

## **Response to “Concerns of South Wisconsin District Circuits 18 and 19 Regarding Infant Communion”**

### Background.

In a letter dated January 5, 1996, the president of the South Wisconsin District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod endorsed and thereupon forwarded to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations the following request from two circuits in his district “regarding the theology and practice of the Lord’s Supper in regard to baptized infants”:

That the CTCR consider and answer fully and unequivocally, on the basis of Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions and the formal position of the LCMS, the attached questions; that in their study, the CTCR also use, examine, evaluate and comment upon the documents enclosed with this letter and resolution.

In submitting this request the aforementioned circuits noted that a controversy has arisen in their midst on the question of infant communion and they expressed the desire for “godly peace based upon the Word of God.” Specifically, the dispute centers around materials (prepared by a pastor of one of the circuits) which call for a reexamination of the LCMS’ historic practice of not communing infants and which advocate infant communion as alone based on truly scriptural and confessional premises.

In view of the large number of questions presented by the circuits, it seemed advisable to the Commission that a specific response to each individual question would appear to be somewhat unwieldy, and perhaps unduly complex. The Commission has decided, therefore, to proceed as follows.

Based on the accompanying materials forwarded to it,<sup>1</sup> the Commission has first summarized the line of argumentation employed in defense of the practice of infant communion. A response to the principal theological points at issue is then given. Finally, the Commission in a concluding word discusses the importance of other matters which are directly germane to the question at issue. The Commission has not engaged the historical arguments presented in the accompanying materials, nor has it evaluated the use of the writings of the Lutheran Reformers and others. However important the historical arguments may be, historical precedent carries weight only insofar as it is supported by what the Scriptures clearly teach.

The Commission notes that the communing of baptized infants has become a matter of increasing discussion and concern within the Lutheran community in recent times. The implications of this practice

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<sup>1</sup> The following items from Circuits 18 and 19 were forwarded to the Commission: 1) *Concerns of South Wisconsin District Circuits 18 and 19 Regarding Infant Communion Which They Request The CTCR To Address*; 2) *Truly Worthy and Well Prepared: A Reexamination of Infant Communion in Light of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions with A Brief Historical Introduction* [hereafter, *Truly Worthy*]; 3) *A Statement of Concern*; 4) *An Epitome of Arguments Favoring Infant Communion Not Yet Included in Truly Worthy and Well Prepared*; 5) *Truly Worthy and Well Prepared: Issues Raised By The Circuits 18 & 19 Winkel*; 6) *A Look at Francis Pieper’s Treatment of Faith, Especially as it Relates to Infant Faith and the Lord’s Supper*.

and its theological rationale for communion practice in general in Lutheranism are considerable, especially as the members of our Synod seek faithfully to implement the Synod's official practice of close(d) communion.<sup>2</sup>

In completing this assignment, the Commission submitted the questions of Circuits 18 and 19, together with the accompanying papers, to the faculties of the Synod's two seminaries for reflection and response. Input received from faculty members has been incorporated in this response.

1. A Case for Infant Communion: Questions at Issue.

The principal theological argument for infant communion is summarized in the following paragraph from *A Statement of Concern*:

Since worthiness "is and consists solely and alone in the most holy obedience and complete merit of Christ," and since this righteousness of Christ is given completely to the newly baptized, whatever their age and mental capacities, no baptized child of God can be declared unworthy to commune. To declare them unworthy would be to violate Scripture and the Confessions, and to engage in Pelagianism.

The author of this statement argues in documents which were submitted to the Commission that the faith which grasps the righteousness of Christ is given in baptism to infants and adults alike, without distinction, and constitutes the sole prerequisite for reception of the Lord's Supper: "The same human faith which grasped the promise at Baptism is all that God requires of those who would grasp the promise of the Supper" (*Truly Worthy*, 17). That is to say, ". . . baptismal faith and eucharistic faith are not simply of the same cloth, but one and the same thing" (17). Hence, there is no preparation or requirement for the Lord's Supper apart from faith in Christ. Self-examination understood as a cognitive process is not required; in fact, to establish such a "requirement" is to adopt a synergistic interpretation of the Lord's Supper, to be guilty of Pelagianism and finally to turn the Lord's Supper from Gospel into Law (17; cf. *A Statement of Concern*, 1-2).

The assumption which appears to underlie these statements is that the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are so similar that what can be said of one can necessarily be said also of the other. In a "Scriptural Syllogism" summarizing the author's case for infant communion (*Truly Worthy*, 18; see discussion below, pages 9-11), the burden of the argument is that no more can or must be said scripturally about "repentant faith" in connection with the Lord's Supper than what is said scripturally about it in connection with Baptism.

a. Arguments for Infant Communion from the Scriptures.

Important for the theological argument for infant communion—and against the traditional Lutheran practice—in the material provided is an exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:28-29. The biblical

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<sup>2</sup> At its November/December 1995 meeting the CTCR, in response to ongoing concerns raised about the practice of close(d) communion in the contemporary context, placed this issue on its agenda.

mandate given in 1 Corinthians 11:28 “Let a man examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup” applies to infants and adults alike, since infants, too, can examine themselves: “Infants can and do examine themselves in the biblical and confessional sense of the word δοκιμάζειν (to examine)” (13). “When one takes in all the different uses of δοκιμάζειν,” the proponent of infant communion contends, “the following definition seems best: ‘to ascertain the worthiness, suitability or genuineness of a person or thing’” (14). Hence, 1 Corinthians 11:28 is translated: “Let a man ascertain himself worthy and thus let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (38). According to this understanding, the “Scripture’s definition” of δοκιμάζειν refers not to “an act of intellect, but an act of repentance, and therefore an act that God is quite capable of bringing about within the baptized infant” (2). Thus, “communicants must ascertain that they are worthy to commune, that is, that they have repentant faith (1 Corinthians 11:28, 29).” This “repentant faith” “infants have been given . . . by Christ in Baptism” and they “are sure of His salvation (Matt. 18:6 et. al.)” Therefore, so the syllogism concludes, infants can commune (18). “To make self-examination anything more than repentant faith is to turn it into a work done by us” (35) and finally to deny the righteousness of Christ: “For us to claim that by reason of age and intellect we are somehow capable of pleasing God is to deny that our only righteousness is that of Christ” (16). Since the “righteousness of Christ is given completely to the newly baptized, whatever their age and mental capacities, no baptized child of God can be declared unworthy to commune” (A Statement of Concern, 1).

Thus, the argumentation for infant communion in the materials presented to the Commission holds that Paul’s command “let a man examine himself” does not refer to an act of the intellect. But then the question arises, how are we to understand the assertion immediately following Paul’s command: “For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor. 11:29)? The grammar of this verse—goes the argument—should be understood as follows. The participial phrase μὴ διακρίνων in 1 Corinthians 11:29 expresses attendant circumstance, yielding the translation “For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself while also not discerning the worth and purpose of the body.” Thus the following interpretation, argues the proponent of infant communion, must be given to this verse: “Rather than being the lack of discerning the body which causes the unworthy eating, it is the unworthy eating which causes the lack of discerning the body, that is, of discerning its value and purpose” (Truly Worthy, 37). That is to say, “[w]hat becomes clear is that unworthy eating, the eating without repentant faith, causes the guilt of not discerning the Lord’s body as worthy, that is, of dishonoring it by not receiving it in faith” (38). Since we can be sure that baptized infants have faith, they do not come under judgment: “Therefore, baptized, believing infants cannot receive the Supper to their condemnation” (40).

b. Arguments for Infant Communion from the Lutheran Confessions.

The proponent of infant communion concludes that “the theology of the Confessions supports the admission of baptized infants to the Supper and rejects the contrary theology” (*Truly Worthy*, 19). In support of this conclusion he first cites “three chief passages” from the Confessions: (1) FC Ep VII, 18-20, 38, 39; (2) FC SD VII, 68-71, 124, 125; (3) Ap XXII, 1-4. On the basis of the parallel texts from the Formula of Concord,<sup>3</sup> it is concluded:

the truly Lutheran position on this matter is that those who have repentant faith are worthy to receive the sacrament without any other preparation, such as the traditional “examination.” It is the biblical examination, the ascertaining of repentant faith, that is required and nothing more. To set forth intellectual or other human works as requirements is contrary not only to the sense of δοκιμάζειν, but to the Lutheran confession of faith. . . . The one whom our Lord would exclude is not the uneducated or intellectually infirm, but the unrepentant. The unbeliever, not the believing infant, is the only unworthy guest. (*Truly Worthy* 21.)

Reference is also made to Apology XXII which states, in part: “There can be no doubt that the use of both kinds in the Lord’s Supper is godly and in accord with the institution of Christ and the words of Paul. . . . It is evident, therefore, that the entire sacrament was instituted for the whole church” (1, 4). In the proponent’s view, the confessional position that both kinds, according to Christ’s institution, are intended “for the whole church” is “the very rationale that it [the sacrament] should be given back to the infant believers as well: that the whole sacrament belongs to the whole church, that is, all who have faith in Christ” (*Truly Worthy*, 22).

A response is then given to those who cite in support of not communing infants the Preface to the Large Catechism, in which Luther states that those who do not possess “the minimum of knowledge required of a Christian”—at least the Ten Commandments, Creed, and Lord’s Prayer—should not be admitted to the sacrament (Preface, 1-6, Tappert, 362). It is argued that, indeed, “[t]he baptized infant knows the three chief parts, . . . without which . . . one is not a Christian.” This is “a theological comprehension through faith,” not “a verbal comprehension” (*Truly Worthy*, 24).

The confessional texts which cite the practice of not administering the sacrament to those who have not been previously examined and absolved, it is said, have as their purpose not “to demand confession or examination from the one who would commune, but to make sure that the gospel nature of the sacrament . . . is made as clear as possible to them.” In fact, it is pointed out, “all the baptized, infants included, have been examined and absolved, and even instructed in Baptism itself” (*Truly Worthy*, 25). Moreover, instruction and examination as urged in Apology XXII, 49 “are acts required of the pastor so

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<sup>3</sup>A key text is paragraph 8 of the Epitome: “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 (1 Cor. 11:27, 29).”

that his people might more readily receive and take heart in the sacrament,” but they are not “laid down for those who would receive the Supper” (*Truly Worthy*, 26, citing also SA, III and VIII).

2. Response to Arguments for Communing Infants.

a. Relationship Between the Sacraments.

Before we evaluate the scriptural and confessional arguments for infant communion, it is necessary to address briefly the issue raised in the concluding paragraph of the introduction to part 1 above regarding the relationship between the two sacraments. As Lutheran theologians have often noted, the Lutheran Confessions do not begin with a general doctrine of the sacraments or the means of grace, from which deductions are then made or parallels drawn regarding each of the sacraments. Werner Elert, for example, regards it as significant “that the Lutheran confessions—in contradistinction to many Reformed confessions—never derived their doctrine of the Lord’s Supper from a general definition of the sacraments.”<sup>4</sup> Such a way of proceeding would have obscured “the fact to which the greatest importance is constantly attached: that the words of institution are ‘extraordinary’ (*inusitata*), without analogy of any kind (FC, SD VII, 38).”<sup>5</sup> Both Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are based on the specific words of Christ when He instituted each of the sacraments.<sup>6</sup>

Precisely because the institution of Christ—and not some abstract concept of “sacrament”—is decisive for determining the nature and proper use of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, Christ’s institution is also decisive for what we say about *each* of the sacraments and their use. As Edmund Schlink points out, “To start with the general doctrine of the sacrament is impossible because the institution of the Lord’s Supper in the decisive words ‘This is my body,’ is without analogy in the institution of Baptism.”<sup>7</sup> The Lutheran confessional writings honor the particularity of each sacrament and its proper use.<sup>8</sup> This is already evident from the fact that the Augsburg Confession presents separate articles on the two sacraments. The Confessions proceed in this way because that is the manner in which the biblical writings themselves reveal what God wants us to know about the nature and use of each of these divinely given means of grace.

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<sup>4</sup> Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 303.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> In the document titled *An Epitome of Arguments Favoring Infant Communion Not Yet Included in Truly Worthy and Well Prepared* it is said concerning Matthew 28:19-20 that Christ’s command that we keep everything He has commanded us includes the command that infants keep the Lord’s Supper. This conclusion, however, is based on the unfounded assumption that the communing of infants is included in the Lord’s words “all that I have commanded you.” See discussion below.

<sup>7</sup> Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 182.

<sup>8</sup> See C. Ernst Kinder, “Zur Sakramentslehre,” *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 3 (1961), 141-74 (esp. 166-71); Friedrich Kalb, *Theology of Worship*, trans. Henry P. A. Hamann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 88-89.

To be sure, the Scriptures teach that Baptism and the Lord's Supper have much in common with each other and they are related intimately with respect to the life of the believer. But the author of the writings submitted to the Commission seems to hold a *priori*, and without qualification, that what is required for a proper understanding and use of the Lord's Supper cannot be more than what is required for a proper understanding and use of Baptism. The author argues, for instance, with respect to the faith given to infants in Baptism: "As sure as the infant craves his mother's milk without any comprehension of what it is except that it is from his loving mother, tastes good and satisfies his needs, *so also must* the baptized infant crave his Father's table *without any comprehension* of what it is except that it is from his loving Father, tastes good and satisfies his need" (*Truly Worthy*, 17; emphases added). As we will discuss below, however, the scriptural texts which instruct us regarding the proper use of the Lord's Supper and about the divine blessings in it to which faith clings do in fact (and in a way not found in scriptural texts regarding Baptism) stress the critical importance of comprehending what is taking place in the sacrament and in one's spiritual life—which surely does not contradict or undermine anything said in the Scriptures about Baptism and the receiving of its blessings by faith. St. Paul's exhortations in 1 Corinthians 11 for communicants to partake of the sacrament with comprehension are based on Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper, not on a theology of Baptism (though, of course, he assumes that those who commune are baptized Christians; 1 Cor. 10; 12:13). And, the warning given to the "brethren" in 1 Corinthians 11:27-31 about the "judgment" resulting from eating and drinking "without discerning the body" has no parallel in biblical texts which speak about the proper understanding and use of Baptism.

b. Exegetical Considerations: 1 Corinthians 11:28, 29.<sup>9</sup>

To summon exegetical support for infant communion, the attempt is made to "develop" a meaning of *δοκιμάζειν* in 1 Corinthians 11:28 that is strictly limited to "repent" or "believe in Christ" and

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<sup>9</sup> In his discussion of the 15th century Hussite "restoration" of infant communion the author refers to the Hussite view that since John 3 refers to baptism, John 6 must be speaking about the Lord's Supper. He then notes, ". . . Lutherans would agree whole heartedly with the exegesis of John 3. It is amazing that we hold out on John 6" (*Truly Worthy*, 9). Commentators ancient and modern have been divided on whether or to what extent John 6 (specifically vv 51-58) may be interpreted as a reference to the Lord's Supper. (For more recent reviews of the issue see such discussions as Craig R. Koester, "John Six and the Lord's Supper," *Lutheran Quarterly* IV (Winter 1990), 419-37; Hans-Josef Klauck, "Lord's Supper," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 4:362-72; Raymond Brown, "The Johannine Sacramentary," in *New Testament Essays* [New York: Paulist Press, 1965], 51-95; B. Klappert, "Lord's Supper," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976], 2:534-35.)

Luther was among those who rejected a eucharistic interpretation of the passage. He never deviated from what he wrote in 1520: ". . . the sixth chapter of John must be entirely excluded from this discussion, since it does not refer to the sacrament in a single syllable" (*LW* 36:19). Luther held that John 6 spoke of faith and of spiritual, not sacramental eating. Participation in the Lord's Supper does not and cannot automatically confer eternal life, as would have to be the case if John 6:54 referred to it ("He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life . . .")

Consistent with Luther, the Lutheran confessors in the Formula of Concord declared that John 6:48-58 refers to "spiritual participation," that is, faith: "There is therefore a twofold eating of the flesh of Christ, the one is spiritual, of which Christ speaks chiefly in John 6:48-58. This occurs, in no other way than with the spirit and faith, in the preaching and contemplation of the Gospel as well as in the Lord's Supper" (SD VII, 61-62).

that excludes cognitive discernment. The procedure followed here, and the conclusions thereby reached, are problematic for two reasons. First, the author appears to argue that the verb δοκιμάζειν has a *basic meaning* that can be applied to each of its uses. Linguists refer to the attempt to find “a type of underlying meaning which is to be found in all occurrences” of a term as the “basic meaning (*Grundbedeutung*) fallacy” and warn of the extreme difficulty of establishing one meaning that is “either shared by all the meanings of a term or which has any relevance in explaining all the meanings.”<sup>10</sup> The basic or “general” meaning offered by the advocate of infant communion for δοκιμάζειν is “to ascertain the worthiness, suitability, or genuineness of a person or thing.” In his defense of this “meaning” the author of *Truly Worthy* (14) rightly admits that the particular uses of the verb allow for various “external entailments” (subjects, objects, modifiers, etc.). The substitution of such a generic meaning, however, negates the effects these entailments have upon the meaning of a given vocable in a given context. This way of proceeding enables the author, of course, to claim support for his view. In response we ask, why can the verb not mean, as it is generally translated, “examine”? In the preponderance of New Testament occurrences of δοκιμάζειν the usage of this word falls into the semantic domain “to try to learn the genuineness of something by examination and testing, often through actual use.”<sup>11</sup> This obviously involves the intellect, or theological acumen, if you will, as when the apostle John exhorts “. . . test (δοκιμάζετε) the spirits, whether they are from God. . .” (1 John 4:1).

Second, the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:28 by the advocate of infant communion is informed merely by a systematic consideration which—valid though it is and one to which we must fully subscribe—establishes a meaning that is too restrictive, when the context of this verse is taken into account. Having defined δοκιμάζειν as “ascertaining worthiness,” the author of the infant communion material relies upon the Small Catechism to define “worthiness.” He then paraphrases the meaning of this text: “God means a person must ascertain that he has been given faith by God and is kept in that faith” (*Truly Worthy*, 15). It should be acknowledged, at least, that Luther in the Small Catechism is addressing a different situation, namely, those who because of their own sinfulness would refrain from communion. Paul is dealing with the opposite problem in Corinth, namely, a communion participation that is bringing the judgment of God upon the congregation. The apostle has named the sins that have brought the situation in Corinth to its sorry state: despising God’s church, shaming the poor, and violating the character of the sacramental meal. Paul’s final solution for the problem is given in 11:33, “when you come together for the purpose of eating, wait for one another.” Thus, the author of *Truly Worthy*, purely

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<sup>10</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, Second edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1: xix; see also, e.g., Anthony C. Thiselton, “Semantics and New Testament Interpretation,” in *New Testament Interpretation*, I. Howard Marshall, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1991 reprint), 80-82.

<sup>11</sup> Louw and Nida, 332.

on the basis of the Small Catechism, has in effect narrowed the meaning of δοκιμάζειν to the virtual equivalent of μετανοεῖν or πιστεύειν without recognizing that far more is in view in Paul’s words “let a man examine himself” than a bare definition of “worthiness” given in the Catechism (critically important though this definition is).

Another set of exegetical considerations must be noted in connection with the interpretation of Paul’s assertion in 1 Corinthians 11:29: “For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.” Key here is the translation of μὴ διακρίνων.

It is rightly noted that the traditional understanding of μὴ διακρίνων in 1 Corinthians 11:29 is an obstacle to understanding true worthiness as referring only to having Christian faith. A “better way” to interpret this participial phrase, the author proposes, is to understand it as expressing attendant circumstance, rather than as having a causal meaning. Since the author provides no exegetical evidence, however, one might be immediately suspicious of this proposal.<sup>12</sup>

What this discussion of St. Paul’s phrase fails to see is that the structure and parallelism of 11:31 guide the translation of μὴ διακρίνων in 11:29 and render the above interpretation untenable. Furthermore, it would appear that the author of *Truly Worthy* has misunderstood the grammar of 11:31, for he fails to translate it (38) as a conditional sentence that is contrary to fact. Consider, first of all, 11:31: “But if we were discerning ourselves [but it’s not happening], we would not be being judged [but it is happening].” The presence of ἄν in the apodosis and the imperfect indicatives in both clauses of the sentence make its “contrary to fact” character clear. In the mind of Paul, the “if” clause is not true. The Corinthians are not themselves, in fact, discerning. It follows, then, that they are, in fact, being judged (by the Lord).

The parallelism of 11:31 with 11:29 is strong. “Eats and drinks judgment” (κρίμα, 11:29) is parallel to “being judged” (κρίνεσθαι, 11:31). The conditional clause “if we were discerning ourselves” (εἰ ἑαυτοὺς διεκρίνομεν, 11:31) is parallel to the participial construction, “not discerning the body” (μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα, 11:29). The context, therefore, strongly supports the traditional translation of the participle in 11:29 with a conditional or (the closely related) causal sense.<sup>13</sup>

A second exegetical point is this. Paul’s contrary to fact conditional sentence in 11:31 shows that the Corinthians, whom Paul does *not* regard as unbelievers, are in fact being judged by the Lord because they are communing unworthily, and thus experiencing the judgment, though not the condemnation, of the Lord. We must therefore draw the conclusion that a person may have saving faith in Christ, be a “true” Christian, and still be able to commune unworthily. This would seem to oppose what

<sup>12</sup> While of course not a finally determinative consideration, it is noteworthy that no English translation specifically translates the participial phrase as an attendance circumstance having the meaning given to it by the author.

<sup>13</sup> H. P. V. Nunn, in his *A Short Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), par. 245, lists the participle in 1 Cor. 11:29 as an example of the conditional use. See also BDF, 418.

appears to be a fundamental assumption of the argument presented in favor of communing infants, viz., that only the absence of faith should keep someone from receiving the sacrament. This leads to a final observation.

The argument for infant communion collapses all cognitive elements of believing into a “repentant faith” of the heart. For instance, it is stated, “To make self-examination anything more than repentant faith is to turn it into a work done by us, and to be as guilty as the papists of blindness” (35).

In this statement, as well as in many others, the author of *Truly Worthy* seems to object to anything “intellectual” as a component of communing worthily. Yet, St. Paul’s counsel to “*examine* oneself” and “*discern*” the body, which is the basis for withholding the sacrament from infants, does not impose a “law” or look only to an “intellectual works righteousness.” It is a commonplace in Lutheran practice that it is not enough for an older child or adult merely to “understand” the sacramental teaching.<sup>14</sup> He or she is both to “understand” *and* “believe,” and such faith, even though it possesses an intellectual component, is utterly the gift of God and not a meritorious human work. Given this understanding of what the Scriptures teach concerning preparation for the reception of the sacrament, we categorically reject the author’s claim that “to make self-examination anything more than repentant faith is to turn it into a work done by us, and to be guilty as the papists of blindness” (*Truly Worthy*, 35).

No less than δοκιμάζειν, διακρίνειν also involves the use of the intellect. For example, in the parallel texts Matthew 16:3 (διακρίνειν) and Luke 12:56 (δοκιμάζειν) cited by *Truly Worthy*, Jesus admonishes the Pharisees and Sadducees for being able to make an informed judgment regarding the weather based on an analysis of the sky, but being unable to discern the signs of the times.<sup>15</sup>

The exegetical case for infant communion presented to Circuits 18 and 19 is summarized in the following “Scriptural Syllogism”:

Major Premise: Communicants must ascertain that they are worthy to commune, that is, that they have repentant faith (1 Cor. 11:28, 29).

Minor Premise: Infants have been given repentant faith by Christ in Baptism and are sure of His salvation (Matt. 18:6 et.al.).

Conclusion: Infants can commune.

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<sup>14</sup> *Truly Worthy* makes the point that the term “examine” is tied “not to intellect, but to absolution” (25). However, this is to beg the question. The purpose of a conscious and purposeful self-examination is, ultimately, the receiving of the absolution. Moreover, it simply does not follow from a command to examine oneself, as *Truly Worthy* contends, that the “Gospel nature” of the sacrament is made less clear!

<sup>15</sup> The author of *Truly Worthy* holds that since δοκιμάζειν “basically . . . means” (38) “to judge valuable or worthy” (however, see previous discussion) and since these words are used in the above parallel texts, “it is this meaning that we should take with us into 1 Cor. 11:29” (38). Exegetical moves such as this, operate, again, with a “basic meaning” fallacy and fail to take seriously the context of a given usage. The burden of Paul’s reflections on the practice of Lord’s Supper in Corinth was that they failed to take seriously the difference between the Lord’s Supper and their common meal (1 Cor.11:20). St. Paul is calling them to be cognizant of the difference and to act accordingly—and he does this by laying before them again the apostolic paradosis concerning the sacrament.

A number of serious problems with this syllogism are immediately apparent (e.g., unproven definitions of certain terms are assumed [“ascertain,” “repentant faith”]; the major premise begs the question by assuming that the sole qualification for worthiness to commune is “repentant faith”). The syllogism can be shown to be invalid, however, simply for the following reason. The conclusion that infants can commune could only be drawn logically if the minor premise asserted that infants have the ability to *ascertain* (and in the sense of their being sure of their salvation) that they are worthy to commune. The syllogism collapses as it stands because of this error in logic (*non-sequitur*). It is the meaning of “ascertain” that is precisely at issue.

c. The Lutheran Confessions.

The Formula of Concord’s assertion that “there is only one kind of unworthy guest, namely, those who do not believe” is regarded as providing clear and unequivocal proof “that the Lutheran teaching on this matter is that there is no preparation or, requirement for the Lord’s Supper outside of faith in Christ” (*Truly Worthy*, 20).

This interpretation of the Formula fails to take into account an important distinction between being worthy to receive the sacrament, and a *worthy use* of the sacrament. In the above-mentioned citation the confessors affirm nothing more than what was already confessed in the Small Catechism concerning personal “worthiness”: “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.”<sup>16</sup> To define true worthiness for a salutary reception of the sacrament, however, is not to say everything that needs to be said on the basis of the Scriptures about *preparation* for receiving the sacrament. For example, with reference to the abuses of the mass, the Augsburg Confession warns on the basis of Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians 11:27 “whoever uses the sacrament unworthily [*wer das Sakrament unwürdiglich braucht*] is guilty of the body and blood of Christ” (XXIV, 12; cf. Ap XXIV, 49; XV, 41; LC II,5; V,2). That more than personal worthiness based on faith in the heart is being referred to is also clear from the Latin text: “But Paul severely threatened those who dealt unworthily [*qui indigne tractant*] with the Eucharist when he said . . . .” Private masses come under this admonition (XXIV, 13).

All of this is to say that while “worthy use” also involves faith in the heart, faithful stewardship of the sacrament requires preparation beyond a bare determination that the communicant believes. To speak of preparation for the sacrament involving self-examination and instruction to the end that one might commune “worthily” in no way sets up an additional requirement beyond repentant faith as

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<sup>16</sup> The Small Catechism, VI, 10; Tappert, 352.

a “requirement” for worthiness. Quite the contrary, such preparation belongs to the *faithful use* of the sacrament.

The author’s conclusion that “the unbeliever is the only unworthy guest” is reinforced, he believes, by Article XXII of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the subject of which is the giving of both kinds to the laity. Though admitting that this article does not deal directly with the question of infant communion, the author holds that since the theological argument which requires communion under both kinds is valid, “then this section also makes infant communion the only Lutheran position” (*Truly Worthy*, 22). This “theological argument” is that God gives “the whole sacrament to the whole church.” And, so goes the conclusion, this means giving the Lord’s Supper also to infants.

The author’s argument here would be a cogent one only if he could show that the confessional writings teach that *all Christians*, in every case and without restriction, are to be admitted to the sacrament. This, of course, is not the meaning of Apology XXII, which intends only to say that both kinds are to be given and received not only by the priests, but also by the laity. The referents of “all” in “all of the church” are priests and laity, and “part” in “part of the church,” the priests. And, as the Confessions elsewhere make abundantly clear the referent of “laity” in the case of the Lord’s Supper is always laity who “know what they seek or why they come” (LC V, 2).

In the Shorter Preface to his Large Catechism Luther speaks of “the minimum knowledge required of a Christian” and adds, “Whoever does not possess it should not be reckoned among Christians nor admitted to a sacrament” (Preface, 2). In his commentary on these words *Truly Worthy* reveals what appears to be a major assumption which undergirds opposition to the tradition of excluding infants from the sacrament: “You cannot refuse one admission to the sacrament on the basis of these words without also refusing them a part in the church” (*Truly Worthy*, 24). It is therefore necessary for the author (without rejecting Luther’s provision outright) to interpret Luther’s reference to “*knowledge*” as referring to “a theological comprehension,” rather than to “a verbal comprehension” (presumably meaning comprehension which can be articulated), and hence to conclude that infants possess the former: “the baptized infant *knows* the chief parts” (24; emphasis added).

Such a line of argumentation is based on a very strained reading of Luther’s text. “For this reason,” Luther immediately states after the above-cited quote, “young people should be . . . diligently drilled in their practice” (3). The father of the household is to “ascertain what they have learned. . . .” (4). Surely, the knowledge being referred to here is an articulate or verbal comprehension.

Moreover, in the Shorter Preface Luther clearly did *not* intend to say that ignorance of Christian doctrine as summarized in the chief parts of the catechism necessarily makes one an unbeliever and therefore outside of the one holy Christian church. On the contrary, Luther’s concern is that those who “come to Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar and exercise all the rights of Christians” and “wish

to be Christians” *be* so “in fact as well as in name” (5-6).<sup>17</sup> This means instruction in the various parts of the catechism, so that they may be classified among or referred to as (*gezahlet...werden; sit referendus*) Christians—just as one who is a craftsman may be accepted and considered competent by knowing the rules and practices of his trade.

The above-mentioned assumption, which shapes *Truly Worthy’s* reading of Luther’s comments in the Shorter Preface, reveals the central theological issue regarding infant communion. Its author appears to be saying, in effect, that to refuse admission to the sacrament is to excommunicate him/her.<sup>18</sup> This, of course, presupposes further that the basis for admission to the sacrament is faith in the heart (*fides qua*), not the faith which is confessed (*fides quae*). Given this understanding, it is difficult to see how, ultimately, *anyone* could be admitted by pastors to the sacrament, or how *anyone* could be refused, since by its very nature faith in the heart is hidden to human eyes or knowledge. Only “[t]he Lord knows those who are his” (2 Tim. 2:19). As our Confessions remind us, “In this life...the kingdom of Christ has not yet been revealed” (Ap VII and VIII, 17).

*Truly Worthy* cites a third set of confessional texts (AC XXV, 1; Ap XV, 40; XXIV, 29; SA III, VIII) which indicate that the Lutheran practice is to admit to the sacrament only those who had been previously examined and absolved. In explaining this practice, the author makes three basic points: 1) “The purpose (of XXV, 1) is not to demand confession or examination from the one who would commune, but to make sure that the gospel nature of the sacrament...is made as clear as possible to them” (25); 2) Infants “have been examined and absolved, and even instructed...in Baptism itself” (25); and 3) Instruction and examination are acts “required of the pastor,” but are not laid down as “a requirement...for those who receive the Supper. . . .” (26).

The numerous *non sequiturs* present in this line of thinking only reveal how far the confessional evidence must be stretched to make a case for infant communion. First, it appears to be *Truly Worthy’s* view that it is permissible to require examination (“there was to be . . . examination”) as long as one’s purpose is right. Then, there is an injunction to examine (with the right purpose, of course), but infants are exempt, for they have already been examined in Baptism itself (presumably infants are themselves exempt from a “verbal” *confession* before the sacrament is administered to them! – cf. AC XXV). And then, preachers are required to carry out an examination before a person may commune, yet a person may commune without a preacher examining him or her.

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<sup>17</sup> See LC Preface, 6 (Tappert, 362). The German text of paragraph 6 reads: “Wiewohl wir’s fur den gemeinen Haufen bei den dreien Stücken bleiben lassen, so von Alters her in der Christenheit blieben sind, aber wenig recht gelehret und getrieben, solange bis man sich in denselbigen wohl ube und läufigt werde, beide jung und alt, was Christen heissen und sein will, und sind nämlich diese . . . .” (BKS, 554)

<sup>18</sup> One cannot hold that the refusal to admit to the sacrament constitutes excommunication without also discarding the Lutheran practice of temporarily suspending someone from the sacrament.

### 3. Concluding Comments.

In its introductory section, *Truly Worthy* challenges the logic of the synodical catechism's statement that infants must not be given the sacrament because they are included among those who "are unable to examine themselves."<sup>19</sup> *Truly Worthy* states: "Yes, a man must examine himself. This premise is undeniable, for it is inspired. But the second premise, that the infant cannot examine himself, is neither inspired nor is it based on a thorough study of Scripture and the Confessions"(2). As the summary of this position presented earlier in this evaluation makes clear, the proponent of infant communion believes the biblical and confessional evidence supports a "self-examination" of which infants are capable. This has necessitated the development of a definition of *δοκιμάζειν* which minimizes, if not removes entirely, any cognitive functions on the part of individuals. The author has sought to provide us textual evidence that the discernment called for by Paul does not involve the intellect.

The issue here is not merely having a proper "theology of the sacraments," deducing what is thought to be the right relationship between Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and then determining practice. The question is, what precisely do the Scriptures themselves teach regarding the theology and practice of each, and of their relationship. We are bound to the biblical text, and however cogent we may believe our speculations to be, we do not present them as biblical and confessional without clear evidence from those texts that deal with the subject at hand.

This caution has special pertinence to the issue of infant communion. The materials forwarded to the Commission provide no evidence, from those texts that speak directly about the Lord's Supper, that suggests the inclusion of infants. In fact, the one text in the New Testament (1 Cor. 11:17-34) which deals explicitly with the practice of the Lord's Supper in an early Christian congregation (and in an immediate context where concern is registered about a proper use of the sacrament) expressly mentions that communicants ought consciously to reflect on their readiness to receive the Lord's body and blood. Infants, our synodical catechism teaches—and correctly so—are not capable of such reflection and therefore must not be given the sacrament.

Adopted by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations  
April 29, 1997

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<sup>19</sup> *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986; 1991), 241.