



The question of the Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper in Lutheran World Federation publications 1947-2010²

Zagadnienie obecności Chrystusa w Wieczerzy Pańskiej w publikacjach Światowej Federacji Luterkańskiej 1947-2010

Key words: Lutheran World Federation, Lord's Supper, presence of Christ

Słowa kluczowe: Światowa Federacja Luterkańska, Wieczerza Pańska, obecność Chrystusa

Abstract

The article presents how the key theme of the Lutheran doctrine on the Lord's Supper was addressed in the publications of the world's biggest organisation of Lutheran churches between the LWF First Assembly in Lund and the LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart. This subject was of special interest to the first two assemblies (Lund, Hanover). The following themes can be distinguished in the reflection on the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper in the period under consideration: the category of "Word" (including liturgical and pneumatological contexts), the relationship of the body and

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blood of Jesus Christ to the elements of the sacrament, as well as ecclesiological (including practical: mission and diakonia) and eschatological contexts.

Streszczenie

Artykuł „Zagadnienie obecności Chrystusa w Wieczerzy Pańskiej w publikacjach Światowej Federacji Luterkańskiej 1947-2010” prezentuje jak od Pierwszego Zgromadzenia Ogólnego w Lund po Jedenaste Zgromadzenie Ogólne w Stuttgarcie, publikacje tej największej światowej organizacji zrzeszającej Kościoły luterkańskie odnoszą się do kluczowego motywu luterkańskiej nauki o Wieczerzy Pańskiej. Temat ten był przedmiotem szczególnego zainteresowania w czasie dwóch pierwszych Zgromadzeń Ogólnych (Lund, Hanower). W rozważaniach o obecności Chrystusa w Wieczerzy Pańskiej na przestrzeni badanego okresu można wyróżnić następujące motywy: kategoria „Słowa” (w tym w kontekście liturgicznym i pneumatologicznym), relacja ciała i krwi Chrystusa do elementów sakramentu, a także konteksty eklezjologiczny (w tym praktyczny: misji i diakonii) oraz eschatologiczny.

The question of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar is a key theme of the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Lutheranism inherited the firm stance of Martin Luther (Althaus 1966, 391-403; Barth 2009, 239-242; Uglorz 2007; Sojka 2016, 234-241), forged during his dispute with Ulrich Zwingli in the 1520s. Disagreement over the interpretation of true presence of body and blood in the elements of the sacrament prevented a consensus between the Wittenberg and the Swiss current of the Reformation during the so-called Marburg Colloquy (Lohse 1998, 46-63; Maciuszko 2014; on the position of U. Zwingli cf. Jaskóła 2017; Sojka 2020 – further literature there). The interpretation of true presence of body and blood in the elements of the Lord's Supper constituted a major part of the explanation of the sacrament in both catechisms (BSELK, 888-891, 1132-1159; BC, 362-363 {The Small Catechism, The Sacrament of Altar}, 467-476 {The Large Catechism, The Sacrament of Altar}), which quickly not only gained importance as the texts written by M. Luther, but also the authority of Lutheranism's confession writings. It is the “Small Catechism” that most succinctly captures the Wittenbergian position on the matter: “What is the Sacrament of the Altar? Answer: It

is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself, for us Christians to eat and to drink” (BSELK, 888-889; BC, 362 {Small Catechism, The Sacrament of Altar}) The significance of the doctrine of the real and substantive presence of Christ’s body and blood in the bread and wine administered in the Sacrament of the Altar was also confirmed in the youngest confessional text of Lutheranism, i.e. the “Formula of Concord”, written in the context of disputes with the position of the Swiss Reformation, formulated by both Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin (cf. Janse 2008, 345-349; Piwko 1995, 146-153; on the Lutheran dispute with the Calvinist position cf. Lohse 1998, 129-134.).

Now considering the above historical and theological background, the question must be posed of how the presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper is addressed by 20th-century Lutheranism. This question is relevant not only from an intra-Lutheran perspective, but also in view of the 20th-century ecumenical efforts, where to this day the matter of altar fellowship remains problematic.

This paper seeks to analyse publications of the largest organisation of the Lutheran churches, i.e. the Lutheran World Federation, from its inception at the LWF First Assembly 1947 in Lund to the LWF Eleventh Assembly held in 2010 in Stuttgart. The following sections will present relevant material from each assembly and the period following it. Until the Helsinki Assembly in 1963, LWF Assemblies were held at five-year intervals, after which the period between them was extended to seven years.

1. LWF Assembly in Lund and the period up to 1952

The 1947 LWF Assembly in Lund addressed the question of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper as part of the work of Section I “Confessing ‘The Truth’ in a confused world”, which dealt with theological issues. The second part of its report was devoted to the sacraments (the other two dealt with the Word and the Church). In it, three passages on the

question of Baptism are followed by four dealing with the Lord's Supper. The first of these, entitled "Lord's Supper Continually Nourishes and Builds", points to the uniquely repetitive nature of the sacrament in question, thus substantiating the thesis posed by the title about the Sacrament of the Altar continually nourishing and building up the body of Christ. This thesis was further developed by highlighting the nature of the Lord's Supper as a commemoration of God's act in Christ, much like the Passover in the Old Covenant ("*Report of section I. Confessing...*" 1948, 54f). The next section, entitled "Christ Himself Present", completes the picture by emphasising that any description of the Lord's Supper must not be limited to just remembering Christ's death. For it is essential that Christ Himself is present in the bread and wine of the sacrament in order to build up His Church. Referring to M. Luther, the section describes Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper with a parallel to the incarnation of the eternal Word in Christ. The real presence of Christ in the sacrament is not dependent on the faith of those receiving it, but grounded in the incomprehensible grace of Christ, who wants to give Himself to people in the sacrament. Its occurrence is inseparably linked to the words of institution (in this case only referred to in relation to the bread in 1 Cor. 11:24). This in turn links to another dimension, i.e. that of communion with Christ into which Christians enter by partaking of the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16) [*"Report of section I. Confessing..."* 1948, 55).

The next paragraph in the second part of the Report of Section I, entitled "Sacramental Communion a Mystery", points out that that sacramental communion is essentially a mystery, which is what leads to various incorrect explanations of the significance and substance of the Lord's Supper. In this context, both the magical interpretation (which is how the document sees the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation) and the spiritualist-symbolic interpretation are explicitly rejected as "equally at variance with our faith in Christ as truly incarnate

(*sarx egeneto*)” (“*Report of section I. Confessing...*” 1948, 56). The next paragraph of the report, whose title expressly opposes only transubstantiation (“No Transubstantiation”), actually argues against both of the framings identified as erroneous above. Transubstantiation is described as a magical or mystical transformation, and a human speculation that has nothing to do with the Gospel. The argument against transubstantiation is based on a specifically Lutheran understanding of the Word of God and seeks parallels in both baptism and the sermon, through which the Word also reaches people. There is no transubstantiation in baptism, which shows that Christ wants to be present in natural means and to work through them by the power of His Word. In preaching we also encounter the Word of the Gospel through ordinary human words, and they are not transformed in any particular way. The authors also criticised the view that, based on the use of natural means in the Lord's Supper, they merely *signify* (*significat*) the body and blood of Christ, thus rejecting any claims of real presence. They argue by referring to baptism as a parallel and point out that to assert that baptism does not give grace and constitute a covenant, but only signifies them, is a perversion of its meaning and contrary to the fact that baptism establishes a real relationship between Christ and those baptised. In conclusion of this polemical section, the authors reiterate that the mystery of the Lord's Supper is that of incarnation (“*Report of section I. Confessing...*” 1948, 56f).

To summarise the work, the Lund Assembly and its outcomes, the understanding of the Word played a significant role in shaping both the conclusions and refutations. In terms of what the sacrament actually is, emphasis was placed on Christ as the incarnate Word. In terms of what the sacrament is not, a coherent and unified understanding of the means of grace based on the constitutive role of the Word played a special role. It is the latter that formed grounds for the rejection of both transubstantiation and the mere symbolic presence of Christ in

the sacrament. The publications that appeared in the period following the LWF Assembly in Lund did not explore the presence of body and blood in the elements of the Lord's Supper any further.

2. LWF Assembly in Hanover and the period up to 1957

The issue of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper made a strong comeback in the work of the LWF Assembly in Hanover in 1952. A study document entitled "The Living Word in a Responsible Church", prepared by the LWF Commission on Theology, which became part of the report of Section I of the Assembly dealing with theological issues, emphasises that "The bread is the body of Jesus Christ, and the wine is the blood of Jesus Christ. [...] In the bread which we eat and in the wine which we drink the true body and the true blood of Christ are given to us..." ("Report of Section I. Theology" 1952, 128; cf. "Studiendokument für Sektion I: Theologie..." nd, 20; emphasis in original). The fact of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the elements, like the resurrection, cannot be proven, but has the nature of a miracle and of an object of faith. The study document also states that the presence of Christ in the sacrament cannot be described in symbolic terms nor through the concept of transubstantiation ("Report of Section I. Theology" 1952, 128; cf. "Studiendokument für Sektion I: Theologie..." nd, 20).

The theme of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar was also explored in the lectures delivered during the assembly. Anders Nygren, in the keynote lecture "The Living Word in a Responsible Church", emphasises that in the Lord's Supper

...Christ Himself is really present and in the most intimate possible manner literally «incorporates» Himself into the church, which is His Body, and into everyone of the faithful members of the church, who are members of His Body, by allowing them to partake of His Body and His Blood, and in this way He bestows upon them the fellowship of His sufferings and the power of His resurrection (Nygren 1952, 46).

Further on, A. Nygren elaborates on the salvific power of the sacraments (and also of the preached Word) referring to the Word as the means through which God acts in His power, yet doing so not as people expect, but *sub contraria specie*. This divine work includes the living presence in Word and sacrament through which the members of Christ's Church receive the gift of life (Nygren 1952, 46f). In conclusion, A. Nygren defines one task of the Lutheran Churches as being on guard that none of the following articles of faith in Christ are missed: "Christ did come in the fullness of the time; Christ is really present with us in Word and Sacrament, Christ will return in glory for the consummation of all things" (Nygren 1952, 47). In further reflections, A. Nygren strongly emphasises that Word and sacrament are not merely signs pointing to another reality, but they themselves are another reality. Therefore, one cannot deny the event which, through the power of the Word of God, occurs in the Word proclaimed and the sacraments. This event is about the gift of life, given to the Church by the living presence of Christ, the Christ through whose incarnation, death and resurrection that life was revealed. This reality demands that (A. Nygren refers to the Reformation dispute between Luther and Zwingli) the sacrament should be interpreted in terms of *est* [is] and not *significat* [signifies] (Nygren 1952, 47).

The issue was also examined in a liturgical context. Peter Brunner, in his lecture "Our Church Service", emphasised the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper "in, with, and under the bread and the wine" (Brunner 1952, 52).³ In order to substantiate the formula invoked, P. Brunner refers to a parallel based on the theology of the Word, which had been applied in Lund. The parallel in question is that of the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar and the words of the sermon, in which

³ The formula "in, with and under the bread and wine" was built from the prepositions describing the presence of the body and blood in the elements of the Sacrament of the Altar in the "Large Catechism": "in" and "under" (BSELK, 1134, BC, 467 {The Large Catechism, The Sacrament of Altar}) and the "Apology of the Augsburg Confession": "with" (BSELK, 425; BC, 184 {Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article X}).

the Word of God is given “in, with and under” human words (Brunner 1952, 52). Elaborating further on the Lord’s Supper, he emphasises that its institution by Christ is essential in order to understand and appreciate its significance. The sacramental reality of this meal, in which Christ Himself is always present and at work anew, starting with the first such meal during the night He was betrayed, flows forth from this mandate contained in the Word of Christ. P. Brunner places the work of Christ in the Lord’s Supper in the broad context of his saving work. He emphasises that the core of this sacrament are the words of institution spoken by Christ concerning the bread and the cup. “These words do not interpret any action or a symbol. They state what the food is that is used in this action” (Brunner 1952, 54). The relationship between bread and Christ’s Body and wine and His Blood is “not analogy but identity” (Brunner 1952, 54). Neither bread nor wine are transformed in the sacrament, they remain bread and wine, but through the power of Christ’s word of institution, the bread is body and the wine is blood. In his lecture, P. Brunner also emphasised the connection of the body of Christ received in the Lord’s Supper with the incarnation: “The Body of Jesus which we receive in the Lord’s Supper is the bodily humanness in which He accomplished our salvation” (Brunner 1952, 55). Christ’s saving work, suffering and victory “is **in** His Body and **is** His Body which we receive in the Lord’s Supper in the form of bread” (Brunner 1952, 55; emphasis in original).

The problem of true presence also emerged in the statements made during the deliberations of Section I of the assembly. R. Hauge emphasised that the real presence is the presence of Christ himself, not the presence of *materia coelestis* (heavenly matter): “Die Gabe des Abendmahles ist keine himmlische Substanz, sondern die Heilsbedeutung des Werkes Jesu bzw. seines Todes”⁴ (As cited in Andersen 1953, 85). He also

⁴ “The gift of the Lord’s Supper is not a heavenly substance, but the salvific significance of Christ’s work, or rather of his death.”

stipulated that, “Die Göttliche Gnadengabe darf nicht mit dem sinnlichen Elementen als solchen in Verbindung gebracht werden”⁵ (as cited in Andersen 1953, 85). However, he immediately supplemented this thesis by adding: “Andererseits kommt aber gerade den irdischen Elementen wesentliche Bedeutung zu. Gerade durch Brot und Wein handelt Gott mit uns”⁶ (as cited in Andersen 1953, 86). This connection shows how the Lord's Supper combines the idea of creation with its saving effect.

The Hannover LWF Assembly discussed above revisited themes that had already been raised in Lund. The study document and the cited speakers agreed with the thesis that the sacramental bread is the Body of Christ and the sacramental blood is the Blood of Christ. The study document limited itself to recognising it as a mystery of faith. In contrast, broader justifications were provided by A. Nygren and P. Brunner, referring to the efficacy of God's Word and the wider context of Christological and soteriological reflections on the work of Christ. The latter theme was also present in the lecture by R. Hauge. In his argument, P. Brunner also invokes the parallel between the elements of the sacrament and the sermon. It should also be noted that the study document directly rejects the symbolic interpretation and the transubstantiation of the elements. The rejection of the former can also be found in the paper by A. Nygren.

Following the Hanover assembly, the theme of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper returned in other works of the LWF. The issue was addressed in an ecclesiological context by, among other things, two studies published in the official publication of the Federation “Lutherische Rundschau” (hereafter: LR) or “Lutheran World” (hereafter LW). In a text entitled “Gesamtkirche und Einzelgemeinde nach lutherischen Verständnis”⁷ Eduard Ellwein, elaborating on the *notae ecclesiae*

⁵ “The divine gift of grace must not be associated with the sensual elements as such.”

⁶ “On the other hand, it is precisely the earthly elements that are of essential importance. It is precisely through bread and wine that God engages with us.”

⁷ “Universal church and individual congregation according to Lutheran

proposed in Article VII of the “Augsburg Confession” (BSELK, 102-103; BC, 42-43), stated that

in [...] der Spendung der Sakramente der Herr selbst handelt. [...] er auch den Abendmahltisch selber zubereitet, selber Brot und Wein segnet und zum Träger seiner leibhaftigen Gegenwart macht und selber austeil.⁸ (Ellwein 1952, 124).

Once again, therefore, there is a clear emphasis on the connection between Christ’s presence in the elements and His incarnation. In the second of these studies– “The Church and the Break-through of the Eschata” – Rudolph Stählin describes the sacraments as “prototypes” of the signs of *eschata*’s intrusion into the world. For it is in them,

Here the Christ the Lord meets man with His Spirit which gives life and His gifts which maintain life. Here the eschata seek to break through in the person of the eschatos and to be received in the liberty and courage of faith. Here is the matter of the ultimate, of the incarnation and the resurrection, of the transition from old to new aeon (Stählin 1956, 255f).

In his ecclesiological reflections set in an eschatological context, R. Stählin focuses on the description of Christ’s presence in the sacrament in terms of encounter focusing on the saving significance of the sacrament and its connection with the incarnation of Christ.

The ecclesiological context of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper is also reflected in the study work of the LWF’s Commission on Theology. A volume summarising its work entitled “Einheit der Kirche”⁹ included a paper by A. Nygren of the same title. It discussed different concepts of Church unity, including a view referring to Article VII of the “Augsburg Confession” that church is where Christ is and that He is present “in

understanding”

⁸ “The Lord Himself acts in [...] the administration of the sacraments. [...] He also prepares the table of the Lord’s Supper Himself, He Himself blesses the bread and wine and makes them the vehicles of His incarnate presence, and He Himself distributes.”

⁹ “Unity of the Church”

seinem Wort und in den Sakramenten”¹⁰ (Nygren 1957, 96). Elaborating on the sacraments, A. Nygren points out that

Das Abendmahl schließlich ist «die Gemeinschaft des Leibes Christi» (1. Kor. 10,16). Im Abendmahl ist Christus selbst gegenwärtig mit seiner Dynamis und macht uns teilhaftig an seinem Leib: «Nehmet, esset, das ist mein Leib» (1 Kor. 11,24)¹¹ (Nygren 1957, 96).

In the text under discussion, A. Nygren sees the presence of Christ as the guarantee of the church-forming character of the sacrament.

The volume referenced, which summarises the work of the LWF Commission on Theology, also contains a second part including papers devoted to the issue of church and worship. Among others, it includes a text on the sermon in Lutheran worship by Conrad Bergendoff, who, following the example of P. Brunner at the LWF Assembly in Hanover, deals with the question of the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar from a liturgical perspective. In doing so, he makes use of a parallel that was already present in the reflections in Lund, as well as in the paper by A. Nygren in Hanover. This time, however, the parallel between Christ's presence in the sermon and the sacraments is used as an argument for the salvific presence of Christ in the words of the sermon (Bergendoff 1957, 114).

3. LWF Assembly in Minneapolis and the period up to 1963

The issue of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper is reflected in the final document of the Minneapolis Assembly, the so-called “Minneapolis Theses”. Part five of the theses entitled “Free and United in Hope” (*Befreit und geeint auf Hoffnung*) contains the following thesis:

The Sacrament of the Altar, where Christ is really present, is the anticipation of the heavenly banquet. He who comes to us in bread and wine,

¹⁰ “in His word and sacraments.”

¹¹ “The Lord's Supper is ultimately ‘the fellowship of the body of Christ’ (1 Cor. 10:16). In the Lord's Supper, Christ Himself is present with his *dynamis* and let us partake of His body: ‘take, eat, this is my body’ (1 Cor. 11:24).”

is the same Christ who is to come in glory (“Christ Frees and Unites. Theses...” 1958, 90 {Thesis V.6}).

Much like in R. Stählin’s reflections (discussed above), we are presented here with a description of the sacrament in the language of encounter in an eschatological context. The latter helps to emphasise the identity of Christ in the elements and Christ coming in glory.

The above thesis draws on reflections presented in the keynote paper relating to this part of the “Minneapolis Theses”, delivered at the assembly by Friedrich W. Krummacher. It speaks of the tokens of hope in victory present in worship, which include the real presence of Christ, hidden under Word and Sacrament, and which will be manifest to all in the last days (Krummacher 1958, 77).

The above-mentioned statements of the assembly show that, in addition to the worship context known from earlier publications, the question of Christ’s presence in Sacrament has gained a definite eschatological context. His presence is recognised as true and definitely linked to the elements of bread and wine. The final theses of the assembly also draw on R. Stählin’s proposal to describe it as an encounter.

In the period following the LWF Assembly in Minneapolis, the theme of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Altar in the context of preaching is further pursued on the pages of the Lutheran World. Per Erik Person points out the identity of Christ’s presence in the sermon and the Lord’s Supper, since the same Christ with his saving work is present in both. The only difference is in the form of this presence, i.e. in the case of the sacrament its particular form emphasises the *pro me* aspect of the Gospel promise. The foundation of this saving presence in both the sermon and sacrament is the Word of God, which turns them into the means of God’s presence. This presence is precisely the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the elements. This presence in the sacrament brings the redemptive gifts: forgiveness of sins, life and salvation (cf. BSLEK, 888-889; BC, 362 {Small Catechism, The Sacrament of Altar}). This again brings up the parallel between the

presence of Christ in the words of human preaching and the Body and Blood of Christ in the bread and wine. This reality of the consumption of the Body and Blood under the bread and wine points to the fact that the forgiveness of sins given with it is not just something “spiritual”, but concrete and real. This bodily dimension of partaking of the sacrament also refers back to the fact that salvation also includes the resurrection of the body. The presence “in, with and under” the bread and wine indicates that salvation is a work of God, beyond human comprehension. This understanding of the presence demands that it must always be received in the communion of the church – because the Word must always have addressees. P.E. Person also emphasises that there is no way that Christ’s presence in the sacrament can be caused by the faith of the recipients. Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Altar is not an act of man, but the effect of the gracious action of Christ himself. The sacrament thus becomes a means of judgement for human efforts and piety that would like to replace God’s action. Nor is the presence of Christ the work of the celebrant, who is only a servant and instrument of God’s action (both in the sacrament and in the sermon). It is not the work of a human being, but the work of the Word. The objective presence of Christ’s Body and Blood in the elements of bread and wine also results in the fact that they are consumed either for salvation or for judgment, depending on whether or not their presence is received in faith (Person 1959/60, 441, 443f).

The relationship between the sacraments and the sermon is also addressed in another article published in “Lutherische Rundschau” written by Wilhelm Narum. He, too, points out the parallelism of Christ’s presence in the sermon and the sacraments, noting its pneumatological aspect. He also emphasized that through preaching the Word and administering the sacraments Christ is present in the Holy Spirit (Narum 1959/60, 457).

In the period after the Minneapolis Assembly, some limited references to the nature of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament appear in two more

studies. Firstly, in an article on the unity of the Church, summarising a volume of studies on the church and the Sacrament of the Altar prepared for the LWF Assembly in Helsinki, Vilmos Vajta emphasises that

...bread and wine are gifts of Christ's body and blood bestowed upon mankind; through his sacrifice the church on earth is founded as the one body of Christ (Vajta 1963, 222).

Secondly, Peter Brunner's text on *koinonia* in the pages of "Lutherische Rundschau", includes a statement about the Lord's Supper as the actual realisation of church fellowship in the local church through the fact that "...im Abendmahl Leib und Blut Jesu Christi unter dem Brot und dem Wein zum Essen und Trinken dargereicht und empfangen wird"¹² (Brunner 1963, 153). Thus, they both point, as they have before, to the crucial ecclesiological, or rather "ecclesiogenic" (church-forming), significance of the presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the elements of the Lord's Supper.

It is quite clear that after the LWF Assembly in Minneapolis, the presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the elements of the Sacrament of the Altar returns as a theme especially in reflections on the sermon and sermon-sacrament parallels. It is also in this context that it has been more extensively discussed. Apart from emphasising the centrality of the creative role of God's Word, the pneumatological context was also present. Moreover, the issue of the presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the elements of the sacrament provides a starting point for ecclesiological considerations.

4. LWF Assembly in Helsinki and the period up to 1970

Before moving on to discuss the remarks on the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar at the Helsinki Assembly itself, it is worth noting an issue of "Lutherische Rundschau" that appeared before the

¹² "in the Lord's Supper the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ are given and received under bread and wine."

assembly and was devoted to its theme, i.e. “Christ today” (*Christus heute*; cf.: *Lutherische Rundschau* 13 [2] {1963}). The articles it contained included the text “Christ Today: His Presence in the Sacraments” [*Christus heute: Seine Gegenwart in den Sakramenten*] by Arthur C. Piepkorn, professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, Saint Luis, Missouri, an establishment of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (hereafter: LCMS) which is not a member of the LWF. Inviting this theologian to present his reflections on the theme of the assembly was an expression of the efforts at rapprochement between the LWF and the LCMS at the time (“Self-understanding and Ecumenical Role...” 1984, 7f [No. 4-6]; Brand 1988, 49f; Root 1997, 221-227).

A.C. Piepkorn presented an extensive analysis of the term Christ’s “presence” in the sacraments. He began by examining the biblical material, then presented the relevance of the definition of a sacrament and Christological assumptions (the doctrine of the two natures) for speaking of Christ’s presence in the sacraments, as well as a discussion of the Trinitarian and ecclesiological contexts of the teaching on the sacraments in the Lutheran confessional writings, in the case of the latter with particular reference to the issue of church ministry. The remainder of the text was devoted to the individual sacraments: baptism, absolution (A.C. Piepkorn followed the thinking of P. Melancthon in his “Apology of the Augsburg Confession” [BSELK, 513; BC, 219 {*Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article XIII, 4}] and the Lord’s Supper. The last part dealt with the remaining of the seven sacraments that the Reformation did not recognise as such (Piepkorn 1963, 327-351).

A.C. Piepkorn devoted as many as two of the nine parts of his reflections to the Lord’s Supper. The second part focuses on the sacrificial aspect of the Sacrament of the Altar, while the first one is entirely devoted to the question of Christ’s presence in it. Piepkorn begins by emphasising the literal understanding of the words of institution “This is my body [...] This is my blood” and then comments as follows:

Die Tatsache, dass in der Eucharistie Leib und Blut Christi wahrhaft gegenwärtig sind und allen, die davon essen, ausgeteilt werden, ist eines der unaufgebbaren Grundanliegen lutherischer Theologie¹³ (Piepkorn 1963, 340).

He goes on to describe this presence in terms of a sacramental union, parallel to the hypostatic union in Christ. Such a description entails the rejection of transubstantiation, as well as consubstantiation, impanation, the local limitation of Christ's human nature, the confusion or fusion of His natures. These views were rejected because they either contradicted Scripture or involved untenable metaphysical assumptions. Referring to M. Luther's views and the "Formula of Concord", Piepkorn emphasised that the doctrine of true presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper is founded on the doctrine of the omnipresence of Christ's bodily nature. He also pointed out that the doctrine of sacramental union, combined with the doctrine of *manducatio oralis* or *indignorum*, upholds the conviction of the objective (and therefore independent of the faith of the recipient) presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the elements of the sacrament. This presence is also independent of the dignity of the minister or of those receiving the sacrament. As for the latter, through the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the elements partaking of the sacrament also involves a dimension of personal encounter with the incarnate Word that is Christ. In summary of his remarks, A.C. Piepkorn states: "Wichtiger als die 'wie' des Abendmahles ist das 'warum'"¹⁴ (Piepkorn 1963, 344). Finally, he demonstrates the multifaceted teaching of the Lutheran confessional writings on the benefits of the sacrament (Piepkorn 1963, 340-344). This in-depth analysis, which is firmly rooted in the teaching of the Lutheran confessional writings, has hardly found any continuation in the work of the assembly

¹³ "For Lutheran theology, the fact that in the Eucharist the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present and distributed to those who partake of it is one of the fundamental issues that cannot be relinquished."

¹⁴ "The 'why' of the Lord's Supper is more important than the 'how'".

on the theme of which it had been prepared. The only exception during the assembly was the reference to the category of Christ's "omnipresence" indicated below.

The question of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper was not addressed in the final document of the LWF Assembly in Helsinki, prepared after the end of its deliberations (cf. Trillhaas 1965, 60-63), which focused primarily on the question of the validity of the doctrine of justification (cf. "*Justification Today...*" 1965, 476-482). It did, however, come up in the course of the assembly's deliberations in the discussion on worship. In his lecture, Andar Lumbantobing pointed to the Indonesian experience (the speaker came from the Batak Church in Indonesia) of preaching about the true presence of Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar to people from tribes with a well-established tradition of eating human flesh in order to acquire the magical power (*mana*) of the sacrifice. Apart from this non-European context of consideration, A. Lumbantobing offered a reflection closer to European experience by stating that "In Holy Communion Jesus offers Himself..." (Lumbantobing 1965, 124) in a tangible form of bread and wine, which can be seen, touched and tasted. He further interprets this presence as follows: "Our Lord and Saviour is really present [...] in the bread and wine, because He is present everywhere" (Lumbantobing 1965, 125). He also points out that this omnipresence has the character of an irrational miracle and is therefore a matter of faith, which is not perceptible to the human senses (Lumbantobing 1965, 125).

The relationship between Christ's omnipresence and His presence in the Sacrament of the Altar pointed out by A. Lumbantobing sparked controversy in the working groups drafting the final document of the assembly. In its report, Group 14 stressed the need to distinguish between the general term omnipresence and the specific, real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Christ is present everywhere, but his presence in the Sacrament of the Altar has a special, sacramental dimension resulting from the *verba testamenti* ("Reports of Discussion Groups on

Justification” 1965, 457). Thus, for the first time in the history of LWF assemblies, the assembly reflected on the theme of Christ’s omnipresence, which is well-known from the Lutheran confessional writings, for the sake of greater precision immediately placed it in the context of the doctrine of the Word.

The assembly also revisited the question of the ecclesiological significance of Christ’s presence. E. Clifford-Nelson, in a lecture discussing the unity of the Church, pointed out that the presence of Christ in the Church is intimately connected with the means of grace – it takes place where the ministry of Word and sacraments is exercised. This presence, and consequently the ministry of Word and sacrament, is the source of the Church’s authority (Nelson 1965, 276f).

References to the question of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Altar also appear in LWF publications following the Helsinki Assembly. In a lecture on the doctrine of justification in the context of social justice held at the 1967 LWF international theological conference, Jörg Baur emphasised that Christ’s saving presence for us only takes place in Word and sacrament. He presented his thesis as an expansion of a quote from a study by G.W.F. Forell: “Although [...] God is everywhere, in every creature, in every stone, in fire and in water, He does not want to be found anywhere but in Word” (Forell 1954, 119; as cited in Baur 1967, 90)¹⁵ Thus, J. Baur’s reflections on the omnipresence of Christ revolve around the doctrine of the Word.

Another much broader reference to the question of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Altar is R.G. Forell’s article on “Lutherische Rundschau”, analysing Lutheran involvement in the ecumenical movement. The author not only reminds us that one of the essential functions of the Lutheran confession writings is to indicate “dass wir als Lutheraner an die reale Gegenwart des wahren Leibes und Blutes Christi in

¹⁵ In this context, J. Baur, as cited by G.F.Forell, refers to a statement made by M. Luther in WA 23, 151.

Herrenmahl gebunden sind"¹⁶ (Forell 1965, 338)¹⁷ but also engages in a broader analysis. In it, he seeks to show that the doctrine of the real presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the sacrament, as presented in the confessional writings, offers an opportunity for anthropology, ecclesiology and the doctrine of the Word, by means of which it will be possible to overcome their contradictions.

In the case of anthropology, it is a matter of extreme representations of man, either as the master of his own destiny or as the victim of non-personal and irrational forces. The confession of the true presence of Christ's body and blood can provide an answer to this problem, for it shows that just as Christ is present in the common elements of bread and wine, so is He present in the common man touched by his grace. At the same time, it does not imply the annihilation of man, just as the presence in bread and wine does not imply the annihilation of the elements. Just as they can carry the sacramental presence of Christ, so man, with all his circumstances, can become a new creature by his grace. The confession of the true presence also brings us back to the Reformers' anthropological diagnosis of man as *simul iustus et peccator* (Forell 1965, 338f).

As far as ecclesiology is concerned, the problem lies in extreme representations of the Church, i.e. those that see the Church in purely sociological terms as just an institution from which Christians can turn away as an instrument of no use to God, or those that see the Church as a disciplined community of God's own people which they use as an instrument of upholding their moral and theological legalism. While the former representations are blurred and lack clear definitions, the latter ones are a source of division. In the face of these, the doctrine of true presence opens up the prospect of a very broad understanding of

¹⁶ "...that as Lutherans we are committed to the real presence of the true body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper."

¹⁷ Forell refers to article X of "Augsburg Confession" (BSELK, 104-105; BC, 44-45) and to article VII,6 of *Epitome* of "Formula of Concord" (BSELK, 1258-1259; BC, 505).

the Church as real, earthly and institutional, but also chosen by God to proclaim His Word and administer His sacraments. Christ, received in faith in sacrament together with the elements of bread and wine, points to the need to also receive in faith God's holy Church in its human form, in which it is perceptible on earth. The parallel between Christ's presence in the earthly elements and His presence in the earthly and bodily men and women, members of His people on earth, is significant in this regard (Forell 1965, 339f).

R.G. Forell identifies some problematic contradictions in the doctrine of the Word. On the one hand, the doctrine of transubstantiation, which rejects the human form of the Word in favour of a docetic illusion, and, on the other hand, a position that would like to limit the Word merely to a collection of historical documents of human faith and courage, whereby the confrontation of man with the Word of God is lost. There is a way to overcome this contradiction though, by pointing out that just as Christ is present in the sacrament in, with and under the earthly elements, so too is the Word of God present in, with and under the earthly and human documents. At the same time, in contemporary disputes Scripture should not be interpreted in terms of transubstantiation or treated as mere memoirs. Instead, our approach should be characterised not by an expectation of the true presence of the living God (Forell 1965, 340f). The above text by R.G. Forell was the first attempt in an LWF publication not only to define the presence of Christ in a sacrament, but also refer to the confessional writings to draw consequences for the contradictions present in contemporary theological debate.

In the period following the LWF Assembly in Helsinki, the ecumenical context of considering the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar also returns. In the recommendations of the LWF Commission on Theology on ecumenical relations drawn up at the meeting in Moshi (Tanzania) in 1969, the question of Christ's presence in the sacrament appears in the section on the nature of worship. It reads: "The Lord's Supper is the presence of Christ, distributed as God's gift, and cannot

take place without those partaking of the sacrament.” (“Guidelines for Ecumenical Encounter” 1970, 57) What is important here, therefore, is the practical consequence arising from the presence of Christ in the sacrament, according to which it is impossible to celebrate the sacrament without the participation of the congregation.

5. LWF Assembly in Evian and the period up to 1977

Discussion about Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in an ecumenical context continued at the LWF Assembly in Evian (1970). One of the keynote speeches given by Kent S. Knutson dealt with the reactions of the Lutheran churches to the changes in the Roman Catholic Church and its theology which occurred in the period leading up to the assembly. His particular focus was on the work of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Discussing the theological points shared by Lutherans and Roman Catholics, Knutson emphasised the conviction that Christ's true body and blood are consumed in the Lord's Supper. He highlighted how the statements of Vatican II appreciated the thesis that Christ is present not only in sacraments, but also in worship (Knutson 1971, 45, 46). Knutson was referring to the thesis often found in LWF publications that the means of grace, i.e. the sermon and the sacraments, carry the presence of Christ. The lecture in question also contained a rebuttal to the doctrine of transubstantiation, not seen in LWF Assembly Proceedings since the LWF Assembly in Hanover. Indeed, K.S. Knutson expressed concern about the content of the 1965 encyclical *Mysterium fidei* (cf. *Mysterium Fidei...*, 1965), which, he argued, followed the line of the Council of Trent in its understanding of transubstantiation. At the same time, he offered an interpretation, which was optimistic from an ecumenical perspective, i.e. that this was a manifestation of internal tensions within the Roman Catholic Church regarding the clarification of the theology of the Eucharist (Knutson 1971, 49). Thus, the relevant elements of dispute with Roman Catholic teaching were interpreted in the interest of a possible ecumenical rapprochement and not, as was

the case at the LWF Assemblies in Lund or Hanover, in terms of a clear delimitation of Lutheran teaching on the Lord's Supper.

After the LWF Assembly in Evian, the problem of true presence appears above all in the commentaries published in the "Lutheran World" following the 1973 "Leuenberg Agreement" signed by the European Churches of the Lutheran, Reformed and Union traditions, as well as the Waldensians and the Bohemian Brethren. Harding Meyer pointed out that the concept of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar embraced in this document („Agreement between Reformation churches in Europe..." 1973 {No. 15 and 18}) corresponds more closely to that of Article X of the *Confessio Augustana Variata*,¹⁸ rather than Article X of the *Confessio Augustana Invariata*.¹⁹ This brings up the question of whether, in a new interpretation of its own confessions, Lutheranism is beginning to see Article X of the *Confessio Augustana Variata* as a legitimate interpretive option for understanding the Lord's Supper. Such a possibility, however, creates a tension in the context of the Lutheran emphasis on *Confessio Augustana Invariata* as its symbolic book. This problem, according to Meyer, is not a minor one. He emphasises its relevance also for the LWF, which takes *Confessio Augustana Invariata* as its doctrinal basis (Meyer 1973, 37).²⁰ Marc Lienhard comments in a similar tone, pointing out reservations about the passage on the Lord's

¹⁸ Cf.: *Confessio Augustana variata*, art. X: "Of the Lord's Supper they teach that together with the bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christa are truly tendered to those that eat in the Lord's Supper" (BSELK-QM1, 127; "The Variata of 1540" 1930, *401-*402).

¹⁹ German text: "Concerning the Lord's Supper it is taught that the true body and blood of Christa re truly present under the form of bread and wine in Lord's Supper and are distributed and received there" (BC, 44; cf. BSELK, 104). Latin text: "Concerning the Lord's Supper they teach that the body and blood of Christ are truly present and are distributed to those who eat the Lord's Supper" (BC, 45; cf. BSELK, 105).

²⁰ *Confessio Augustana Invariata* has been among the two confessional writings listed as the doctrinal basis of the Federation since the inception of the LWF. The other is the "Small Catechism". Cf. LWF Constitution as in force after the Evian Assembly. Cf. "The Constitution of the LWF..." 1963.

Supper in the “Leuenberg Agreement”. He highlights the vagueness of the phrase used there “with bread and wine” (“Agreement between Reformation churches in Europe...” 1973 {No. 15 and 18}), which can be interpreted differently than in the sense of true presence (Lienhard 1973, 32f).

The following year, M. Lienhard published in a more extensive study on church fellowship based on the “Leuenberg Agreement” “Lutheran World”, in which he softened his position. He admitted that the document did not fully reflect the Lutheran teaching on the presence of true body and blood in the Lord's Supper, since, of all the prepositions defining this presence in the elements of the Sacrament of the Altar: “in, with and under”,²¹ the document uses only “with” (“Agreement between Reformation churches in Europe...” 1973 {No. 15 and 18}). It also lacked the clarification characteristic of Lutheran approaches, i.e. that it referred to the “true body” and “true blood” of Christ (cf. BSELK, 104; BC, 44 {Augsburg Confession, Article X, German Text}; BSELK, 888; BC, 362 {The Small Catechism, The Sacrament of Altar}; BSELK, 1258-1259; BC, 505 {Formula of Concord, Epitome, VIII, 6-7}), as well as statements referring to the doctrine of the omnipresence of Christ's body (BSELK, 1264f; BC, 507f {Formula of Concord, Epitome, VIII, 32-34.36}). However, M. Lienhard's view was that the text of the Agreement did not miss what is most essential in the teaching on the Lord's Supper, namely that

...in the reception of the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper, I am actually reached by the gift of salvation and that this not depend on my subjective comprehension (Lienhard 1974, 334).

He grounded this observation on the fact that the wording of No. 18 of the “Leuenberg Agreement” did not allow for any other interpretation of partaking of the Lord's Supper than as receiving the saving gift (Lienhard 1974, 334).

²¹ Cf. above footnote 3.

The adoption of the “Leuenberg Agreement” raised questions about the extent to which its conciliatory wording regarding the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the elements of the Lord’s Supper was compatible with traditional Lutheran teaching on the matter. M. Lienhard proposed a solution to these doubts, indicating that the wording of the “Leuenberg Agreement” should be read not through the lens of full conformity to a specifically Lutheran view of the subject, but through the lens of preserving the essence of the matter, because of which the Lutheran tradition attached so much importance to preserving the teaching on the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacrament. This change of perspective makes it possible to take a positive view of the formula contained in the “Leuenberg Agreement”.

6. LWF Assembly in Dar es Salaam and the period up to 1984

At the LWF Assembly in Dar es Salaam, the topic of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper did not appear in the official proceedings report (cf. “Daressalam 1977. In Christ – A New Community. The Proceedings...” 1977). On the other hand, in preparatory material for the individual discussion seminars, specifically Seminar II “In Christ – One Community in the Spirit”, the issue of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Altar is present, as it had been before, only in the context of worship:

In worship, those gifts that help Christians to become part of the new community are constantly renewed. In the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of holy communion, the crucified and risen Lord himself meets human beings. In this meeting, they hear the call to conversion and to the discipleship of Christ. This encounter is the very source of strength for the whole Christian community in its service of reconciliation (“In Christ – a New Community. A Study Guide...” nd. 40).

Once again, therefore, Christ’s presence is interpreted as an encounter, with an emphasis on the effects of that encounter on the way of life of the Christians involved.

Following the LWF Assembly in Dar es Salaam, the LWF publications continue to look at the question of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper through the lens of worship. This is due to the fact that the assembly initiated a study programme on worship ("Abridged and Consolidated Report of the Plenary Sessions" 1977, 198). The resulting report of the Study Commission of the LWF viewed the presence of Christ in terms of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which gives the sacrament a dimension of epiclesis. At the same time, the authors pointed out that it permeates the whole sacrament and is not merely confined to the prayer containing the epiclesis ("Die Identität der Kirche und Wesen und Funktion des Gottesdienstes..." 1979, 10 {No. 1.4}). At the same time, in the accompanying commentary referring to the above passage, Roger W. Nostbakken juxtaposed two opposing views on the role of epiclesis for the fact of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. On the one hand, he cited Peter Brunner, who insisted that the epiclesis is not necessary for the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar, since it is He himself who makes the bread the vehicle of His body and the wine of His blood. P. Brunner further extended his take on the matter by stating that the prayer containing the epiclesis should precede the words of institution, so as to avoid the impression that the work of Christ that they accomplish requires improvement. On the other hand, he referred to the Reformed theologian Jaen-Jacques von Allmen, who pointed out that, according to the Eastern tradition, the epiclesis after the words of institution emphasises that the true presence of Christ excludes "sacramental automatism", thus opposing any interpretations that would wish to make the true presence of Christ conditional upon the celebrant saying the appropriate Eucharistic prayer, in favour of emphasising that it is an action of the free grace of God (Nostbakken 1979, 58; cf. Brunner 1954, 348-357; Allmen 1965, 30-32). It is thus evident that the above reflections on Christ's presence in the sacrament emphasised its pneumatological aspects.

The study of worship outlined above was continued in the so-called “Northfield Statement on Worship” [*Northfield-Erklärung zu Fragen Gottesdienstes*] published in 1984. It speaks of the entire worship service, of which the sacraments remain an essential part, in terms of savouring God’s gracious acts as well as encountering the crucified Christ, and more specifically of Christ’s presence in, among other things, the sacraments. The Lord’s Supper (Eucharist) is defined as “...das Mahl, in dem Christus sich hingibt zur Erhaltung des Lebens der Gemeinde.”²² (“Northfield-Erklärung zu Fragen Gottesdienstes” 1983, 5f {No. 1f, 8}). Just like the previous studies on worship, the “Northfield Statement on Worship” also states the presence of Christ in the sacraments in general. In doing so, it focuses on the implications of the Sacrament of the Altar for the life of the church.

The question of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Altar also appeared in the context of worship in the study for the 35th anniversary of the LWF, prepared by Vilmos Vajta. In a section devoted to spirituality, he pointed to the view, rooted in the thinking of M. Luther, of the role of external elements that gain their significance through the Word of God attached to them. This goes against the tendency to escape into a spirituality focused solely on the internal. It is necessary to maintain the connection of the Spirit with the bodily life through Word and faith. Starting from these references, V. Vajta pointed out that “our churches are required to give effect to the sacramental dimension of the spiritual life in a new way” (Vajta 1983, 10). In the context of emphasising the bodily dimension of spirituality, V. Vajta emphasised that “the incarnation of Jesus Christ, in his presence in the sacrament, is the key for the coming world” (Vajta 1983, 10). Thus, his reflections return to the eschatological aspect of Christ’s presence in the sacrament, already present at the LWF Assembly in Minneapolis.

²² “... the meal in which Christ offers himself to sustain the life of the church”.

The problem of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper was also raised during the seminar on the "Augsburg Confession" held in the late 1970s. In the opening analysis of the post-conference volume, Edmund Schlink pointed out, *inter alia*, that Article X of the "Augsburg Confession" failed to resolve the problem of whether Christ's presence is to be understood in terms of transubstantiation. He further emphasised that the *Confessio Augustana*, as the Church's confession of faith, focused on the centre of faith, which is *Christus pro nobis* and His saving work towards man in Word and sacraments. For this reason, the controversy about the understanding of the presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament had been subordinated to the key issue, i.e. the words of consolation contained in the Lord's Supper: "this is my body" and "this is my blood" (Schlink 1984, 11f). E. Schlink thus showed that, on the basis of the "Augsburg Confession", the key to interpreting the presence of Christ's body and blood in the elements of the Sacrament of the Altar is the truth of the saving work of Christ, available to man in Word and sacrament, which is fundamental to this confession.

Some references to the question of presence also appear in the post-Dar es Salaam period in the context of mission. At the LWF supra-regional consultation on mission and evangelism held in Stavanger (Norway) in 1982, Andreas Aarflot, in his sermon at the opening service, speaking in the context of reflections on Christian freedom, underlined that in the sacraments Christians have access to the treasures of God's grace, which in the case of the Lord's Supper "are manifest in the elements of bread and wine, which become the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ for those who take part in the Lord's Supper" (Aarflot 1983, 3). It is noteworthy how in such a general context A. Aarflot made it clear that he meant the presence of Christ in the elements of the Lord's Supper, rather than merely stating the presence of Christ in the sacrament, as had been the case in many of the cited references on this subject in the publications discussed above. Moreover, the report of one of the working groups noted the presence of Christ in a local

congregation in the Sacrament of the Altar and in the Word, making the local congregation the cornerstone of mission “Group 1B: Mission and Evangelism...” 1983, 131).

7. LWF Assembly in Budapest and the period up to 1990

During the LWF Assembly in Budapest, the issue of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Altar appeared in three contexts. The first of these was mission. Geir Gundersen, author of a meditation included in a Bible study based on the so-called great commission in Matthew 28:16-20, pointed out that Christ’s presence in Word and sacrament is fundamental for assessing whether Christian preaching is conducted in accordance with the missionary imperative in Matthew’s text. Is it God’s folly in the eyes of the world (cf. 1 Cor 4:10), which is nevertheless an expression of His power, or is it deception and opium for the masses? If the presence of Christ is missing, Christianity will remain just the latter (Gundersen 1984, 84).

The second context was worship as a sign of hope. The working group Worship and Christian Life [*Gottesdienst und Christliches Leben*] described the first of its objects in terms of “presence of the living Christ in Word and sacrament that makes Christian worship a sign for the world” (“Working group 2: Worship and Christian Life” 1985, 200).

The third context involved an important ecumenical event, which was the publication of the so-called “Lima Document” in 1982 (cf. BEM 10-17 {Part: Eucharist}). Preparatory materials for the assembly’s discussion groups on its assessment pointed out, *inter alia*, that the wording of the “Lima Document” regarding the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar was comparable to the results achieved by the LWF in bilateral ecumenical dialogues (“Issue 4: Ecumenical Commitment...” 1984, 58f).²³

²³ Compare the determinations of BEM, Eucharist, No. 4-6, 13f, 19f, 32{BEM, 10-12, 14, 16-17} with, for example, the results of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue: “The Eucharist” (1978) No. 19, 48-55 (“The Eucharist, 1978” 2007, 197, 203-205); “Ways

The few references to the issue of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper at the LWF Assembly in Budapest focused on the practical implications for missionary preaching, or for the description of worship in the eschatological context of hope, which was the major point of interest at the Assembly. Only on assessment of the "Lima Document" can an interest in interpreting the question of presence more broadly be seen, but here, too, it was limited to a statement of conformity with the LWF bilateral dialogues. It should also be noted that in the period following the Budapest assembly, the issue of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar does not appear in the publications of the LWF, even in the form of such humble mentions as during the assembly.

8. LWF Assembly in Curitiba and the period up to 1997

At the LWF Assembly in Curitiba, as in Dar es Salaam or Budapest, the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper was merely mentioned. The first of the contexts where it appeared was the discussion about *notae ecclesiae*, and thus the ecclesiological context already present in earlier LWF publications. In a lecture on the Gospel in a secular world held within Section II of the Assembly "I Have Heard the Cry of My People... For Salvation" [*Ich habe das Schreien meines Volkes gehört... nach Heil und Erlösung*], Jaan Kiviit reminded that Christ is present in the Church provided that the *notae ecclesiae* are preserved in it, i.e. the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered in accordance with the gospel. The preservation of *notae ecclesiae* makes the Church a sign of God's presence to the world (Kiviit 1990, 53).

The LWF Assembly in Curitiba returned to a practice abandoned after the Helsinki Assembly, i.e. producing a single final document to sum up its deliberations. The "Message" formulated in Curitiba included a reference to the question of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar, but it was in a rather specific context, namely in the section

entitled “A Liberated Creation” [*Eine befreite Schöpfung*]. It states that in the Lord’s Supper

...the fruits of the earth are brought to the table. Bread baked from the harvest of the fields, wine ripened on sunny slopes symbolize all that we need to live even as they bring us the very body and blood of Christ (“I Have Heard the Cry of My People... The Assembly Message” 1990, 89).

The “Message” therefore emphasises not only the relationship of the elements of the sacrament to the body and blood of Christ, but also their context as parts of creation, having their own specific symbolism.

The Curitiba Assembly thus considered the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper in an ecclesiological context already known in the reflections of the LWF. But for the first time since the Helsinki General Assembly, it also spoke directly of the presence of Christ’s body and blood in the elements of bread and wine. It also revisited an even older context present in the reflections of the LWF at the Hanover Assembly, namely the problem signalled by R. Haug of the relationship between the presence of body and blood in the Lord’s Supper and creation.

9. LWF Assembly in Hong-Kong and the period up to 2003

While the LWF Assembly in Hong-Kong itself did not address the issue of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper, it was addressed by an ecclesiological study project of the LWF, carried out from 1993 onwards under the title “The Church as Communion” [*Die Kirche als Gemeinschaft*]. Its results were published in 1998, i.e. after the Hong-Kong Assembly.

In one of the papers prepared for the study programme, Simo Peura looked at the Church as *communio* in Martin Luther’s theology. Analysing the concept of *communio* in the writings of the Reformer, S. Peura also referred to his understanding of the Lord’s Supper. In this context he drew attention, *inter alia*, to the aspect of participation in Christ by those partaking of the sacrament. He combines it with an emphasis on

the sacrament as a union of the Word of God and the element, thus the Word, that is, God, is united with the bread and wine. Consequently, the elements become the body and blood of Christ (Peura 1997, 117). In fact, this was actually the first time since the report of Section I at the LWF Assembly in Hanover and the papers delivered there that the relationship of the body and blood of Christ and the elements of the Lord's Supper had been analysed in such detail. What paved the way for revisiting the matter, of course, was the reference to the concept of *communio* in M. Luther's theology, where it is linked to reflection on the Sacrament of the Altar.

The problem of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in the period after the Hong-Kong Assembly was also addressed by the then LWF President Christian Krause at the LWF Council meeting in Bratislava in 1999. In his reflections, he focused firstly on Christ's command "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24; Luke 22:19), pointing out that it directs attention at the centre of worship, in which the bread is broken and the cup shared, by which Christ is made present among those taking part, as the one "...who died for us, for our redemption from sin, our resurrection to life and the communion of saints" (Krause 1999, 26). It is from this remembering that a whole culture of life develops, in which the culture of remembrance is coupled with the culture of charity, and the Lord's Table with the care for bread for the world. This culture of life thus described is also a culture of hospitality that combines three dimensions: *koinonia* (communion), *martyria* (witness and remembrance) and *diakonia* (works of compassion) (Krause 1999, 26). Thus, by referring to Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, Ch. Krause shows that it has far-reaching implications for the attitude of Christians towards their neighbours and the world.

10. LWF Assembly in Winnipeg and the period up to 2010

The preparatory materials for the following LWF Assembly in Winnipeg focused on Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar

from a specific perspective, defined by the theme of the assembly: “For the Healing of the World” [*Zur Heilung der Welt*]. Discussing healing through the sacraments, it defined them as a

...means of grace, expressions of the saving and healing presence of God in the church. They are healing events through which God restores human beings (“*For the Healing of the World*” *Assembly Study Book...* 2003, 19f).

Further, describing the significance of the Sacrament of the Altar specifically, the authors pointed out, inter alia, that “We meet the resurrected Christ in the breaking of bread (Lk 24:13–35), and are formed into a meal-sharing community” (“*For the Healing of the World*” *Assembly Study Book...* 2003, 20). The Lord’s Supper involves receiving Christ into one’s own body “in a way that transforms us personally and collectively” (“*For the Healing of the World*” *Assembly Study Book...* 2003, 20). They also pointed out that the sacraments make God’s grace visible and audible, allow it to be “edible, drinkable” (“*For the Healing of the World*” *Assembly Study Book...* 2003, 20). The perspective taken, i.e. the importance of the sacrament for healing, determined the focus on its benefits, while allowing not only to point to the sacrament as an encounter with God and, more specifically, with the risen Christ, but also to refer to the bodily, tangible aspect of receiving Christ into one’s own body.

The issue of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Altar also came up in statements made during the assembly itself. It was mentioned, among others, by the retiring LWF President Christian Krause, who referred in his speech to the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasising the necessity of Christ’s presence among Christians in Word and sacrament, because, as the crucified one, He restored peace between them and God (Krause 2003:13; cf.: Bonhoeffer 1958, 168).

In addition to the above reference, the topic of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper was addressed more extensively in the keynote address of the assembly given by Margot Kässmann who opened the part

of her speech devoted, *inter alia*, to the question of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar with a reference to the concept of *communio sanctorum*, which points to the Lord's Supper as a participation in the sacred. She then characterised the words of institution: "The body of Christ, given for you", "The blood of Christ, shed for you", which proclaim "Christ, really present among us here and now" as an "impenetrable mystery" (Kässmann 2003, 91). She then elaborated on the sacrificial nature of the Lord's Supper, pointing out that the giving of Christ's body and blood can be controversial. These reflections were concluded with the telling words: "The Lord's Supper remains a theological challenge" (Kässmann 2003, 91).

Statements regarding Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper made in the assembly are not immediately determined by the theme of the assembly, i.e. "For the healing of the World". Therefore, Ch. Krause referred to the context of Christ's presence through Word and sacrament, which had already appeared many times. This context was also present in the reflection of M. Kässmann, who, without denying the significance of the *verba testamenti*, consciously rejected an analysis of the phenomenon of Christ's true presence in the here and now. She limited herself only to pointing out that it has the nature of a mystery and therefore remains a theological challenge for those who are confronted with it.

After the Winnipeg Assembly, the question of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper was considered in two contexts of church life practice: mission and diakonia. The context of mission returned and that of diakonia first emerged in LWF reflection on the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar, when, after the Winnipeg Assembly, LWF produced two handbooks dedicated to reflection on these two spheres of practical activity of the Church.

The first of these, published 2004, is entitled "Mission in Context. Transformation – Reconciliation – Empowerment". In the part on the theology of mission in the section "God's mission as Sanctifier", it points to the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the sacramental presence.

It is the Holy Spirit who enables imperfect human efforts to be part of God's mission. It was emphasised that it is He who transforms human words proclaiming the Good News, the water of baptism, as well as the bread and wine, or the elements of the Lord's Supper, into "signs of Christ's presence in the church" (*Mission in Context...* 2004, 27). Thus, one can see a return to the earlier parallels between the sacraments and the proclaimed Word, as well as an emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit for Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. These considerations are expanded in the next section on the theology of mission, which described mission as deriving its mandates from the Word and guided by the Holy Spirit in an ecclesiological context. It presented the Sacrament of the Altar as a manifestation of mission spirituality,

...in which Christ himself is present with the Church in and with the bread and wine, giving his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins (*Mission in Context...* 2004, 31).

The Lord's Supper was further defined as a "sacrament of presence" (*Mission in Context...* 2004, 31), which

...brings God's eschatological reality into the life of the church, empowering it for mission and giving the world a foretaste of the coming communion (1 Cor. 11:26) (*Mission in Context...* 2004, 31).

In the above mission context, the question of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar was again considered with reference primarily to pneumatology, taking into account the parallel between the word of the sermon and the sacrament. It should be noted that the study under discussion also closely linked the nature of the Lord's Supper as a sacrament of presence with the fact of the giving of Christ's body and blood in the elements of bread and wine.

The second publication appeared in 2009 and was entitled "Diakonia in Context. Transformation – Reconciliation – Empowerment". It addressed the issue of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar in the chapter on the identity of the diakonia, in a paragraph referring

to the “diakonia of the table”. It highlighted the essential connection between the communion of the table and the Lord’s Supper. The sacrament was described as a mystery of change, in which “ordinary bread and wine are received as Christ’s precious body and blood” (*Diakonia In Context...* 2009, 33), and sinners receive forgiveness of sins and become agents of change in their daily lives (*Diakonia In Context...* 2009, 33). The emphasis was on the communal dimension of the sacrament and its implications for the participants. Thus, like M. Kässmann’s remarks in Winnipeg, the theme of the sacrament as mystery was revisited, and the relationship of the body and blood of Christ to the elements of the Lord’s Supper was defined from the perspective of the partakers, with no attempt to emphasise the objectivity of the presence of Christ’s body and blood in the bread and wine.

11. LWF Assembly in Stuttgart

At the LWF Assembly in Stuttgart, much like in the preparatory materials for the Winnipeg Assembly, the question of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper was defined through the theme of the Assembly, which this time was the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread”. Similarly to the previous assemblies, this was not a central issue, so it can only be found in the preparatory material for the so-called Village Groups [*Dorfgruppen*], intended as a platform for discussion and exchange of experiences regarding the issues discussed. References to the issue in question are determined by the Bible material discussed by the Village Groups. The theme of the group’s work, whose materials include the question of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper, was Eucharistic hospitality, so the deliberations were conducted in an ecumenical context. The first passage to guide the group’s reflections were the words of Jesus in John 6:32-59, where he describes himself as the bread of life and his body as true food and promises that the partaking of his body and blood is a guarantee of eternal life. In the questions accompanying the discussion of this passage, the emphasis

was on the soteriological aspect, related to the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. Materials for the same group, in the context of the New Testament account of the practice of breaking bread in Christian churches (cf. Acts 2:42) and the story of the two disciples going to Emmaus, who recognised the risen Christ only in the breaking of the bread (cf. Lk 24:13-35), include the following statement:

Here the sacramental meal causes the followers of Jesus to experience the presence of the risen Lord and to be empowered for mission (“Village Group 5...” nd., 15).

So the context of mission, closely linked to experiencing the presence of Christ in the sacrament, is revisited.

12. Conclusions

Looking at the material presented above from a formal perspective, it must be said that an in-depth analysis of the issue of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper can only be found in the final documents of the first two LWF assemblies, i.e. Lund and Hanover. Later, with some exceptions, most references to Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Altar are made in the context of various other topics. Besides this, only two in-depth analyses of the Reformation sources of the doctrine of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper can be found in the entire period under review. Just one of these is part of the LWF study programme (“The Church as Communion”, the concluding volume of which was published after the Hong Kong Assembly). The other one, written by a theologian belonging to the LCMS, a Lutheran Church which has never been a member of the LWF, is more attached to traditional terms such as “sacramental union”. Such terms are not used in the remaining part of the material analysed to describe the phenomenon of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Altar. This article by A.C. Piepkorn, which appeared before the Helsinki Assembly as a commentary on its theme, should not be seen as an expression of a debate within the LWF, but of an effort at rapprochement between the LWF and the LCMS.

From a material perspective, several themes and contexts of reflection on the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar can be identified in the texts analysed. They run with varying intensity through the LWF publications discussed. The first such theme is the teaching on the Word of God instituting the sacrament, which is often directly linked to the issue of the incarnation of Christ. This is particularly present in the first two assemblies in Lund and Hanover. Later, at the Helsinki Assembly, the combination of the category “Word” and “the omnipresence of Christ” appears. The Word is also linked repeatedly to the pneumatological context.

The category of “Word” also allows us to take the parallel between the sacraments and the words of the sermon as one of the relevant themes of the analyses. At the same time, it should be noted that this parallel has explanatory significance both for the doctrine of the sacraments and for the understanding of the meaning of the sermon. Both it and the pneumatological context connect yet another broad practical context for considering Christ’s presence in the sacrament, namely the consideration of the Lord’s Supper in the context of worship. This is particularly relevant in the context of the study of the service by the LWF after the Hanover Assembly and before the Budapest Assembly.

Another important theme is the relationship of the body and blood of Christ to the elements of the Sacrament. It should be noted that the explicit mention of the connection of body and blood with the elements of bread and wine appears at only four LWF Assemblies: in Lund, Hanover and only after a long interval in Curitiba and Winnipeg. Apart from this, the issue appears particularly intensely in the context of the evaluation of the wording of the “Leuenberg Agreement” in the 1970s, as well as in the handbooks on mission and diakonia published by the LWF after 2000. It should also be noted that LWF analyses rarely attempt to explain the connection between the body and blood of Christ and the elements of the Sacrament of the Altar. Rather, attention is often devoted to the connection between this presence and the salvific benefit

of the sacrament, or it is merely stated that Christ is present in the sacrament, without attempting to explore it further, or even to highlight the connection between the body and blood of Christ and the elements.

Attempts at a positive interpretation of the relationship of the body and blood of Christ to the elements have only been made in the above-mentioned analyses rooted in Reformation theology, one of which came from A.C. Piepkorn – a theologian from outside the LWF. The lecture by M. Kässmann held in Winnipeg can be viewed as a counterbalance to these analyses. Kässmann consciously dispensed with explaining the relation of the body and blood of Christ to the elements of the sacrament, limiting herself to the use of the term “mystery”. In this context, it should also be noted that since the period after the Hanover Assembly, there have been attempts to explain the presence of Christ in the sacrament in terms of “encounter”. An interesting attempt to change the perspective on the question of the true presence of flesh and blood in the sacrament was made by R.G. Forell in his article published after the Helsinki Assembly. In it, the author presents the doctrine of true presence as an opportunity for ecclesiology, anthropology and the doctrine of the Word.

A negative interpretation regarding the relationship of the body and blood of Christ and the elements of the Sacrament of the Altar is found in the refutations of transubstantiation and symbolic understanding in the documents of the Lund and Hanover assemblies. Later on, the topic of transubstantiation is only revisited in the above-mentioned studies by A.C. Piepkorn (where transubstantiation is accompanied by an extensive list of other rejected views), R.G. Forell (who views transubstantiation as the abandonment of the Word in favour of a docetic illusion) in the ecumenical and reconciliatory context at the Evian Assembly (maintaining, however, a critical view of the problem from a Lutheran position), and in E. Schlink’s analyses of Article X of the “Augsburg Confession” on the occasion of its 450th anniversary. Such a distribution and content of references to transubstantiation allow the hypothesis that a decisive

role in the abandonment of negative references to this issue was played by the ecumenical opening of the LWF at the LWF Third Assembly in Minneapolis, as expressed in the theses adopted at that assembly (cf. ("Christ Frees and Unites. Theses..." 1958, 84-91) and the initiation of ecumenical dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council (cf. *The Lutheran World Federation's Commitments...* 2018, 12), which was reflected in the tone of the discussions in Evian.

The penultimate broad context for considering Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in LWF publications is ecclesiology. This is not only about the church-forming role of Christ's presence in the sacrament, or its relevance to the consideration of the authority of the church or church fellowship in both intra-Lutheran and ecumenical contexts. The contexts of the church's practical work in the world are also relevant, including especially mission and diakonia. In both cases, the LWF publications, the result of research in the 1980s and after 2000, highlight the important role of belief in the presence of Christ in the sacrament for the significance of the Lord's Supper in these practical aspects of church life.

The final important context in which Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper is considered is its eschatological dimension. It is particularly present in the period leading up to the Minneapolis Assembly, and at the assembly itself.

In conclusion, an analysis of the discussion of the Christ's presence in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in LWF publications until 2010 reveals two things. Firstly, the process of abandoning the excessive attachment to the ways of discussing Christ's presence and the terms inherited by Lutherans from the 16th century debate. This applies to both positive explications and refutations, especially in the context of the doctrine of transubstantiation. It is significant that the latter is mentioned for the last time in the context of an analysis of Article X of the *Confessio Augustana* and the ambiguity of this article, which, after all, is normative for Lutheran teaching on transubstantiation. This shows the self-critical power of the Lutheran debate in the LWF, i.e. engaging

in ecumenical dialogue becomes a starting point for a critical self-assessment of its own confessions of faith.

Secondly, the discussion of the Lord's Supper and the presence of Christ in it shows a general shift in the LWF debate away from repeating the traditional agenda (as is well seen in the way the topic was approached in Lund and Hanover) in favour of confronting the Lutheran heritage in the context of the contemporary challenges of the church. At the same time, the debate does not abandon the essence of the beliefs that Lutheranism inherited from its founding fathers. This method is well depicted in the material studied by M. Lienhard in his assessment of the statements of the "Leuenberg Agreement" on the presence of Christ in the elements. He mitigates his initial critical assessment by reflecting that the wording proposed in this ecumenical document in no way contradicts the interest represented by the sixteenth-century dogmatic formulas it omitted. The fact that the LWF's reflection on Christ's presence does preserve the essence of Lutheran convictions is also evident in the fact that it makes the theme of presence an essential element of its reflection and the practice of church life, especially and mission and diakonia after the year 2000. Paradoxically, too, the refusal in Winnipeg to define precisely the mechanism of the presence of the Body and Blood in the sacrament, and instead the acknowledgement that it is a theological challenge – a mystery – conveys something of the Lutheran spirit of refusal to see how the sacrament occurs. Such a state of affairs in the sixteenth-century debate is evidenced in the material analysed here by the reflections of A.C. Piepkorn, who represented in this debate a Lutheranism attached to the repristination of sixteenth-century formulations, which offer an apt justification for rejecting the various attempts to explain the phenomenon of the presence as incompatible with Scripture and containing unjustified metaphysical assumptions.

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