

The Theology of the 1986 PCA Majority Report on Paedocommunion:

A Review and Critique

Jonathan H. Barlow¹

When the Presbyterian Church in America ordains a pastor, the candidate affirms an ability to “sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures”.² We Presbyterians concern ourselves to be pastored by those who are friends of, rather than enemies of, the fundamental structure of doctrine affirmed by the confessional documents of the denomination. One joy of membership in a confessional body such as the PCA is the confidence that public and objective standards for doctrine and practice give the worshipper. The worshipper knows that the body through which he is joined to the larger universal church, and ultimately to Christ, stands for a set of doctrines against which novel opinions can be weighed and in terms of which new practices can be judged. It is chiefly this doctrinal core, often referred to as *Reformed Theology* or *Calvinism* that we are concerned to see ministers, elders and deacons uphold as they pastor God’s flock.

This paper will examine the Majority Report of the 14th General Assembly’s *Ad-Interim Committee to Study the Question of Paedocommunion* in light of this confessional concern.³ It is granted by both the Majority report and Minority report that the history of Reformed practice has been to admit only those to the table who are of mental capacity to

¹ Jonathan H. Barlow, M.Div., is a graduate of Covenant Theological Seminary. He is currently enrolled in Ph.D. work in the field of Historical Theology.

² Book of Church Order 21-4.

³ The committee produced two reports, the Majority report which opposed paedocommunion, and the Minority report which supported the practice. In the structure of General Assemblies, such reports are presented and voted upon. Technically, the whole assembly can accept either report as “faithful to the scriptures”. The label “minority” or “majority” refers to the relative number of people recommending the report on the committee.

express conscious, active faith in Christ and participate in self-examination. In other words, an affirmation of Paedocommunion would indeed be a significant novelty, though not an absolute novelty, for Reformed Christians to embrace.⁴ This paper will argue, however, that while the Minority report advocates a novel practice, it does so on the basis of a firm grounding in the system of doctrine expressed in the confession and catechisms. The Majority report, while defending current practice, actually engages in significant theological innovation in its defense. Therefore, if this paper's thesis is upheld, the adoption of paedocommunion would actually have a conserving effect upon PCA doctrine and practice, even though the practice itself would be new to the denomination.

The Historical Context of the Debate

The issue of paedocommunion came before the Presbyterian Church in America in an official way in 1986. The committee commissioned by the 12th General Assembly presented its findings to the 14th general assembly. The Minority of the committee supported the idea that covenant children who are physiologically mature enough to eat solid food should be admitted to the Lord's Table. The Majority of the committee opposed this position and recommended the continuance of existing practice in the matter. Each side produced a written report.

The reports, the Majority written by Dr. Edmund Clowney, and the Minority written by Dr. Robert S. Rayburn, were printed and disseminated to the presbyters. The floor debate on the subject consisted of opening remarks by Clowney and Rayburn. Both men moved that the committee accept his respective report as "agreeable to the

⁴ It is outside of the scope of this paper to discuss the few minor Reformers who advocated paedocommunion.

scriptures”, the Minority report being a substitute motion. A review of the ensuing debate, largely procedural in nature, makes clear that the novelty of the Minority’s position was a significant hindrance to its receiving the depth of consideration that such a complex issue requires. In addition, because Larger Catechism Question #177 contains a clause that would likely need to be amended in order to uphold the scriptural fidelity of paedocommunion, some were concerned about the thought of revising a confessional standard. Little theological debate took place on the floor, but the Minority report’s well-argued position paper earned the respect of many presbyters, even among those who opposed its recommendation. One such presbyter even attached an amendment to the Majority report that required the PCA to make available to any who requests it, the documents used by the committee in crafting its two reports.

A scriptural issue, the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11, and four areas of Reformed theology are crucial to this debate: sacramentology, monergism in salvation, the Christian life, and covenant theology. First we will examine the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 offered by the Majority Report. Then, we will take each area of doctrine in kind.

Prologue: 1 Corinthians, Chapter 11

At a fundamental level, it is chiefly the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul tells the Corinthians that “a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup”⁵ that forms the basis of the Majority’s prime conviction. This conviction is that the Lord’s Supper was designed by Jesus, structurally, to require active

⁵ All scriptural quotations from the *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Occasionally words are adjusted by the author to better reflect the Greek or to bring out root word repetition.

faith in order to participate and benefit: “The Supper is to be eaten in memory of Christ’s death, and in hope of his coming. In 1 Corinthians 11:26-29 the apostle requires that those who partake are to examine themselves so that they may distinguish the Lord’s body and not eat or drink unworthily. Little children cannot fulfill this requirement.”⁶ If this structural aspect of the Supper can be established, then the Majority has proven its case because even if Children were allowed to partake of the elements, they would not truly be participating in the Lord’s Supper. An analogy might be that of the attempt to actively participate in a conversation that is carried on in a language unknown to oneself. True participation is simply impossible. And because of the Pauline warnings of judgment for unworthy participation in the Supper, the Majority goes further to establish its case that not only are children simply not able to participate in the Supper, but that they must be protected from the judgment that such participation could bring upon them.

On this point, the Majority stands solidly in the Reformed tradition of interpretation of the passage. In fact, in the General Assembly floor debates conducted about this matter, the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 was the main emphasis of presbyters opposed to paedocommunion. Unless this passage can be shown, at a minimum, to present no significant barrier to the communion of young children, then the other aspects of this paper would be, due to the Reformed tradition’s emphasis upon the text of scripture, interesting but unpersuasive.

The Majority contends that Paul’s statements have the effect of barring all from the table who are unable to exercise an adult-like faith. A corollary to this contention

⁶ Majority Report, pg. 516. Contained in “Minutes of the General Assembly: 1988” (Atlanta, GA: PCA, 1988). The Minutes contain both Majority and Minority reports.

must be the position that Paul's statements could not be made in an ecclesiastical context in which the communion of children is a normal and accepted practice. Neither of these contentions may be upheld.

First, it is commonly accepted that the Western church practiced paedocommunion until about the 13th century.⁷ Obviously, Paul's warnings were not interpreted in terms that the Majority report would advocate for 1200 years. The same forces that produced the doctrines of transubstantiation, concomitance, and the practices of withholding the cup from the laity led to the removal of cup and loaf from children.

Secondly, Paul's statements can be understandable in a context in which children are already taking Communion and in which Paul expects them to continue. The Minority points to a number of apostolic exhortations made to churches that, if applied in the same way the Majority applies 1 Corinthians 11, children would be denied food (2 Thess. 3:10), baptism (Acts 2:38), or even salvation itself (Rom. 10:13-14). Further, Paul's exhortations in 1 Corinthians 11 are akin to a prophetic mode of discourse, calling God's people back to a righteous approach to the sacraments. Such exhortations are common in the Hebrew prophetic literature; the Minority points to Isaiah 1:10-20, Amos 5:18-27, and Jeremiah 7:1-29. Others are Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:8, and I Samuel 15:22.⁸ Often these exhortations sound as though God has decided not to even require the very feasts he has previously prescribed, either because they are being performed in Israel, rather than in Judah and its approved altar, or because God is displeased with the manner in which the sacrificial feasts are carried out. Such prophecies, like 1 Corinthians 11,

⁷ Tommy Lee, *The History of Paedocommunion from the Early Church Until 1500* (Internet Resource: http://www.reformed.org/sacramentology/tl_paedo.html), n.d.

⁸ I am indebted to Prof. Jack Collins for this point in his unpublished lecture notes, "Children and Communion: A Biblical Study", 2002.

threaten death for continued disobedience in carrying out prescribed feasts and offerings. Yet it is widely recognized that the class of fellowship or “peace” offerings, of which the Passover was one example, were celebrated by whole households. Deuteronomy 12:7-19 specifies that the feast offerings be whole household affairs.⁹

Given the plausibility that Paul’s prophetic mode of warning could be injected into a situation in which children were already partaking of Communion and expected to continue to partake, 1 Corinthians 11 simply cannot be used as evidence that children should be excluded from Communion if they are unable to perform an adult-like self-examination.

A further consideration deals with the grammatical structure of the text. The passage emphasizes that God’s judgment is upon one who does not “judge the body rightly” (v. 29). A parallel expression in verse 31 – “if we judged ourselves rightly” – repeats the verb for judgment or discernment. And the application, or summation, of the matter is that: “So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another” (v. 33). The emphasis is on the problems at Corinth in which elitism and class distinctions obscure the unity of the church body. Paul prescribes judging the body, that is, judging ‘ourselves’, as the remedy for disunity in approaching the sacrament. It can hardly be the case that young children are the locus of elitism or the perpetrators of class discrimination. Thus, Paul’s exhortations need not be viewed as erecting barriers for those who are not even able to perform the offensive activity. In other words, the passage can only restrict access to Communion for those who can examine themselves if the purpose of examination is to uncover a sin that the examining one could commit.

⁹ Paul explicitly links the Lord’s Supper with peace offerings in 1 Corinthians 10:16-18.

Children cannot commit the sins against the body that Paul has in view, and thus their inability to reflect on such sins is insignificant to their admission to the table just as their inability to work does not speak to their laziness and thus lead to their starvation.

Whatever other argument one may use to establish that some standard of rationality applies to worthy communicants, 1 Corinthians 11 is far from being solid evidence, despite the Reformed tradition of interpretation. With this interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 in mind, therefore, the Majority's case can be examined for its fidelity to or departure from the system of Reformed doctrine.

Approach to Christian Life and Covenant Theology

The majority report employs the idea of an "age of discretion". In other words, there exists a certain age at which a child gains the requisite maturity for mentally active participation in the self-examination required to commune. As a concept, however, an "age of discretion" fits awkwardly into a Reformed doctrine of the Christian life in which one is charged with continually 'improving' upon one's baptism¹⁰ - a baptism that was administered to an infant. That we expect of each Christian a spiritual maturity appropriate to his mental and physical maturity is assumed in Reformed theological discussions. Edmund Clowney, the author of the Majority report, writes elsewhere that "The objectivity of the sacrament is the work of God in blessing us as he promised; that

¹⁰ Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC), Question 167: "How is our baptism to be improved by us? Answer: The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body."

promise is embraced by faith. In the sacraments faith receives the blessing that is signified by the authority of God's Word and given according to his promise ... faith holds the sign and the blessing signified together".¹¹ And though Clowney approaches faith in its many aspects – trust, understanding, belief, etc. – he does not intend to communicate, by these statements, that the sacrament of baptism profits nothing for a child despite a child's lesser capacities. Thus, there must be a theological distinction between baptism and the Lord's Supper that would allow Reformed theology to admit children to one sacrament and exclude them from the other.

The necessity for this theological distinction was first thrust upon Reformed theology from the outside by the Anabaptists. Calvin writes:

“Furthermore, they object [Anabaptists] that there is no more reason to administer baptism to infants than the Lord's Supper, which is not permitted to them. As if Scripture did not mark a wide difference in every respect!”¹²

Calvin then proceeds to present a theological distinction that would allow baptism and Communion to be applied differently. John Murray, a modern Reformed theologian, writes:

“It is objected that paedobaptists are strangely inconsistent in dispensing baptism to infants and yet refusing to admit them to the Lord's able ... At the outset it should be admitted that if paedobaptists are inconsistent in this discrimination, then the relinquishment of infant baptism is not the only way of resolving the inconsistency. It could be resolved by going in the other direction, namely, that of admitting infants to the Lord's Supper. And when all factors entering into this dispute are taken into account, particularly the principle involved in infant baptism, then far less would be at stake in admitting infants to the Lord's Supper than would be at stake in

¹¹ Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.XVI.30, pg. 1352. Battles, trans.

abandoning infant baptism. This will serve to point up the significance of infant baptism in the divine economy of grace.”¹³

Murray, like Calvin, opposes paedocommunion, but recognizes the force of the allegation of inconsistency. His apparent sympathy with paedocommunion is not as inconsistent with Calvin’s position as it first seems. He does proceed to offer many of the same arguments distinguishing the two sacraments, and thus their just participants. Murray has simply found a way to undercut the Anabaptist objection. He is, in a sense, calling their theological bluff, the strength of his argument depending upon the *unthinkableness* of communing infants for either party to the dispute. Covenant theology has always led to such allegations of inconsistency, and the general response taken up by the Majority report tends to innovate in ways that distort major commitments of Reformed covenant theology.

One commitment of Reformed covenant theology as found in the Westminster Confession of Faith is that “the sacraments of the old testament in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited were, for substance, the same with those of the new”.¹⁴ The Majority report, after dispensing with the propriety of infant communion, a red herring given that the Minority is advocating only the communion of those who can eat solid food, asks the following rhetorical question on the basis of the physical maturity required to eat Passover food: “In the heightening of fulfillment by which the New Covenant is related to the Old, is it not possible that the degree of required maturity could be heightened?”¹⁵ This question is followed by the statement, “We might expect that the active participation of the one celebrating a sacrament would be radically deepened in the

¹³ John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980). pp. 73-74.

¹⁴ Westminster Confession of Faith, XXVII.5. Hereafter, WCF.

¹⁵ Majority Report, pg. 517.

fulfillment of the New Covenant”.¹⁶ In other words, given that the “spiritual things” signified in the sacraments have come to pass in redemptive history (the coming of Christ, Christ’s resurrection) the New Covenant participant would have a spiritually deeper experience in their participation and a related deeper obligation for exhibiting active faith in their participation.

The only proof offered for the supposition of a deepening of spirituality in New Testament sacraments is that the Bible presents a series of movements that abstract ritual meals from everyday meals – the Passover moves from homes to the central sanctuary, Paul tells the hungry Corinthians to eat regular meals at home and reserve the uniqueness of the sacramental meal, etc. At best, this proof demonstrates that corporate worship formalizes the very activities that occur in daily life. What is there in the recognition of the formalizing of a sacrament that leads to the supposition that the pool of licit participants in the sacrament has now been diminished or tightened? Likewise, baptism ceases to be done at roadsides or in the very location of conversion as in the book of Acts; it has become an event of corporate worship in Presbyterian churches. But this implies nothing about the field of potential recipients; both children and adult converts may receive baptism.

The argument further strains its credibility when it employs the metaphor of “solid food” and “milk” introduced by the author of Hebrews. Hebrews 5:12-14 reads, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to

¹⁶ Ibid.

the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” The Majority report asks, “Could not the transition from milk to solid food symbolize a spiritual maturity of the sort that the author of Hebrews so readily associates with this transition in diet?”¹⁷ The answer is, of course, “yes”. The author of Hebrews is exhorting the audience of the sermon/epistle to a greater understanding of Jesus’ priesthood by the metaphor of moving from milk to solid food. Yet again, however, the Minority is not advocating the communion of those Christians incapable of eating solid food. And metaphorically, communing adults can themselves be immature or mature, even as the author’s audience. And if, as the report itself admits, Reformed theology distinguishes the two sacraments as the sacrament of initiation into Christian life (baptism) and the sacrament of nourishment in that life (the Lord’s Supper), then presumably nourishment unto maturity (metaphorical milk to solid food) is made possible in part by the sacrament of nourishment – the Lord’s Supper. Spiritually immature adults are nourished unto maturity *by* the Lord’s Supper and by the preached Word. Apparently, the majority report offers nothing in corporate worship to nourish the faith of young Christians in addition to the preached word. This can hardly be metaphorically described as providing them with “milk”.

John Calvin objected to those who would lessen the Spiritual significance of Old Testament sacraments in relation to New:

“But we must utterly reject that Scholastic dogma ... which notes such a great difference between the sacraments of the old and new law, as if the former only foreshadowed God’s grace, but the latter give it as a present

¹⁷ Majority Report, pg. 517.

reality. Indeed, the apostle speaks just as clearly concerning the former as the latter when he teaches that the fathers ate the same spiritual food as we, and explains that food as Christ [1 Corinthians 10:3] ... Therefore, whatever is shown us today in the sacraments, the Jews of old received in their own – that is, Christ with his spiritual riches. They felt the same power in their sacraments as do we in ours; these were seals of divine good will toward them, looking to eternal salvation.”¹⁸

The position of the Majority rejects the parity that Calvin defends, and in so doing departs from Reformed tradition in order to dispel paedocommunion.

Word and Sacrament

The Majority’s view of the spiritual nurture of Christian children is that they must reach a level of spiritual maturity by means other than the sacrament of nourishment in order to participate in the sacrament of nourishment. Spiritual maturity is at least in part prior to, rather than the result of the nourishment provided by God through the Lord’s Supper. One reason for this position on the part of the Majority is a distinction between active and passive participation that will be discussed in the next section – the reception of the nourishing effects of the Supper require that the communicant actively express and exercise faith in his eating and drinking. Another reason is that by baptism and by the Word of God, the child receives all the benefits of the Covenant of grace. The Lord’s Supper offers them no additional benefits and is thus superfluous for children who cannot benefit. The Majority proves that this is a tenet of “classical Reformed theology” by quoting the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck,

“Withholding the Supper from children deprives them of not one benefit of the Covenant of grace. This would indeed be the case if they were denied baptism. One who does this must suppose that the children stand outside of the covenant of grace. But it is otherwise with the Lord’s Supper. Whoever administers baptism and not the Lord’s Supper to children acknowledges that they are in the covenant and share all the

¹⁸ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.XIV.23. p 1299, Battles Trans.

benefits of it. He merely denies to them a special way in which those same benefits are signified and sealed when that does not suit their age. The Supper does not convey any benefit that is not already given before in the Word and in baptism through faith.”¹⁹

If it is true that the Supper conveys no unique benefit, then the argument proves not only the lack of necessity of participation for children, but it proves that the Supper is not capable of benefiting adults in any way that sermons or their baptisms have not already. This vitiates Bavinck’s preceding sentence in which it is granted that the Supper is said to signify and seal benefits of the Covenant of grace to those who are of a proper age. One cannot hold both that water is the remedy for thirst and that subsequent applications of water do not convey any benefit that is not already given in the first glass. The reapplication of any benefit of the Covenant of Grace is itself a benefit. We cannot console ourselves concerning our children’s non-communion with this argument of the Majority Report unless we share its presupposition that the benefit of the Supper is only for those who can express an active faith. That is the very question at hand, whether or not active faith is required for participation. As we have already seen, this cannot be established by 1 Corinthians 11 alone.²⁰

Further, the sacramentology expressed in the quote from Bavinck and embraced by the Majority is nearly unrecognizable as a Reformed position due to its separation of word and sacrament. Rayburn writes, “At present we risk promoting superstition by divorcing the Word from the sacrament. Believing they have right and title to it, we

¹⁹ Majority Report, pg. 516. Quoting Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. IV (Kampen: Kok, 1911), pg. 642. Translation is apparently by Clowney.

²⁰ Often, mentally disabled persons are excluded from the Lord’s Supper in the PCA for the same reasons as children – their inability to provide requisite evidence of sufficient rational understanding of the rite. The consolation that the Lord’s Supper is ‘not necessary’ for their salvation or that it is not withholding any spiritual benefit from them that they have not already received in baptism is often given to concerned parents.

begin to give the Word to our children as soon as or even before we give them solid food; but for the sacrament they must wait. The implication is that there is some new divine communication, some supernatural efficacy which the sacrament contains but the Word does not, or that the sacrament unlike the Word, has an intrinsic power and is not merely an instrument by which the Spirit ministers grace to the heart.”²¹ Calvin sees the sacraments as shoring up the work wrought by the Spirit through the Word: “as a building stands and rests upon its own foundation but is more surely established by columns placed underneath, so faith rests upon the Word of God as a foundation; but when the sacraments are added, it rests more firmly upon them as upon columns ... For by them [the sacraments] he [God] manifests himself to us ... and attests his good will and love toward us more expressly than by word.”²² Thus Rayburn points out the problems of separating Word and Sacrament, and Calvin points out the necessity of their combination in experiencing all the blessings that the Spirit wishes to bestow upon believers.

Active / Passive Distinction

The Majority report conflates the idea of active/passive aspects of the sacramental rites with active or passive understanding on the part of participants: “In baptism, the recipient of the sacrament is passive. In the Supper the participant is active.”²³ The one baptized, in other words, plays only a passive role – the infant is held and water is applied. The participant in Communion engages in an active memorial. The Majority report holds that the action lies in the taking and in the eating that the participant in the

²¹ Minority Report, pg. 525.

²² *Institutes*, IV.XIV.6.

²³ Majority Report, pg. 516.

Supper performs.²⁴ This emphasis would be acceptable to the Minority as well because children can take and eat. In other words, if the emphasis is on action, then nothing prevents a 16th month old from participating just as actively as an adult. The fact that children *can* actively take and eat reveals that the Majority report also must understand “taking” and “eating” metaphorically. Taking implies “an active expression of personal faith”. And further, “the active participation that is required by the form of the Lord’s Supper necessitates a conscious response if the sacrament is to have positive meaning”.²⁵ Presupposed here is that the sacrament’s memorial is directed to the believer himself or herself rather than to God or to both God and his people, as are many biblical memorials.

A memorial has not taken place, according to the Majority, unless the one performing the actions of the memorial is cognizant of the meaning of his actions. This peculiar memorial theory is assumed and not argued in the report. A telling illustration that the theory is read into texts may be seen in this expression of the Majority: “The traditional Reformed practice has honored the active confession of faith that our Lord has made structural for the observance of the Supper. It has sought to prepare the child to show forth, *with understanding*, the Lord’s death till he come”.²⁶ The biblical text merely reads “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you show forth the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor. 11:23). The phrase “with understanding” is imported in the Majority’s approach to the notion of a memorial. This is eisegesis.

Further, the way in which the Majority distinguishes between active and passive sacraments tends to deny the monergism inherent in a Reformed approach to the

²⁴ “The action of the sacrament lies in the taking and eating.” pg. 518.

²⁵ Ibid., 518.

²⁶ Ibid., *emphasis mine*.

Christian life. Monergism emphasizes that the work of showing forth and applying grace, both in initial salvation and in the recurring nourishment of that salvation, is the work of God alone. Calvin writes, “the sacraments properly fulfill their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in.”²⁷ The Spirit is the prime actor in the sacraments and Christ is the substance of the sacraments: “Christ is the matter (if you prefer) the substance of all the sacraments; for in him they have all their firmness, and they do not promise anything apart from him.”²⁸ And this applies to both sacraments; the gift of faith is required for reception of the Holy Spirit’s work. The sacraments “avail and profit nothing unless received in faith”.²⁹ And yet Calvin emphasizes that the sacraments are from God and do not depend upon the recipient for their value: “What I have said is not to be understood as if the force and truth of the sacrament depended upon the condition or choice of him who receives it. For what God has ordained remains firm and keeps its own nature, however men may vary.”³⁰

Calvin holds monergistic sentiments and the requirement of faithful reception in harmony with the application of the sacrament of baptism to children. Yet he and the Majority are led to inconsistently maintain a higher standard of participation in the sacrament of Communion. By whatever faith infants receive Christ through the Holy Spirit’s work in baptism, such faith is insufficient to receive Christ by the Holy Spirit in

²⁷ Institutes IV.XIV.9. Battles, pg. 1284.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Institutes IV.XIV.17. Battles, pg. 1292.

³⁰ Institutes IV.XIV.16. Battles, pg. 1291.

Communion, even when the child can actively take and eat the elements of the Supper.³¹ Calvin even goes so far as to deny that Passover was eaten by any who could not inquire into its meaning on the basis of Exodus 12:26.

Sacramental Efficacy

The majority report emphasizes active elements of the Lord's Supper primarily because it finds in the Lord's Supper an opportunity to exercise personal faith and express such faith in memory of Christ's work. Further, the report rejects what it labels as "Eastern Orthodox" – a sacramentology that views "the bread and the wine as imparting spiritual life."³² On both counts, the Majority report departs from its own tradition.

Concerning the memorial aspects of the Supper, even assuming that 'memorial' chiefly implies a personal remembrance rather than a covenantal 'reminding' God of his promises, the Westminster Larger Catechism separates itself both from Zwinglianism and its memorialism and from a view that the elements themselves confer benefits in the sacraments: "How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation? Answer: The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered, but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ, by whom they are instituted".³³ The sacraments, therefore, are by God's power actual means of salvation, not only memorials to God's work in Christ. Further, those who worthily partake of Communion "feed upon his [Jesus'] body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and

³¹ For biblical mentions of infants and their ability to express devotion, see 2 Chr. 20:13-18; Dt. 29:11-12; Dt. 29:10; 1 Cor. 10:3-4; Lk. 1:15, 1:44; various Psalms, etc. In many of these passages, "all" can only be seen to include infants as well.

³² Majority, pg. 516.

³³ WLC, Question 161.

growth in grace”.³⁴ This statement uses language that evokes the very passage, John 6, which the Majority, following Bavinck, rejects as possibly referring to Eucharistic eating.

Conclusion

The Westminster Confession Faith, as the Minority Report points out, contains within itself the ecclesiology necessary for the adoption of paedocommunion. Chapter XXV, part ii defines the visible church as “all those ... that profess the true religion, together with their children”. Further, the sacraments are “holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace ... to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him: as also to put visible difference between those that belong unto the church and the rest of the world...” (XXVII, i) And “The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New” (XXVII, v.). Given that children are part of the visible church, and that giving them sacraments puts a visible difference between them and children born apart from the church, and given that children ate of sacraments in the Old Testament that were the same in substance as New Testament sacraments, in the system of doctrine expressed by the Westminster Confession, a Presbyterian must go on to find in the scriptures an explicit reason to withhold the Lord’s Supper from any baptized person old enough to take the elements and eat or drink them.

The Majority report attempts to find a key to justify the exclusion of children on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11, a passage we have shown to have no bearing on the question given that it follows a prophetic mode of discourse designed to call God’s people back to a true appreciation of the sacraments -- a mode of discourse that was used

³⁴ Ibid, Question 168.

by prophets in the Hebrew scriptures to call God's people back to the faithful participation in sacraments in which we know children to have participated. The Majority seeks to distinguish baptism and the Lord's Supper by reference to the degree of active participation required by each. We have shown that this emphasis conflicts with the Reformed emphasis upon monergism in the giving both of grace and of the faith required to receive it. The Majority risks turning Reformed sacramentology into a memorialism that the Westminster Confession of Faith implicitly rejects. The Majority also proposes a "heightening" of spirituality in the New Testament by comparison with the Old Testament. This heightening has been shown to conflict with the Westminster Confession's and Calvin's emphasis upon Christ as the substance of both Old and New Testament sacraments.

Accepting the Majority report as cogent requires accepting a nearly memorialistic view of the Lord's Supper, the notion that God has built a "dry spell" into the Christian life during which one waits to receive spiritual nourishment until one is spiritually mature enough to actively participate in the memorial, the notion that the Lord's Supper provides no benefit to believers that is not already present in baptism and the preached word, and the notion that New Testament believers have a spiritually deeper experience and a deeper obligation for active faith than people did under the Old Covenant. In short, acceptance of the Majority argument *against* paedocommunion requires more modifications to the system of doctrine taught in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms than acceptance of the Minority's argument *for* paedocommunion requires.

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