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Foreword

By: Pres. Wilhelm Petersen

This issue of the *Quarterly* continues with Pastor Gaylin Schmeling's thesis on "The Lord's Supper in Augustine and Chemnitz." The December 1993 edition focused on Augustine and his doctrine of the Lord's Supper and this issue continues with Chemnitz and his theology.

The author begins with brief, yet interesting, information on the life and activities of Chemnitz and then proceeds to analyze his theology of the Lord's Supper. The article points out that even though Augustine and Chemnitz were separated by more than a thousand years, separated both in culture and in race, one a North African and the other a Saxon German, yet both confess the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper. Pastor Schmeling also points out some of the differences between these two fine theologians.

Also included is an interesting article by Pastor Paul Johnston on "The Theology of Death in the Writings of St. Ambrose." He examines what Ambrose believed concerning death in some of his writings, mostly sermons that he delivered. Our readers will appreciate the many positive things that he says about the death of a believer in Christ. Pastors will find some very helpful material for funeral sermons.

Pastor Johnston concludes by saying "that, for Ambrose, physical death is not something for the Christian to fear. Christ is the very Champion over death's powers and its ability to separate man from God. Death for the believer is sent from God as a remedy for his sufferings on earth, as a blessing instead of a punishment."

We conclude by wishing our readers a pleasant and relaxing summer as they go about their various duties!

Chemnitz and the Lord's Supper

By: Pastor Gaylin Schmeling, STM

The Life of Martin Chemnitz, the Superintendent of Braunschweig (1522-1586, Si Martinus non fuisset, Martinus vix stetisset)

• Chemnitz' Early Life.

The name Martin Chemnitz is one largely buried in antiquity. With the exception of a few Lutherans who remember him in connection with the composition of the *Formula of Concord* (1577 AD), Chemnitz is one of history's forgotten men. Yet, he was the leading light in Lutheranism after Luther, so much so that the seventeenth century had this saying: "If the second Martin (Chemnitz) had not come, the first Martin (Luther) would scarcely have stood."¹ This is not to say that he was the only figure of any importance in the generation following Luther. But, of the sixteenth century Lutheran theologians (Andreae, Selnecker, Chytraeus, and others) who transmitted the treasures of the Lutheran Reformation to succeeding generations, Chemnitz was the greatest. He, more than any other, was the bridge and link between Luther and third generation Lutherans, the dogmaticians of the seventeenth century. Chemnitz was not a creative spirit, but he put the theological inheritance which he received from Luther and Melancthon into a logical and systematic form for future generations.

Martin Chemnitz was born November 9, 1522, in Treuenbrietzen, Germany, a small town located fifteen miles northeast of Wittenberg. His father, Paul, was a wool merchant who died when Martin was eleven years old. The local schoolmaster, Laurentius Barthold, recognized him as a lad with superior gifts and persuaded his mother to send him to Latin school in Wittenberg. Because of financial difficulties, he had to discontinue his education for a time, but later with the help of two prominent citizens of Magdeburg, he continued his studies in the same city from 1539 to 1542. After some

¹ *Si Martinus non fuisset, Martinus vix stetisset*

additional studies at the University of Frankfurt on the Oder, Chemnitz returned to Wittenburg in 1545. There he studied at the feet of Melancthon and established a longtime friendship with him. As a bonus he heard Luther lecture and preach, but by his own admission he “did not hear him with due attention then” (Graebner, 479). It was later that he came to treasure the seminal writings of Martin Luther.

- **Chemnitz the Librarian at Koenigsberg**

When the Smalcald War disrupted the University of Wittenberg temporarily, Chemnitz in 1547 sought the more peaceful atmosphere far to the north at Koenigsberg in East Prussia. As the rector of the city's Kneiphof school, he received his master's degree in 1548 at the newly established University of Koenigsberg. Later he attained the position of librarian at the ducal library of Koenigsberg. Here he had the opportunity to do a considerable amount of study which prepared him for his future as one of the greatest theologians of the age. Chemnitz was very much a self-taught doctor of the church.

With the outbreak of the Osiandrian controversy in Koenigsberg, Chemnitz found himself at odds with Duke Albert of Prussia. Andrew Osiander, the Duke's favorite, advocated a doctrine of justification which stated that the sinner is justified, not by imputed, but by essential righteousness. God does not declare the sinner just, but makes him just; does not impute Christ's obedience and righteousness to the sinner, but has Christ Himself dwell in the sinner for his justification. This view was sharply resisted by Chemnitz and his friend Moerlin. The Duke did not dismiss Chemnitz because he needed his expertise as an astrologer. Chemnitz, however, decided himself not to remain in the hostile atmosphere of Prussia, especially since his friend Joachim Moerlin had been banished by the Duke.

- **Chemnitz the Superintendent**

After Moerlin's flight from East Prussia he was called as superintendent at Braunschweig. At his urging, Chemnitz accepted the duties of preacher and coadjutor in Braunschweig. On November 25, 1554, John Bugenhagen, the original developer of the

Reformation in Braunschweig, ordained Chemnitz into the holy ministry. In 1555 he married Anna Jaeger, the daughter of a licensed jurist, and to this union ten children were born.

In 1561 Chemnitz became involved in the Hardenberg case. Hardenberg was a preacher at the cathedral in Bremen, where he held to views concerning the Lord's Supper that were considered to be Calvinistic. At a meeting held in Braunschweig, Hardenberg was declared to be a despiser of the Augsburg Confession and a Sacramentarian. That same year Chemnitz' first theological publication appeared, a lengthy treatise on the Lord's Supper in reaction to Hardenberg. What Chemnitz found particularly disturbing was the dishonesty in the word-games played by the Crypto-Calvinists. Rather than being straightforward as the Zwinglians had been, the Crypto-Calvinists were concealing their error with deceptive words. Chemnitz emphasized the interpretation of the Words of Institution and the importance of distinguishing between questions having to do with the substance and essence of the Supper, and those dealing only with its power and effect. The Calvinists were more interested in the later, and this he found to be the great weakness in their approach (Jungkuntz, 54).

In 1567 and 1568 Chemnitz reaped the fruits of his long years of self-preparation, for in 1567 he was appointed superintendent of Braunschweig when Moerlin became bishop of Koenigsberg, and the following year he took his doctorate in theology at the University of Rostock. He faithfully served the church in Braunschweig as superintendent. An important vehicle in developing the confessional consciousness of both the laity and the clergy was the publication in 1569 of his *Enchiridion* which was used in the preparation of the clergy for examinations by the superintendent and for the examination of candidates for ordination.

• Chemnitz the Theologian and Concordist

A short writing by Chemnitz against the new Jesuit order brought him into conflict first with Johannes Alber of Cologne, and then with a more formidable foe, Jacob Payva de Andrada. In answer to Andrada and his defense of the Council of Trent, Chemnitz

analyzed the Council in four books, demonstrating with exhaustive evidence from Scripture and from the ancient teachers of the church, where the Council of Trent had departed from the teaching of Scripture. In his *Examen* Chemnitz, following Luther, helped the church to see the difference between justification itself and the fruits of justification. He distinguished clearly between the righteousness which is ours by imputation unto faith, i.e., forensic righteousness and the righteousness that is worked in us gradually as a result of faith, that is, that which belongs to sanctification. Werner Elert writes, "As Martin Chemnitz showed in his critique of the Trent dogma, this concept made it impossible to bridge the opposition" (Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 1, 73). There was an irreconcilable difference between the Lutherans and Rome concerning the central article of the faith. The first volume of the *Examen* which appeared in 1565 covered the chief articles of the Christian faith. In the remaining three volumes he treated the Sacraments and the abuses in the Roman Church which the Council of Trent sought to defend.

Chemnitz is known predominantly for the role which he played during the dissension that arose after Luther's death. After Luther's death, Melancthon was looked upon as the leading theologian in the Lutheran Church, but he was unable to give strong direction. Melancthon did not have leadership qualities. He tended to vacillate on important doctrinal issues. As a result of this, opposing parties like the Gnesio-Lutherans, who believed they were upholding Luther's doctrine, and the Philippists, who accepted Melancthon's compromises, arose in the Lutheran Church. It was Chemnitz, more than anyone else, who was the guiding force behind the *Formula of Concord* which settled these doctrinal controversies. He was instrumental in putting together this document which was signed by three electors, twenty dukes and princes, many lesser nobles, thirty-five imperial cities, and about 8,000 pastors and teachers. Chemnitz was irenic, yet firm. He did not engage in name calling but focused on the issues, and as a result brought concord out of dissension.

Chemnitz was a prolific writer. Besides the *Formula*, the *Examen*, and the *Enchiridion*, Chemnitz wrote the *De Duabus Naturis*, a learned study of the two natures in Christ; the *Loci Theologici*, lectures on the *Loci Communes* of Melancthon; the *De Coena Domini*, his main work on the Lord's Supper; the *Harmonia Evangelica*, a harmony of the four Gospels; the *Postilla*, his sermons; and the *Apologia*, a defense of the *Formula of Concord* which he authored together with Kirchner and Selnecker.

Throughout his life Chemnitz enjoyed excellent health, which allowed him to do an amazing amount of scholarly work. But by 1582, though only sixty years old, he suffered from what we would today call "burn-out." In 1584 he resigned from his office as superintendent. On April 6, 1586 he died a faithful confessor of the church.

The Biblical Foundation of the Lord's Supper

- **The Words of Institution are the Proper Foundation for the**

God's Old Testament people. This meal not only pointed back to God's deliverance in Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb, but it also pointed forward to the blood of the true Lamb of God who would redeem all men on the cross. In this meal where Old Testament believers ate the flesh of the Passover lamb which was to picture for them the true Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world, Jesus, the very Lamb of God, gave New Testament believers not only a picture of His flesh and blood with bread and wine, but He gave them His true body and blood, therein He bestowed upon them all the blessings of the cross.

According to Chemnitz, Jesus took ordinary, common bread from the table for His institution (LS, 95). Therefore unleavened bread was used, for only unleavened bread was allowed in the Passover. Jesus took bread and gave thanks or blessed it. Both the giving thanks and the blessing refer to the same act of our Lord. Chemnitz writes concerning this blessing:

Mark uses the word "to bless — εὐλογεῖν" because it points to the special power of the divine Word.

Supper

Chemnitz' doctrine of the Lord's Supper has its foundation in the Words of Institution. Just as all dogmas of the church have their foundation in definite passages of Scripture where they are clearly treated and explained (*sedes doctrinae*), so the proper foundation for the doctrine of the Supper is to be found in the *Verba*. Chemnitz chides all those who want to find a basis for the Sacrament outside the Words of Institution or who refuse to make the *Verba* normative in the study of the Supper. He agrees with Cyprian who says concerning the Sacrament, "We ought not to give heed to what someone before us thought should be done, but to what He, who is before all, did first" (*Ex*, 2, 312).

Because the Words of Institution are so important for Chemnitz, he does a careful exegesis of each account of the institution: Chemnitz sees the Lord's Supper in the context of the Passover meal (*LS*, 109). As our Lord and His disciples gathered that first Maundy Thursday evening, they came together to celebrate no ordinary meal. This was the Passover, the most solemn meal for

five loaves which were multiplied... Therefore, because the bread of the Supper received this designation from God by the divine power of the Word of Christ whereby it is the body of Christ and the wine is the blood of Christ, Mark uses the word "to bless" in order to show that it is the same power and has the same meaning in this passage as does the word "to thank — εὐχαριστήν" (*LS*, 104).

After our Lord blessed the bread, He broke it (ἐκλάσεν). This breaking was of practical necessity because of the size of the loaves. Chemnitz sees no liturgical or spiritual significance in the breaking of the bread. The loaves had to be broken into fragments to be eaten, even as one would slice a loaf of bread today. The breaking was for the purpose of distribution. In fact, the breaking may be synonymous with the distribution as the word *shabar* is sometimes used in Hebrew (*LS*, 123). This blessed and broken bread Jesus gave to His disciples saying, "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you." The demonstrative pronoun "this — τούτο" according to Chemnitz, points out what is distributed, received, and eaten in the Lord's Supper, contrary to Carlstadt who said that

“this” refers not to the bread our Lord had in His hand, but to His body seated at the table. The word “is — ἔστιν” can be understood in no other way than “is.” It cannot mean “This is a picture of My body” nor “This only represents My body.” Rather, it means “This is My body.” Likewise, there is no figure in the word “body — σῶμα.” It is His natural body born of Mary that would die on the cross and rise again (*LS*, 154). In summary Chemnitz writes concerning the bread words of our Lord:

Moreover, concerning that bread which becomes the Eucharist or the blessing in the Lord's Supper and is distributed, received, and eaten, if the question is asked what it is, the Son of God has affirmed with a clear declaration that it is His body... Therefore it is not merely bread which after the giving of thanks is distributed to those who eat the Lord's Supper and is received orally, but at the same time the body of Christ is distributed and received to be eaten (*LS*, 96).

The Words of Institution continue: “In the same way also, the cup after supper.” The words “after supper” indicate, according to Chemnitz, that the Lord Jesus instituted His New Testament meal of salvation after they had completed the Passover meal with its paschal lamb (*LS*, 108f). Jesus took the third cup of the Passover, which was a cup of wine, for only wine was used in the Passover. He blessed it even as He had blessed the bread and gave it to them saying, “This is the new testament (covenant, διαθήκη) in My blood which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Chemnitz states that these words of explanation concerning the cup, which is Christ's true blood, allude to the ratification of the first covenant in Exodus 24. As the old covenant was sealed by animal blood sprinkled on the people picturing the blood of Christ, so the new covenant is sealed by the very blood of Christ through which we receive all the blessings of salvation. Real blood ratified the old covenant and the people were given that real blood in testimony of the fact that they received the blessing of the sacrifice. Likewise real blood ratified the new covenant and God's people are still given that real blood of the true Lamb of God so that they are certain that the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice apply to them (*LS*, 100ff). The Words of Institution summarize the blessings of the

Sacrament with the phrase “for the forgiveness of sins” which indicates that the whole treasure house of salvation is offered in the Supper as Chemnitz points out in the *Examen*:

It is a very sweet promise which is joined to the communion of the cup by the voice of the Son of God: “Drink of this all of you; this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins.” The New Testament includes the grace of God, reconciliation, forgiveness of sins, adoption, etc., according to the statement of Jeremiah (Chr 31:31ff; *Ex*, 2, 347).

Jesus concluded His institution with the command, “Do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me.” A similar command had already been given concerning His body. These words explain that this institution was not meant only as a one-time occurrence in the past. It is to be repeated until Christ comes again in glory. (1Co 11:26) Each time Christians celebrate this Supper they bring Christ's great sacrifice into remembrance and receive the treasure of that sacrifice, the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

When Christ said, “Do this in remembrance of Me,” He commanded Christians to continue this institution. What is necessary for a valid Lord's Supper celebration? Jesus said, “Do this,” do what I have done. One is to take bread and wine, bless them with Christ's almighty Words of consecration “This is My body, This is My blood” which effects the presence, and distribute His true body and blood.

But the command of Christ, “Do this,” which comprehends the whole action or administration of this sacrament (namely, that in a Christian assembly we take bread and wine, consecrate it, distribute it, receive it, eat and drink it, and therewith proclaim the Lord's death), must be kept integrally and inviolately, just as St. Paul sets the whole action of the breaking of bread, or of the distribution and reception, before our eyes in 1 Corinthians 10:16 (*FC SD*, §7 [82], Tappert 584).

”This Do” includes the entire action of the Sacrament: consecration, distribution and reception (*LS*, 186).

• The Words of Institution are Christ's Last Will and Testament

The fact that the *Verba* are Christ's last will and testament is of extreme importance to Chemnitz because this indicates that these words must be interpreted literally.

When the last will and testament of a man has been executed, we are required under the law to observe the words with special care so that nothing be done which is either beside or contrary to the final will of the testator ... Now, because the Son of God in His last will and testament has not permitted His heirs the liberty of believing or doing whatever seems good to them, but has willed that we believe what He has spoken in His words of institution and do what He has commanded, therefore we should give very careful thought that we do not thrust anything upon these words of the last will and testament of the Son of God, lest we deprive ourselves of the benefit of eternal happiness conveyed to us by His will or our inheritance itself be taken from us as being unworthy because we have departed from the will of the Testator as it has been given to us in the words of His last testament (LS, 27).

If the words of a human will cannot be changed or modified but must be taken literally, how much more shouldn't the last will and testament of God's Son be followed carefully and understood literally?

The fact that Christ's last will and testament is to be taken literally is used by Chemnitz as he contends with his adversaries on both sides of the issue of the Lord's Supper. He opposes the Sacramentarians who refuse to take the *Verba* literally saying that the bread only represents the Lord's body. He takes the same position over against the Roman Church when it argues that Christ's body and blood are present apart from the divinely instituted use or action. Also, because the Sacrament is the last will and testament of Christ, it is a gift or inheritance for God's people and not a sacrifice of Christ's body and blood offered to the Father in the Supper.

• Other Scriptural Testimony

While the biblical foundation for the Sacrament is to be found in the Words of Institution as they are recorded by the holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul the Apostle, for Chemnitz another portion of Scripture which is important in this study is 1 Corinthians 10:16-17: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not

the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body for we all partake of the one bread.” St. Paul says that the cup and the bread are communion in the body and blood of Christ. Chemnitz understands the word “communion — κοινωνία” to mean a sharing in, a participation in, or a partaking of Christ’s body and blood (*LS*, 40). It is the very same body which came forth from the Virgin Mary’s womb and died on the cross, the very same blood with which He washed away the sins of the world.

When St. Paul speaks of “the cup of blessing which we bless — τό ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν” “he is referring to and expressing the words in the institution: ‘He took bread and likewise the cup and blessed it or gave thanks’” (*LS*, 139). This cup of Christ’s institution is a cup which the church is to bless. It is Christ’s commanded blessing which causes Jesus’ body and blood to be present. Since the Lord has commanded that the bread and wine be blessed in order to have a valid Sacrament, what is the blessing that the Lord desired His church to use? In close proximity to this Scripture where St. Paul particularly asserts that Christ’s followers bless, he also gives the church a word of the Lord in liturgical form concerning the Lord’s Supper, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed, etc.” (1Co 11:23). These words which Christ gave to St. Paul He wanted delivered to the church for the celebration of the Supper as Chemnitz confesses with the other writers of the *Formula of Concord*, which says, “... ‘The cup of blessing which we bless’ which happens precisely through the repetition and recitation of the words of institution” (*FC SD*, §7 [82], Tappert 584).

According to Chemnitz this text from 1 Corinthians 10 speaks not only of the blessing of the Supper, but also of the other commanded actions of the imperative “Do this” in the Words of Institution. “For these words in the institution refer both to the distribution and reception, which Paul in this passage covers with the words ‘breaking’ and ‘communion’” (*LS*, 140). All three parts

of the sacramental action (consecration, distribution, reception) must occur to have a valid Sacrament.

Another section of Scripture often referred to in the study of the Lord's Supper is John 6. The Sacramentarians of Chemnitz' day held that the Words of Institution must be interpreted in the light of John 6. Since the eating of John 6 refers to spiritual eating by faith and John 6:63 indicates that "the flesh profits nothing," the Sacramentarians maintained that the only eating of Christ's body in the Lord's Supper was a spiritual eating and not a sacramental eating with the mouth.

In response to this argument, Chemnitz agrees that John 6 refers to spiritual eating, but as a result of this he holds that it does not specifically speak to the Lord's Supper. The eating and drinking in John 6 refer to the eating and drinking which a believer does by faith through the means of grace, receiving all the blessings of Christ's body and blood offered up for salvation (*Ex*, 2, 326). John 6 does not specifically apply to the Lord's Supper because here the eating and drinking are figurative, while in the Words of Institution the eating and drinking are literal. If John 6 is to interpret the *Verba* implying that the eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood is figurative, then the eating and drinking of the bread and wine can also be figurative and the whole Dominical directive is abrogated (*Ex*, 2, 410; *LS*, 238). The second reason that Chemnitz rejects this argument of the Sacramentarians is that the sermon recorded in John 6 occurred a year before the institution of the Supper. Therefore, the sermon in John 6 cannot apply to the dogma of the Sacrament (*LS*, 236). The third and most important reason Chemnitz rejects this argument is because the eating in John 6 always results in salvation (Joh 6:51), while in the Lord's Supper many eat judgment to themselves (*Ex*, 2, 326f, *LS*, 238).

At the same time, Chemnitz maintains that there is a definite connection between the Words of Institution and John 6. John 6 speaks of the spiritual eating that is necessary for worthy participation in the Holy Supper. All communicants, both the worthy and unworthy, eat sacramentally with the mouth the very body and

blood of Christ born of the Virgin, but only those who eat spiritually through true repentance and faith receive all the wonderful blessings offered through that body and blood. Thus, John 6 applies to worthy participation in the Sacrament, and in this sense speaks to the Supper (*Ex* 2, 326f; 2, 410; *LS* 239). In summary, Chemnitz confesses with the other writers of the *Formula* concerning these two kinds of eating and the connection between John 6 and the Words of Institution:

There is therefore a twofold eating of the flesh of Christ. The one is spiritual, of which Christ speaks chiefly in John 6:48-58. This occurs, in no other way than with the spirit and faith, in the preaching and contemplation of the Gospel as well as in the Lord's Supper. It is intrinsically useful, salutary, and necessary to salvation for all Christians at all times. Without this spiritual participation, even the sacramental or oral eating in the Supper is not only not salutary but actually pernicious and damning (*FC SD*, §7 [61], Tappert 580f).

The Essence of the Lord's Supper

- **The Earthly and Heavenly Elements in the Sacrament**

Following the Ancient Church beginning with Irenaeus, Chemnitz speaks of the Sacrament as consisting of both the earthly and heavenly elements (Ireneaus, 4, 18, 5). The earthly elements are bread from grain and wine from grapes. The heavenly elements are body and blood of Christ born of Mary, crucified and raised again (*LS*, 46).

We grant, with Irenaeus, that after the blessing in the Eucharist the bread is no longer common bread but the Eucharist of the body of Christ, which now consists of two things — the earthly, that is, bread and wine, and the heavenly, that is, the body and blood of Christ. **This is certainly a great, miraculous, and truly divine change**, since before it was simply only ordinary bread and common wine. What now, after the blessing, is truly and substantially present, offered, and received is truly and substantially the body and blood of Christ. Therefore we grant that **a certain change takes place**, so that it can truly be said of the bread that it is the body of Christ. But we deny that it follows from this that we must therefore assert the kind of transubstantiation which the papalists teach (*Ex*, 2, 257f).

Chemnitz maintains the doctrine of the real presence and is utterly realistic in expressing it. In his *Apologia* written in defense of the *Formula of Concord*, he quotes the beautiful words of Chrysostom:

That which is present in the cup is indeed the very thing which flowed from the side of Christ and that is what we receive. That we also confess and teach (Chrysost: 1Co 11. *Hoc, quod in poculo adest, illud est, quod ex latere Christi fluxit, et illud participamus. Das so im Kelch gegenwertig ist/ist eben dasselbig so auss der Seiten Christi geflossen ist/und das empfahren wir. Das bekennen und lehren wir auch*) (Chemnitz, Kirchner, and Selnecker, 4, 196).²

Chemnitz uses the word “change” to explain that the bread and the wine through the consecration are the body and blood of Christ. The bread and wine are not changed into the body and blood of Christ. He does not accept the doctrine of transubstantiation as defined by Thomas Aquinas (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3, 75, 5ff). Rather, the bread and wine are so intimately united with His body and blood that Jesus can say that the bread and wine are His body and blood. It is not a change in substance, but a change created by union, the sacramental union of two substances.

- **The Connection Between the Earthly and Heavenly Elements in the Sacrament**

Chemnitz' **doctrine of the Holy Supper is incarnational** as is all of His theology. In this he follows the tradition of the Ancient Church. In the incarnation Christ took upon Himself our dying flesh so that, through unity with His divinity, He might conquer sin, death, and all our foes in that flesh and raise us to His divine life, as the sons of God with an eternal existence. He partook in our suffering, death, and hell so that we may partake in His glory, life, and

² When the *Formula of Concord* appeared in print it was so severely attacked that the Elector commissioned Chemnitz, Selnecker, and Kirchner to write a defense of the document. This defense, the *Apologia*, was written in 1584. Because the *Apologia* was produced by the authors of the *Formula*, its value cannot be overestimated as a commentary and explanation of the *Formula* and Article VII. This edition of the *Apologia* is to be found in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library at Mequon, Wisconsin.

heaven — a wonderful exchange. (*Der fröhliche Wechsel*) The one who became incarnate in the Virgin Mary's womb for salvation is now incarnate in the Sacrament offering the treasure of salvation to all. The Word, who became flesh, is now present with His flesh in the Supper, which is the source of eternal life. Quoting Chrysostom, Chemnitz writes, "The table of the Lord takes the place of the manger, for in it lies the body of the Lord, not indeed wrapped in swaddling clothes but clothed with the Holy Spirit" (*LS*, 155; Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, 55; Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, 122).

With this incarnational concept of the Supper, Chemnitz as the fathers, John of Damascus for instance, compares the union between the earthly and heavenly in the Sacrament with the personal union in Christ (John of Damascus, 4, 13). According to the hypostatic or personal union the Divine *Logos*, who is the only begotten of the Father before all worlds, assumed human nature into His divine person. The personal union is a union of the divine and human subsisting in the one hypostasis or person of the Son of God. Here the divine and human form one undivided person in Christ. Similarly, in the Sacrament there is a union where the bread and the wine are united with the flesh and blood of the Divine *Logos*.

The particular character of this Sacrament requires that there be two distinct things or substances which, joined by sacramental union, make one complete Sacrament, even as in the one person of Christ there are two complete and distinct natures. For all antiquity uses this comparison. But Paul mentions bread and wine also after the blessing, 1Co 10:16; 11:27. Likewise the fathers also taught the same. In order to testify that they do not approve the papistic transubstantiation, they also usually used these terms, namely that in, with, and under the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ are present, offered, and received (*MWS*, 120f; *LS* 153f; *FC SD*, §7 [37f], Tappert 575f).

In the Supper there is both the earthly and the heavenly reality. One does not receive merely bread and wine as the Sacramentarians teach, nor does one receive only body and blood as Rome teaches. Rather, both the bread and wine and body and blood are received through the sacramental union. To put this in christological terms, Rome tends toward "Eutychianism" by saying the bread and wine

are transformed into Christ's body and blood, while the Sacramentarians tend toward "Nestorianism" in that the body and blood are so separate from the bread and the wine, that they are not received with the bread and the wine. The doctrine of Chemnitz is incarnational, a "Chalcedonian" approach to the Sacrament which distinguishes between the bread and wine and body and blood, but still holds them inseparably connected. It seems that both of Chemnitz' opponents in this conflict could not accept this intimate connection between the earthly and heavenly because they held that the finite is not capable of containing the infinite — *Finitum non capax infiniti*.

Chemnitz teaches that the living and whole body of Christ is in the bread (*Ex*, 2, 343). Yet, he rejects the Roman teaching of concomitance as a defense for distributing only the body of Christ to the communicants (*Ex*, 2, 429). In his *Enchiridion* Chemnitz recognizes that the body of the living Christ is not without blood, but this does not give license to distribute under one kind.

But the body of Christ, as being alive, is not without blood. Therefore, when the body of Christ is received under the bread, isn't His blood also received, even if the use of the other kind is omitted?

We should not on the basis of the judgment of our smart-aleck reason, which Scripture declares is not only blind, but blindness itself, in divine things, take the testament of the Son of God to ourselves to reform and change [it], as though, in the night in which He was betrayed and instituted His Supper, He was not rational enough to know that a living body does not exist without blood; but we should rather take our foolish reason captive to the obedience of His infinite wisdom, and in simple obedient faith we should believe His word and obey [His] command. He does not say and command that we should eat His blood, but that we should eat His body, but drink His blood from the cup of blessing; if we very simply obey that command, there is no danger of any error to fear (*MWS*, 122f).

Chemnitz bases his doctrine of the real presence on the *Verba* and only on the *Verba*. However, because of the Sacramentarian criticism that the Lutherans were teaching that Christ's body is in the bread in a crude, visible manner like bread in a basket, Chemnitz, following Luther, teaches that there are different modes of

Christ's presence, in much the same way that the nominalists did (*LW*, 37, 65; Buescher, 75f). **The First mode is the circumscriptive mode.** This is the comprehensible, corporal mode as when our Lord walked bodily on earth (*FC SD*, §7 [99], Tappert 586). **The second mode is the definitive mode.** For Chemnitz, definitive means a presence which is not bound to a certain space. This is an incomprehensible or illocal, spiritual presence as when Christ passed through closed doors on Easter and as He is in the bread and wine in the Supper (*FC SD*, §7 [100], Tappert 587). **The third mode is the repletive mode.** This is the mode by which Christ, who is one person with God, is present in all things and places and, yet, is not contained in any space (*FC SD*, §7 [100], Tappert 587).

The Effectual Cause of the Lord's Supper

- **The Consecration and the Sacrament**

The Holy Sacrament bestows upon us all the blessings of salvation. Because it is such a treasure, Christians will want to be certain that they have the Supper in their midst. How does one know that he has the true Supper? What causes Christ's body and blood to be present in the Sacrament or what effects the presence? It is not any power or work of man, but alone the Word and institution of Christ, as Chemnitz declares (*LS*, 139). It is that all-powerful Word which God spoke at the creation and it was done (Psa 33:9). Because the presence is not effected by any human words or actions, Chemnitz does not make the eucharistic prayer or the canon of the Mass a prerequisite for the Supper. In this regard Chemnitz asserts:

... he acts wickedly who takes away the consecration of the Eucharist from the words of divine institution and transfers it to the prayers of the canon, which have been patched together by men out of unsound and sound, or rather, mostly out of unsound materials (*Ex*, 2, 226).

Chemnitz clearly states that it is the all-powerful Word of God which consecrates the Sacrament and effects the presence.

For it is most certain that there is no sacrament without the Word, as Paul calls Baptism "the washing of water with the Word" (Eph 5:26). The saying of Augustine has it correctly: "Let the Word come to the element, and it becomes a sacrament." Likewise: "Take the Word

out of Baptism, and what will the water be but water?" In no way, therefore, can there be a Eucharist without the use of the Word. For if the Word is taken out of the Eucharist, the bread will be nothing but bread. For this reason Augustine says, *Contra Faustum*, Bk. 20, ch. 13.: "Our bread and cup becomes sacramental by a certain consecration; it does not grow that way." Therefore what is not consecrated, though it be bread and cup, is food for refreshment, not a religious sacrament. This ground is very firm, being derived from the definition of a sacrament. This addition of the Word to the element in the **sacraments is called "sanctification"** by the ancients. The common people call it "consecration." Paul, following the description of Mark, calls it "blessing" when he says: "The cup of blessing which we bless" (1Co 10:16; *Ex*, 2, 225).

This Word of God is not any scriptural passage that one would care to use. It is a definite Word of God which consecrates the Sacrament. Discussing Justin Martyr's account of the Divine Liturgy in the Ancient Church, Chemnitz indicates that the consecration of the Lord's Supper is none other than the Words of Institution.

Justin also says that the priest prays and gives thanks for a long time and in many words, but not to this end, that the consecration of the Eucharist may take place in this way. For he adds that he who presides gives thanks "that He saw fit to do these things," that is, that these mysteries were instituted and handed down to us by Christ. Concerning the consecration itself he says that the food of the Eucharist is consecrated "through the word of thanks from Him," that is, through praying the word handed down by Christ Himself. Paul affirms that he received from Christ what kind of word this is (1Co 11:23-25). Justin also explains himself, for he says that this is the word which the evangelists in their expositions of the institution of the Supper committed to writing (*Ex*, 2, 227).

It is the Words of Institution which bring about the sacramental union so that not only mere bread and wine are present in the Sacrament, but also the body and blood of the Lord.

We understand a sacramental change, that, although before it was only common bread and ordinary wine, when the Word of Christ comes to it, it is not merely bread and wine but at the same time also the body and blood of Christ, which is present, offered, and received here in the Eucharist (*Ex*, 2, 267; *Ex*, 2, 258f; *Ex*, 2, 386; *Ex*, 2, 415).

Chemnitz teaches that the Words of Institution spoken by the minister are the effectual cause of the presence. At the same time,

he binds the consecration into an intimate relationship with Christ's original institution and command.

For where His institution is observed and His words are spoken over the bread and cup [wine], and the consecrated bread and cup [wine] are distributed, Christ Himself, through the spoken words, is still efficacious by virtue of the first institution, through His word, which He wishes to be there repeated (*FC SD*, §7 [75], Triglotta 999).

The consecration and Christ's original institution are so intimately united that the words spoken by the minister are not human words, but God's Word. Chemnitz asserts this as he comments on Chrysostom's Sermon on the Betrayal by Judas (*PG*, 49, 380ff).

Also Chrysostom, in his homily on the betrayal of Judas, explains this question beautifully, namely, that it is not man who sanctifies the things set before us on the Lord's Table, in order that they may be the body and blood of the Lord, but that the same Christ who sanctified His first Supper now sanctifies also our Lord's Supper. For although the words are brought forth by the mouth of the priest, nevertheless the sacraments are sanctified by the grace and power of God. For the words, "This is My body" are the words of Christ, not the words of the priest. It is through these that what is set before us is sanctified. After this he undertakes a comparison between this word of Christ and the command, "Be fruitful and multiply," which, once spoken, has efficacy in the article of creation for all time (*Ex*, 2, 227; *Ex*, 2, 229; *FC SD*, §7 [76], Tappert 583).

Thus the Words of Institution are efficacious by virtue of the original institution. **The Words of Institution repeated by the minister in a proper celebration of the Sacrament by virtue of Christ's original command and institution, effect the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper.**

- **The Sacramental Action Must Remain a Unit**

When our Lord gave us His body and blood in the Supper, He gave it for a certain use, to be distributed and received for the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, while the almighty Word of Christ indeed effects the presence, Chemnitz is extremely careful to keep the whole sacramental action (*usus*; consecration, distribution, reception) as a unit.

Nevertheless, the meaning is not that the blessed bread which is divided, which is offered, and which the apostles received from the

hand of Christ was not the body of Christ but becomes the body of Christ when the eating of it is begun. For the whole action of the institution hangs together, and the words, "This is My body" belong to the entire action. Therefore, it is concerning that bread which is blessed, which is broken or divided, which is offered, received, and eaten — I say, it is concerning that bread that Christ says, "This is My body" (*Ex*, 2, 248).

The blessing of the Eucharist and the promise of the presence of the body and blood of Christ ought not to be torn apart and forcibly separated from the use which is prescribed and commanded in the institution. For it is of the blessed bread, which is distributed, received, and eaten, that Christ asserts, "This is My body" (*Ex*, 2, 249).

The Words of Institution indeed effect the presence, but without the distribution and reception there is no Sacrament, that is, no real presence. Chemnitz, as the other writers of the *Formula*, asserts the *Nihil Rule*: Nothing has the character of a Sacrament outside its intended use (*FC SD*, §7 [85f], 584f).

Now we ask, if these words are pronounced over the bread and wine, "This is My body; this is My blood," but no distribution is made, it is given to no one, and there is no one to receive, eat, and drink — we ask, I say, whether the institution of Christ is being observed there. It is clear that it is not. We ask secondly whether the genuine Sacrament of the Eucharist is there where the institution of Christ is not being observed. **Surely, because the sacraments of the New Testament are consecrated by the institution, it is evident and certain that there is no sacrament where the institution is not being observed** (*Ex*, 2, 246).

For when the words are indeed spoken over the bread but the action which is prescribed and commanded in the institution is either not observed or is changed into another use, then we do not have the promise of the presence of the body and blood of Christ there, as it is present in His supper (*Ex*, 2, 280; *MWS*, 121).

- **The Moment of the Presence in the Sacrament**

The question of the moment was a non-issue in the Ancient Church. The Eastern Church was not accused of error, although it at times spoke of the presence only after the epiclesis in the eucharistic prayer, and not immediately after the *Verba* were recited. They viewed the eucharistic prayer as a consecratory whole with the institution narrative as its most essential part because this was

the Word of the Lord. They considered the Words of Institution to be the efficacious Words of God through which the Holy Spirit functions causing the presence of Christ's body and blood.

With the rise of Scholasticism in the Western Church came an almost overriding desire for precision, which in turn set the stage for questions concerning the moment of the presence and conflict between the *Verba* and the epiclesis. The Scholastics tended to stress rational speculation in explaining the make-up of the Sacraments. In trying to explain the "how" of the Lord's Supper, they appealed to Aristotelian causation and to transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is the instantaneous change of the entire substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood with the accidents of bread and wine remaining. Substance is that which exists in itself and not in another. Substance is a metaphysical concept. It is the innermost essence of an individual thing which remains if all the qualities attached to it are removed, that is, the accidents. An accident exists only in a substance. The accidents of a substance are color, size, taste, etc. Some of the Scholastics were not even satisfied with this doctrine which fixed the moment of the presence immediately following the *Verba*. They began to debate whether it occurred at "*Hoc*" or "*Corpus*" or "*Meum*." Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD) was certainly a child of his times in respect to this emphasis on precision. He wrote concerning the consecration:

And therefore it must be said that this change, as stated above, is wrought by Christ's words which are spoken by the priest, so that the last instant of pronouncing the words is the first instant in which Christ's body is in the sacrament; and that the substance of the bread is there during the whole preceding time. Of this time no instant is to be taken as proximately preceding the last one, because time is not made up of successive instants, as is proved in *Phys. vi*. And therefore a first instant can be assigned in which Christ's body is present; but a last instant cannot be assigned in which the substance of bread is there, but a last time can be assigned. And the same holds good in natural changes, as is evident from the Philosopher [*Phys. viii.*] (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3, 75, 7).

The Lutheran fathers defended the truth that the Words of Institution effect the presence, but they did not accept the doctrine of the instantaneous replacing of one substance with another. They found no scriptural basis for this theory. They did not develop a dogma of the moment of the presence. Now, to be sure, Chemnitz speaks of Christ's body and blood being on the altar as did many of the Ancient Church fathers. But in Article VII of the *Formula of Concord*, a statement which was to bring peace among Lutherans on this issue, as well as others he demands only this for confessional agreement: that one teach that Christ's body and blood are truly present in the elements of bread and wine in the Supper so that His body and blood may be distributed (*reichen, exhibeo*) by the minister and received by the communicant (*FC SD*, §7 [10f], 571).³ This statement does not assert an instantaneous presence immediately after the *Verba* are said. It states only that the Lord's body and blood are present in the Sacrament and that they are offered by the hand of the minister (*MWS*, 124). At the same time this statement disavows "receptionism" that is, that Christ's body and blood are present only at the eating and drinking, and as a result of the same. This statement maintains that Christ's body and blood are distributed by the minister, indicating that Christ's body and blood are present in the minister's hand so that they may be offered to the communicant to be eaten and drunk as Chemnitz teaches elsewhere.

Nevertheless the meaning is not that the blessed bread which is divided, which is offered, and which the apostles received from the hand of Christ was not the body of Christ but becomes the body of Christ when the eating of it is begun. For the whole action of the institution hangs together, and the words, "This is My body," belong to the entire action. Therefore, it is concerning that bread which is blessed, which is broken or divided, which is offered, received and eaten — I say, it is concerning that bread that Christ says, "This is My body" (*Ex*, 2, 248).

³ The Formula of Concord specifically addresses the Saliger Controversy of 1563-69 in which the efficacy of the Words of Institution and the duration of the sacramental union were under discussion; also see G. Schmeling, "The Saliger Controversy," *LSQ*, 27, 2, 31ff.

• **The Reservation of the Sacrament and the *Reliquiae***

Related to the discussion of moment and time in the Sacrament is the question of the *reliquiae*, the elements remaining after the Lord's Supper celebration. In the High Middle Ages the reservation of the Sacrament for the purpose of adoration and ocular communion became common (Mitchell, 66ff). In regard to this issue Chemnitz writes, "And there is no word of God about the bread of the Eucharist being reserved or carried about in processions; in fact, it conflicts with the Words of Institution when the bread which has been blessed is not distributed, not received, not eaten" (*Ex*, 2, 281). From this statement and others like it, it has been assumed by some that Chemnitz believed that all consecrated elements must be consumed in the Communion Service. However, these words of Chemnitz must be seen in their context. He is rejecting the Roman practice of reservation, veneration, ocular communion, and the *Corpus Christi* Festival.⁴ He is not saying that all must be consumed in the Communion Service, for even in the Ancient Church the elements were sometimes burned or carried to the sick (*Ex*, 2, 298; *Ex*, 2, 301ff). Rather, he is rejecting the abuses of the Medieval Church. The Sacrament was not instituted to be carried around but to be eaten.

In *De Duabus Naturis*, Chemnitz specifically says that there is no sacramental presence outside the sacramental action:

In the fifth place, by the external ministry of the Word and Sacraments God is truly present in the church, working with us and effectually acting in us through these means. He is present even in the external signs in the use of the Sacraments, dispensing and communicating through these visible signs His invisible grace, according to His Word. But the signs themselves, by themselves, add nothing toward this grace. God is not present with them inseparably, but because of the covenant and according to the Word they are not Sacraments apart from their use. **When these Sacraments have been completed, they either pass away, as Augustine says, or are separated from the Sacramental union.** But the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ is something else, for it is permanent, inseparable, and

Ocular communion is communing with the eyes which took the place of oral reception for many in the Middle Ages.

intimate, constituting one hypostasis of both natures in which each nature works in communion with the other (*TNC*, 109).

The hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ is permanent and inseparable, but the sacramental union exists only in the sacramental action. Therefore, there is no basis for ocular communion, the reservation, and the veneration of the Sacrament outside the use. At the same time, the remaining species should be handled with respect for they were the bearers of the Lord's body and blood.

The Adoration of the Lord's Supper

• **The Spiritual Adoration of the Sacrament**

While Chemnitz rejects all adoration outside the sacramental action, (consecration, distribution, reception) he does speak of a valid adoration in the Lord's Supper celebration.

It is certain also that the worship of God is not restricted to either time or place (John 4:21; I Tim. 2:8). Therefore Christ is to be worshipped always and everywhere. Therefore if we believe that Christ, God and Man, is present with a peculiar mode of presence and grace in the action of His Supper, so that there He truly and substantially imparts His body and blood to those who eat, by which He wants to unite Himself with us in such a way that with this most precious pledge He applies and seals the gifts of the New Testament to everyone who eats in faith, gifts He gained for the church by the offering of His body and the shedding of His blood; if, I say, we truly and from the heart believe these things, **it neither can nor should happen that faith would fail to venerate and worship Christ who is present in this action** (*Ex*, 2, 277).

Chemnitz then explains that proper adoration is an inner spiritual worship which expresses itself in true preparation for the Sacrament:

The true inner and spiritual veneration and worship is comprehended in these Words of the Institution: "Do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise: "You proclaim the Lord's death." When do you do this? When, **in the first place**, the heart believes and thinks rightly, piously, and reverently about the essence and use of this Sacrament, according to the Word. Second, when with a thankful mind we faithfully ponder and consider, and with the heart and mouth praise these immeasurable benefits of the Son of God, the Mediator, that coming down from heaven for us men and for our salvation He assumed a

body of our substance, and offered it to the Father on the cross for our redemption, and poured out His blood in a most bitter death; and that in addition He communicates this His holy body to us that it may be eaten, and this blood that it may be drunk in this His Supper, in order that in this way He might apply and seal the benefits of the New Testament to the believers with a most sure and precious pledge, that He might unite Himself by means of the firmest covenant with this our poor and defiled substance, and that He might transform and prepare our soul for health and our body for immortality, etc. Third, when, having considered our uncleanness and wretchedness, we call in ardent prayer upon Christ, God and man, whom we believe to be truly and substantially present in that action, that He would be our Mediator, Propitiator, Advocate, Intercessor, Justifier, and Savior, that we may, because of His death, be received and preserved in the covenant of the New Testament, by which the Father wills, because of His Son, to be reconciled to the believers; likewise, when faith in prayer interposes the sacrifice of Christ the Mediator between our sins and the wrath of the Father, as Anselm speaks. When we consider the greatness of the mystery and our own unworthiness, we pray that we may not by unworthy eating become guilty of profaning the body and blood of Christ but that, ingrafted by this eating into the body and blood of Christ, we may draw life from it as branches from the vine and that this eating may benefit us for strengthening of faith, increase in love, mortification of the flesh, etc. Therefore we pray that the gifts of repentance, faith, and love may be bestowed on us, preserved, confirmed, and increased in us (*Ex*, 2, 282f).

For Chemnitz, true adoration of the Sacrament is an inner worship and preparation of the heart.

- **Outward Forms of Adoration**

When this true inner worship is present in the heart, then outward manifestations of reverence will follow of their own accord (*Ex*, 2, 283; *MWS*, 132). These outward signs of reverence will not be tied to the elements, “For He is not contained in them as being locally shut in. We eat the bread of the Supper reverently, but in our worship we look upon Christ Himself, supernaturally present in heavenly majesty in the Supper” (*Ex*, 2, 280). True adoration is a proper preparation of the heart for the Sacrament and a proper use of the same. All signs of outward reverence are in the area of Christian freedom.

The Sacrifice and the Lord's Supper

• **The Forms of Eucharistic Sacrifice Acceptable to Chemnitz**

One of the most disputed and also most misunderstood issues at the time of the Reformation was the concept of Eucharist as sacrifice. This has been an issue in theological dialogue to this day. In what way is the Lord's Supper a sacrifice? Chemnitz enumerated a number of forms of eucharistic sacrifice in the Ancient Church which are acceptable to him.

It was customary in the Ancient Church that whenever the Sacrament was celebrated, bread and wine and other gifts were offered on the Lord's table or altar for the maintenance of the ministry and of the poor. From these offered gifts some of the bread and wine was used for the Sacrament. Thus, the bread and wine were designated a sacrifice because they were a part of the people's offering of thanksgiving. Also, the appointed public prayers connected with the Supper were at times named a sacrifice in accord with the Scriptures which speak of the prayers of the faithful as sacrifice (Psa 141:2; *Ex*, 2, 484f).

The Lord's Supper is called the Eucharist by most of the Ancient Church fathers, Ignatius, Justin, Irenaeus, etc. They do this because in the celebration there is placed before the Christian the contemplation of the many blessings of God and, chiefly, the foremost work of God's love that He sent His Son, who shed His blood to redeem us, that in this way we would be challenged to thanksgiving. The Lord's Supper is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (Heb 13:15; *Ex*, 2, 485).

According to Chemnitz, in the true use of the Eucharist the church and individual believers dedicate themselves soul and body to the Lord. Christians present their bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God which is our spiritual service. (Rom 12:1) Having said this, Chemnitz quotes Augustine's famous statement concerning the **ecclesial concept of eucharistic sacrifice**.

Therefore Augustine writes, *De civitate Dei*, Bk. 10, ch. 6: "This is the sacrifice of Christians that we, being many, are one body in Christ. The church frequently makes use of the sacrament of the altar, which is known to believers, where it is demonstrated to her that in the offering which she offers she is herself offered" (*Ex*, 2, 486).⁵

The action of the Lord's Supper is called a sacrifice by the ancients because it is celebrated and used as a **memorial or commemoration** of the one sacrifice of Christ, once performed on the cross. Chemnitz permitted this view of eucharistic sacrifice as long as one bears in mind the following:

These explanations of the ancients should be pondered. They say expressly that Christ was in fact, or in truth, offered only once — on the cross — and that the action of the Lord's Supper is called a sacrifice, offering, immolation on account of the similarity, not because a sacrifice of Christ is really made there but because it was instituted and is used in remembrance or commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ, made once on the cross (*Ex*, 2, 490).

Finally, Chemnitz speaks of the Lord's Supper as a presentation of Christ's sacrifice in the midst of His people where they receive His body and blood which bestows upon them all the blessings of the sacrifice of the cross.

The fathers call the body and blood of the Lord which are present in the Supper a saving sacrifice, a pure host, our ransom, the purchase price of our redemption, the ransom for the sins of the world, a propitiatory sacrifice and a propitiation, **not because the body and blood of Christ are offered in the Mass by the action of the priest in order that they may become the ransom and propitiation for the sins of the whole world, but because that sacrifice which was once offered on the cross for our redemption and for the sins of the whole world—the body and blood of the Lord—is present, is dispensed, offered, and taken in the Lord's Supper, so that the power and efficacy of this offering, once made on the cross, is applied and sealed individually to all who receive it in faith.** Thus Cyprian says of the Lord's Supper: "This life-giving bread and the cup of blessing, hallowed by the solemn benediction, benefits the life of the total man, being at the same time a medicine and an offering, to heal our infirmities and to purge our iniquities" (*Ex*, 2, 491).

- **The Forms of Eucharistic Sacrifice Unacceptable to Chemnitz**

For Chemnitz, the Sacrament is a commemoration of the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross where the blessings of that sacrifice are made present for the church. Here there is no

⁵ See also *LW*, 35, 99.

sacrifice or offering up of Christ's body and blood for the redemption of the world to appease the just anger of God. That was done once and for all on the cross. Rather, the Sacrament is a commemoration or remembrance of the once and for all sacrifice where that sacrifice is made present in the midst of His body, the church, so that repentant sinners may share in the benefits of the sacrifice, the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. The Lord's body and blood in the Sacrament are not a propitiatory sacrifice for expiating and blotting out sin because all sins were blotted out through Christ's death on the cross. Instead, His body and blood which were once offered for all, now convey or bring those blessings to the individual in the Supper. Chemnitz disavows all forms of eucharistic sacrifice which militate against the one propitiatory sacrifice of Christ on the cross, or which make it a work or sacrifice of man.

But this I do deny, that the ancients by the term "sacrifice" understood the theatrical representation by which the papalists define the sacrament of their Mass, and that the histrionic action of the priest, handling the body and blood of Christ with certain gestures and acts, is a propitiatory sacrifice for expiating and blotting out sins, for placating the wrath of God, and for obtaining any and all benefits from God. For we have the explanations of the ancients, how they want it understood that they call both the action of the Lord's Supper and the body of Christ in the Supper a sacrifice and a sacrificial victim (*Ex*, 2, 486f).

Chemnitz will not accept any view of eucharistic sacrifice which makes the Lord's Supper a new sacrifice or adds to the sacrifice of the cross. With this understanding of the Lord's Supper, John Eck's view of eucharistic sacrifice was unacceptable to Chemnitz.

... therefore Eck says that the Mass is a sacrifice in another, special way, namely, because the church not only uses the Eucharist for a remembrance of the passion but because in the Mass she represents the sacrifice of the suffering of Christ by the total action of gestures, words, ceremonies, and vestments, and by **means of this representation offers Christ Himself anew for a sweet-smelling savor to God the Father** (*Ex*, 2, 445).

Chemnitz rejects the canon of the Council of Trent which speaks of the Lord's Supper as a propitiatory sacrifice and not only as a commemoration of the sacrifice of the cross. Nor will he agree

that the Lord's Supper in anyway benefits the dead because the sacrifice which blotted out all sin, both of the living and the dead, occurred on the cross, while the Sacrament conveys those blessings to those eating in faith. The Lord's Supper can only impart the blessing of salvation to those who are present receiving. The Council of Trent decrees in Canon III, "Concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass":

If anyone says that the Mass is merely a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving or a bare commemoration of the sacrifice performed on the cross, not however a propitiatory sacrifice, or that it benefits him only who eats and that it ought not to be offered for the living and the dead for sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities, let him be anathema (*Ex*, 2, 440).

Chemnitz considers the Tridentine dogma, that the sacrifice of the Mass is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross, to be a camouflage. To say that the Supper is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross, meaning that in the Sacrament Christ's body and blood are offered up to appease God's just anger over sin, impairs the oneness of the once and for all sacrifice on the cross (Heb 7:26-27, 9:12). The sacrifice of the cross cannot be all-sufficient, offered once, and still need to be continually offered in the Mass. The only way that the sacrifice of the Sacrament is the same as the sacrifice of the cross is that in the Supper, that very body and blood which once obtained redemption for all, are now present in the Supper conveying those blessings to the individual. Chemnitz and the Lutheran fathers are extremely emphatic in their rejection of any form of eucharistic sacrifice which militates against the once and for all sacrifice of the cross or makes the Sacrament a human work or sacrifice.

The Proper Preparation for the Lord's Supper

In order to obtain the benefits of the Holy Supper one needs to be well prepared to receive it worthily, for St. Paul says, "He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1Co 11:29). This worthiness consists in a sincere sorrow over sin, striving to do better, and in a confident faith in Jesus the Savior who paid for the sins of the

whole world on the cross with His body and blood and who gives us that very body and blood in the Supper for forgiveness of sins, life and salvation (*MWS*, 130). When the unworthy come to the Lord's table, they indeed receive the Lord's body and blood, but it is to their harm rather than their benefit — *manducatio indignorum* (*MWS*, 130f).

Immorality indeed excludes one from the Lord's table. The same is true of false doctrine. The Sacrament is a sign of the unity of the church and, more than that, it makes that unity. We become His one body, the church, by receiving His one body in the Supper. Because this is the case, the Sacrament may be received only with those who confess all the doctrines of the Scripture. Otherwise, we are really lying. We are declaring we are one when we are not one (*LS*, 193).

The Blessings of the Lord's Supper

- **The Sacrament and the Forgiveness of Sins**

The Words of Institution summarize the blessing of the Supper in the words, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." Forgiveness of sins is the chief blessing of the Sacrament from which flows all the other benefits of the Supper. The Holy Sacrament assures each individual personally of the Gospel declaration of forgiveness. It is a real means of grace which gives us everything which Christ won on the cross in our stead. Christ accomplished salvation on the cross, but He has not distributed or given it on the cross. He distributes it to us through the Lord's Supper and the other means of grace. In the *Examen* Chemnitz discusses the wonderful comfort derived from the various means of grace.

Moreover, in temptations the mind is troubled chiefly about this question, whether, in view of the fact that the promise is spoken in general, I also, who believe, have forgiveness of sins; whether I have it truly, surely, and firmly. Also, a pious mind is concerned lest it be snatched away or wrested from it. For this use therefore, God, who is rich in mercy, which He pours out abundantly on the believers, instituted beside the Word also the use of the Sacraments. **However, we leave and ascribe both to the Word and to each Sacrament what**

belongs to each in particular. Through Baptism we are reborn in Christ; having been reborn, we are nourished with the Word and the Eucharist; if we have fallen, we return through repentance and faith to the promise of grace, and by faith in the promise we are again reconciled to God through the Mediator. Nevertheless the Eucharist, which contains the basis for the remission of sins, namely the body and blood of Christ, is not excluded from also this use. **For the Son of God testifies in the Eucharist by a most extraordinary and sure pledge, namely by exhibiting His body and blood, that He surely communicates, applies, and seals to each and everyone who uses this Sacrament in faith, forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and all the other benefits** which He obtained for the church by the offering up of His body and the shedding of His blood that they might be offered in the Word and Sacraments and be accepted by faith. And so faith has in the use of the Eucharist a firm anchor of consolation, trust, and certainty concerning the forgiveness of sins. It also has an effectual remedy for raising up and supporting a feeble faith in the midst of sorrow and trials, against want of confidence, doubt, faint-heartedness, and despair (*Ex*, 2, 239).

The forgiveness of sin is offered in the Supper because this Sacrament is the ransom money for sin. In our weaknesses and failures we can often begin to wonder whether we are really forgiven. How can God forgive a wretch like me? Are my sins just too great to be pardoned? In this Supper the Lord Jesus removes our every doubt. As we come to the Lord's Table we are in spirit at Golgotha kneeling before the cross embracing His dying body and drinking from His five bloody wounds. As a kidnapped child is bought back by its parents with money, so Jesus bought us back not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. His body and blood are the ransom for sin. In the Supper we receive the very thing which paid for sins, the very thing which freed us from hell's destruction. Then no matter how great and terrible our sins may be, no matter how heavily they burden our conscience, receiving this Sacrament we need never wonder whether our sins are forgiven, for within us we have the very ransom money which paid for our sins, namely, His true body and blood (*LS*, 189).

Chemnitz often describes the treasure of forgiveness in the Supper in the terms of a last will and testament. Chemnitz does this on

the basis of the Words of Institution where Christ speaks of “the new testament in My blood.” Before a man dies he often prepares his will where he bequeaths his property to whomever he desires. Those remembered in his will may be totally unworthy, but he has the right to do as he pleases with what is his. Then, through his death, the will is made effective. Likewise, Jesus is the testator who prepared for His death and established His will, His gift. The Holy Supper is Christ's last will and testament which He left behind to be distributed to believers for all time. This testament He ratified and made effective through His death on the cross. We, His heirs, do nothing to obtain the inheritance nor are we worthy; the testament was established totally through His death. This wonderful inheritance is the remission of sin and eternal life given through His body and blood. Therefore, the Lord's Supper is totally a gift (*LS*, 27).⁶

- **The Sacrament and the Faith-life**

- The Supper as Life-Giving Nourishment

The Holy Supper confers life. This is not temporal life which we received through natural birth, but it is that new spiritual life which has been regenerated in us through the new birth in Holy Baptism. Since this life is still weak and imperfect, and constant growth is necessary, the Lord Jesus has instituted this Sacrament as a true spiritual nourishment. It is the strengthening and food for our faith-life as Chemnitz writes, “It becomes a heavenly and spiritual nourishment for both body and soul of believers unto eternal life” (*LS*, 61).

Chemnitz cites the fathers of the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) as saying:

The flesh of Christ on account of the union with the divine nature, which is life itself, is made life-giving or a life-giver and it thus has the authority or power to give life, and this authority it exercises in the action of the Lord's Supper in the believers (*TNC*, 474).

The body and blood of our Lord in the Supper are life-giving. They are never unfruitful, impotent, and useless. Here we receive the body and blood of the living God into this body made of dust.

⁶ See also *LW*, 35, 86-87; 36, 179-180.

What can be more beneficial? What can be more powerful? This is the greatest treasure in the life of a Christian. It is the greatest benefit for body and soul.

This life-giving bread and cup of blessing, hallowed by the solemn benediction, benefits the life of the total man, being at the same time a medicine and an offering, to heal our infirmities and to purge our iniquities (*Ex*, 2, 491).

When discussing the blessing of the Sacrament, Chemnitz' predominant theme is **life in the flesh of Christ**. This is simply an application of his **incarnational theology**.⁷ The One who became incarnate for our salvation is now incarnate in the Sacrament offering the treasure of salvation to all.

Therefore, in order that we might be able to lay hold on Christ more intimately and retain Him more firmly, not only did He Himself assume our nature but He also restored it again for us by distributing His body and blood to us in the Supper, so that by this connection with His humanity, which has been assumed from us and is again communicated back to us, He might draw us into communion and union with the deity itself (*LS*, 188).

As is seen above in his incarnational doctrine of the Supper, Chemnitz, at times, alludes to 2 Peter 1:4 expressing the benefits of the Supper in the *theosis* or deification theme of the Ancient Church. Christ distributes His body and blood to us so that, we might be drawn into communion and union with the deity, participating in the divine nature.⁸

• The Supper and the Christian Life

As the Christian travels in this life, he faces problems and troubles all the way. There is bitterness in the home, conflict with friends, sickness, and even the death of those most near and dear. Yet, in every difficulty and problem of life the Lord Jesus says, "Come to My Table all you that labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest." Through the Sacrament of His body and blood He gives Christians the strength to face all the problems and troubles of life and the power to do all things through Him, the power to

⁷ See pp. 13-16 above.

⁸ Also see *LS*, 143.

overcome and obtain the victory. Here the Lord offers His life-giving nourishment to resist all the attacks of the devil, the world and our flesh, and the ability to lead a more Christ-like life.

When we consider the greatness of the mystery and our own unworthiness, we pray that we may not by unworthy eating become guilty of profaning the body and blood of Christ **but that, ingrafted by this eating into the body and blood of Christ, we may draw life from it as branches from the vine and that this eating may benefit us for strengthening of faith, increase in love, mortification of the flesh, etc.** (*Ex*, 2, 283).⁹

The Supper is indeed “a heavenly and spiritual nourishment for both body and soul of the believer unto eternal life” (*LS*, 61).

- The Supper as Communion with Christ and His Body, the Church

Many Christians seek a closer walk with Jesus, a closer relationship with the Savior. At times every Christian feels very distant from the Divine Redeemer. Chemnitz does not direct such individuals to wrestle with the Lord in prayer until they feel His presence, nor are they to seek an emotional experience of Christ within them. Rather, they are to go where the Lord has promised to be found, in the Word and Sacraments. In the Supper there is an intimate union with Christ, for here He comes into the believer with His body and blood and remains with him. Concerning this communion with Christ, Chemnitz writes:

Moreover, the Son of God testifies that in the true use of the Eucharist He grafts the believers into Himself as members that He may bear, sustain, guide, and quicken them, in order that they may be united with Him more and more and may be enabled to continue more firmly in Him and hold fast the benefits they have received. This sweet, useful, and necessary comfort and strengthening of the faith the

⁹ See also *LS*, 191. In illustrating this communion and union with Christ in the Sacrament, many of the Lutheran fathers used the example of the vine and the branches in John 15. By receiving His body and blood we are engrafted into Him, drawing life from Him as branches from the vine. We are so united with Him that we can say, “It is not I that live, but Christ lives in me.” When we remain in Him and He in us through a regular use of Word and Sacrament we will bear abundant fruit, for without Him we can do nothing.

papalists endeavor to take away from the church, when they remove the application and sealing of the forgiveness of sins from the fruits and effects of the Eucharist (*Ex*, 2, 239f).

This incorporation into Christ, which the Lord's Supper grants, constitutes at the same time a true communion among all members of His body. Just as we were united with Christ and His body, the Church, in Baptism, so in the Holy Supper we are strengthened and preserved in that unity. One cannot be united with Christ without also at the same time existing in communion with all the other members of this body. As He comes into us with His flesh and blood uniting us with Himself, so He comes into all the other communicants drawing us together as His church. The Eucharist is both the supreme manifestation of the church's unity and a powerful means to effect that unity. St. Paul says, "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (1Co 10:17) As many kernels of wheat are ground together to form a loaf of bread and as many grapes are crushed to form one cup of wine, so in the Supper we become one body by partaking in His one body. Receiving His one body in the Sacrament, we become His one body, the church (*LS*, 143ff; *LS*, 193).

- The Sacrament and Salvation

The Holy Supper confers salvation. Where there is forgiveness of sins there is also eternal salvation. In the Supper the believer receives the very ransom money that paid for his sins and freed him from destruction. This is what has thrown open the doors of heaven and broken every barrier down. As we receive His body and blood in the Supper we know that heaven is ours (*LS*, 188).

As Christ walked among men, people were healed and raised from the dead by His very touch. His flesh and blood are life-giving. Then as we receive His glorified and risen body and blood into this dying body, we are assured that, even though it returns to the dust from which it was formed, on the last day it will break forth from the grave glorified like Christ's glorified body and so we will ever be with the Lord. Because of this the Early Church fathers have often spoken of the Supper as the viaticum, "the medicine of

immortality,” which is a food preparing us for eternal life. This is a concept closely related to the *theosis* theme. Chemnitz, likewise, espouses this position that the Sacrament is the **medicine of immortality, that we should not die but live in God.**

Because in the Eucharist we receive that body of Christ which has been given for us, and blood of the New Testament which has been shed for the remission of sins, who will deny that believers there receive the whole treasury of the benefits of Christ? For they receive that through which sins are remitted, by which death is abolished, by which life is communicated to us, by which Christ unites us to Himself as members, so that He is in us and we are in Him. Hilary says beautifully: “When these things have been taken and drunk, they bring about both that Christ is in us and that we are in Him.” Cyril says: “When in the mystical **benediction we eat the flesh of Christ in faith, we have from it life in ourselves, being joined to that flesh which has been made life, so that not only does the soul ascend through the Holy Spirit into a blessed life, but also this earthly body is restored by this food to immortality, to be resurrected on the last day.**” Therefore we receive in the Eucharist the most certain and most excellent pledge of our reconciliation with God, of the forgiveness of sins, of immortality and future glorification ... Beautiful is that statement of Ignatius, which is found in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where he calls the Eucharist *pharmakon athanasias, antidoton tou mee apothanein, alla zeen en theoo dia Ieesou Christou, katharteerion alexikakon*, that is, “a medicine of immortality, an antidote, that we may not die but live in God through Jesus Christ, a cleansing remedy through warding off and driving out evils” (*Ex*, 2, 233f).

St. Paul says, “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” (1Co 11:26) Not only does the Supper point us back to the sacrifice of the cross, but at the same time it points forward to the final consummation of our redemption on the last day. Each time we celebrate the Sacrament we do it eagerly awaiting the second coming as the whole Ancient Church cried *Maranatha*, “Lord come quickly.” The Father then gives us His Son under the form of bread and wine as a foretaste of the great wedding feast of the Lamb which will be ours at His second coming. In the Supper we for a moment step out of our mundane workaday existence where we carry one after another to the

grave, and we have a foretaste of heaven, where the Lamb once slain Himself descends and angels prostrate fall. Here is heaven on earth as the fathers prayed, “Your Supper be my heaven on earth, till I enter heaven.” (*Daß dein Abendmahl mein Himmel auf Erden werde*) Then as we eat at His Table here, we have the certainty that we will be at His Table there where we will eat of the heavenly manna and drink of the river of His pleasure forevermore (*LS*, 157).

A Comparison of These Two Fathers

• **The Essence of the Lord's Supper**

• The Connection Between Sign and Reality

For Augustine, a Sacrament is a “sacred sign — *sacrum signum*” (Augustine, *City of God*, 10, 5, 43). A Sacrament is a sacred sign of a hidden reality and power — *res et virtus*. He says, “These things, my brothers, are called sacraments for the reason that in them one thing is seen, but another is understood. That which is seen has physical appearance, that which is understood has spiritual fruit” (Augustine, *Sermon 272*, 94). The sacramental sign, however, not only points to and represents the reality that it signifies, it also participates in it and renders it present. The sign is not mere sign, but a sign filled with reality.

This eucharistic tradition of Augustine, together with that of Ambrose, was transmitted to the early Middle Ages initially through Isidore of Seville (560-636 AD), a contemporary of Gregory the Great in the West and Maximus the Confessor in the East. He was born at Seville in Spain and became Archbishop of Seville around 600 AD. Isidore combined the traditions of Augustine and Ambrose in his own thought. He found no conflict between the eucharistic theology of these two Western fathers.

Like Augustine, Ambrose at times spoke of the Sacrament as a sign filled with reality, but the use of the sign and reality distinction was not his normal way of explicating the Sacrament. **He usually maintained the identify of the elements with the body and blood of Christ by virtue of the change effected through the consecration.** Ambrose's stress on a change in the elements by

virtue of the consecration with the Words of Christ is vividly portrayed in this selection from *De Mysteriis*:

For the sacrament which thou receivest is consecrated by the word of Christ. [*Christi sermone conficitur*] But if the word of Elijah was powerful enough to bring down fire from heaven, **will not the word of Christ be powerful enough to change the characters of the elements?** [*ut species mutet elementorum*] Thou hast read of the works of the whole creation that he spake the word, and they were made; he commanded and they were created. The word of Christ, then, which could make out of nothing that which was not, can it not change the things which are into that which they were not? For to give new natures to things is no less wonderful than to change their natures (Ambrose, 146).

The difference between the Ambrosian and the Augustinian understanding of the Sacrament seems to go back to different liturgical traditions. Ambrose, who has left us some of the first liturgies in Latin in his *De Mysteriis* and in *De Sacramentis*, was familiar with a liturgy in which a change in the elements was expressed. (*transformatio, transfiguratio, mutatio*) This terminology was transmitted in the older Gallic and Spanish liturgies. The Roman and African liturgies which influenced Augustine and in turn were influenced by him, did not speak of a change or a transformation of the elements. These liturgies used such words as "to consecrate," "to dedicate," or "to bless," which were more restrained than the realistic terms of Ambrose.

In the ninth century these two traditions came into conflict for the first time in the eucharistic controversy that arose between Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus, two monks of the monastery of Corbie in northern France. This controversy was precipitated by a major shift in thought during the Middle Ages. The fundamental unity between sign and reality, which characterized the ancient world, was beginning to dissolve. The sign was no longer seen as a means of participating in the reality. Rather, it was on the way to becoming a mere sign or pointer which was separated from the reality it signified. As long as the bread and the wine in the Sacrament were spoken of as signs which cause the heavenly reality of Christ's body and blood to be present for the communicant, there

was no problem in using symbolic and realistic language simultaneously. But once the unity between sign and reality began to dissolve, the symbolic language of an earlier era was increasingly misunderstood. Symbolic language concerning the Lord's Supper was perceived as threatening the presence of the reality, the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament. Therefore, the conditions were ripe for the eucharistic controversy of the ninth century.

In the Reformation, the Reformed understood the Augustinian eucharistic sign as a mere pointer which was separated from the reality it signified. This understanding was affirmed by those statements of Augustine which seem to separate the Sacrament as such (the outward sign) from the gift which it was meant to communicate.¹⁰ Thus, men like Zwingli believed themselves to be in agreement with Augustine when they maintained that there was no real connection between the elements of bread and wine and the Lord's body and blood. Concerning this he wrote:

I have now refuted, I hope, this senseless notion about bodily flesh. In doing that my only object was to prove that to teach that the bodily and sensible Flesh of Christ is eaten when we give thanks to God is not only impious but also foolish and monstrous, unless perhaps one is living among the Anthropophagi [cannibals] (Zwingli, 216).

Augustine's understanding of the Sacrament as a sign is rooted in his Neo-Platonism.¹¹ This distinction between sign and reality is easily applicable to Baptism where the visible sign of water points to the invisible grace, but this is not the case with the Lord's Supper. If the bread and wine, corresponding to the element of water in Baptism, are the *signum*, then what is the *res*, the purpose of the Sacrament for which God's grace is given? Is it not communion with the body of Christ, the church, the bond of love existing in the communion of saints? Augustine at times speaks of Christ's body and blood as the *res* of the Sacrament, but more often it refers to

¹⁰ See LSQ, 33, 4, pp. 11-14.

¹¹ See LSQ, 33, 4, pp. 11-14.

the power and benefit of the Sacrament. Thus, one can understand why Zwingli and his followers appealed to the Bishop of Hippo.

The scholastics like Thomas Aquinas attempted to overcome this weakness in Augustine's theory. They distinguished three strata in the Supper: that which is sign only (*sacramentum tantum*), the ultimate reality (*res tantum*), and between these two that which is both sign and reality. (*sacramentum et res*) The *sacramentum tantum* is the bread and wine. The *res tantum* is the mystical union in Christ's body, the church. The *sacramentum et res* is the body and blood of Christ born of Mary, crucified, and risen which is *res* in relationship to the elements, but still sign in relationship to the real *res* (Sasse, *This is My Body*, 21). This complicated distinction proves the inherent weakness in Augustine's concept of sign and reality.

Chemnitz, in his writings, usually does not use Augustine's distinction between sign and reality to explain the Sacrament. But when the Sacramentarians used this terminology of Augustine to argue against the real presence, Chemnitz responds by showing how Augustine should be understood.

From another standpoint and in another respect, it was not on account of the absence of the body and blood of Christ that the ancients called the bread and wine signs or symbols. For sometimes they used this simile: As bread nourishes, sustains, preserves, and strengthens the body to natural life, so the body of Christ distributed and received in the Supper nourishes, sustains, and strengthens the soul and the body to eternal life. Sometimes they argue that the external reception of the body of Christ is a figure or likeness of the spiritual ingrafting into the body of Christ, as Augustine, *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum*, Bk. 2, ch. 9... Often they argue that the body of Christ signifies the mystical body, that is, the church, as Chrysostom, *Homilia* [24] in *1 ad Corinthios*, on 1Co 10, and Augustine, *Ad infantes* and *De consecratione*, dist. 2, ch. 2, *Quia passus* (LS, 245).

The bread and wine are signs or symbols of Christ's body and blood which are the invisible reality of the Sacrament.

While Chemnitz maintains that Augustine, correctly understood, should not be considered a Sacramentarian or defending a Zwinglian position, the sacramental theology of Chemnitz is much more in

line with the Ambrosian eucharistic tradition than with the Augustinian tradition. Like Ambrose, Chemnitz asserts a **change** in the elements by virtue of the consecration so that the bread and the wine are indeed Christ's body and blood. A certain change takes place through the consecration so that it can truly be said of the bread and the wine that they are the body and blood of Christ.

We grant, with Irenaeus, that after the blessing in the Eucharist the bread is no longer common bread but the Eucharist of the body of Christ, which now consists of two things — the earthly, that is, bread and wine, and the heavenly, that is, the body and blood of Christ. **This is certainly a great, miraculous, and truly divine change**, since before it was simply only ordinary bread and common wine. What now, after the blessing, is truly and substantially present, offered, and received is truly and substantially the body and blood of Christ. Therefore we grant that **a certain change takes place**, so that it can truly be said of the bread that it is the body of Christ. But we deny that it follows from this that we must therefore assert the kind of transubstantiation which the papalists teach (*Ex*, 2, 257f).

- The Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood

Augustine of Hippo and Martin Chemnitz are separated by more than a thousand years. They are separated both in culture and in race, one a North African and the other a Saxon German. Yet, both confess the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper. So firmly does Augustine assert this truth that in a Christmas sermon he can preach, "Him whom the heavens do not contain the bosom of one woman bore... she carried Him in whom we exist; she fed our Bread" (Augustine, *Sermon* 184.3, 38, 6). However, his distinction between sign and reality in his definition of Sacrament has led many to conclude that the Sacrament for him is merely a bare sign and not a sign filled with reality. This is due in part to a misunderstanding of the ancient world's concept of sign and to an inherent weakness in Augustine's theology of Sacrament.

The Ambrosian tradition of eucharistic theology of which Chemnitz was a part, reached a conclusion during the High Middle Ages in the doctrine of transubstantiation. According to Thomas, transubstantiation is **an instantaneous change of the entire**

substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood with the accidents of bread and wine remaining (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3, 75, 5ff).¹² The doctrine of transubstantiation was called into question by the nominalists like William of Ockham. According to Ockham, the view that the substance of bread and wine remain, and in the same place and under the same species is to be found in the body and blood of Christ, is very reasonable apart from the decision of the church to the contrary (Birch, 987). Ockham believed that it was more in accord with Scripture and reason to hold that both bread and wine and Christ's body and blood were present in the Sacrament and there offered, than to teach transubstantiation. Still, he would not oppose the teaching of the church. Transubstantiation became the official dogma of the Western Church at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 AD.

Chemnitz and the Lutheran Reformation upheld the real presence of Christ's body and blood, but on the basis of Scripture they rejected transubstantiation as the way of explaining how the presence occurred. They believed that transubstantiation went beyond the teaching of Scripture and the Ancient Church in explicating the change that occurred in the Sacrament. Rather Chemnitz, as many of the Ancient Church fathers, compared the union between the earthly elements and the Lord's body and blood to the personal union in Christ. Concerning these fathers Chemnitz writes:

For they asserted that the person of Christ consists of two natures which are neither disunited nor confused but joined together and united, just as the Eucharist consists of two things, namely, the external appearance of the elements and the invisible body and blood of Christ (*LS*, 153).¹³

When Chemnitz uses the word "change" to explain that the elements through the consecration are the body and blood of Christ, he does not mean that bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, but they are so intimately united with them that Jesus can say that the bread and wine are His body and blood. It is

¹² See also pp. 19-21 above.

¹³ See also pp. 13-16 above.

not a change in substance but a change created by union, the sacramental union of two substances.

The Effectual Cause of the Lord's Supper

• The Eucharistic Prayer and the Sacrament

In the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus which is dated around 215, we find one of the earliest examples of a eucharistic prayer in complete form. The prayer begins with the thanksgiving which praises and thanks God for the creation and the redemption. In the prayer the *Verba*, the Words of Institution, hold a predominant position. They explain why the church has such a eucharistic meal and they are the words which the Lord gave for blessing in the Supper. The *Verba* are followed by the anamnesis, the remembering of Christ's death and resurrection for salvation, and by the epiclesis which is the calling down of the Holy Spirit. These thanksgiving or eucharistic prayers did not necessarily follow this form everywhere in the church. There are indications that there was a considerable amount of freedom for the celebrant in formulating the thanksgiving provided that the institution narrative was included. When the dominical narrative was lacking or lost as in the case of the so-called *Anaphora of the Apostle's Addai and Mari*, this thanksgiving prayer would have been considered defective.

The African eucharistic prayer as preserved by Fulgentius of Ruspe, which was probably used by Augustine, has the same basic form as the prayer of Hippolytus. The epiclesis of the African prayer, like the epiclesis of Hippolytus, is not a consecratory epiclesis. The Holy Spirit is not called down to make the elements the body and blood of Christ, but He is called down so that the church may be gathered into the unity of Spirit (Dix, 296ff). For Augustine the most important part of the eucharistic prayer is the institution narrative for this is the Word of Christ.¹⁴

The text of the Eucharistic prayer with which Chemnitz was acquainted had been fairly uniform since around 700. It was commonly referred to as the canon of the Mass. Chemnitz, as Augustine,

¹⁴ See LSQ, 33, 4, pp. 17-18.

considered the Words of Institution to be the most important part of the canon because these words were the Words of Christ. Chemnitz and the other Lutheran Reformers did not make the eucharistic prayer or the canon of the Mass a prerequisite for the Supper. In fact, in the Lutheran Mass, the canon of the Mass was removed in its entirety and was replaced by the Words of Institution.

Chemnitz defended this change in the historic liturgy. He believed that the canon of the Mass obscured the central article of the faith, justification by faith alone. The eucharistic prayer turns the primary direction of the Sacrament upside down. The Supper then is not a testament or pure gift from God, but man's offering to God; it becomes an action of man rather than an action of God. Whenever the *Verba* are enclosed in a eucharistic prayer the primary emphasis of the Sacrament is not God's presentation of Christ's free forgiveness, but the church's sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God. The sacrifice of the cross and forgiveness are gifts of God for man which can only be received with thanksgiving. Instead of trying to participate in and enter into Christ's sacrifice by lifting our hearts to the heavenly altar, we stand in awe with Isaiah of old as Christ speaks to us on earth, granting us forgiveness and thus taking us up into His sacrifice (*LW*, 35, 99).

When the *Verba* are placed in a eucharistic prayer, the meaning of the consecration is obscured. The Words of Institution are not our words of prayer to God but God's Words of grace. The Words of Institution in the Divine Liturgy are not to be directed to God, rather they are Christ's Words of consecration directed to the elements and Christ's Words of Gospel proclamation directed to the church. Concerning this Chemnitz asserts:

... he acts wickedly who takes away the consecration of the Eucharist from the words of divine institution and transfers it to the prayers of the canon, which have been patched together by men out of unsound and sound, or rather, mostly out of unsound materials (*Ex*, 2, 226).

Chemnitz' high estimate of the Words of Institution, which he held in common with Augustine caused him to defend the removal of the canon of the Mass from the Divine Liturgy and its replacement with the *Verba*.

- The Consecration and the Sacrament

According to Augustine, the Words of Institution embedded in the eucharistic prayer are the consecration of the Holy Sacrament. Augustine emphatically teaches that the blessing of Christ, the *Verba*, effect the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament. "For, not all bread, but only that which receives the blessing of Christ becomes the body of Christ — *Non enim omnis panis, sed accipiens benedictionem Christi fit corpus Christ.*" (Augustine, *Sermon 234.2*, PL 38, 1116).¹⁵ While Augustine says that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ through the consecration, he does not use the "change" terminology of the Ambrosian tradition.

The Western Church, in general, held that the Words of Institution were consecratory. While not denying this, it gradually became common in the Eastern Church to speak of the epiclesis as a calling down of the Holy Spirit to make the elements the body and blood of Christ. John of Damascus, whose works are in many ways the capstone of Eastern dogma and theology, brings out the relationship between the efficacy of God's Word and the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament. He compares the Supper to the creation and incarnation. The creation came into being by the Word of God and the overshadowing of the Spirit. At the Word of God spoken by Gabriel, the Word became incarnate in the Virgin's womb through the working of the Holy Ghost. In the same way, the Words of Institution are the efficacious Words of God through which the Holy Spirit functions causing the presence of Christ's body and blood (John of Damascus, 4, 13).

While the Damascene keeps a proper balance between the *Verba* and the epiclesis and considers them a consecratory whole, some of his statements can be understood as teaching that the epiclesis in itself is consecratory. This view became even more pronounced in Eastern Theology as time went on. Still no one in the East would have spoken of the epiclesis as consecratory in contradistinction to the *Verba* until the moment of the consecration question was raised

¹⁵ See also LSQ, 33, 4, pp. 17-18.

in the Scholasticism of the West. Most in the East spoke of the institution narrative as consecratory, but these words were effective through the power of the Spirit called upon in the epiclesis.

With the rise of Scholasticism in the Western Church, the stage was set for questions concerning the moment of the presence and the conflict between the *Verba* and the epiclesis. The Scholastics appealed to Aristotelian causation and to transubstantiation, an instantaneous replacement of one substance with another. In defining the precise moment of the presence at the *Verba*, they left no room for the epiclesis, the calling down of the Spirit to operate through the *Verba*, as was common in the Eastern tradition. After the failure of the Council of Florence in 1439 to reunite the church, the dialogue concerning the consecration between the East and the West came to an end and remained unsettled.

An underlying issue in the epiclesis question for the East was the relationship in the Sacrament between the Second Person and the Third Person of the Trinity. The Western concept of consecration in which the consecratory power resides solely in the *Verba*, was viewed by the Greeks as undermining of the Spirit's work in the Sacrament. This made Christ alone the consecrator. The Greeks agreed that Christ was the consecrator, but He consecrates through the Spirit.

In the Reformation, Chemnitz met a church divided on the doctrine of the consecration; the East asserting that the epiclesis was consecratory and the West that the *Verba* was consecratory. On the basis of Scripture Martin Chemnitz upheld the Western tradition. In total agreement with the Bishop of Hippo, the great teacher of the Western Church, Chemnitz maintained that the Words of Institution effect the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper. Chemnitz quotes approvingly the doctrine of the consecration found in the Western fathers:

Thus the other fathers hold that before the consecration there is only one substance there, namely, the bread and wine. But when the Word and institution of Christ comes to these elements, then not only one substance is present as before, but at the same time also the very body and blood of Christ, as Ambrose says, *De*

sacramentis, Bk. 4, chs. 4 and 5: "This bread is bread before the words of the Sacrament. But when the words of Christ come to it, it is the body of Christ." Again: "Before the words of Christ it is a cup full of wine and water. When the words of Christ become operative, the blood which has redeemed the people is caused to be there" (*LS*, 156).

For Chemnitz the Words of Institution indeed effect the presence, but if there is no distribution and reception, there is no real presence. The whole action of the Supper must remain united.

Therefore when the bread is indeed blessed but neither distributed nor received, but enclosed, shown and carried about, it is surely clear that the whole word of institution is not added to the element, for this part is lacking: He gave [it] to them and said, Take eat. And when the word of institution is incomplete there can be no complete Sacrament. In the same way it is also not true Baptism if the Word is indeed spoken over the water, but if there is no one who is baptized (*MWS*, 121).¹⁶

The fact that Chemnitz teaches that the Words of Institution are consecratory does not deny that the Holy Spirit operates in the Supper. As it is the Spirit who works in Baptism through the Word, so it is the Spirit who works in the Holy Supper through the Word. Like John of Damascus before him, Luther draws an interesting parallel between the incarnation and the consecration in the Sacrament, indicating that Christ's body and blood are present through the Word and power of the Holy Spirit.

Take yet another example. How did his mother Mary become pregnant? Although it is a great miracle when a woman is made pregnant by a man, yet God reserved for him the privilege of being born of the Virgin. Now how does the Mother come to this? She has no husband [Luke 1:34] and her womb is entirely enclosed. Yet she conceives in her womb a real, natural child with flesh and blood. Is there not more of a miracle here than in the bread and wine? Where does it come from? The angel Gabriel brings the word: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, etc." [Luke 1:31]. With these words Christ comes not only into her heart, but also into her womb, as she hears, grasps, and believes it. No one can say otherwise, than that the power comes through the Word. As one cannot deny the fact that she thus becomes pregnant through the Word, and no one knows how it comes about, so it is in the sacrament also. **For as soon as Christ**

¹⁶ See also pp. 18-19 above.

says: **“This is my body,” his body is present through the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit.** If the Word is not there, it is mere bread; but as soon as the words are added they bring with them that of which they speak (*Denn sobald Christus spricht: “Das ist mein Leib,” so ist sein Leib da durchs Wort und Kraft des Heiligen Geistes.* (Psa 33:9) *Wenn das Wort nicht da ist, so ist es schlecht Brod; aber so die Worte dazu kommen, bringen sie das mit, davon sie lauten*) (LW, 36, 341; SL, 20, 742).

The lack of the epiclesis in the historic Lutheran Liturgy is not a denial of the Holy Spirit's operation in the Supper. It is God, the Holy Ghost, who works through the means of grace, Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments.

• The Moment of the Presence in the Sacrament

Because the Ancient Church did not designate a precise instant in which the consecration is effective, the question of the moment was a non-issue in the Ancient Church. As has been shown above, Augustine taught that the Words of Institution effect the presence, but he did not assert that the *Verba* are instantaneously effective.¹⁷ He maintained that the *Verba* are effective within the action of the Sacrament. It was only when transubstantiation, with its instantaneous transformation of one substance into another, became the accepted doctrine of the church, that the question concerning the moment of the presence came to the foreground. This same concept of instantaneous transformation, which was viewed by the Greeks as undermining the work of the Spirit in the Sacrament, also raised the question of the moment of the presence. If the *Verba* are instantaneously effective, then Christ's body and blood are present immediately after the words are said.

In the Reformation, Chemnitz defended the truth that the Words of Institution effect the presence against the Sacramentarians, but as Augustine, he developed no dogma concerning the moment of the presence. One should not assume that Chemnitz did not face this issue. In the Saliger Controversy in which Chemnitz participated, some of the main topics under discussion were the efficacy of the Words of Institution, and the duration of the

¹⁷ See pp. 16-17 above.

sacramental union of Christ's body and blood under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. While this was the case, in Article VII of the *Formula of Concord*, a statement which was to bring peace among Lutherans on these very issues, he held that this was sufficient for confessional agreement: that one teach that Christ's body and blood are truly present in the elements of bread and wine in the Supper so that His body and blood may be distributed by the minister and received by the communicant (*FC SD*, §10f, 571). This statement does not teach that Christ's body and blood must be present immediately after the Words of Institution are recited. Nor does it limit the presence to the eating and drinking. Rather, it states Christ's body and blood are distributed by the minister, indicating that Christ's body and blood are present in the minister's hand so that they may be offered to the communicant to be eaten and drunk (*MWS*, 124; *Ex*, 2, 248).¹⁸

- **The Adoration and Reservation of the Lord's Supper**

The attitude of reverence toward the Blessed Sacrament and the practice of the adoration of the Lord's bodily presence in the Supper are occasionally referred to in the Early Church. Augustine alludes to such adoration when he writes:

For He took earth from earth, because flesh is from earth, and from the flesh of Mary He took flesh. And because He walked here in that flesh, He also gave us that flesh to eat for our salvation. But no one eats that flesh, unless he has first adored it" (Augustine, *Ennaratio on Psalm 98 [98:9]*, 183).

The context of Augustine's remarks suggest that he is referring to the custom of adoring the consecrated elements during the liturgy. When adoration was discussed in Augustine's time, it was normally an adoration within the eucharistic celebration. The remaining elements were usually consumed in the celebration or immediately afterward by the clergy. The carrying of the consecrated elements to the sick and the custom of taking the Sacrament home to be used in time of need were exceptions to this rule. The latter custom gradually fell into disrepute in the church.

¹⁸ See also pp. 19-21 above.

In the Middle Ages there was a far greater emphasis on beholding and worshipping the elements and there began a worship of the Sacrament outside the celebration. Throughout the Carolingian period, the norm of eucharistic practice remained active participation in the Divine Liturgy, culminating in the reception of the sacramental elements. But in the tenth and eleventh centuries, attitudes toward the Sacrament underwent an emphatic change. The sacramental elements of Christ's body and blood were viewed separate from the Divine Liturgy, and were regarded as objects of devotion outside of the worship service. With the decline in the frequency of communion, possibly as a result of the dread of unworthy participation in the Sacrament, viewing or beholding the Lord's body was considered to be as beneficial and, at times, more beneficial than oral reception. Ocular communion (communing with the eyes), at least in the popular mind, offered the blessings of oral reception without the danger of unworthy participation inherent in the oral reception of Christ's body and blood. Later, the elevation of the host in the Divine Liturgy, the use of the monstrance, and the Corpus Christi Festival with its processions were innovated to satisfy this desire to gaze upon the host. Thus, there was a movement away from oral reception to ocular reception. This movement was never completed, nor was it officially espoused. However, considering the fact that the average communicant in the Medieval Period communed orally only three or four times a year, ocular communion was by far the norm.

From this history it is evident that Chemnitz faced a considerably different situation than Augustine did as he came to grips with the veneration of the Sacrament. Chemnitz faced a powerful cult of eucharistic adoration outside the liturgy. The excesses of this worship are to be seen in the life of Dorothea of Danzig who lived at the end of the fourteenth century. She is famed to have gazed upon the reserved host as many as a hundred times in a day, and still she craved to see it again (Mitchell, 180f).

In response to the medieval custom of the reservation and the veneration of the host outside the liturgy, Chemnitz writes in his *Examen*:

... we will not put away the bread and wine which have been blessed with the words of the Supper, shut them in, reserve them, carry them about, and use them for display, but will distribute, receive, eat and drink them, and proclaim the death of the Lord. Thus the obedience of our faith will do what Christ did before and commanded to be done (*Ex*, 2, 295).

Here Chemnitz speaks against the reservation and veneration outside the liturgy. He does this on the basis of Christ's command in the institution: "This do in remembrance of Me." This directive of our Lord demands a prescribed action or use. In the assembly of Christ's body, the church, one called as Christ's representative is to take bread and wine, blessing them with Christ's all-powerful Words of consecration and distribute Christ's very body and blood so that they may be received by the communicant. In this ordered action of the Supper, Christians can be sure that Christ's body and blood are present so that they can be distributed by the minister and received. According to Chemnitz, when the prescribed sacramental use is not complete or changed into another use, there is no promise of the presence of Christ. There is no promise that Christ will be present to be venerated in the host reserved in the monstrance, in the tabernacle, and in the Corpus Christi procession. Concerning this Chemnitz says:

For when the Words are indeed spoken over the bread but the action which is prescribed and commanded in the institution is either not observed or is changed into another use, **then we do not have the promise of the presence of the body and blood of Christ there as it is present in His Supper** (*Ex*, 2, 280).

When the sacramental action is changed or the whole use (*usus*; consecration, distribution, reception) is not carried out, then there is no Sacrament, that is, no real presence, for nothing has the character of a Sacrament outside its intended use (*FC SD*, §7 [85f], Tapfert 584).

Ocular communion, which many in the Medieval Church believed gave the blessings of the Supper without the dangers of oral

reception, in the estimation of Chemnitz, was not only contrary to the institution of Christ, but it also had no certainty of Christ's blessing. The blessings of the Sacrament are assured to those **who eat and drink Christ's body and blood in a worthy manner**. A requisite for receiving the intended blessings of the Supper is oral reception. Beholding or gazing upon the host at the elevation does not offer forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Although Chemnitz rejects the reservation and all adoration outside of the sacramental action, he does assert a valid adoration in the Lord's Supper celebration (*Ex*, 2, 277). He even quotes approvingly Augustine's statement on adoration in his exposition of Psalm 98 (99:5) (*Ex*, 2, 277). He then explains that proper adoration is an inner spiritual worship which expresses itself in true preparation for the Sacrament. When this true inner worship is present in the heart, then outward manifestations of reverence will follow of their own accord (*Ex*, 2, 283; *MWS*, 132).¹⁹ All outward signs of reverence for Chemnitz are in the area of Christian freedom. For example, while every allusion to sacrifice linked to the elevation was rejected, the rite of the elevation, which was considered an adiaphoron, continued among many early Lutherans as a confession of the real presence.

• **The Sacrifice and the Lord's Supper**

• The Commemoration of the Sacrifice of the Cross

The appellation "sacrifice" for the Sacrament is much more prevalent in Augustine than it is in the works of Chemnitz. Chemnitz' careful and sparing use of the term "sacrifice," in reference to the Lord's Supper is a direct result of the abuses of the Middle Ages. In spite of this, there is no question that both these fathers regarded the Sacrament as a commemoration of the sacrifice of the cross. **This means that the Sacrament is a presentation of Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross in the midst of His people where Christ's body and blood, the sacrifice once offered, are made present, conveying all the blessings of the cross**

¹⁹ See also pp. 23-24 above.

to Christ's body, the church. In his *City of God* Augustine says that the Eucharist is a sacramental symbol of the reality which is the sacrifice of the cross.

Thus he is both the priest, himself making the offering, and the oblation. This is the reality, and he intended the **daily sacrifice of the Church to be the sacramental symbol of this**; for the Church, being the Body of which he is the Head, learns to offer herself through him (Augustine, *City of God*, 10, 20, 401).

It is not the sacrifice itself, but a sign or a presentation of the sacrifice. Elsewhere he speaks of it as commemoration — *memoriam* — of Christ's sacrificial death (Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, 20, 18).

In his *Enchiridion*, Chemnitz explains in what sense the fathers spoke of the Sacrament as a sacrifice. The fathers understood the Eucharist to be “celebrated in memory or commemoration of the only propitiatory sacrifice which Christ accomplished once on the cross, that is, in thanksgiving and praise of the Lord's death” (*MWS*, 126). This is further clarified in the *Examen*:

The fathers call the body and blood of the Lord which are present in the Supper a saving sacrifice, a pure host, our ransom, the purchase price of our redemption, the ransom for the sins of the world, a **propitiatory sacrifice and a propitiation, not because the body and blood of Christ are offered in the Mass by the action of the priest in order that they may become the ransom and propitiation for the sins of the whole world, but because that sacrifice which was once offered on the cross for our redemption and for the sins of the whole world — the body and blood of the Lord — is present, is dispensed, offered, and taken in the Lord's Supper, so that the power and efficacy of this offering, once made on the cross, is applied and sealed individually to all who receive it in faith** (*Ex*, 2, 491).

Chemnitz, together with Augustine, holds that the Sacrament is a commemoration of the once and for all sacrifice of the cross where the blessings of that sacrifice are made present for the church. He, however, totally rejects the assertion that in the Supper Christ's body and blood are offered up as a propitiatory sacrifice for the expiating and blotting out of sin, because all sins were blotted out through Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross.

Here Chemnitz opposes one of the predominant themes of the Medieval Church.

The great theologian of the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD), identified the sacrifice of the Eucharist with the sacrifice of the cross implying that they are one and the same, for they have the same victim and the same effects or benefits (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3, 83, 1). A later churchman, Gabriel Biel (1420-1495 AD), who was the best known of the nominalists among the Lutheran reformers, stressed a dissimilarity between the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Mass. In his thought, the Mass remained a second sacrifice only historically related to the cross (*LW*, 36, 313). By not firmly maintaining the unity between the cross and the eucharistic sacrifice, Biel made medieval theology vulnerable to the reformers criticism who held that the Mass had been turned into a new Calvary in which the sacrifice of the Mass added to Christ's work on the cross. Also Biel advocated the value of human merit and work in the Eucharist. As a result of this, Chemnitz, as Luther before him, condemned the Mass as a work and sacrifice of men (*LW*, 36, 313). In response to the criticism of the Reformation, the Council of Trent decreed in Chapter II, "Concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass":

For the sacrificial Victim is one and the same, the same now offering through the ministry of the priests who then offered Himself on the cross, the manner of offering alone being different (*Ex*, 2, 440).

In Canon III it is stated that this sacrifice is not a bare commemoration of the cross, but a **propitiatory sacrifice** (*Ex*, 2, 440). Chemnitz could not accept the teaching that the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Mass are identical; the self-same offering sacrificed once on the cross and now continually offered in the Mass. This concept in Chemnitz' estimation denies that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was all-sufficient offered once and for all as the writer to the Hebrews declares, "Who [Christ] does not need daily as those high priests to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Heb 7:27; *Ex*, 2, 457). If Christ is offered up

continually to expiate sin, then Christ's once and for all atonement sacrifice was not perfect and complete. To be sure, Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us, but He does this on the basis of His sacrifice offered once, not on the basis of the Mass continually offered (Heb 7:25). Chemnitz agrees that Christ's body and blood, the propitiatory sacrifice of the cross, are present in the Supper so that the communicant may receive the blessings of the cross, but they are not in any way offered to God to appease His just anger over sin because that was done once and for all on Calvary. In the Supper the propitiatory sacrifice is not offered to God, but God offers and gives the benefits of that sacrifice to His people. The sacrifice of the cross cannot be all-sufficient offered once and still need to be offered daily in the Mass.

Chemnitz considers the Tridentine dogma, that the sacrifice of the mass is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross, to be a camouflage. **To say that the Supper is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross, meaning that in the Sacrament Christ's body and blood are offered up to appease God's just anger over sin, impairs the oneness of the once and for all sacrifice on the cross** (Heb 7:26-27, 9:12). The sacrifice of the cross cannot be all-sufficient, offered once, and still need to be continually offered in the Mass. The only way that the sacrifice of the Sacrament is the same as the sacrifice of the cross is that in the Supper, that very body and blood which once won redemption for all, are now present in the Supper conveying those blessings to the individual. Chemnitz and the Lutheran fathers are extremely emphatic in their rejection of any form of eucharistic sacrifice which militates against the once and for all sacrifice of the cross or makes the Sacrament a human work or sacrifice.

Chemnitz, as Luther before him, is extremely adamant in his rejection of the Mass as a propitiatory sacrifice offered to God. He speaks of it as the abomination of the Mass.

That it lacks true, firm, and solid grounds in Scripture is, however, not the only thing we criticize in the papalist Mass; what we complain about most of all is that **it is an abomination, conflicting with the doctrine of the Word, the sacraments, and faith** — yes, that it is full

of abuse against the unique sacrifice of Christ and against His perpetual priesthood, as this has been demonstrated at length by the men on our side in fair and honest writings (*Ex*, 2, 493).

This is a very strong statement from Chemnitz who is usually very moderate and conciliatory. He is so firm in this statement because he believes that this concept of eucharistic sacrifice is contrary to the central article, justification by faith alone. When Christ's sacrifice at Calvary is not viewed as all-sufficient, the basis for justification is destroyed. The whole world is declared righteous on the basis of Christ's once and for all vicarious atonement sacrifice (objective justification). If there is no all-sufficient sacrifice there is no forensic justification. The whole world is declared righteous on the basis of Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice at Calvary, the blessings of which are offered to all in the means of grace (Word and Sacrament) and are appropriated through faith which is worked through those same means of grace (subjective justification).

This concept of eucharistic sacrifice not only makes the Calvary sacrifice less than complete, but it adds human activity to Christ's sacrifice. The church needs to continually offer Christ's sacrifice to the Father. The priest makes the offering not only in the name of Christ, but also in the name of the church, in the name of the faithful who are present, and even in his own name. This changes the action of God in the Sacrament into our activity or action. As a result, salvation is not entirely the work of God, but it is at least in part the work of man, and Christ is made of no effect (*Gal* 5:4; *Ex*, 2, 497).

This concept changes the primary emphasis of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is not man's offering to God, but it is primarily a testament or pure gift from God. It is the last will and testament of Christ where He gives us all the benefits of His atoning death of the cross (*LW*, 35, 86f). Here He bequeaths to us the whole treasure of the cross.

The papalist Mass obscures and overturns the means which the Son of God Himself instituted and ordained in order that through them the merit, power, and efficacy of His death and passion might be applied and accepted for the remission of sins and eternal salvation. For just as a sure and sufficient merit of salvation has been ordained by God,

namely, the sacrifice of Christ, so, because an application of His merit must be made, the Son of God instituted and ordained certain means for this purpose, namely, the means of Word and sacrament (*Ex*, 2, 497).

This is not to say that there is no offering of praise, thanksgiving, and one's whole sanctified life in the Sacrament. Still, this is always a secondary emphasis of the Supper. The Supper is primarily sacrament or a gift from God, and, secondary, our offering of thanksgiving in response to that gift.

According to the Lutheran fathers, the Supper contains all the elements of a last will and testament.

Since God in the Scriptures again and again calls his promise a testament he means to announce thereby that he will die; and again, in calling it a promise he means to announce that he will live. And thus, by that one word he wanted to make us understand that he would become man, die; and yet live eternally ... A testament is nothing but the last will of one who is dying, telling how his heirs are to live with and dispose of his properties after his death... **Four things are necessary in a complete and proper testament:** the testator, the oral or written promise, the inheritance, and the heirs; and all of these are clearly visible to us in this testament. **The testator** is Christ, who is about to die. **The promise** is contained in the words with which the bread and wine are consecrated. **The inheritance** which Christ has bequeathed to us in his testament is the forgiveness of sins. **The heirs** are all the believers in Christ, namely, the holy elect children of God — wherefore Paul in Titus 1 [:1] calls the Christian faith the faith of the elect (*LW*, 36, 179).²⁰

As Augustine gives his presentation of eucharistic sacrifice, it is not in contrast to controversy concerning this doctrine, as was the case with Chemnitz. Therefore, Augustine is not as precise as Chemnitz in his definition of eucharistic sacrifice, nor is there any reason we should expect him to be. He was not facing the same issues as arose in the Reformation. There are times in his writings where Augustine appears to be saying that the Eucharist is a true sacrifice of Christ's body and blood in and of itself, and not only a commemoration of the all-sufficient sacrifice of the cross (Augustine, *Sermon Denis* 3, 102f). Still, he does not explain what

²⁰ See also pp. 9-12, and 31-33 above.

he means by this. If he means the Eucharist is a sacrifice because here the body and blood which were the once and for all sacrifice for sin, are present conveying all the blessings of the cross to the individual, Chemnitz would agree with him. In that sense the Eucharist may be called a true sacrifice. If, however, he means that in the Eucharist Christ's body and blood are offered to the Father as a propitiatory sacrifice for sin, Chemnitz would totally disagree.

The idea that the Supper is a propitiatory sacrifice offered to God militates against Augustine's own understanding of the cross. For Augustine the all-sufficient sacrifice and oblation for sin is the once and for all offering which the Redeemer made on Calvary (Augustine, *De Trinitate IV*, 13, 17, in CCSL 50, 183).²¹ It appears then that when Augustine speaks of the Eucharist as a sacrifice he does not mean that it, in and of itself, is a propitiatory sacrifice offered to God, but rather a commemoration of the all-sufficient sacrifice of the cross where Christ's body and blood offered once are made present, conveying all the blessings of the cross to Christ's body, the church.

When Augustine speaks of eucharistic sacrifice in a more precise manner, he usually speaks of it as such a commemoration. For example, he states that the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to the one true sacrifice on the cross, and this sacrifice is commemorated in the Sacrament.

For they were our examples, and in many and various ways they all pointed to the one sacrifice which we now commemorate. Now that this sacrifice has been revealed, and has been offered in due time, sacrifice is no longer binding as an act of worship, while it retains its symbolical authority (Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 6, 5, in NPNF, 4, 169).

The Hebrews, again, in their animal sacrifices, which they offered to God in many varied forms, suitably to the significance of the institution, typified the sacrifice offered by Christ. This sacrifice is also commemorated by Christians, in the sacred offering and participation of the body and blood of Christ (Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 20, 18, 262).

²¹ See also See *LSQ*, 33, 4, pp. 20-21.

Before the coming of Christ, the flesh and blood of this sacrifice were foreshadowed in the animals slain; in the passion of Christ the types were fulfilled by the true sacrifice; after the ascension of Christ, this sacrifice is commemorated in the sacrament (Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 20, 18, 262).²²

Both Chemnitz and Augustine would agree that the one true sacrifice to which all the Old Testament sacrifices point is the sacrifice of the cross, and this sacrifice is commemorated in the Holy Supper.

• The Ecclesial Concept of Eucharistic Sacrifice

While Augustine teaches that the Eucharist is a commemoration of Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross, his predominant theme by far as he discusses eucharistic sacrifice is that **the sacrifice of the Eucharist is Christ's body, the church**. Augustine teaches that as Christians were united with Christ and His body, the church, in Baptism, so in the Holy Supper they are strengthened and preserved in that unity by receiving His body and blood. Since they are united with Christ's body, the church, by receiving His body born of Mary, His body, the church, is the true sacrifice of the Eucharist. Out of gratitude for salvation full and free imparted to the church in the Sacrament through Christ's body and blood, the church offers itself, all that it is and all that it has, as a thankoffering to God on the basis of Christ's once and for all sacrifice on the cross. Concerning this Augustine writes in Book 10, 6 of the *City of God*:

For as we have many members in one body, and all members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another, having gifts which differ according to the grace that is given to us" (Rom 12:3-6). This is the sacrifice of Christians: "We, though many, are one body in Christ," and this is the sacrifice which the church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, known to the faithful, in which she teaches that she herself is offered in the offering she makes (1Co 10:17; Augustine, *City of God*, 10, 6, 46).²³

²² See also *LSQ*, 33, 4, pp. 20-22.

²³ See also *LSQ*, 33, 4, pp. 23-27.

Chemnitz, in his *Examen*, says much the same. According to Chemnitz, in the true use of the Holy Supper the church and individual believers dedicate themselves, soul and body, to the Lord. Christians present their bodies living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God which is our spiritual service (Rom 12:1). Having said this, Chemnitz quotes Augustine's statement from the *City of God* concerning the ecclesial concept of eucharistic sacrifice.

Therefore Augustine writes, *De civitate Dei*, Bk. 10, ch. 6: "This is the sacrifice of Christians that we, being many, are one body in Christ. The church frequently makes use of the sacrament of the altar, which is known to believers, where it is demonstrated to her that in the offering which she offers she is herself offered" (*Ex*, 2, 486).

The only apparent difference between Augustine and Chemnitz in this concept of eucharistic sacrifice is that Augustine tends to stress the offering of the church as a unity, and Chemnitz tends to stress the individual Christian offering of himself.

It also should be noted that Chemnitz is not the only Lutheran father to speak of this concept of eucharistic sacrifice. In his *Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, the Holy Mass*, Luther comes very close to Augustine's understanding.

To be sure this sacrifice of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, and of ourselves as well, we are not to present before God in our own person. **But we are to lay it upon Christ and let him present it for us**, as St. Paul teaches in Hebrews 13[:15], "Let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess him and praise him"; and all this "through Christ." **For this is why he is also a priest -- as Psalm 110[:4] says, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" -- because he intercedes for us in heaven.** He receives our prayer and sacrifice, and through himself, as a godly priest, makes them pleasing to God. Again St. Paul says in Hebrews 9[:24], "He has ascended into heaven to be a mediator in the presence of God on our behalf"; and in Romans 8[:34], "It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who sits on the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."

From these words we learn that we do not offer Christ as a sacrifice, but that Christ offers us. And in this way it is permissible, yes, profitable, to call the mass a sacrifice; not on its own account, but because we offer ourselves as a sacrifice along with Christ. That is, we lay ourselves on Christ by a firm faith in his testament and do not

otherwise appear before God with our prayer, praise, and sacrifice except through Christ and his mediation... . If the mass were so understood and for this reason called a sacrifice, it would be well. Not that we offer the sacrament, but that by our praise, prayer, and sacrifice we move him and give him occasion to offer himself for us in heaven and ourselves with him. **It is as if I were to say, I had brought a king's son to his father as an offering, when actually I had done no more than induce that son to present my need and petition to the king and made the son my mediator** (*LW*, 35, 99).

Chemnitz and the other Lutheran fathers make use of the ecclesial concept of eucharistic sacrifice. However, it is never as predominant in their writings as it is in Augustine's works. This is due in part to their general aversion to speaking of the Supper as a sacrifice. Whenever the Supper is designated a sacrifice there is always a possibility that it will be understood as a propitiatory sacrifice offered to God. Thus the Lutheran fathers are very reticent to speak of the Sacrament as a sacrifice in any way. They much prefer to highlight the primary emphasis of the Supper which is a testament or a gift from God. It is the last will and testament of Christ where he bequeathes all the blessings of the cross.

Another reason for this reluctance in employing this otherwise acceptable theme of eucharistic sacrifice may be its use among the Reformed. It was probably deemphasized in reaction to the Reformed teaching that the Supper was merely a sign of the unity of the church as the body of Christ and of the church offering itself. As the Reformed emphasized the church as the body of Christ as the only sense in which Christ was bodily present in the Supper, the Lutherans, desiring to stress the real presence of Christ's body and blood born of the Virgin in the bread and wine, made less use of the theme that in the Supper Christians are united into Christ's body, the church, and offer themselves to the Lord as a thankoffering for salvation full and free.

• The Sacrifice and Those Who Died in the Lord

Because the whole church is united with Christ, its Head, and offered up to the Father in the Eucharist, for Augustine, the Eucharist is beneficial not only for those who participate, but also for the

entire church including the faithful departed. The notion that the whole church is united with Christ's salvific work in the Sacrament leads Augustine to assume that there is a benefit for the whole church in the Sacrament, even for those who do not participate by oral reception. Thus, Augustine teaches that the sacrifice of the Eucharist is a great benefit to those who have died in the Lord by virtue of their baptismal faith.²⁴

Here Chemnitz parts company with the great Bishop of Hippo. Because the Sacrament was instituted by our Lord for the prescribed purpose of being eaten and drunk for the forgiveness of sins, the promised benefits can only be received through oral reception. Chemnitz disavows any benefit from the Supper for those absent.

A sacrament, however, is a holy sign through which God freely offers, conveys, applies, and seals His gratuitous benefits to us. It is therefore an extraordinary perversion of the Lord's Supper to make a sacrifice out of a sacrament, in the way the papalists speak of the sacrifice of their Mass, namely, that the representatory action of the priest procures for us the application of the benefits of Christ and that anyone who causes a Mass to be celebrated in his behalf by this work procures grace and whatever other things are ascribed to the Mass... In addition there is this perversion, that whereas Christ instituted the use of His Supper for all who receive it, who take, eat, and drink, the papalist Mass transfers the use and benefit of the celebration of the Lord's Supper in our time to the onlookers, who do not communicate, yes, to those who are absent, and even to the dead (*Ex*, 2, 498).

The Sacrament benefits only those who actively participate in the Supper. Besides this Chemnitz sees no need for any sacrifice, benefit, or prayer for the faithful departed, for they are already with the Lord in glory.

• **Proper Preparation for the Lord's Supper**

• Worthy Participation and the Sacrament

For Augustine, as for all the early fathers, St. Paul's admonition (1Co 11:29) concerning unworthy participation in the Sacrament was an extremely serious matter. These words made a deep

²⁴ See p. 27 above.

impression on the Early Church. Only those individuals who were baptized and instructed in Christian doctrine were permitted to partake in the Supper. If a person was in a state of impenitence, he was considered unworthy and was barred from the Sacrament. Chemnitz affirmed this practice of Augustine and the Early Church. One must be properly prepared to receive the Sacrament worthily. This worthiness consists in a sincere sorrow over sin, striving to do better, and in a confident faith in Jesus the Savior who paid for the sins of the world on the cross with His body and blood, and who gives us that very body and blood in the Supper for forgiveness of sins, life and salvation (*MWS*, 130).

Both Chemnitz and Augustine taught that the unworthy guest does not merely receive bread and wine. He truly receives the body and blood of the Lord, but it is to his great harm rather than to his benefit.²⁵ The eating of the unworthy (*manducatio indignorum*) together with the oral reception of Christ's body and blood by the communicants (*manducatio oralis*) became watch words for Chemnitz and the Lutheran fathers as they faced the controversy concerning the real presence with the Reformed. They maintained that only the one who believed in the oral reception of Christ's body and blood born of Mary and the eating of the same by the unworthy, really confessed the true and substantial presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper.

- Altar Fellowship and the Sacrament

Immorality indeed excludes one from the Lord's table. The same is true of false doctrine. The Sacrament is the supreme manifestation of the church's unity and a powerful means to effect that unity. As we were engrafted into Christ and His body in Baptism, so in the Supper we are strengthened and preserved in that unity. We are united with His one body, the church, by receiving His one body in the Supper (1Co 10:17). All Christians who come to the Sacrament present themselves as one spiritual family. What they eat and drink together, Christ's body and blood, ties them together far

²⁵ See *LSQ*, 33, 4, p. 28 and p. 28 above.

more closely than any bonds of blood. They are brothers and sisters in Christ. The unity that is effected in the Sacrament assumes a unity in doctrine and belief. Because this is the case, the Sacrament may be received only with those who confess all the doctrines of the Scripture. Otherwise, we are really lying. We are declaring that we are one when we are not one (Mat 7:15-19; Rom 16:17; Gal 1:8-9; Eph 4:1-6; 2Ti 2:16-19; 2Jo 9-11). There was no doubt about this truth in the Early Church. The Early Church unanimously practiced closed communion (Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship*, 115ff).

In the Reformation this principle was upheld. Luther writes, "Whoever really regards his doctrine, faith, and confession as true, right, and certain cannot remain in the same stall with such as teach or adhere to false doctrine" (*SL*, 17, 1180). "When it occurs that individuals become disagreed in doctrine, the result is that it separates them and indicates who the true Christians are, namely, those who have God's Word pure and excellent" (*SL*, 17, 1346). Luther put this statement into practice at the Marburg Colloquy of 1529 AD. As the Colloquy began, all participants considered themselves "Catholic" Christians who wanted the Catholic Church reformed, even if they differed on the manner of the Reformation. They viewed themselves as brothers who were coming together to discuss disagreements that had arisen between them. As a result of the Colloquy, Zwingli and the Swiss showed themselves not to be weak brothers but those who were persisting in false teaching in regard to the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood. Thus Luther would not give Zwingli the right hand of fellowship. The *Formula of Concord* of which Chemnitz was one of the authors, quotes Luther's verdict in regard to the Reformed and fellowship with them:

"I reckon them all as belonging together (that is, as Sacramentarians and enthusiasts), for that is what they are who will not believe that the Lord's bread in the Supper is his true, natural body, which the godless or Judas receive orally as well as St. Peter and all the saints. Whoever, I say, will not believe this, will please let me alone and expect no fellowship from me. This is final" (*FC SD*, §7 [33], Tappert 575).²⁶

Chemnitz, just as Augustine and the whole Ancient Church, would not commune with those who taught doctrine contrary to the Holy Scripture and, thus, practiced closed communion.

- **The Blessings of the Lord's Supper**

- The Sacrament as the Forgiveness of Sins

The Words of Institution summarize the blessings of the Supper in the words, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." Therefore, it is only natural that both Chemnitz and Augustine speak of the forgiveness of sin as a primary blessing of the Sacrament. Both men knew their lost and sinful condition by nature and yearned for the grace of God. Augustine's *Confessions* are a case study in human depravity, and these insights were deepened in his conflict with the Pelagians. Augustine recognized that his soul was never at rest until it was at rest in the Lord. Such rest Augustine found in the Holy Eucharist where he ate the price of his redemption as he asserts in the *Confessions*:

You know my unskillfulness and my weakness; teach me and heal me. **He, your only Son, in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, has redeemed me with His blood. Let not the proud speak evil of me, for my thoughts are on the price of my redemption; I eat it and drink it and give it to others to eat and drink, and, being poor myself, I desire to be satisfied by it among those that eat and are satisfied, and they shall praise the Lord who seek Him** (*Confessions*, 10, 43,256).

Chemnitz fought to defend that same certainty of forgiveness and peace with God. In Chemnitz' estimation, the Roman party endangered salvation by making it dependant on human action, and the Reformed took away the comfort of forgiveness in the means of grace by denying their efficacious power. He found wonderful comfort in the truth that the Lord's Supper and the other means of grace truly dispense forgiveness of sins and all God's blessings.

But lest the infirmity, unworthiness, and uncleanness of our flesh disturb or overturn our faith, the Son of God affirms that in His Supper He is offering His body and blood to us in such a way that with the

²⁶ For a complete study of the Marburg Colloquy, also see H. Sasse, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-238.

bread and wine we receive them in our mouth, that we may be even more certain that the unworthiness and uncleanness of our flesh can be covered and hidden before the tribunal of God through the most holy body and most precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ ... Some prayers of the ancient Greek fathers are extant in which with the sweetest words they say that the body and blood of Christ, when they are eaten by us in the Supper, **become for us the 'acceptable offering' which we can bring before the tribunal of God [Rom 15:16, 31]. Likewise they speak of it as our guarantee of eternal life and salvation (LS, 190).**

Because of the controversies which Chemnitz faced in the Reformation, the means of grace are even more predominant in his theology than in Augustine's. First of all he makes a distinction between where salvation was won and where it is dispensed. Salvation was accomplished totally and completely through Christ's holy life for us and His holy death for our sins. (substitutionary atonement) However, Christ did not distribute or give salvation on the cross. This He does through the means of grace, Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments. The Scriptures declare that faith comes from hearing the Word, that Baptism saves us, that whenever you forgive sins they are forgiven and whenever you do not forgive sins, they are not forgiven, and that the Lord's Supper gives the forgiveness of sins (Rom 10:17; 1Pe 3:21; Joh 20:23; Mat 26:28). God nowhere promises the Spirit and His gifts outside these means of grace. In this Chemnitz is in agreement with the Lutheran Confessions which state, "We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through His external Word and Sacraments. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and Sacraments is of the devil" (SA, 3, 8, 10, 313).

Chemnitz points out that the Christian is brought to faith and reborn through the life-giving Word and Holy Baptism. The Christian daily returns to his Baptism through repentance and faith and strengthens and nourishes that baptismal faith-life through the Word and the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood (Ex, 2, 239). Likewise, Holy Absolution, both public and private, is not merely an announcement of forgiveness, but a real impartation of the same (Ex,

2, 562). Through these God ordained means of grace, the Lord both confers on men the remission of sins merited by Christ and works faith in that proffered forgiveness or, where faith already exists, it strengthens and nourishes it.

- The Sacrament as Life-Giving Nourishment and Salvation

As Martin Chemnitz explains the blessings of the Sacrament, another major theme found in his writings is that the body and blood of our Lord in the Supper are life-giving. Here is received life-giving flesh. Chemnitz cites the fathers of the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) as saying:

The flesh of Christ on account of the union with the divine nature, which is life itself, is made life-giving or a life-giver and it thus has the authority or power to give life, and this authority it exercises in the action of the Lord's Supper in the believers (*TNC*, 474).

Chemnitz' affirmation of this statement in his *De Duabus Naturis* is in line with his incarnational theology and points to the essential connection between Christology and soteriology in his thought. According to the hypostatic or personal union the Divine Logos, who is the only begotten of the Father before all worlds, assumed human nature into His divine person. The human nature in Christ does not subsist in itself or according to itself, in its own personality, but subsists in another, namely in the *hypostasis* of the pre-existent Logos (ἀνυπόστατον, ἐνυπόστατον) (*TNC*, 31). The personal union is the union of the divine and the human, subsisting in the one hypostasis (ὑπόστασις, *persona*) of the Son of God, producing a mutual and indissoluble communion of both natures.

As a result of the hypostatic union, Chemnitz teaches a real communication of attributes in the person of Christ. On the basis of the communication of attributes Chemnitz maintains that Christ's flesh is life-giving or as Luther says, that it is body and blood that is filled with God or permeated with divinity — ... *sondern es ist ein Leib und Blut, der voll Gottes ist, oder das durchgöttert ist* (*SL*, 7, 2353; *LW*, 23, 143). The fact that Christ's body and blood are filled with God or permeated with divinity is taught, in particular, on the basis of the second genus of the communication of attributes

(*Genus Maiestaticum*) which states that while nothing is added to or taken away from the divine nature, yet, because of the hypostatic union with the deity, countless supernatural qualities and qualities which are even contrary to the common condition of human nature, are given and communicated to Christ's human nature (*TNC*, 6). This truth is expressed by St. Paul when he writes, "For in Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9). Only the life and death of this One who is God and man in one person could accomplish the redemption of the world. He had to be true man so that He could take our place under the Law and suffer and die in our stead. At the same time, He had to be true God so that His holy life and death would be a sufficient ransom for all men.

Because Christ's body and blood are permeated with divinity, they are certainly life-giving as they are received in the Blessed Sacrament. The Divine Logos, who became incarnate and dwelt among us as the second Adam to undo our lost condition and restore all people to the original righteousness and holiness of the first Adam at the creation and even more, to give us eternal life in heaven — paradise regained, is now incarnate in the Sacrament dispensing all the treasures of that salvation. Here the altar becomes His manger and we receive His flesh permeated with divinity which transforms us into Itself and prepares us for eternity (*LS*, 155; *LW*, 37, 101). Our Lord says, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him ... so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me" (Joh 6:54-57). While this passage does not specifically refer to the Lord's Supper, its promise certainly applies to all places where He is present for us with His blessings and, therefore, applies to worthy participation in His body and blood in the Holy Sacrament. Thus, there is no end to the benefits which Chemnitz ascribed to this vivifying flesh. It is a heavenly and spiritual nourishment for both body and soul of believers unto eternal life. It is "a medicine of immortality, an antidote, that we may

not die but live in God through Jesus Christ, a cleansing remedy through warding off and driving out evils" (*LS*, 61; *Ex*, 2, 234). With this incarnational theology of the Supper Chemnitz, at times, alludes to 2 Peter 1:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:16 expressing the benefits of the Supper in the *theosis* or deification theme of the Ancient Church. Christ gives us His body and blood permeated with divinity, so that we might be drawn into communion and union with the deity itself, participating in the divine nature (*LS*, 143; *LS*, 188; *TNC*, 55).²⁷

Augustine refers to the Sacrament as "Life" in his *On the Merits and Remission of Sins* (Augustine, *On Merit and Remission of Sin*, 1.34, 274). However, this explanation of the blessings of the Supper is not as common in Augustine as in Chemnitz. It appears he does not make the same connection between Christology and the soteriological significance of the vivifying flesh of Christ that Chemnitz does. This is more prevalent among the Greek fathers.

In one of his Christmas sermons, Augustine states, "He who was God became Man in His effort to make godlike those who were men; without relinquishing what He was, He desired to become what He had made. He Himself fashioned what He would become, in that He added man's nature to God without losing God's nature in man" (Augustine, *Sermon* 192.1, in *The Fathers of the Church*, 38, 32). Yet, even when he makes a statement like this which sounds much more at home among the Greek fathers than in the West, he makes no connection to the Eucharist. He does not speak of the Eucharist as the medicine of immortality, as the life-giving flesh of God, and as the means of communion and union with the deity, participating in the divine nature. One of the places where Augustine may have this concept in mind is when he puts these words on the lips of our Lord in the *Confessions*, "I am the food of the grown man. Grow and you shall feed upon me. And you will not, as with the food of the body, change me into yourself, but you will be changed into me" (*Confessions*, 7, 10, 149).²⁸

²⁷ See also pp. 13-15, 31-33 above.

²⁸ See also *LSQ*, 33, 4, pp. 31-33.

Augustine thinks more in terms of the whole church receiving the benefits of the Eucharist, than in the individual participating in the deified flesh of Christ.

- The Sacrament as the Bond of Unity

The primary purpose and benefit of the Sacrament in Augustine's theology is unity. This is the great contribution of the Bishop of Hippo to the dogma of the Eucharist. It is the Sacrament of unity because it unites God's people to Christ, their head, and to each other in His body, the church. Augustine says, "**If you receive worthily, you are what you received**" (Augustine, *Sermon 227*, 96). As we were united with Christ and His body, the church, in Baptism, so in the Eucharist we are strengthened and preserved in that unity by receiving His body and blood. In the Supper the Lord comes to the believer with His body and blood and unites the believer with Himself. He remains in us and we in Him ever undivided, both here in time and forever in eternity.²⁹

Augustine illustrates this unity with Christ and the incorporation into His body which occurs in the Eucharist, building on St. Paul's words, "For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of the one bread." (1Co 10:17) He applies St. Paul's concept of the church being "one bread" and compares Christians to seeds of grain being milled. "Remember that bread is not made from one grain, but from many. When you were exorcised you were, after a fashion, milled. When you were baptized you were moistened. When you received the fire of the Holy Spirit you were baked. Be what you see, and receive what you are" (Augustine, *Sermon 272*, 95).

Augustine's concept of the Eucharist as the Sacrament of unity, the bond of charity is the basis for his principle concept of eucharistic sacrifice. In the Supper the assembly is drawn together as Christ's body, the church, and offered up to the Father as a thank-offering on the basis of Christ's atonement sacrifice on the cross. The Sacrament as the bond of unity and the ecclesial concept of

²⁹ See also *LSQ*, 33, 4, pp. 33-36.

eucharistic sacrifice in many ways summarizes Augustine's eucharistic theology.

To refer to the Supper as the source of our mutual fraternal fellowship in the church is not foreign to Chemnitz.

But because Christ in the Supper joins Himself most intimately to us by that very nature with which He is our Head, namely, by His body and blood, at the same time through this assumed nature of His, which is akin to ours, He will work powerfully and efficaciously in the believers, so that, because our Head Himself is among us, we also may be members of one another. For we being many are one body because we all partake of that one bread which is the body of Christ (1Co 10:17), and we all drink into the one Spirit (1Co 12:13; *LS*, 193).

This, nevertheless, is not Chemnitz' primary emphasis. For Chemnitz the Sacrament is principally a means through which the benefits of the cross are appropriated by the individual. In comparison to this understanding of the eucharistic benefit, the concept of the Eucharist as the bond of unity fades into the background in the works of Chemnitz. This is true because the great questions of the Reformation were how does a man find a gracious God and how is that grace received by the individual? Also, in the Reformation era people were generally more conscious of the individual than in previous eras and thought of themselves as individuals. Augustine, on the other hand, speaks of the benefits of the Supper in relationship to the whole church, almost to the exclusion of the individual. This is the case because he does not think of Christians as individuals in their relationship with the Lord, but a part of Christ's body, the church. While one would never want to underrate the blessings and comfort of the Sacrament for the individual, in our land of rugged individualism we do well to highlight the fact we are not individuals standing alone in relation to the Lord, but are part of Christ's body, the church, drawn together through His body and blood in the Supper.

Augustine of Hippo and Martin Chemnitz are separated by more than a thousand years. They are separated both in culture and in race, one a North African and the other a Saxon German. Yet, they both confess the real presence of Christ's body and blood in

the Sacrament, which is effected through the Word and institution of Christ. One cries to Christians today: "O Sacrament of unity, O bond of charity. You, O Christians are what you receive. Be offered up through Christ, your head." The other in eucharistic joy exclaims: "Receive the vivifying flesh and blood of Christ, our ransom, the price of our redemption, the food for sojourners, the medicine of immortality, a foretaste of heaven."

Abbreviations

Confessions — Augustine. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*.

Doctrina — Augustine. *De Doctrina Christiana*.

Ex — Chemnitz. *Examen*.

FC — Formula of Concord (SD — Solid Declaration)

LS — Chemnitz. *The Lord's Supper*

LSQ — *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*

LW — Martin Luther in *Luther's Works (American Edition)*

MWS — Chemnitz. *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments, an Enchiridion*

SL — Martin Luther in *Luther's Works (St. Louis Edition)*

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The Theology of Death in the Writings of St. Ambrose

By: Paul I. Johnston

Death is a topic which occurs again and again in the writings of Ambrose of Milan. The stark exigencies of life in fourth century Europe probably made this topic a necessary one for the faithful bishop of souls to treat, but beneath and alongside the references to death which Ambrose makes in his writings is a discernable theology of death. It will be the purpose of this study to examine in some detail what Ambrose believed concerning death, and then to see how these beliefs are reflected in some of his representative works. The seven works selected for reading and examination of their presentation of the subject of death include Ambrose's *De Paradiso*, *De bono mortis*, *De fuga saeculi*, and the funerary works *Consolation on the Death of Emperor Valentinian*, *Funeral Oration on the Death of Emperor Theodosius*, *On the Decease of Satyrus*, and *On the Belief in the Resurrection*.

Ambrose's View of Death

Ambrose distinguishes among three kinds of death.³⁰ The first, spiritual death, he sees as the Christian's dying to sin and coming alive to God. The second, natural death, he defines as the condition necessary to all men's experience of separating the human soul from the body.³¹ The third kind of death is penal death, in which Ambrose views the soul dying to God through sin.^{32,33}

³⁰ I am indebted to Dr. Quentin F. Wesselschmidt of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, for initial insights into Ambrose's thanatology.

³¹ Quenstedt apparently would agree with Ambrose's definition of natural death, for his own definition is that "The nature of death is the loosening, and local separation, of the soul from the body" (Syst. II, 1701). Quoted in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:507.

³² These are taken from Ambrose, "On the Belief in the Resurrection," §36. Roy Joseph Deferrari, gen ed., *The Fathers of the Church*, 69 vols. (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1953). Vol. 22: *Funeral Orations by Saint Gregory*

Ambrose appears to spend the bulk of his writings elaborating upon the second classification of death as a separation of soul and body. This type of separation is to him not the end of life itself, but rather a blessed release of the soul from its bodily prison.³⁴ The body's comforts and joys and presence are lost to the believer's soul only temporarily, believes Ambrose, because Christ in the resurrection will make all things new, including a restoration of the conjoint operations of the human soul and body. Because the soul is very life itself, it continues to live on in a conscious, though resting, mode of existence, he claims. Physical death is viewed also as not being inherently part of the nature of man, but as a result of the fall into sin.³⁵

Death is feared by people for three reasons, Ambrose asserts. Either they fear annihilation of their personalities at death, or they love the body and the attractions and activities connected with worldly life to such a degree that the idea of death seems intolerable to them. The other reason for human disquiet over having to undergo death is the fact, says Ambrose, that many people believe a number of fables concerning torments in the coming life which are not

Nazianzen and Saint Ambrose, trans. Leo P. McCauley, John J. Sullivan, Martin R. P. McGuire, and Roy J. Deferrari, 211-212. All other footnote references to the *Fathers of the Church* series will be abbreviated FOC and appropriate volume number given.

³³ "Eternal death, eternal damnation, is a condition most miserable through the aggregation of multitudinous evils, and to last forever." David Hollaz, quoted in Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 656.

³⁴ Here Ambrose probably is displaying the influence of Neoplatonism. "All individual souls are of celestial origin. But these, descending into bodies, forget more or less completely the source from which they spring, and become imprisoned and entombed in matter." Frederick Homes Dudden, *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), 255ff. Dudden gives an interesting observation here also concerning how the Neoplatonic thought current in Ambrose's day effected a synthesis (and thus a strengthening) of the pagan cults.

³⁵ Dudden adds, "Though it [death] did not belong to man's original nature, it is now *conversa in naturam*, and has become, since Adam, the *lex communis* which we cannot hope to evade." *Ibid.*, 651.

necessarily true.³⁶ He does assert, however, that a fear of death is natural to man, because death itself is an unnatural end to life and not a part of God's natural processes operating in creation.

Because death in Ambrose's second sense is not really an evil since it brings rest for the body and a freeing of the soul to depart and be with Christ, not death itself but only an irrational fear of death is what should be feared by the Christian, says Ambrose. Death provides the only authentic rest possible for man, and in contemplating death, a man can see that it is a good thing to die because many holy and wise men in the Scriptures even desired death as a rest from their labors (Ambrose mentions such men as St. Paul, Job, David, and Simeon). Death *per se* cannot be an evil also for the reason that it is a universal experience — and if a common law of human nature, thus not something to be lamented. Lastly, Ambrose claims that death is not really an evil because it itself puts an end to evil, an end to sin, and an end to spiritual restlessness.³⁷ If the main part or essential life of the Christian, the soul, cannot be hurt by death, but rather passes as a result of death from a demeanor of agitation to one of tranquility, then death must be a good instead of an evil, he believes. Ambrose even goes so far as to claim that the human soul is endowed with more lively vigor after death than it had at any time here in this life.

The bishop of Milan also holds that a person's eternal future is already, irrevocably determined at the hour of his death. Although one might pray for the deathbed conversions of one's relatives and friends, and acknowledge them as valid with great rejoicing to God when they did occur, it would be a mistake to Ambrose to speak of

³⁶ Some of these fables are listed by Ambrose in *De bono mortis*, §8.33. Bernard M. Peebles, gen. ed., *The Fathers of the Church*, 69 vols. (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1972). Vol. 65: *Saint Ambrose: Seven Exegetical Works*, trans. Michael P. McHugh, 94.

³⁷ "... we attain to that life where there will be no more forgiveness, but only perfectly pure and holy people, full of godliness and righteousness, removed and free from sin, death, and all evil, in a new, immortal, and glorified body," LC, Apostles' Creed, Art. III; §58, *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 693.

a possibility for conversion after death. He also teaches that all Christian souls are granted an interlude of seven days between their release by death and their entrance into either Paradise or the Kingdom of Heaven to contemplate their happy fate. Through such contemplation these souls increase the measure of heavenly bliss they have been given to experience, Ambrose believes.

Martyrs received special emphasis in Ambrose's system of eschatology. He believed that the holy Apostles and martyrs could intercede with Christ to obtain forgiveness or special temporal favors for the ones who called upon their names. Ambrose taught that the martyrs, though dead, remained conscious of earthly life and actions, and that they were especially active and to be invoked at the site of their tombs. Prayers alone could effect their help, but even better was to produce a "pledge" of the martyr when invoking his or her help. These "pledges" were some relic of the saint—a portion of the instrument used to torture them, for example, or some of their own bones or blood—which could be accorded some place of honor in a church building and counted on to produce supernatural results of healings and deliverance. Ambrose was one of the first to introduce and strongly push the veneration of relics in the Western church.³⁸

Human death was exemplified and explained by the saving death of Jesus Christ, in Ambrose's thought. Christ died in order that men might become perfect and learn to know God, he believed. It is primarily through the death and blood and sufferings of Christ that mankind is ransomed from sin and eternal death and delivered over into a state of grace and of God's favor. "It was fitting that He should die for all, that in His Cross there should be remission of sins and that His Blood should wash away the defilements of the

³⁸ On this, see Dudden, 308-319. Paulinus also gives evidence in his account of Ambrose's belief in and advocacy of the discovery and use of martyrs' relics in Christian worship. See, for example, Paulinus' chapter XIV, which details Ambrose's discovery of the long-forgotten martyrs SS. Protasius and Gervasius. Paulinus of Nola, "The Life of St. Ambrose," in Frederick Russell Hoare, ed., *The Western Fathers* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), 159.

world,” is how Ambrose expresses the importance of Christ’s expiatory death in one place.³⁹

What follows are brief examinations of the individual works for the manner in which they treat the subject of death, so central to the teaching of St. Ambrose.

De bono mortis

This sermon by Ambrose, composed in written form sometime between 387 and 391, is one of the chief sources in his writings of his teaching concerning the nature of physical death. His burden is to show the reader that death for the Christian is a positive good and not a punishment. A secondary emphasis in the work is to urge the soul onward in its growth in heavenly virtues in view of the fact that physical death is to be sought and prayed for as a good.⁴⁰

Ambrose from the first admits that the pagans, and even Holy Scripture, assert that death is a deprivation of life, hence an evil. Death is “the evil which is introduced as the price of [man’s] condemnation,” however-not as part of God’s original plan, but now a fact to which all creation is subject due to man’s disobedience and folly (*FOC* 65, §1.2, 71). Since man brought sin into the world, argues Ambrose, and sin has brought burdens, evil, and vanity to all men which they can scarcely endure, the relief of these burdens must be a good, and therefore death as the great releaser from all earthly trials is a good.

³⁹ Ambrose, quoted in Dudden, 607. This biographer insists that the chief emphasis in Ambrose’s theology of the atonement lies in the fact that “the Son of God became incarnate in order that, by means of His sufferings and the death of His body, He might redeem man from the sinful state to which his fall had brought him.” Dudden, *ibid.*, 605.

⁴⁰ “In the preaching and writings of St. Ambrose during these months, there no longer shines forth that buoyancy so characteristic of the years of struggle against the Arians. From their contemplative spirit, from their reserve we come to appreciate his change of attitude: age and experience had made him more calm, more spiritual.” Angelo Paredi, *Saint Ambrose: His Life and Times*, trans. M. Joseph Costelloe (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 209.

He makes a physiological observation as to how death appears in section 2.5, with the words, “And at last, in its departure, we see how the soul of the dying man gradually frees itself from the bonds of the flesh and, passing out from the mouth, flies away as if freed from the prison, the poor abode that is the body” (*FOC 65* §2.5, 72-73).⁴¹ Ambrose speaks of death as being a “freeing of the soul from the body, a kind of separation in man, (*FOC 65*, §3.8, 74) and as providing release and rest for the body. The soul, however, at death “turns to its place of repose and is free, and if it is devout, it is going to be with Christ” (*FOC 65* §3.8, 75). It rejoices in this freedom from the body, for while joined with the body the soul’s strength was impeded and its concentration hindered (*FOC 65* §3.12, 78). “The soul is not held back by any obstacle placed by death but is more active, because it is active in its own sphere without any association with the body, which is more of a burden than a benefit to it” (*FOC 65* §4.13, 80), says Ambrose. These observations are as much philosophical as they are theological, it would seem.

Resuming his discourse on physical death as a release from burdens in this sin infested life and as a rest for the soul, Ambrose says,

Now consider this: If life is a burden, death is a release; if life is a punishment, death is a remedy; and if there is a judgment after death, there is also life after death. And so is not such a life a good?... Therefore death is in every way a good, both because it separates elements in conflict, so that they may not fight with one another, and because it is a kind of harbor for those who seek an anchorage of trusty rest after they have been tossed about on the sea of this life, and because it does not make man’s condition worse (*FOC 65* §.14, 80.81).

Death must be good, he argues, because death brings the end of sin (not of existence or of personal consciousness) and the end of even the possibility of increasing the tally of one’s faults before God.⁴² The resurrection promised in Scripture serves the purpose

⁴¹ In another place, Ambrose expresses this idea in another way, “Now through death the soul is freed, while it separates itself from the dwelling place of the body and divests itself of the wrappings of disquiet.” Ambrose, *De bono mortis*, §5.16, 82.

⁴² This idea of death being a good because it delivers individual men or the

“that the guilt might fail through death, but the nature be continued through resurrection” (*FOC* 65 §4.14, 81).

Much attention is given to warnings and arguments against a morbid fear of death, which Ambrose believes is unnatural. Not only does death bring a rest from earthly toils, but also “a return to life-only those who have died can rise again” (*FOC* 65 §8.32, 94). The example of Lazarus shows the Christian that death is to be feared as little as sleep, because both bring rest. The “soul is freed, the body dissipated. What is freed rejoices, what is dissipated into its clay feels nothing. What feels nothing is nothing to us,” Ambrose observes (*FOC* 65 §8.31, 93-94). For all of these reasons, then, Ambrose asserts:

And so death is not an evil. For death is not with the living nor with the departed. It is not with some, because they are still living, but the others have departed. And so death is not bitter in the case of those who still do not know it, for the very reason that they do not know it, nor in the case of those who already have no sensation in regard to the body and have been freed as regards the soul (*FOC* 65 §7.30, 93).

Ambrose teaches also that the blessings given by those who are about to die have great spiritual power, and that Christians should be zealous to seek out these blessings at each opportunity which presents itself. “Let the last words of the one who is about to die reecho your name, and as his soul departs from the body let it bear with itself a blessing on you,” is his observation in this regard (*FOC* 65 §8.37, 97). Death is good because it puts an end to errors and sins, believes Ambrose. Death puts an end to guilt, not to nature (*FOC* 65 §9.38, 98). The soul which does not sin does not die, because it remains in its own nature, in virtue and glory (*FOC* 65 §9.41, 100). The soul is life itself, and is the opposite of death

world itself from continuing to heap up sins is found often in Ambrose, as, for example, in this commentary on Psalm 46, verse 5: “Towards the evening of the world He is slain, when the light was beginning to fail; for the whole world was in darkness and would have been wrapped in more miserable darkness still, had not Christ, the Everlasting Light, come to us from heaven to pour out on mankind a season of innocence.” Quoted in Robinson Thornton, *St. Ambrose: His Life, Times, and Teaching* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1879), 149.

(*FOC 65* §9.42, 100).⁴³ As death's opposite, then, the soul cannot die. "If the soul is in the hand of God, surely our soul is not shut up in the tomb with the body nor is it held by the funeral pyre, but enjoys a holy repose," he says (*FOC 65* §10.44, 101). The soul at death does not experience death as such, but is "snatched away from death" to receive a "pious inheritance" (*FOC 65* §12.55, 110).

As a kind of summary of Ambrose's presentation of death as separation of soul and body, here is this passage from the latter half of *Death as a Good*:

Who would doubt that death is a good? Whatever is unquiet, or shameworthy, or hostile to us, whatever is boisterous or stormy or entices to vice of every kind, is at rest; it lies still and is shut in the hollow tomb like a wild beast. Its savagery is bereft of life, while the union of the vital parts is dead and dissolved into clay. But that part that is intimate with the virtues, friendly to the rules of right conduct, zealous for glory, in pursuit of the good and subject to God—that part flies away to what is on high; it remains with the pure and everlasting good that is immortal, cleaves to Him and is with Him from whom it takes its likeness, 'whose offspring,' as someone says, 'we also are' (*FOC 65* §9.38, 97).

It should be noted that in this sermon Ambrose takes a Neoplatonic view of the body of the Christian, calling it even "nothing to us" (*FOC 65* §8.31, 94) and the instrument which "pours death into the soul" (*FOC 65* §7.26, 90). In this total identification of the evil fleshly desires with the corporeal existence of the Christian, Ambrose goes beyond Scripture and sets up a non-Christian Gnostic-type dualism which actually strikes at the heart of the doctrine of the Incarnation and lends aid to the position of argumentation of

⁴³ But this is perhaps too optimistic a view to have even of the Christian's regenerate soul. Charles Porterfield Krauth comments in this regard, "There are those who seem to think that the body is the seat of original sin, and that all that is necessary to redeem the soul from the power of sin, is to separate it from the body. But the true primary seat of sin is the soul. The body can be spoken of as the seat of sin only in a secondary sense, and because of the soul's connection with it." C. P. Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 426.

the Arians, whom Ambrose hated so bitterly.⁴⁴ This criticism aside, *De bono mortis* provides an excellent sketch of Ambrose's theology of natural death and, to a lesser extent, of spiritual and penal death also.

De Paradiso

In this sometimes rambling and disconnected essay, Ambrose mostly concerns himself with the argument whether God's foreknowledge of the Fall made Him in some way a cause of Adam's sin. His allegorical method of exegesis is much in evidence throughout the treatise, especially in its first part, where Ambrose attempts to draw a parallel between the four branches of the river encircling Paradise (Genesis 2:1-14) and the four ancient Greek cardinal virtues of wisdom, fortitude, temperance, and justice.⁴⁵ His discussion treats most of death in chapter 9, sections 43 and 44, when Ambrose explains what Scripture means when God told Adam, "thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

Ambrose asserts that the serpent spoken of in the text as the perpetrator of death upon Adam and Eve "stands for enjoyment and the figure of the woman for the emotions of the mind and heart."⁴⁶ These two conspired together to deceive the mind [Adam], which

⁴⁴ On the false Gnostic dualism, Lohse comments, "However, through the true man's denial of the world and striving for redemption is expressed a new understanding of life which condemns the world as alien and seeks for a way to salvation that will enable the soul to return to its true home, which has long been lost to it." Eduard Lohse, *The New Testament Environment*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976), 254.

⁴⁵ J. H. Srawley points out in his introduction that the allegorical interpretation of Scripture had the advantage for the expositor of allowing him to maintain the unity of the Old and New Testaments, especially in presenting preparation and fulfillment of prophecy; and it "minimized the risk of allowing the literal meaning of Scripture to obscure its deeper and permanent truth for the guidance alike of the devotional and practical life." J. H. Srawley, ed., *St. Ambrose On the Sacraments and On the Mysteries*, trans. T. Thompson (London: S.P.C.K., 1950), 44

⁴⁶ Roy Joseph Deferrari, gen ed., *The Fathers of the Church*, 69 vols. (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1961). Vol. 42: *Saint Ambrose: Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, trans. John J. Savage, §11, chapter 2, 293.

under the dual onslaught fell altogether.⁴⁷ Had Eve had pure senses which were controlled by the mind, Ambrose believes that the Fall could have been prevented: “If Eve, that is, the emotions of the first woman, had kept her lamp lighted, she would not have enfolded us in the meshes of her sin. She would not have fallen from the height of immortality which is established as the reward of virtue” (*FOC* 42 §11, chapter 2, 294).⁴⁸

Replying to those who contend that it was to no avail for God to inflict death as the punishment for Adam’s disobedience because one cannot fear what he does not already know from experience, Ambrose says that death is so strong and so unnatural an occurrence that the first man, endowed as he was with a fully-formed capacity to reason, quite naturally was conscious that death was something unpleasant and to be shunned. “There is an instinct innate in all living creatures which impels them to dread even what they have not yet experienced as harmful,” he comments (*FOC* 42 §29, chapter 5, 307).

Another problem that may arise in devout minds which contemplate the mysteries of Paradise is the question of whether the forbidden tree was the source of the death (natural death and penal death, presumably) which came to Adam, or whether God Himself actually smote Adam with death. The first-given solution to the problem from whence death came would imply that God was less powerful than the tree which He had planted in the garden; the

⁴⁷ Dudden says on this point, “The devil did not venture to attack the reason directly; he enticed the sensuous element, which in turn seduced the reason. Thus both the higher and the lower parts of man’s nature combined to produce sin.” Dudden, *Life and Times*, 615.

⁴⁸ Vanity is exemplified in another way by the daughters of Eve [sensuality], notes Ambrose: “Though God is ‘a craftsman and painter of distinction,’ there are women who ‘erase that painting by smearing rouge upon their faces with their natural whiteness. The resulting picture is not one of beauty but of ugliness, of fraud rather than of simplicity. It is something passing that is spoiled by rain or perspiration Do not put aside the painting made by God to assume that of a prostitute.’” Ambrose, quoted in Paredi, *Saint Ambrose: His Life and Times*, 322.

second, that God is guilty of inconsistency in His innermost nature and counsels. Ambrose concludes that, since disobedience was the real cause of Adam's death, man himself is the agent of his own death. God cannot be blamed for imposing this death, says Ambrose, because God as a good physician counselled Adam not to eat what He knew would be harmful to him.

Ambrose next discusses the implication of a set of four phrases which he draws somewhat tangentially from Genesis 2:17—to live in life, to die in death, to die in life, to live in death (*FOC 42 §43* chapter 9, 322). The first of these, “to live in life,” he explains as meaning “a wonderful life of happiness” lived in genuine virtue, or “to bring about in the life of this body of ours a participation in the life of blessedness” (*FOC 42 §44* chapter 9, 322). “To die in death” means the separation of soul and body at the time of death, when the body disintegrates and the soul cannot yet take full part in eternal life. Ambrose explains “to die in life” as referring to the spiritual death which exists already here on earth among the unbelievers who are alive in body “but because of [their] acts, [are] dead” (*FOC 42 §44* chapter 9, 322).⁴⁹ And “to live in death” is a category which applies to men and women who sacrifice their earthly lives rather than deny Christ and the saving faith. “The flesh dies, but what is good does survive,” Ambrose observes (*FOC 42 §44*, chapter 9, 323).⁵⁰ In section 45 of chapter 9 Ambrose gives his threefold division of death into spiritual death, natural death, and penal death which was mentioned at the beginning of this study.

This treatise on the spiritual significance of Paradise closes with Ambrose's appeal for his readers to undergo spiritual death through

⁴⁹ And so Quenstedt remarks, “The eternal death of the damned is the final and entire loss of divine fellowship, and the horrible torture of soul and body resulting therefrom, the never-ending misery dreaded by the damned in hell, which is called by John the second death, Rev. 2:11; 20:14, in referring to both the natural and the spiritual death peculiar to unbelievers.” Quoted in Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 627.

⁵⁰ This idea is in agreement with the Lutheran Confessions, which remark, “And death itself serves this purpose, to abolish this flesh of sin, that we may rise absolutely new.” AP VI; §56, *Triglotta*, 299.

sanctification, so that they may survive the inevitable experience of natural death. He ends with this typically Pauline injunction,

The law of the flesh wars against the law of the mind. We must labor and sweat so as to chastise the body and bring it into subjection and sow the seeds of spiritual things. If we sow what is carnal, we shall reap fruit that is carnal. If, however, we sow what is spiritual, we shall reap the fruit of the spirit.... we surely ought to fill the belly of our souls with the Word of God rather than with the corruptible things of this world (*FOC* 42 §77, chapter 15, 356; §74, chapter 15, 353).

Funeral Oration on the Death of Emperor Theodosius

Ambrose delivered this address in the year 395, just two years prior to his own death. The primary concern which apparently was troubling his mind was not so much the theological aspects of death, but the political instability throughout the Roman Empire which was likely to occur now that the strong and victorious Theodosius⁵¹ had been succeeded by both his adolescent sons-Honorius in the West, and Arcadius in Constantinople. Consequently there are few theological or doctrinal statements concerning Ambrose's teaching on death to be found in this oration, but many injunctions to the imperial army to remember what happened to Maximus and Eugenius (Ambrose flatly says that they are in hell), and what will happen to all who follow their evil example and take up arms against legitimate rulers.⁵²

⁵¹ The bravery the departed emperor showed in defending Christianity and in outlawing paganism especially endeared him to Ambrose. Theodosius' proclamation of November 8, 392, among other things, provided for the following: "But if any man shall burn incense to a corruptible image, a piece of human artifice, and by a ridiculous example honour that which himself but just now framed, and shall by crowning the stock with garlands, or by erecting an altar of turfs, do what he can, though but in a mean way, yet a way highly injurious to religion, to pay worship and reverence to a fond statue, let him, as a person guilty of the violation of religion, be punished with the loss of that house or field wherein he ministered to such Pagan superstition." Theodosius, quoted in William Cave, *Lives of the Most Eminent Fathers of the Church* (Oxford: J. Vincent, 1840), 90.

⁵² "Here he once more celebrated the dead ruler as the model of a truly great and pious prince, and did not miss the opportunity on this occasion to bind the soldiers' loyalty to his sons." Hans von Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Lat-*

In demonstrating the necessity of forgiveness and love for the individual's salvation, Ambrose in passing states his belief that at death the "good soul" (i.e., of the Christian) is filled with the Holy Spirit (*FOC 22* §18, 315).⁵³ Because Theodosius had shown true sorrow over his sins in the course of this life, he received not only pardon here, but eternal rest in heaven, says Ambrose. This idea of death being a rest for the believing soul is stated forcefully and picturesquely by Ambrose in these words,

... his soul has turned to its rest, as Scripture has it, saying: 'Turn my soul unto thy rest, for the Lord hath been bountiful to thee.' Beautifully is it said to the soul: 'Turn,' that the soul, tired out, as it were, with the daily sweat of its toil, may turn from labor to rest. The horse is turned toward the stable when it has finished its course; the ship to the port, where it is given safe anchorage protected from the violence of the waves (*FOC 22* §28, 319.23).

This rest, Ambrose asserts, "is the rest of the great Sabbath, in which each of the saints is above the sensible things of the world, devoting himself entirely to deep and invisible mystery and cleaving to God" (*FOC 22* §29, 320). This rest Theodosius even now enjoys, and because he is at rest, "he cannot suffer a fall when he is in that rest" (*FOC 22* §30, 321). The perfection and perfect spiritual peace of the soul thus is included in Ambrose's teaching about death.⁵⁴ In heaven, the soul enjoys not only rest, but also "perpetual light" and "lasting tranquility" (*FOC 22* §32, 321).

Because "death is not the end of nature but of guilt," Ambrose comforts the survivors of the emperor with the thought that

in Church, trans. Manfred Hoffmann (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 121.

⁵³ Whether this filling is a superabundance of the Spirit given the faithful at the moment of death, or merely the full measure of a lifetime of grace being measured at death, Ambrose does not say.

⁵⁴ "Show us that good, which in its nature is unchangeable; and which, when we arrive at heaven, we shall never cease to acknowledge and approve. There thy saints are freed from errors and anxieties, from folly and ignorance, from fear and terror; from all lusts and carnal affections." Ambrose, Discourses, quoted in Elizabeth Strutt, *The Book of the Fathers* (London: John W. Parker, 1837), 335.

Theodosius will rise again, his life restored to his body in a more perfect way (*FOC 22* §36, 323). Until that day, he urges them to comfort themselves with the fact that Theodosius already is dwelling in the celestial city, enjoying radiant light and consoled in every possible way after finally laying aside the heavy earthly yoke of the imperial power.

Consolation on the Death of Emperor Valentinian

Ambrose delivered this sermon in 392 at the interment of the remains of 20-year-old Valentinian II. In it he expresses over and over his regret at not reaching the young emperor of the West before his death, especially in view of the fact that Valentinian had asked Ambrose to come to him to complete his instruction in the faith and to baptize him. Accordingly, references to a specific theology of death are spotty in this work. To fear death is not a part of perfection, Ambrose says (*FOC 22* §33, 280). He follows this statement with a clear, concise statement of his belief (based upon 1 Thessalonians 4:12-14) that the dead retain consciousness of their surroundings and their personality while awaiting the resurrection:

But I ask whether or not there is any consciousness after death?....

For how does he not possess consciousness whose soul lives and flourishes and will return to the body, and will make that body live again when it has been reunited with it?.... Life, therefore, awaits them for whom resurrection awaits (*FOC 22* §44, 285).

How much more than the gentiles should a Christian receive consolation in death, says Ambrose, because it is “the end of sin, and because life is not to be despaired of which is restored by the resurrection” (*FOC 22* §45, 285). Because life will be restored, death is not to be feared. By dying, Valentinian has passed on to “better things.”⁵⁵

In a philosophical vein, Ambrose observes that Valentinian’s sisters should not grieve overmuch for their dead brother, for he

⁵⁵ “The ‘being with Christ’ or ‘in Paradise’ of the departed believing souls must certainly be an augmentation of the communion with Christ which Christians enjoy here on earth ... ,” is Pieper’s observation concerning the heavenly joys which a believing soul experiences upon death. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:512.

too, being mortal, “was subject to human frailty” (*FOC* 22 §47, 286). It is the common lot of all to die, and “no one redeems himself from death, neither the rich man, nor even kings,” he says (*FOC* 22 §48, 286). Ambrose is of the opinion that Valentinian received the grace he had sought in Holy Baptism, although his untimely death prevented him from receiving the sacrament. For, Ambrose reasons, “If, stricken with sickness, he had deferred it, he would not be entirely without Thy mercy who has been cheated by the swiftness of time, not by his own wish” (*FOC* 22 §52, 288). Ambrose compares Valentinian’s baptism of desire to that of the holy martyrs, which would in his case be just as efficacious, with the words,

He who had Thy Spirit, how has he not received Thy grace? ...
But if [the martyrs] are washed in their own blood, his piety and his desire have washed him, also (*FOC* 22 §52-53, 288).

Ambrose bids farewell to Valentinian in as it were a sort of vision of his soul, now at rest, ascending from the darkness of earth to the joys of heaven.⁵⁶ There is absolutely no reason for those who remain to mourn the young emperor on the grounds of his soul’s unrest, for nothing now can disturb the security of Valentinian’s repose and happiness which he has gained through death (*FOC* 22 §65, 292).⁵⁷ The dominant theme of death as rest is taken up again at the very last, when Ambrose declares his wish that the deceased “may find rest in the tranquility of Jacob the patriarch, for the bosom of the patriarchs is a kind of retreat of eternal rest” (*FOC* 22 §72, 295). Repose there is absolutely secure, which, “protected and walled about by the hedge of heaven’s refuge, is not disturbed

⁵⁶ “Here is the shadow and the symbol; there is the reality: the shadow in the Law; the symbol in the Gospel; the reality in Heaven. Formerly a lamb was offered, and a calf; now Christ is offered. But he is offered as man, accepting suffering; and he offers himself as priest, so that he may forgive our sins: here in symbol; in reality there, where he intercedes for us as an advocate before the Father.” Ambrose, *On the Duties of Ministers*, 1.238, quoted in Bettenson, 186.

⁵⁷ Elsewhere Ambrose observes, “For where peace is, there is Christ, for Christ is Peace; and where righteousness is, there is Christ, for Christ is Righteousness.” Ambrose, *Epistle LXIII*, quoted in Schaff and Wace 10:457.

by the attacks of the beasts of the world,” Ambrose declares (*FOC* 22 §73, 295).

De fuga saeculi

This sermon was preached sometime in the early 390s, according to the best conjecture by scholars. In it Ambrose, true to his ascetic and mystical bent, exhorts his hearers to a life of Christian virtue untainted by the selfish idolatry and pleasures of this world by using the examples of great saints such as Moses, Jacob, and John the Baptist. He also gives an exegesis of the six cities of refuge (Numbers 35:13-14), which Ambrose explains as stages on the way to living a life of Christian virtue and perfection.⁵⁸ There are many important references to death and dying in the sense of Christian sanctification in this treatise, which Ambrose makes use of as examples why believers should earnestly seek to flee from this world and to seek the heavenly rest of God’s kingdom.⁵⁹

Ambrose begins his references to death early on in this work, as he seeks to impress his hearers of the way in which penal death enters the life and becomes active in it. In this regard he observes, “‘Death has entered in through the window,’ the prophet said. Your eye is your window. If you look at a woman to lust after her, death has entered in; if you listen to the harlot’s words, death has entered in; if licentiousness takes hold of your senses, death has gone in” (*FOC* 65 §1.3, 282). All fleshly affection has to be struck down and die in the Christian, if his soul is to live, for “unless fleshly

⁵⁸ Farrar in this connection mentions one of the faults with Ambrose’s exegesis, which “endeavours to find in one particular fragment of Scripture the complete portrayal of the matter in hand. He adopts the already-current and arbitrary threefold method of interpretation, so as to find in each passage an historic, moral, and spiritual or mystic meaning. The spiritual meaning is in many places so exclusively insisted upon, that hardly any of the historic sense remains.” Farrar, 191-192.

⁵⁹ “Moreover, the flight [from the world] consists in this: to keep away from sins, to take up the rule of virtues unto the likeness and image of God, to enlarge our strength unto the imitation of God according to the limit of our potentiality. For the perfect man is the image and glory of God.” Ambrose, *De fuga saeculi* (*FOC* 65 §4.17), 295.

affection has perished, there can exist no fruit of eternal life” (*FOC* 65 §2.8, 286). The remedy for inborn sinfulness’ external manifestations, he believes, is for the believer to hasten to the bosom of the Father and to the mystical fountain of wisdom located in the secret place of God. From this fountain, one “may drink the everlasting drink of eternal life in place of death,” says Ambrose (*FOC* 65 §2.10, 287). He observes also that a man who has known the truth and the justice of God ought not to do things that are deserving of death (*FOC* 65 §3.14, 291).

What “true” death is, Ambrose makes clear in this startlingly direct paragraph in his sermon:

For God’s everlasting divinity and eternal power never die. To be sure, He dies to us if He is separated from our soul, not that our spirit is destroyed by death, but that it is loosened and stripped from union with Him. Yes, true death is the separation of the Word from the soul. Thereupon, the soul begins at once to be open to sins of volition (*FOC* 65 §2.13, 290).

In order to fight eternal, spiritual death, the soul must have as its earnest purpose the goal of virtue and the intention to flee constantly from sinful pursuits practiced by the rest of the world.⁶⁰ Indeed, flight itself is a kind of death, but a dying to the world, not to God.⁶¹ Being subject to the passions of the senses is what Ambrose has in mind when he speaks of those who are dead to God and who embrace rather than flee from the world.

The passages which refer to physical death in this work are primarily those which deal with the death of Christ for the sin of the world. Some of these are eloquent testimonies to Ambrose’s belief in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for all sin to placate the wrath of God the Father. Here is an example of this strong emphasis throughout *De fuga saeculi*:

⁶⁰ Ambrose recommends especially that “Three things should be observed: The appetite should be subjected to the reason; moderation should be observed; and everything should be done in its own time and place,” says G. A. Jackson in commenting on the first book of Ambrose’s *De officiis Ministrorum* (36).

⁶¹ “Flight then is a death that has either been solemnized or foreshadowed.” *FOC* 65 §4.18, 296.

And so then, Jesus took flesh that He might destroy the curse of sinful flesh, and He became for us a curse that a blessing might overwhelm a curse, uprightness might overwhelm sin, forgiveness might overwhelm the sentence, and life might overwhelm death. He also took up death that the sentence might be fulfilled and satisfaction might be given for the judgment, the curse placed on sinful flesh even to death The chief priest died for you and was crucified for you, so that you may cleave to His nails. For in that flesh He took you up with your sins, and the debtor's bond of your offenses was fastened to that cross, so that now you may have no debt to the world, which you have renounced once and for all Thus you need not be afraid of death now if you carry Christ, in whom you can say, 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting' (*FOC* 65 §7.44, 314-315; §9.57, 322-323)?

Of all the readings selected for this study, *De fuga saeculi* appeared to come closest to presenting a proper division between God's Law and God's Gospel, and showed a deep understanding of Christ's prophetic office manifested under the *genus apotelesmaticum* in the state of humiliation. Ambrose makes it plain just when he is talking about justification and again when he presents the all-important teaching of sanctification and its role in the flight from the world.⁶² In this treatise at least, the latter is always based upon the former. Here Ambrose anticipates Augustine's treatment of justification by faith.

On the Decease of Satyrus

This deeply moving funeral sermon Ambrose gave in 378 as a tribute to his brother Satyrus. The intensity of Ambrose's grief and the depth of love which he bore his brother display more than a stoic resignation to his loss. The bishop of Milan also used this occasion to discourse about the blessedness of death for the Christian, and in this oration Ambrose himself gives many verbal clues as to

⁶² Ambrose mentions the "spiritual death" of sanctification also in *De fuga saeculi*, §3.9: "Doesn't each person who dwells in this life undergo something like death, if he is able so to act that all his bodily pleasures die and he himself dies to all his desires and the allurements of the world, as Paul had died, saying, 'The world has been crucified to me and I to the world?'" *FOC* 65 §3.9, 75.

his own personal teaching about the benefit of death (*FOC* 22, 159-195).⁶³

Death is portrayed throughout the sermon chiefly as the real beginning of a glorious eternal life with God and all of the blessed dead in Christ. Ambrose even remarks, “I have not lost you; I have simply altered my manner of enjoying you” (*FOC* 22 163). Death as separation from mutual love and consolation of those in this life is the mournful counterpart to this joy which Ambrose consistently holds up to the crowds packing the basilica in Milan for this funeral. This comment is typical of the pathos and sense of personal loss exuded by Ambrose in this oration:

What enjoyment is left to us, now that we have lost such a dear and glorious ornament, now that our light in the darkness of this world has been extinguished? In him not only the glory of our family but also that of our whole country has perished (*FOC* 22 173).

Theologically speaking, Ambrose portrays death as a liberation and a rest for Satyrus. At death the Savior receives the human spirit commended to Him on the deathbed. And Christ, “by virtue of His divine power ... has liberated his [Satyrus’] soul from the pains of death and the assaults of evil spirits.” Ambrose continues,

Though the deceased has not sat up in the coffin, he has found rest in Christ. Though he has not spoken to us, he sees the things which are above us and he already rejoices in his superior knowledge (*FOC* 22 174).

Rest, divine knowledge allied with preparation for the beatific vision, and freedom from the power of the evil legions of demons are thus portrayed by Ambrose as accompanying death for the Christian. In Satyrus’ case, at any rate, all of these were seen as preferable to remaining alive in Italy, because Ambrose opines that

⁶³ The entire circumstance of death in Ambrose’s day was quite elaborate, as Dudden shows, “The ritual customary in connexion with a death may briefly be indicated. First, the nearest relative bestowed the last kiss on the dying person — the idea being to catch the final breath — and reverently closed the eyes of the dead. Psalms were chanted by those who were present. The corpse was then washed, prepared with perfumes and fragrant ointments, and arrayed in garments of white linen or else in robes appropriate to the person’s social or official rank.” Dudden, *Life and Times*, 180.

he “was taken away so that he might not fall into the hands of the barbarians” (*FOC 22* 175) whose invasion seemed imminent even then.

Ambrose closes this magnificent sermon with what perhaps could be seen as a comment approving the thought expressed in Revelation 14:13 concerning the good works of the blessed dead following them, when he says, “For the beauty of virtue does not die with the body, and natural life and supernatural merit do not have the same end, although natural life itself does not perish forever, but is at rest for a time by a kind of a release from its activities” (*FOC 22* 188).⁶⁴ In this way perhaps Ambrose is again stating the reality of the celestial rest of the soul of the believer at death, as mentioned above. After describing the hopelessness of the heathen, who believe that their dead have perished forever, Ambrose reiterates that for the Christian, “death is not the end of our nature, but only of this life” (*FOC 22* 191). As Christians, he says, “... our dead do not seem to be lost but to be sent on before us, not to be swallowed up by death but to be received by eternity” (*FOC 22* 191).

On the Belief in the Resurrection

This elaborate treatise on the necessity and reality of the bodily resurrection from the dead was delivered by Ambrose as a sermon on the seventh day after his brother Satyrus’ funeral. The first half of this lengthy address is devoted mostly to an examination of physical death, and Ambrose’s impressions and beliefs concerning it.

One should not mourn for departed relatives, Ambrose acknowledges, because death is a common experience and is a debt which all must pay; secondly, it frees from the calumnies of this life; and thirdly, under the appearance of sleep (i.e., through death) we obtain rest from the toils of this world and a stronger vigor is infused into the soul (*FOC 22* §3, 198). In fact, an untimely death

⁶⁴ Ambrose also says in the course of this oration that death and sleep have much in common: “For sleep is the likeness and image of death” (192).

means that the virtuous soul actually will retain more of its virtue intact than it otherwise would have been able to, had it continued to live on in the polluted world. Therefore it is a major evil to indulge in inordinate grief, or to dread death, for these in themselves have driven many spiritually unstable men and women to suicide in their sorrow (*FOC 22* §11, 201). Sorrow must have a limit, for there is a remedy for bodily death, says Ambrose. “For just as in Adam I am guilty of sin and owe a debt to death, so in Christ I am justified,” he remarks (*FOC 22* §6, 200).

Ambrose notes that two things enter into the feeling of loss which people feel over a loved one who has died: the mourner’s own longing for the presence of the loved one, or the thought that he who has died has been cut off from the pleasure of living and from enjoying the fruits of his toil (*FOC 22* §14, 203). Ambrose discounts the first feeling by pointing out how selfish it is for a single human being to want to upset the entire course of nature (of which physical death is a part), and puts aside the second by reminding his readers that life is a constant series of disappointments and bitter sorrows.⁶⁵ On the contrary, the human soul demonstrates already in this life its willingness and endeavor to reach beyond its confines of the body through the senses of seeing and hearing, Ambrose notes. If the soul is filled with eager desire to escape from its bodily prison, how much more repose and peace must dead relatives and friends enjoy now than when they were alive (*FOC 22* §20, 205)! He says,

We know, however, that the soul survives the body and that, once it is freed from the shackles on its own faculties, it beholds in clear vision what previously, when dwelling in the body, it did not see Therefore, if the death of our flesh frees us from the miseries of this

⁶⁵ ” ... basing his argument on the Gospel, [Ambrose] showed that no happiness can exist except in eternal life, and thus the things of this world, far from leading to happiness, often act as a hindrance, whilst on the contrary trials and misfortune can be a more direct means of attaining it. Furthermore, the life of blessedness partly begins in this world, in peace of conscience and the security of innocence.” F. Cayre, *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology*, trans. H. Howitt (Paris: Society of St. John the Evangelist, 1935), 541.

world, it is certainly no evil, since it restores freedom and excludes pain death is not an evil, since it is a refuge from all miseries and evils, a safe and secure anchorage, and a haven of rest (*FOC 22* §21-22, 205).

It is a mistake to view death as a penalty for the Christian, Ambrose maintains, because for the believer death is rather a remedy given by God to eradicate sin in his life (*FOC 22* §37, 212). Although man has been punished by having to work an unfruitful earth in the sweat of his brow, God gave death as an end to the evils of this sentence of punishment. "You see that death is rather the limit of our punishment, because by it the course of this life [is] ended. Therefore, death, far from being an evil, is even a good," says Ambrose (*FOC 22* §38-39, 213).⁶⁶ And anyone who dies believing in Christ becomes through baptism a sharer in His grace (*FOC 22* §43, 215).

Above all, it is the death of Jesus Christ which renders the fear of our own deaths inoperative, Ambrose says. In this beautifully mystic and significant passage, Ambrose explains why physical death is not to be dreaded:

His death is the life of all. We sign ourselves with the sign of His death, when we pray we announce His death, when we offer the Sacrifice we proclaim His death. His death is a victory, His death is a mystery, His death is an annual feast of the world Death, then, should not be lamented, since it is the source of salvation for all (*FOC 22* 215-216).

Because Christ guarantees human nature a new and glorified existence in the resurrection victory He made possible for all, Ambrose goes on to observe that thus what really dies in death is the evil which plagues human nature, not human nature itself (*FOC 22*

⁶⁶ A parallel is found in FC SD I, §44, concerning the distinction between the "substance" of original sin and the substance of human nature, properly considered: "But inasmuch as the Son of God assumed our nature, and not original sin, it is clear from this fact that human nature, even since the Fall, and original sin, are not one [and the same] thing, but must be distinguished," *Triglotta*, 873. Or in other words, as death might properly be called a punishment for original sin, it cannot be viewed as such for uncorrupt human nature, or for renewed human nature *qua* human nature.

§48, 216). With this understanding of the significance and the operation of death, the final picture which Ambrose draws of death in this work as “the rest of those who sleep ... death is not eternal, but, like sleep, it is entered upon for a time and then, at an appointed time, is put aside” (*FOC* 22 §66, 226), seems accurate and justified.

Conclusion

By means of examining the seven sources listed above, it is possible to conclude that, for Ambrose, physical death is not something for the Christian to fear. Christ is the very Champion over death’s power and its ability to separate man from God. Death for the believer is sent from God as a remedy for his sufferings on earth, as a blessing instead of as a punishment. By mortifying the desires of the flesh, it already is possible to give the soul inside the body more room in which to strain upward toward its true heavenly home, where one day it will trade the light and splendor of glory for the dark gloom of things physical and temporal. The initiation one received into the mystical union with Christ in Holy Baptism, which initiation he practiced often in his life by putting off the defilements of his sinful flesh and putting on Christ in the Holy Supper, are but a foretaste of a greater change to come, that of the resurrection of the body from death, that soul and body might again live together in the glories of heaven together with the martyrs, virgins, and the holy apostles.⁶⁷

The peaceful, accepting, and fervently faithful and faith-filled view which Ambrose displays toward physical death is one which the average Christian today would do well to emulate. In his own words,

⁶⁷ “For what need was there that Christ should take flesh, what need that Christ should ascend the cross, what need that Christ should taste death, receive burial and rise again, except for the sake of your resurrection?” Ambrose, “*Explanatio Symboli Ad Initiandos*,” quoted in R. H. Connolly, *The Explanatio Symboli Ad Initiandos: A Work of Saint Ambrose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 24.

For everyone ought to desire for himself above all else that 'this corruptible body put on incorruption, and this mortal body put on immortality,' so that we who now succumb to death through the frailty of the body, being placed above nature, may no longer have even the possibility of fearing death (Ambrose, *On the Belief in the Resurrection*, FOC 22 §135, 259).

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