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The Spirituality and Materiality of the Sacraments in the Lutheran Tradition¹

What is a sacrament? This question is vital to Lutheran theology. When Martin Luther first appeared as a Reformer, the struggle against the sacramental notion in the old papal tradition was at the center of his attention. In the following years, he argued obstinately with the so-called Spiritualists as well as with Huldrych Zwingli about the correct understanding of what a sacrament is.

This paper does not tell the history of these harsh conflicts; there is enough literature about it.² Besides, since the Leuenberg Agreement in 1973, at least the sacramental conflict between Lutheran and Reformed Christians is resolved. The following instead addresses Luther's theology of the sacraments with a focus on the aspects of spirituality and materiality. Part one gives the Lutheran *definition* of a sacrament. The second part discusses the *spirituality* of the sacraments by explaining the role of faith and the word for the sacraments. The third part analyzes the *materiality* of the sacraments by explaining the role the elements play in faith. In the end, the strong connection between spirituality and materiality in the Lutheran tradition should be clear.

1 "Lutheran Tradition" and "Lutheran Theology" in the following refer to Martin Luther's thinking. This paper is not addressing Lutheran Orthodoxy or later developments.

2 Compare for example Gerhard May, ed., *Das Marburger Religionsgespräch 1529*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1979); Brian A. Gerrish, "Discerning the Body: Sign and Reality in Luther's Controversy with the Swiss," *The Journal of Religion* 68 (1988): 377-95. For a recent approach from a catholic perspective see Jeffrey VanderWilt, *A Church Without Border: The Eucharist and the Church in Ecumenical Perspective* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998).

What Is a Sacrament?

In his definition of a sacrament – the theological dimension of which will be unfolded later – Martin Luther often referred to *Augustine*, who developed the first theology of the sacraments.³ Augustine understood the sacraments as visible signs of an invisible reality. He defines sign saying, “*quae cum ad res divinas pertinent, sacramenta appellantur*,” that is, “signs that concern the divine things are called sacraments.”⁴ The sacraments are *signa* (signs) that refer to some *res* (thing) that cannot be grasped with words.⁵ For Augustine, Jesus Christ, the Word that became flesh is “the highest sacrament.”⁶ What constitutes a sacrament and thus makes it a sign for Augustine? The connection between *word* and *external element* constitutes the sacrament, “*Accedit verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum, etiam ipsum tamquam visibile verbum*,” that is, “The word joins with the element and produces the sacrament, which in itself is somehow a visible word.”⁷

Luther quoted these definitions several times; nonetheless, he still differed from Augustine. The first difference lies in Luther’s distinction of *two types* of words relevant for the sacrament.⁸ First, a promise that Christ connected with the element, which for baptism is, “The one who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk 16:16).⁹ Second, the words with which Christ instituted the sacrament, which for baptism are, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).

Luther concluded his critique of the number of seven sacraments in the Catholic tradition from this definition of the sacrament. He finally accepted only two as actual sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. All so called *sacraments* that had been common in the church until then, yet do not have words and elements did not count as sacraments for him any longer. These include: confirmation, confession, marriage, ordination to priesthood, and the anointing of the sick.

3 Compare Gunther Wenz, “Sakramente I,” in Gerhard Müller, ed., *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Vol. 29 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 663–84, 665.

4 Augustine, Epistola 138, 7,1, C.Chr.SL 31,2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 278 (my translation).

5 Compare Pamela Bright, “Ekklesiologie und Sakramentenlehre,” in Volker H. Drecoll, ed., *Augustin Handbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 506–18, 516.

6 Bright, “Ekklesiologie,” 517 (my translation).

7 Augustine, In Iohannis Evangelium tractatus 80,3, C.Chr.SL 36 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 529,5–7 (my translation).

8 Compare Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie: Eine Vergegenwärtigung*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 239–40.

9 All Bible texts from the NRSV.

For a long time Luther was hesitant as to whether confession counted a sacrament as well as, since Christ instated confession and added a promise: “He breathed on them and said to them (the disciples), ... ‘If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them’” (Jn 21:22–23). But Luther admitted that Christ added no visible element to this promise. This lack of a visible element finally led Luther to judge that Confession should not be counted a sacrament.¹⁰ Even if there are the relevant words for being a sacrament, since there is no material element, confession cannot be considered as one. But Luther declared it useful because in confessing our sins and by being told they are forgiven, we return to baptism; confession is “*reditu(s) ... ad baptismum.*”¹¹

The Role of the Word for Faith – The Spirituality of the Sacraments

Luther stresses that it is not the external elements of water, bread, and wine as such that constitute the sacrament.¹² The element itself has no saving power. “External are water, wine, bread, but God is internal with his words which are spoken, and he enters into the heart and drives you through the Holy Spirit.”¹³ In his *Small Catechism*, Luther emphasizes the essential role of the word in regard to both, baptism and the Lord’s Supper,

How can water do such great things? Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God’s word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit. – How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’ These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: ‘forgiveness of sins’.¹⁴

10 Compare Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie*, 244.

11 Compare Martin Luther, “De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium (1520),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (WA), Vol. 6 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1888), 497–573, 572,17; *Luther’s Works: American Edition* (LW), ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1973); (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957–1986): Vol. 36, 124.

12 Compare Paul Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1962), 297.

13 Martin Luther, “Predigt am 10. Sonntag nach Trinitatis (1524),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 15 (Weimar: Böhlau 1899), 662–71, 669,17–19 (my translation/forthcoming in LW New Series, LW.NS).

14 Martin Luther, “Small Catechism,” quoted from <http://sites.cph.org/catechism/sacrament-of-holy-baptism.asp>; <http://sites.cph.org/catechism/sacrament-of-the-altar.asp> (accessed on

In both quotes, it is the word that makes the elements a sacrament.¹⁵ In addition, it is faith in this word, which is relevant to the sacrament bringing salvation. I will now unfold in greater detail these two aspects – word and faith – and their relation to each other.

First of all, the word meant here is not any human word, but the word *of God*. As the word of God, it is powerful and performative – as it has always been, for example when God created the world or when the word of God became human.¹⁶ If water, bread and wine can do these great things through the word of God, it is likely to misunderstand the liturgical event as a magic formula that transforms the elements of water, bread, and wine into things that automatically transport salvation. The saving effect of the word of God is not in the material elements but in the heart of the human being who is using the elements. This becomes clear when we take a look at the concrete content of “the word of God.”

The word of God does not speak about God’s majesty or his absolute difference to the world. The word of God – that is finally Jesus Christ – tells us who God really is: that God wants to be there for human beings. Christians believe in the God who has revealed his heart in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God comes close to human beings and forgives their sins. Therefore, the word of God is essentially a word of promise.¹⁷ Only through this word *of promise* do we understand the sign of the sacrament correctly; it is a *sign of this promise*. What is the content of the word of promise in the two sacraments? It is the promise of the forgiveness of sins (compare Mk 16:16 and 1 Cor 11:23–26).

Through this word of promise, faith is created. In general, this is the *character of faith* for Luther: Faith is “*fides ex auditu* (faith that comes through listening).”¹⁸ Faith and God’s word are strongly connected, “Faith is oriented to God in his word” and vice versa, “the word of God is characterized by the fact that it calls to faith and generates faith”.¹⁹ If the word of God is essentially promise, then faith essentially means “to trust and believe Him (and His promise) from the (whole) heart.”²⁰ Faith for Luther is not some diffuse feeling, not even some feeling of

6/21/2014). “Der Kleine Katechismus für die gemeine Pfarherr und Prediger (1529),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30, I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 264–345, 311,25–313,6; 317,28–319,7.

15 Compare Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 297.

16 Compare Ulrich Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers nach seinen Predigten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 288.

17 Compare Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie*, 49.

18 Martin Luther, “Disputatio de fide infusa et acquisita (1520),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 6 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1888), 85–86, 85,10 (my translation/forthcoming in LW.NS).

19 Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 48 (my translation).

20 Martin Luther, “Large Catechism. The Ten Commandments,” quoted from <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-3-tencommandments.php>, (accessed on 6/22/2014); “Der Große Katechismus (1529),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30/I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 123–238, 133,3f.).

absolute dependence. Faith is very concrete. It is caused by very concrete content, namely the promise. Faith means to expect from God to do what he promises and to think of him as being able to do it. Luther writes,

So when the soul firmly trusts God's promises, it regards him as truthful and righteous. Nothing more excellent than this can be ascribed to God. ... On the other hand, what greater rebellion against God, what greater wickedness, what greater contempt of God is there than not believing his promise?²¹

In order to understand the whole Lutheran concept of the sacraments, one has to recognize that faith is nothing human beings can produce by themselves. Faith is also not a decision; it is the work of the Holy Spirit. By their intellect, human beings can understand the meaning of a word. But only through the work of the Holy Spirit can a word touch the heart of a man or a woman, so that they understand that it is *me* who is meant in this word. The same is said when Luther states that no other authority but the word of God establishes my faith.²² The word of God proves itself to the human being. Luther writes that the human being "feels, that (the Word) is so certainly true, that no one can ever tear it from, even if the same preacher were to try to do it."²³ He or she "feels captive by how true and right (the Word) is, even if the world, all the angels, all the princes of hell said differently, even if God Himself spoke differently."²⁴

In this emphasis on faith, Luther criticized the Catholic practice of the sacraments of his time. Contrary to the old theology, which thought that the sacrament would give salvation to anyone participating "*ex opere operato*," just through being carried out by a priest, for Luther, the sacrament only lends salvation if people believe.²⁵ The sacrament is not some magic cure, but, as it presents God's promise for a human being, it is a personal interaction.²⁶ The sacrament is something between the person of God and the human person, who has to respond to the promise with faith.

God deals with us in no other way than by his holy word and sacraments, which are like signs or seals of his words. The very first thing necessary, then, is faith in these words

21 Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," LW 31, 350 ("Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 7 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1897), 20–38, 25,9–18).

22 Compare Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 51.

23 Martin Luther, "Gospel for the Second Day of Christmas, Luke 2:15–20," LW 75, 248–55, 24; "Kirchenpostille: Das Evangelium in der Früh-Christmeß, Lukas 2,15–20 (1522)," WA 10,I,1, 128–41, 130,5–6.

24 LW 75, 249; WA 10,I,1, 130,16–18.

25 Compare Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 300; Gunther Wenz, *Einführung in die evangelische Sakramentenlehre* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 41.

26 Compare Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 300.

and signs, for when God speaks and gives signs, man must firmly and wholeheartedly believe that what he says and signifies is true.²⁷

Thus, “the sacrament justifies not because it is performed but because it is believed.”²⁸

Yet, Luther denied an understanding of his emphasis on faith, which concluded that the sacraments are only an expression of faith and that their execution depends on faith.²⁹ In Luther’s view, the sacraments are an expression of what God does, not of what human beings do – as faith depends on God’s word and commandment, not on human deeds.³⁰ Luther’s doctrine of justification is the reason for his stance in this issue. If justification is possible only by faith, not by works, then no cooperation of humans in baptism or the Lord’s Supper is imaginable. The sacraments are in no regard works of human beings but are the way in which God’s grace reaches us.

Now we can recognize the *difference between Augustine and Luther’s concept* of the sacraments more distinctly. Luther at first sight agrees to Augustine’s concept of the sacrament as consisting of word and visible element. But both differ essentially in how they understand Augustine’s sentence, “The word joins with the element and produces the sacrament.”³¹ For Augustine, the combination of word and element makes the sacrament *refer* to the eternal grace of God. The sacrament is a “visible word” in this referential sense. It is the faith of the person receiving the sacrament that *constitutes* this reference, that is, the connection between the visible sacrament and the invisible *res*.³² Still, the sacrament itself does not impart this invisible *res*. The imparting is done only by the work of inner (not the spoken!) word, the eternal Logos, in the heart of the believer.³³ Augus-

27 Martin Luther, “Defense and Explanation of All the Articles”, LW 32, 15 (“Grund und Ursach aller Artikel D. Martin Luthers, so durch römische Bulle unrechtlich verdammt sind (1521),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 7 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1897), 308–457, 323,3–7). Compare Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” LW 36, 66 (“De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium (1520),” WA 6, 532,36–533,1): “Thus it is not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone, but it is faith in that word of promise to which baptism is added. This faith justifies, and fulfills that which baptism signifies.”

28 Bryan D. Spinks, *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From Luther to Contemporary Practices* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 5.

29 Compare Martin Luther, “Large Catechism: Holy Baptism,” quoted from <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-6-baptism.php>, 52–56 (accessed on 6/22/2014); “Der Große Katechismus (1529),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30,I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 123–38, 218,24–219,2).

30 Compare Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 302.

31 Compare Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, “Zur Rezeption der Augustinischen Sakramentsformel ‘Accedit verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum’ in der Theologie Martin Luthers,” in *ZThK* 70 (1973): 50–76, 51.

32 Compare zur Mühlen, “Rezeption,” 51–52; Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, “Luthers Tauflehre und seine Stellung zu den Täufern,” in *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526 bis 1546*, vol. 1, ed. Helmar Junghans (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 119–38, 119.

33 Compare zur Mühlen, “Rezeption,” 52.

tine's understanding of the sacrament remains in the realm of a hermeneutics of significance.³⁴

For Luther instead, at least in his writings from 1520 on, it is *the sacrament* which *constitutes* faith of the person receiving the sacrament and which brings the eternal grace of God to the believer.³⁵ This is possible through the words, which join the elements of the sacraments. The words spoken in baptism and Eucharist are *performative words*, which realize what they promise.³⁶ Christ's commandment that instituted the sacrament makes us believe in the effectiveness of the sacrament. The word of the promise makes us effectively participate in the salvation, which is constituted by the same Christ. To sum up the Lutheran position: the sacrament is not simply referring to. It constitutes what it speaks of. It is a visible *promise*.³⁷

Although it is God who causes faith, it is at the same time the human being who believes in her heart. In faith, every human being is addressed as an individual, not as a member of a group or as the Heideggerian "Man." In faith, a human being is addressed as "I." I believe in the God who addresses me as her child. In Luther's words, "A Christian is a person to himself; he believes for himself and for no one else."³⁸ Only individual faith is strong enough in the hour of death,

When in the deathbed you would want to say: the pope said this, the council have decided this, the church fathers ... have determined that, then the devil very quickly will bore a whole and break in: what, if this was false? Could they not have erred? Thus you are already down.³⁹ ... Thus you have to know without any doubt that you can say: This is God's word on which I stand.⁴⁰

34 Compare zur Mühlen, "Rezeption," 51–52.

35 Compare with a quote from Martin Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods," LW 35, 49 ("Ein Sermon von dem hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen wahren Leichnams Christi und von den Brüderschaften (1519)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 2 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1884), 742–58, 742,7–14): "The first is the sacrament, or sign. The second is the significance of this sacrament. The third is the faith required with each of the first two. These three parts must be found in every sacrament. The sacrament must be external and visible, having some material form or appearance. The significance must be internal and spiritual, within the spirit of the person. Faith must make both of them together operative and useful."

36 Compare Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie*, 49.

37 Compare Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, "Taufe V. Reformationszeit," in Gerhard Müller, ed., *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Vol. 32, 701–10, 702; Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie*, 240.

38 Martin Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved," LW 46, 122 ("Ob Kriegsleute auch in seligem Stande sein können (1526)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 19 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1897), 616–62, 648,19–20).

39 Martin Luther, "Predigt am 8. Sonntage nach Trinitatis (1522)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 10,III (Weimar: Böhlau, 1905), 257–68; 259,12–16 (my translation).

40 Martin Luther, "Predigt am 8. Sonntage nach Trinitatis (1522)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 10,III (Weimar: Böhlau, 1905), 257–68, 259,17–18 (my translation).

The *materiality* of the sacraments becomes precisely relevant in this context of individuality and certainty, as we now will see.

The Role of the Elements for Faith – The Materiality of the Sacraments

General Aspects

If the word is so central and is God's means for causing faith, why then the sacraments; why then the necessity of a *visible* word? As already mentioned, historically, Luther developed his emphasis on the word in the context of his critique of the Roman Catholic concept of the sacrament. His emphasis on materiality and on the visible arose from his later debate with the Anabaptists and the Spiritualists. The Anabaptists argued that only someone who already believes could be baptized; consequently they did not accept the baptism of small children, as they cannot believe. The so-called Spiritualists rejected such external things as baptism in general, as God is spirit and does not need material things.⁴¹ One of their representatives, Karlstadt, judged, "... one has to eat Christ's flesh spiritually," and confessed; "I want to have the spirit as my witness, in my inside, of what Christ has promised."⁴²

Luther stressed instead that faith needs something to hang on to. Yes, God is invisible. But "enough is visible, which is told you in the ministry, in baptism, the Eucharist, the Absolution."⁴³ Faith clings to the external things. In a sermon from 1528 on Lk 1 (the pregnant Mary visits Elisabeth) Luther explains, "... God gives no article of faith which is not expressed in a bodily thing."⁴⁴ Thereby, Elisabeth "draws her faith from the *voice* of Mary and remains faithful in her

41 Compare Luther's reference to this position in "Der Große Katechismus (1529)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30,I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 123–238, 212,32–213,2. 213,33–214,6 (English version: <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-6-baptism.php>).

42 Compare zur Mühlen, "Rezeption," 63. The quotes are from Erich Hertzsch, ed., *Karlstadts Schriften aus den Jahren 1523–25*, Vol. 2 (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1957), 25,5; 18,30–31 (my translation). The external word as well for him is only a letter, but not spirit; compare zur Mühlen, "Rezeption," 63.

43 "Satis est visibilis, quod tecum loquitur in ministerio, baptismo, Eucharistia, Absolutione." Martin Luther, "Erste Predigt über die Taufe, gehalten am 2. Sonntag nach Epiphaniä (1538)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 46 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912), 145–51, 149,16–18.

44 Martin Luther, "Predigt am Tage Mariä Heimsuchung (1528)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 27 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1903), 233–36, 234,15–16 (my translation).

bodily person.”⁴⁵ So faith is both, “Faith represents some invisible thing and nevertheless sees it externally through the eyes.”⁴⁶

Why is the visible sign, the external element so important? I will give an account of several aspects here. The visible sign helps the believer to not speculate about God, his character and plans in phantasy, but to find him at a concrete place where he chose to be found. Human beings are not able to find God elsewhere. Through their own speculation they will never reach God.⁴⁷

This binding is not limited exclusively to the sacraments. Already the *external* (not the internal!) word *extra me*, which I can hear in the sermon or read in scripture, binds me and shows me where I can find God. God’s word is not some spiritual entity, but something *sensible* and *perceptible*. “... the entire Gospel is an external, verbal preaching.”⁴⁸ You can hear the word with your ears. It comes from the outside and thus breaks open the heart, which is curved in toward itself. Without this outer word, we would only listen to our sinful hearts. But words in principle are spoken to all. Sermons are directed to all who have ears to hear.⁴⁹ In the situation of doubts and temptation, there is no certainty that I am meant. Yet, the elements of the sacraments are given to the concrete individual, to the one child who is baptized, and the one adult who is eating the bread and drinking the wine with his or her own mouth. This *concreteness* strengthens my faith that *my* sins are forgiven.

Furthermore, also the *materiality* of the sacraments and the fact that it is the *body* of the believer on which the sacraments are performed or which participates in the sacraments help the believer to believe.⁵⁰ The sensorial nature of the sacraments is of great help for the believer who now can grasp the promise of God with his or her senses. Luther writes, “Yea, it shall and must be something external, that it may be apprehended by the senses, and understood and thereby be brought into the heart.”⁵¹ What the word is telling to the ears, the elements are telling to sight and the other senses, in baptism to touch, in the Lord’s Supper to smell and taste as well. Thus, word and material elements (interpreted by these

45 Martin Luther, “Predigt am Tage Mariä Heimsuchung (1528),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 27 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1903), 233–236, 234,18–19 (my translation).

46 Martin Luther, “Predigt am Tage Mariä Heimsuchung (1528),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 27 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1903), 233–36, 234,30–31 (my translation and emphasis).

47 Compare Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 279–80; Adam C. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 112–13.

48 Martin Luther, “The Large Catechism. Holy Baptism,” quoted from <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-6-baptism.php>, 30 (accessed on 6/23/2014); “Der Große Katechismus (1529),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30,I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 123–238, 215,35–6.

49 Compare to the following Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 299.

50 Compare Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 299.

51 Martin Luther, “The Large Catechism. Holy Baptism,” quoted from <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-6-baptism.php>, 30 (accessed on 6/23/2014); “Der Große Katechismus (1529),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30,” I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 123–238, 215,34–35).

words) do the same: they cause faith. They do the same, but in different ways.⁵² This is why the sacraments are “like a sign or seal of his words”,⁵³ “a visible sign of divine intent”.⁵⁴ They are “his word with a sign as with a seal” which “confirms” his word, “so that we do not doubt”.⁵⁵

Another aspect needs to be mentioned. The promise of the bodily sacrament includes also the body of the believer. It lends the believer certainty that the body will participate in eternal life also.⁵⁶ Luther explains this for baptism in this way,

It is promised me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body. For that is the reason why these two things are done in Baptism, namely, that the body, which can apprehend nothing but the water, is sprinkled, and, in addition, the word is spoken for the soul to apprehend. Now, since both, the water and the Word, are one Baptism, therefore body and soul must be saved and live forever: the soul through the Word which it believes, but the body because it is united with the soul and also apprehends Baptism as it is able to apprehend it.⁵⁷

Finally, the materiality and visibility of the sacraments show to the world where the Christians are – and where the heathens. They are public, visual rituals of Christianity.⁵⁸

At the end of the day, for Luther, the connection of the invisible and the visible, or of the spiritual and the material, has Christological reasons.⁵⁹ In Jesus

52 Compare Dorothea Wendebourg, “Taufe und Abendmahl,” in Albrecht Beutel, ed., *Luther Handbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 414–23, 414–15. Compare to the problem of a sacramental “proprium” in relation to the word: Wenz, *Einführung*, 47–51.

53 Martin Luther, “Defense and Explanation of All the Articles,” LW 32,15 (“Grund und Ursach aller Artikel D. Martin Luthers, so durch römische Bulle unrechtlich verdammt sind (1521),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 7 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1897), 308–457, 323,5).

54 Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Preparing to Die,” LW 42,108 (“Ein Sermon von der Bereitung zum Sterben (1519),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 2 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1884), 685–97, 692,37f.).

55 Martin Luther, “Sermon vom Auffahrttage (1522),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 10, III (Weimar: Böhlau, 1905), 133–47, 142,8–10 (my translation).

56 Compare Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 299.

57 Martin Luther, “The Large Catechism, Holy Baptism”, quoted from <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-6-baptism.php> (accessed on 6/23/2013); “Der Große Katechismus (1529),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30, I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 123–238, 217,28–35).

58 Compare Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 280. Luther is aware of the fact that this material dimension of faith sounds weird. But the only decisive thing is that Jesus Christ has installed the sacraments in that way. It may be that we doubt about the use of external things. However, as Christ has set up the sacraments, they cannot be useless or in vain. Compare Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 302.

59 Compare also Martin Luther, “Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments,” LW 40, 146 (“Wider die himmlischen Propheten, 2. Teil (1525),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 18 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1908), 134–214, 136,10–13): “Now when God sends forth his holy gospel he deals with us in a twofold manner, first outwardly, then inwardly. Outwardly he deals with us through the oral word of the gospel and through material signs,

Christ, we see a human being with our eyes, yet faith also comprehends the invisible God in him.⁶⁰ In the visible Jesus Christ, we see the invisible God through faith. Through Christ we understand, “God dealt with us physical beings physically.”⁶¹ Therefore, Luther calls Christ, similar to Augustine, the one sacrament.⁶² Let me finally direct your attention to the different materiality of the two sacraments.

The Materiality of the Water

First of all, the water is *creatura Dei*, created by God. In relation to the sacrament, God uses the creatureliness through his word.⁶³ Without the word, we would not understand the creature correctly.⁶⁴ Faith would not emerge.

Only against this background,⁶⁵ the special materiality of the *water* has a certain meaning. It shows what the word is saying.⁶⁶ The water is a sign for the washing away of sins. Of course it is not the water which washes away the sins. But

that is, baptism and the sacrament of the altar. Inwardly he deals with us through the Holy Spirit, faith, and other gifts.”

60 Martin Luther, “Predigt am Tage Mariä Heimsuchung (1528),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 27 (Weimar: Böhlau 1903), 233–36, 234,24; compare Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 274.

61 John W. Kleinig, “Where is your God? Luther on God’s Self-Localisation,” in *Perspectives on Luther: Papers from the Luther Symposium held at Luther Seminary Adelaide, South Australia, 22–23 March, 1996 Commemorating the 450th Anniversary of the Reformer’s Death*, ed. M.W. Worthing (North Adelaide: Faculty of Luther Campus, 1996), 91–103, 94, quoted from Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 113. Ulrich Asendorf explains: “Expressions like word event (Wortgeschehen) and speech event (Sprachereignis) because of their latent spiritualism are not very suitable to express Luther’s understanding,” Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 275 (my translation).

62 Compare Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 276.

63 Compare Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 288.

64 Compare Martin Luther, “Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6–8 (1530–2),” in LW 23, 123: “it was necessary for God to hide, cover and conceal Himself, thus enabling us to touch and apprehend Him. He must disguise Himself in flesh and blood, in the Word, in the external ministry, in Baptism, in the Sacrament and the Lord’s Supper, where He gives us His body in the bread and His blood in the wine, to eat and drink. He must conceal Himself in forms to which He adds His Word, in order that we may recognize Him.”

65 Compare, with reference to the Lord’s Supper, Edmund Schlink, *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften*, 3rd ed. (München: Kaiser, 1948), 217–18, who emphasizes that Lutheran theology “has no interest in showing any symbolic meaning which bread and wine may have as such, and through which bread and wine would already be distinguished from all other elements of this world” (my translation). Gunther Wenz adds: “The function of the element as sacramental sign is constituted by the word alone.” Wenz, *Einführung*, 37 (my translation).

66 Compare Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” LW 36, 67–69; “De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium (1520),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 6 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1888), 497–573, 531,26–30.

it is the water which in its special materiality depicts the washing away of sins through forgiveness.⁶⁷ This could not be expressed, for example, by eating an apple.

Furthermore, by being immersed in the water, the water is a sign of the person's death and rebirth with Christ.⁶⁸ Christ has touched the water with his body in his own baptism; therefore, the water is sanctified through Christ.⁶⁹ Consequently, Luther argues, "Thus faith clings to the water, and believes that it is baptism in which there is pure salvation and life ..."⁷⁰

But again, it is not the materiality as such that saves. On God's side, it is the Holy Spirit who is baptizing; the Holy Spirit is creating faith and the new human being in baptism.⁷¹ And only through God's word baptism is what it is,

From this now learn a proper understanding of the subject, and how to answer the question what Baptism is, namely thus, that it is not mere ordinary water, but water comprehended in God's Word and command, and sanctified thereby, so that it is nothing else than a divine water; not that the water in itself is nobler than other water, but that God's Word and command are added. ... all on account of the Word, which is a heavenly, holy Word, that no one can sufficiently extol, for it has, and is able to do, all that God is and can do.⁷²

On the human side, faith is necessary for receiving the saving effects of baptism,

[w]ithout faith they could not be apprehended. For by suffering the water to be poured upon you, you have not yet received Baptism in such a manner that it benefits you anything; but it becomes beneficial to you if you have yourself baptized with the thought that this is according to God's command and ordinance, and besides in God's name, ... Now, this the fist cannot do, nor the body; but the heart must believe it.⁷³

Faith as the necessary human response to the promise of baptism is not conceived as a single conversion experience. It instead means a new understanding of baptism again and again, an understanding of the promise of forgiveness of sins and of dying and rising again with Christ. Luther explains: "Sacramentally, you

67 Luther speaks also about being washed with Christ's blood in baptism; compare Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 289, 292–93).

68 Compare Wendebourg, "Taufe und Abendmahl," 416.

69 Compare Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 293.

70 Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism. Holy Baptism," quoted from <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-6-baptism.php>, 28 (accessed on 6/23/2014); "Der Große Katechismus (1529)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30, I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 123–238, 215,26–29.

71 Compare Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 289.

72 Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism. Holy Baptism," quoted from <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-6-baptism.php>, 17 (accessed on 6/23/2014); "Der Große Katechismus (1529)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30, I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 123–238, 214,10–13.

73 Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism. Holy Baptism," quoted from <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-6-baptism.php>, 35 (accessed on 6/23/2014); "Der Große Katechismus (1529)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30, I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 123–238, 216,26–31.

have been once baptized in the sacrament, but you need continually to be baptized by faith, continually to die and continually to live”.⁷⁴ In this sense, Luther reminds believers to remember their baptism every day⁷⁵ and in this God’s promise.⁷⁶

The Materiality of Bread and Wine

Luther emphasizes the materiality of the Lord’s Supper even stronger than the materiality of baptism because of his understanding of the presence of the *body and blood of Christ* in bread and wine. Luther is convinced that the human body and blood of Christ are *really* present in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. God himself is acting in the Lord’s Supper – namely, Jesus Christ through his *bodily* presence in the *materiality* of bread and wine.

In his early writings, Luther stressed the twofold materiality of bread and wine in comparison to the use of only the bread in the Catholic Church at that time. One of his arguments was, that *the flesh* of Christ present in the bread is that with which Christ did all his good deeds, but that it is *the blood* of Christ present in the wine that represents the suffering of Christ in which we participate as well.⁷⁷ The materiality of bread alone cannot represent both.

Luther’s main argument for Christ’s bodily presence in the Eucharist is again a word –namely, the word in which Christ instituted the Eucharist. Christ, pointing to the elements of bread and wine, said, “This is my body, this is my blood.” Luther’s “argument turns around the sheer power of the word, which does what it says. When we say the words over the bread, Christ is really present.”⁷⁸ Any intellectual argument against this word of God does not count for Luther. He confessed, “If he (God) should command me to eat dung, I would do it.”⁷⁹

74 Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” LW 36, 69; “De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium (1520),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 6 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1888), 497–573, 535,10–11.

75 Compare Martin Luther, “The Large Catechism: Holy Baptism,” quoted from <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-6-baptism.php>, 41 (accessed on 6/23/2014); “Der Große Katechismus (1529),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30, I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 123–238, 217,15–17.

76 This is the function of repentance. Compare Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” LW 36, 59; “De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium (1520),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 6 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1888), 497–573, 528,13–16.

77 See: Martin Luther, “The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods,” LW 35, 60; “Ein Sermon von dem hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen wahren Leichnams Christi und von den Bruderschaften (1519),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 2 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1884), 742–758, 749,18–22.

78 Gerrish, “Discerning the Body,” 380.

79 Compare Martin Luther, “The Marburg Colloquy and the Marburg Articles,” LW 38, 19; “Das

Different from the Catholic tradition, Luther did not argue for a so-called transsubstantiation. The idea of transsubstantiation uses the Aristotelian difference between accidents and substance. Substance is the essence of a thing; accident is the quality of it. For example, the substance of a table is that it is furniture you can sit and put things on. The accidents are that it can be out of wood, that it can be brown, and have four legs. Transsubstantiation means, when the priest speaks the words of institution, the substance of bread and wine changes – they essentially become the body and the blood of Christ –, but the accidents remain the same. They still taste and look like bread and wine.

Luther did not accept this theory for two reasons. On the one hand, he thought this is the attempt to theorize about the mystery of the presence of Christ. And on the other hand, he judged that the body and blood of Christ are present in bread and wine in the same manner as the divine nature of Christ is present in the human nature of Jesus, that is, without changing the original nature.⁸⁰ In Jesus Christ, the divine nature is present in a true human being, not in some superman, and so on. Analogically, the body and blood of Christ are present in real bread and real wine. Luther describes this presence with the formula “in, with and under.”⁸¹

How is this presence possible for Luther? Of course, the spiritual God can be present everywhere, but are not the body and blood of Jesus Christ aspects of Christ’s humanity – and humans can only be at a single place? Luther argues that the presence of the human nature of Christ is possible because of the strong and dense union of the divine and human nature in Christ.⁸² Luther assumes that they are bound together so closely in the one person Jesus Christ that their essential qualities are exchanged, for example, the divine nature of Christ becomes mortal, and the human nature of Christ gets the capability of being ubiquitous.⁸³

Marburger Gespräch und die Marburger Artikel (1529),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30, III (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 110–71, 116,27–8.

80 Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 318–19, with reference to Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity Of The Church”, LW 36, 35; “De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae prae-ludium (1520),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 6 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1888), 497–573, 511,20–21; 34–38.

81 Martin Luther, “Vom Abendmahl Christi: Bekenntnis (1528),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 26 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1909), 261–509, 447,21–22: “Christus spricht nicht: Das brod ist mein leib, Sondern ym brod, mit brod, unter brod ist mein leib ...”

82 Compare Martin Luther, “Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper,” LW 37, 214; “Vom Abendmahl Christi. Bekenntnis (1528),” 326,29–327,2.

83 Compare Martin Luther, “Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper,” LW 37, 218–19; “Vom Abendmahl Christi. Bekenntnis,” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 26 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1909), 261–509,321,19–26. Compare to the whole figure of the *communicatio idiomatum*: Johann Anselm Steiger, “Die *communicatio idiomatum* als Achse und Motor der Theologie Luthers: Der ‚fröhliche Wechsel‘ als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zu Abendmahlslehre, Anthropologie, Seelsorge, Naturtheologie, Rhetorik und Humor,” in *NZStH* 38 (1996), 1–28.

In Luther's understanding, the bodily presence of Christ in bread and wine is received by both the believers as well as the non-believers. Christ's presence is constituted by God's word, not by the faith of those participating in the Eucharist. But Christ's presence leads to forgiveness of sins and salvation only for those who believe that Christ is present and that his promise is true.⁸⁴

In his early writings, Luther did not formulate that the believer in fact is eating the body and blood of Christ. Body and blood are present in bread and wine, yet basically as signs for Christ's sacrifice. Their presence ensures the promise of the forgiveness of sins.⁸⁵ The presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper is the seal for the forgiveness of sins, and Christ causes this forgiveness. The word "brings with it everything of which it speaks, namely, Christ with his flesh and blood and everything that he is and has."⁸⁶ This is why faith in the forgiveness of sins is caused and strengthened through the Lord's Supper.

But in the conflict with reformed theologians, Luther put emphasis on the real presence of the *whole* Christ in the Lord's Supper. Because of the relevance of Christ having become human, the bodily presence of his human nature in the Lord's Supper is relevant as well.⁸⁷ Luther spoke quite drastically here and emphasized the saving dimension of *bodily* eating the body of Christ,⁸⁸ we "embody Christ in us (*leiben Christum ynn uns*) and he embodies himself in us. I am savoring Christ."⁸⁹ I am eating Christ, and Christ is eating my evil.⁹⁰ When I am eating Christ I am becoming part of him; Luther can say, I become one cake with him.⁹¹ In eating the Lord's body and drinking his blood, Christ and I are "baked into each other" so that my sins and my death become his and his justice and life become mine.⁹² In the Lord's Supper, God und human beings have a bodily encounter. In the Lord's Supper, Christ "is just as near to us physically as he was

84 Compare Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism. The Sacrament of the Altar," quoted from <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-6-baptism.php>, 33–35 (accessed on 6/24/2014); "Der Große Katechismus (1529)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30, I (Weimar: Böhlau, 1910), 123–238, 226,24–32.

85 Compare Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 321.

86 Martin Luther, "The Adoration of the Sacrament," LW 37, 278; "Vom Anbeten des Sakraments des heiligen Leichnams Christi (1523)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 11 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1900), 431–56, 433,27–28.

87 Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 332, and the references there.

88 Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 338, who speaks of: "a particular effect of salvation regarding the physical eating of Christ's physis" (my translation).

89 Martin Luther, "Katechismuspredigten. Erste Reihe (1528)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 30, I (Weimar: Böhlau: 1910), 2–27, 27,67 (my translation).

90 Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 296.

91 Martin Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods," LW 35, 58; "Ein Sermon von dem hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen wahren Leichnams Christi und von den Bruderschaften (1519)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 2 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1884), 742–58, 748,14–18.

92 Compare Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 303.

to them (the people of his time).⁹³ Luther even wrote almost brutally in his controversy with Zwingli that when taking the elements in the Eucharist, I am crunching the body of Christ with my teeth.⁹⁴

Again, it is not the eating and drinking as such that is useful, it is the eating and drinking in faith. Yet, this bodily eating when it is done in the spiritual attitude of faith *literally* has an effect on our body,

So, when we eat Christ's flesh physically and spiritually (leiblich und geistlich), the food is so powerful that it transforms us into itself and out of fleshly, sinful, mortal men makes spiritual, holy, living men.⁹⁵

This is a transformation also of the body. Now the body can live eternally because the body has eaten this special meal.

Luther explains, "But the soul sees and clearly understands that the body will live eternally because it has partaken of an eternal food which will not leave it to decay in the grave and turn to dust."⁹⁶ Christ gives us "his own body as nourishment, in order that with such a pledge he may assure and promise us that our body too shall live forever, because it partakes here on earth of an everlasting and living food."⁹⁷ As Christ's body becomes part of my body in the Lord's Supper and thus my body part of his body, my body will also participate in the resurrection of his body.⁹⁸ This is the case because "Christ's body is not like beef or the flesh of a

93 Martin Luther: "That these Words of Christ, 'This is My Body,' etc., Still Stand Firm against the Fanatics," LW 37, 94; "Daß diese Wort Christi 'Das ist mein Leib' noch fest stehen wider die Schwärmgeister (1527)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 23 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1901), 64–283, 193,8–11; see also Christoph Henschen, *Erniedrigung Gottes und des Menschen Erhöhung: Eine systematisch-theologische Studie zu Luthers Abendmahlslehre nach der Schrift Daß dieses Wort Christi, 'Das ist mein Leib' noch fest stehen – 1527* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010), 166.

94 Compare Volker Leppin, *Martin Luther* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 286.

95 Martin Luther, "That These Words of Christ," LW 37, 101. Luther also describes these twofold, spiritual and material eating with the different tasks of mouth and heart when participating in the Eucharist, compare Henschen, *Erniedrigung Gottes*, 173–76. Here we might see the decisive difference between Luther and Zwingli. Zwingli insists on Jn 6,63: "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless." But this is not meant as some idealistic approach. Zwingli relates the article "the" of the flesh to the body of Christ. Christ himself is saying here that it is absurd to believe in the saving power of bodily eating his flesh; it is only the death of Christ, which saves us. Zwingli therefore assumes a spiritual real presence of Christ. Compare Johannes Voigtländer, *Ein Fest der Befreiung: Huldrych Zwinglis Abendmahlslehre* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlagshaus, 2013), 123, 148, 109.

96 Martin Luther, "That these Words of Christ," LW 37, 93–94; "Daß diese Wort Christi 'Das ist mein Leib' noch fest stehen wider die Schwärmgeister (1527)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 23 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1901), 64–283, 191,25–27.

97 Martin Luther, "That These Words of Christ," LW 37, 71; "Daß diese Wort Christi 'Das ist mein Leib' noch fest stehen wider die Schwärmgeister (1527)," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 23 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1901), 64–283, 155,36–156,2.

98 Compare Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 304; Henschen, *Erniedrigung Gottes*, 277.

cow, but is body and blood which is full of God, which is made divine through and through” (*durchgöttert*).⁹⁹

As a conclusion, we can say that for Luther, the humanistic assumption that spirit and material are to be strongly distinguished is not acceptable.¹⁰⁰ The Christian existence is both, spiritual and material.¹⁰¹ And God does not encounter us only in spiritual realities, he has become human, he has entered history, he has become material too. This is the honor of God, “... the glory of our God is precisely that for our sakes he comes down to the very depths, into human flesh, into the bread, into our mouth, our heart, our bosom.”¹⁰²

99 Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 298.

100 Leppin, *Martin Luther*, 286.

101 Compare Martin Luther, “Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper,” LW 37, 199; “Vom Abendmahl Christi. Bekenntnis (1528),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 26 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1909), 261–509, 306,19–28.

102 Martin Luther, “That These Words of Christ,” LW 37, 72; “Daß diese Wort Christi ‘Das ist mein Leib’ noch fest stehen wider die Schwärmgeister (1527),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 23 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1901), 64–283, 157,30.