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Citations from the Lutheran Confessions are taken from *The Book of Concord* edited by T.G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). The following abbreviations have been used:

- AC — Augsburg Confession
- Ap — Apology of the Augsburg Confession
- Ep — Epitome of the Formula of Concord
- FC — Formula of Concord
- LC — Large Catechism
- SA — Smalcald Articles
- SC — Small Catechism
- SD — Solid Declaration  
of the Formula of Concord

# Admission to the Lord's Supper

*Basics of Biblical and Confessional Teaching*

## INTRODUCTION

The 1998 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) asked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to provide, “in a timely fashion, a careful response to *A Declaration [of Eucharistic Understanding and Practice]*, with special emphasis on pastoral oversight and the role that agreement in the public confession of faith participation in the Lord’s Supper entails.” This response, said the Synod, should be useful “as the basis for study and discussion of this issue throughout the entire Synod.”<sup>1</sup>

Resolution 3–05 mentions two specific issues that relate to admission to the Eucharist: pastoral oversight and doctrinal unity among those who commune. In order to speak to those issues, however, more foundational considerations must lie firmly in place. It is undeniably true that the Synod’s historic position accurately reflects the great stream of churchly tradition.<sup>2</sup> This tradition teaches that

<sup>1</sup> 1998 Resolution 3–05 “To Reaffirm Our Practice of Admission to the Lord’s Supper,” *Convention Proceedings*, 115.

<sup>2</sup> The standard treatment of the practice of the early church is Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans N. E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966). Evidence for current official teaching in the Roman Catholic fellowship may be found in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), paragraphs 1399–1401. Note especially this poignant and worthy statement from the latter source: “*The Eucharist and the unity of Christians*. Before the greatness of this mystery St. Augustine exclaims, ‘O sacrament of devotion! O sign of unity! O bond of charity!’ The more painful the experience of the divisions in the Church which break the common participation in the table of the Lord, the more urgent are our prayers to the Lord that the time of complete unity among all who believe in him may return.” (par. 1398)

The *Catechism* goes on to teach: “Ecclesial communities derived from the Reformation and separated from the Catholic Church, ‘have not preserved the proper reality of the Eucharistic mystery in its fullness, especially because of the absence of the sacrament of Holy Orders.’ It is for this reason that Eucharistic intercommunion with these communities is not possible for the Catholic Church.” (par. 1400)

both (1) a genuine understanding of and faith in Christ's presence in and through the sacramental elements and (2) doctrinal and personal unity among those who commune together are necessary for admission to the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, an appeal to church history, though offering a clear and unified answer, cannot provide a sufficient answer without clear testimonies from the Bible and from the Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of sacred Scripture.

This document offers, therefore, a study of both biblical material and confessional writings as an attempt to foster both discussion and informed agreement within our church body. It has the following overall outline:

- I. The Scriptures
  - A. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34: The Congregation's Sacrament of Unity
  - B. Pastors as Stewards of the Mysteries
  - C. "Doctrinal Divisions" in the New Testament
- II. The Lutheran Confessions
  - A. Introduction: Who Should Not Commune? Two Answers
  - B. How "Christians as Individuals" May Commune Worthily
  - C. Communicants as "Confessors"
- III. A Critique of *A Declaration of Eucharistic Understanding and Practice*
- IV. Concluding Summary
- V. Appendix: Common Questions About Admission to the Lord's Supper

A major goal of this study is to further the discovery of the extent and nature of the agreements and disagreements that exist among us by laying out in some detail the pertinent issues regarding admission to the Lord's Supper. The procedure will be to work carefully from biblical and confessional theology toward an understanding and practice that is faithful to and consistent with biblical and confessional teaching. The problems to be addressed are not simple ones that can receive only cursory answers. While specific response to *A Declaration of Eucharistic Understanding and Practice (DEUP)* occurs in Part III, footnotes throughout the document will make reference to *DEUP* when appropriate. Citations from the New Testament are original translations.

# I. THE SCRIPTURES

## A. 1 Corinthians 11:17–34:

### The Congregation's Sacrament of Unity

#### *Overview of Context*

A contextual study of 1 Cor. 11:17–34 may begin with two important observations that will be reiterated and supported throughout the discussion that follows in this section. First, Paul was dealing with an *intra-congregational* situation in Corinth. The closest modern analogy to Paul's tactics and teaching in 1 Corinthians 11 would be a situation of pastoral care within a particular Christian congregation. Second, the divisiveness of the Corinthian Christians in their eucharistic assemblies was such a heinous affront precisely because the Lord's Supper is divinely given to maintain and preserve spiritual unity among those who gather. To gather in disunity, then, is to contradict directly the very nature of the Sacrament and the purpose for which it exists.<sup>3</sup>

The entirety of Paul's first Corinthian letter reveals that the Corinthian Christians were a divided, fractured group. Their schismatic behaviors and attitudes consistently contradicted the truths of the Gospel contained in Paul's apostolic teaching. It was not that the Corinthians' divisions actually divided the body of Christ, for the church possesses a unity in the Savior that no particular sin can destroy. Similarly, the schisms and factions present at the celebration of the Eucharist (1 Corinthians 11) did not nullify or invalidate the Supper. Such divisions, however, contradicted the Gospel and turned the Lord's Supper from Christ's gracious gift into Christ's presence of judgment.

Already in the first chapter Paul rebuked the Corinthians' divisions as an offense to the Gospel. When the apostle writes, "Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:13), the expected answer to all of these questions is, "No!" Yet the tragedy of the

<sup>3</sup> DEUP's major shortcoming may be mentioned here at the beginning of this study. DEUP simply makes no mention whatsoever of the corporate dimensions of the Eucharist and the corporate implications for those who would commune together.

Corinthians' life together is that they are behaving as if the answer were "Yes!" In truth, Christ cannot be divided, but the Corinthian believers, members of the body of Christ, have created "schisms" (σχίσματα, 1 Cor. 1:10) among themselves as if Christ *were* divided.

Foremost among the Corinthians' many problems was their failure to recognize and nurture their community life as a manifestation of the Gospel and its power. They were missing the connection between union with Christ and loving unity with one another. In response to this Paul proclaimed:

For if someone sees you who have knowledge reclining in an idol's temple, won't his conscience, because it is weak, be 'built up' with the result that he eats meat offered to idols? For the one who is weak, the brother on account of whom Christ died, is being destroyed because of your knowledge. And in this way, by sinning against the brothers and beating their consciences, you are sinning against Christ. (1 Cor. 8:10-12)

The Corinthians' sinning in their relationships with one another was at the same time, and more importantly, sinning against Christ Himself. Sin on the horizontal, interpersonal dimension really was sin on the vertical dimension. Accordingly, Paul sought to remedy the problems of "schisms" (σχίσματα; 1 Cor. 1:10; 11:18; 12:25), "factions" (αἰρέσεις; 1 Cor. 11:19) and their tendency "to divide" (μερίζειν; 1 Cor. 1:13) into competing groups.

Given this context it is not surprising that the two passages in which Paul teaches about (or relies on teaching about) the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:16-18; 1 Cor. 11:17-34) primarily emphasize the *corporate* character and implications of the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup> Paul explains why the Corinthian Christians cannot partake of the sacrifices at idol shrines while also eating the Lord's Supper. After establishing that their eating and drinking is, in fact, participation in the body and the blood of the Lord (10:16), Paul continues: "Because there is one loaf, we many are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (10:17). The Lord's body in the Supper actually effects—that is, maintains—the oneness of the body of believers, the Christians who

<sup>4</sup> Paul is so focused on the corporate question that in these passages he leaves entirely unstated that benefit of the Eucharist that we normally regard as central to the Lord's own institution—namely, the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28)! The apostle explicitly deals only with the corporate aspects and benefits of the Lord's Supper.

eat the bread.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, the Corinthians must not see themselves merely as "individuals" who are free to do as their "freedom" and "knowledge" might choose or suggest. Even to speak of "individuals" communing in the Eucharist can lead to serious misunderstanding, "for the participation in Christ's body and blood . . . necessarily involves the individual with those with whom he or she is communing."<sup>6</sup>

As we turn to examine the crucial passage 1 Cor. 11:17-34, the following two points from this brief contextual survey are important. First, Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 11:17-34 occurs in the broader context of disunity and factionalism that was so central to the Corinthian situation. Second, the apostle has already established the unbreakable connection between the horizontal and vertical dimensions in the Christian life. To sin against the brother is also to sin against Christ. Accordingly, divisions may not be tolerated or fostered within the Christian congregation, for they contradict the Gospel itself and threaten the very life of the church.

### *Exegesis of 1 Cor. 11:17-34*

#### **The Social Setting**

What was going on in the Corinthian house churches as they celebrated the Lord's Supper? Specifically, what sinful attitudes and practices evoked Paul's response? Although precise knowledge of the situation at Corinth eludes us, we can rely on the one hand on knowledge of Greco-Roman society in general and Corinth specifically, and on the other hand on a careful reading of Paul's own words.

The general contours of the situation are clear. The house churches of Corinth were practicing a communal meal in connection with the observance of the Lord's Supper.<sup>7</sup> During the communal meal there was inequitable distribution of the food, resulting in excessive eating and drinking on the part of some and a lack of pro-

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted carefully that here Paul speaks of the entire Eucharist even though he mentions only the loaf, the bread. Through a synecdoche ("a part for the whole"), "one loaf" refers to both the bread and the wine, the body and the blood of the Lord.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey A. Gibbs, "An Exegetical Case for Close(d) Communion: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22; 11:17-34," *Concordia Journal* 21 (April 1995):153.

<sup>7</sup> There may be a reference to a Corinthian house church under Gaius' patronage in Rom. 16:23 (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14). Note that Prisca and Aquila sponsor house churches in both Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19) and Rome (Rom. 16:4-5)!

vision for others. The richer Christians, who owned houses, were particularly subject to Paul's disapproval: "It's not that you don't have houses in which to eat and drink, is it?" (11:22a).

But we can go further than this general picture. Recent scholarship on Corinth and on features of Greco-Roman meals brings interesting and helpful insights. Noting what he calls a "staggering" number of Corinthian inscriptions that honor the person who paid for and erected the monuments in question, Ben Witherington concludes that

Corinth was a city where public boasting and self-promotion had become an art form.

The Corinthian people thus lived within an honor-shame cultural orientation, where public recognition was often more important than facts and where the worst thing that could happen was for one's reputation to be publicly tarnished. . . .

These cultural factors come into play over and over again in 1 and 2 Corinthians, where boasting, preening, false pride, and the like are topics that the apostle addresses repeatedly.<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, this boastful aspect of Corinthian, Greco-Roman culture manifested itself specifically at communal meals. In fact, contemporary pagan writers critiqued their own culture for this tendency. Festive meals were a standard feature of various group associations found in the Roman Empire. When wealthy patrons hosted meals in their homes, society's stratifications often manifested themselves.<sup>9</sup> According to Gordon Fee, the average dining room (the *triclinium*) in a good-sized home was about eighteen feet square, comfortably seating (or rather, reclining) as many as twelve people. A larger number of guests, perhaps as many as fifty people, could be served in the typical courtyard (the *atrium*).<sup>10</sup> As one writer expresses it,

In Greco-Roman society, patrons often seated members of their own high social class in the special *triclinium* (the best room),

<sup>8</sup> Ben Witherington, III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Wayne Meeks writes: "Festive meals were a common feature of the life of voluntary associations of all sorts, and the Christians' Supper was still understood in this way by Pliny, who early in the second century in Bithynia forbade such meals, in accordance with Trajan's ban against clubs." *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale, 1983), 158.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 533-34.



while others were served, in plain view of this room, in the *atrium* (the couches in which might seat as many as forty persons). The guests in the larger room, the *atrium*, were served inferior food and inferior wine, and often complained about the situation.<sup>11</sup>

The parallels to the setting in Corinth are revealing. The culture was setting the agenda for the church's practice. Some members were eating much, and eating well, and were doing so in the very presence of fellow Christians who received less.<sup>12</sup> Others were receiving precious little (if anything) at the community's meal.<sup>13</sup> This was life as they knew it. Some members of society simply *were* more important than others, and they deserved special treatment.<sup>14</sup> There was no need to be as one. Divisions were a normal part of life, and the Corinthians saw no contradiction between life in the world and life in the church.

Paul's words, therefore, fit perfectly into the setting: "It's not that you don't have houses in which to eat and drink, is it? Or are

<sup>11</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 477. Martial, a younger contemporary of St. Paul, commented on Roman society on all levels. Ben Witherington cites Martial concerning dinners where levels of social status were reflected on the menu: "Since I am asked to dinner..., why is not the same dinner served to me as to you? You eat oysters fattened in the Lucrine Lake while I suck a mussel through a hole in the shell. You get mushrooms while I get hog funguses. You tackle turbot, but I brill. Golden with fat, a turtledove gorges you with its bloated rump, but a magpie that has died in its cage is set before me. Why do I dine without you, Ponticus, even though I am dining with you?" *Conflict and Community*, 242.

<sup>12</sup> There is some debate over the translation of *προλαμβάνει* (v. 21) and *ἐκδέχεσθε* (v. 33). The question is whether the normal temporal component of meaning should be reflected: "takes beforehand" and "wait for," or whether the equally well-attested translations of "receive" and "welcome" should be preferred. In a thorough and balanced discussion, A. Andrew Das opts for the latter translations. The rich Christians are likely receiving and abusing their abundance of food at the same time that poorer Christians are receiving poorer fare. "1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Revisited," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 62 (July 1998):188-92.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Lampe, in "The Eucharist: Identifying with Christ on the Cross," *Interpretation* 48 (January 1994): 38-39, thinks that the Corinthians' community meals were a form of the *ἔρανος* a kind of potluck to which each participant brought something. The *ἔρανος* is, according to Lampe, as early as Homer and as late as the second century A.D. "Either each participant ate his or her own food, brought along in a basket, or all of the provisions were put on a common table, as is done at a potluck dinner" (38).

<sup>14</sup> Witherington writes, "If the Christians themselves viewed their household assemblies as being like such *collegia*, some of them might also have assumed that it was appropriate to operate the group according to the social conventions of the larger society. These associations had a clear hierarchical structure of deities, then patrons or leaders, and, finally, ordinary members, which on the surface at least would seem to parallel the structure of the Christian *ekklesia* in Corinth. It should not surprise us then that the Corinthians would revert to normal socializing and dining behavior at their meetings (cf. 1 Cor.11:20-22). The major difference between the Christian house meetings and such societies was that the Christians gathered mainly for religious worship and fellowship, not ordinary socializing with a religious element. . . ." (32).

you despising the church of God and bringing shame upon those who do not have [houses]?" (1 Cor. 11:22) We should be clear about the *overt* sin against which Paul brings his apostolic rebuke and correction. The *overt* sin was their toleration, even promotion, of divisions and factions between Christians. Yet, as the structure of his argument reveals, Paul knew that the *primary* or *fundamental* sin was sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. Because the Corinthians were failing to live out the Sacrament's purposes for their life together, their sinful disunity automatically meant that they were abusing the Lord's Supper, the congregation's sacrament of unity.<sup>15</sup> In ironic contrast to his earlier statement (11:2), Paul sums up the sorry state of their disunity: "What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you!" (11:22) And what *does* Paul say to them?

### Paul's Response

Remarkably, yet fittingly, Paul responded with the doctrine of the Sacrament of the Altar, with the declaration of what the Eucharist actually is. For Paul the *primary* sin, the *fundamental* issue, was not their abuse of one another, but their abuse of the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians' disunity contradicted the very purpose of the Eucharist, as Paul had already taught them in 1 Cor. 10:16-17:

The cup of blessing which we bless, it's the participation in the blood of Christ, isn't it? The bread which we break, it's the participation in the body of Christ, isn't it? Because there is one loaf, we many are one body for we all partake from the one loaf.

On the assumption that his readers have agreed with him in chapter 10, Paul responded to the situation in chapter 11 by proclaiming to them the words of institution. Their despising of one another did not elicit Paul's praise because (*γάρ*) the *Eucharist* was what was really going on. Christ's body was given—for *you all* (plural). Christ's blood was received, maintaining the new gracious covenant between God and His people—all God's people.<sup>16</sup> The body and the blood were for the remembrance of Jesus. This was not an optional

<sup>15</sup>The problem is not new in the story of God's people (cf. Is.1:14-17; James 2: 1-4; Gal. 2:12-15).

<sup>16</sup>The corporate character of the Eucharist is further underscored by its institution in the context of the Passover meal (Matthew 26; Mark 16; Luke 22). At Passover, God called out of Egypt a *people* for His own possession. In the giving of His body and His blood into death, Christ instituted a new covenant relationship between God and His *people*.

way to view the Sacrament.<sup>17</sup> The Lord's Supper was the communicants' remembering of Jesus' work on their behalf. That is to say,<sup>18</sup> they were proclaiming to one another its meaning and its benefits.<sup>19</sup>

Yet all the while the Corinthians through their disunity—their despising the church and shaming the poor—were contradicting both the Sacrament's purpose and the Sacrament's character as proclamation. Their behavior belied the Supper's purpose of making and maintaining the many as one. Through His paradoxical Gospel wisdom, God had chosen the foolish and weak things of the world in order to shame the wise and the strong. But the Corinthians were heeding neither the proclamatory character nor the unifying purpose of the Supper. Rather than being one voice, their assemblies were a cacophony of conflict. Their divisions effectively denied the shameful, paradoxical, salvific death of Christ which the Supper declares and the benefits of that death offered in the Supper.<sup>20</sup> In response to their sinful disunity, Paul taught them about the Eucharist, the congregation's sacrament of unity.

<sup>17</sup> Paul emphasizes the Eucharist as the remembrance of Jesus by repeating the Lord's words "for my remembrance" (εις την ἐμην ἀνάμνησιν, 11:24, 25). The phrase is absent from Matthew and Mark, and present in the Lord's words in Luke 22:19 only once, after the giving of the bread.

<sup>18</sup> The close connection between "the remembrance of Jesus" and the "proclaiming of the Lord's death" is seen in the repetition of the rare adverb "as often as" (ὡσάκις, 11:25, 26), found in the New Testament only here and in Rev. 11:6.

<sup>19</sup> The indirect object of "you are proclaiming" (καταγγέλλετε) is unexpressed. In the present context, however, it seems most likely that the proclamation is going on among members of the congregation. That is to say, when one participates in the Lord's Supper one is proclaiming the Lord's death to one's fellow communicants. If this is so, then "you are proclaiming the Lord's death" (11:26) is perhaps parallel in meaning to "for my remembrance" (11:24, 25).

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that "the Lord's death" stands in an emphatic, fronted position in 11:26. Beverly Roberts Gaventa emphasizes the uniqueness of the phrase "the Lord's death" and states: "In my judgment, the phrase 'the death of the Lord' refers to Jesus' death in all its significance as the scandalous event in which all human values and expectations are overturned (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23)." "You Proclaim the Lord's Death: 1 Corinthians 11:26 and Paul's Understanding of Worship," *Review and Expositor* 80 (Summer 1983): 380. She further comments, "That death, in Paul's view, stands diametrically opposed to the claims of social status that were at work in the Corinthian community. To proclaim the death of the Lord is, to say the least, not to proclaim one's own rights or prerogatives" (384).

## Apostolic Exhortation and Warning: Discerning the Body

In 1 Cor. 11:27 Paul drew a solemn conclusion (“Therefore,” ὡστε): unworthy eating and drinking mean profanation of, sinning against, the sacramental presence of Christ’s body and blood.<sup>21</sup> In this context the unworthiness of their eating and drinking consisted especially in “the loveless and inconsiderate behavior of the Corinthians at the love-feasts and Supper.”<sup>22</sup>

The corrective? Each member of the congregation should examine or test himself or herself, and after that self-examination each should eat and drink properly. For, as Paul shockingly explained, sacramental participation brings God’s judgment as long as<sup>23</sup> the communicants do not “discern the body.” That the Corinthians have *not* been “discerning the body” is clear from what follows. They have been eating and drinking judgment, resulting in physical sickness and death among their members (1 Cor. 11:30). These *Christians*, whom Paul names as “my brothers” (11:33), were being judged by the Lord, although even in that judgment God’s purpose to save was at work. As they were being judged they were being trained or disciplined by God so that they might not be condemned along with the world (11:32). God was dealing here in judgment with His people, but still He desired their salvation.

The crucial phrase, much controverted, is “discerning the body.” To what does “the body” (τὸ σῶμα) refer? The answer to this question is of primary importance, and it requires a careful and thorough answer.

The primary question is one of reference: to what does “the body” (τὸ σῶμα) refer in 1 Cor. 11:29? In the first place, “the body” in this passage refers to the body of Christ that is truly and sacramentally present and is being received orally by all who were communing in Corinth. The following four factors support this traditional conclusion.

First, the only other use of “the body” in the immediate context refers to Christ’s sacramental presence: “This is my body (τοῦτο μου

<sup>21</sup> The genitive case after the adjective “guilty” (ἔνοχος) can express three things: (1) the punishment to be received (Matt. 26:66); (2) the crime that has been committed (Mark 3:29); or (3) the person or thing against whom the sin has been committed (Is. 54:17; James 2:10). An interpreter who does not hold to the real presence will probably opt for the second sense, as awkward as that might be. If the third sense is what Paul intended, then note well that the real sinning in Corinth is against the Sacrament itself.

<sup>22</sup> V. C. Pfitzner, *Chi Rho Commentary on First Corinthians* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1982), 184.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon Fee notes that the participle “not discerning” may have either a conditional (“if he does not discern”) or a causal (“because he does not discern”) relationship to the main verb. *1 Corinthians*, 562.

ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα), which is on your behalf" (11:24). Moreover, in this immediate context Paul had an opportunity to refer to the church as "the body," and did not do so. Rather, he wrote, "For when you come together in church. . . ." (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ, 11:18).

Second, while the overt sin in Corinth involved a breakdown of congregational fellowship and sin on the horizontal plane, Paul was not content to deal merely on that level. Rather, the reason why (γάρ, 11:23) he refused to praise them (11:22) flows from the realities that are the Supper of the Lord. Their real and *primary* problem was this: because they were eating and drinking the Supper in an unworthy manner, they were guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. The structure of Paul's thought demands the conclusion that at the most important level their failure to "discern" involved the Eucharist itself.<sup>24</sup>

Third, the rhetorical structure of 11:27–29 is significant, especially in relation to 11:30–32. Verse 29 coheres logically as part of the smaller subunit of verses 27–29,<sup>25</sup> which together serve as the referent of "this" ("On account of *this*," διὰ τοῦτο) in verse 30.<sup>26</sup> When Paul writes in 11:30, "on account of *this*," "this" refers to 11:27–29. These three verses then, as a unit, are the ground on which the conclusion of 11:30–32 is based.

The relationship of verses 27–29 to one another may be described as follows:

(27) Situation stated: the problem in Corinth

"Whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord."

(28) Contrast: the exhortation that will undo the problem of verse 27

"But (δέ) let a person examine himself and thus let him eat from the bread and let him drink from the cup."

(29) The ground or reason why the exhortation in verse 28 should be heeded

"For (γάρ) the one who eats and drinks eats and drinks a judgment against himself if he does not discern the body."

<sup>24</sup> Were the Corinthians explicitly denying the doctrine of the real presence? There is no evidence that they were doing so. Yet even if they were correctly confessing the doctrine, their divisions revealed them to be practically rejecting the Eucharist's character and purpose.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Das has recently emphasized the need to describe the rhetorical structure of Paul's argument. "Revisited," 199–201.

<sup>26</sup> Paul uses this phrase "on account of this" (διὰ τοῦτο) 22 times in his epistles. The "this" does refer forward to a purpose about to be articulated at 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Tim. 2:10; Phm. 15. But in all other uses "on account of this" refers back to a section of Paul's argument or narration (cf. Rom. 1:26; 4:16; 5:12; 13:6; 15:9; 1 Cor. 4:17; 11:10, 30; 2 Cor. 4:1; 7:13; 13:10; Eph. 1:15; 5:17; 6:13; Col. 1:9; 1 Thess. 2:13; 3:5, 7; 2 Thess. 2:11).

The sub-unit consisting of 11:27–29 is entirely concerned with bread and wine and with body and blood. It deals with unworthy eating and drinking. The most natural direction to look for help in determining the referent of “the body” in verse 29 is back to verses 27 and 28.<sup>27</sup> When one looks in that direction, the use of τὸ σῶμα in the phrase “discerning the body” refers to the eucharistic presence of Christ’s body.

Fourth, in the places in 1 Corinthians where the noun “body” does refer directly and unambiguously to the church as the body of Christ, there are always explicit textual markers that indicate that reference. Especially when Paul is shifting quickly from a eucharistic reference of “the body” to an ecclesial one, he provides explicit indications of that move, as in 1 Cor. 10:16–17.<sup>28</sup>

The question arises, however: if “the body” in verse 29 is a reference to the eucharistic presence of Christ’s true body, why does the apostle not say “discerning the body *and the blood*”? Some think that the singular use of “the body” forces the conclusion that Paul is not referring here to the sacramental presence of Christ but only to the church as the body of Christ. This understanding does not necessarily follow, however, and against it the following factors can be raised.

First, a natural explanation for the shortened reference to “the body” is that the phrase functions as a synecdoche in which the whole of something is referred to by a part of the whole.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> This is, of course, the direction in which most of the later manuscript tradition looks. The phrase “body of the Lord” is found in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts (N<sup>2</sup> C<sup>3</sup> D F G (Ψ, 1241<sup>S</sup>) 1881<sup>C</sup> Majority it vg<sup>cl</sup> sy; Ambst.).

<sup>28</sup> Das comments on 1 Cor. 10:17: “The words ‘we, who are many’ and ‘we all’ clearly indicate that Paul is talking about the people who have come together in the Sacrament. He is shifting the discussion from the Sacrament, the one loaf, to its effects in the body, the church (the ‘we who are many’). The same contextual indicators are used also in 1 Corinthians 12 (for example, 12:27: ‘Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it’).” “Revisiting,” 198.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. footnote 5 above. As a further example of one sacramental element used to refer to the entire Eucharist, one can note St. Luke’s phrase, “breaking of the bread” (Acts 2:42).

In an interesting parallel, Philip Melancthon in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession allows that passages that refer only to “the breaking of the bread” [cf. Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7] may refer to the Lord’s Supper. However, against the Roman practice of communing the laity with only one kind, he insists that “it does not follow that only one part was given; for by the ordinary usage of language, naming one part also signifies the other” (Ap XXII, 7; Tappert, 237). As an illustration of how easily this idiom may occur, note the phenomenon earlier in the Apology: “When we are baptized, when we eat the Lord’s body, when we are absolved. . . .” (Ap XIII, 4; Tappert, 211). The Smalcald Articles also states: “. . . we have no regard for the subtle sophistry of those who teach that *bread and wine* surrender or lose their natural substance and retain only the appearance and shape of *bread* without any longer being real bread. . . .” (SA III, VI, 5; Tappert, 311; emphasis added).

Second, some wish to find great significance in the shortened expression "the body." Yet these same interpreters do not find similar significance in the other discernable "shortenings" in the immediate context. But two other discernable abbreviations are present and are reflected in the manuscript tradition.<sup>30</sup> If one "shortening" ("the body" in 11:29) has great significance, then why are the other two "shortenings" not significant ("the bread" in 11:27, and "the one who eats and drinks" in 11:29)? The manuscript tradition's repeated attempts to clarify Paul's meaning show that this is a passage in which Paul is arguing succinctly and tightly. And we do know that the apostle fully anticipated the opportunity to flesh out his own meaning at a time not too far in the future: "But the remaining things I will set in order when I come" (11:34).

The strongest case, then, can be made for a eucharistic reference of "the body" at 11:29. The Corinthian Christians have not been "discerning the eucharistic presence of Christ's body and blood." Having argued this, however, is that all that we might say? Is it possible that "discerning the body" *also and at the same time* involves a "subtle allusion" to the church which gathers around the Sacrament?<sup>31</sup> Several contextual factors support this conclusion as well, and even if "the body" (τὸ σῶμα) in 11:29 does not directly *refer* to the congregation gathered, it certainly does *imply* or *involve* it.

In the first place it has already been observed that 1 Cor. 11:27–29 is a tightly knit unit. The verses that follow, 11:30–32, have the same character. Noteworthy is the way the apostle uses words of the "judge" (κριν-) stem: "judgment" (κρίμα, 11:29, 34); "to discern" (διακρίνειν, 11:29, 31); "to judge" (κρίνειν, 11:31, 32); "to condemn" (κατακρίνειν, 11:32). In such a context it is not at all unlikely that Paul may be accomplishing more than one thing at one time through careful and subtle use of language.

Second, there is a parallelism between 11:29 and 11:31. As noted above, 11:27–29 is a discrete sub-unit of Paul's argument, serving as the logical ground for the conclusion that begins at 11:30. To jump

<sup>30</sup> At 11:27 Paul writes: "whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily. . . ." A few manuscripts (8 D<sup>2</sup> L 326. 1505 *al sy*<sup>h</sup>; Ambst) offer a clarification and insert the phrase "bread of the Lord" to clarify. Again, when Paul at 11:29 writes "For the one who eats and drinks, eats and drinks a judgment against himself. . ." the vast majority of the manuscript tradition (8<sup>2</sup> C<sup>3</sup> D F G Ψ 1881 Majority latt sy) felt a need to make explicit what was implicit by adding the adverb "For the one who eats and drinks *unworthily*. . . ."

<sup>31</sup> The phrase is from Andrew Das, who notes the possibility of such an allusion. "Revisiting," 201.

directly from 11:29 to 11:31, therefore, runs the risk of ignoring the structure of Paul's argument. Nevertheless, there is a striking parallelism of sentence structure that may be diagrammed as follows:

11:29—The one who eats and drinks eats and drinks a judgment against himself . . .  
if he does not "discern the body" (μη διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα).

11:31— If we were "discerning ourselves" (εἰ δὲ ἑαυτοὺς διεκρίνομεν), we would not be being judged.

The parallelism is apparent. "Not discerning the body" in verse 29 is parallel to the conditional<sup>32</sup> clause, "If we<sup>33</sup> were discerning ourselves [but we have not been doing so]. . . ." A right perception of the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist will necessarily entail a right perception of one's relationship to fellow communicants.

In the third place and most broadly, Paul's entire theology of the Eucharist's corporate character and purpose supports an allusion to the church in the words "discerning the body" in 11:29. As we have already observed, the two "dimensions" in the Lord's Supper cannot be separated. Indeed, after issuing the warning and exhortation of 11:27–29 and offering his apostolic explanation for why God's judgment (but *not* condemnation!<sup>34</sup>) has come upon some of the Corinthian Christians, the apostle concludes, "Therefore, my brothers, when you are coming together to eat, welcome one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, in order that you may not come together for judgment" (11:33–34a).

<sup>32</sup> As the English translations make clear, 11:31 is a "contrary to fact" conditional sentence in Greek. Paul knows that the Corinthians have not, in fact, been discerning themselves.

<sup>33</sup> It may seem curious that Paul, in addressing a serious problem among the Corinthians, now writes, "If we were discerning ourselves. . . ." As Leon Morris notes, Paul "has a habit of classing himself with those he is writing about, quite irrespective of whether the activity in question is one he would engage in or not. Indeed, quite often it is impossible to envisage Paul as engaging in the activity of which he writes." *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 88–9. Morris gives several excellent examples, including 1 Cor. 6:15 and 10:22.

<sup>34</sup> It is crucial to note that in these verses Paul distinguishes between divine *judgment* and divine *condemnation*. The Corinthians have been receiving God's judgment (κρίμα, 11:29, 34); God has been judging (κρινόμενοι, 11:32) them. But the purpose for this judgment has been a disciplinary one ("we are being disciplined," παιδεύόμεθα) in order that the Christians might *not be condemned* with the unbelieving world (ἵνα μὴ σὺν τῷ κόσμῳ κατακριθῶμεν, 11:32).

This distinction, of course, does not lessen the fearful truth that the Corinthians' divisive eucharistic assemblies were, in fact, bringing God's judgment upon them and their assemblies!



So then, what does it mean to “discern the body” and thus to commune “worthily”? From the particulars of 1 Cor. 11:17–34 the following points can be stated with confidence.

First, “discerning the body” requires faith that Christ’s true body and blood are received in, with, and under the eucharistic bread and wine. This is a *sine qua non* for all discussion of Paul’s theology and understanding of the Lord’s Supper. We do not actually know if some of the Corinthians were denying this teaching outright. But if they did not deny it *de jure*, they were denying it *de facto* by their schisms and factions (11:18–19), for their behavior contradicted the promised benefit of the Lord’s Supper and brought divine judgment upon some of their number.

Second, “discerning the body” implies faith in and desire for the effects of the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s own words of institution (Matt. 26:28) indicate that the primary benefit of the Eucharist is the forgiveness of sins. Yet in the Corinthian situation Paul focuses so strongly on the corporate character and benefits of the Supper that the forgiveness of sins receives scarcely any attention. The Eucharist is God’s means for preserving the unity of the church, maintaining the many Christians as one body since they all eat of the one loaf (1 Cor. 10:17). To create divisions is to contradict the character and purpose of the Sacrament, and to fail to discern the body.

Third, the context indicates that “discerning the body” must involve a repentant willingness to remove sinful divisions between Christians that fracture the visible unity of the congregation and contradict the Gospel-corporate character of the Lord’s Supper. All who commune must examine themselves and through repentance and faith they must find the divinely-created willingness to remove divisions and to preserve unity with fellow communicants. In the context of 1 Cor. 11:17–34, the overt divisions seem to have been primarily of a personal and/or sociological character, although schisms of a more doctrinal nature cannot be absolutely excluded.<sup>35</sup> While there is little in the context that corresponds to the phenomenon of “doctrinal disagreements” between Christian denominations, that should not surprise us. As noted earlier, the apostle deals with

<sup>35</sup> The Corinthian Christians clearly did have divisions of a doctrinal character that included following after different teachings (1 Cor. 1:10), rejecting apostolic teaching regarding morality (1 Corinthians 5), abuses in the context of worship (1 Corinthians 12–14), different views on the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15), etc.

*intra-congregational* divisions. Yet as we shall see below in "Pastors as Stewards of the Mysteries," Paul does deal with doctrinal disunity among the Corinthians. He calls them back under his own apostolic authority and teaching.

### *Summary Observations of "The Congregation's Sacrament of Unity"*

1. Christians can commune "unworthily" (ἀναξίως). This may be difficult to understand, perhaps, when we recall the gracious character and purposes of the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, Paul's testimony is clear. The apostle, to be sure, carefully distinguishes between the judgment (κρίμα) and training (παιδεύεσθαι) that God administers on the one hand, and being "condemned along with the world" (κατακριθῆναι σὺν τῷ κόσμῳ) on the other hand. Yet no child of God should commune in such a way that this divine training and judgment become necessary.

2. The key to communing in a worthy manner is the ability and willingness to "discern the body." This ability and willingness is God's gift. It consists of repentance and faith, and these move in two directions at the same time. Repentance applies to sin committed against God in general, the vertical dimension. But owing to the corporate character of the Sacrament, such repentance also applies specifically and especially to one's relationship to fellow communicants, the horizontal dimension. One who communes "worthily" acknowledges the importance of preserving a unity with fellow communicants and is willing to do what is needed to remove any fracture or division in that unity.

The faith of one who communes worthily includes faith in Christ in a general way as well as faith in the real presence of Christ's body and blood. Moreover, faith in the Sacrament's benefits is also required, and especially its purpose to maintain the corporate identity and unity of the church as the body of Christ. Thus, faith in the Sacrament's benefits also moves in two directions: toward the blessing of renewed relationship with God in Christ as well as toward the blessing of preserved and restored unity with fellow communicants.

3. The Lord's Supper, Paul declares, is a joint proclamation of the Lord's death, that is, of the nature and benefits of the Lord's death. This is a point of some importance to Paul. Paul twice repeats Christ's words that His body and blood are "for my remembrance" (11:24, 25) *as often as* the bread will be eaten and the cup will be drunk. Just so, *as often as* the Corinthians eat and drink the Supper they are proclaiming—perhaps especially to each other<sup>36</sup>—the nature and benefits of the Lord's death until He comes. Yet, the disunity in their assemblies was giving the lie to the proclamation of the Lord's death, even as such factionalism stood in contradiction to the Lord's Supper and the gifts that it offers.

4. The next point should be familiar. Since the body and blood of Christ are for the oneness and unity of the body, those who commune must not perpetrate or ignore sinful disunity in their midst. Paul's treatment of "divisions" at the Lord's Supper (σχίσματα, 11:19) probably has specific reference to the social class distinctions that are defiling the Corinthians' communal meals and the accompanying eucharistic celebration. The apostle is not indifferent to divisions of a doctrinal nature, however, as the next section of this study will describe. In 1 Corinthians the apostle is dealing, as it were, with members of his own congregation. He therefore addresses the immediate abuses regarding the Lord's Supper in chapter eleven, while pastorally, patiently, and firmly dealing with other doctrinal and moral aberrations throughout the remainder of the letter.

Nevertheless, this must be said: disunity contradicts the very character of the Lord's Supper itself. This point has immense implications for pastoral and congregational practice in our churches today. Lutherans, it is true, have given some traditional emphasis to the necessity of mutual forgiveness and reconciliation among those who participate together at the congregation's eucharistic assembly. But more emphasis and teaching would reflect the apostle's chief and explicit concern in dealing with the fractured Corinthian situation. Modern situations of congregational conflict and in-fighting can bear obvious and eerie resemblance to the situation in Corinth.

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 19 on the question of "to whom are the Corinthians proclaiming the death of the Lord?" It seems more likely that the proclamation is to one's fellow communicants (cf. the use of the verb "to proclaim" [καταγγέλλειν] at 1 Cor. 2:1; 9:14; Col. 1:28). If this is true, it sharpens the contradiction between the divisiveness of the Corinthians and the content of their mutual, eucharistic proclamation. Fee writes, "Thus the focus of Paul's concern is on this meal as a means of proclaiming Christ's death, a point the Corinthians' action is obviously bypassing." *1 Corinthians*, 557.

Pastors should continue regularly to teach their congregations about the need for unity, mutual love, and forgiveness at the congregation's sacrament of unity.

## B. Pastors as Stewards of the Mysteries

### *The Pastor in 1 Corinthians*

We may turn now to address specifically one of the chief concerns expressed in 1998 Resolution 3-05, the role of pastoral oversight in the administration of the Lord's Supper. A superficial reading of 1 Corinthians 11 finds no explicit mention of pastoral oversight. Paul simply addresses the members of the house churches directly: "Let a person examine himself. . . ."

Were there pastors in the house churches of Corinth? A strong case can be argued in the affirmative, for we know what the apostolic practice was: "appoint elders in each city" (Titus 1:5; cf. 1 Timothy 3; Acts 14:23). Moreover, some of the names of these men may actually appear in 1 Cor. 16:17-18: "And I rejoice at the coming of Stephanus and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because these men filled up your need. For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore, acknowledge men such as these."

Nevertheless, Paul speaks directly about none of these Corinthian pastors or elders in his dealings with the Christians there because *the apostle himself is the one exercising pastoral oversight in the troubled situation*. He is their one "father" in Christ (1 Cor. 4:15-16), and both of the canonical Corinthian epistles reflect the apostle's urgent need to call the Corinthians back to a joyful acknowledgment of and submission to Paul's own apostolic teaching and authority. We may find insight, then, into the exercise of pastoral oversight regarding the congregation's sacrament of unity by examining the apostle's own approach. 1 Corinthians reflects a pastor dealing with members of his own congregation regarding both the "direct" abuse of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34) as well as moral errors and doctrinal aberrations.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> DEUP was rightly faulted by 1998 synodical Resolution 3-05 for its silence on the issue of pastoral oversight.

### *"Stewards of the Mysteries" in Context*

"Let a person thus regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries; here finally it is sought among stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:1-2). Paul's well-known words contain a two-fold emphasis that reflects both his calling as an apostle and the heart of pastoral ministry and service. On the one hand, Paul and other Christian teachers such as Apollos and Cephas (cf. 1 Cor. 3:21) are *only* servants and unimportant in themselves. "What then is Apollos? And what then is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to each one. . . . Therefore neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but the one who gives growth is God" (1 Cor. 3:7).

On the other hand, Paul, the Corinthians' spiritual father, is a servant of *Christ* and a steward of *God's* mysteries. The only opinion regarding his faithfulness that matters is God's opinion. And so Paul—apostle, servant of Christ, steward of God's mysteries, and pastor to his "children"—spends the entire first three chapters leading up to 1 Cor. 4:1 correcting the Corinthians. He chides them for their factions, for their worldly wisdom, for their failure spiritually to discern the gifts of God's Spirit, and for their prolonged period of spiritual infancy. The pastor does not leave his congregation in its error. Rather, he lovingly yet firmly teaches them the truth and calls them back to the "foolishness" of the Gospel in both their doctrine and their behavior.

The goal of such spiritual service and stewardship is that the Corinthian Christians would continue to know and more deeply to appreciate Christ and Him crucified, so that their faith would not be in human wisdom, but in God's power (1 Cor. 2:2, 5). The Corinthians indeed are "the church of God which is in Corinth, made holy in Christ Jesus, called saints," to whom the grace of God has been given and who have been enriched in every way in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2, 4-5). Nevertheless, their spiritual father must correct them, and as Christ's servant and the steward of God's mysteries he must show them how they are not apprehending God's wisdom hidden in mystery (1 Cor. 2:7). The foundation laid (for there can be no other) is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). But the task is now one of building and to that task Paul the pastor sets his hand in 1 Corinthians as Christ's servant and steward of the Gospel's mysteries. Paul preach-

es the Law and the Gospel, corrects error, encourages, and rebukes. He leaves no stone unturned, no error left in its darkness. He writes with love and with firmness.

This is the pastoral approach of Paul with regard to his own congregations, his own "members." When addressing the abuses found in the context of their eucharistic assembly, he speaks directly to those abuses. But he patiently speaks also to other problems, calling the Christians to repentance and assuming that they will respond:

I will come to you when I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia, and perhaps I will remain or even winter with you, in order that you may send me on my way, wherever I am going. For I do not wish now to see you in passing, for I hope for some time to remain with you—if the Lord permits. (1 Cor. 16:5-7)

Other New Testament passages reflect the same character of the apostolic and pastoral office with its general oversight. In Acts 20:28 this same apostle gives charge to the elders of the churches in the area of Ephesus. The elders bear a two-fold responsibility: shepherding and nurturing the flock, and at the same time defending the flock from ravenous false teachers (cf. Matt. 7:15) who attempt to wreak havoc both from without and from within.

Pay attention to yourselves and to the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd God's church which he made his own possession through his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will enter among you, not sparing the flock, and from you yourselves men will arise who speak perverse things so as to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch. . . (Acts 20:28-31a)

The writer to the Hebrews also reflects this common biblical conviction that God has set pastors among His people to care for them and to keep watch over their spiritual condition:

Obey those who lead you and submit, because they themselves are keeping watch on behalf of your souls as those who give an account, in order that they may do this with joy and not with groaning, for this would be hurtful for you. (Heb. 13:17)

From this brief glance at the context of 1 Cor. 4:1-2 and several other passages of Scripture we may conclude the following. Paul's practice and admonition in 1 Corinthians 11 is only one manifestation of the larger reality. He deals with erring or wayward members of congregations over which he exercises apostolic and pastoral

oversight. Because this is the case, Paul deals patiently with their errors as one who seeks both to rebuke and to nurture. The Corinthians have not separated themselves from Paul's authority, and so he is patient. He shows us how a parish pastor should proceed in dealing with his own members. Abuses of and misunderstandings about the Lord's Supper must be addressed. Other matters also should receive attention, to be sure. But as long as they are "his" members, Paul realizes that their understanding and spiritual formation will at times reflect their spiritual immaturity.

Application for modern pastoral practice is evident and important. No pastor should subject the members of his own congregation to an exhaustive "theological examination" as evidence of worthiness to commune. Rather, the pastor teaches and exhorts to right faith and understanding with regard to the Eucharist. When other problems, misunderstandings, and errors arise, the pastor deals with them patiently, yet firmly. The steward of God's mysteries gives careful attention lest his members create or maintain sinful divisions or distinctions that contradict the purposes of the Lord's Supper. He teaches the Christians entrusted to his care and guidance to "discern the body." He also deals with other errors and aberrations as they arise, firmly yet with patient love.

But 1 Corinthians 11 does not directly speak to the issue of "outsiders" or visitors, of Christians who have stated their allegiance to a different and erring confession of the Gospel and its truth. To that issue we may now speak, the issue of doctrinal division among Christians.

### C. "Doctrinal Divisions" in the New Testament

The New Testament writers' primary distinction among teachers and teachings separates apostolic from non-apostolic, light from darkness, faith from unbelief.

Children it is the last hour, and just as you heard that the antichrist was coming, also now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. They have come from us, but they were not from us. For if they were from us, they would have remained with us. . . . Who is the liar except the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Everyone who denies the Son does not have the Father. . . . (1 John 2:18-20, 22-23a)

So also Paul himself calls down the anathema, the very curse of hell itself, upon the Judaizing teachers in Galatia:

I am amazed that so quickly you are deserting the One who called you by the grace of Christ for another gospel, which is not another, except there are some who are troubling you and wishing to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven preach to you contrary to what we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said beforehand and now again I am saying, if someone is preaching to you contrary to what you received, let him be accursed. (Gal. 1:8-9)

The presence of this "true gospel vs. other gospel" distinction is exactly what one would expect to find in the writings of the first generation of the apostolic church.

What about erroneous teaching that exists among those who still may be Christians? All error flows from Satan and from unbelief, and thus all error in itself is completely "non-Christian" or heretical. But false teaching can be confessed not only by unbelievers but also by believers, who by a felicitous inconsistency still cling in faith to Christ Jesus as Savior. This we call "heterodoxy" and the New Testament reveals the presence of heterodox teaching on the part of those who nevertheless may be in the church.<sup>38</sup>

In one sense the modern situation is without parallel in the New Testament writings. That is to say, there were no longstanding, hard lines of confessional and doctrinal disagreement at the time when the New Testament documents were being written. But in another sense internal disagreements already did exist within the pale of New Testament Christendom. In describing the Council of Jerusalem the narrative in Acts recounts that "some of those from the party of the Pharisees who had believed stood up and said. . . ." (Acts 15:5). These members of the "party of the Pharisees" had *believed*; they are "in" the church. But there results a crucial discussion in the Jerusalem council over a major doctrinal disagreement, namely, the relation of Gentile Christians to the law of Moses. The

<sup>38</sup> An important distinction, then, exists between "heterodoxy" and "heresy." Dr. Francis Pieper writes that "properly called a *heterodox church (ecclesia heterodoxa impura)*" is a congregation or church body that "in spite of the divine order, tolerates false doctrine in its midst." *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:422. *Heresy* is the persistent advocacy of false, unscriptural teaching. See the summary of Luther's understanding of heresy as "stubborn error in an article of faith in opposition to Scripture" in the *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, ed. Erwin L. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 375. See also the CTCR's discussion of "heresy" in its 1965 report on *Theology of Fellowship*, 13-15.



happy ending of the story, of course, is that the error held by some in the party of the Pharisees is rejected and the Gospel is resoundingly affirmed: "We [Jewish Christians] believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they [Gentile Christians] will" (Acts 15:11).

A passage that addresses a situation of heterodox teaching in the New Testament period is Rom. 16:17–18:

And I beseech you, brothers, to watch out for those who make dissensions and stumbling blocks contrary to the teaching which you learned, and stay away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord, Christ, but their own belly, and through fair speech and blessings they deceive the hearts of the guileless.

This passage, classically cited to show the importance of orthodox doctrine, is not without its subtleties of interpretation.<sup>39</sup> But regardless of the full exegesis, Paul's words of warning here would certainly and especially *include* heterodox teachers who persuade fellow Christians to think and believe in ways that contradict apostolic confession and teaching. When one considers also the various warnings that the risen Christ issues to the churches in Asia Minor (cf. Revelation 2–3), it is clear that the New Testament itself bears testimony to the presence of heterodoxy within the visible church itself, and to the need to preserve pure doctrine.

What about the relationship between heterodoxy and fellowship at the Lord's Supper? Should Christians who have differing confessions commune at the same table? While the New Testament documents do not specifically discuss this issue, we do have the strong positive statement regarding the early church in Acts 2:42: "And they [those who had received the apostle's word, 2:41] were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers." The reference to a common life devoted to a common teaching is explicit, and it was in such a context that the celebration of the Lord's Supper

<sup>39</sup> The thorough study of Robert George Hoerber, *A Grammatical Study of Romans 16,17* (no publisher; no date) is well known in LCMS circles. Hoerber shows that the phrase "contrary to the doctrine" (παρά τὴν διδασχὴν) may modify either the participle "making" or the substantives "dissensions and stumbling blocks" (4–11). He goes on to present a strong case that "contrary to the doctrine" modifies "dissensions and stumbling blocks" (12–23). For other views, one may survey the standard commentaries on Romans.

took place.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the context of Rom. 16:17–18 includes references to mutual greetings within the Roman churches and from churches elsewhere in the empire, as well as to the “holy kiss.” It is at least probable that the exhortation to avoid those who cause dissensions and stumbling blocks contrary to the received teaching has special application to the corporate worship setting.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, we do have the example of the apostle Paul in his dealings with his own members and with heterodox teaching that exists among them. We may describe in brief his approach and draw conclusions from it.

As noted above, Paul’s instructions and warnings about “divisions” at the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:17–34) probably do not have in mind divisions of a doctrinal nature. The Corinthians were “despising God’s church and shaming those who do not have,” refusing to “wait for” or “welcome” one another at their communal meals (1 Cor. 11:21, 22, 33). The divisions specifically in view are more personal and Paul speaks directly to them. The Corinthians must discern the body and blood of Christ in the Lord’s Supper and repent of the ways that their sinful personal stratifications deny the Gospel and the Gospel character of the Eucharist.

What about doctrinal divisions and heterodox teachings? Paul does not deal with them in 1 Corinthians 11. But he *does* deal with them throughout the remainder of the letter. One searches in vain for the attitude by which Paul would say, “You may think what you like about matters of morality (against 1 Corinthians 5), or pagan worship (against 1 Corinthians 8), or worship practices (against 1 Corinthians 11–14).” These are his members, and he exercises his oversight as steward of the mysteries. It is inconceivable that Paul might say, “Think what you like about these issues. Disagree with

<sup>40</sup> That the phrase “the breaking of the bread” here refers to the Lord’s Supper is noted even by scholars with no particularly high sacramental theology of their own. See F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 79; Henry Alford notes that a eucharistic reference in 2:42 has been “both in ancient and modern times, the prevalent one.” *Alford’s Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, Volume II, Acts–II Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 29. Alford himself nuances the view by understanding “the breaking of the bread” as a reference to the Christians’ community meals, “accompanied as they were at this time by the celebration of the Lord’s Supper” (29).

<sup>41</sup> Cautious support for this is offered by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Anchor Bible. Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 742; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 796. Some commentators, however, reject this possibility. See, e.g., Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 537.

me and still come to the Lord's Supper." Hardly.<sup>42</sup> The apostle himself shows that his spiritual children are to follow in and confess his teaching:

Or did the word of God go out from you, or did it reach to you only? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or a spiritual person, let him recognize that the things which I am writing to you are the command of the Lord. If anyone does not know, he is not known. (1 Cor. 14:36-38)

But Paul does deal patiently with them *because they are already members of his churches*. Outsiders are not in view. As one wag has put it, the issue is not "the visiting Methodists from Ephesus." We might offer the following as a construct on the apostle's patient yet firm dealing with his wayward communicants. Because the Corinthians are members of the church under the apostle's authority and teaching, Paul deals with them both as "confessors" and as "individual believers." As "confessors," on the one hand, the Corinthians have publicly declared their allegiance to and trust in the proclamation they received from Paul the apostle. He is their spiritual father and they have not broken fellowship with him. They have "confessed" what Paul has taught. Accordingly, he deals with them as "insiders."

On the other hand, the Corinthians are also "individual believers." And so Paul discerns the need for rebuke and correction and instruction, and offers it accordingly. Paul deals with them *ad hoc*, as the situation demands. In this way he patiently yet directly deals with heterodox teaching among them. The most drastic abuses of the Lord's Supper have resulted in divine judgment and those abuses must stop at once. But as long as the lines of communication are open, as long as the Corinthians acknowledge that Paul is indeed "called, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God" (1 Cor. 1:1), Paul regards them as those who confess his doctrine and he deals with them primarily as individuals.

Here is an example once again for pastoral practice today. When the pastor deals with his members who have made a public confession of the apostolic faith, he assumes that they are "confessors" and

<sup>42</sup> DEUP proposes that "Scripture imposes no denominational requirement on baptized Christians who desire to receive the body and blood of Christ offered in the Lord's Supper." The use of anachronistic language ("denominational requirement") obscures the very real concern that the New Testament writers, including Paul, evidence for sound doctrine.

of one faith with the congregation. But as their individual needs, problems, sins and errors may arise, he deals patiently with them as "individual believers," not arbitrarily barring them from the Sacrament but teaching and warning, guiding and exhorting.

How would Paul think about communion fellowship with "outsiders," that is, with Christians who specifically rejected his doctrine of Baptism or Scripture or the Lord's Supper itself? Again, we must speak carefully since no Pauline text brings these two issues together in explicit terms. But this much is clear. Paul did not tolerate doctrinal diversity. His teaching was that of one sent by Christ Himself and his hearers were to accept it as such. Moreover, the Eucharist was the congregation's sacrament of unity, and divisions were to be dealt with before mutual communing took place. The biblical evidence leads to this conclusion: unity in apostolic doctrine is appropriate and necessary among those who commune together at the Lord's Supper.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *DEUP* avoids the question of Paul's "toleration" of false doctrine by considering only what constitutes "worthy reception," and not at all pondering the apostle's insistence that the Corinthians conform their thinking and living to his apostolic teaching.

## II. THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

### A. Introduction: Who Should Not Commune?

#### Two Answers

The survey of biblical teaching above found it necessary to introduce the two-fold distinction of "communing as an individual" and "communing as a confessor." The conflicts reflected in 1 Corinthians were intra-congregational and the Corinthians' relationship with Paul had not yet degenerated to the point of the "painful visit" and the "sorrowful letter" (2 Cor. 2:1-3) that took place sometime after the writing of 1 Corinthians. Paul still regarded the Corinthians to be under his pastoral care, and he wrote to correct abuses and errors in their midst. He assumed (not entirely correctly, perhaps) that they were "confessing" his authority and doctrine, and he wrote to them as individuals. The patience, love, and teaching of a pastor are evident throughout the letter and specifically in 1 Cor. 11:17-34. He deals with the communicants there as individual Christians and with an eye toward their communing worthily. How Paul regarded communion practice with reference to heterodox believers of a different "confession" simply nowhere comes to explicit expression in his writings. On the basis of the New Testament's attitude toward heterodoxy, however, we concluded that the corporate unity implied in the very act of the Lord's Supper itself could scarcely ignore the presence of contradictory confessions (Acts 2:42; Rom. 16:16-18).

The distinction between communicants as "individuals" and as "confessors" will be helpful in examining the Lutheran Confessions as well. The Confessions are often intensely pastoral documents, constantly keeping in view the consolation of sinners and the spiritual well-being of Christians, in other words, viewing those who commune as "individuals."

At the same time, however, statements in the Confessions make it clear that communion fellowship with those who adhere to a het-

erodox confession (that of Rome or of the Reformed<sup>44</sup>) is out of the question.<sup>45</sup> While it is a possibility that an individual Christian may be personally prepared to receive the Lord's Supper worthily and to his or her own personal blessing, we may not classify Christians only as individuals. Rather, all Christians adhere to a confession (or choose to reject all formal confessions), and the terrible doctrinal divisions in the visible church must, tragically, be reflected in the teaching concerning admission to the Lord's Supper.

## B. How "Christians as Individuals" May Commune Worthily

### *Through "Faith in These Words"*

The classic statement on "communing worthily" comes from the Small Catechism's teaching concerning "The Sacrament of the Altar":

Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?

Answer: Fasting and bodily preparation are a good external discipline, but he is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words: "for you" and "for the forgiveness of sins." On the other hand, he who does not believe these words, or doubts them, is unworthy and unprepared, for the words "for you" require truly believing hearts. (SC VI, 9-10; Tappert, 352)

Faith, as that means by which a sinner receives the gifts of God, takes front and center in all of the confessional teaching regarding the reception of the Eucharist in a worthy manner (that is, to one's blessing). Faith in these words is *necessary*, and faith in these words is *sufficient* for an individual to commune worthily. This emphasis on the necessity and the sufficiency of faith corresponds to the Confessions' "dual horizon" of responding both to Roman Catholic error and Reformed false doctrine.

<sup>44</sup> The Confessions' usual term for "Reformed" is "Sacramentarian." This expression groups together those who reject the sacramental union of Christ's body and blood in and under the bread and wine of the Eucharist. This sacramental union confessed by the Lutherans means that all who eat the bread and drink the wine of the Supper, even unbelievers and heretics, eat and drink with their mouths the very body and blood of Christ Jesus.

<sup>45</sup> Again, *DEUIP* fails to consider this aspect of confessional teaching at all, stating that "...only those should excuse themselves from the Sacrament who desire no grace and absolution and have no intention to amend their lives. . . ."

On the one hand, faith is emphasized as *necessary* over against the Roman Catholic teaching that the sacraments work their benefits merely by being performed (*ex opere operato*) apart from faith. But faith in the heart is that faculty which receives the gifts of God that are present in the Eucharist. Apology XIII makes this clear: "Thus we teach that in using the sacraments there must be a faith which believes these promises and accepts that which is promised and offered in the Sacrament." This is said in response to "the whole crowd of scholastic doctors who teach that unless there is some obstacle, the sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato*. . . ." (Ap XIII, 18; Tappert, 213). The Apology goes on to say:

Here we are talking about personal faith, which accepts the promise as a present reality and believes that the forgiveness of sins is actually being offered, not about a faith which believes in a general way that God exists. Such use of the sacrament comforts devout and troubled minds.

Words cannot describe the abuses which this fanatical notion, about the sacraments *ex opere operato* without a good disposition in the one using them, has spawned in the church.... No one can produce a single word from the Fathers that supports the scholastics on this question. In fact, Augustine says the opposite: that faith in the sacrament, and not the sacrament, justifies. (21-23; Tappert, 214)

On the other hand, the Confessions (especially those chronologically later) emphasize that faith is *sufficient* over against the Reformed teaching that, in some sense or to some degree, virtue or external preparations enable a person to commune in a worthy manner.

We believe, teach, and confess that the entire worthiness of the guests at this heavenly feast is and consists solely and alone in the most holy obedience and complete merit of Christ, which we make our own through *genuine faith* [*wahrhaftigen Glauben*] and of which we are assured through the sacrament. Worthiness consists not at all in our own virtues or in our internal and external preparations. (FC Ep VII, 20; Tappert, 484; emphasis added)

Likewise, [we reject] the teaching that even true believers who have and retain a *true, genuine, living faith*, but who fail to meet their own self-devised standard of preparation, may receive this sacrament for judgment, just like unworthy guests. (FC SD VII, 125; Tappert, 591; emphasis added)

Thus, the emphasis of the Lutheran Confessions on faith as that means by which guests at the Lord's Supper are able to commune worthily stands in a position between errors on either side: those emanating from Roman Catholic teaching, and from Reformed false doctrine. The "antitheses" of Article VII of the Epitome of the Formula of Concord, which specifically delineate Roman Catholic and Reformed errors, demonstrate this by their introductory statement: "we unanimously reject and condemn all the following errors, which are contrary and contradictory to the doctrine set forth above and to our simple faith and confession about Christ's Supper" (FC Ep VII, 21; Tappert, 484).

It is crucial at this point, however, to expand on what is included in "the genuine faith" by which communicants worthily receive the Supper. One view which is present also in the LCMS holds that "genuine faith" refers only to saving faith in Christ as Savior, the faith that all Christians possess even though they may also believe wrongly about other articles of Christian truth, including the doctrine of the Eucharist itself. But the Confessions themselves make it clear what is meant by "the genuine faith" that is required of all who would commune worthily.

Genuine faith includes faith in the Eucharist itself, namely, that there the true body and blood of Christ are offered to all and are received orally together with bread and wine by all who eat and drink. All who commune should hold to this teaching.<sup>46</sup> Luther in the Large Catechism introduces the article on the Sacrament of the Altar with these words:

As we treated Holy Baptism under three headings, so we must deal with the second sacrament in the same way, *stating what it is, what its benefits are, and who is to receive it*. All these are established from the words by which Christ instituted it. So everyone who wishes to be a Christian and go to the sacrament should be familiar with them. For we do not intend to admit to the sacrament and administer it to *those who do not know what they seek or why they come*. (LC V, 1-2; Tappert, 447; emphasis added)

<sup>46</sup> Here we can note how different the Reformation context was from the one Paul faced in Corinth. There is no evidence in 1 Corinthians 11 that the Christians there were explicitly denying the doctrine of the real presence. To the contrary, Paul's direct and unapologetic use of the teaching concerning the Lord's Supper (11:23-26) assumes that the Corinthians will both recognize and accept it. At the time of the Reformation, however, the warring parties disagreed precisely over the doctrine of the Sacrament itself.



Also in the Large Catechism, Luther writes:

We have briefly considered the first part, namely, the essence of this sacrament. Now we come to its power and benefit, the purpose for which the sacrament was really instituted, for it is most necessary that we know what we should seek and obtain there. This is plainly evident from the words just quoted, "This is my body and blood, given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." In other words, we go to the sacrament because we receive there a great treasure, through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins. (LC V, 20–22; Tappert, 449)

Especially noteworthy are Luther's words, "it is most necessary that we know what we should seek and obtain there." What is sought is the "great treasure," the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. What is obtained is the great benefit that flows from Christ's body and blood, namely, "the forgiveness of sins." Luther makes this point explicit and expands upon it:

Here again our clever spirits contort themselves with their great learning and wisdom, bellowing and blustering, "How can bread and wine forgive sins or strengthen faith?" Yet they know that we do not claim this of bread and wine—since in itself bread is bread—but of that bread and wine which are Christ's body and blood and with which the words are coupled. These and no other, we say, are the treasure through which forgiveness is obtained. This treasure is conveyed and communicated to us in no other way than through the words, "given and poured out for you." Here you have both truths, that it is Christ's body and blood and that these are yours as your treasure and gift. (LC V, 28–29; Tappert, 449)

The Small Catechism says, "...but he is truly worthy and well prepared who *believes* these words: 'for you' and 'for the forgiveness of sins'" (SC VI, 10; Tappert, 352; emphasis added). Luther, author of both Catechisms, teaches that the faith that enables one to commune worthily includes faith that believes in the scriptural doctrine concerning *both* what the Eucharist is and the benefits that it offers. One final citation from the Large Catechism helps to show that this is the case:

So far we have treated the sacrament from the standpoint both of its essence and of its effect and benefit. It remains for us to consider who it is that receives this power and benefit. Briefly, as we said above concerning Baptism and in many other places, the answer is: It is he who believes what the words say and what they give. . . .

But he who does not believe has nothing, for he lets this gracious blessing be offered to him in vain and refuses to enjoy it. The treasure is opened and placed at everyone's door, yes, upon everyone's table, but it is also your responsibility to take it and confidently believe that it is just as the words tell you.

This, now, is the preparation required of a Christian for receiving this sacrament worthily. (LC V, 33, 35–36; Tappert, 450)

Accordingly, we insist and confess that the "genuine faith" required for receiving the Eucharist worthily includes a proper understanding of and faith in what the Sacrament is, that is, in the doctrine of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in and under the sacramental elements of bread and wine. It might be noted at this point, moreover, how closely Luther's understanding corresponds to the traditional and primary understanding (offered in part one of this study) of Paul's phrase "discerning the body."

### *"Christians as Individuals" Can Commune Unworthily*

If it is true that the "genuine faith" by which one communes worthily includes a right understanding of and faith in the nature and essence of the Eucharist itself, then it also follows that Christians themselves can stand in danger of receiving the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner and thereby receive God's judgment. This point was established in the exegesis of 1 Cor. 11:17–34 above, but it is important also to understand the Confessions' teaching on this matter. The clearest statement to this effect comes from Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confession on "The Mass":

Then when our preachers preached about these things and the priests were reminded of the terrible responsibility which should properly concern every Christian (namely, that whoever uses the sacrament unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of Christ), such mercenary Masses and private Masses. . . were discontinued in our churches. (AC XXIV, 12–13; Tappert, 57)

The crucial fact that *Christians* may also commune unworthily and to their judgment must be further established in light of the false opinion mentioned above that all confessing Christians should be admitted to the Lord's Supper. Passages from Article VII of the Formula of Concord (Epitome and Solid Declaration) such as the following are often put forward in support of this position:

8. We believe, teach, and confess that there is only one kind of unworthy guest, namely, those who do not believe. Of such it is written, "He who does not believe is condemned already" (John 3:18). The unworthy use of the holy sacrament increases, magnifies, and aggravates this condemnation (I Cor. 11:27, 29).

9. We believe, teach, and confess that no genuine believer, no matter how weak he may be, as long as he retains a living faith, will receive the Holy Supper to his condemnation, for Christ instituted this Supper particularly for Christians who are weak in faith but repentant, to comfort them and to strengthen their weak faith.

10. We believe, teach, and confess that the entire worthiness of the guests at this heavenly feast is and consists solely and alone in the most holy obedience and complete merit of Christ, which we make our own through genuine faith and of which we are assured through the sacrament. Worthiness consists not at all in our own virtues or in our internal and external preparations. (FC Ep VII, 18-20; Tappert, 484)

These paragraphs of FC VII must not be understood apart from their historical context. The Formula is addressing itself to a territorial church united around the Lutheran Confessions. Statements such as "the entire worthiness of the guests at this heavenly feast is and consists solely and alone in the most holy obedience and complete merit of Christ, which we make our own through genuine faith and of which we are assured through the sacrament" (quoted above) must be read over against the negative statement to which they are opposed. So, the next sentence in FC VII reads, "Worthiness consists not at all in our own virtues or in our internal and external preparations." Not our virtue or preparations, but Christ's merit. This contextualized statement, then, does not contradict the teaching found elsewhere in the Confessions and discussed above. "Faith in these words" includes a divinely-given proper understanding of what the Lord's Supper is and gives, an understanding that the Reformed confessions explicitly reject.

### *Two Kinds of "Christians as Individual" Communicants*

We may at this point summarize the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions regarding those who commune "worthily" and those who commune "unworthily." Those who commune worthily are

Christians with "genuine faith," understood as encompassing both saving faith in Christ Jesus as well as faith in and proper understanding of the nature and benefits of the Lord's Supper itself. Such faith, it must quickly be added, is no human achievement and no mere intellectual assent. It is heartfelt trust and is the gift of God the Holy Spirit who works through the Word. Such faith recognizes the Supper for the gift that it is and eagerly acknowledges and receives the benefits of forgiveness, life, and salvation offered in the Eucharist.

At the same time, the Confessions also acknowledge that such faith (a faith that renders "worthy" reception of the Lord's Supper possible) also has effects in the realm of one's response to God's commandments and one's relationship to other people. Luther writes in the Large Catechism:

Those who are shameless and unruly must be told to stay away, for they are not fit to receive the forgiveness of sins since they do not desire it and do not want to be good. . . . The only exception [to the truth that "we come. . . because we are unworthy"] is the person who desires no grace and absolution and has no intention to amend his life. (LC V, 58, 61; Tappert, 453)

The willingness to "amend one's sinful life" is a necessary and inevitable outcome of genuine faith. This statement about repentance shows that the Confessions agree with the Pauline emphases on the corporate nature of the Sacrament that were underscored and described in the first part of this study (cf. AC XXIV; Apology XXIV; SA II, ii, 9).

### *Pastoral Oversight and "Christians as Individuals"*

Just as Paul exercised oversight as "pastor" in the situation at Corinth, so also Christian pastors exercise oversight in the administration of the Lord's Supper in the worship life of the congregation. In the context of the Lutheran Confessions, the disputed issue is often the relationship of the pope and/or the bishops to local priests/pastors. But the following quotations make it clear that the pastors have the responsibility of oversight:

Thus the Mass is preserved among us in its proper use, the use which was formerly observed in the church and which can be proved by St. Paul's statement in I Cor. 11:20ff. and by many state-

ments of the Fathers. For Chrysostom reports how the priest stood every day, inviting some to Communion and forbidding others to approach. The ancient canons also indicate that one man officiated and communicated the other priests and deacons, for the words of the Nicene canon read, "After the priests the deacons shall receive the sacrament in order from the bishop or priest." (AC XXIV, 35-38; Tappert, 60)

The custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved. (AC XXV, 1; Tappert, 61)

Our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments. . . . This power of keys or of bishops is used and exercised only by teaching and preaching the Word of God and by administering the sacraments (to many persons or to individuals, depending on one's calling). (AC XXVIII, 5, 8; Tappert, 81-82)

According to divine right, therefore, it is the office of the bishop to preach the Gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine and condemn doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel, and exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose wicked conduct is manifest. (AC XXVIII, 21; Tappert, 84)

However, the lesser (that is, the truly Christian) excommunication excludes those who are manifest and impenitent sinners from the Sacrament and other fellowship of the church until they mend their ways and avoid sin. Preachers should not mingle civil punishments with this spiritual penalty or excommunication. (SA III, ix; Tappert, 314)

The Gospel requires of those who preside over the churches that they preach the Gospel, remit sins, administer the sacraments, and, in addition, exercise jurisdiction, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve those who repent. By the confession of all, even of our adversaries, it is evident that this power belongs by divine right to all who preside over the churches [and not just to bishops or popes], whether they are called pastors, presbyters, or bishops. (Treatise, 60-61; Tappert, 330)

Begin by teaching them the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, etc., following the text word for word so that the young may repeat these things after you and retain them in their memory.

If any refuse to receive your instructions, tell them that they deny Christ and are no Christians. They should not be admitted to the sacrament, be accepted as sponsors in Baptism, or be allowed to participate in any Christian privileges. (SC, Preface, 10–11; Tappert, 339)

But let us talk about the term "liturgy." It does not really mean a sacrifice but a public service. Thus it squares with our position that a minister who consecrates shows forth the body and blood of the Lord to the people, just as a minister who preaches shows forth the gospel to the people, as Paul says (I Cor. 4:1), "This is how one should regard us, as ministers of Christ and dispensers of the sacraments of God," that is, of the Word and sacraments; and II Cor. 5:20, "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (Ap XXIV, 79–80; Tappert, 263–64)

The active role of the pastor is assumed in these confessional statements: "inviting some. . .and forbidding others," "forgive. . . judge. . .condemn. . .exclude," "preside over the church." The Confessions teach that it is the pastor's privilege and responsibility to administer the sacraments according to the call that he has received.<sup>47</sup> This is not to be done in a high-handed manner, nor should the pastor think that he can see into the hearts of those who commune. Rather, he is to instruct, admonish, and invite to (or bar from) the Sacrament in accordance with biblical and confessional teaching about the Sacrament. And as God gives him wisdom he is to administer the Sacrament faithfully to his congregation. Unless there is compelling reason to think otherwise, the pastor will assume that his members' confession of faith, made when they joined his congregation, was sincere. He will deal with them as individuals who commune worthily by virtue of genuine faith in these words, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." When he learns that a member has a mistaken or uninformed understanding of some aspect of Christian truth, the pastor will follow the example of Paul and not arbitrarily bar this person from the Sacrament. Rather, he will teach, encourage, correct, and admonish with great patience. For there are only two kinds of individual communicants: those who, through faith in these words, participate worthily to their great blessing and benefit, and those who, through lack of such faith, participate unworthily and to their judgment.

<sup>47</sup> *DEUP* leaves the role of pastoral oversight unexpressed, stating only that certain persons should "exclude themselves."

## C. Communicants as "Confessors"

Since there are two kinds of individual communicants and only two, an important observation follows. The teaching of our Synod, which is consistent with historic Christianity, is to refrain from communing Christians who have joined themselves to churches whose public confession differs in important ways from the scriptural and confessional teaching (and thus is heterodox). This has been the case even when those church bodies (e.g., the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA]) officially espouse the biblical and confessional teaching regarding the Sacrament of the Altar. Our practice of not communing those who belong to such church bodies does *not* mean that we fear that such individual Christians would necessarily commune in an unworthy manner. There is another important consideration besides genuine faith and personal worthiness. We ask at times that those who may have *genuine faith* and who, if they were to commune in our churches might do so *in a worthy manner*, still not commune at our altars because of other doctrinal disagreements between their church bodies and our own Synod. There is a need for more precision when we enunciate this teaching.<sup>48</sup> It might be said, for instance, that eating and drinking the Supper with those who have joined themselves to a different confession is "unfitting" or "inconsistent" with the character of the Eucharist.

This emphasis upon doctrinal agreement among those who commune together flows from two propositions. First, it assumes that differing confessions prevent churches from enjoying altar fellowship. Second, it assumes that Christians are not to be seen merely as "individuals," but also as "confessors" of the doctrine of their own church body. Discussion of each of these two propositions follows.

<sup>48</sup> This point has not always been clear in our own circles, and one can imagine how those outside the Synod might have misunderstood our position. An example of such misunderstanding occurs in the Pentecost 1996 issue of "Celebrate!", a publication of The Committee for A Declaration of Eucharistic Understanding and Practice. In a two-page article titled "Eucharistic Understanding and Practice: A Biblical and Confessional Study" Question #5 asks, "Who, then, is an unworthy guest at the celebration?" The answer given, in part, is: "We reject and condemn: The practice of admitting other criteria of exclusion drawn from tradition, historical practices, synodical resolutions, dogmatic statements, etc." But the practice of taking into account "other criteria" does not label as "unworthy guests" those who may be asked to refrain from communing.

## *No Difference of Confession at the Same Altar*

We have seen in the first section of this study that the New Testament takes a stern approach to heterodoxy. The Confessions also speak clearly about the dangers of such false teaching and the need to avoid it. The *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, for example, warns against “becoming participants in the impious doctrines, blasphemies, and unjust cruelties of the pope” (*Treatise*, 41; Tappert, 327) and then comments:

To dissent from the consensus of so many nations and to be called schismatics is a serious matter. But divine authority commands us all not to be associated with and not to support impiety and unjust cruelty. Consequently our consciences are sufficiently excused. The errors of the pope’s kingdom are manifest. . . . (*Treatise*, 42; Tappert, 328)

The *Treatise* then lists a number of these errors, including the profanations of Masses, the Roman Catholic doctrine of repentance, the teaching concerning sin, and papal usurpation of ecclesiastical power (*Treatise*, 43–59; Tappert 328–30). The Formula of Concord recalls and endorses this teaching in the Solid Declaration’s “Summary Formulation”:

In these articles [adopted at Smalcald in 1537] the doctrine of the cited Augsburg Confession is repeated, several articles are further explained on the basis of God’s Word, and in addition the grounds and reasons are set forth at necessary length for renouncing the papistic errors and idolatries, for having no communion with the papists, and for neither expecting nor planning to come to an understanding with the pope about these matters. (FC SD, Rule and Norm, 7; Tappert, 505)

Over against the groups whose confession denied the real presence in the Sacrament (the so-called “Sacramentarians”), the Formula of Concord quotes Luther approvingly as follows:

Shortly before his death, in his last confession, he [Luther] repeated his faith in this article [regarding the Lord’s Supper] with great fervor and wrote as follows: “I reckon them all as belonging together (that is, as Sacramentarians and enthusiasts), for that is what they are who will not believe that the Lord’s bread in the Supper is his true, natural body, which the godless or Judas receive orally as well as St. Peter and all the saints. Whoever, I say, will not believe this, will please let me alone and expect no fellowship from me. This is final.” (FC SD VII, 33; Tappert, 575)



Finally, Article XII of the Solid Declaration titled "Other Factions and Sects Which Never Accepted the Augsburg Confession" states regarding such groups<sup>49</sup> that

We have not been able to refrain from witnessing publicly before all Christendom that we have no part or share in their errors, be they few or many, and that on the contrary we reject and condemn all these errors as wrong, heretical, and contrary to our Christian and biblically-based Augsburg Confession. (FC SD XII, 8; Tappert, 633)

Strong words, indeed. Yet they testify to the Confessions' belief that false doctrine is a dangerous cancer that must be cured, and if not cured, avoided. Differing church confessions render common eucharistic fellowship impossible. A recent and tragic contrast to this conviction of the Lutheran Confessions is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's decision in 1997 and 1999, respectively, to establish full altar and pulpit fellowship with Reformed church bodies and with the Episcopal Church. The ELCA has designated the differences between Lutheran and Reformed teaching on the Eucharist as "complementary" and as an "acceptable diversity."<sup>50</sup> This contradicts, in the most dramatic way possible, the approach of the Lutheran Confessions.<sup>51</sup>

### *"Christians as Confessors"*

The second proposition that undergirds the practice of withholding communion fellowship when doctrinal unity does not exist among those who commune is this: Christians are not to be seen merely as "individuals" but also as "confessors" of the doctrine of

<sup>49</sup> The article mentions the Anabaptists, the Schwenkfelders, the New Arians and the New Anti-Trinitarians. See Tappert, 633–36.

<sup>50</sup> Addressing the issue of "The Presence of Christ" in the Lord's Supper, *A Formula of Agreement* states: "The members of the theological conversations acknowledged that it has not been possible to reconcile the confessional formulations from the sixteenth century with a 'common language . . . which could do justice to all the insights, convictions, and concerns of our ancestors in the faith' (*A Common Calling*, p. 49). However, the theological conversations recognized these enduring differences as acceptable diversities with regard to the Lord's Supper. Continuing in the tradition of the third dialogue, they respected the different perspectives and convictions from which their ancestors professed their faith, affirming that those differences are not church-dividing, but are complementary." For the official text of *A Formula of Agreement*, see [www.elca.org/ea/formula.html](http://www.elca.org/ea/formula.html).

<sup>51</sup> See the "Antitheses: The Contrary and Condemned Doctrine of the Sacramentarians" of FC Ep, VII (Tappert, 484–86, par. 21–42).

their own church body. In a time of rampant individualism when people "do their own thing" even when joining a church, this notion seems precarious at best to some. It also must be readily admitted that people often join a denomination for reasons other than its doctrine. Indeed, the very notion of "joining a *denomination*" is probably not even present in the minds of some church members, especially those who freely "church hop" from one to the other. Is it possible in such a context to maintain the idea that individual Christians represent and "confess" the doctrine of their church body?

It is not only possible; it is necessary. If the church ceases to insist that individuals represent the public confession of their church body, at least five dangers immediately present themselves.

In the first place, the current erosion of the importance of doctrine would be accelerated to an alarming extent. Many voices in our present context assert that all truth is relative and that all perspectives are equally valid. Standing against the culture, Christ's church must hold firmly to the truth that doctrine—propositional truth—will be either true and good, or false and evil. Many people, including members of our own congregations, will be baffled by this classic approach. When we encounter these reactions, we must be prepared to explain ourselves in winsome and patient ways. We must also continue to hold high the standards for our own catechetical instruction of doctrine. Abbreviated programs of instruction, either for young people or for adults, that neglect the teaching of Lutheran doctrine will only accelerate the slide into an indifference to God's revealed truth in Holy Scripture.

In the second place, if the doctrinal confession of one's own church body can be ignored, then it must follow that heterodoxy poses no danger to the spiritual lives of Christians. The question stated directly is this: Does it matter, or does it not matter, that a church's confession proclaims that the Bible is only "a faithful witness" to the truth and is not completely inspired and inerrant, or that the Lord's Supper does not offer the true body and blood of Christ, or that the good works of Christians attain merit before God, or that baptism is merely an outward "symbol" of an inner reality? In the sixteenth century the three major theological "camps" were the Lutherans, the Reformed, and the church of Rome. Major differences in confession separated these three camps, and still separate them today.

Perhaps the most difficult issue for the LCMS today is its relationship with the ELCA. But the recent actions of the ELCA in establishing full communion with the Reformed and the Episcopalians on the one hand, and in endorsing the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* with Rome on the other hand, have made our relationship with the ELCA both more sorrowful and more obvious.<sup>52</sup> We must insist that false doctrine does matter, because ultimately it turns sinners away from Christ alone and from the means by and through which He and His benefits may with certainty be found.

In the third place, if individual church members are not seen as “confessors” of their church body’s doctrine, then the concept of church membership is watered down to the point of meaninglessness. The rationale for any catechesis in the traditional sense of the term vanishes, and there emerges a resounding contradiction between our own confirmation process and the attitude with which we view members of other denominations. Indeed, there would be no theological rejoinder possible to a member of an adult membership class in one of our churches who publicly rejected (for example) the Lutheran doctrine of baptism and still wanted to join the congregation.

Fourth, unless individual Christians can be seen as “confessors” of their church body’s doctrine, Scripture’s teaching concerning altar and pulpit fellowship as historically confessed by the LCMS becomes virtually meaningless. It is true that one could maintain that on the denominational or even congregational levels, there should not be joint communion services. But if any of the individuals in those services could—at least in theory and under ordinary circumstances—commune together, then the formal practice would be emptied of all real meaning.

Fifth and finally, the crucial passage, 1 Cor. 11:17–34, places only a minor emphasis (at least explicitly) on the need for *doctrinal* unity among those who commune together. But we must remember that Paul is dealing with an *intra-congregational* situation and that elsewhere in the letter he corrects the Corinthians’ errors in matters of both doctrine and personal morality. Moreover, the apostle quite

<sup>52</sup> One can refer to two recent CTCR resources that assess the ELCA’s actions over against the Reformed, and regarding the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: The Formula of Agreement in Confessional Perspective* (1999) and *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Perspective* (1999).

emphatically states that those who commune at the Lord's Table are engaging in an act of proclamation: it is the Lord's *death* that they are proclaiming until he comes again. Heterodox teaching threatens and contradicts to a greater or lesser extent the pure proclamation of the death of Christ for us, even as the Corinthians' social and personal divisions at their community meals also contradicted the Lord's death for them all. The Eucharist is the congregation's sacrament of *unity*. Differences of confession cannot be a matter of indifference when seeking the unity presupposed by the Lord's Supper, the very unity that the Supper is given to maintain and preserve.

### *"Christians as Individuals" in Other Church Bodies*

Significant dangers threaten when the church succumbs to the modern spirit and regards the official confession of an individual Christian as a matter of no importance. But these are not the only dangers that threaten and the LCMS has always recognized this. Even as the LCMS' biblical and confessional teaching has denied admission to the Lord's Supper to those of a different confession, the Synod has also consistently held that there can be exceptions to this ordinary way of proceeding and that such exceptions are best left up to *ad hoc* pastoral discretion. Why is this so? This is because of the dangers that emerge should our pastors and congregations view individual Christians of differing confessions *only* as "confessors" and *not at all* as "individuals." We can list at least four of these dangers.

First, if Christians are viewed only as "confessors," then denominational membership can become a substitute for genuine faith as the sole requirement for worthy communing. This position is hard to maintain, for as the periodic surveys show and as every honest person already knows, some official members of the LCMS do not understand, cannot articulate, and tragically do not believe our own doctrine. A simplistic use of "denominational membership" as the sole criterion for communion admission, unaccompanied by exhortation and teaching, would be a caricature of biblical and confessional teaching.

In the second place, if individual communicants are viewed only as "confessors," the temptation arises to ask "how orthodox" their confession is. Even in the case of members of our own congregations, pastors who view communicants in this way and only in

this way might be tempted to conduct "interviews of theological orthodoxy" and to ban from the Lord's Supper those who cannot give a "good" confession or one that is "good enough." This kind of approach shifts the entire matter of confession away from the church body onto the shoulders of the individual in an extreme and dangerous way.

Third, viewing communicants only as confessors of official doctrine runs the danger of intellectualizing "faith in these words" (cf. SC VI, 5-10; Tappert, 352). The cognitive and intellectual element of faith is present, of course. But the simple faith by which the Christian becomes a worthy communicant is not a matter of theological sophistication and precise articulation. Such faith is the heart's trust in the words of Christ and in the saving gifts He offers through his own Supper.

Fourth and perhaps most important, if individual Christians are viewed only as confessors of the ecclesiastical doctrine with which they are associated, there may result an unwillingness on the part of our pastors to struggle with those rare and genuinely difficult situations of unusual personal need and pastoral care. In times of emergency, of war, of severe illness or intense personal crisis, and in situations involving individuals who are in a *state of confession*,<sup>53</sup> we must be willing to search for the balance between personal faith and need on the one hand, and the corporate dimensions and unity implied in and demanded by the Lord's Supper on the other hand. This willingness to deal with individuals reflects the view found in the Preface to the Book of Concord that individual members of heterodox church bodies may nevertheless be open to the biblical and confessional teaching about the Lord's Supper:

But we have no doubt at all that one can find many pious, innocent people even in those churches which have up to now admittedly not come to agreement with us. These people go their way in the simplicity of their hearts, do not understand the issues, and take no

<sup>53</sup> The expression "in a state of confession" (Latin, *in statu confessionis*) "is quite generally employed in the current usage of our church to declare that an individual or congregation is in a state of protest because it holds that a particular teaching, practice, or action of the church against which the protest is lodged is contrary to the Word of God or endangers the Gospel. Used in this sense, the declaration that one is *in statu confessionis* is not tantamount to the breaking of fellowship. If, however, the circumstances which called forth the protest are not corrected in due time, the implication is that the protest will lead to the severance of fellowship relations." CTCR Opinion on "In Statu Confessionis: A Theologico-Historical Definition" (April 1970), 1971 *Convention Workbook*, 39.

pleasure in blasphemies against the Holy Supper as it is celebrated in our churches according to Christ's institution and as we concordantly teach about it on the basis of the words of his testament. It is furthermore to be hoped that when they are rightly instructed in this doctrine, they will, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, turn to the infallible truth of the divine Word and unite with us and our churches and schools. (Preface; Tappert, 11–12)

It will never be possible to compile a list of "acceptable exceptions." Life in this present evil age will not allow for such simplicity and precision. The Synod has always recognized this and we must allow the tension to remain. We must engage one another in respectful mutual conversation over the controverted specifics of the "situations of emergency, and special cases of pastoral care, or extraordinary situations and circumstances" which call for "the necessity of exercising responsible pastoral care."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup> 1998 Resolution 3–05 "To Reaffirm Our Practice of Admission to the Lord's Supper" (see Preamble), *Convention Proceedings*, 115. See 1986 Resolution 3–08 "To Maintain Practice of Close Communion," *Convention Proceedings*, 143, and 1995 Resolution 3–08 "To Reaffirm Practice of Close[d] Communion," *Convention Proceedings*, 121–22. In this latter resolution the Synod recommended to its member congregations for guidance the following Communion Card statement prepared by the CTCR:

The Lord's Supper is celebrated at this congregation in the confession and glad confidence that, as He says, our Lord gives into our mouths not only bread and wine but His very body and blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins and to strengthen our union with Him and with one another. Our Lord invites to His table those who trust in His words, repent of all sin, and set aside any refusal to forgive and love as He forgives and loves us, that they may show forth His death until He comes.

Because those who eat and drink our Lord's body and blood unworthily do so to their great harm and because Holy Communion is a confession of the faith which is confessed at this altar, any who are not yet instructed, in doubt, or who hold a confession differing from that of this congregation and The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and yet desire to receive the Sacrament, are asked first to speak with the Pastor or an usher. For further study, see Matt. 5:23ff; 10:32ff; 18:15–35; 26:26–29; 1 Cor. 11:17–34.

### III. A CRITIQUE OF *A DECLARATION OF EUCHARISTIC UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE*

We may now offer, on the basis of the preceding study, a specific critique of *A Declaration of Eucharistic Understanding and Practice*, pointing out how it is not "an adequate basis for addressing questions about admission to the Lord's Supper" (1998 Res. 3-05). *DEUP* is quoted below in capital letters, with a brief critique indented in regular characters.

AS MEMBERS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD DESIRING TO SUPPORT THE MISSION OF THE SYNOD AND TO BE FAITHFUL TO SCRIPTURE AND THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS, WE DECLARE THE FOLLOWING TO BE OUR EUCHARISTIC UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE:

1. CHRIST INSTITUTED THE SACRAMENT OF HIS BODY AND BLOOD TO NOURISH AND SUSTAIN HIS PEOPLE AND ASSURE THEM OF HIS GRACE.

This first thesis is certainly correct. Yet, in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 Paul gives pride of place to the Sacrament's purpose to maintain the *unity* of those who commune. No mention of this occurs in *DEUP*, which prejudices the issue by focusing solely on the individual. The Eucharist's corporate implications for intra-congregational practice and inter-confessional relationships are immense. *DEUP* fails to mention this necessary corporate unity of those who commune together.

2. SAINT PAUL DEFINES WORTHY RECEPTION OF THE BODY AND THE BLOOD IN TERMS OF SELF-EXAMINATION AND DISCERNMENT OF THE LORD'S BODY (1 CORINTHIANS 11:28-29).

This statement is a correct one, as far as it goes. But the historic practice of the Christian church, and of the Synod, has not lumped all who are denied admission to the Lord's

Supper into the single category of "those who receive unworthily." Some should not come to the Supper because as unworthy communicants they would receive God's judgment. Some should not come because as "confessors" of heterodox doctrine their presence would be unseemly or unfitting, because it violates confessional unity.

3. OUR LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS, IN THE WORDS OF THE SMALL CATECHISM, STATE CLEARLY THAT ONE IS TRULY WORTHY AND WELL PREPARED WHO HAS FAITH IN THESE WORDS OF CHRIST: "GIVEN AND SHED FOR YOU FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS" (SC, VI, 10).

This statement is a fine one, as far as it goes. The Small Catechism, however, is written out of pastoral concern for members of Lutheran congregations, and does not address the issue of the presence of two different confessions at the same altar.

4. OUR LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS, IN THE WORDS OF THE LARGE CATECHISM, STATE CLEARLY THAT ONLY THOSE SHOULD EXCLUDE THEMSELVES FROM THE SACRAMENT WHO DESIRE NO GRACE AND ABSOLUTION AND HAVE NO INTENTION TO AMEND THEIR LIVES (LC, V, 5,61).

*DEUP* speaks of Christians "excluding themselves" and does not use the confessional language of pastors "inviting some and forbidding others." Moreover, Paul the pastor did not leave the Corinthians to their own devices. He instructed them how to examine themselves and he insisted that their divisions cease.

5. A PRACTICE CONGRUENT WITH THE SCRIPTURE AND THE CONFESSIONS CALLS FOR THE SACRAMENT TO BE SHARED WITH THOSE WHO REPENT OF THEIR SINS, BELIEVE THE real presence, AND SINCERELY INTEND TO AMEND THEIR LIVES.

*DEUP* does not take into consideration viewing Christians as "confessors," which the discussion above has shown to be necessary.



6. SCRIPTURE IMPOSES NO DENOMINATIONAL REQUIREMENT ON BAPTIZED CHRISTIANS WHO DESIRE TO RECEIVE THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST OFFERED IN THE LORD'S SUPPER.

In 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 Paul does not speak to the same denominational situations as exist today because he is addressing an intra-congregational situation. As indicated above, however, the Scriptures do address doctrinal divisions very much like those that mark the contemporary scene. While "denominational membership" cannot become an automatic litmus test for admission to the Sacrament, nevertheless the Lord's Supper presumes and requires a unity (Acts 2:42) that is contradicted when, under ordinary circumstances, opposing confessions are represented among those who commune together. The Eucharist is a mutual proclamation of the Lord's death, and differing confessions at the same altar cannot be the norm or regular practice of our congregations.

THEREFORE WE AFFIRM THE RIGHT OF LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS AND PASTORS TO OFFER THE EUCHARIST TO ALL WHO SHARE THIS BIBLICAL AND CONFSSIONAL STANCE. WE DECLARE THIS TO BE OUR EUCHARISTIC UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE AND COMMEND IT TO OTHERS.

*DEUP* does not adequately reflect biblical teaching and confessional emphases. Its major deficiency is the failure to address the corporate character and implications of the Eucharist itself.

## IV. CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The Lord's Supper offers the two-fold gift of forgiveness and peace with God on the one hand, and unity and oneness among those who commune together on the other hand (Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 10:16-17). Those who receive the body and the blood of the Lord do so, therefore, in terms of their relationship with God as well as with their fellow-communicants.<sup>55</sup>

The most important distinction among those who commune is the difference between communing "worthily/in a worthy manner" and receiving the Eucharist "unworthily/in an unworthy manner." All those who repent of their sins, trust in Christ, believe in the real presence of Christ's body and blood and seek to be one with those with whom they commune are prepared to commune "in a worthy manner." The positive purpose of this distinction is that those who come might receive the Eucharist as Christ intends it to be received, for the forgiveness of sins and the continued unity of the body of Christ. The negative purpose of this distinction is to prevent some from receiving the Sacrament to their own spiritual harm.

To be sure, Christians themselves ought to seek to discern when they should or should not come to the Lord's Supper. Those living an unrepentantly immoral life may realize that receiving the Lord's Supper could harm them. Christians who reject the doctrine of the real presence may also understand that they should not come to an altar where faith in the real presence is proclaimed and required. But along with individual Christians, pastors also have received responsibility to instruct, exhort, and include or exclude some from the Lord's Supper. The very existence of the letter of 1 Corinthians itself gives evidence of Paul exercising his responsibility as a steward of the divine mysteries (1 Cor. 4:1). The Lutheran Confessions also assume and describe this pastoral responsibility. When our pastors ask some to refrain from communing because they may do so "in an unworthy manner," it will be done out of love and concern for the spiritual well-being of those persons.

<sup>55</sup> See *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 1983, 19-23.

Moreover, the second distinction among communicants also flows out of concern for their well-being, for heterodox teaching is a danger to one's life in Christ. This second distinction views individual Christians as persons who represent the confession or doctrine of the church body to which they have promised their loyalty. The LCMS, therefore, also teaches in accordance with the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the historic tradition of the church when it asks that fellow-Christians who are confessors of a different doctrine not participate in the Lord's Supper at our altars. The Lutheran Confessions are especially clear that those who adhere to the Augsburg Confession should not practice altar fellowship with those who hold to unscriptural confessions, and so the LCMS has preserved this historic practice. We do this not with any thought of superiority or with any gladness, but in deep sorrow and prayer to the Lord of the Church that he would remove the divisions that separate His children from one another in their visible expressions of fellowship. Even as we view Christians of other confessions in this way, however, we must at all times acknowledge the possibility, even necessity, of situations of crisis or personal spiritual need in which these fellow Christians as individual believers in need of the Sacrament's comfort and strength might receive such also from our pastors and at our altars.<sup>56</sup>

A final note. If we are right about the seriousness of the divisions that separate the visible churches from one another, we are not permitted by Christ or His Gospel to hold back and wait for those whom we believe to be in error to come to us. We must go to them, committed to genuine, respectful participation in substantial theological dialogue, urgently praying to the Lord of the Church "that the time of complete unity among all who believe in him may return."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> See synodical resolutions cited in note 54.

<sup>57</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1398.

## V. APPENDIX: COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT ADMISSION TO THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. **Question:** How can we possibly say that all those Christians from other church bodies are unworthy to receive the Lord's Supper? Isn't that what we are saying?

**Answer:** Absolutely not! There are *two* reasons why people can be refused admission to the Lord's Supper. The first has to do with faith and discerning the body. Those who do not have such faith and discernment would commune in an unworthy manner and thereby receive God's judgment. But the second reason has to do with the need for a fitting confessional unity among those who commune together. Roman Catholic Christians, for example, may be perfectly prepared to receive the Lord's Supper in their own churches in a worthy manner and so to their own great blessing. But it would be unfitting for them, as confessors of their church body's error, to receive the Sacrament in our churches.

2. **Question:** Why are we so unfriendly? When we tell some Christians that they can't commune with us, it seems so unfriendly!

**Answer:** It is probably inevitable that, when we ask people—including some fellow Christians—not to commune at our altars, some may conclude that we are "unfriendly." This is why it is so important that we *explain* ourselves and our teaching to others who, quite frankly, may not understand it at all. But when we explain, with genuine interest and friendliness, our doctrine that the Lord's Supper is both a gift and a sign of unity, others will come to see that we do what we do not because we are unfriendly but because of what we firmly believe.

3. **Question:** What about our mobile society? "Snowbirds" spend months away from their home congregations, and many people travel overseas and around the country. Doesn't that change the way we should think about admission to the Lord's Supper?

**Answer:** Vacations and brief periods of travel ordinarily do not create any particular situation of intense spiritual need or crisis.

When visitors from other church bodies come to our churches or when our own members attend worship out of town at other churches, there is normally no pressing reason to override their identity as "confessors" of a certain doctrine.

The case of "snowbirds" or others who are away from their home congregations for long periods of time raises a more difficult question. It would be a difficult situation indeed for a Christian to be bereft of the Lord's Supper for many months or even years. If in such a situation a pastor's discretion led him to admit members from other churches to the Lord's Supper at an LCMS congregation, it would have to be done after much discussion and discernment, and with the understanding that the "long-term visitor" was in agreement with our doctrine and had placed himself under the pastoral care of our pastor. Moreover, the future confession of the "long-term visitor" should be an item of discussion.

**4. Question:** What about relatives who are very close to us but who are members of other church bodies? On special occasions such as baptisms, confirmations, or weddings, can't they be admitted to the Lord's Supper if they have genuine faith and repentance?

**Answer:** This question is often a very difficult and sensitive one on an emotional level, because we *feel* united with those whom we love—and all the more when they are fellow Christians! As powerful as those feelings can be, however, they must not override the spiritual realities involved. The situation can be eased if we can talk with our friends and relatives openly and lovingly about the differences that divide orthodox Lutheran churches from heterodox Christian churches. Many Christians may not even be aware of the differences, and such discussions would be of benefit to all.

**5. Question:** Well, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He communed Judas, didn't He? How can we dare exclude anyone, if the Lord gave His Supper even to the man who betrayed Him?

**Answer:** We cannot determine with certainty on the basis of the Gospel accounts whether or not Judas was present at the institution of the Lord's Supper. But even if he were present, we cannot take all the historical details of the institution of the Eucharist as patterns that we must follow today. If we did so, we might have to conclude

that only a certain inner circle of Christians should receive the Lord's Supper, for only the Twelve were present that night. Or, on the assumption that Judas was not repentant (since Satan had already entered into him, Luke 22:3), we could conclude that unrepentant persons should be welcomed to the Eucharist. One can see the specific errors that are created when we try to make the historically unique aspects of the institution of the Lord's Supper into patterns or policies.

On the positive side, however, the historical example of Judas could well reinforce the sound pastoral principle that pastors are not expected or required (or even able) to judge the hearts of communicants. Judas was a hypocrite, one who presented himself as a believer on the outside but was an unbeliever in his heart (cf. FC SD VII, 60; Tappert, 580).

**6. Question:** I understand and support our teaching on admission to the Lord's Supper, but it bothers me that no one else has the same perspective. Why are we so different?

**Answer:** As a matter of fact, our teaching stands in line with the history of the Christian church and with the majority of Christendom to this day. Both the Roman Catholic church<sup>58</sup> and the Orthodox churches teach something very similar to what our Synod does regarding admission to the Lord's Supper. In North America, however, the Protestant churches that do not accept the truth that *all* who eat and drink the Eucharist eat and drink the body and blood of Christ with their mouths have had an inordinate amount of influence in the thinking and practices of many churches today. Such churches have lost the understanding of the seriousness of harm that threatens a communicant who does not discern the body and blood of Christ. Therefore, these churches are less likely to ask, out of love, that such people refrain from participation.

<sup>58</sup> Published in worship booklets used in Roman Catholic parishes is the following paragraph from "Guidelines for Receiving Communion" issued by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in *Guidelines for the Publication of Missalettes* (Washington, D.C., 1986): "For Other Christians. We welcome to this celebration of the Eucharist those Christians who are not fully united with us. It is a consequence of the sad divisions in Christianity that we cannot extend to them a general invitation to receive Communion. Catholics believe that the Eucharist is an action of the celebrating community signifying a oneness in faith, life, and worship of the community. Reception of the Eucharist by Christians not fully united with us would imply a oneness which does not yet exist, and for which we must all pray."

7. **Question:** Well, how much correct doctrine does a person have to know in order to be able to commune "worthily"?

**Answer:** The question confuses the two ways of looking at a communicant. As individuals, we do not receive the Sacrament worthily because we know a certain "laundry list" of correct doctrines. Repentance, faith in Christ's words in and about the Sacrament, and the desire for repentant living in unity with one's fellow communicant are the components of communing in a worthy fashion.

But communicants are also confessors and members of church bodies. As such, it is not merely what the *individual* knows that is in view. It is the doctrine confessed *by his or her church body* that is the important thing. We ask those who join our church if they accept the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions even though they may have only studied the Small Catechism. In a similar manner, members of other churches who are heterodox in their confession have bound themselves to a confession, even though they may not know all of its content.

8. **Question:** What is the "passing of the peace"? What does this custom, increasingly common in our congregations, mean?

**Answer:** The "passing of the peace" is a modern application of the ancient custom known as the "kiss of peace" (see Rom. 16:16). Although some perhaps see this as a mere token of friendship and friendliness, its historic meaning could be understood, taught, and received for great blessing in our churches. As practiced in the ancient church, the "kiss of peace" was a "mutual greeting of the faithful in the Eucharistic liturgy, as a sign of their love and union. It is first mentioned by St. Justin Martyr (2<sup>nd</sup> cent.) and is probably a usage of the Apostolic period (cf. Rom. 16:16, 1 Pet. 5:14, etc.)."<sup>59</sup> Those who were to commune together first showed a sign of their mutual faith, love, forgiveness, and unity. The teaching value of this ancient custom, given our current setting where Christians often see themselves as "free-standing individuals," is evident. When individual communicants approach the Lord's Supper, it is not only a matter between themselves and their Lord. Rather, the relationship of love and unity with the fellow communicant is equally in view

<sup>59</sup> F. L. Cross, ed., and E. A. Livingstone, ed. (Third Edition), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 932.

and must also be preserved with equal dedication. Understood properly, the unity that is expressed is not mere friendship or even love, but a spiritual unity based on a common faith and confession.