

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 2 E. THE SACRAMENTS

The celebration of the Lord's supper with thanksgiving

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1. The Lord's supper is being celebrated in some of our congregations without the traditional preface and thanksgiving, or any form of thanksgiving. This practice is spreading in the Lutheran church in Australia.

It is argued that the words of institution effect the real presence. Hence all other parts of the traditional orders (the preface with the thanksgiving, the sanctus, the Lord's prayer before or after the words of institution, and the Lamb of God) have the status of adiaphora. That is, they are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's word, therefore pastors may omit or include them as they please.

2. However, the thanksgiving is commanded by Christ, so its inclusion is not left to the pastor's discretion. The thanksgiving should be observed in the celebration of the sacrament.
 - a. The words and form of the thanksgiving are not specifically prescribed by our Lord. Nevertheless the evidence clearly indicates that Christ's command to 'do this' in remembrance of him (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24,25) includes the act of thanksgiving over the bread and the wine (Matthew 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25).
 - 1) The gospels indicate that the thanksgiving which Jesus prayed at the last supper was similar to the prayers of blessing and thanksgiving which Jesus said in the meals where he acted as host together with his disciples (Matt 14:19; 15:36; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16; 24:30; John 6:11; compare Acts 27:35).

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- 2) By doing this, Jesus did not establish something completely new. Rather, he acted according to Jewish custom. Before a meal Yahweh was acknowledged as the source of every blessing; at the end of each meal Yahweh was thanked for his blessings.
- 3) These meal-time prayers were called 'benedictions' or 'eulogies' because they normally began with the formula: 'Blessed are you, Adonai [God].' This was followed by statements which described the mighty acts of God in creating the world and providing food for humankind. They were, therefore, acts of praise addressed to God. This custom may be behind the use of the Greek verb for 'blessing' with reference to the bread in Matthew 26:26 and Mark 14:22 (compare 1 Cor 10:16).
- 4) The variation in Matthew and Mark between the 'blessing' with the bread and the 'thanksgiving' with the wine probably reflects the different wording in the Jewish tradition for the benedictory grace with the bread at the beginning of the meal and the thanksgiving with the wine at the end of the meal.
- 5) The words of thanksgiving are the first in a sequence of acts to be performed in the celebration of the Lord's supper.
 - The four New Testament accounts of the institution of the sacrament all report the act of thanksgiving with a form of the Greek verb which indicates that the act of thanksgiving is closely linked with the subsequent actions [an aorist participle is used rather than an aorist indicative tense, as is the case with most of the other acts].
 - This may be taken in one of two ways. It may indicate that the customary words of thanksgiving were spoken before the rest of the rite was performed, that is, the thanksgiving was the first in a series of acts. Or it may indicate that the words of thanksgiving not only began the rite, but they also accompanied some or all of the subsequent acts, including the words of Christ for the bread and the wine.
 - These alternatives in understanding the extent of the thanksgiving are evident in the difference between the 'Service with Communion' and the 'Service — Alternative Form'. But either way, the thanksgiving, according to all New Testament accounts, is an essential part of the celebration.
- b. Just as Jesus addressed the thanksgiving to his Father, so the eucharistic thanksgiving is addressed to the first person of the Holy Trinity.
 - 1) The Father is the source of everything we receive in worship. Therefore, in the Lord's supper all prayer is offered to him.
 - 2) In the eucharistic prayer Jesus leads us in our thanksgiving to the Father for his gifts in creation and redemption.
3. The apostolic fathers, writing soon after the New Testament was written, unanimously testify to the practice of celebrating the Lord's supper with the thanksgiving.
 - a. Ignatius (died about AD 104) refers to the Lord's supper as the eucharist [= 'thanksgiving'] (*Letter to the Smyrneans* 7:1; 8:1).

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- b. A writing known as *The Didache* calls the Lord's supper the 'eucharist' (9:2,5), mentions the giving of thanks with the breaking of the bread (14:1), and gives prayers of thanksgiving for the cup and the bread (9:1–5) as well as a post-communion prayer of thanksgiving (10:1–6).
 - c. Justin (died about AD165) also calls the Lord's supper the eucharist (1 Apology 66), mentions the offering of praise and thanksgiving to the Father (65,67), and refers to the consecrated elements as 'eucharisted food' ['food over which the thanksgiving has been spoken'] (66).
- 4. The Lutheran Confessions associate the sacrament of the altar with the performance of thanksgiving.
 - a. Since the preliminary act of thanksgiving was not a matter of debate at that time [1580], the Formula of Concord did not discuss it but merely assumed that the words of institution would be accompanied by thanksgiving.
 - 1) The Formula of Concord seems at times to limit the act of consecration to the mere recital of the words of institution (Formula of Concord, Epitome VII, Affirmative Theses 4; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII, 82–83). Clearly, however, the essential part of the act is taken to refer to the whole of it, for in paragraph 84 the Latin text speaks about the consecration of the elements with a 'blessing' (*benedictione*).
 - 2) The Formula of Concord also quotes the words of Justin with approval where he maintains that the food of the sacrament has been 'consecrated' (Latin) or 'blessed' (German) by Christ through word and prayer (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII, 39).
 - 3) Both the Latin and the German text regularly refer to the consecrated elements as the 'blessed' bread and wine (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII, 44, 52, 56, 57, 63, 75, 83, 86, 126).
 - b. The importance of thanksgiving is affirmed in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession. The writer refers to the sacrament as the 'eucharist' (Apology XXIV, 66–67, 76, 87; compare Augsburg Confession XXII, 6; XXIV, 12), and teaches that it is our true sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise to God (Apology XXIV, 19, 30–33, 35, 74–77).
 - c. Even though the Lutheran Confessions hold that the words of institution constitute the real presence of Christ's body and blood, they still seem to envisage that the words of institution would be preceded by words of thanksgiving and prayer.
- 5. Liturgically speaking, the thanksgiving functions as an important part of the whole sequence of acts in the communion liturgy from the preface to the Lord's prayer. These acts prepare for the words of institution and so contribute something significant to the right administration and celebration of the sacrament.
 - a. The initial salutation ['The Lord be with you'] calls upon and acknowledges the Lord Jesus as the host and celebrant of the sacrament.
 - b. The thanksgiving fulfils Christ's command to celebrate the sacrament with thanksgiving. It joins the congregation with Christ in addressing his holy Father on behalf of the church and the world (compare 1 Tim 2:1). It also reveals the messianic significance of the Lord's supper. As the faithful receive with thanksgiving the body and blood of the Messiah, they also already in this age

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celebrate the life of the age to come.

- c. The *Sanctus* ['Holy,Holy,Holy'] not only joins the eucharistic celebration of the congregation with the adoration of all the saints and angels before the throne of God, but also expresses the future dimension of the sacrament as a foretaste of eternal life with God.
 - d. The *Benedictus* ['Blessed be the Lord God of Israel'] acknowledges the advent and presence of the promised Messiah in the sacrament. The *Benedictus* comes from Psalm 118:26, which is the culmination of Psalms 113-118. These psalms constitute the so-called 'Egyptian' *Hallel* [songs of praise to the Lord] sung by Jesus and his disciples at the last supper (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:30).
 - e. In the absence of another eucharistic prayer, the Lord's prayer has traditionally functioned as the eucharistic prayer in the Lutheran liturgy. By it we join with Jesus in interceding for the church and the world in the celebration of the sacrament. Since, according to Paul in 1 Tim 4:5, all things are consecrated by the word of God and prayer, the Lord's prayer has been understood by some Lutherans as the prayer for the consecration of the elements.
 - f. All these acts, from the salutation to the Lord's prayer, join the people of God with Christ in the celebration of the heavenly liturgy. Christ not only serves them sacramentally as the victim but also ministers sacrificially as their great high priest who leads them in their service of thanksgiving, adoration, praise, and intercession.
 - g. While the wording of these acts may vary from time to time and place to place, the words of institution are recited in the context of Christ's own ministry of intercession and praise, which spans time and space.
6. From all this we conclude that some form of thanksgiving and praise to God the Father should normally be spoken or sung in connection with the words of institution in every public celebration of the sacrament by pastors of the Lutheran Church of Australia.