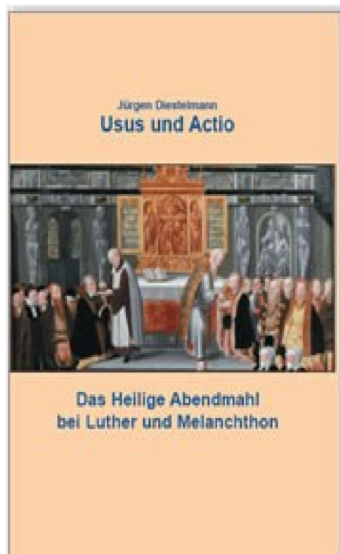
As expected the following recension of Jürgen Diestelmann's new Book will appear in June 2009 in "LOGIA – A Journal of Lutheran Theology" (in the Holy Trinity issue).

See: http://www.logia.org/

REVIEW ESSAY: Jürgen Diestelmann, *Usus und Actio: Das Heilige Abendmahl bei Luther und Melanchthon mit einem Geleitwort von Prof. Dr. Reinhard Slenczka, D.D., sowie Zusammenfassungen in englischer, schwedischer und finnischer Sprache* (Berlin: Pro BUSINESS Verlag, 2007). 354 pp. € 35.

John R. Stephenson



Beginning with a pamphlet, published in 1960, on Luther's understanding of the consecration, the now 80 year-old Jürgen Diestelmann, emeritus pastor of the famous Brüdern-St. Ulrici congregation in Braunschweig, Germany, has issued a steady stream of studies on the classical Lutheran understanding and practice of the sacrament of the altar. These works have culminated in the volume under review, an attractively produced hardback that will likely turn out to be his magnum opus.

From first page to last, Diestelmann is concerned to document and commend authentic Lutheran *practice* in keeping with the *doctrine* of the real presence. His keynote statement that "over the Lutheran mass lay the fascination of the holy that radiated from Luther's belief in the real presence" (17) is visually confirmed by the cover artwork (reproduced in greater detail opposite the title page) that depicts an early Lutheran distribution, with celebrant vested in alb and chasuble and assistant in cassock and surplice (the back cover and p. 267 feature Luther in the act of consecration; see also 48). Layfolk receiving from the chalice on the left side of the picture would signal to an informed observer viewing this scene in a German art gallery that the service in question was not Roman Catholic. Meanwhile, every feature of the whole shouts out that the ceremony here captured in art did not occur in the sphere of Reformed Christendom.

In his opening chapter on the Reformer himself (8-47) Diestelmann will surprise few *Logia* readers as he tells how Luther spurred (even in Roman Catholic circles) greater frequency of eucharistic participation (14-18), encouraged reception of the host on the tongue (11, n. 14), and continued to wear traditional vestments (11, n. 13) and practice the elevation (29-32) and adoration (28) of the blessed sacrament. Such was the impact of this visible, audible, and tangible witness that in the late spring of 1543 the Swiss student Sixtus Dietrich registered Dr. Luther's "love of music" and marvelled over Wittenberg's liturgical-sacramental life, wishing that it be universally emulated (27, n. 71).

With the observation that "While polemics against the sacrificial and private mass occupy much space in Luther, nowhere in his writings do we find a demand to do away with tabernacles" (18), Diestelmann introduces new and intriguing data for our consideration. He argues that the Reformer's counsel, given in 1522, that hosts not distributed in a given celebration be reserved in a monstrance (!) until they could be administered to sick communicants (20, n. 46, according to which, more than two decades later, George of Anhalt related how he heard the older Luther give similar advice), is to be understood in light of the important distinction between the age-old custom of reserving the consecrated species for this pastoral purpose and the late medieval practice of permanent reservation for the sake of extra-eucharistic adoration (George of Anhalt had sharp words against the latter, 26). Diestelmann locates directions for such temporary reservation in Sehling's *Kirchenordnungen* (20, n. 47) and supplies evidence of beautifully decorated pyxes (*capsulae*) used in 16th-century Lutheran churches for the reservation of consecrated hosts (in Augsburg, after 1537, on the altar); one such was made in Coburg in 1607 (23, n. 58; see also 103f.). In the closing pages of his work, Diestelmann underscores how the historic Church of Sweden allowed for reverent reservation for the purpose of communion alongside the practice of consuming the remaining sacrament (305).

A review of Luther's insistence, against Karlstadt (33-37), Zwingli (37-44), and Schwenkfeld (39-44), that Christ in the upper room mandated the effective, consecratory speaking of his eucharistic words, and of the Reformer's confession, in his 1533 letter to Frankfurt, that the celebrant holds the Lord's body in his hands as he distributes the host (44-47), sets the stage for the longest chapter in the book (49-137), which tells the sorry tale of Melanchthon's defection from the doctrine that he formally professed in the Augustana and its Apology. Alas, Melanchthon eventually sided with the aforementioned *Schwärmer* in their denial that the Lord mandated an effective consecration. "It came to the point that Melanchthon was ultimately closer to Bucer and Calvin in eucharistic doctrine than to Luther" (76).

Diestelmann's practical orientation is seen in his beginning the chapter on Melanchthon not with a chronological account of the latter's gradual and deepening defection from orthodoxy, but with the 1543 dispute among the clergy of Eisleben instigated by the shocking innovations of Simon Wolferinus (49-58). After all, actual treatment of consecrated

elements is where the rubber of eucharistic doctrine hits the road, and Wolferinus was scandalizing his fellow clergy by treating consecrated but undistributed elements as ordinary bread and wine. To begin with, Wolferinus faced an unbroken phalanx of clerical opposition, with Justus Jonas, superintendent in Halle, invoking the Vincentian canon against him: "Why wouldn't you imitate the religious and marvellous reverence of *all* the ancients of the church towards this sacrament from the times of Augustine and Jerome, indeed, from the age of Polycarp?" (54, n. 155; John Hachenburg of Erfurt would make the same appeal to tradition a decade and a half later; 155, 163).

But while Luther set Wolferinus straight in two famous letters (58-68), he was tragically mistaken when, in the second of these, he stated that Philipp agreed with him on the effective consecration, the extended real presence, and the need to treat consecrated but unconsumed elements on the basis of Christ's commands "eat, drink." For Melanchthon had hardened Wolferinus in his error by writing him a supportive letter behind the Reformer's back. In this missive Melanchthon identified the sacrament not with the consecrated elements, but with the "whole action" that he reduced to distribution and reception (57). With the words, "God is not to be bound to any thing–*Deus non esse alligandum ad ullam rem*," Melanchthon was "brusquely rejecting the real presence in earthly elements" (58). It seems that Wolferinus forwarded Melanchthon's letter to Luther (65), whereupon in his second letter to Wolferinus the Reformer generously interpreted his subordinate's "no sacrament outside the use" rule in a sense opposite to what its framer intended.

As early as 4 January 1528, thus a good two years before he composed the Augustana, Melanchthon admitted that Basle's John Oecolampadius had raised doubts in his mind whether the real presence occurs "as some people [!] say, by the power of the words–*ut quidam dixerunt, virtute verborum*" (79, n. 248). At Marburg in October 1529 Melanchthon privately signaled to Zwingli a certain sympathy with his position (79f.). And in 1531, writing in a mixture of Latin and Greek to the Swiss brothers Thomas and Ambrose Blaurer, he offered ammunition for use against Luther, expressing skepticism concerning the omnipresence of Christ's human nature (81). It thus comes as no surprise that when Melanchthon, armed with a seven-point instruction from Luther, ostensibly represented the Wittenbergers at negotiations held in Kassel in 1534 with Martin Bucer and his comrades, he admitted that he came as "an emissary of someone else's opinion–*nuntius alienae sententiae*" (85, n. 269; 93-96).

Small wonder, then, that Melanchthon worked with Bucer to pull the wool over Luther's eyes at the discussions that culminated in the Wittenberg Concord of 1536, giving the Reformer the impression that the upper Germans interpreted this statement from the vantage-point of the Augustana, when they did nothing of the kind (98-109). When Bugenhagen reminded Luther that "many [presumably upper German] churches" mixed consecrated with unconsecrated elements (101f.), Bucer's reply (which Luther naively understood in traditional terms; see the data supplied in the fourth paragraph of this review!) was breathtaking in its deceit: "we place the remaining bread in a little box, yet with due reverence–*reliquum panem in capsulam quidem reponere sed cum debita reuerentia*" (101, n. 332).

Melanchthon spent a good part of 1543 in the territory of the electoral archdiocese of Cologne, where he worked hand in glove with Bucer to produce, under the title *Einfältiges Bedenken–Simple Deliberation*, a blueprint for the proposed reformation of this territory. While Luther was temporarily cheered by the verbal report Melanchthon gave him on his return to Wittenberg, he went through the roof when the *Simple Deliberation* finally came into his hands. Zeroing straight in on the sections relating to the sacrament of the altar, Luther noted how "It chatters long and much about the benefit, fruit, and honor of the sacrament. But it mumbles about the essence, making it impossible to grasp its position, just like the *Schwärmer* do, and, as the bishop [Nicholas von Amsdorf, who had commented on the *Simple Deliberation* at the elector of Saxony's request] demonstrates, doesn't say a word against the *Schwärmer*" (110).

Significantly, Melanchthon had composed his interpretation of the "no sacrament outside the use" rule (of which, in 1557, he claimed authorship; 257) for the benefit of Wolferinus while in Cologne under Bucer's baleful influence (75). The *Simple Deliberation* made it impossible to keep putting the best construction on Melanchthon's teaching; Luther now realised he had been deceived, and relations between Melanchthon and himself went downhill in the brief time that elapsed before the Reformer's death.

My dogmatics locus on the Lord's Supper deals with the untruth spread by a Reformed church historian at the turn of the 17th century to the effect that the aged Luther repented his two decades of vehemence and hailed Calvin as the author of a desirable via media in matters eucharistic (*The Lord's Supper*, 71-73). For his part, Diestelmann relates the mendacious report disseminated by the Reformed theologians of the Palatinate (the "Heidelberg country lie–*Heildelberger Landlüge*") that, just prior to setting off on the visit to his native Eisleben from which he did not return alive, the Reformer admitted to Melanchthon that he had gone overboard in his testimony to the real presence, asking Philipp to set things right after his demise (123-125; in 1874 our author's great-grandfather, Theodor Erdmann Diestelmann, published a book arguing for the authenticity of the *Landlüge*; 124, n. 416).

But how could Luther have said any such thing, when at this very time he was approving stern sanctions against the young clergyman, Adam Besserer, who, flustered at the altar, distributed an unconsecrated host to a communicant and then placed a consecrated host that had dropped from the paten into a container of unconsecrated

hosts (116-123)? On 17 January 1546 Luther paraphrased Ps. 1:1 in private correspondence: “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the sacramentarians, or stand in the way of Zwinglians, nor sit where the Zürichers sit” (128).

It is hard to see how the later Melanchthon could be considered a proponent of the real presence doctrine when he could write that “Christ is present in the sacrament” not on account of anything that happens to bread and wine, “but because he freely wants to be present in the rite that he instituted–*sed quia liberrime vult adesse ritui quem instituit*” (137).

When the aforementioned John Hachenburg published his *Against the New Zwinglians* in 1557 (141), Melanchthon lashed out at him as the “donkey of Erfurt,” prompting Hachenburg to compare himself with Balaam’s ass, implying perhaps that Luther was in this case the angel of the Lord barring the way of the animal-abusing Melanchthon (144f.). At all events, if Hachenburg was a donkey, then the Reformer himself must share this epithet (165). In 1561 Hachenburg issued a second book, *On Adoration*, which argued so closely from the Jena edition of Luther’s works that it might have a good claim to represent the inauguration of the discipline of Luther scholarship (156-159). As, already in his first book, Hachenburg upheld Luther’s position on eucharistic adoration, Melanchthon denounced him in a letter to his Reformed friend, Albert Hardenberg in Bremen, as an advocate of “bread-worship–*artolatreia*” (144).

In 1560, the year of Melanchthon’s death, Nikolaus Tretwin, a young clergyman near Eisenach, consecrated too much of both species and mixed the remainder with unconsecrated elements, justifying his action by maintaining that “this sacrament doesn’t become the body of Christ until a person takes it in the mouth.” While Nicholas von Amsdorf stated that “this pastor is to be completely removed from office,” Duke John Frederick the Middler merely threatened him with banishment if he repeated his transgression (166f.).

By the end of his life Melanchthon’s clear disavowal of Lutheran sacramental doctrine cost him the friendship of two former students who had held him in high honor. Diestelmann’s interest in Joachim Mörlin is doubtless bound up with the fact that the latter, born and educated in Wittenberg where he served for a year as Luther’s “chaplain,” was superintendent in Braunschweig from 1553 till 1567. In 1555 Mörlin was troubled over Melanchthon’s ambivalent posture when his counsel was sought in the case of a Braunschweig layman, Hennig Kloth, who was disciplined by the clergy and finally exiled by the town council on account of his Zwinglianism (182, 186). Two years later Mörlin was mortified by Melanchthon’s advocacy of a Calivinizing sacramental doctrine during the colloquy of Worms (202), at the end of which the author of the Augsburg Confession had a cordial meeting with Theodore Beza (!), with whom he had no difficulty establishing consensus in matters eucharistic (204, n. 692). In 1560 Mörlin discovered that, at the time of his death, Melanchthon was planning to travel to Bremen to assist his Reformed friend Albert Hardenberg in his controversy with the Lutherans Joachim Westphal, Tilemann Hesshus, and Mörlin himself (208, 262). Melanchthon’s support of Hardenberg contributed to Bremen’s adopting the Reformed confession in 1562 (220-267). A blow Melanchthon aimed at both Mörlin and Erasmus Sarcerius landed on the face of Luther himself; Philipp attacked the former for quoting Luther’s counsel to the Frankfurters, “Don’t say, ‘Mum,’ ‘mum,’ but say what this is that the priest holds his hand,” and the latter for commending the Reformer’s reverent treatment of consecrated elements (259).

In February 1559 Melanchthon wrote to his former pupil Tilemann Hesshus, recently called by the Lutheran-leaning Elector Ottheinrich to be general superintendent in the Rhineland Palatinate, where a determined minority were determined to establish the Reformed faith, expressing the hope “that they might both permanently remain one in Christ” (215). Ottheinrich’s death in the month Melanchthon wrote this letter stripped Hesshus of his chief earthly support as he sought to restore communion on the tongue and the proper understanding and practice of the consecration. As the new elector and the university of Heidelberg moved against Hesshus and sought opinions from leading theologians, Melanchthon, typically, declined to approve his pupil’s Luther-quoting confession that the consecrated bread and wine are the true body and blood of Christ (216-218). Tragically, “Melanchthon’s opinion [*Gutachten*] became the basis for the Calvinization of the Palatinate,” which took place, incidentally, in the face of popular opposition (218).

As he moves to summarize the gist of article vii of the Solid Declaration (285-296), which he interprets as a vindication of Luther against Melanchthon (“The eucharistic doctrine of the Lutheran church, as it took specific shape in the Formula of Concord, is that of Luther and not that of Melanchthon and his pupils”; 303), Diestelmann briefly covers sacramental controversies in Danzig, Rostock, and Lübeck that have been the topic of in-depth research by Tom Hardt and Jobst Schöne. Given that, in his charitable interpretation of Melanchthon’s Nihil rule, Luther equated “action” with “use,” I have long been puzzled at John Saliger’s being credited with confessing the real presence “before the use,” which sounds like a contradiction in terms. Diestelmann explains that Saliger differed from Luther, not in doctrine, but in terminology, understanding the “action” as commencing with the consecration (or with the immediately preceding Our Father), but the “use” as consisting in the distribution and reception of the sacrament (280).

Diestelmann’s narrative took me over terrain that started to become familiar to me during my doctoral researches in the late 1970s. Most of the data he sets forth are accessible in the works of Hermann Sasse, Tom Hardt, Bjarne Teigen, Jobst Schöne, and, not least, in the magnificent (but sadly unpublished) doctoral dissertation of Edward

F. Peters. Diestelmann acknowledges all of these secondary sources, though he makes surprisingly few references to Sasse. Given the ready availability of these resources, it is unlikely that Diestelmann's latest work will be rendered into English, though it should be purchased by all serious libraries and added to the collections of specialist scholars.

In his closing chapter (297-315) Diestelmann dots his i's and crosses his t's, relating Melanchthon's tragic posthumous victory over Luther in actual Lutheran doctrine and practice to the current interconfessional and ecumenical scene. While my own reflections at this juncture went in the direction of lamenting Melanchthon's clear responsibility for the 1973 Leuenberg Concord, which established intercommunion between the great majority of Lutheran, United, and Reformed churches in Europe, and for the ELCA's "enjoyment" of eucharistic fellowship with Reformed bodies, Diestelmann zeroes in on the hypocrisy of the "Lutheran" World Federation's putting on a "Catholic" face when dialoguing with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, while taking off this mask when dealing with the Reformed side of Christendom's aisle ("double-tonguedness" in German as opposed to our being "two-faced"; 299). For "With her unalterable confession of the real presence the Lutheran church can ultimately only stand on the side of the Catholic and Orthodox churches" (297).

Diestelmann makes positive mileage from the fruits of recent ecumenism as he uses the 1982 Lima/Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry statement of the World Council of Churches to support his closing plea for the reverent treatment of consecrated elements (299-302). The goals of his scholarly labors remain thoroughly practical until he puts down his pen (see 302-304, which are fodder for the solid volume of pastoral theology that we so direly need).

Although Diestelmann mainly refreshed this reader's memory concerning data that he began to gather thirty years ago, I am indebted to him for confronting me with telling evidence to which I have hitherto been blind. I had not realized how, in Luther's own parlance a "Zwinglian" is not simply one who interprets "is" as "signifies" and denies the presence and oral reception of Christ's body and blood but rather one who denies that our Lord mandated the effective consecration through the recitation of the words of institution. Within this context, Melanchthon's "'Zwinglianism' was directed against any kind of real presence in bread and wine" (306).

Moreover, I was impressed by Diestelmann's account of his holding his own against the formidable intellect of the late Dr. Hardt. At an earlier stage of his researches Diestelmann (whose daughter, Susanne, rendered into German Hardt's *Venerabilis et adorabilis Eucharistia*) crumbled under Tom Hardt's forceful critique of an aspect of his 1960 pamphlet. According to Hardt, when Luther (in his second letter to Simon Wolferinus) defined the *tempus vel actio sacramentalis* ("sacramental time or action") as starting with the *oratio dominica*, the latter expression must mean the "Lord's words" and not the "Lord's Prayer," as Diestelmann had argued (69). Diestelmann has now returned (by way of a careful study of Luther's use of almost identical terminology in 1523 and of appeal to a translation made by John Hachenburg; 70f.); to his original view that Luther understood the "sacramental action" to begin with the Our Father, with the consecration ("the most powerful and chief action in the sacrament–*potissima et principalis actio in sacramento*") continuing the "sacramental action" by effecting the real presence (71). Should Diestelmann be right, which I rather think he is, I would be inclined to see the start of the dominically prescribed "sacramental action" as occurring when we obey Christ by offering thanks during the Preface.

During his decade of retirement Pastor Diestelmann has continued to edit the *Brüdernrundbrief* ("circular letter") issued from his congregation, which for the past half century has been almost the only beacon of genuinely Lutheran light to shine from the Babylonian captivity of the formerly Lutheran churches sucked into the black hole of the Union church (*EKD*) of 1948. *Logia* readers with knowledge of German can access the *Rundbrief* at http://www.luther-in-bs.de/. All *Logia* readers will be concerned to learn, from the August-September 2008 issue of this newsletter, that the authorities of the apostate Braunschweig territorial church, which are now in the process of "downsizing," have targeted Pastor Diestelmann's successor, Pastor Frank-Georg Gozdek, insisting, as he is being asked to assist at another parish in order to draw a full salary, that he consent to work with "ordained" women and celebrate the most holy sacrament in grape juice. *Oremus*/Let us pray!

In closing, I would move forward a good century from the time frame of Diestelmann's researches. In 1678 Abraham Calov, who himself held to a modified real presence doctrine in which the Lord's body and blood were acknowledged as present only during the moment of reception, took great umbrage when his colleague on the Wittenberg faculty, John Meisner, undertook to loosen the "sacramental union" into a mere "sacramental conjunction" (August Tholuck, *Der Geist der lutherischen Theologen Wittenbergs im Verlaufe des 17. Jahrhunderts*, 231, 413). Intent on smoothing the ruffled feathers of his squabbling theologians, Elector George II rolled into town, dishing out 100 thalers to Meisner and a coach and horses to Calov (Tholuck, 232). Why oh why did His Electoral Grace not point them (especially Meisner) to the lips of Christ speaking from the upper room at Wittenberg's (still Lutheran) altars and gently suggest that they dust off Dr. Luther's letters to Simon Wolferinus?