

# **Does Our Lord Invite Baptized Infants to His Supper?**

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## FOREWORD

The Annunciation of our Lord, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012

It has now been several months since I presented this theological paper to my *winkel*, a meeting of local pastors within our synod for theological discussion and worship. The *winkel* requested that I present this paper to both of our seminaries for a *Gutachten*, an assessment on its theology and proposed practice. That now has been done.

So far, nothing has been officially received from either seminary. However, I did receive an e-mail from a seminary professor, which is below.

Dear Pastor Futrell:

I finally had opportunity to read your paper. Frankly, I find it worthy of acceptance in every regard. My own researches into the topic correspond with your own comments. However, you were more thorough than I. I did not consider Luther and Melanchthon, the Confessions, or the later theologians, although I was aware that they were merely repeating, as you rightly note, the RC view on “age of discretion” that had become standard by the time of Aquinas and Lateran IV.

Of course, a major question, and not really addressed in your paper, is that of necessity. My study suggests that along with the change of view concerning the communion of all the baptized, there was also (in the West) a change of view concerning whether John 6 was eucharistic and therefore where the Supper was necessary. I think it true to say that for the first 1000 years or so, it was universally held that John 6 was about the Supper and therefore the eucharist was necessary for salvation (John 6:53 — parallel in thought to Jn 3:3, 5). The claim that John 6 was not eucharistic and the Supper not necessary, “allowed” for the view that there was no concern about children not communing (a view that Luther also expresses), and this view allows for the introduction of the idea of “age of discretion”.

It has always amazed me that this question gives rise to the most hostile reaction. That was my experience in the \_\_\_\_\_ district. Many pastors insisted that I hereticize the practice and were angry when I would not. I hope that your paper received a calmer response, which it both deserves and the topic demands.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture is as silent on the Lord's Supper in relationship to age as it is with baptism. Scripture does not specifically mandate infant or adult baptism, nor does it specifically mandate infant or adult communion. However, Scripture is clear that the Church is to baptize and celebrate the Lord's Supper. These are not options for Christ's Church.

If Scripture is not specific about who should receive the Lord's Supper in relation to age, how should we proceed? What criteria should we use to come to a faithful understanding on this matter? This paper will look into this subject, hoping to find a practice that is biblical, reflective of the Church catholic, and not contrary to our Lutheran Confessions.

Further, we must also realize that when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He did not do so in a theological vacuum. He did not invent the practice of worship-related eating. Instead, He was establishing a meal that was both the continuation and the consummation of what God had commanded His people in His Old Covenant.<sup>1</sup>

## THE OLD COVENANT AS FOUNDATION FOR THE NEW

In the Old Covenant, we see the types (foreshadowing) that preceded their fulfillment, their antitypes. For example, Old Covenant circumcision is the type for baptism, the New Covenant's fulfillment of circumcision. Colossians 2:11-14 reads:


In Jesus, you were also circumcised with a circumcision not done with human hands. Instead, this was a stripping off of the corrupt nature, by the circumcision done by Christ when you were buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your offenses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ, having forgiven us all our offenses. He erased the charges that were against us and opposed to us. He took those charges away, nailing them to the cross.

See Figure 1: Comparison Between Circumcision and Baptism.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel J. Brege, *Eating God's Sacrifice* (Morrisville, North Carolina: Lulu, 2009).

## Comparison Between Circumcision and Baptism

<b>Circumcision (Old Covenant)</b>		<b>Baptism (New Covenant)</b>
<p>Has God’s Command: Genesis 17:11                      - Linked to faith: Deuteronomy 4:2</p> <p>Physical Aspect: Genesis 17:11                      - Removal of foreskin                      - Shedding of blood – reached forward to sacrifice for sin</p> <p>God’s Promise: Brought one into God’s Old Covenant of salvation                      - Genesis 17:9-14</p> <p>How Often: Once                      - Can’t have 2<sup>nd</sup> circumcision</p> <p>Normative Age: Infant (on 8<sup>th</sup> day)                      - Leviticus 12:3</p> <p>Exception to Norm: Adult Converts</p>		<p>Has God’s Command: Matthew 28:19-20                      - Linked to faith: Mark 16:16; John 3:3-18</p> <p>Physical Aspect: 1 Peter 3:20-21, Titus 3:5                      - Washing of water                      - Cleansing – Reaches back to sacrifice for sin: 1 Peter 3:20-21, Titus 3:5</p> <p>God’s Promise: Brings one into God’s New Covenant of salvation                      - John 3:3-7, 1 Peter 3:20-21, Titus 3:5</p> <p>How Often: Once                      - Ephesians 4:5: “one baptism”</p> <p>Normative Age: Infant                      - Matthew 28:19-20 (“all” includes infants)</p> <p>Exception to Norm: Adult Converts</p>

In a similar way that circumcision was the type for baptism, the Old Covenant sacrifices and Passover were the types for the Lord’s Supper. Since this paper’s focus is on the Lord’s Supper and if infants should commune, not all of the Old Covenant tie-ins will be explored.<sup>2</sup>

See Figure 2: Old Testament Types for the Lord’s Supper

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<sup>2</sup> For a superb treatment of this subject, refer to *Eating God’s Sacrifice: The Lord’s Supper Portrayed in the Old Testament Sacrifice* by Daniel J. Brege.

## Old Testament “Types” for the Lord’s Supper

Old Testament Offerings or Meal	Connection	Lord’s Supper Words of our Lord
<p><b>Peace Offering</b> (Lev. 3:1-17, 7:11-34)</p>	<p>Words Moses used at the sealing of the covenant on Mt. Sinai: “Behold, the blood of the Covenant</p>	<p>... this cup is the new <b>covenant in My blood</b> ...</p>
<p><b>Sin Offering</b> (Lev. 4:1-21, 4:21-5:13)</p>	<p>Parallels wording for the sin offering: “blood of the sin offering ... will be forgiven (Lev 4:25-26)</p>	<p>... shed for you <b>for the forgiveness of sins</b> ...</p>
<p><b>Guilt Offering</b> (Lev. 5:14-6:7, 7:1-6)</p>	<p>Isaiah 53, which prophesied Jesus as the guilt offering: “because he poured out [shed] his life to death” (Is 53:12)</p>	<p>... <b>shed</b> for you ...</p>
<p><b>Burnt Offering</b> (Lev. 1:1-17, 6:8-13, 21:6)</p>	<p>The words “do” and “memory” were related to the daily, morning and evening burnt offerings</p>	<p>... <b>do</b> this in <b>remembrance</b> of me ...</p>
<p><b>Grain Offering</b> (Lev. 2:1-16, 6:14-18)</p>	<p>The grain offering consisted of two foods: unleavened bread and wine</p>	<p>Our Lord Jesus Christ ... took <b>bread</b> ... took the <b>cup</b></p>
<p><b>Passover Meal</b> (Lev. 2:1-16, 6:14-18)</p>	<p>The Lord’s Supper was instituted during Passover, showing that Christ fulfilled the Passover meal</p>	<p>The words of our Lord for the Lord’s Supper <b>took place during Passover</b></p>

What is worth noting for this paper are the Old Covenant sacrifice and meal in which God commanded His people, the laity, to eat: The Peace Offering and the Passover.

For the Peace Offering (also called the “Fellowship Offering”), anyone who was ceremonially clean could eat of that offering.<sup>3</sup> If one was in the Covenant and was participating in that offering, irrespective of age, he ate. God “ate” His part, the fatty portions. The priests and their families ate the heave and wave portions.<sup>4</sup> If a layman had brought the peace offering, he and his family also ate from this holy sacrifice.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 7:19. John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture, ed. Dean O. Wenthe and Christopher W. Mitchell (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 162-163. Kleinig writes, “[The priests] determined whether a person with a skin disease was clean and fit to approach God at the sanctuary without desecrating His holiness.”

<sup>4</sup> The wave portion was the breast meat of the sacrificed animal. The heave portion was the meat from the right thigh of the sacrificed animal. The wave portion was agitated back and forth, and the heave portion up and down. It is worth noting that this movement formed the shape of a cross.

<sup>5</sup> Brege, 247.

The Passover meal has the strongest connection (but not the only one) to the Lord's Supper, as our Lord instituted His Supper within the context of a Passover meal. The early Church reflected this belief by adopting the title of "Passover" (or "Pasch") for the Lord's Supper.<sup>6</sup> And again, as with the Peace Offering, there is no age distinction when it comes to eating and drinking at the Passover meal. As long as one belonged to "the congregation of Israel," he could celebrate and eat of the Passover meal.<sup>7</sup>

God, in His Old Covenant, set the precedent that when it came to holy eating, if one was in His Covenant, irrespective of age, he may participate in worship-related eating.

### INFANT COMMUNION IN THE EARLY CHURCH

In 397 AD, the Council of Carthage recognized and canonized the books of the Bible for use within the Christian Church—both Old Testament and New. So, it behooves us to see what practices and beliefs then existed about infant communion in the Church, the same Church that later recognized the canon of Scripture.

The first documented, non-biblical evidence we have for communion, including infant communion, is from the *Didache* (about 55-70 AD). It reads: "Let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord" (*Didache* 9:5).<sup>8</sup> However, this statement from the *Didache* would only apply to infants if the early Church practiced infant baptism.<sup>9</sup> If infant baptism has been the practice of the New Testament Church since the beginning, then we see that infants included "those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord." This means they were also communicants at the Lord's Supper during the period when the *Didache* was written. For the *Didache* has no language that excludes infants from the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>6</sup> Brege, 85.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 12:47, 50.

<sup>8</sup> Various authors in the Apostolic Church, "The Didache," in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, trans. Michael W. Holmes, ed. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 359.

<sup>9</sup> The Lutheran Church and most Church historians hold that infant baptism has always been the practice of the Church.

Clement of Alexandria (150-210) wrote, concerning the Supper, that “as soon as we are regenerated [baptized], we are honoured by receiving the good news of the hope of rest, even the Jerusalem above, in which it is written that milk and honey fall in showers, receiving through what is material the pledge of the sacred food.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, Clement shows us that first communion followed baptism.

Hippolytus (170-236),<sup>11</sup> in his *On the Apostolic Tradition*, described the initiation rite for those being brought into the Church, which consisted of baptism, the laying on of hands and anointing with oil (part of the chrismation/confirmation rite), and Lord’s Supper. These were done sequentially, one after the other. The initiation rite’s repeated use of “each one” (“*ita singuli*” in the Latin) shows that each person participated in every part of the rite, from beginning to end.

Included in the initiation rite were “little ones,” those who were too young to speak for themselves. They, through their sponsors, with the others, were baptized, renounced the devil, confessed the Creed, were confirmed and/or chrismated, and received the body and blood of Christ. We know this is so because the rubrics say, “And thus let it be done to each.”<sup>12</sup>

An explicit reference we find on infant communion pre-dating the Council of Carthage (397 AD) is from Cyprian, *On the Lapsed*, in 251 AD. Several times, Cyprian mentioned how to deal with infants and children who were earlier at pagan sacrifices but then later came to receive communion. In one instance, while under the care of her wet nurse, an infant was at a pagan sacrifice, who had been given bread soaked in wine. When her mother took her to church, Cyprian described what then happened during the Lord’s Supper:

The infant ... began to cry convulsively, struggling and tossing in a veritable brain-storm, and for all its tender age and simplicity of soul, was confessing, as if

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<sup>10</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor; Book 1*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2004), 22.

<sup>11</sup> Hippolytus was a disciple of Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John the Apostle and Gospel writer.

<sup>12</sup> Hippolytus, *On the Apostolic Tradition*, trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 113. *Apostolic Tradition* 21:37.



under torture, in every way it could, its consciousness of the misdeed [of participating in a pagan sacrifice].... when its [her] turn came to receive, it turned its little head away as if sensing the divine presence, it closed its mouth, held its lips tight, and refused to drink from the chalice. The deacon persisted and, in spite of its opposition, poured some of the consecrated chalice. There followed choking and vomiting. The Eucharist could not remain in a body or a mouth that was defiled; the drink which had been sanctified by Our Lord's blood returned from the polluted stomach.<sup>13</sup>

The incident Cyprian mentioned was not set in a context to discuss post-baptismal, infant communion. Cyprian simply mentioned this incident in passing. It was part of his account of those who fell away during persecution. Such a matter-of-fact mention by Cyprian shows that he saw nothing unusual about infant communion, which testifies to infant communion being a common, non-disputed practice.

We also know from Augustine (354-430) that the Church baptized *and* communed infants. He wrote:

Well now, if you can tolerate that Christ is not Jesus for some persons who have been baptized, then I'm not sure your faith can be recognized as according with the sound rule.<sup>14</sup> Yes, they're infants, but they are his members. They're infants, but they receive his sacraments. They are infants, but they share in his table, in order to have life in themselves.<sup>15</sup>

Notice that Augustine said that if one rejects Christ's works for infants, including receiving the Lord's Supper, he is not adhering to the *regula fidei*, the rule of faith.

These historical "fragments" show us the New Testament Church's belief and practice on infant communion. This was the same Church that would later recognize and canonize the scriptures at Carthage in 397 AD. And it makes little sense for a Church to recognize a text as canonical if that text teaches a practice contrary to how they were practicing the Faith.

<sup>13</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *The Lapsed, The Unity of the Catholic Church*, trans. Maurice Benevot (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1957), 33. *The Lapsed*, Chapter 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Latin*, "in the sound rule." This also ties into Augustine's *Confessions* III, 11, where Augustine's mother, Monica, dreamed of her son standing on a "rule made of wood." Monica took this to mean that one day her son would stop being a Manichee and become an orthodox, catholic Christian.

<sup>15</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle, vol. 5, *Sermons 148-183* (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1992), 261. *Sermon* 174:7.

## INFANT COMMUNION IN THE SCRIPTURES, Part 1

As Lutherans, we are well aware of our current understanding 1 Corinthians 11, in particular, verse 28 (“let a person examine himself”), which is our *sedes doctrinae* against infant communion. Our LC-MS explanation to *The Small Catechism* uses 1 Corinthians 11:28 as *the* proof text against communing infants. It reads, “The Sacrament must not be given to the following: . . . Those who are unable to examine themselves, such as infants.”<sup>16</sup>

It obviously follows, then, that if the early Church practiced infant communion, they had a different understanding of 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, since the same Church unanimously received 1 Corinthians (as *homologoumena*) into the Canon. But we would be especially remiss if we missed a New Testament passage that affirms the Old Covenant understanding of communing all in the Covenant, irrespective of age.

1 Corinthians 10:18 reads, “Consider the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices communicants in the altar?” Here, the Apostle Paul connects Old Covenant sacrificial eating to communing in the Lord’s Supper of the New Covenant. No doubt exists that “those who ate the sacrifices” in the Old Covenant included infants and young children. Here, the Apostle Paul matter-of-factly applies the understanding that infants and children also commune in the New Covenant.

See Figure 3: Connection Between Old-Covenant Sacrificial Eating and the New-Covenant Lord’s Supper

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 240-241.

**1 Corinthians 10:18: Consider the people of Israel**



**Are not those who eat the sacrifices**



**communicants in the Altar?**

**INFANT COMMUNION POST CARTHAGE (397 A.D.) UP TO THE YEAR 1000 A.D.**

If our Lutheran understanding of 1 Corinthians 11:28-29 is the historic, catholic understanding, the Church would have stopped communing infants (if the earlier historical evidence was atypical and not catholic). Yet, that is not what we see. In fact, we see the doctrine and practice of communing infants confirmed all the more.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (circa 500) wrote, "You might say, however, that what could really earn the ridicule of the impious is that fact that infants, despite their inability to understand the divine things, are nevertheless admitted to that sacrament of sacred divine-birth [baptism] and to the sacred symbols of divine communion."<sup>17</sup>

In 800, Charlemagne sent out a questionnaire to the bishops in his empire asking, "Why is an infant first made a catechumen?" and finally "Why is one confirmed with the body and blood of the Lord?" The bishops *unanimously* responded that infants are confirmed

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<sup>17</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Jean Leclercq (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1987), 258.

with the body and blood of the Lord, so they could be members of that head [Jesus Christ], who suffered and was raised for them.<sup>18</sup>

Although not plentiful, up to the year 1000 AD, the only evidence we find shows that infant communion was the universal practice of the New Testament Church since the beginning. We find no evidence to the contrary. Even more, during this period, Popes, bishops, theologians, and liturgical rites all testify to the antiquity and catholicity of infant communion.<sup>19</sup>

## INFANT COMMUNION IN THE SCRIPTURES, Part 2

Now, we will look at the Scriptures in a way that few of us today have ever had. In a sense, we will be like Baptists looking at Matthew 28:19-20 and being told that the “all” in “all nations” of Christ’s mandate includes infants. We will be tempted to use our “*sola scriptura*” principle as a trump card to keep the “interpretation” we like. Yet, we must remind ourselves that *sola scriptura* does not mean “*nuda Scriptura*.” Here, we are to receive the counsel of the Church catholic.

For Lutherans, Scripture alone is the final authority—but not the only one!<sup>20</sup> That is why we have a set of Confessions that copiously quote the Church Fathers, assert our catholicity, and affirm the Creeds. And even Scripture itself asserts, “Most important, you should know this: no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20). So, here we go!

In Matthew 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16, and Luke 18:15-17, our Lord Jesus admonished His disciples who were trying to keep children away from Him. St. Luke used the Greek

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<sup>18</sup> Ronald Bagnall, “The Communion of the Baptized—From Paul to Luther via Augustine, Alcuin, and Aquinas” (Ph.D. diss., Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA), 1991, 195-208.

<sup>19</sup> The most exhaustive exploration into the Church’s practice of infant communion is by Ronald Bagnall. His thesis on the subject is over 400 pages and is also a useful reference as it includes writings on the subject that have never been translated into English before. See Ronald Bagnall, “The Communion of the Baptized—From Paul to Luther via Augustine, Alcuin, and Aquinas” (Ph.D. diss., Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA), 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Ironically, James Payton, a Calvinist, does a good job of explaining *sola scriptura*’s original meaning, and how, today, we often misunderstand that principle. See James R. Payton, Jr. *Getting the Reformation Wrong: Correcting Some Misunderstandings* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), 134-148.

word *βρέφος* to show that infants were also part of the children whom Jesus blessed. Our baptismal liturgy recognizes these passages as showing our Lord's desire that children are to be included in the Gospel gifts that He bestows.<sup>21</sup>

Based on such an understanding of God's grace, the Church catholic has always baptized infants, recognizing that the mandate to baptize "all nations" (*ἔθνος*) in Matthew 28:19 includes infants.<sup>22</sup> Jesus' admonition to His Disciples established the principle that infants are to be receivers to His Gospel gifts and should only be refused them if God in His Word elsewhere mandates such a restriction.

Although never overtly mentioned, the New Testament implies the practice of post-baptismal, infant communion. We know from descriptive New Testament accounts that entire families were baptized after the conversion of the head of the household, such as the jailer and his family (Acts 16:25-33). In Acts 2:41, 3000 were converted and baptized. Later, the newly baptized "all" in verse 44 (and surely some among the 3000 had families that were also baptized according to New Testament practice!) "broke bread from house to house," that is, received the Lord's Supper.<sup>23</sup> We have no reason to conclude from this text that infants were excluded.

The context of 1 Corinthians suggests that the entire baptized community—the body of Christ—received Holy Communion. Consider 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. St. Paul began chapter 10 with a typological interpretation of the Old Testament. What happened in Israel's past is seen as a type or foreshadowing of things to come.<sup>24</sup> In this case, baptism and the Lord's Supper:

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<sup>21</sup> The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 269.

<sup>22</sup> This author has done a study on the ages of those being baptized in the Church catholic and has found the historical evidence of infant baptism to be very convincing.

<sup>23</sup> However, the Lutheran exegetical understanding of Acts 2:46 referring to the Lord's Supper is mixed. Gerhard Krodel affirms that verse 46 refers to the Lord's Supper, R.C.H. Lenski thinks no, and Robert Smith thinks perhaps. It will be interesting to see what the new *Concordia Commentary* on Acts will say. Gerhard A. Krodel, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Roy A. Harrisville, Jack Dean Kingsbury, and Gerhard A. Krodel *Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 94. R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament Acts* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934; reprint, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 2001), 120. Smith Robert H, *Concordia Commentary Acts* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 70.

<sup>24</sup> V.C. Pfitzner, *ChiRho Commentary Series, First Corinthians* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1982), 145.

For I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they were drinking from the spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ.<sup>25</sup>

Here, the Apostle Paul was directing his reference, “our fathers,” to the Corinthian Christians. Paul, in effect, said: “You Corinthians are all baptized and all communicants.” The “all” and the “all” are the same: baptized, communicant members of the Corinthian congregation.<sup>26</sup>

Ambrose of Milan (337-397 AD) ties this passage to participating in the Lord’s Supper. He wrote, “What we eat, what we drink, the Holy Spirit expresses to you elsewhere, saying; ‘Taste and see that the Lord is sweet. Blessed is the one who trusts in him’ [Psalm 33:9]. Christ is in that Sacrament, because the body is Christ’s.”<sup>27</sup>

Ambrose does not have some novel interpretation. Lutherans have traditionally also interpreted this text eucharistically. For example, Martin Chemnitz understood it in such a way: “Just as the same sacraments were held in common by all in the Old Testament, so also we in the New Testament all have the same sacraments, namely, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>28</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul wrote, “For also we are *all* baptized with one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, and we *all* were given to drink of the one Spirit.” Earlier, in 1 Corinthians 10:17, he wrote, “Because there is one bread, we the

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<sup>25</sup> The Scripture quotation is Gregory Lockwood’s translation. See Gregory J. Lockwood, *Concordia Commentary*, ed. Jeffrey A. Gibbs *1 Corinthians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 321.

<sup>26</sup> Colin Buchanan, *Children in Communion*, Grove Worship Series, no. 112 (Nottingham: Grove Books Limited, 1990), 6.

<sup>27</sup> Ambrose of Milan, *1-2 Corinthians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, ed. Thomas C. Oden, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 92. *The Mysteries*, 56.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord’s Supper*, trans. J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 259.

many are one body, for we *all* share in one bread” [author’s emphasis].<sup>29</sup> In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul stated that baptism admitted people into the “one body”; and in 1 Corinthians 10:17, that the “one bread” of communion sustained them as “one body.” Notice that Paul used the word “all” (πάντες) when referring to those who communed. This shows that those who were brought into the New Covenant through baptism also communed at the Lord’s Supper table.<sup>30</sup> As for the New Testament baptismal texts, “all” means “all.”

See Figure 4: The Apostle Paul’s Use of “All” in Relation to Baptism and the Supper

1 Corinthians 12:13  
“We are *all* baptized... into one body



“All” means “All”



1 Corinthians 10:17  
“We are one body, for we *all* share in one bread



<sup>29</sup> Lockwood’s translation, 337, 441.

<sup>30</sup> Buchanan, 6.

**SO WHAT HAPPENED? THE DENIAL OF THE LORD’S SUPPER TO INFANTS**

Even to this day, all the churches descended from the five apostolic sees<sup>31</sup> theologically allow post-baptismal, infant communion. In practice, the exception is the Roman Catholic Church, which theologically allows—but chooses not to have for various reasons—infant communion as a liturgical practice. (To understand this distinction within those under the “umbrella” of Rome, see the excursus on this topic [W] .)

So, what took place within western Christendom, so that today, Roman Catholicism, by and large, no longer communes infants? Within Western Christendom, three developments took place that eventually made excluding infants from the Lord’s Table the common practice.

First, the practice of baptism, chrismation/confirmation, and communion became separated within the Church of Rome. As a hierarchy of the clergy

became more formalized over time, different clergy would perform differing functions. Presbyters (elders) could baptize infants; however, a bishop was required to lay his hands on the baptized infant for chrismation/confirmation. As bishops were fewer in

**Excursus: Rome’s Liturgical Practice of Not Communing Infants**

The Roman Catholic Church doesn’t claim infant communion to be theologically wrong based on 1 Cor. 11:27-28. For them, it’s a matter of custom and chosen liturgical practice. Rome’s understanding on infant communion is—not that it’s theologically wrong—but that communion is not necessary for an infant after baptism.

After the Reformation, the Council of Trent simply reaffirmed this understanding. As Trent put it, “... little children who have not attained the use of reason are *not by any necessity bound* to the sacramental communion of the Eucharist ...” The anathema of Canon 4 affirms this: “If anyone says that communion of the Eucharist *is necessary* for little children before they have attained the years of discretion, let him be anathema.” [*author’s emphasis*](Council of Trent, Session 21, Canon 4.)

The Council of Trent recognized that circumstances best dictate the liturgical practice for first communion. Unlike current-day Lutheranism, for Rome, infant communion is a matter of liturgical practice, not doctrine.

That’s why within Roman Catholicism, communion is given later for Latin-Rite Catholics (and those descended from the Latin rite). The other rites within Rome practice according to their own liturgical norms, which includes infant communion. These include Eastern-Rite Catholics (including Maronite, Uniate, Syro-Malabar, and Syro-Malankara Catholics).

<sup>31</sup> The five Apostolic Sees are Rome (Ss. Peter and Paul), Constantinople (St. Andrew), Antioch (St. Peter), Alexandria (St. Mark), and Jerusalem (Jesus and the Apostles). Today, churches descended from three of the five Apostolic Sees are in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, one is Coptic (Alexandria), and one is Roman Catholic.



number, often a considerable time developed between baptism and confirmation.<sup>32</sup> Once the delay became normative, it became the normative practice. Children now had to be instructed in the faith before confirmation and communion instead of instruction taking place irrespective of confirmation.

Second, strong concern developed about desecrating the consecrated elements of the Lord's Supper. Many within the Roman Catholic Church "began to feel uneasy about the communion of persons who might not be able to swallow this host."<sup>33</sup> Because of this, by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, post-confirmation infants and children were no longer given Christ's body in the Supper, fearing they would desecrate it by not fully consuming it; they only received Christ's blood. In 1121, William of Champeaux used the doctrine of concomitance to explain why communing infants with only Christ's blood was acceptable.<sup>34</sup> He wrote, "To little children only the chalice is given, because they cannot assimilate the bread, and in the chalice they receive Christ entire."<sup>35</sup>

Third, the idea developed in the West that one should have a certain level of intellectual knowledge before he communed of the Lord's Supper (this development has greatly influenced the Lutheran Church even to this day). Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (1125-1274 AD) began to speak of an "age of discretion," probably influenced by a renewed appreciation of Aristotle and other ancient Greek writers.<sup>36</sup>

Tying in this "age of discretion" thinking to the possibility of spilling Christ's blood in the Sacrament, Aquinas moved even further:

On the part of the recipient the greatest reverence and caution are called for, lest anything happen ... in receiving the blood, for, if incautiously handled, it might easily be spilt. And because the multitude of the Christian people increased, in

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<sup>32</sup> Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 181.

<sup>33</sup> John D.C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the West* (London: S.P.C.K, 1965), 102.

<sup>34</sup> He concluded that because Christ in His entirety is present in the wine or the bread, consuming only one of the elements was necessary.

<sup>35</sup> Fisher, 102.

<sup>36</sup> In ancient Greece, children were sequestered from their father until seven years of age, at which time a boy's "real" education would begin. John Sommerville has written a concise summary of cultural attitudes toward children from the dawn of history to the present. See C. John Sommerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 28-34.

which there are old, young, and children, some of whom have not enough discretion to observe due caution in using this sacrament, on that account it is a prudent *custom* in some churches for the blood not to be offered to the reception of the people, but to be received by the priest alone.<sup>37</sup> [*author's emphasis*]

This understanding of an “age of discretion” was formalized at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, which, by practice, only allowed communion to those who “have reached the age of discretion faithfully [and] confess all their sins at least once a year to their own priest and perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed.” The Council of Bayeaux in 1300 formalized this “age of discretion” to seven years of age.<sup>38</sup> Besides the “age of discretion,” the Fourth Lateran Council also removed the chalice from the laity’s celebration of the Lord’s Supper to prevent them from spilling and, thus, desecrating Christ’s blood.<sup>39</sup>

Because, for the previous century or more, infants in most places had only been receiving the chalice, they were now left with no regular means of receiving the Sacrament. Now, in one fell swoop, the Roman Catholic Church stopped, in practice, communing infants. Infants lacked the necessary “discretion.” And because infants were part of the laity, they no longer drank Christ’s blood in His Supper. This was how infant communion stopped being the dominant practice within Roman Catholicism.

During the Counter-Reformation, the Roman Catholic Council of Trent (1545-1563) upheld the Fourth Lateran Council’s decision to continue allowing the withholding of communion from infants. Their rationale was that the Lord’s Supper was not needed for infants because they have received baptism (yet, by extrapolation, if that were true, then why would any of us need the Lord’s Supper?). It is worth noting, however, that neither the Fourth Lateran Council nor the Council of Trent condemned infant communion as

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<sup>37</sup> Aquinas Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 9, trans. Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947; reprint, Charleston, South Carolina: Forgotten Books, 2007), 298 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>38</sup> Fisher, 106.

<sup>39</sup> The Text of the Fourth Lateran Council as found at “Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215,” [online] Medieval Sourcebook, 1996, cited 25 Oct 2011, available from <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.htm>>.

heterodox.<sup>40</sup> For Rome, this was not so much a theological decision but one of liturgical practice.

## DOES SCRIPTURE ALLOW THE HISTORIC, CATHOLIC PRACTICE OF COMMUNING INFANTS?

### 1 Corinthians 11:28: Do Infants Need to “Examine” (δοκιμαζω) Themselves?

1 Corinthians 11:28 reads concerning the Lord’s Supper that “a person should examine himself.” Yet, does this passage even apply to infants? If not, then the argument that infants cannot examine themselves is *non sequitur*. Martin Luther said no, that this passage has nothing to do with infants and young children. (This is covered more fully later in this paper.)

The immediate context of what was taking place in church of Corinth shows what problem the Apostle Paul was addressing. The more affluent Corinthians—in this case, adults—were treating the Lord’s Supper as their own, consuming their own food, shaming the poorer members (vv. 20-22), and eating it in a way that highlighted, and provoked, their divisions. Their behavior was egregious because it was contrary to what the Lord’s Supper is, and so also contrary to what the Church is.

In Corinth, the reality of the situation, their irreverent gluttony and selfishness, made the Lord’s Supper into a mockery. “When you meet together, it is not to eat [φάγειν] the Lord’s Supper” (1 Corinthians 11:20).<sup>41</sup> We can infer that by the time the Lord’s Supper was to be celebrated in the “agape meal,” it was an excessive indulgence like many other Corinthian parties in town.

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<sup>40</sup> From the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the Council of Trent, which states, “Antiquity is not therefore to be condemned, however, if in some place it at one time observed that custom.” See *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H.J. Schroeder (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1941).

<sup>41</sup> The author’s translation here brings out the infinitive in the original Greek text, which shows the problem in the Corinthian Church. When the congregation met, they came together for the wrong reason. Instead of focusing on the Lord’s Supper, a distorted form of the “agape meal” was the focus, making their purpose for gathering into something it was not meant to be.

So then, Paul's call to self-scrutiny, to examination, was to see if someone needed to repent of his actions. In this case, it focused on one's behavior relating to the Lord's Supper, what that behavior confessed, and how it affected the other Christians in the congregation.<sup>42</sup>

Yet, how do we know this is, exegetically, the case? To understand more fully Paul's use of *δοκιμαζω*, we need to go back to chapter 8 in 1 Corinthians. In chapters 8-10, Paul deals with the abuse of "Christian freedom" by some Corinthians to eat food that was earlier sacrificed to idols. Paul makes two main arguments.

1. Yes, you can buy food with a free conscience—but not if your freedom causes your brother to stumble. Here, Paul used himself as an example: "But I haven't taken advantage of these rights" (1 Corinthians 9:15). Paul then went on to say that choosing to act in such a way where one offends a weaker brother is not proper, because Christians are members one of another.
2. But then Paul moves beyond that, for idolatry is not simply an indifferent matter, a matter of *adiaphora*. And so to eat the food that had earlier been sacrificed in a pagan temple is to "be participants with demons." Paul then says, "Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy?" (1 Corinthians 10:22).

In 1 Corinthians 9:1-23, Paul uses himself as an example of forfeiting his own "rights" for the benefit of others. But then he goes even further. He explains that living the Christian faith in this world is like a race, and, like in a race, someone can disqualify himself (1 Corinthians 9:27). We should especially note the word "disqualified" (*ἀδόκιμος*). We will see later how the adjective "disqualified" relates to the verb "examine" in 1 Corinthians 11:28.

In Chapter 10, Paul further explains the danger of being "disqualified." It is possible to taste the greatest of blessings, yet someone can still disqualify himself by his actions.

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Hays does a good job of looking at the context of what was taking place in the congregation of Corinth. See Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. James Luther Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 200.

Paul then uses Old-Covenant Israel as the example, except Paul adapts New-Covenant imagery to drive his point home.

Like those in the New Covenant, the Old Covenant Israelites were also baptized (into Moses in the cloud and the sea). Like in the Lord's Supper, they even drank of Christ. Yet, they disqualified themselves—they were overthrown, laid low, and killed (*καταστρέψει*) in the desert. (1 Corinthians 10:5)

Paul then explains, "Now these things became examples for us, so we won't desire evil as they did" (1 Corinthians 10:6). The point Paul was making was that the Corinthians Christians were also to take care, so they would not likewise fall and "disqualify" themselves.<sup>43</sup>

It is in this context that we are to understand Paul's call for a person to examine (*δοκιμαζω*) himself. "Examine" corresponds to the idea of being "disqualified" that Paul mentioned earlier in 9:27. To examine oneself then is to "judge" (*διακρίνω*) and see if someone has "disqualified" himself in the Faith. This examining of oneself is not an intellectual moment of introspection, of knowing enough doctrine to see if someone is "worthy."<sup>44</sup> This is a call, if needed, to repent.

Speaking to adults and their corresponding, sinful behaviors, Paul called each adult to "examine" himself to see if he needed to repent of sinful acts that caused a brother to stumble, that caused division. This was not in intellectual exercise of recalling the doctrine of the Faith. This was to make sure that someone did not "disqualify" himself from the Sacrament by his actions.

Paul shows us his understanding of these ideas in 2 Corinthians 13:5. "Examine [*πειράζω*] yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Test [*δοκιμαζω*] yourselves. Don't

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<sup>43</sup> During Israel's wandering in the desert, we should note that infants and children were not disqualified from the Promise Land of Israel.

<sup>44</sup> Tim Gallant, "Does 1 Corinthians 11.28 Spell the Death-Knell for Paedocommunion?," [online] Paedocommunion.com, cited 29 October 2011, available from <[http://www.paedocommunion.com/articles/gallant\\_examination\\_and\\_remembrance.php](http://www.paedocommunion.com/articles/gallant_examination_and_remembrance.php)>.

you realize that Christ Jesus is in you? Unless, of course, you are disqualified [ἀδόκιμος].”

Paul then goes into what happens if someone does participate in the Sacrament who should have repented but did not. This is where discerning or judging (διακρίνω) comes in.

### 1 Corinthians 11:29: “Discerning” or “Judging” (διακρίνω) the Body

The Apostle Paul exhorted the adult members of the Corinthian congregation to examine themselves, because “whoever eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.” (1 Corinthians 11:29) Not only was “discerning” the body directed as speech toward adults, but it also required an attendant action that infants and young children cannot do. (But that is all right, for they are not guilty of committing those sins that Paul said required such “discerning.”) This doubly shows that this passage was not directed toward infants, but to the adults who were “quarrelling,” as Luther put it.

The dictionary Greek form for words translated as “discerning” is διακρίνω. If one were to compare the translations of διακρίνω in the New Testament, he would find that διακρίνω is translated differently in verse 29, than elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>45</sup> Kittel’s first meaning for κρίνω, which is the root entry for διακρίνω, is “to sunder.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, κρίνω originally had a sense of removing, or setting something apart. The Liddell-Scott Lexicon first lists διακρίνω as “to separate one from another ... to part combatants.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Brant Pelphrey’s 139-page thesis thoroughly looks into the uses of διακρίνω and shows how it is translated and understood in 1 Corinthians 11:29 differs from its uses elsewhere. To get a broader understanding what “discerning” the body means, one should read his thesis. Brant Pelphrey, “Discerning the Body: ΔΙΑΚΡΙΝΩ in First Corinthians 11:29” (Master’s thesis, Holy Cross Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, MA, 2000), 68.

<sup>46</sup> Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 469.

<sup>47</sup> Liddell-Scott Lexicon, s.v., διακρίνω in BibleWorks 7, BibleWorks, LLC, Norfolk, VA, 2006. Also, other lexicons could be used to make the point, but to keep this term paper within size guidelines, only these two were referenced.

However, most translations see *διακρίνω* in 1 Corinthians 11:29 in a weakened or figurative sense: “to discern.”<sup>48</sup> Everywhere else our New Testament translations render *διακρίνω* in a way that retains the original, more literal, sense of the word.<sup>49</sup>

Two verses later, in 1 Corinthians 11:31, most translations render *διακρίνω* as “judge.” “But if we were judging [*διακρίνω*] ourselves, we would not be undergoing judgment [*κρίνω*].” Although the same subject matter is being dealt with as in verse 29, there we find *διακρίνω* translated as “discern.”<sup>50</sup>

*Διακρίνω* in 1 Corinthians 11:29 should not be understood in a figurative or weakened sense; it should be understood in the same way *διακρίνω* is translated in verse 31: “judge.” In context of verses 28 and 29, each adult is to examine himself and “judge” the body of the Lord (*corpus verum*), which, in turn, necessitates a “judging” of the congregation (*corpus mysticum*). This judging entails removing one’s self, if need be, from the “body.”<sup>51</sup> If one does not judge and remove himself, then the congregation is to do so, lest they are judged as verse 31 states.

In 1 Corinthians 11:27, Paul says that if someone is unworthy (by sinful, divisive behavior), he isn’t only sinning against the congregation, he is even sinning against the Lord’s body and blood! That’s why verse 28 then tells someone to “judge” himself. Is he sinning against the congregation? If so, then repent and reconcile before communing. If not, then commune. Verse 29, then concludes Paul’s argument: One eats and drink judgment to himself if he does not judge the body. Here “body” refers to both the Lord and the congregation. You don’t have one without the other.

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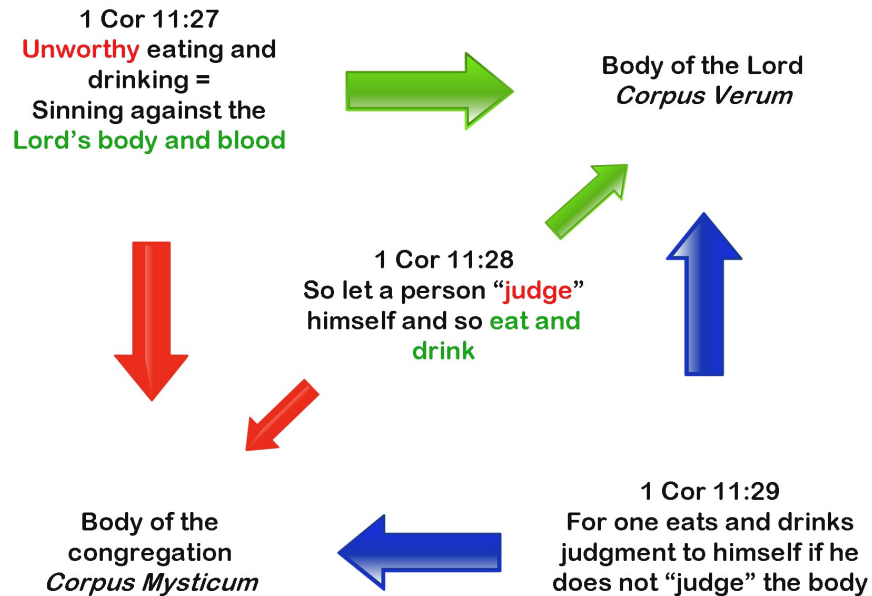
<sup>48</sup> Pelphrey, 69.

<sup>49</sup> Do note, however, the classical Greek of the Septuagint has more variation in its use of *διακρίνω* compared to the koine Greek of the New Testament. According to the author’s own research, the Septuagint translates forms of the Hebrew words for “judge”, “see”, “choose”, and “examine” with forms of *διακρίνω*.

<sup>50</sup> Pelphrey shows example after example in Chapter 4 of how *διακρίνω* is translated with a different emphasis in 1 Corinthians than elsewhere in the New Testament.

<sup>51</sup> Mark Surburg in his thesis brings out very well the classical Lutheran understanding that “body” in verse 29 refers primarily to the body of Christ in the Sacrament, not the congregation. In the thesis, he concludes, “The logic of Paul’s argumentation leads us to see that in *σώμα* we have a double entendre. . . . from *corpus verum* to *corpus mysticum*.” See Mark P. Surburg, “Discerning the Body—An Exegetical Examination of 1 Co. 11:17-34” (Master’s thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, 2000), 126.

See Figure 5: Putting Together Paul’s Argument



Paul then goes on to say in verse 31 that if the congregation (“we”) were properly “judging” themselves, they would not be undergoing judgment. What was this judgment? Verse 30 tells us. Many in the congregation were “weak and ill,” and many had even “fallen asleep.” In other words, many had fallen away from the Faith by not repenting and remaining impenitent in their sinful behaviors toward others in the congregation.

Eating and drinking the body and blood in vs. 27 requires individual (vs. 29) and corporate (vs. 31) judging and, if needed, exclusion. This understanding shows how the entire Church catholic practiced infant communion *and* closed communion during her first 1,200 years.



## INFANT COMMUNION AND FIRST-GENERATION LUTHERANISM

Both Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon had a view of infant communion that was closer to Roman Catholicism than current-day Lutheranism. Although infant communion was not a topic of much theological interest (since few in the West were communing infants), we do find a few writings that show their views differed from the Lutherans that followed them.

### Luther: 1 Corinthians 11:27-28 Has Nothing to Do With Infants

For Luther, communing infants was not a grave, theological error. He simply saw no pressing need to bring back that practice. In 1523, Luther said concerning the Hussites in Bohemia, who communed baptized infants: "I cannot side with the Bohemians in distributing the Lord's Supper to children, even though I would not call them heretics on that account."<sup>52</sup>

Later in 1532, Luther was asked if the Lord's Supper should be given to children (*pueris*). He replied:

There is no urgency about the sacrament of the altar. So there is no command concerning prayer, but there is a precept that when we pray we should expect to be heard. Nor is there a precept about afflictions, although those who are afflicted ought to be patient. However, it doesn't follow that the children are damned who either do not pray or are not afflicted. When in I Corinthians [11:28] Paul said that a man should examine himself, he spoke only of adults because he was speaking about those who were quarreling among themselves. However, he doesn't here forbid that the sacrament of the altar be given even to children.<sup>53</sup>

This question is applicable to us today: "What in the context of 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 shows that it has anything to do with infants and children?" Infants and children aren't mocking the poorer members of the congregation. Infants and children aren't getting drunk at the "agape meal" before the Lord's Supper took place.

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<sup>52</sup> This quotation is in footnote 133, which is a quotation from Walther's *Pastorale*, pg. 190. See Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 383.

<sup>53</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 54, *Table Talk* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 58.

Luther is simply agreeing with Paul. For, earlier, Paul explicitly stated that he was addressing adults concerning this adult-related problem: “I speak to sensible people; judge [κρίνω] for yourselves what I say” (1 Corinthians 10:15). In 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, Paul was speaking to those same, “sensible people” who could “judge” for themselves. That’s why Paul’s words of censure, his words of Law, have nothing to do with infants and children. It’s *non sequitur*.

When we apply Paul’s words meant for adults so broadly, to include infants and children, it only cascades into further error. For when we apply Paul’s words of law so indiscriminately, we are then no longer properly distinguishing between Law and Gospel. We broadly over-apply the Law and so, in turn, broadly under-apply the Gospel!

Perhaps this comparison with another text of Scripture will help make this clearer.

**1 Corinthians 11:28**

Verse: “Let a person examine himself, and then, so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”

Premise: Infants do not examine themselves.

Conclusion: Therefore, infants should not eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

**2 Thessalonians 3:10**

Verse: “If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.”

Premise: Infants are unwilling to work.

Conclusion: Therefore, infants should not eat.

We can easily see the disastrous results of taking a scripture passage out of context and misapplying it. If we did that to 2 Thessalonians 3:10, we would be denying infants food

from our tables, to their physical detriment. By misapplying 1 Corinthians 11:28, we are denying infants food from God's Table, to their spiritual detriment.

In 1539, Luther wrote this about receiving the Lord's Supper:

... whether you are male or female, young or old, [it] need not be argued—just as little as it matters in baptism and the preached word. It is enough that you are consecrated and anointed with the sublime and holy chrism of God, with the word of God, with baptism, and also with this sacrament; then you are highly and gloriously enough and sufficiently vested with priestly garments.<sup>54</sup>

We can see from these words of Luther, that throughout his life, he didn't see infant communion as something theologically forbidden based on 1 Corinthians 11:27-28. For him, as with the Church of Rome, infant communion wasn't something that had to be done for infants to have saving faith.

### **Luther and Melancthon: Examining (δοκιμαζω) Oneself is Not Restricted to Those with Higher Cognitive Function**

Besides our current-day misapplication of 1 Corinthians 11:28, which misapplies the Law and under-applies the Gospel, both Melancthon and Luther understood a person examining himself differently than we do. We understand it primarily as faith expressing itself in a cognitive way, such as, "Can one *intellectually understand* what he needs to about the Lord's Supper?" If not, he is not to commune.

If Luther understood the Supper was limited to someone who could examine himself in such a way, he would have never written these words.

Some have asked whether the sacrament is to be offered also to the deaf and dumb. Some think it a kindness to practice a pious fraud on them and think they should be given unblest wafers. This mockery is not good; it will not please God, who has made them Christians as well as us. They deserve the same things that we do. Therefore if they are rational and can show by indubitable signs that they desire it in true Christian devotion, as I have often seen, we should leave to the Holy Spirit what is his work and not refuse him what he demands. It may be

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<sup>54</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 41, *Church and Ministry III* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 152.

that inwardly they have a better understanding and faith than we; and this no one should maliciously oppose.<sup>55</sup>

Clearly, Luther understood *δοκιμαζω* differently than we do today. Luther concluded that even those who are cognitively lower functioning “deserve the same things that we do,” that is, the Lord’s Supper. And if one so “mentally challenged” was rational (such as, not in a screaming frenzy) and wanted to receive the Sacrament, he should—even if he could not intellectually understand and verbalize the faith! For “it may be that inwardly [he has] a better understanding and faith than we.” With Luther’s understanding of faith and intellect, it’s easy to see why he didn’t understand a person’s need to examine himself the same way that we do today.

Similarly, Philip Melanchthon also viewed a person examining himself as not something requiring a certain level of cognitive ability. For Melanchthon, it was if someone was repentant. That was the purpose of self-examination. In his *Loci Communes*, he dealt with 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 in this way:

... it is manifest that in this area [the Lord’s Supper] we must repeatedly teach that the eating is of no benefit to those who *are not repentant and continue in their sins against conscience*, as Paul clearly affirms, “He who eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” Also these who *do not have the fear of God and faith, or repentance and faith, and knowingly persevere in sins contrary to conscience, are unworthy to eat. . . . This same action indeed speaks of both repentance and faith. [author’s emphasis]*<sup>56</sup>

Notice how Melanchthon did not understand 1 Corinthians 11:27-28 as Lutherans do today. For infants do not “knowingly persevere in sins contrary to conscience.” For Melanchthon, 1 Corinthians 11:27-28 centered on being repentant. The shift where Lutheranism linked the idea of cognitive ability to “a person examining himself” took place during the second generation of Lutheranism.

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<sup>55</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 110.

<sup>56</sup> Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes*, trans. J.A.O Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 147.

## INFANT COMMUNION AND SECOND- & THIRD-GENERATION LUTHERANISM

Even before our Confessions were adopted in 1580, the Lutheran *status quo* was not to commune infants. This was simply the practice we inherited from Rome, which Luther and Melanchthon maintained.

Yet, not all was well within Lutheranism. Contrary to Luther and Melanchthon, we begin to see what will soon become the theological understanding within Lutheranism. For example, the Brandenburg-Nürnberg Church Order of 1533 excluded from communion “the irrational and fools, [and] children who cannot understand.”<sup>57</sup>

Our second-generation Lutheran fathers moved from Rome’s liturgical practice and made it into theological doctrine. Outside the radical Reformation, this was the first time that 1 Corinthians 11:27-28 would be understood in such a new and novel way. What was a liturgical practice for Rome became a theological matter of doctrine within Lutheranism. For us, *lex orandi, lex credendi* rang true. In this area, we departed from the Church catholic!

To see this shift, notice how Martin Chemnitz understood 1 Corinthians 11:27-29. He wrote in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*:

It is clear that one cannot deal with infants through the bare preaching of repentance and remission of sins, for that requires hearing (Rom. 10:17), deliberation and meditation (Ps. 119), understanding (Matt. 13:51), which are not found in infants. With regard to the Lord’s Supper Paul says: “Let a person examine himself.” Likewise: “Let him discern the Lord’s body,” a thing which cannot be ascribed to infants.<sup>58</sup>

In 1577, in our dialogues with the Patriarch of Constantinople, our Tübingen Theologians (Lucas Osiander, Jacob Andreae, and Martin Crucius) wrote:

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<sup>57</sup> Roger T. Beckwith, “The Antiquity of Infant Communion,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 38, no. 2 (Winter 1976).

<sup>58</sup> Chemnitz, Martin. *Examination of the Council of Trent*. Translation of *Examen Concilii Tridentini*. electronic ed, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1971), Part II, 165-166.

We often exhort our people who have repented to partake frequently of the Lord's Supper. However, we do not commune the infants, for Paul says: "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the Lord's body, eats and drinks judgment upon himself" [1 Corinthians 11:28-29].<sup>59</sup>

By the third generation, our pre-eminent "golden-age" theologian, Johann Gerhard, maintained this novel understanding of 1 Corinthians 11:28-29. He wrote, "The minor children, who have not yet arrived at the age of understanding [may not partake of the Supper], for they cannot examine themselves and discern the body of Christ."<sup>60</sup>

Notice in particular Gerhard's line of thinking. He shows the inherited "age of discretion" thinking from medieval Roman Catholicism. So, at this point, he is in line with Roman-Catholic thinking. But then Gerhard makes the "Lutheran leap," making a theological conclusion that Rome, Luther, and Melancthon never did: "for they [infants] cannot examine themselves and discern the body of Christ."

### INFANT COMMUNION AND THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

Our Lutheran Confessions are silent on the matter of infant communion. In such silence, our Confessions simply do not use 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 as we do, to bar infants from the Lord's Table.

*The Apology to the Augsburg Confession* does say that communion will not be forced on those not yet ready to partake. "Our pastors, accordingly, do not force those who are not ready to use the sacraments" (*Ap*, XI, 5).<sup>61</sup> *The Formula of Concord* states that there is only one type of unworthy guest at the Supper: "We believe, teach, and confess that there is only one kind of unworthy guest, those who do not believe" (*FC*, VII, 18).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> George Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople: The Correspondence between the Tubingen Theologians and Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople on the Augsburg Confession* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2005), 143.

<sup>60</sup> Johann Gerhard, *A Comprehensive Explanation of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, trans. Elmer Hohle (Malone, Texas: Repristination Press, 2000), 430. Gerhard even excluded the mentally retarded, which he called "halting idiots," because they did not have the intellectual acumen to examine themselves.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 186.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 506.

We know that infants can and do believe, as Jesus mentioned “little ones who believe in [Him]” (Matthew 18:6). Further, the Apostle Paul wrote to Pastor Timothy: “From infancy [βρεφούς] you have known the sacred Scriptures, which have the power to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).<sup>63</sup>

Lutherans, like Jesus, have always understood that infants can and do believe. It follows then that our Confessions can allow us to commune infants, while not condemning or mandating it. However, our Confessions will only allow this if we understand that “examining someone” only applies to those whom Luther (and the Church catholic) understood them to apply.

Our *Apology* says that “Among us ... the sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake it, after they have been examined and absolved” [*Ap*, XXIV, 1].<sup>64</sup> Yet, notice how our Confessions refer to this practice of examining someone. It is called a “custom”: “For the *custom* has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not been previously examined and absolved” (*AC*, XXV, 1) [*author’s emphasis*].<sup>65</sup> Because it is a “custom,” the Lutheran Church has freely adapted it as needed at various times to include “announcing before communion,” communion cards, and so on.

Our *Apology* (*Ap* XV, 38-41) lists instruction, examination, and absolution before someone receives the Lord’s Supper as “ancient traditions” of the Church.<sup>66</sup> Nowhere do our Confessions base this pre-communion examination on 1 Corinthians 11:27-29!

To apply 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 to infants and young children is to have a novel “interpretation” of Scripture that neither Luther, Melanchthon, nor our Confessions

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<sup>63</sup> Although Jewish parents normally began instructing children in the Scriptures from their fifth year, St. Paul’s use of *bre,foj* denotes that Timothy’s instruction started while still as an infant. For *bre,foj* can denote even a child in the womb. See Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *The New American Commentary*, ed. David D. Dockery 1,2 *Timothy Titus* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1992), 233. Also see R.C.H Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament Colossians 1-2 Thessalonians 1-2 Timothy Titus Philemon* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937; reprint, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 2001), 839.

<sup>64</sup> Kolb, 258.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid*, 72.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, 229.

had. Even more, when we understand the mandate to “examine,” we apply an overly intellectualized understanding of what that means. We understand “examine” in a way that did not exist until medieval Roman Catholicism came up with its “age of discretion” thinking. Both are novel understandings and practices within Christ’s New Testament Church.

### IS THERE A BETTER WAY?

It is always hard to admit error. It is even harder when we realize that we have a theological worldview at odds with the Church catholic, Luther, and Melanchthon. So, is there a better way? Yes.

First, we need to recognize our error and repent of it. Right now, we don’t even realize that we are erring and so we see “infant communion” as the error. But as we continue to understand the topic of infant communion in a more biblical and catholic way, we as a church body will begin to shift in our teaching and practice. Yet, this is something we need to do as a *church body*. For if each does what is right in his own eyes, it will simply lead to liturgical chaos (as if we don’t have enough of that going on already!).

Until we, that is, the LC-MS, restore the biblical and catholic practice of infant communion, the most any pastor or congregation should do is to practice “early communion.” Early communion was the practice during the Lutheran Reformation and our official liturgies also allow this.

### CONCLUSION

When we rightly reinstitute the practice of infant communion, we are correcting several incorrect understandings and practices.

1. Infant communion better fulfills the Old Covenant types, which pointed forward to their fulfillment in Christ and His Supper. “All” within the Old Covenant



participated when it came to worship-related eating. This “all” included infants and children.

2. The practice of infant communion would bring the Lutheran Church back into proper catholicity. We then would stop following novel teachings from medieval Roman Catholicism, which we further and incorrectly made into doctrine during 2<sup>nd</sup>-generation Lutheranism. We would then be faithfully following what our Confessions assert, that we believe and practice what the Church has always believed and practiced—unless something is found to go against Scripture.
3. Infant communion would keep us from contradicting Scripture. For when we apply 1 Corinthians 11:28 (“let a person examine himself”) to infants and children, we contradict 1 Corinthians 12:13 and 10:17-18, which teach that “all” Christians are baptized into one body, and that same “all” participate in the Lord’s Supper.
4. Infant communion would help us properly to distinguish between Law and Gospel. It would keep us from over-applying the Law to “examine oneself” toward infants and young children. This, in turn, would also keep us from under-applying the Gospel.

For the first 1200 years, the entire Church catholic baptized, confirmed, and communed infants. Within Roman Catholicism, baptism and the Lord’s Supper became separated from each other for non-theological reasons. Eventually, as a liturgical practice, infants no longer received the Lord’s Supper—although infant communion was never considered heterodox.

The Lutheran Reformation did little to change the practices of not communing infants adopted during medieval Roman Catholicism. Even worse, what became a liturgical practice in the Church of Rome, we made into theological doctrine during the second generation of Lutheranism.

Historical and theological events were never compelling enough to prompt our Lutheran fathers to examine fully the historic Church practice of post-baptismal, infant communion. Our Lutheran hermeneutic would have restored this ancient practice unless it was found to be unbiblical (the *sola scriptura* principle and the catholic principle).<sup>67</sup> However, as this serious theological exploration into infant communion never happened, we not only maintained Rome's "age of discretion" error, we even went further and made it into theological doctrine.

Opening the Lord's Supper to baptized infants is in full concord with the Lutheran theological understanding that we are saved by grace and not by works. By grace through faith in baptism, one is brought into the Church. If one is in the Church, then all God's grace should be available to him—including infants. Our Lord's Supper practices should reflect our theological underpinnings within the practices of the Church catholic.

Restoring the biblical and historic practice of infant communion will do this. Amen.

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<sup>67</sup> Our Lutheran Confessions explicitly or implicitly affirm the "catholic principle." For instance, they read "we have made this mutual declaration with hearts and mouths that we intend to create or accept no special or new confession of our faith" (*SD*, "Concerning the Binding Summary," 2; Kolb, 526). Elsewhere, our Confessions read, "that no new interpretation is introduced here" (*AC XX*, 12; Kolb, 54) and that "we have said nothing new" (*Ap II*, 15; Kolb, 114).

**APPENDIX: POSSIBLE RITE FOR POST-BAPTISMAL ANOINTING WITH OIL  
AND THE LAYING ON OF HANDS**

*The following includes a prayer and a post-baptismal anointing of oil and the laying on of hands, which a pastor may choose to do immediately following the baptism.*

P: Let us pray.

P: Blessed are You, O Lord God Almighty, Source of all good, Sun of Righteousness, who shines the light of salvation to those in the darkness of sin. In the waters of Holy Baptism, You have united Your son/daughter, *name*, in the suffering and death of Your Son, Jesus Christ, cleansing him/her by His blood. Continue to strengthen, seal, and confirm in him/her the gift of Your Holy Spirit, that he/she may live in daily repentance with a faith that ever clings to his/her Savior. Continue to deliver him/her from the power of Satan and keep him/her from false and dangerous teachings, that he/she may be faithful in hearing Christ's Word and receiving His body and blood.

P: By the Lord's Supper, strengthen him/her to believe that no one can atone for sins but Christ alone. Enable him/her to find joy and comfort in Him. From Your Word and Sacraments, may he/she live in faith toward You and in fervent love toward others. May he/she bear his cross with patience and joy until the day of the resurrection of his/her body to life immortal. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, we pray, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen**

*The pastor now anoints the head of the newly baptized in the shape of the cross. He then lays his hands on the newly baptized, saying:*

P: The almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given you the new birth of water and the Spirit and has forgiven you your sins, strengthen, seal, and confirm you with His Spirit and grace to life everlasting.

**C: Amen**

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