sent a boy with the consecrated elements (Chemnitz, *Examination*, 307; *Examen*, 331; reference to: Eusebius, *Church History* VI, 44 [not 34, as the Latin and English edition says]; Eusèbe, *Histoire*, 159-160; Eusebius, *Church History*, 290). Chemnitz seems to be unaware of the first account of the practice to have communion outside the divine service by Justin Martyr, *Apol. I*, 67 (Ante-Nicene Fathers, 186).

⁴⁴Otto Nußbaum, *Die Aufbewahrung der Eucharistie*, Theophaneia, volume 29 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1979) gives an exhaustive treatment of the historical evidence for the reservation of the sacrament in church history. Nußbaum's study supports Chemnitz' theses that the reservation was not a universal practice.

from any superstition and without any special worship apart from the use."⁴⁵

Since there is historical precedent, although not as widespread as Trent claims, how prevalent should the present practice be? For that, Chemnitz goes back to the institution narrative, which is "norm and rule."⁴⁶ Chemnitz is not in favour of a reservation and gives several arguments for his position.

First, from the description of the last supper, Chemnitz concludes: "Therefore it agrees better with the description of the institution and the example of Christ to recite the words of institution and by means of them to bless the Eucharist at the place and time of Communion, in the presence of those who are to be communed, rather than at another place and time in the absence of those to whom it is to be offered."⁴⁷ The second argument looks at the character of the words of institution. "'Take, eat, do this etc.' are directed not to the elements, but those who were about to commune."⁴⁸ Therefore, it is not in harmony with the institution to consecrate in the absence of the communicants. Third, the Lord's Supper is not a medicine to be taken quietly, but the words are necessarily attached to it. A separation of the words of institution and communion distorts the intimate connection between the proclamation of Christ's death and communion. Fourth, the sick need comfort, and the best consolation they can get are the Words of Institution. Fifth, if there is no reservation, the question of what the elements are apart from the use, which "disturb the simplicity of the doctrine and faith concerning the Eucharist," is avoided.⁴⁹ Sixth, and last, since Rome tries to make it mandatory, as a sign of Christian liberty in protest of this effort to enslave consciences, the Lutherans reject this canon of Trent.

⁴⁵Chemnitz, *Examination*, 309; *Examen*, 332: "Fuit autem talis illa reservatione simpliciter sine aliqua superstitione, et sine peculiari cultu extra usum."

⁴⁶Chemnitz, *Examination*, 311; *Examen*, 333: "norma[m] et regula[m]"

⁴⁷Chemnitz, *Examination*, 311; *Examen*, 333: "Magis igitur consentaneum est descriptioni institutionis, et exemplo Christi, verba coenae recitare, et illis benedicere Eucharistiam, in loco communionis, et tempore communionis, in praesentia communicandorum: quam alio et loco et tempore, absentibus illis, quibus exhibenda est."

⁴⁸Chemnitz, *Examination*, 311; *Examen*, 333: "Verba illia coenae, Dixit: Accipite, comedite, hoc facite etc. diriguntur non ad elementa, sed ad communicaturos."

⁴⁹Chemnitz, *Examination*, 312; *Examen*, 333.

Therefore, the Lutheran practice is to “recite the words of the Supper, which are in fact the consecration, in the presence of the sick person.”⁵⁰ In that way, the Lutherans follow the prescription and example of Christ, and not a particular tradition which has no foundation in Scripture.

If we look at Chemnitz’s argument, we see that he very carefully investigates the historical evidence. He does not go the easy route, simply dismissing all historical questions by referring to the sole authority of Scripture. Nevertheless, a practice that is not mentioned in Scripture and is not universal must be judged according to Scripture. He does not argue that any prolongation of the use is in itself illegitimate – as the bringing of the elements immediately after consecration to the sick and shut-ins, or to keep elements for a short time to commune the sick.⁵¹ But for the present time, he sees no advantages of such a practice that is not as close to the example and command of Christ as the practice the Lutherans have adopted, to keep consecration and communion as close together as possible.

Having surveyed the historical practice and reflection in the Lutheran church on the question of whether pre consecrated elements should be used at the communion of home-bound Christians, the question remains, how this informs our present practice.

First, in the Lutheran church there is no real historical precedent to bring the consecrated bread and wine to the homes. The really scanty evidence from two orders of the Reformation time that bear the marks of a period of transition and that did not in any way shape the later practice of the Lutheran tradition, is rather explained out of certain idiosyncrasies given up after maturing. Second, following the Lutheran rule that the institution of the Lord’s Supper gives the pattern and rule of our practice, the custom to separate the community in which the sacrament is

⁵⁰Chemnitz, *Examination*, 312; *Examen*, 333.

⁵¹Also in his discussion of chapter III and canon IV of the decree on the sacrament (*Decrees*, 694-695; 697), in which the theological foundation of the reservation of the sacrament and the eucharistic cult is laid by the assertion that the sacramental union starts after the consecration and continues after mass, Chemnitz, using extensively the rule “that sacraments apart from their divinely instituted use are not sacraments” (Chemnitz, *Examination*, 243), concludes that we are not allowed to disrupt the action of the Lord’s Supper and postpone communion for days, months, or years. “For the account of the institution relates that the offering, taking and eating took place at once” (*Examination*, 249; *Examen*, 307).

consecrated from the community in which it is consumed — as it is done in when the consecrated elements are brought to the homes — is more remote from the institution of the Lord's supper than having the entire *actio* happening with the communicants present. Third, since the Words of Institution are both proclamation and consecration, such a practice severs what God has put together in this action, even when the words are repeated at the place of communion, since the words are no longer performative words bespeaking *now* what the elements are, but they become merely an historical report. We also have to remember that it was the gist of Luther's reform of the mass to bring consecration and communion as closely together as possible, so that in his *Deutsche Messe* he even has the consecration of the bread and its communion first, and then following the consecration of the chalice and the communion of the blood of Christ.⁵² This practice, although not followed in the orders for corporate worship in the Lutheran churches, nevertheless influenced the way in which the communion of the sick was celebrated. Here, where because of the small number of communicants such a celebration was more practical, the bread was consecrated and immediately distributed, followed then by the chalice.⁵³ Fourth, the Lutheran Church took great pains to make it clear to the communicants what elements were consecrated. For that purpose, the signing of the cross during the very words of Christ as a significative gesture was introduced at the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁵⁴ It is against the spirit of this liturgical approach, which cherishes the certainty of the communicant very highly, if this certainty is not given to a communicant when he is deprived of the consecration in his presence. Fifth, the communion of the sick is part of the overall spiritual care of those persons. The general custom to have at least the opportunity for private confession or the obligatory general confession before the Lord's Supper shows that communion is embedded in the pastor-communicant relationship. This becomes impossible if

⁵²Martin Luther, WA 19, 99,5-11; LW 53, 81-82.

⁵³Th. Kliefoth, *Die ursprüngliche Gottesdienst-Ordnung in den deutschen Kirchen lutherischen Bekenntnisses, ihre Destruction und Reformation. 2., beträchtlich erweiterte Auflage*, volume 5 (Schwerin: Verlag der Stiller'schen Hof-Buchhandlung [Didier Otto], 1861) [Liturgische Abhandlungen, vol. 8]), 161.

⁵⁴Georg Rietschel, *Lehrbuch der Liturgik*, second edition, revised by Paul Graff (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1951), 376-377; Paul Graff, *Geschichte der Auflösung der gottesdienstlichen Formen in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands*, volume 1 (Göttingen: Vandehoeck und Ruprecht, 1937), 200-201.

people who are not called to the ministry become "extraordinary ministers of communion," to use the Roman Catholic term. Another aspect is the question of admission to the sacrament. It is part of the pastor's duty as a steward of God's mystery to explore and decide if the person asking for the Lord's Supper is in the state to receive in a way that is benefiting this person. The question of admission to the Lord's Supper is too often seen only as a question of church membership, instead of a question of spiritual care, if communion is beneficial for this person at that specific time.⁵⁵

It remains in question whether today's situation forces us to deviate from the historical Lutheran practice and to adopt a practice that might not be heretical, but is definitely inferior. Is it the lack of time, a schedule of duties that leaves the pastor hardly time to breathe? In the nineteenth century, horse and buggy or walking were the means of transportation of a pastor visiting his people. Now we have cars and the congregations are, for the most part, not really larger than in times past. Do we really have the right to say that pastors today have less time to visit their parishioners than in times past? If there is a problem with time, maybe the pastor has to rethink his schedule and his priorities in the light of what he has promised at his installation when he responded affirmatively to the question: "Will you minister faithfully to the sick and dying?"⁵⁶ That might mean that some things he does now he no longer can do. But a concentration on the essential duties of the pastor is certainly not a luxury, but rather a sign of faithfulness to the Lord of the office and to the congregation the pastor is serving. Luther approved of the Brandenburg order "until one can do it in a better way."⁵⁷ The Lutheran church has found a better way. To go back to a poorer practice cannot be an adequate way in which we face the challenge of a greying society.

⁵⁵Maybe one reason for that is the fading of the notion that one can eat and drink the Lord's body and blood to one's damnation. If that is seen as a real possibility, questions of admission become rather urgent for those who care about the spiritual future of those desiring communion.

⁵⁶The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship: Agenda* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 225.

⁵⁷Compare note 16.