
PART A: INTERIM EUCHARISTIC SHARING WITH THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

[1] It has been public knowledge for some time that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, when assembled for its Seventh Biennial Convention, issued a formal invitation to Lutheran Church–Canada for the establishment of "interim eucharistic sharing" between our two church bodies.¹ This invitation was transmitted in a letter of 6 August 1999 from Bishop Telmor Sartison to President Ralph Mayan.

[2] In keeping with our established polity, the President of Synod has charged the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to draft an official response to the ELCIC's invitation, which will set forth the doctrinal basis for a resolution to be submitted to our next Synodical Convention. This preliminary document is hereby shared with the pastors and congregations of Lutheran Church–Canada with two goals in mind: first, to provide information to our congregations and pastors in order that the issues might be thoroughly discussed; and, secondly, so that we in LCC may together review and confess the Scriptural teaching on the essence of Christ's Holy Supper and its place in the life of the Church to the glory of God and for the benefit of His whole people on earth.

A word of thanks and commitment

[3] We begin by thanking our brothers and sisters of the ELCIC for their invitation issued through Bishop Sartison, and we greet them in the incarnate Son of God Who shed His precious Blood for us all on Calvary and Who now intercedes for all the members of His divided Christendom on earth before His and our Father in heaven. With them we acknowledge our Lord's will, expressed in His high-priestly prayer (John 17), that His people here below be gathered together in visible unity,² and we lament the tragic divisions that have rent His Christians into such a confusing welter of confessions and denominations. Repentance for hateful attitudes harboured and evil deeds committed down the centuries in the name of Christ should not be voiced only by the head of the Roman Catholic Church, but by ourselves also.³ And so we commit ourselves to deep engagement with our brothers and sisters in the ELCIC, that is, to appropriate forms of common prayer, to charitable dialogue, and to shared efforts for the relief of misery both here in Canada and around the globe.

And a word of caution

[4] It is possible, though, to focus on Jesus' prayer for visible church unity in John 17 in such a way as to overlook certain factors expressed in this chapter which have a direct bearing on the ELCIC's invitation. The Lord here prays to the Father in the light of His historic work of revealing to the disciples the Father's Name (vs. 6), and He asks that they might be kept in this Name (vs. 11) from the assaults of the evil one (vs. 15). Christ consecrates Himself unto death on the Cross "that they also may be consecrated in truth" (vs. 19), and He prays, "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth" (vs. 17). The Son of God Himself here forges an essential connection between visible church unity and the confession of God's revealed truth. Hence the many grievous personal sins of church

leaders and church members down the ages are far from being the only or even the major cause of the tragic splits in external Christendom. Honest disagreements with respect to God's revealed truth have led to a situation where the various church bodies are not simply denominations standing alongside one another, but also confessions conscientiously refusing full communion/altar and pulpit fellowship to each other. Fulfilment of the Saviour's petition for unity in John 17 will not be brought closer by papering over the deep and mutually exclusive doctrinal differences between the churches. On the contrary, these obstacles must be squarely faced as we speak the truth to each other in love.⁴ LCC will thus follow the advice of a respected Lutheran theologian of the last century who urged separated Christians to confess the faith of their fathers "in common where possible, separately where necessary."⁵

"Instituted by Christ Himself"

[5] We rejoice that section five of the ELCIC's 1991 *Statement on Sacramental Practices* begins with the affirmation that, "The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus Christ himself" (5:1).

Time was when this allusion to a well-known phrase in the Small Catechism (SC VI, 1) could have been taken for granted among Christians of all confessions and not have needed to be spelled out explicitly. Yet John Reumann, a leading scholar of the ELCA much involved in the quest for Christian unity, has written a volume entitled *The Supper of the Lord* in which he asserts repeatedly that we today cannot know with certainty what our Lord said and did at the Last Supper where He founded the Eucharist for His Church.⁶ If Reumann is right, then the earthly Jesus instituted the Holy Supper, but left unclear precisely what He had instituted. In this case church bodies may establish interim or permanent eucharistic sharing among themselves pretty much as they please.

[6] At this point we must approach the ELCIC with a bold question and ask plainly, "Which Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper?" The dogmatics textbook most widely used in the seminaries of the ELCIC defines the Blessed Trinity in terms which all Christian people find both startling and offensive: "Truly the Trinity is simply the Father and the man Jesus and their Spirit as the Spirit of the believing community."⁷ Now the only Jesus Christ acknowledged by LCC is the Word who became flesh, the Eternal Son of God who became the Son of Mary. We have a deep affinity with any church body, Lutheran or otherwise, which can affirm without reservation the Reformer's beautiful exposition of the second article of the creed. LCC confesses that this Jesus, and He alone, is the Founder of the Holy Supper. We recall how, in his most extensive writing on the Lord's Supper, Luther approached the biblical text with two clear presuppositions shared by all true Christians of all ages, first, the divinity of Christ,⁸ and, secondly, the inerrancy of Holy Scripture.⁹ John Reumann reaches different conclusions from the Reformer, because he rejects Luther's starting point.

What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

[7] Throughout his career as the Reformer of the Church, Luther stoutly confessed that the consecrated bread and wine in the Holy Supper are the true Body and Blood of Christ.¹⁰ He regarded denial of the Real Presence as rejection of the Christian faith itself,¹¹ and he refused altar and pulpit fellowship to all those who do not confess of the Sacrament of the Altar that, "It is the true Body and Blood of Christ, under the bread and wine" (SC VI, 1). In his *Brief Confession concerning the Holy Sacrament* (1544), the Reformer pronounced the following anathema:

For they [deniers of the Real Presence] do not want to believe that the Lord's bread in the Supper is his true, natural body which the godless person or Judas receives orally just as well as St. Peter and all the saints. **Whoever (I say) does not want to believe that, let him not trouble me with letters, writings, or words and let him not expect to have fellowship with me. This is final.**¹²

[8] As it is expressed in the words just quoted from the Small Catechism and the Smalcald Articles, the doctrine of the Real Presence is more than simply the private opinion of the theologian and Church Father Martin Luther. This article of faith is explicitly confessed in all but one of the 16th-century documents which, along with the three ancient catholic creeds, make up our Book of Concord. The Augsburg Confession of 1530, which gives the "Lutheran" Church its proper name ("Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession"), speaks as follows: "It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received. The contrary doctrine is therefore rejected" (AC X). This belief is reiterated in the corresponding article of the Apology (that is, the defence) of the Augsburg Confession, which even quotes with approval an ancient writer who says that "the bread ...is truly changed into flesh" (AP X, 2). In "his" Large Catechism (which is also "ours" in virtue of our confessional subscription), the Reformer repeats the teaching with which all confirmed Lutherans are familiar from their confirmation instruction: "Now, what is the Sacrament of the Altar? Answer: It is the true body and blood of the Lord Christ in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by Christ's word to eat and drink" (LC V, 8). The doctrine summarized in these brief statements is presented in great depth and detail in the last of our Confessions, namely, the Formula of Concord of 1577, which insists that "all who eat and drink the blessed bread and wine in the Lord's Supper receive and partake of the true, essential body and blood of Christ orally" (i.e., with the mouth; SD VII, 63). The Formula of Concord takes the view that Dr. Martin Luther is the best interpreter of the Augsburg Confession (SD VII, 33, 34), and claims with particular reference to the Holy Supper that "the true meaning and intention of the Augsburg Confession cannot be derived more correctly or better from any other source than from Dr. Luther's doctrinal and polemical writings" (SD VII, 41). All quotations from the Reformer in this document are thus to

be understood not as hero worship but from the perspective of the Book of Concord itself.

[9] These solemn words make clear that not only LCC but also Luther himself—who still speaks to us through his writings in the communion of saints (Heb. 11:4)—is deeply troubled by the only answer offered in the ELCIC's document on *Sacramental Practices* to the question, "What is the Sacrament of the Altar?" At #5.2 we read that, "In Holy Communion the crucified and risen Christ is present in word and action. This presence is a mystery." The ELCIC has here completely left the ground of the Lutheran Confessions and opted for a way of speaking which originated among the opponents of the Lutheran Reformation. In the 1520s and 1530s Martin Butzer of Strasbourg endeavoured to mediate between Luther's clear confession and Ulrich Zwingli's equally straightforward denial of the **Real** (i.e., bodily) Presence by speaking instead of the Lord's **personal** presence in the Supper. Butzer's language is typical of the Anglican Church, which must take pains to accommodate the contradictory views of its high and low church wings. And we must admit that, after Luther's death, even Philipp Melancthon spoke ambiguously about our Lord's sacramental presence. But in his Open Letter of 1533 to the Christians of Frankfurt on the Main, the Reformer himself condemned any and all ambiguity on this matter,¹³ and he insisted that Christians should only commune at altars where pastors make clear that what they hold in their hands and place in communicants' mouths is the true Body and Blood of Christ.¹⁴

[10] At the first Supper Jesus commanded the disciples to eat and drink with their mouths His Body given and His Blood shed. In I Cor. 10:16 St. Paul teaches that we partake of the Lord's Body when we partake of the blessed bread, and that we partake of the Lord's Blood when we partake of the blessed cup. Moreover, the Apostle's fearful warnings against unworthy Communion (I Cor. 11:27-32) make no sense at all if the bread is not the Lord's Body and the cup is not the Lord's Blood. Under God and in faithfulness to His Word, LCC can do no other than accept Luther's "final" judgement of 1544, which means that full communion/altar and pulpit fellowship is only possible with churches which unambiguously believe, teach and confess the answer given by the Reformer to the question, "What is the Sacrament of the Altar?" Moreover, on the basis of what has just been reviewed, we would earnestly ask the ELCIC how its commitment to open Communion¹⁵ squares with the Large Catechism's commitment of Lutheran pastors and people to the principle that, "...we do not intend to admit to the sacrament and administer it to those who do not know what they seek or why they come" (LC V, 2).¹⁶

Instrument or Expression of Unity?

[11] There is great tension within Christendom today between those who regard the common celebration of Holy Communion as a suitable means to the end of Christian unity, and those who view the sharing of the Blessed Sacrament as the fitting expression of an already existing unity. Many of the member churches of the World Council of Churches strongly lean to the first of these

alternatives. Thus when the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council produced its document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* in 1982, this achievement was marked by an interdenominational celebration of Holy Communion in Lima, Peru, presided over by the then archbishop of Canterbury, who was assisted by ministers of various church bodies. In the other corner stand the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, confessional Lutheran and conservative Reformed churches, all of which—despite their many other differences—have the same basic reason for not taking the path which led to Lima.

[12] We oftentimes use the word "doctrine" in the plural, speaking of the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the Incarnation, the doctrine of the Atonement &c. Such usage should actually be carefully avoided, since the only time the New Testament speaks in the plural form of doctrines is when St. Paul makes reference to the teachings of demons (I Tim. 4:1)! The Holy Spirit's deliberate decision to speak of doctrine in the singular has to do with the fact that the truth of God's Word is a whole which is meant to be transmitted and accepted in its entirety. The 3000 converts on the Day of Pentecost were not invited to pick and choose from the various items presented in the "doctrine" of the apostles (Acts 2:42). The Early Church summarized the whole truth of Scripture in the "Rule of Faith", which at the time of the Lutheran Reformation became known as the "Confession" of the Church. Luther explains this deep Scriptural perception with the aid of the image of a ring or a bell which is either whole or ruined:

For it is characteristic of all heretics that they start by denying one article of the faith; after that, all the articles must suffer the same fate and they must all be denied, just as the ring, when it gets a crack or a chink, is totally worthless. And if a bell cracks at one place, it does not chime any more and is completely useless.¹⁷

[13] So doctrine is a whole made up of various articles, and it would not be appropriate even for churches which confess the Real Presence to come together for joint celebrations of Holy Communion while they remain in disagreement on other articles of faith. The practice of closed Communion is rooted not only in St. Paul's warnings against the consequences of unworthy Communion, but also in I Cor. 11:26—"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." Since the Roman, Orthodox, Lutheran and Reformed churches do not, alas, make the same proclamation of the Lord's death, they may not eat His bread and drink His cup together.

The deepest dividing line between us?

[14] By this point it will be clear to our separated brothers and sisters in the ELCIC that LCC is not minded to accept at this time the invitation extended to us through Bishop Sartison. Even the very concept of "interim eucharistic sharing" strikes us as analogous to the idea of "trial marriage." A recent article in *The Canadian Lutheran* used the image of marital intimacy to illustrate what is at stake in our upholding of the historic practice of closed Communion.¹⁸ Communing under normal circumstances at a LCC altar expresses an attitude to the

doctrine of Scripture summarized in Luther's Small Catechism which is highly similar to that of a husband and wife who hold each other in the marital embrace while "forsaking all other." What underlies this practice is the conviction that the Christian faith is a "given" transmitted whole and entire by Christ Himself to the apostles and by the apostles to the Church. Even though we account for a numerically tiny portion of Canadian Christendom, we venture to maintain that this "given" is nowhere better expressed than in the Small Catechism of 1529. As is demonstrated by the quotations from Luther made above, such belief has sharp consequences for practice. Meanwhile the theology and practice of the ELCIC cause us to wonder whether Christian doctrine is regarded in these circles as something which is to be constantly adapted to the temper and perceived needs of the world rather than, as St. Jude put it, being "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). We look forward to dialogue with our counterparts in the ELCIC on the topics covered in this document in the hope that the Lord Himself will, in His good time, restore the unity which to our human eyes now seems fractured beyond repair.

¹ "That the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada invite the Lutheran Church—Canada to join in a relationship of interim sharing of the Eucharist and that the terms of this agreement be defined by the President of Lutheran Church—Canada and the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, in consultation with their Council of Presidents and Conference of Bishops respectively" (NCC-99-35).

² Jn. 17:21-22: "that they may all be one, even as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."

³ See C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1977) 32: "If ever the book which I am not going to write is written it must be the full confession by Christendom of Christendom's specific contributions to the sum of human cruelty and treachery. Large areas of 'the World' will not hear us till we have publicly disowned much of our past. Why should they? We have shouted the name of Christ and enacted the service of Moloch." Since John Paul II is known to be an avid reader of C. S. Lewis, the words just quoted may have played a role in prompting the statement issued by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the RC equivalent of our CTCR) on 7 March 2000 under the title "Memory and Reconciliation: the Church and the faults of the past."

⁴ Since the ELCIC's 1991 *Statement on Sacramental Practices* understands itself to be "representative of Lutheran tradition" (1.4), it is appropriate to recall Luther's delight in the bold and clear confession of divine truth, as expressed in his *On the Bondage of the Will* of 1525: "For it is not the mark of a Christian mind to take no delight in assertions: on the contrary, a man must delight in assertions or he will be no Christian. And by assertion—in order that we may not be misled by words—I mean a constant adhering, affirming, confessing, maintaining, and an invincible persevering ...The Holy Spirit is no Skeptic, and it is not doubts or mere opinions that he has written on our hearts, but assertions more sure and certain than life itself and all experience." *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation; Library of Christian Classics XVII* (London: SCM Press, 1969): 105, 109.

⁵ "...gemeinsam, wo es sein kann, getrennt, wo es sein muß." Hermann Sasse, "Union und Bekenntnis," in: Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf ed., *In Statu confessionis; Gesammelte Aufsätze von Hermann Sasse* 2 vols. (Berlin and Schleswig-Holstein: Verlag die Spur GMBH & Co, 1975 & 1976) I: 278f.

⁶ See John Reumann, *The Supper of the Lord; The New Testament, Ecumenical Dialogues, and Faith and Order on Eucharist* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1985) xif & 2: "Perhaps the most profound impact from biblical studies is the growing realization that we cannot today with surety ascertain what Jesus did, said, or intended, historically ...Yet one of the ironies resulting from all the intense modern study of the Gospels is that scholars are more and more certain that *we do not know exactly what Jesus said that night.*"

⁷ Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson eds., *Christian Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) I:155.

⁸ "...you do know and must know that our text, 'This is my body,' etc. comes not from men, but from God himself, spoken by his own lips and set down in these very letters and words." AE 37:304.

⁹ "For he [St. Mark] cannot contradict himself and all the others [in his account of the eucharistic words]." AE 37: 310.

¹⁰ Luther never deviated by a hair's breadth from the confession he made already in the Babylonian Captivity of 1520: "For my part, if I cannot fathom how the bread is the body of Christ, yet I will take my reason captive to the obedience of Christ [II Cor. 10:5], and clinging simply to his words, firmly believe not only that the body of Christ is in the bread, but that the bread is the body of Christ." AE 36:34.

¹¹ "For Christian unity consists in the Spirit, when we are of one faith, one mind, one heart, Ephesians 4 [:3ff.]. This, however, we will gladly do: in civil matters we are glad to be one with them [viz., the deniers of the Real Presence], i.e., to maintain outward, temporal peace. But in spiritual matters, as long as we have breath, we intend to shun, condemn, and censure them, as idolaters, corrupters of God's Word, blasphemers, and liars; and meanwhile, to endure from them, as from enemies, their persecution and schism as far and as long as God endures them; and to pray for them, and admonish them to stop. But to acquiesce in, keep silence over, or approve their blaspheming, this we shall not and cannot do." See also Luther's 32nd thesis against the R. C. theologians of Louvain of 1544: "We earnestly believe that the Zwinglians and all sacramentarians who deny that the body and blood of Christ are taken with the bodily mouth in the venerable eucharist are heretics and estranged from the church of God." AE 34:356.

¹² AE 38:304; emphasis added.

¹³ "*In summa*, it is appalling to hear that in one and the same church or at one and the same altar both sides should come for and receive of one and the same Sacrament, yet with the one side believing that it receives only bread and wine, while the other believing that it receives the true body and blood of Christ. And I often doubt whether it is possible to believe that a preacher or pastor could be so hardened and malicious (and moreover remain silent) as to let both sides go, each one in their delusion that they receive one and the same Sacrament, each one according to their faith, etc. If there is that kind of pastor, he must have a heart harder than any rock, steel or even a diamond. He must certainly be an apostle of wrath; the Turks and Jews are much better." "An Open Letter to Those in Frankfurt on the Main," trans. Jon D. Vieker, *Concordia Journal* 16, 4 (October, 1990):

¹⁴ "Open Letter" 337: "[The pious Christian asks] what is given him by the hands [of the pastor]. Here, there is no use in rolling mush around the mouth and saying, 'Mmmm, mmmm.' ...The mush must be spat out and the 'mumming' quit. Freely and plainly he must be told whether with his mouth he receives only bread and wine."

¹⁵ "We are committed to eucharistic hospitality. Baptized persons of Lutheran and other Christian faith communities are welcomed to the Lord's table." *Sacramental Practices* 6.13.

¹⁶ Luther's vehement denunciation of the practice of Open Communion in his Open Letter of 1533 gives us all food for thought: "It is quite true that wherever the preacher administers only bread and wine for the Sacrament, he is not very concerned about to whom he gives it, what they know or believe, or what they receive. There one sow feeds with the others, and such preachers simply see themselves above such caring. They would rather have uninstructed, ecstatic saints than have the care of nurturing Christians. Rather, they want to do things in such a way that after three years every thing would be laid waste, and neither God nor Christ nor Sacrament nor Christians would remain anymore. However, because we are concerned about nurturing Christians who will still be here after we are gone, and because it is Christ's body and blood that are given out in the Sacrament, we will not and cannot give such a Sacrament to anyone unless he is first examined regarding what he has learned from the Catechism and whether he intends to forsake the sins which he has again committed. For we do not want to make Christ's church into a pig pen [Matthew 7:6], letting each one come unexamined to the Sacrament as a pig to its trough. Such a church we leave to the Enthusiasts!" "Open Letter" 343.

¹⁷ AE 38:308.

¹⁸ Warren Hamp, "The Communion of saints; Celebrating the Lord's Supper," *The Canadian Lutheran* 14, 8 (November