

# LUTHER'S OPINION OF AUGUSTINE'S WORDS: ACCEDAT VERB UM AD ELEMENT UM ET FIT SACRAMENTUM

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*Editor's Preface: The "moment of presence" in the Lord's Supper has been a subject of much discussion in recent years within the Lutheran Church. It has often been claimed that Luther believed that Christ's body and blood were present from the moment of consecration. Although some quotations taken from his writings may seem to support such a view, Luther's opinion translated here, in which he more directly addresses this issue, seems to cast doubt on the claim that "consecrationism" was Luther's consistent view.*

*This statement has been translated from Vol. 21b of the St. Louis edition, columns 3457-3459. In Volume 21, 393-395 of the Walch edition of 1588 it appears among Luther's letters. It is letter number 156 in the third collection of letters, previously unpublished letters prepared from the autographs. No information is provided about the date or situation of this short writing. In the St. Louis edition it is included among the addenda (Nachlese).*

*We offer this translation, not as a resolution of the debate concerning the moment of presence (since this should be based on exegesis of Scripture rather than on the opinions of human authorities), but as a matter of historical interest relating to a topic which has been a subject of much discussion.*

It is all the more important to understand this statement of Augustine, because of the degree to which the papists have misused it and deduced the greatest errors from it. They draw the following conclusion: Augustine affirms that a sacrament consists of two parts, namely the word and the outward sign (*elemento*). Hence they conclude that as soon as the officiating priest has spoken the words of institution in the presence of the bread and wine, immediately the body and blood of Christ must be present. Furthermore, in order to render fitting honor to Christ, this bread must be enclosed in a secure little house so that mice and worms don't eat it, and then people must worship it. Therefore, under the papacy a similar thought was impressed on the hearts of the people so that they believed that none of their prayers were more acceptable to God and more readily heard than those spoken at the place where the consecrated bread is enclosed.

In order to avoid these errors, one must know that Augustine was not speaking only of the pronunciation of the words of Christ, but rather includes with it the command to take and eat the bread. And afterward he adds: *hic est corpus meum*. [here is my body], which is as much as to say that apart from this use my body and blood do not become connected with these outward signs. For one must not think that this Lord's Supper is like some kind of magic illusion in which Christ can be taken hold of without the word<sup>1</sup> through mere human superstition. Wherefore, even as baptism, unless a child is there that is to be baptized,<sup>2</sup> is nothing else than mere water: so we maintain with absolute certainty that where there are no people present who are eating and drinking according to Christ's institution, nothing else than bread and wine are there even though one should speak the words a thousand times.

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<sup>1</sup> The German has "ohne Wort." This seems to refer to Christ's command to take and eat.

<sup>2</sup> The German has "Wenn ein Kind da ist" but the sense and parallelism require the rendering "unless a child is there" or "if no child is there." An alternate rendering would be "Wherefore, even as baptism, if a child is present which is to be baptized, is nothing else than mere water [until the water is applied], so we maintain with absolute certainty . . . , etc. In both sacraments Luther is stressing that unless the action Christ commanded takes place, there is no sacrament.

If, however, the question is asked what parts are essential to the sacrament, we answer: there are three things that belong to the sacrament. First of all, the element must be there, that is, a visible sign. Thereupon must follow the complete speaking of the words. And thirdly, the correct use according to Christ's institution must be added. For example, the element in baptism is the water; the accompanying words that must be spoken are these: "I baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Finally, the proper use commanded by Christ includes that the child itself is immersed or sprinkled. One must assert the same in regard to the Lord's Supper. To begin with, all the elements, the bread and the wine, must be present. Thereupon all the words of the testament must be spoken. Finally, the proper use must be added, that is, the eating and drinking. This I believe throws sufficient light on the true meaning of this saying which all the schools drum into their students.

But here we must also incidentally examine the question whether the adoration of the elements is necessary or not. Some want to establish and prove its necessity under the pretext: Christ is to be worshipped; Christ is present in the Lord's Supper; therefore the Supper must be adored. There is an easy answer to this allegation, if the words of Christ are diligently weighed. For he does not say: "Take and worship," but he commands that we should eat and drink. For only the performance of what Christ commanded, namely, the worthy eating and drinking, is the true and foremost honor we can and should render this ceremony. Although no one will find fault with the show of honor for the elements that consists in outward reverence, nevertheless, since this custom had its origin in the traditions of these people [that is, the Roman Catholics] it must be a superstitious opinion when it is taught as though it is a necessary service to God and cannot be omitted without sin. For we must at all times remember the principle which Jesus in Matthew 15 applies from Isaiah: "They honor me in vain with human ordinances." That is, human traditions are no divine worship. Therefore, if we were to worship the bread and wine which is given to us in the sacrament under this superstitious opinion, we would become open idolaters and would establish a divine worship that militates against the express Word of God because God does not want us to call on him in any other way than he himself prescribes, namely in spirit and in truth.