

Theological Opinions of the Consistory of the COELC

XVII

On Intinction

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Preface

Intinction, as mentioned in this statement, is the practice of consuming the elements of bread and wine in Holy Communion in a manner in which the bread and wine have been mixed together, whether this be the dipping of the bread into wine or the crumbling of the bread into the wine and using a spoon to administer the mixed elements (as is practiced in the Eastern Orthodox Church)

Historical Analysis

The origins of the practice of Intinction dates back to some time before the Fourth Century AD. Originally the practice was used for the elderly who could not swallow the dry communion bread. However, in this original practice the bread was not mixed with the wine. Instead, the bread was dipped into water to soften the bread, and the wine was drunk separately.

Later the practice of dipping the bread into the wine, rather than water, was adopted. When this practice began is unsure, the earliest mention of it comes from Pope Julius I (280-352AD)¹ who in 340AD wrote a condemnation of several irregular practices that had emerged regarding the Sacrament of Holy Communion. He wrote:

But their practice of giving the people intincted Eucharist for the fulfilment of communion is not received from the gospel witness, where, when He gave the Apostles His Body and Blood, giving the bread separately and the chalice separately is recorded.

Scholars are not sure where the exact origins of Intinction began, although there is some evidence of an early practice of intincting the bread in water for the sick and elderly. How it later developed into a practice of dipping the bread into the wine is unsure.

The practice of mixing the bread and the wine in the cup seems to originate in the Eastern Church, where the original practice closely mirrors that of the Eastern Orthodox Church today, that is where the bread is crumbled into the cup and mixed into a form of slush and then administered via a spoon. The earliest reference to this practice comes from the Seventh Century AD when St. Sophronius (560-638AD), the Patriarch of Jerusalem, mentions the practice of administering the Lord's Supper to the sick as "*the holy chalice filled with the holy body of the Lord and the blood.*"

Scholars believe that this practice of mixing the elements in the cup was originally done for one or more of the following reasons: for Paedo-Communion or Infant Communion, in order for the infants to consume the elements; for communing the sick or elderly; or for fear of spilling the consecrated elements, thus the bread and wine were mixed to avoid the possibility of crumbs.

The practice of Intinction was never condemned in the Eastern Church, whereas the Western Church condemned it over and over again.

The original condemnation came from Pope Julius I as mentioned above. Additionally Pope Leo the Great (400-461AD) and Pope Gelasius (410-496AD) referred to the practice as sacrilegious.

¹ Note dates given are their birth and death years not the years of their time as Pope.

At the Fourth Council of Braga (675AD) canon 2 officially condemned the practice of Intinction, with wording almost identical to that of Julius I.

Pope Urban II (1035-1099AD) (at the Council of Clermont in 1090AD) and Pope Paschal II (1050-1118AD) in 1099AD, both prohibited the practice, although both made special allowances for special situations in which the sick had to be spoon-fed the elements, in such a case the Popes allowed the mixing of the bread and the wine together, marking the first time the Western Church allowed Intinction in limited situations.

With the introduction of Transubstantiation and Concomitance the Western Church largely shifted to Communion in One Kind (just the bread), thus the question of Intinction was not discussed.

Pope Innocent III (1161-1216AD) was the last pope to comment on the issue of Intinction declaring the practice out of bounds.

However, in 1948, at the Lambeth Conference, the Roman Catholic Church overturned the 1600year position of the Western Church (starting with Pope Julius I) and now accepts Intinction as a practice in their churches.

This decision would spark a change in many other churches also, for one the Lutheran Church. The original position of the Early Lutherans condemned Intinction (see below the section on *Lutheran Reformers*).

Beyond Martin Chemnitz, there does not seem to be much mention of Intinction amongst Lutheran theologians (at least that we have been able to find). C.F.W. Walther the founder of the *Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod* does not mention it in any of his writings. In his *Pastoral Theology* Walther gives a list of Holy Communion adiaphora and Intinction is not mentioned in the list. This could mean that Walther did not consider Intinction as an adiaphoron but that is an argument from silence.

What is clear is that the *Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod* did in 1944 passed a resolution condemning the practice of Intinction as an invalid administration of Holy Communion.

However, like many churches of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century the *Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod* softened their stance. In 1983 in the statement *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper* the *Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod* in section III: *Questions and Answers* question 18 “*What is the propriety of Intinction?*” answers:

Intinction refers to the dipping of the consecrated bread into the consecrated wine prior to distribution. While the consecrated elements offer Christ's body and blood to every communicant, regardless of method of distribution, our Confessions and practice preserve the model of our Lord's distribution of the bread and then the wine (Matthew 26:26-29)

This is the most recent statement made by the *Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod* on Intinction. Here the *Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod* does not endorse the practice of Intinction and seeks to retain the regular distribution; however, the statement no longer rejects the practice of Intinction as an invalid administration of Holy Communion.

Biblical Analysis

On the night when Jesus was betrayed He instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion, commanding the Disciples to “take and eat” the bread/Body and to “drink” the wine/Blood (Matthew 26:26-27; Mark 14:22; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

Christ commands us to eat the bread which is His Body and to drink the wine which is His Blood. The problem with the practice of Intinction is that the communicant is not following the command to drink the wine, but is instead eating the bread soaked in wine.

Some may argue that the communicant is still drinking the wine, and that the bread is merely acting as a sponge. They will reference John 19:28-30 in which Jesus said “I thirst” and the soldiers gave him vinegar to drink by filling a sponge and putting it on a hyssop branch for him to drink from.

The issue here is that there is a difference between drinking liquid from a sponge and eating bread that has soaked up a liquid. When one drinks from a sponge they are not eating the sponge but are sucking the liquid out of the sponge and drinking the liquid. When one consumes the bread that has

been intincted they are not sucking the liquid out to drink it, instead they are eating the bread, which just happens to have soaked up the wine.

Now some may object and say, that of course the communicant is drinking the wine. The wine is a liquid and you can't eat a liquid.

This is true one cannot eat a liquid, but the issue here is that the solid bread and the liquid wine are no longer separated into bread and liquid but are instead now one solid, thus the wine soaked bread cannot be drunk, it can only be eaten, for it is a solid and you cannot drink a solid.

For example: If one mixes milk into mash potatoes and then consumes the mix they are not eating mashed potatoes and drinking milk. They are eating mashed potatoes that has milk mixed in.

The same goes for Intinction, one is not eating bread and drinking wine, they are eating wine soaked bread. There is no longer the two substances of bread and wine but the one substance of wine soaked bread.

Thus Intinction is breaking the command of Christ to eat bread and drink wine.

Lutheran Reformers

The *Book of Concord* does not explicitly address the issue of Intinction. The closest that one will find is the *Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration* Article VII: Concerning the Holy Supper.⁸³⁻⁸⁴ Here the authors of the Formula state that “*this ‘blessing’ or the recitation of the Words of Institution of Christ by itself does not make a valid Sacrament if the entire action of the Supper, as Christ administered it, is not observed... On the contrary, Christ’s command ‘Do this’ must be observed without division or confusion.*”

Here the Formula clearly states that it is not a valid Sacrament if the Supper is not observed as Christ administered it, for the command of Christ to ‘do this’, requires us to administer the Holy Supper as he did.

The Formula then describes what a valid administration of the Supper is, “*that in a Christian assembly bread and wine are taken, consecrated, distributed, received, eaten and drunk.*” And here the Formula makes the point of including both eating and drinking. For, as mentioned in the above section on *Biblical Analysis* Christ commands us to eat the bread and drink the wine, thus a valid administration of the Sacrament requires both eating and drinking.

The best way to determine what the reformers believed regarding Intinction is Martin Chemnitz’s *Examination of the Council of Trent*². In the section on *Concerning Communion Under Both Kinds* Chemnitz takes a brief detour in his argument for Communion Under Both Kinds to address the question of Intinction.

While arguing against the practice of Communion under one kind Chemnitz quotes from an epistle of Cyprian of Carthage (200-258AD) which stated that if any of the Church Fathers through ignorance, “*did not observe and keep what the Lord by His example and teaching taught us to do,*” then for the sake of ignorance forgiveness may be granted to them, but that this practice should not be practiced among us. Chemnitz states how Cyprian was writing against the “water-dispensers” that is those who offered only water instead of wine during Holy Communion. He then states how’s Cyprian’s ruling that we should “*observe and keep what the Lord by His example and teaching taught us to do*” is not only applicable to the “water-dispensers” but also to those who practice Communion Under One Kind. From there Chemnitz begins to speak of another example of those who do not observe and keep what the Lord by His example and teaching taught us to do, that is those who practice Intinction. Chemnitz writes,

So, when about the year of our Lord 340 some men offered the Eucharist to the people by means of a wafer dipped in the cup in place of Full Communion, Julius pronounced this to be contrary to the teaching of the Gospel and of the Apostles. He says that this is proved from the fountain

² See Volume 2 pages 352-353 and 421-423

of truth itself, from which the ordained mysteries of the Sacraments came forth. And soon afterwards he says that the proof for this is the testimony of the Gospel, where mention of the charge concerning the bread and the cup is made separately for each. Therefore Pope Julius proves from the Institution of the Supper described in the Gospel that the cup is to be offered to the people separately, and disapproves the Intinction of the Eucharist, because it is not in agreement with the Institution.

From this we can learn from Chemnitz what was the Lutheran opinion regarding Intinction. Chemnitz states that Intinction is not in agreement with the Institution of Jesus but is contrary to the teaching of the Gospel and the Apostles, or in other words contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. This is a very serious charge as Chemnitz wrote in the *Formula of Concord*, which all Lutherans are to subscribe to and confess, the Lord's Supper is not "a valid Sacrament if the entire action of the Supper, as Christ administered it, is not observed... On the contrary, Christ's command 'Do this' must be observed without division or confusion."

Chemnitz also states very clearly, that the testimony of the Gospel is that the charge concerning the bread and the cup is that they are to be administered separately. Here Chemnitz confesses that the Scriptures teach us that we are commanded or charged by Christ to administer the bread and wine separately during Holy Communion.

Thus from this we learn that the position of the Lutheran Reformers was that the Word of God commands us to administer the bread and the wine separately during Holy Communion and that the practice of Intinction is not a valid Sacrament as it is not in agreement with the Institution of Christ but is contrary to Christ's command to "do this".

Later in this section Chemnitz wrote some more on Intinction, stating that, "On account of the fear of the danger of spilling, some already early considered a departure from the form of the Institution of Christ; however, lest they should take away and abrogate Communion under both kinds, altogether, they gave the communicants consecrated bread dipped into the cup of blessing for a full Communion." Here Chemnitz is using the example of Intinction, which he states was introduced for fear of spilling the wine, to show that the Early Church would rather practice Intinction than distribute only the bread.

Note that Chemnitz already calls this practice a departure from the Institution of Christ. This is a serious statement, since the *Formula of Concord* stated that a valid administration of the Sacrament must follow the Institution of Christ.

Chemnitz continues stating that this practice of Intinction had crept into the Church, through cases of necessity, such as communing infants and the sick. Here he references Cyprian of Carthage and Prosper of Aquitaine (390-455AD). He states that some sought to bring this practice into the ordinary Communion of the Church.

He goes on to say that this practice was "contrary to the Institution of Christ and the custom of the ancient Church." Here Chemnitz explicitly says that Intinction is contrary to the Institution of Christ. And this is significant for as the Formula said, if the Holy Supper is not observed as Christ administered, then it is not a valid Sacrament.

Chemnitz continues stating that:

Pope Julius, about 340AD, sharply rebukes this custom in an epistle to the bishops of Egypt. It is worth the effort to consider on what grounds he refutes it. He says that it is contrary to the divine order, contrary to the apostolic institutions, likewise that it is contrary to the evangelical and apostolic teaching and ecclesiastical custom... Julius finally concludes: "When they give a dipped Eucharist to the people for a full Communion, they have not received this as a proved testimony from the Gospel, where He commended His body to the apostles, and also His blood; for the commendation of the bread is mentioned separately and that of the cup also separately."

Here we can again see Chemnitz calling Intinction contrary to the divine order of God.

Chemnitz goes on to state that after Julius' decree Intinction was suppressed in the Church but crept in again later, being condemned in 580AD at the Third Council of Braga, repeating the decree of Julius. Chemnitz states, "so frequently have human intellects meditated upon a departure from the

form of Communion prescribed by the Son of God Himself. But in the better times of the Church there were men who retained and sharply defended the testamentary institution of the Son of God against all customs and pretexts.” Here Chemnitz plainly states that Intinction is a departure from the form of Communion as prescribed by the Son of God.

Chemnitz continues stating that in 920AD the Monastic Order of Cluny instituted the use of Intinction out of fear of spilling the wine. Later that the Council of Tours permitted the use of Intinction for the sick. And, lastly in the days of Bishop Ivo of Chartres (1040-1116AD) permission was granted to practice Intinction due to fear of spilling the wine. Chemnitz provides these examples only to prove his point that until the Thirteenth Century AD, that even though the Church departed from the Institution of Christ by practicing Intinction, they still sought to administer both bread and wine and not bread alone (Communion Under One Kind).

Chemnitz also points out that not everyone endorsed Intinction, most notably Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153AD) and Peter Lombard (1096-1160AD) rejected this practice around the time of Ivo of Chartres.

Further Comments

Historically there have been numerous reasons for practicing Intinction, such as Paedo-Communion or Infant Communion, communing the sick or elderly, or for fear of spilling the wine. However, in the modern Church three main reasons have been proposed: communing the elderly, stopping the spread of germs and communing alcoholics.

In this section we will look at these three situations, discussing the issues with them and proposing an alternative to Intinction.

1. *The elderly*: the general argument here is that some elderly people struggle to swallow the dry wafer or are unable to drink properly from the chalice (at least not without spilling the wine). Regarding the dry bread, there is no reason to depart from the Institution of Christ and use the wine to soften the bread. It is believed that the earliest form of Intinction was the dipping of the bread into a cup of water. The Words of Christ simply command us to eat the bread and drink the wine, there is nothing forbidding us from softening the bread with water, as long as the bread is eaten and the wine is drunk. Therefore, if a communicant has trouble swallowing the dry bread then the administrator can simply dip the bread into some water.
Note that it would be permissible to dip the bread in the wine, as long as the wine was also drunk in addition, but to avoid all confusion it would be best practice to dip the bread in water. Regarding the elderly spilling the wine, or the wine drooling out the side of their mouth, if the elderly cannot drink from the cup then use a syringe to squirt the wine into their mouth, or even use an eye dropper to drip a drop or two into their mouth. The Words of Institution do not provide a quantity of wine that is to be consumed, as long as the liquid is drunk separately from the bread. 1 Corinthians 11:21-23 condemns those who drank too much wine and became drunk, but there is no minimum requirement for how much is to be drunk.
Now some will object and state that using a syringe or eye dropper to administer the wine is contrary to the Institution of Christ. But the syringe and eye dropper are merely acting as instruments to get the wine to the communicants mouth. As long as the wine comes from the cup to the mouth and is drunk this is not a departure from the Words of Christ.
2. *Stopping the spread of germs*: many believe that Intinction stops the spread of germs but this is not the case. If the communicants are all intincting into the common cup the germs will still cling to the bread. Secondly, Intinction actually exasperates the spread of germs because so many people are dipping their fingers into the cup. It is for this reason that many churches that practice Intinction actually prohibit it during flu season to curb the spread of germs.
If communicants are worried about the spread of germs, they can then use individual cups. For there is nothing in Scripture that forbids the use of multiple cups during Holy Communion. There are places in Scripture that speak of one cup but the Scriptures also speak of one loaf and

yet many churches do not use one loaf but instead they use multiple communion wafers. The use of one cup or one loaf is great symbolism that represents the oneness of the communicants but this is not mandatory.

3. *Alcoholics*: many argue that recovering alcoholics cannot drink the wine because it would set off their alcoholism, and thus should intinct instead. However, if such a small sip of wine would set off their alcohol addiction, then the small amount of wine in the intincted bread would most likely do the same also. The best practice for those struggling with an alcohol addiction is to hand them an individual cup of diluted wine, even if this is mostly water with a few drops of wine. For the Words of Institution do not forbid the mixing of water into the wine. For much of church history the practice was to mix water into the wine because of the blood and water that flowed from Christ's side. Martin Luther in his *Twelfth Passion Sermon* states that, "*It is this flowing of both water and blood from Christ's side, that is said to have given rise to the custom of mixing the wine used in the Supper of the Lord with water. Cyprian vigorously defends this custom as a special ordinance of Christ, and the Armenians were condemned as heretics for not complying with it. Since Christ, however, did not command this to be done, and since the Words of Institution tell us merely that Christ took the cup and gave it to His Disciples, it is no necessary to hold this custom as essential.*" Here Luther does not reject the mixing of water into the wine but merely states that it is not essential or necessary.

Confession

1. We believe, teach and confess that a valid administration of the Sacrament means that we are to administer the Sacrament as it was instituted by Christ.
2. We believe, teach and confess that Jesus commands us to eat the bread which is His Body and to drink the wine which is His Blood, and that we are to eat the bread and drink the wine separately.
3. We believe, teach and confess that Intinction, that is the mixing of the elements of bread and wine and consuming only the bread soaked with wine and not drinking from the chalice, is contrary to the Institution of Christ.
4. We believe, teach and confess that Intinction is a violation of the command of Christ to drink the wine since one is not drinking the wine but is eating bread mixed with wine.
5. We believe, teach and confess that Intinction is not a right or valid administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.
6. We reject and condemn the practice of Intinction, that is the mixing of the bread and the wine, whether this is in the form of dipping the bread into the chalice or in the form of crumbling the bread into the wine and then administering it via a spoon.
7. We believe, teach and confess that Intinction is only valid in the circumstance in which the bread is dipped (preferably in water) and the wine is drunk separately.
8.
 - a. We approve the practice of using liquid to soften the bread. We recommend that if this is done the bread is to be dipped into water and not into the chalice, lest it give the appearance of approving the false practice of Intinction.

- b. We do not forbid the practice of softening the bread by dipping it into the chalice, as long as the wine is then drunk separately, thus the person both eats bread soaked with wine and in addition drinks the wine.
 - c. However, while we do not forbid this latter practice we strongly recommend against it, and encourage the use of water to soften the bread, simply because we do not wish to create confusion in our congregations and give the impression that we support the practice of consuming only the bread mixed with the wine.
9. We believe, teach and confess that it is valid to consume wine diluted or mixed with water.
10. We approve the practice of using wine mixed with water for Holy Communion.