

THE SALIGER CONTROVERSY

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One of the best known and often misunderstood controversies concerning the Lord's Supper is that which centered around the Lutheran pastor, John Saliger. He is also known by his Latinized name, Beatus. In the early 1560s, Saliger was called as pastor in the town of Wörden in present-day Netherlands and in 1566 was called to a newly founded Lutheran congregation in Antwerp (Wiggers, p. 614).

Although Saliger was very intelligent, he was also characterized as being restless, stubborn, and unable to control his temper. Besides being a part of the Eucharistic controversy, Saliger also became involved in the controversy concerning original sin and in the course of time sided with Flacius whose views were rejected in the *Formula*. This did not in any way help his reputation.

Saliger stayed less than two years in Antwerp. Because of disagreements over the doctrine of original sin, he returned to his home city of Lübeck in 1568. Here he was called as one of the pastors of St. Mary's Church. Soon Saliger raised objections to what he declared to be the current Lübeck practice of failing to consecrate new elements if they were brought to the altar during the distribution. The clergy of Lübeck at times mixed unconsecrated wine with the consecrated assuming that the consecrated would mix with the unconsecrated as the Early Church always used wine mixed with water in the Sacrament. They also assumed that those hosts not set aside for use in the Supper but enclosed in a box on the altar were nevertheless Christ's body by virtue of the first consecration and did not need to be consecrated if they were used. It was in this controversy that Saliger first became acquainted with his ardent supporter, Heinrich Fredeland, curate at St. Jakobi Church in Lübeck.

The debate over the second consecration led to the question as to when Christ's body and blood were present in the Supper. Saliger taught that by virtue of the Words of Institution, Christ is present the moment the consecration is said. He may have also held at this point that the presence would continue even though the reception was delayed days or months (Schöne, p. 11). He furthermore asserted that those who did not believe this were Sacramentarians. It's obvious that it didn't take long before the Lübeckers were enraged.

The pastors at Lübeck defended themselves with a confession concerning the Lord's Supper in 1569. It stated that in the Sacrament under the bread and wine, Christ's true body and blood are offered with the hand and received by the mouth of both the believing and the unbelieving. The effecting cause (*causa efficiens*) of the Sacrament was declared to be "not papish murmuring but Jesus' almighty Words of Institution." This is compared with God's creative word in Genesis 1. The material cause (*causa materialis*) was defined as the elements and the formal cause (*causa formalis*) as the total action with the command or use that we should eat and drink it. Also the Lübeck Confession said that the proper number of host should be counted out for the communicants and the same care should be taken with the wine. When elements did remain after the distribution they were not considered Christ's body and blood, for nothing has the character of a Sacrament outside its intended use. Concerning this they said they had the "witness of Luther, Melanchthon, Chytraeus, Chemnitz, Hesshusius and Wigand" (Schöne, pp. 33-34).

The city council of Lübeck tried a number of things to bring peace to their fair city torn by the wrath of theologians. One of these was to ask the city of Braunschweig to send their Superintendent, Martin Chemnitz, to Lübeck to settle the dispute. This Chemnitz consented to do. On the way home from Rostock where he received a doctor of theology degree, he spent eight days in Lübeck trying to bring peace. His visit however brought no result and the council later had to threaten Saliger and Fredeland with dismissal. In order to settle the controversy the city council of Lübeck finally decided that Saliger and Fredeland should go elsewhere. Saliger had been in Lübeck for six months. It seems that neither of the parties were accused of false doctrine by Chemnitz or anyone else (Wiggers, pp. 615-616).

Saliger went next to Schwerin and there won the favor of the Mecklenberg Dukes, Johann Aibrecht I and Ulrich. They directed him to the vacant pastorate of St. Nicolai in Rostock. Because many in Rostock had heard about the troubles he caused in Lübeck, the ministerium was opposed to him. He, however, was given the position after he appeared before a commission consisting of Chytraeus; Wigand, Superintendent of Wismar; Simon Pauli, Superintendent of Rostock; and two other councilmen. Here he promised that he would not revive the Lübeck controversy in his new parish.

Before being formally admitted at Rostock, Saliger had to appear before the ministerium. Here the question concerning the reliquiae was brought up. Saliger said that only the proper amount should be consecrated so that nothing remained after the distribution. When asked about mishaps with the Sacrament such as spillage, he replied that the spilled element was not to be considered the Sacrament. It should be noticed that if Saliger previously taught that the remaining elements were the body and blood of Christ he is very careful not to say that now. He only advocates care so that amounts of the element do not remain (Schöne, p.13).

Although Saliger had promised not to revive the Eucharistic controversy when he received his position in Rostock, he was soon preaching against the Lübeck pastors from his pulpit. This caused confusion and divisions among the people at Rostock. At this point the controversy centered around the phrase "*sacramentum esse ante usum*," that there is a Sacrament also before the use. Saliger was advocating the presence of Christ's body and blood before the use and whoever taught otherwise was a Sacramentarian. What he most likely meant was that the presence was there before the eating. His terminology, however, was very confusing. He accused the Rostock clergy of teaching that the bread and wine in the Sacrament were not a Sacrament until they touched the tongue and the lips, that their faith made the Sacrament. This they firmly denied and challenged Saliger to prove it. But in spite of all attempts to make him see reason, Saliger was not to be silenced.

In February 1569, the situation came to a head. With the approval of Duke Ulrich, a commission of local theologians was appointed to deal with the matter. At the formal hearing, on February 15, Simon Pauli, Superintendent of Rostock, spoke on behalf of the Rostock clergy. He confessed, "We believe and confess with heart and mouth before God in heaven, who alone knows the heart, that the blessed bread and the blessed wine in the Supper of the Lord are His natural body and blood, which were received and partaken of here on earth with the mouth, not only by Judas and the other godless people but also by Peter and other saints of God" (Wiggers, p. 627). In the same confession, Pauli listed the grievances which were being brought against Saliger: (1) that he had revived the Lübeck controversy; (2) that he had made use of unusual

terminology in referring to the Sacrament “before the use”; (3) that he had taught this doctrine not only in sermons, but had also distributed it among the people in print; (4) that he had pictured his colleagues as Neosacramentarians; (5) that he had taught that whoever believes and teaches otherwise about the Sacrament, teaches and believes falsely, and whoever receives the Sacrament with another point of view receives the Sacrament unworthily; (6) that he had called the rule “Nothing has the character of a Sacrament outside of its divinely instituted use” satanic; (7) that he had brought all kinds of private matters into the pulpit; (8) that he had taken six or seven books with him into the pulpit to prove his own teaching and to bring the other pastors into disrepute as “Sacramentarians”; (10) that he had ignored and refused to follow the dukes’ written admonition; (11) that he had caused great confusion in the churches and in the University and had put the ministerium under suspicion (Peters, pp. 347-348; Wiggers, pp.627-628).

In answer to these accusations Saliger denied that he had ever used the words “before the use” in an unclear manner. He later gave the following confession, part of which is recorded here.

I, John Saliger, believe with my heart and publicly confess before God and all men that when the bread which is designated for the immediate (celebration of the) Supper, according to the number of communicants, according to the command of the Lord Christ, is blessed with His divine powerful Word of Institution, which He commanded, when it is spoken by Him through the minister, and is blessed for the use of being distributed by the minister – I believe that this blessed bread, through and according to the divine blessing in the Holy Supper, is the true, essential, natural, present body of our Lord Jesus Christ, in sacramental union, also for the use of being eaten, which nevertheless ought to follow in order in this Supper, according to the command: take and eat, this do in remembrance of me. For this reason, whoever takes the bread into his hand after the blessing has been spoken or sung is taking along with the blessed bread the true body of Christ corporeally, even though invisibly, into his hand; and whoever offers the blessed bread with his hand, is with his hand offering to people the holy body of the Lord under the bread; whoever receives the venerable Sacrament, and the communicants who corporeally eat the blessed bread eat at the same time with their physical mouths, under the bread, the true natural present body of Christ our Lord, whether they are worthy or unworthy; the worthy for the forgiveness of their sins and in remembrance of Christ, the unworthy, however, to their judgment, since they do not discern the body of the Lord. (Peters, pp. 348-349; Wiggers, p. 630; The same Confession is made concerning the blessed wine.)

Further meetings of this commission did not bring any solution to the controversy and it was finally decided to appeal to John Wigand, former Superintendent in Wismar and at the time professor in Jena. Eventually Wigand replied and gave his Gutachten. His position is summarized with these eight points:

1. Christ said that the bread and wine were His body and blood before the elements touched the mouths of the Apostles.

2. St. Paul says the same thing in 1 Cor. 10:16 when he speaks about the cup “which we bless,” and so forth.
3. According to the ordinance which Christ instituted, it is necessary that what is to be eaten and drunk be there present before this eating and drinking can be done.
4. It is of great comfort to know that what is being offered to us in the Sacrament is not mere bread and wine, but the true body and blood of Christ.
5. If it is not taught that the body and blood of Christ are there “before the reception,” according to Christ’s words, that is, if the material cause of the Supper is not defended, this not only causes confusion and error among Christians, but it also serves as an encouragement to the Sacramentarians, who in their books speak disparagingly about the material cause.
6. Following Luther’s Small Catechism and Large Catechism, children ought to be asked before they go to the Lord’s Table: “What do you want to receive and eat and drink?” They ought to answer: “The true body and blood of Christ.” Therefore, according to and by the power of Christ’s words, the body and blood are there before they are received, although they should then be received immediately. With this position the “beautiful Confessions” and the books of Luther, “our dear teacher and the last Elijah of the world,” agree, in opposition to the Sacramentarians.
7. The Augsburg Confession and its Apology defend the same position.
8. It is clear that the teachers of the ancient Church taught the same thing (Peters, pp. 351–352; Wiggers, pp. 633–635; Schöne, pp. 50–54).

In his Gutachen, Wigand emphasizes that Christ’s body and blood are present before the eating but he rejects the confusing terminology that there is a Sacrament before the use. Concerning the moment of the presence he declares, “One does not dispute concerning the moment, that is at which minute such things happen but account of Christ’s word, who declares, who speaks, who relates, it is so and not otherwise” (Schöne, p. 53).

Around the same time David Chytraeus sent a letter concerning the conflict in Rostock. He had been teaching in Rostock but at this time was momentarily in Austria organizing the Reformation there. In his letter he rebuked Saliger for his conduct and then asked, “Since it is sufficient for the pious heart to know from the Words of Institution that the bread which is presented to me by the minister is the true body of Christ, of what use is it to dispute about the bread that lies on the paten or is left after the reception? *Cum piaie menti satis sit e verbis institutionis discere, panem, qui mihi a ministro exhibetur, verum Christi corpus esse, quid opus est de pane in patella jacente aut post sumptionem reliquo disputare?*” (Schöne, p. 55). Here Chytraeus shows that there should be no arguments about the exact beginning and end of the presence. This is not spelled out in Holy Scripture. He is not concerned about what remains after the worship service for it is outside the use and therefore no Sacrament.

The controversy was brought to a close in October 1569, when *Der Abschied der Mecklenburgischen Herzöge* also known as the Wismar Recess was issued in the name of dukes Johann Albrecht I and Ulrich of Mecklenburg. Chytraeus was the main author of the Abschied. It reads as follows:

1. The Dukes ... order ... all preachers and deputies (*legenten*) in ... the churches and University at Rostock not to stir up and incite unnecessary, vehement, and confused

debates and arguments. Included among these is the question, "how and when and in what manner the bread in the Lord's Supper is the body of Christ?" The three disputed points concern the presence of Christ's body and blood, the consecration, and the rule that nothing is a Sacrament outside the intended use. These main points are to be taught thus.

2. In the Holy Supper where the same is observed according to the order, institution and command of Jesus Christ, it is by virtue of the institution of Christ not only simple bread and wine but also the true essential natural body of Jesus Christ which He gave into death for us and His true, essential, natural blood poured out for our sins. These are present with the blessed, visible, and unchanged bread and wine. The body is not just figurative, representative or absent, nor is it there only in its power, effect, and benefit, but the body and blood are truly present given to us by Christ himself through the hand of His servant. They are received not only spiritually with faith, but also physically (*leiblich*) with the mouth. The body and blood are distributed to and received not only by the believing but also by the unbelieving (*bösen Christen*).
3. The blessing, as some call it, or recitation of Christ's Words of Institution by itself, if the entire action of the Lord's Supper as Christ ordained it is not observed, if, for instance, the blessed bread is not distributed, received, and eaten but is locked up, offered up, or carried about, does not make a Sacrament. But the command of Christ, "do this," which comprehends the whole action of this Sacrament (namely, that in a Christian assembly we take bread and wine, consecrate it, distribute it, receive it, eat and drink it, and therewith proclaim the Lord's death), must be kept integrally and inviolately, just as St. Paul sets the whole action of the breaking of bread, or of the distribution and reception, before our eyes in 1 Cor. 10:16.
4. To maintain this true Christian doctrine concerning the Holy Supper and to obviate and eliminate many kinds of idolatrous and papistic perversions of this testament, the following useful rule and norm has been derived from the Words of Institution: Nothing has the character of a Sacrament outside of the use instituted by Christ, or outside of the divinely instituted action. This rule dare not in any way be rejected, but it can and should be profitably urged and retained in the church of God. In this context "use" or "action" does not mean the oral eating alone, but the whole action of the Supper with all of the parts that belong to it, included in Christ's institution.
5. "Although now in this complete inseparable action of the Holy Supper which indeed is properly named the Sacrament of the Holy Supper, Christ is truly and essentially present, and distributes and delivers His true body and blood with the bread and wine, since the true presence of Christ's body and blood is not to be denied before the reception, but in this church confessed with customary and useful statements; nevertheless the following strange statements which are not customary in our church and which are doubtful, obscure, and offensive should not be used in the schools and churches of this land. These statements are no where found in God's Word or the writings of Dr. Luther but are very commonly used among the Papists to confirm their magical blessing and the permanent inclusion of Christ's body under the form of the bread before and after the reception (*Niessung*). The following are such statements: That

there is a Sacrament also before the use, *sacramentum esse ante usum*; again when the blessing is spoken the bread is no longer an element; again, that in St. Paul's words, 'The bread which we break is a participation in the body of Christ,' the word participation is to be understood as the joining or unifying of the bread and body before the reception and not as referring to the eating by the communicants; again, that after the spoken blessing the bread and wine are a complete Sacrament also before the distribution (*Austheilung*) (which might not take place until several days or months later), and the opposite statement (which is held by no one in our church on the basis of the action) that the body and blood of Christ are not present in the Supper before the blessed bread and wine are touched with the lips or enclosed in the mouth; again, the body of Christ is not in the bread but in the eating etc. 'For we prescribe no moment or time to God,' says Luther, 'but are satisfied thus, that we simply believe that what God says certainly happens that it happens or should occur'" (Schöne, pp. 67-69).

The writers of the *Abschied* wanted no part in useless arguments concerning the how and the when of Christ's presence in the Sacrament. Paragraph two boldly confesses that Christ's body and blood are present in the Sacrament and received by both believers and hypocrites. Paragraph three shows that the whole action (consecration, distribution, reception) must occur otherwise there is no Sacrament. Yet it is Christ's almighty Word alone which effects the presence. Here too, the question concerning the reliquiae is put aside. What is not distributed is not a Sacrament. Paragraph four defends the "Nihil" rule which Saliger at times seemed to question.

In paragraph five certain improper statements are rejected. Notice that the "ante usum" terminology of Saliger is disavowed. The subsequent history of this decision is interesting. The "ante usum" terminology was not accepted because it was confusing. The "usus" as explained by the writers of the *Formula* included consecration, distribution, and reception. Then to say that the Sacrament was there before the use meant that the presence occurred before the Words of Institution were said. This however is not what Saliger meant. By the term "usus" he meant "the eating." He wanted to say that the body and blood were present before the eating. Now because this term was rejected in the *Abschied*, certain later theologians who also understood the "usus" here as "the eating" took this statement as a condemnation of the view that the body and blood were present before the reception. This was not the original intent. The *Abschied* is rejecting confusing terminology that could imply that there is a Sacrament before the consecration. During this period of time the term "usus" is used both in the way it would later be defined in the *Formula* and as only referring to the "eating".

Also the two extremes in pinpointing time (holding Christ is present the moment the consecration is said or holding His body and blood are not present until the eating) are avoided when the *Abschied* rejects the statement "that after the spoken blessing the bread and wine are a complete Sacrament also before the distribution and the opposite statement that the body and blood of Christ are not present in the Supper before the blessed bread and wine are touched with the lips or enclosed in the mouth." This position is then supported by what Luther says about moment and time in the Carlstadt letter. At the close of the *Abschied* it states that the Rostock clergy were not guilty of any false doctrine and Saliger was rebuked for his contentious spirit. Notice that paragraphs three and four of the *Abschied* are taken almost verbatim into the *Formula* (SD VII 83-85).

Saliger was to be forgiven if he agreed that the pastors of Rostock were not teaching falsely and if he carried the controversy no further. This he would not do and was dismissed from office on October 16, 1569. After leaving Rostock, he stayed a short time in Wismar. Later he returned to Wörden, where he had once been minister. As far as can be determined, Saliger remained there until his death.

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