

Texas District President Request concerning “DVD Consecration”

The Request of the District President

In a letter dated April 21, 2005 the president of the Texas District asked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) to “give consideration to the following situation that occurred in one of our congregations here in the Texas District”:

On Maundy Thursday, the pastors wanted the members of the congregation to have a better sense of the dynamics that were present in the Upper Room when Jesus first instituted the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. They had members of their individual “care and share” groups, approximately 55, come together at the church and they were instructed concerning procedures to follow with their groups on Maundy Thursday. They were given a DVD, wine and hosts and an order of service to follow with their groups. At a particular time, so designated by the Pastor, each leader would turn on his DVD and the Pastor of the congregation would consecrate the elements via the DVD for the groups assembled. In turn, the leader of the group would distribute the elements to those present.

I understand that instructions were given to the leaders to assure that only members of the congregations or persons who are members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod would be given the Sacrament.

The president specifically asks the CTCR:

Did they violate any doctrine concerning the Sacrament of the Altar? Further concerns would be, should this practice be encouraged? Would it not erode the safeguarding of the Sacrament? A further question would be is the consecration of the elements by DVD valid?

The Response of the CTCR

The troubling questions raised by this novel practice go to the very heart of the nature and purpose of the Lord’s Supper as instituted by Christ. The primary purpose of the Lord’s Supper is to strengthen faith in God’s grace and forgiveness. Such faith is strengthened through God’s word and promise, which assure us that this Sacrament “is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to drink” (“The Sacrament of the Altar,” SC 1-2). As this request itself illustrates, the practice described above has raised and (if perpetuated) would surely continue to raise questions and doubts about whether Christ’s Supper was being celebrated in complete faithfulness to His own instructions and example. This practice, therefore, certainly cannot be condoned or encouraged. Among the serious concerns raised by the Commission regarding this practice are the following:

- 1) The Lord’s Supper was instituted by Jesus with words and actions spoken and carried out by him *in the direct presence* of his disciples (Matt. 26:26-28). Throughout history, the church has sought to be faithful to Christ’s practice in this regard. Pastors speak the words of institution *in the presence* of the assembled congregation, thereby giving assurance that we are “doing this” as our Lord has instructed us to do (Luke 22:19).

Whenever the actual words and actions of the celebrant in consecrating the elements are intentionally separated (by time, distance, or technological means) from the distribution and reception, no assurance can be given that our Lord's instructions are being heeded and that the body and blood of Christ are actually being given and received for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith (cf. fn. 15 of the CTCR's 1983 report *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper* [TPLS]).

- 2) This practice lends itself to the unscriptural notion that the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper are present by virtue of the "incantation" of the pastor in some way, shape or form, rather than by the gracious power of Christ and his Word. "Concerning the consecration," says the Formula of Concord, "we believe, teach, and confess that no man's work nor the recitation of the minister effect this presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, but it is to be ascribed solely and alone to the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ" (FC Ep VII, 8; quoted in *TPLS*, 15). While it is true that "the regularly called and ordained pastors of the church are to officiate at the administration of Holy Communion" (*TPLS*, 17-18), it is only "through Christ's word and its power"—not through the mere "sound" or "recording" of the voice of the pastor—"that Christ's body and blood are present in the bread and wine" (*TPLS*, 14).
- 3) As emphasized above, the focus in our celebration of the Lord's Supper must always be on the gracious word of Christ—the word that gives assurance to hearts weighed down by guilt, doubt and fear that the great gifts promised here are truly given and received. The Commission says: "To...insert some personal idiosyncrasy into the consecration is to detract the people's attention from the Sacrament. The congregation's focus is to be on Christ's word and invitation. The celebrant is a servant to sharpen that focus" (*TPLS*, 15).
- 4) The gracious blessings given and received in the Lord's Supper are not in any way dependent on human attempts to recapture "the dynamics that were present in the Upper Room when Jesus first instituted the Sacrament." (Attempting to "recapture the dynamics" of this first-century event by using a DVD player seems especially ill-conceived and ill-advised.) The blessings of the Lord's Supper are dependent only on Christ's word and promise: "It is in Christ's word that the Christian Church receives the Lord's invitation: 'Take and eat; this is my body'" (*TPLS*, 5). The church's primary concern, therefore, is "rightly to follow the Savior's guidance" in its use and celebration of this great gift (*TPLS*, 5).

Finally, it is important to note that this response of the Commission is in no way intended to pass judgment on the motives of those involved in this practice. The sole purpose of this response is to promote and encourage the proper practice of the Lord's Supper in faithfulness to the teaching and example of Christ, so that doubts and questions may be replaced by faith in Christ's gracious word, promise, and presence.

Adopted by the CTCR (unanimously)
February 18, 2006