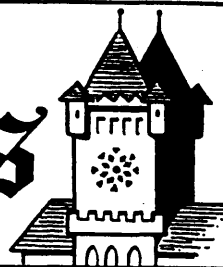


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PRESUPPOSITIONS OF PAEDOCOMMUNION

by

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For several years this subject has been a concern because Reformed churches see a discontinuity in the sacraments regarding children. Baptists often level the charge of inconsistency at paedobaptists. Such a criticism initiated the following study in that it was believed paedocommunion warranted investigation. At the beginning, it was not known that the early church did practise paedocommunion. History is not a primary consideration, so the Scriptures were considered first. It must also be said at the outset that James B. Jordan has also written several theses on the subject, and they should be read with these. As colleagues, we have mutually benefited one another on this subject, though most of our ideas have developed separately. Thus, both studies will help one to understand the position. Also, a *dialogue* written by Lewis Bulkeley should be read in conjunction with this study. His approach and style are unique and one will find it helpful (For information write "Dialogues", P.O. Box 6421, Tyler, TX 75711).

The following statements are presented in a loosely constructed outline. Main areas of concern are addressed. But one should not expect to find the final statement in the following. This paper is a first draft, and criticisms are welcomed. The points begin with major presuppositional issues, since all exegesis is dominated by one's presuppositions. A discussion of some of the history of the position is found at the end of the paper. Historical continuity is important, and church history confirms that eastern and western churches practised paedocommunion for nearly twelve centuries. Biblical and theological matters, however, are primary.

The Continuity of the Sacraments

The effect of nominalism on the church over the centuries has been to bifurcate the two sacraments. It has been customary in Reformed circles to speak of two sacraments, but there is really one sacrament with two aspects. The Church does not have two relationships with God, nor does it have two categories of relationship. If it is one with God, then union and communion are to be viewed as established simultaneously. To separate union from communion is to distort not only any relationship, but most certainly the relationship which the Church has with God.

The sacraments of Scripture are cleansing and eating, in both Old and New Testaments. Importantly, they are coalesced to the point that one rarely takes place without the other. A few examples are cited to acquaint the reader with this continuity between the sacraments.

When Israel was delivered from bondage they were baptized by Moses (Exodus 24). First, the people and "the Book of the Covenant" were sprinkled (baptized according to Hebrews 9:19). This baptism of blood sealed them to the covenant itself. Second, verses 9-11 state that Moses and the elders went up before God and "ate and drank" with Him (verse 11). It might be objected at this point that their meal was not a sacrament because Passover is the Old Testament sacrament. Strictly speaking, however, all of the meals of the Old Testament that prefigured Christ and communion with Him, and involved judgment if taken unlawfully, were part of the Old Testament *meal* sacrament. Certainly Passover is part of this paradigm, but not exclusively so.

The continuity of the sacraments is also seen in the Exodus itself. Paul points out that they were baptized in the sea first. Then they ate manna from heaven (1 Corinthians 10:1ff.).

In the Jealousy Ordeal (Numbers 5), cleansing was not separated from eating. The woman suspected of adultery ingested the "holy water" that was also used in cleansing the people (verses 15-18 and 25). Also it should be noted that the woman brought a "meal" offering. According to Leviticus, this was eaten by the priest as a communion meal. In the case of the Ordeal of Jealousy her offering became a *memorial*, obviously analogous to the Lord's Supper (verse 18).

Turning to the New Testament, one encounters this continuity of the sacraments in the very death of Jesus. His death is called a *baptism* as well

as something which Jesus *drank* (Mark 10:38-39). To think of separating the Lord's baptism from His death would have been impossible and inconceivable.

In line with this continuity in the cleansing and eating of Jesus' own death, the New Testament refers to the sacraments with the same unity. At baptism the person is baptized with Jesus (Galatians 3:23), and in communion Jesus is eaten (John 6). Both are symbolically real, but the church is to eat what it is baptized with.

Therefore, it would be better to refer to *one* sacrament with two aspects: inception and communion. This brings out the unity of the sacrament and emphasizes the unbiblical nature of dividing the two. With reference to children, it is *biblically* inconsistent to give a child sacramental union with Jesus, while withdrawing the perpetuation of that union through eating Jesus' meal. Although the sacraments are one, they have unique functions, and thus a legitimate diversity. But to change any *essential* feature of the two is to break that continuity. Denial of the table to children and infants violates one of those *essential* elements.

A further word may be also said about a discontinuity between the sacraments. Some, as has been mentioned, attempt to put the discontinuity in the sacraments at the point of the subjects. It is better, however, to see that the discontinuity appears another way. It concerns the frequency of each sacrament. Baptism establishes God's relationship with man, and communion extends it. Both involve union and communion, but these aspects are maintained through participation in the Lord's Supper. Therefore, it becomes important for one who has been baptized to proceed to communion. If one does not, then he has effectively been excommunicated. Children must be included, therefore, who have been baptized. If God did not intend His Supper to have a place in preserving the church (John 6), then it should be lowered to a place of insignificance. Of course many churches, de facto, have so relegated communion by denying any real presence, observing it once a quarter, and withholding it from children of the covenant. Children as well as any member of the covenant must take the Supper because it signifies the sustaining union and communion that baptism began. Both continuity and discontinuity between the sacraments argue for paedocommunion.

Meals and Children

In the Bible children of the covenant ate communion meals with God and their families. The pattern is so consistently laid down that the burden of proof is on the one who would aver that children are not to participate in the New Covenant communion.

The sacrifices: Of the five sacrifices (Leviticus 1:1-6:7) two are meals. The Meal offering (Leviticus 2) was eaten by the priests only, whereas the Peace offering was ingested by the priest and the subject's entire family (Deuteronomy 12:7). The word for "household" normally means all of the members of the family. In light of the nature of this sacrifice, it would be inconceivable that infants and little children would be left out.

The Passover: Much has been said about the Passover meal, but very few comments have been made which would prove that the children did not participate (Exodus 12:26). It was *in* the context of participation that the children were prompted to ask, "what does this mean," or "why do we do this." This is God's way of committing His people. They are first presuppositionally committed by a living faith (James 2:24), and *then* understanding comes. One ought, however, to see the incipient rationalism involved with having a child come to "the age of understanding" before it is allowed to participate. While the Baptists are guilty of irrationalism, requiring a conversion experience, Reformed churches have tended to teach that intellectual understanding is the way to God.

The wilderness meals: The Apostle Paul says, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that *all* your fathers were under the cloud, and *all* passed through the sea; And were *all* baptized unto Moses

in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." In this passage one should note the continuity in the use of the word *all*. If the first two *alls* refer to everyone, then so do the last two. It would seem that one could not have it both ways, but no one usually contests infants ate of the *Spiritual* food in the wilderness.

But the Spiritual food which they ate was *Christ*. The parallel with the Lord's Supper can hardly be missed, particularly since 1 Corinthians 10 is the immediate context for the chapter on communion. This passage connects the Old Testament meals with the Lord's Supper. If the food and drink which they drank was *Christ* and the food and drink which the church eats is *Christ*, then what is the difference? God certainly held them accountable, and judged them for sin. In fact, there is a direct parallel also between the unlawful eating of the manna in the wilderness and the unlawful eating described in 1 Corinthians 11. Therefore, the wilderness meals are a model and at least establish a pattern for the New Covenant meal (cf. also John 6).

Since the prohibition of young children and infants disrupts a major pattern, one would expect some discussion of this situation in the New Testament. Now it might be objected that the food which the wilderness church ate was essential to their survival as a people, so the parallel breaks down. But this objection only reinforces the parallel, because the food which the New Covenant people eat is just as necessary to their survival as a people. Indeed, it is *more* important, for Christ has come in history, and a real transition from wrath to grace has occurred.

A Covenantal Approach to the Sacraments

Covenant theologians have historically argued that man's relationship to God is analogous to the relationship within the Trinity. That is, it is not individual only, but also social. Thus, God does not just save individuals, but families and nations (Acts 2:43ff.). God claims the individual *and* his family in other words. The claim is made through the sacrament of baptism and the child is brought into the covenant. But it is schizophrenic to approach one sacrament covenantally, and view the other in an individualistic way. The child is either in the covenant or not. According to Scripture, one is in the covenant when God has claimed him.

This schizophrenic approach to the sacraments has resulted from an unbiblical attempt to inject either rationalism or irrationalism into the covenant. If for example, the basis for admittance to the Table is mastery of a body of knowledge, the church is saying to its children that the essence of the covenant is knowledge. And if, on the other hand, the child must tell of a conversion experience, as is practiced by many Presbyterian churches today, the covenant is defined accordingly. There is obviously nothing wrong with knowledge or experience, but these are not the foundations of one's relationship to God. Of course, knowledge could be defined in a deeper sense than the accumulation of data, but historically that has not been the case. According to the Scriptures, therefore, it would be better to see knowledge and experience as outgrowths of *faith and its expression in moral and governmental obedience*. Faith in Christ is primary, presuppositional, and the church must again place emphasis where God does.

One place to look in Scripture for this emphasis is the Lord's approach to anyone who wanted to be His disciple. This is critical because disciples are the ones to be baptized. (Note that the Great Commission is to "make disciples," according to the original in Matthew 28:19-20). What did one have to do to be a disciple? Did he have to tell of a conversion experience? Were several questions and their answers memorized? On the contrary, one had to believe and that faith was measured by *following after Christ*. Following Jesus means complying with His law and government first and foremost. No true learning can take place if this is not the approach. And no experience is trustworthy if it is not measured by this standard.

Now, anyone who followed Jesus in this manner was allowed to eat with him. In the Gospels, meals commonly followed a response to Jesus' call to be a disciple. In the case of baptized children, do they meet the requirements Jesus gave? Are they submitted to the law of God and His government? Of course they are! So why should the church place other standards before the ones Jesus gave? This is perhaps the worst effect of denying the sacrament to children. It says to them that their knowledge or experience is more important than God's Law and government. According to Jesus' tests for discipleship, however, the latter is primary. That is why little children should not be kept from Him (Luke 18:15ff.).

Therefore, the Reformed church has taken a covenantal approach to baptism, but causes a *sacramental schizophrenia* to result from its prohibition of children from the Table.

Incipient Pelagianism: Pelagius maintained that responsibility is limited by ability. Traditionally, children have been kept from the table because they are not *able* to examine themselves. What is really being said in this argument? Is it not saying that children are not responsible because they are not *able*? This appears to argue against the mind of Scripture. First, God says that one is responsible whether *able* or not. So to abstain from participation in the sacrament is an unlawful observance of the Supper. This may seem obvious, but many, indeed most, fail to recognize that Paul was rebuking the Corinthians for *neglecting* the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11). And it was their neglect through drunkenness that was unlawful. It would appear, therefore, that prolonged absence from the table, on the part of one who has been baptized, is wrong.

Second, any argument against paedocommunion because of *inability* on the part of the child can be turned against *paedobaptism*. The Baptist will argue that the child (infant) cannot believe, and since faith is the prerequisite for baptism it is wrong to baptize them.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 Analogy: *If any would not work, neither should he eat*. This passage provides insight regarding a covenantal approach to Scripture. Indeed, it demands that one understand the verse covenantally. In its *prima facie* sense the verse means that anyone in the covenant community who does not work should not eat. But what about children who are too young to work? Every Baptist at this point begins to interpret like a covenant theologian. Of course the children eat, but why? After all they do not work. They eat because they benefit from the responsible labor of the parent.

This Biblical logic which helps to understand the relationship between children and the responsibilities/privileges of the covenant, must be applied to the present issue. Children are given basic privileges of communion while growing into their full responsibilities. This is different from the case of an adult, but what is wrong with that? When considered further, however, it is really no different with an adult: New converts also grow into their responsibilities in the church.

It should be recognized that this is a *positive* approach to the child. The child is brought into communion with God and His people, and given the benefit *before* he is able to assume all the responsibilities. But it must be said that even adults examine themselves at *different* levels of maturity. Children are the same way, and many times they are *more* honest in their evaluation of sin. Whether they do or not, however, children are to be given the benefit of doubt as are the other members. Anyone in the covenant must be approached with 1 Corinthians 13 in mind. Most of the time, the children of the covenant are dealt with "believing the worst," or with suspicion, and their relationship with God is doubted.

Scepticism: When children are approached this way, they are being inculcated with the Thomistic axiom, "the greatest faith comes from the greatest doubt." Consciously or unconsciously they are being told that their relationship with God is doubtful. Thus, they themselves must question their own relationship in order to find *real* faith. But is this the way of Scripture? No. Children of the covenant are to be disciplined in the faith, but not made to doubt it. Satan is the one who tries to cause the brethren to doubt. That is not the role parents of shepherds in the church. Little ones are to be disciplined according to their level of maturation. Again this type of procedure is no different from the way adults are nurtured in the faith. Elders take into consideration whether an adult is new in the faith or young in his knowledge of Reformed theology. Thus, children should be given special consideration because of their newness to the faith, as well as physical and mental immaturity.

The church should want its children to learn that faith comes from God's determining claim, not *doubt*. Is it any surprise that one of the problems children of the covenant face is that they can never seem to attain any assurance of salvation? Sometimes the doubt is due to their reprobate condition (Romans 9:14ff.). Most of the time it results, however, from scepticism.

Usually this approach will be accompanied with *poor solutions* to their doubt. If it is an *irrational* church, the source of certainty will be found in some sort of experience. In other words, the child is told that an experience is the way to verify, or establish (depending whether the child is viewed as already saved or not) salvation. Thus, the child will be motivated to seek out some kind of encounter with God. But a child who has been baptized has already had an encounter with Him at baptism. And this has been followed up by other numerous ways of relating to God: prayer, worship, fellowship with other believers. But it may not meet the *mystical* standards of the irrational test.

When the children of the covenant are not allowed to come to the table, they are being told that their relationship with God does not exist. Not that it *might* not exist, but that they really do not have one at all. The latter is the only way of viewing this prohibition. The irrational recommendation of a conversion experience is not the solution.

If the church is a rationalistic one, the child will be told he needs to master a certain body of knowledge before his conversion can be verified. It should be noted that adults are usually not run through catechism before they join. But the effect in a child is that mastery of the catechism is the path to assurance. Actually such recommendations only serve to give false assurance.

God's tests for knowing him are moral and governmental (1 John 2:2ff.). Children must be told that if they love Jesus "they will keep His commandments" (John 15:10). Children of the covenant that do, keeping in mind the 2 Thessalonians principle, ought to be allowed to the table.

Subjectivism: Rationalism and irrationalism are both subjective because one is always left asking the question "How much." Rationalism says the way to know one is saved is by a mastery of knowledge, and irrationalism, experience. But who determines how much one must know or experience? The answers become rather subjective. To keep children from the Table on the basis of either of these erects a subjective standard for the Table. One must ask whether this standard is found in Scripture for either children or adults.

Confirmationism: Historically, many Reformed churches have taught that the faith of the child is to be confirmed during his teenage years. Usually the standard for this process is mastery of catechisms of creeds. There is nothing wrong with requiring children to master the catechisms; in fact, it should be required. But is this the Biblical way of confirming one's faith? Where in Scripture is a child asked to make a profession of faith in this manner? Actually, the child made a profession in baptism, and *Biblical* confirmation takes place when he *obeys* God's Law. Any attempt to confirm faith by knowledge or experience must rely on an evaluation of something *inside* a person. Furthermore, confirmation as normally practised, is asking God to do a second time what He has already done. So confirmation in this subjective way is no different than asking for a second blessing. Historically,

some of the churches which have practised confirmation were the source of second blessing movements. For example, they tended to grow out of pietistic Lutheran and Methodist churches. The Methodists differ in admitting children to the table, but the rite basically is a confirmational approach. They christen at birth, and baptize at age thirteen after a study program and simple process of catechism. Therefore, several comments need to be made.

First, baptism is primarily God's claim, but it should also be understood as a profession of faith. The Gospel is pictured in the sacrament, so the reception of it on one's self is a statement of faith. Granted, it may be a false profession in the case of infants or adults; nevertheless, it is a profession of faith. Thus, a baptized infant should be treated as a believer, and raised in the faith with a positive view of his relation to the Lord.

Second, covenantal children must confirm their faith by morally and governmentally submitting to His Law. These expressions of faith along with verbal profession will mature as the child grows older. But confirmation should be seen in this manner, which will of course not exclude knowledge and experience. Obedience, submission, and profession are primary.

Third, children are to be approached positively concerning their relationships with God, but not naively. Like all of us, they are totally depraved and should be disciplined when they misbehave. Particularly rebellious children should be brought before the session. The Lord's Supper provides an excellent opportunity for parents to guide, instruct, and discipline their children. But it has its maximum effect in the context of participation, just as it does with adults.

1 Corinthians 11

Since the major passage which is used to argue against paedocommunion is in 1 Corinthians, several comments need to be made about the chapter. Many have said that the "self-examination" and "discernment" required therein cannot be practiced by children. So they may not commune until these commands can be carried out. Closer examination of the passage, however, indicates a more corporatistic interpretation.

The Context

The verses which are normally used in preparation for communion are generally taken out of context. "Self examination" and "discernment" are applied across the board. But only the context can clarify what Paul says about how the Lord's Supper is to be observed.

The general problem was "divisions that exist among you" (verse 18). And it was particularly manifested in their failure to distinguish communion from regular meals. Paul says, "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. . . . What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?" (1 Cor. 11:20-22). However one takes the passage, it must be consistent with this context. But since the text has been used to pretext all sorts of problems in the church, it is difficult to perceive of the relationship of examining and discerning to this specific problem. In other words, how would examination of oneself or discerning the body correct the problem of failing to commune? Whatever the interpretation, it must be a solution to the immediate problem at hand because that is what Paul is attempting to provide.

So this is the problem being addressed. And this problem is pointed out because it is corporatistic in nature — it affects the entire body. How often this context is missed, to the extent that the passage is used primarily to refer to problems of a personal nature only. The problems Paul is attacking concerned persons, but persons in their corporate relationship with one another. The eucharist is a corporate, not a private activity. It is the body corporate that shows forth the death of the Lord (verse 26). If the Lord's Supper has been reduced to private dinners, or corporate dinners for that matter, then the church is not functioning as a body reflecting the body of Jesus. Thus, they miss the point of this corporate exercise. It is not for eating in general, but it is a special meal with the Lord.

Since Paul's comments are made to correct the Corinthian failure to distinguish general meals from the Lord's Table, two statements need to be reconsidered. They are particularly relevant to the issue of paedocommunion. According to some, they involve actions which infants cannot perform and exclude them from the sacrament. Statements made earlier with reference to a "Covenantal Approach to the Sacraments," however, dispel this line of argumentation. In summary, the pattern of Scripture indicates that children participate in general and special meals before the Lord. Ability is not the basis for admission to either sacrament, but God's claim. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 shows the mind of God regarding members of the covenant who are not able to assume full or any responsibility. Privilege is given until irresponsibility becomes visible.

Even though objections have been refuted, however, Paul's remarks concerning examination and discernment must still be addressed. For one, the precise meaning of the context will effect their interpretation. Also, Paul's use of these terms in other contexts challenges some of the common interpretations. Consequently, these words are consistent with and not contradictory to infants being at the Table.

Let a man examine himself (1 Corinthians 11:28)

Most of the time, *examine* is understood in a more quietistic sense of evaluation or contemplation. Does the context warrant such an interpretation? Paul has apparently already evaluated the situation for them in verses 18 through 22. So it does not seem necessary for them to consider whether they have sinned. The apostle has already pronounced judgment, and that means there must be something else he is asking them to do. But one is so

preconditioned to view examination the former way, it is difficult to conceive of any other meaning. Paul's use of the word in other contexts, however, sheds the necessary light. The following references indicate a slightly different meaning.

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is (1 Corinthians 3:13).

I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love (2 Corinthians 8:8).

But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another (Galatians 6:4).

Each reference, and every other use of the word by Paul, points to a more demonstrative meaning of the word. So it would be more consistent to read the statement in question, let a man prove himself. This means that Christ's Table should be approached with demonstration of faith. How often the church comes to communion in contemplation instead of demonstration when judgment has already been passed by God's Word. Remembering Christ's death is a show of faith, and since the Corinthians were essentially not partaking properly, this demonstration was missing. Paul's concern was that they do show the Lord's death till he come (verse 26) so this fits the context precisely.

Now it must be asked, "how does one prove or demonstrate his faith in Christ?" Initially, this faith is professed time and again in the Scriptures by baptism. From that time on, one must live in perseverance of the faith. Until one demonstrates otherwise, he must be allowed to come to Christ's Table. Only the visible sins exemplified by 1 Corinthians 11 can be the basis for denial. Infants who are part of the covenant have passively submitted to Christ's claims on them. Their place in the kingdom has been established. So they should be allowed to come to the Table of Christ until it can be demonstrated that they are living out of accord with the covenant.

The adult comes in much the same way. He is passive in that God has brought him there by grace. He may not be kept from communion until his baptism is denied. This gives the recipient the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise. At baptism, one is judicially declared right with God. To deal either with the adult or infant as though he were still guilty and in need of being proven innocent, is to deny his baptism.

Therefore, the baptized infant has proven himself at that point, and will grow in his perseverance. This is consistent with the demand that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 11:28. Obviously, this demonstration will be in greater or lesser degree with various people in the church. But it must be said that paedocommunion can not be contested on this basis.

Discerning the body (1 Corinthians 11:29).

First it must be mentioned that many of the better manuscripts leave out the reference to the Lord. Thus, the body referred to is the church. Of course it could still refer to the church if the additional phrase were included. At other places in Scripture the body of the Lord is the organic or political church.

Second, other contexts in which this word is used give evidence of a better interpretation. Sometime *discern* is viewed in a rationalistic way so that the standard becomes a certain doctrinal viewpoint. For centuries people have been excluded for believing transubstantiation or other such doctrines. Although such beliefs are wrong, it must be objected that this is not what it means to discern. The following Pauline examples clarify its meaning.

For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive (1 Corinthians 4:7).

I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? (1 Corinthians 6:5).

From these contexts it is clear that the word takes on an adjudicatory force. It is more the idea of distinguishing, than of knowing a catechism or even understanding doctrine for that matter. In context Paul is appealing for the distinction to take place by observing the Lord's Supper. Whether the body spoken of is Christ's political or sacramental body, it would be distinguished accordingly. That is the context of 1 Corinthians 11, and it should not be invested with more than what Paul is saying.

The judgment referred to should also be understood in relationship to how Paul has used the word elsewhere. In 1 Corinthians 6 it was used to indicate adjudication. So why should it be any different here? Why should the corporate side be neglected? After all, Paul has already told the Corinthians that they lack discipline in the church. Thus, it would make more sense that Paul would be speaking this way. Two lines of evidence indicate an adjudicatory interpretation of the judgment involved.

One, Paul ties the immediate subject at hand to the overall problem of schism in the church. If the church was divided over eating the communion meal as a special or general meal, then the elders would need to step in and pass judgment. In chapter six, Paul had used the same language to describe the solution to another problem that was dividing them. So the lexical genre has been set, and again context leads to a more corporate interpretation.

Two, Paul says, *when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord* (verse 32). His use of the passive voice cannot be missed. Some have suggested that this means one is judged by the Word. But the text does not say this, and context can not be pushed aside. Thus, it would make more sense to take the judgment as adjudication which takes place as the elders implement church discipline (Matt. 18:15-18).

Looking at these words in relation to paedocommunion, it is seen how they are not inconsistent with the idea. In the case of discernment, the meal is distinguished as the parents and the whole church keep God's special meal special. And the judgment passed would be carried out likewise.

Finally, this interpretation of the passage in no way removes the places of confession of sin. The New Covenant liturgy for the eucharistic aspect of the antiphonal service refers to confession of sin in other passages. Furthermore, confession of sin is also said to be a vital part of walking with God (1 John 1:9). So it cannot be said that such a view leads to neglect of confession of sin.

The Corporate Picture

One last comment about 1 Corinthians 11 must be made. Paul says, *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come* (1 Corinthians 11:26). These second person plurals reveal that communion is a corporate experience. Children of the covenant are part of God's Kingdom (Luke 18:15). To exclude them from this corporate experience, that is the kingdom, reduces the corporate picture. It is the same as saying that only adults are in the kingdom, when Jesus has said differently. Therefore, the church must include all of its members, that it might more fully shew the Lord's death till he come.

History

The place of historical practice is important, although not primary. But because one is pressed to add that history is not primary is no reason to neglect the relevance of historical continuity. The Word of God has been given to the church of all ages, and not just to the present one. Furthermore, the Word has been handed down from previous generations. Therefore, history has its place.

One must be extremely careful if he practices a doctrine that is novel. Paedocommunion is not in that category. If ever there was a doctrine that had historical precedent, it is this one.

A number of sources could be cited, but two are given in this paper (For more, one should read "Is the Lord's Supper for Children?" in *Westminster Theological Journal*, Spring 1975, by Christian L. Keidel.) The first is Bingham's *Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Vol. V, Book 15, Chapter 4, section 7. He establishes that paedocommunion was practiced the first twelve centuries in the Western and Eastern churches. Sometimes it was enforced, because the sacrament was believed to impart life, but at all times it was thought to be consistent with the teachings in Scripture regarding the covenant. Men such as Augustine argued for paedocommunion on the basis of John 6 which says, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."

Certainly in one sense it would be argued that grace is not in or with the sacrament in a local fashion. But the sacrament cannot be reduced to an empty symbol. Calvin has provided the best description of the relationship of reality to symbol. He says that one is inserted, actually re-inserted, into the humanity of Christ every time he participates. Furthermore, Christ is really present, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, with his body politic. The one who is united with Christ and bears fruit, which is an indication of life, the Lord prunes (John 15:1ff.). But the one who does not bear fruit is cut off (John 15:6ff.). Thus, the one who communes with God unto fruitfulness is nourished because he has eaten Christ's meal. In that case, Augustine's argument is valid (cf. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacraments* by Ronald Wallace, recently published by Geneva Divinity School Press, 708 Hamvassy, Tyler, Texas).

Christ does not wait until one bears fruit in the case of an adult to let him eat His Holy Supper. Why? Because Christ structures His kingdom such that one is *presuppositionally* committed first, and then allowed to have the benefits until proven otherwise. Any other procedure indicates that one earns the right to eat with Jesus. But this cannot be the case. Jesus comes to the church, declares her legally right with God, and brings her into His banquet.

The second historical source to be noted is the Council of Trent, 1562. Its importance grows out of the rejection of paedocommunion. The Roman church was concerned, however, because it had been such a *historic* practice, condoned by some of its leading saints. Their position was stated thus: "Finally: this same holy Synod teaches, that little children, who have not attained to the use of reason, are not by any necessity obliged to the sacramental communion of the Eucharist: forasmuch as, having been regenerated by the laver of baptism, and being incorporated with Christ, they can not, at that age, lose the grace which they have already acquired of being the sons of God. Not therefore, however, is antiquity to be condemned, if, in some places, it, at one time, observed that custom; for as those most holy Fathers had a probable cause for what they did in respect of their times, so, assuredly, is it to be believed without controversy, that they did this without any necessity thereof unto salvation" (The Twenty-First Session, Chapter 4).

Rome's reasoning, at least, teaches that paedocommunion was a historic practice. Its concern is expressed in typical medieval casuistry and

must be pointed out because *reformed* churches have traditionally used it. Rome argues that a child must wait until he comes to "the age of reason." But where is the Biblical precedent for this? Rome clearly illustrates its Thomistic paradigm by the way it approaches the issue of paedocommunion. Reason dictates who will come to the Table. Like Rome, the Reformed church has historically argued the same way. In Scripture, however, God's claim through baptism admits one to the table.

At another place, Rome argues from its doctrine of transubstantiation. Canon IV of the same chapter says, "As regards, however, those two articles, proposed on another occasion, but which have not as yet been discussed: to wit, whether the reasons by which the holy Catholic Church was led to communicate, under the one species of bread only. . . ." From this one learns why the doctrine of paedocommunion initially began to disappear. Historically, the chalice was taken from laymen because it was feared, by the laymen themselves, that some might be spilled. Since it was believed at this time that the wine was really the blood of Christ localized, they did not want to drop any on the ground. That would mean defilement. Regarding the children, they were prone to spill, so it was consistent with the doctrine of transubstantiation to take the sacrament from them.

This is noted because superstition has been the motive both for *giving* to and *for taking* the sacrament from infants. In each case it has been wrong, and such things happen when the church does not argue from the whole counsel of God.

Practical Considerations

Once children begin to participate in communion a favorable mood toward children is encouraged. At present, an almost anti-child mentality exists in the culture and churches. Rarely does one find infants and small children in worship services because it is feared that they might disturb. This is indicative of the modern world's answer and attitude. For one thing, children are a reminder of man's purpose to multiply and subdue (Genesis 1:26ff.). For another, they recall man's earthiness. Worship is not a step into an *ideal* realm of heavenly bliss. When children and infants are there, the sounds they characteristically make are there also. Man cannot escape children, and the church is wrong to put them out.

In part, the reason children are not found in the church is that church meetings consist almost entirely of instruction, with little active worship. Small children get nothing from a sermon or lesson pitched at adult ears, and their natural restlessness prevents mother from paying full attention, so it is understandable that some parents place their children in a nursery during the worship hour. Thus, this very way of structuring worship works to the exclusion of children. One solution, employed in our church, is for the evening service to consist largely of prayer and praise, including the Lord's Supper, and with a short sermon (10 or 15 minutes at the most). The activity of the worship keeps the children interested, and enables them to participate at a very early age.

A second and probably more fundamental reason the church finds it easier to put them out is that it has lost its discipline. It is one thing for an infant to cry innocently, and quite another for a young child to misbehave. Misbehavior should be dealt with by the parents, and if they fail the elders should step in.

Therefore, noise created by infants should not be thought of as irreverent. But disturbance caused by disobedience must be controlled. Paedocommunion thrusts a church into a situation where it must confront its children.

Regarding discipline, the father acting under the authority of the elders should be allowed occasionally to withhold communion from his children, just as individuals may withhold it from themselves on occasion (Matt. 5:23, 24). The father must examine them fairly as they approach the Table. Children are more conspicuous in their sins so it is easier to deal with them than adults. But the father must not expect perfection, and keep in mind that the child is growing in his responsibility. To be harsh is as unfair as an elder being too harsh on the flock.

With a chronic problem or incorrigibility, the parents should bring the child to the elders. This has several benefits. One, the child will learn and see a discipline larger than the home. The church must have discipline which is visible. Two, he will know that his father is under discipline as well. How often a child as it grows up begins to think that the parent can say or do anything he wants. But this is not the case, and appearances before the elders will help to communicate the authoritative accountability around the family. Finally, it may take this other sphere of discipline to deal effectively with the recurrent disciplinary problem. It gives the elders a concrete reason to talk with the parents about the way they are handling the discipline of their children. Maybe the parents can change some things at home which will help the child to overcome this particular problem. But if the child is stubborn, the two spheres of discipline working together will most likely correct the child.

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