

Theological Opinions of the Consistory of the COELC

XVIII

On Infant Communion

Adopted in May 2020

Preface

1. We believe, teach and confess that a person should first examine themselves before partaking of the Lord's Supper¹, and that they must discern the Real Presence of the Lord's Body and Blood in, with and under the bread and wine so that they do not eat and drink to their damnation.² For, those who desire the Lord's Supper must know what they seek and why they come.³ Therefore, to receive the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner⁴, a person must know:
 1. Why they come: They must examine themselves and determine that they are a sinner in need of the Lord's forgiveness.⁵
 2. What they seek: They must discern that in, with and under this bread and wine is the Lord's true Body and Blood given to them for the forgiveness of their sins.⁶
2. We believe, teach and confess that those who are impenitent and do not desire the forgiveness of sins and those who deny the Real Presence of the Lord's Body and Blood, receive the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner and eat and drink judgement upon themselves.⁷ However, those who have faith that this is the Lord's Body and Blood given and shed for them for the forgiveness of sins, receive the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner and eat and drink to their blessing.⁸

Regarding the Communion of Infants: the question is whether an infant can receive the Lord's Supper worthily?

3. We believe, teach and confess that infants are born in sin⁹ and can receive the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.
4. We believe, teach and confess that the Sacraments do not work *ex opera operato*¹⁰, but that the Sacraments require faith which believes the promise and receives what is given.¹¹

¹ 1 Cor. 11:28

² 1 Cor. 11:29

³ LC Lord's Supper.2

⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. 11:27

⁵ Gen. 6:5, 8:21, Psalm 51:5, Rom. 3:23

⁶ Matt. 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20, 1 Cor. 10:16, 11:24-25

⁷ 1 Cor. 11:27-29, Matt. 4:17, Mark 1:15, Luke 13:3,5, John 5:14, 8:11, Rom. 6:1-2, cf. Mark 16:16, John 3:18, LC Lord's Supper.58, LC Confession.29, SC Lord's Supper.9-10, FCSD 7.68, FC Epitome 7.18,

⁸ 1 Cor. 11:31, LC Lord's Supper.33-34, SC Lord's Supper.9-10, cf. Isa. 30:15, Acts 11:18, 2 Cor. 7:10

⁹ Gen. 8:21, Psalm 51:5

¹⁰ Latin for "by the mere act of doing".

¹¹ Mark 16:16, Apol. 13.18

5. We believe, teach and confess that man's reason cannot comprehend the mystery of the Lord's Supper,¹² and that the Lord's Supper is received not by reason but by faith.¹³
6. We believe, teach and confess that infants can possess a true living faith.¹⁴
7. We believe, teach and confess that no genuine believer who retains a true and living faith – no matter how weak – receives the Holy Supper as condemnation. For Christ instituted this supper particularly for those weak in faith but repentant, to comfort them and to strengthen their weak faith.¹⁵
8. Therefore, we believe, teach and confess that it is possible for an infant to receive the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.
9. However, we also believe, teach and confess that pastors are called to serve as faithful and trustworthy Stewards of the Mysteries of God (Word and Sacrament).¹⁶
10. As a responsible Steward the pastor is not to knowingly give the Sacrament to those who would eat and drink it to their harm. Therefore, the pastor is to withhold Holy Communion from those who would eat and drink the Lord's Supper to their harm.
11. The pastor cannot see the heart and faith of the communicant, for God alone knows the true heart of man.¹⁷ The pastor can only make judgements based on the outward confession of the communicant.¹⁸
12. Therefore, even if an infant could receive the Lord's Supper worthily, the pastor should not commune an infant, as he can only make judgements based on an outward confession, and an infant is not able to make an outward confession concerning the Lord's Supper.¹⁹
13. Therefore, we do not approve or support the practice of giving the Lord's Supper to infants, lest they receive the Lord's Supper unworthily and eat and drink to their judgement.²⁰
14. We also believe, teach and confess that we are in no way obligated out of necessity to give the Lord's Supper to infants.²¹
15. We believe, teach and confess that infants do not need the Lord's Supper, as the grace which they have received in Baptism is sufficient.²²
16. We reject and condemn the view that infants must be given the Lord's Supper out of necessity for their salvation.²³

¹² Isa. 55:8-9, 1 Cor. 1:25, 3:19,

¹³ 2 Cor. 5:7, cf. Rom. 8:24, 2 Cor. 4:18, Heb. 11:1

¹⁴ Matt. 18:3,6, 19:14, Mark 9:42, 10:15, Luke 1:41-45, 18:17, LC Baptism.55

¹⁵ FC. Epitome 7.19, cf. Matt. 9:12-13, Mark 2:17, Luke 5:31-32, Matt. 5:3, 17:20, Luke 17:6

¹⁶ 1 Cor. 4:1-2, Apol. 24.80

¹⁷ 1 Sam. 16:7, 1 Kings 8:39, 1 Chron. 28:9, Psalm 44:21, 139:23, Jer. 17:10, Matt. 6:4, Acts 1:24, Rom. 8:27, 1 Cor. 2:11, Rev 2:23

¹⁸ 1 Sam. 16:7

¹⁹ AC 25.1

²⁰ See: Martin Luther on the Bohemian Brethren and Child Communion, cited in Pieper's Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, page 383, fn. 133, See: Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Vol. 2, page 435

²¹ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Vol. 2, page 435

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Regarding the Communion of Young Children or the Mentally Handicapped

17. We hold that if the child or mentally handicapped individual is able to make an outward confession, either verbally or by unquestionable signs, that they desire the Lord's Body and Blood for the forgiveness of their sins, then they may be admitted to the Lord's Supper.²⁴
18. However, we retain the historical, ecclesiastical practice of catechizing Christians in preparation for the Lord's Supper and request that all members are taught the Catechism before being admitted to the Lord's Supper.²⁵

Martin Luther on Infant Communion

On a number of occasions Luther commented on Infant (or Child) Communion.

He states:

When in 1 Corinthians [11:28] Paul said that a man should examine himself, he spoke only of adults because he was speaking about those [adults] who were quarrelling among themselves. However, he doesn't here forbid that the sacrament of the altar be given even to children.

(*Table Talk*, LW 54, page 58).

Some have asked whether the sacrament is to be offered also to the deaf and dumb. Some think it a kindness to practice a pious fraud on them and think they should be given unblessed wafers. This mockery is not good; it will not please God, who has made them Christians as well as us. They deserve the same things that we do. Therefore if they are rational and can show by indubitable signs that they desire it in true Christian devotion, as I have often seen, we should leave to the Holy Spirit what is his work and not refuse him what he demands. It may be that inwardly they have a better understanding and faith than we; and this no one should maliciously oppose. Do we not read of St. Cyprian, the holy martyr, that in Carthage where he was bishop he even had both elements given to the children, although – for reasons of its own – that has now ceased? Christ had the children come to him and would not allow anyone to hinder them [Mark 10:14]. In like manner he withheld his blessings neither from the dumb nor the blind nor the lame. Why, then, should not his sacrament also be for those who heartily and in a Christian spirit desire it?

(*A Treatise on the New Testament*, LW 35, pages 110-11)

Right now I do not think badly about the Bohemian Brethren, having heard from their own representatives their faith concerning the Sacrament of the Eucharist. I do not approve of the Bohemians who commune little children, although I do not regard them as heretics in this matter. (Cited in Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, page 383, fn. 133)

Martin Chemnitz of Infant Communion

Chapter IV

THAT LITTLE CHILDREN ARE NOT OBLIGATED TO SACRAMENTAL COMMUNION

Finally, the same Holy Synod teaches that little children, who lack the use of reason, are not obligated by any necessity to the sacramental Communion of the Eucharist, since, regenerated by the washing of Baptism and incorporated into Christ, they are not able at that age to lose the grace of children of God, which they have obtained. Nevertheless, antiquity is not therefore to be condemned if at some time it observed this custom in certain places. For even as those holy fathers had a believable cause for what they did, by reason of their time, so it is to be certainly and without controversy believed that they did not do this from any necessity for salvation.

²⁴ Martin Luther, *A Treatise on the New Testament*, LW 35, pages 110-11

²⁵ LC Preface.5-6, LC Lord's Supper.85,87, Apol. 15.40

CANON IV

If anyone says that Eucharistic Communion is necessary for little children before they have arrived at the years of discretion, let him be anathema.

[Examination]

There is no controversy between us and the papalists about this question. Therefore I judge that it is not necessary to unravel this whole dispute, since this discussion was instituted chiefly for the sake of the things which are in controversy.

(Examination of the Council of Trent, Vol. 2, page 435)