

*Luther and Melanchthon
on Consecrated Communion Wine
(Eisleben 1542–43)*

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IN 1542 THROUGH 1543 a dispute arose between two evangelical (Lutheran) clerics in Eisleben over how to treat the consecrated wine that remained after the celebration of the Lord's Supper. They appealed to Wittenberg and received from Luther and Melanchthon two divergent opinions on the case. Melanchthon, worried about Roman worship of the bread, staked out a position that prevented Christ from being "trapped" in the elements. Luther, still harboring suspicions over Zwinglian theology, rejected any practice that implied Christ's virtual absence from the meal. However, both theologians, especially Luther, went to extraordinary lengths to tolerate the views of the other man. Thus, in their very different theological opinions on the case, Luther and Melanchthon demonstrated how, within a complicated, collegial relationship, they could advise the churches without compromising their own beliefs. At the same time, their statements also demonstrate the range of worship practices within the early Reformation and the close relation between praxis and teaching. For the Reformers, what one did in worship spoke volumes about what one believed.¹

A New Superintendent Calls for Help

On 21 June 1542 St. Andrew's Church in Eisleben called a new preacher,² Valentin Vigelius, who was also the superintendent for this important mining center and capital of the county of Mansfeld. He arrived to discover that a controversy had broken out among the town's clergy. With the advent of communion in both bread and wine by all participants in the Lord's Supper among Lutherans, a question had arisen concerning the best way to treat any wine that remained at the end of the celebration. Unlike the bread,

which, since it came in the form of wafer “hosts,” the celebrant could set aside in an amount matching the number of communicants who had previously announced their intention of communing, there was always a chance that some wine would remain after all had drunk from the chalice. This problem was accentuated by the widespread practice of cleansing the cup with unconsecrated wine at the end of the meal.

The controversy erupted when a new deacon at the city’s St. Nicholas Church drank the remaining wine out of the chalice immediately after the distribution of the Lord’s Supper, although he had not been among the communicants. (It was not unusual in this period for someone to serve at the Lord’s Supper without themselves receiving the elements.) When some of Eisleben’s clergy (most notably Frederick Rauber of St. Peter’s Church) raised questions about this practice, the equally new superintendent, Vigelius, pointed out that the practice had not caused offense. At the same time, he offered to lay the problem before the professors at Wittenberg.

The theological ramifications for this practice were considerable. On the one hand, those who argued for Christ’s continuing presence in the elements would be under suspicion for harboring “papist” notions that would lead to worshipping the host and, especially on Corpus Christi Day, processing with it. On the other, those who treated the consecrated elements like simple wine would be demonstrating their predilection for a Zwinglian denial of Christ’s presence in the Supper.

Apparently, Vigelius turned first to Philip Melanchthon for counsel.³ The latter’s reply has itself had an interesting history. Johannes Manlius, Melanchthon’s student and an avid collector of Melanchthoniana, published a substantial portion of the letter in volume one of his multi-volumed work, *Loci communes collectanea*.⁴ He gave it the title, “Concerning the Lord’s Supper, Answering a Question of Vigilius [sic!], doctor of theology.” Christopher Pezel, one of the first publishers of Melanchthon’s correspondence,⁵ reprinted the letter under the caption, “A Response of Philip Melanchthon to the Question of the Presence of the Sacramental Body and Blood of Christ in the Supper and concerning the Re-

maining Symbols to Dr. Valentinus, 1551.” The title itself reflects not so much the content of the letter but the fierce debates later in the century over the Lord’s Supper, occasioned not only by the clash between John Calvin and Joachim Westphal but also by Melanchthon himself.⁶ On this basis, Karl Brettschneider, the editor of Melanchthon’s correspondence in the nineteenth-century *Corpus Reformatorum*, thought the letter was addressed to Valentin Weigel (1533–88) and thus related to these later disputes. Shortly after the publication of this letter, however, a hand-written copy came to light, with the title, “A Judgment of Philip Melanchthon about the Fact That Some Pastor Himself Drank What Remained in the Chalice after Communion.”⁷ At least since the publication of an article on this dispute by Gustav Kawerau in 1912, scholars now agree that the “Dr. Valentin Vigilius” is none other than Valentin Vigelius who had been called in 1542 by Count Albrecht of Mansfeld as Eisleben’s superintendent. (It could be that Valentin Weigel was his son.)

Otto Clemen, the editor of Luther’s correspondence, agreed with Kawerau in dating the letter to the Summer of 1543, when Melanchthon was in Bonn helping Martin Bucer reform the archdiocese of Cologne. This is unlikely, given that the parties turned to Wittenberg for theological advice and were not likely to have approached the absent Melanchthon. Moreover, Wolferinus himself states in a letter to Rauber dated 29 June 1543 that the latter had attacked him for almost a year and had sullied his reputation with Melanchthon. As a result, Heinz Scheible, editor of Melanchthon’s correspondence, dates the letter to the last half of 1542. It could have been written between August 1542, when Vigelius arrived in Eisleben, and 18 April 1543, when Melanchthon departed for Bonn.

As the title of the manuscript copy made clear, the issue in 1542–43 was not the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper per se but what pastors should do with the wine that remained after the celebration of Holy Communion. Melanchthon’s judgment touched upon the same narrow question. Nevertheless, later interest in this document surely arose from the broader questions of the nature of Christ’s presence in the Supper debated from the 1550s on and the concomitant practices one belief or another entailed.⁸

With his opening words, Melanchthon expressed what some have called his belief in the “actual presence” (as distinguished from Luther’s “real presence”) of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. However, such a label underestimates Melanchthon’s single-minded focus on God’s Word. He wrote: “It is certain that God must not be tied to anything to which he has not tied himself by his Word.”⁹ He then hauled out one of his favorite analogies: “As all sin who imagine that God hears them more at this statue than elsewhere. From such imagination all idolatry in the world has arisen.” For Melanchthon, then, the conclusion was plain: “Therefore, God must not be tied to bread and wine outside of the use to which the Lord’s Supper was instituted.” Here Melanchthon used the specter of idolatry to exclude all of the abuses in the Sacrament of the Altar. At the same time, he stressed what for Luther, too, had been key from the beginning: Christ instituted the Supper for eating and drinking, not for carrying around and worshiping.¹⁰

It is sheer raving to imagine that when the celebrant speaks the words the Body of Christ migrates into the bread in such a way that it is forced to remain there, as wine poured into a flagon always remains there unless it is again poured out.¹¹

As a contrast to such geometrical inclusion, Melanchthon then stated his own understanding of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper. Its wording agreed with his understanding of the Wittenberg Concord of 1536¹² and his revised version of the Augsburg Confession of 1540 (the so-called “Variata”). “The sacraments are covenants of bestowing [*pacta exhibitionis*].”¹³ As such, when the elements are consumed Christ is “present and efficacious.” Such a presence is “voluntary,” not “a geometric or magical inclusion” that forces Christ to remain in the bread. Melanchthon proposed an analogy to baptism, where the Holy Spirit is truly present in the action and yet does not remain in the water “outside of the action.” Melanchthon argued that this approach avoids foolish questions such as whether mice gnawing on the consecrated host consume Christ’s body. It also rejects processions with the bread.

Melanchthon then addressed the issue at hand. On the one hand, he admitted, based upon his own argumentation, that after communion the remaining bread and wine (after all who intended had

partaken of the Lord's Supper) are not sacramental, "because the whole action is the sacrament." Then comes a surprising turn in the argument. Despite the fact that the *reliquiae* are not part of the sacrament, Melancthon advised Vigelius as follows. "For the sake of the inexperienced and out of reverence, I counsel that one or more of the last persons communing drink out what remains in the chalice." For him pastoral care for the weak, not just theological correctness, shapes liturgical practice. Finally, in a section that is not found in all versions, he reiterated his position.

The sacrament also ceases when the use of the sacrament ceases. Christ must not be worshiped under the form of the bread. The bread remains simultaneously with the body of Christ in the sacrament.¹⁴

The letter gave Vigelius the support he needed to resolve this question—or so he thought. As he later reported to Justus Jonas, formerly Luther's colleague in Wittenberg but now the Superintendent in Halle, Vigelius called a meeting of Eisleben's clergy where they discussed the situation. First, he made it clear that the deacon had not acted out of contempt but "plainly with a simple and godly spirit."¹⁵ They discussed church practices in neighboring communities, during which Frederick Rauber mentioned that in Leipzig they apparently poured the remaining wine on the ground—something that all of Eisleben's clergy rejected out of hand. Vigelius pronounced the deacon's practice to be above reproach and then reiterated some of Melancthon's own arguments.

First, the sacraments were instituted that they may be certain symbols of God's promises and divine favor toward us. Moreover, they were instituted so that those who have faith in the words of the sacraments have forgiveness of their sins. Finally, the sacraments also consist of action and use.¹⁶

He cited Augustine's famous dictum on the nature of the sacrament¹⁷ and (Melancthon's) example of the Holy Spirit not remaining in the baptismal water after the sacrament. "However, once the person is baptized, the use and action of the Sacrament ceases."¹⁸ He mentioned that all the clergy and the citizenry could witness to the fact that this practice had caused no scandal. Thus

he declared himself amazed by the impudence of some (probably the preacher at St. Peter's Church, Frederick Rauber) who had claimed people were offended. As a result, Vigelius had turned to his fellow superintendent, Jonas, for advice.

Attacking the Attacker

On 29 June 1543 Vigelius's coworker at St Andrew's, Simon Wolferinus, took matters into his own hands and began a frontal attack on Frederick Rauber. Wolferinus was a former student at the University of Wittenberg (matriculated 1529/30; received his master of arts degree on 29 January 1534). He was fed up with Rauber's recalcitrance (despite Vigelius's letter to Jonas), with Rauber's year-long attempts to smear his (Wolferinus's) reputation among Eisleben's clergy and with Philip Melanchthon, and with an apparent attack against him in one of Rauber's recent sermons.¹⁹ Accused of changing church practice, Wolferinus responded by formulating ten theses for disputation on the following day.

The theses went farther than either Vigelius or Melanchthon. In the first three Wolferinus argued that the sacraments were divine actions in which Christ witnessed his grace to the church. Outside the appropriate actions, the sacraments "are nothing but mere elements." Those who think the remaining wine and bread or water are still sacraments are raving ignoramuses.²⁰ In the sixth, he argued for the freedom pastors had in adding or removing ceremonies, such as feast days, songs, or fasts, and in the seventh condemned those who imagined and taught that the consensus of the church consisted of unity in ceremonies. In the ninth he countered that "The unity of both the catholic [one manuscript: universal] church and the particular church consists in good doctrine and proper use of the sacraments."

Eisleben was no stranger to sharp theological attacks, in part because the three ruling counts of Mansfeld, who all resided in Eisleben, were divided in their religious allegiance. In the 1520s John Agricola, the rector of Eisleben's Latin school and a former student of Luther, attacked the Visitation Articles and their author,

Philip Melanchthon.²¹ Agricola departed in 1537 for Wittenberg, where he became the center of the first antinomian controversy. He left behind Georg Witzel, a Roman Catholic pastor at St. Andrew's supported by the remaining Roman Catholic Count, Hoyer. Witzel regularly attacked Caspar Güttel, the preacher at St. Andrew's, who was also the first evangelical superintendent in Eisenleben. Witzel's departure in 1538 and Hoyer's death in 1540 paved the way for a completely Lutheran clergy in the town. As this dispute demonstrates, however, it did not lessen the animosity, especially since Wolferinus, Witzel's successor at St. Andrew's, and Rauber at St. Peter's approached the Lord's Supper from such different perspectives.

Appealing to Wittenberg

Faced with Wolferinus's pugnacity and a willingness to instigate public (though not official) proceedings against him, Rauber, the preacher at St. Peter's, left town immediately after receiving the letter and theses and headed for Wittenberg to gain the support of Luther. It must have been clear to him that he would not receive a fair hearing from Vigelius, so he turned to a higher authority, so to speak. He was not disappointed.

We know more about Luther's interest in this question from a later dispute in which Wolferinus's theses became involved.²² In 1557 a pastor at St. Michael's in Erfurt, Johan Hachenburg, published a tract attacking Wolferinus entitled, *Necessary Instruction Against the Errors of the New Zwinglians*. (A handwritten note on the cover of one copy noted that Melanchthon had called Hachenburg a jackass.)²³ In the tract, Hachenburg attacked several errors regarding the Lord's Supper, but especially those of Wolferinus, who limited Christ's presence to the *actio* of giving and receiving the elements. Hachenburg's stated goal was to demonstrate just how broadly the *actio* ought to be conceived.

Not only did he reprint the first three theses of Wolferinus and Luther's letters to him, but he also reported several personal comments of Luther from the 1540s, about which Hachenburg had

knowledge. In one (from 1541) Luther threw up his hands and said, “If I were to see the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove coming from heaven, as did the Holy Baptizer of Christ [John], I would fall on my knees, lift my hands and say, ‘Holy Spirit, have mercy upon me!’ Should I not do the same at the holy Sacrament, where Christ is present?” In a handwritten note to Hachenburg, Luther stated, “Adoration in consuming the elements takes place as a matter of course [*per sese*], because with bended knees the true body and blood are consumed without question.” Luther also told Hachenburg he supported the reinstatement of the elevation (against the Zwinglians).²⁴ Finally, Hachenburg recounted a story from 1542 [an eyewitness corrected the date in the margin to 1544], when a woman communing from one of the choir stalls at St. Mary’s in Wittenberg bumped the chalice too hard, spilling some wine on her lined leather jacket and on the wooden stall. Luther, who was nearby, immediately came (with tears in his eyes) along with John Bugenhagen and a deacon and proceeded to lick up the spilled wine. After the service they retrieved the soiled jacket and cut out the stains, had the stall itself planed, and burned the scrap of cloth and the shavings.²⁵

Actually, Luther had had another occasion to comment on the matter (although Clemen’s connection specifically to Wolferinus is questionable—Conrad Cordatus, later pastor in Eisleben, had posed the question and was interested in the situation in Brandenburg). Some time between 19 October and 5 November 1540, Luther said at table, “There are some who let the Supper be a sacrament only while it is in use. Whatever remains leftover they throw away [a reference to the practice in places like Leipzig?]. . . . One must not make it so precise: four or five steps or even several hours. . . . Whether one or two hours has passed and a person takes it from one altar to another or carries it across the street, it nevertheless remains the body of Christ.”²⁶

Upon Rauber’s arrival in Wittenberg, armed with Wolferinus’s letter and theses, Luther took action. On 4 July 1542, he wrote a sharp letter to Wolferinus, also signed by Wittenberg’s head pastor John Bugenhagen, and rebuked first his behavior and then his theology in no uncertain terms.²⁷ It was yet another misery in Luther’s

last days that Wolferinus (in Luther's own hometown!) falsely accused Rauber of being a papist. Even granting the offense of being attacked in a public sermon (which Rauber had denied to Luther), Wolferinus's options were to have recourse "either to the law or to charity."²⁸ The vehemence of the attack Luther rejected out of hand. "For [Rauber] is neither a heretic nor an enemy of [sound] teaching."²⁹

Luther then turned to the issue itself. This section of the letter deserves to be cited at length.

We do not have it from you, but you from us that the sacraments are actions, not stationary objects.³⁰ But what is this singular temerity of yours that you do not refrain from so evil an appearance—which you ought to know is scandalous—namely, that you mix what remains of the [consecrated] wine or bread with unconsecrated [Latin: *prior*] bread and wine? On the basis of what example are you doing this? Do you not clearly see how you will arouse dangerous questions, if, "convinced in your own mind" [cf. Rom. 14:5], you contend that the Sacrament ceases when the action ceases? Perhaps you want to be called Zwinglian? I believe that you are afflicted with the insanity of Zwingli, you who so pridefully and contemptibly incite [matters] with your singular and glorious wisdom. Was there no other way to avoid suspicion being sown among the simple and our adversaries that you are a despiser of the sacrament, than by your giving offense with the evil appearance of mixing and confounding the remains of the sacrament with [unconsecrated] wine? Why do you not imitate other churches?³¹ Why do you want to be held to be the only, new and dangerous author [of this practice]? I write these things in this manner with deep sorrow, so that you may know that you have offended me and profoundly saddened my spirit.³²

Several comments are in order. First, it is important to notice that Luther did not perceive the concept of Christ's restricted presence during the *actio sacramentalis* as Wolferinus's or (according to his subsequent letter) Melancthon's invention. He fully claimed it as Wittenberg's own. Second, Luther demonstrated his deep sense of the communal nature of worship practices, hearkening back to the old monastic vice of *singularitas*. There was no place in his understanding of liturgical reform for the kind of clerical individualism masquerading as congregational freedom that marks some experimental worship today. Third, he realized the deep con-

nection between practice and theology. As Melanchthon worried about reinstating papal worship of the bread, Luther could smell a Zwinglian a mile away. Why institute a new liturgical practice that leaves the horrible impression that the bread and wine are just bread and wine? Finally, he worried about the pastoral problems such a practice would wreak upon the simple.

Having dressed down his correspondent in no uncertain terms, Luther proceeded to instruct him in how to respond. He should receive Frederick Rauber “graciously and with unified heart.” He should act as they did in Wittenberg, leaving the remaining portions of the Sacrament to be shared by the communicants. This would prevent “scandalous and dangerous questions regarding the cessation of the sacramental action” from arising. Such questions will, Luther predicted, suffocate Wolferinus if he behaves otherwise. By so restricting the sacramental action as Wolferinus tried to do, calumniators (i.e., Zwinglians) could debate whether Christ was present in between the individual acts of communing, so that sacrament would cease to exist more than it would exist, having been reduced to a specific time or even to brief instants. Luther, wishing to prevent a war in Eisleben’s churches, concluded: “I certainly will oppose with all my powers your scandalous and offensive temerity and singularity, so that I may not be burdened in my last hour with your scandals.”³³

One would think that would have been the end of it. However, the Wittenbergers did even more. Justus Jonas was informed of the matter and as a result wrote from Halle on 7 July an equally scathing letter to Wolferinus, warning him to take Wittenberg’s rebuke seriously. Had Wolferinus consulted with Jonas and others, this could have been avoided. “Why do you not imitate the religious and wonderful reverence of all the ancient churches regarding this sacrament at the times of Augustine and Jerome and even during the age of Polycarp?”³⁴ This behavior flies in the face of the teachings of both Luther and Melanchthon. Again, Jonas upbraided him for not taking his complaint privately to Rauber. There are few preachers who teach Christ; instead, most neglect the teaching of the catechism and renew “questions and wars over words,” pro-

hibited by the Scripture. Finally, Jonas took aim at Vigelius' earlier letter, rejected his arguments, and called into question whether Eisleben's superintendent had truly received a legitimate doctorate.

“Undeniable Differences between Luther and Melancthon”?

In the face of this massive rejection by Wittenberg's theologians and friends, Wolferinus played his trump card—the letter from Melancthon to Vigelius, which he thought supported the practice and position at St. Andrew's Church. Upon receipt of this letter, which revealed possible divergence among Wittenberg's theologians, Luther had to respond immediately. Kawerau takes this letter as an indication of undeniable (if not irreconcilable) differences between the two reformers.³⁵ A closer examination of Luther's second letter, however, reveals something quite different: the collegial atmosphere in which the reformers reached decisions regarding theology and practice during the early Reformation.³⁶

On 20 July 1543 Luther responded to Wolferinus's appeal to Melancthon's authority as justification for changes in worship practice.³⁷ Again, the reformer began by expressing sorrow over the current battles, in a city where peace should have prevailed among the ministers. He asked him to consider whether his theses and “such tragic vociferations” represented a charitable, fraternal response. Satan was testing them, “so that he might make a log out of a speck, or rather a raging fire from a spark.”³⁸ He then set out the basic “rules of engagement” when dealing with fellow ministers and not papists. “You could have settled these matters with mutual conversation [*mutuum colloquium*], because the matter was for you not against the ravings of the papists but against a comrade in ministry and religion.”³⁹

Modern readers, used to associating Luther with bombast and “Here I stand,” will find this kind of compromise and sensitivity surprising. However, it occurred more often in Luther's approach to disputes among evangelical parties than his sharp polemics may let on. Luther remained convinced that the discovery and proclamation of the gospel brought with it attacks from Satan, who was

bent on stirring up controversy in the church.⁴⁰ One defense against such raging was mutual conversation and consolation.⁴¹

In this context, Luther then turned to Melanchthon's letter. He agreed completely with the basic premise that "the sacrament is nothing outside the sacramental action."⁴² However, (unlike Melanchthon) Wolferinus had defined this action "too precipitously and abruptly," with the result that he would end up with no sacrament at all.

For if that really acute precision of action is allowed to stand, it follows that after the proclamation of the Words [of Institution], which is the most powerful and principle action in the Sacrament, no one would take in the body and blood of Christ, because the action would be wanting. This is certainly not what Mr. Philip wants.⁴³

Taking a page out of Melanchthon's own book, Luther then pointed out how Wolferinus's definition of the *actio sacramentalis* would result in "infinite scruples of conscience and interminable questions," like those over which the papists argue.⁴⁴ For example, would Christ be present at the first, middle or last syllable uttered (in the Words of Institution)? "Therefore it must be observed that this is not only a movement of instant or present action, but also a time—not a mathematical [= measured] time, but a physical latitude. That is, a space of time and proper breadth must be given to this action, as they say *en platei*."⁴⁵

With this broader definition of sacramental action in place, Luther then drew the following conclusion. "We therefore define the sacramental time or action in this way. It starts at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer and continues until all have communed, emptied the chalice, eaten the remaining bread, the people have been dismissed and all have departed from the altar."⁴⁶ This approach, Luther argued, would avoid "the scruples and scandals of interminable questions."

However, Luther's broader definition might still be considered as standing in some conflict with Melanchthon's original letter. To overcome this problem Luther resorted to some scholarly (if not scholastic) distinctions.

Mr. Philip defines the sacramental action in relation to external things, that is, against shutting [Christ] up [in a tabernacle] and the procession of the Sacrament. He does not divide that action inside itself nor does he define it against itself.⁴⁷

On the basis of these arguments, Luther again warned Wolferinus to take care that the communicants or the priest, and not just one of the deacons who had not partaken of the Host, should drain the chalice. However, his reason for this practice arose more from appearances than theology: “lest you, setting a bad example, seem to divide the Sacrament or to treat the sacramental action irreverently.”⁴⁸ In order to eliminate all question of disunity among Wittenberg’s ranks, Luther concluded: “It is what I think and what Philip thinks. This I know.”⁴⁹

Luther returned to his opening theme, urging Wolferinus to reconcile with Rauber and directing him to share this letter with his opponent and with Vigelius. He mentioned that he had been forced to dictate this letter due to a severe headache, and he asked Wolferinus to pray for him and to gladden his heart by reconciling with his opponent on the basis of their reconciliation in Christ.

Of course one can see the differences between Melanchthon’s and Luther’s conceptions of the Lord’s Supper.⁵⁰ The former took the papal abuses as his starting point and wished to limit the *actio sacramentalis*. The latter worried about Zwinglianism and reducing the *actio* to a single point in time until the presence of Christ disappeared altogether. The former confessed Christ’s presence in the meal *with* the bread and wine. The latter spoke more freely of the Body of Christ in the bread. The former worried about geometrical or magical inclusion that contradicted Christ’s free promise. The latter worried about a mathematical restriction of time and argued for a broader “physical” understanding. Melanchthon stressed Christ’s real presence in the action with the elements; Luther stressed Christ’s real presence in the elements throughout the action.

However, at least for Luther, these differences in defining the *actio* were amenable to reconciliation “*ad extra*” and “*intra se ipsum*.” Moreover, they rested on a fundamental agreement that Christ’s presence in the sacramental action excluded the idolatrous excesses

of Rome and the minimalism of Zurich. Most importantly, their comments stressed, as one of the highest pastoral virtues, maintaining peace and avoiding offense to the weak. “For the sake of the inexperienced and out of reverence,” Melanchthon concluded. To avoid “scruples and the scandals of interminable questions,” Luther admonished. Even on matters of such theological weight and practical significance as this controversy touched upon, Luther and Melanchthon never lost sight of the embattled weak consciences who needed their pastors and teachers to deliver the Word of God to them—not to offend their piety or to confuse their minds.⁵¹

Epilogue

With Luther’s second letter, the curtain closes on this small tempest among Eisleben’s clergy. However, the letters and memory of this controversy lingered on, so that in other contexts Pezel, Hachenburg and Chytraeus, among others, all had reason to refer to portions of the historical record. It was David Chytraeus who actually did more to preserve Luther’s point of view for posterity than anyone else. As a contributor to the final shape of the Formula of Concord, he was very likely among those who made sure that the Formula also addressed the later debate involving Johannes Saliger. In article seven of the Solid Declaration we read,

To maintain this true Christian doctrine concerning the Holy Supper and to obviate and eliminate many kinds of idolatrous misuse and perversion of this testament, the following useful rule and norm has been derived from the words of institution: Nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ, or apart from the divinely instituted action (that is, if one does not observe Christ’s institution as he ordained it, it is not sacrament). This rule dare not in any way be rejected, but it can and should be profitably urged and retained in the church of God.

In this context “use” or “action” does not primarily mean faith, or the oral eating alone, but the entire external and visible action of the Supper as ordained by Christ: the consecration or words of institution, the distribution and reception, or the oral eating of the blessed bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ. Apart from this use it is not to be deemed a sacrament, as when in the

papistic Mass the bread is not distributed but is offered up, or locked up, or carried about, or exposed for adoration, just as the baptismal water is no sacrament or Baptism if it should be used to consecrate bells, or to cure leprosy, or is otherwise exposed for adoration. It was against such papistic abuses that this rule was first formulated, and it was explained by Dr. Luther.

We must, however, also point out that the Sacramentarians dishonestly and maliciously pervert this useful and necessary rule and interpret it as referring only to the spiritual and internal use of faith in order to deny the true, essential presence and the oral eating of the body of Christ, in which here on earth both the worthy and the unworthy alike participate.⁵²

Here the concordists and especially Chytraeus, a devoted student of Philip Melancthon who also had intimate knowledge of Luther's correspondence on this matter, wove together both sides of the response to Eisleben's dispute. Christ's presence is tied to the sacramental action, in which the Words of Institution and the reception of the elements stand center stage. The action involves more than faith or reception, and thus appropriate praxis could avoid excesses of Rome or Zurich.

Such was the nature of the diversity and unity of practice and approach in Wittenberg in the 1540s, and it served the needs of the concordists in the 1570s. However, the one thing missing from the Formula's use of this principle is the central *pastoral* rule, to which both Luther and Melancthon adhered. In determining church practice, one must never neglect the weak and inexperienced for the sake of either theological innovation or perceived doctrinal correctness. This pastoral rule formed the basis of the reformers' unity and led to the development of uniquely *Lutheran* forms of worship.

Abbreviations: *Bds.*: Heinrich Bindseil, ed., *Philippi Melancthonis epistolae, iudicia, consilia, testimonia aliorumque ad eum epistolae quae in corpore reformatorum desiderantur* (Halle: Gustav Schwetschke, 1874); *CR*: *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melancthonis opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Karl Bretschneider and Heinrich Bindseil, 28 vols. (Halle: A. Schwetschke & Sons, 1834–1860); *LW*: *Luther's Works* [American edition], 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86); *MBW*: *Melancthon's Briefwechsel: Kri-*

tische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe: Regesten, ed. Heinz Scheible, 8 + vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977- ; the numbers refer to the number of the letters); *MSA: Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl [Studienausgabe]*, ed. Robert Stupperich, 7 vols. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1951–1975); *WA: Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993); *WA Br. Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Briefwechsel*, 18 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–1985); *WA TR: Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Tischreden*, 6 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912–21).

NOTES

1. Gustav Kawerau has provided a thorough description of this dispute in “Der Streit über die Reliquiae Sacramenti in Eisleben 1543,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 33 (1912): 286–308. His work has subsequently been corrected and expanded by Otto Clemen in *WABr* 10: 336–40 and by Heinz Scheible in *MBW* 3: 346 (on *MBW* 3119). Hans Grass, *Die Abendmahlslehre bei Luther und Calvin* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1954), 112–121, provides the wider context for this dispute. Other studies include Helmut Gollwitzer, *Coena Domini: Die altlutherische Abendmahlslehre in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit dem Calvinismus dargestellt an der lutherischen Frühorthodoxie* (Munich: Kaiser, 1937); Jürgen Diestelmann, *Konsekration: Luthers Abendmahls Glaube in dogmatisch-liturgischer Sicht an Hand von Quellenauszügen dargestellt* (Berlin Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1960); and Bjarne Wollan Teigen, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz* (Brewster, MA: Trinity Lutheran Press, 1986), 135–40. For a critical appraisal of the last book see the review essay by Gaylin R. Schmeling in *Lutheran Quarterly*, n. s. 8 (1994): 321–27 and the extensive reply by David P. Saar, “Still Another View on Consecration,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1995): 473–85.

2. Throughout, this article will use the sixteenth-century German distinction between preacher (one called to preach) and pastor (one called to full pastoral duties).

3. It is not clear, but Melanchthon could have been perceived as writing in the name of Wittenberg's theological faculty, for which he often penned theological position papers.

4. Johannes Manlius, *Loci communes collectanea* (Basel, 1563), 1: 96. It is reprinted in *CR* 7:876–77 (*MBW* 3119) on the basis of Pezel's reprint of the same from 1600, but in comparison with an independent manuscript tradition that contained a fuller text. For the history of the letter, see Clemen's introduction in *WABr* 10: 338.

5. Scheible, *MBW* 1:12, 19–20

6. See Timothy J. Wengert, “‘With Friends Like This. . .’: The Biography of Philip Melanchthon by Joachim Camerarius,” in *The Rhetoric of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe: Forms of Biography from Cassandra Fedele to Louis XIV*, edited by Thomas F. Mayer and D. R. Woolf (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1995), 115–32.

7. Baxmann, *Zeitschrift für historische Theologie* (1861): 620–21. See *Bds.*, 163–64.
8. For a description of how clearly later Lutherans connected practice and theology, see Bodo Nischan, *Prince, People, and Confession: The Second Reformation in Brandenburg* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1994). Another debate over the problem of the remaining elements occurred between Johann Saliger and David Chytraeus in Rostock in the 1560s. On 18 April 1569, Chytraeus, an author of the Formula of Concord, sent Saliger a copy of Luther's (second) letter from 20 July 1543. See Jobst Schöne, *Um Christi Sakramentale Gegenwart: Der Saligersche Abendmahlsstreit 1568/69* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1966).
9. *MBW* 3119 (*CR* 7: 876f.).
10. See Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 1520 (*WA* 6: 497–573; *LW* 36: 11–126). Already in these circulated in 1520 (*MSA* 1:54–55), Melancthon had attacked the abuses of the Mass.
11. *CR* 7: 876.
12. An agreement signed by South German pastors and the Wittenbergers that confessed Christ's presence "with the bread" [*cum pane*].
13. The word "*exhibere*" does not mean in Latin simply "show" or "demonstrate," as exhibit means in English. It has a variety of meanings related to offer or bestow.
14. *CR* 7: 877
15. Kawerau, "Der Streit," 295. A letter by Vigelius to Justus Jonas written sometime prior to 29 June 1543.
16. Kawerau, "Der Streit," 295.
17. See Augustine, *Tractates on John*, 80 (on John 15:3), cited by Luther, among other places, in the Large Catechism, The Lord's Supper, 10.
18. Kawerau, "Der Streit," 295: "Homine autem baptisato cessat Sacramenti usus et actio." Cf. *MBW* 3119 (*CR* 7: 877): ". . . non manet in aqua extra actionem" and "ces-sante usu sacramenti cesset quoque sacramentum."
19. He described his complaints in a letter addressed to Rauber and dated 29 June 1543. It is reprinted in Kawerau, "Der Streit," 296–97.
20. *Ibid.*, 297: "Furor ergo est, rabiosa invidia et inscitia prodigiosa."
21. See Timothy J. Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melancthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).
22. See Clemen's introduction in *WA Br* 10:336–40.
23. *MBW* 8543 (*CR* 9:470), Melancthon's opinion regarding a synod of all electors, princes and estates of the Augsburg Confession, written 4 March 1558. "Nun sind viel der Unsern, die solchen Irrtum (i.e., an understanding of the Lord's Supper arising out of the doctrine of transubstantiation) stärken, als neulich ein Esel zu Erffort von den Partikeln, die auf die Erde fallen, geschrieben hat, daß es der Leib Christi sei, und soll angebetet werden." (Cf. *MBW* 8494 [*CR* 9:409].)
24. The elevation was done away with in Wittenberg on 4 June 1542. See *MBW* 3432 (4:19) and the literature cited there.
25. Clemen also mentions a second tract, published a year before Hachenburg's death in 1562, which collected other statements by Luther. See also *WA TR*, no. 5984. Luther's behavior must be viewed against the backdrop of the superstitious use of the elements among late-medieval Christians. Such disposal of the elements prevented using the elements as talismans. I am indebted to Robert Kolb for this clarification.

26. *WA TR*, no. 5314 (*LW* 54: 407–08). See the literature cited in *LW* on this point. In all these cases, Luther had in mind sacramental use with the sick or homebound, not processions.

27. *WA Br* 10: 340–42.

28. That is, to appeal to the county officials or to approach Rauber privately. For another example of Luther rebuking a disputant on similar grounds, see Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 116–18.

29. *WA Br* 10: 340, 13.

30. “actiones non stantes factiones.” Walch translates: “nicht fortbestehende heilige Dinge.”

31. Luther is thinking of standard practices in his day and at Wittenberg. He was not necessarily aware of the practice in the early church where unconsecrated wine would be mixed with the consecrated in order to make more available to the communicants. Of course, Wolferinus had quite different intentions. I am grateful to my colleague, Gordon Lathrop, for this insight.

32. *WA Br* 10: 340, 16–30.

33. *WA Br* 10: 341, 47–50.

34. Kawerau, “Der Streit,” 298–99.

35. Others who argue similarly include Gollwitzer, *Coena Domini*, 65–96 and, following him, Diestelmann, *Konsekration*, 47–48.

36. See Timothy J. Wengert, “Luther and Melanchthon/Melanchthon and Luther,” *Luther-Jahrbuch* 66 (1999): 70–88, for a detailed look at their subsequent dispute over the Lord’s Supper in 1543.

37. *WA Br* 10: 347–49.

38. *WA Br* 10: 348, 9–10.

39. *WA Br* 10: 348, 10–12.

40. See, especially, Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale, 1989).

41. See the Smalcald Articles, III.iv.

42. *WA Br* 10: 348, 13–14. See not only Melanchthon’s letter but also Luther’s comments (about who was teaching whom regarding the *actio sacramentalis*) in the previous letter.

43. *WA Br* 10: 348, 16–19.

44. *WA Br* 10: 348, 20–21. Cf. Melanchthon’s concern in *CR* 7: 877 over “abominandae illae quaestiones” regarding mice eating crumbs.

45. *WA Br* 10: 248, 22–26. According to Erasmus’s *Adages*, this Greek phrase meant conceding something above what is prescribed. Luther had used the same language in the earlier Table Talk.

46. *WA Br* 10: 348, 27–30. In Wittenberg, the Lord’s Prayer replaced the prayers of the Canon of the Mass and came before the Words of Institution. The suggestion of Teigen, *The Lord’s Supper*, 139, that with the words “oratio Dominica” Luther is not referring to the Lord’s Prayer is speculative at best. The Formula of Concord cited this definition of the *actio* but narrows it to the Words of Institution and the reception of the elements. See below.

47. *WA Br* 10: 348, 31–33. Following Diestelmann, *Konsekration*, 45. The word “inclusio” could also refer to Christ’s inclusion in the bread itself. Melanchthon’s uses the word in his letter to Vigelius (*CR* 7:877).

48. *WA Br* 10: 348, 37–349, 38.

49. *WA Br* 10:349, 39.

50. In this connection, see especially Diestelmann, *Konsekration*, 31–36 and 44–51 and Gollwitzer, *Coena Domini*, 65–96.

51. Theologians from as diverse perspectives as Gollwitzer and Teigen find the differences between the two men overwhelming and minimize the agreement. However, Luther himself had read Melanchthon's position in the letter to Vigelius and had offered the explanation we recounted here. To undervalue the actual agreement creates for the historian the much more difficult problem of explaining how Luther could be so dumb, lenient, or perhaps even senile as to tolerate Melanchthon's less than pure understanding of the sacrament. (Gollwitzer, *Coena Domini*, 69, even suggests Melanchthon was simply oblivious to the differences.) In fact, Luther (to say nothing of Melanchthon) was none of those things. Instead, he allowed for much more diversity in theological expression than most scholars are willing to admit.

52. *The Book of Concord*, Solid Declaration, VII, 85–88. Kolb, Robert, and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 607–608. The footnote in both the Tappert edition of the *Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 585, and the *Bekennnisschriften der evangelischen-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 1001, refer to *WA* 30/2: 254–55 and to the Smalcald Articles, III.xv.4. They overlook the fact that in the marginalia of the original edition, there is a reference to Luther's letters discussed above. As Clemen points out in *WA Br* 10: 339, Chytraeus sent one of these letters to Saliger (he assumes it was the first letter; I believe it must have been the second). I am indebted to Thomas Manteufel for pointing out this oversight to Robert Kolb and myself in connection with our work editing a new English translation of the *Book of Concord* and for directing us to the letters in *WA Br* 10. This omission is also discussed in Teigen, *The Lord's Supper*, 135–40.