

Intinction: A Study Document

Background: *At the March 2015 Council of Presidents meeting, a discussion arose about the propriety of intinction as a method of distributing the Lord's Supper, in part because that method was the only option offered at the November 2014 LCEF leadership conference worship. After some conversation, the assembly decided to request from the CTCR a study document on the practice of intinction to assist the Council in their discussion. Discussion questions are offered herein for that purpose.*

I. Early History

Intinction is the practice of dipping the consecrated bread into the consecrated wine by one's own hand or that of another and then consuming it. Historians point to various reasons for its inception and continuance. Most likely intinction began as a means to commune small children and the ill or elderly who found it difficult to swallow the bread. The practice, however, received objections as early as AD 340. Pope Julius declared it to be contrary to the divine order, contrary to the apostolic institutions, and contrary to the evangelical and apostolic teaching and ecclesiastical custom. He concluded, "When they give the dipped Eucharist to the people for a full Communion, they have not received this as approved testimony from the Gospel, where He commended His body to the apostles and also His blood; for the commendation of the bread is mentioned separately and that of the cup also separately."¹

The Fourth Council of Braga (Spain), which met in AD 675, repeated the objection to intinction:

Although every crime and sin is blotted out by the sacrifices offered to God, what expiation can be made to the Lord for sins committed in the very act of offering sacrifice? For we have heard that some [priests] . . . offer the people eucharist that has been intincted at communion . . . But the gospel says 'Jesus took bread and cup, blessed them, and gave them to his disciples.' The practice of giving the people eucharistic communion by means of intinction has no authority in the gospel, where [we read that] he gave his disciples his body and blood: the bread was given separately and the cup was given separately.²

The arguments against the use of intinction continued into the 11th century. In 1095 the Synod of Clermont decreed, "Let no one communicate from the altar unless one receives the body and the blood in the same way, except in the case of necessity and out of caution."³ Robert F. Taft, former president of *Societas Liturgica* comments, "'Necessity and caution' doubtless refers to the usual exceptions outside the liturgy, as in the case of . . . communion brought to the sick, in which case communion with the intincted host was usual."⁴

A generation later, Pope Paschal II repeated the same instruction:

Therefore, in receiving the body and blood of the Lord . . . , let the dominical tradition be preserved, and no human and novel custom depart from that which Christ the Master ordered and did. For we know that both the bread by itself and the wine by itself were handed down by the Lord. This custom we teach and command to be always kept thus in the holy Church, except for infants and those very ill, who are unable to consume the bread.⁵

Nathan Mitchell notes, however, that despite the theological objections, intinction grew in popularity over time. He adds that besides being offered so that the ill, aged, or small children could receive both elements, intinction also began to be used to prevent communicants from taking home the consecrated bread rather than consuming it at the altar, or to preserve the distribution of both kinds in the sacrament when the doctrine of concomitance was leading to the withholding of the cup from the laity. But once the doctrine of concomitance was established, intinction was on its way to extinction.⁶

Discussion Questions:

1. On what basis did Church leaders argue against intinction?
2. What benefits did intinction offer that made it acceptable to some?
3. What considerations led to exceptions to the general prohibition of intinction?
4. How did the doctrine of concomitance lead to the demise of intinction?

The practice of intinction did not exist in the West during the time of the Reformation; the Roman Catholic Church already had adopted the practice of communion in one kind. So intinction was not a part of the Lutheran debate with Rome. Nevertheless, the Lutherans were concerned about deviating from the Scriptural accounts when administering the Supper. With reference to the practice of withholding the cup, the *Apology* says, "...the church cannot assume to itself the liberty of making Christ's ordinances matters left to human choice."⁷ In the *Apology* Melancthon asks, "Why is the ordinance of Christ altered, especially when He himself calls it His testament? But if it is not permissible to annul a human testament, much less will it be permissible to annul the testament of Christ."⁸ When the Augsburg Confession defends communing in both kinds, it also relies upon church history and the canons, which witness to that long-standing practice: "it is evident that a custom introduced contrary to the commandments of God, must not be approved, as the canons testify."⁹

Martin Chemnitz, while writing on the topic of communing in both kinds, mentioned intinction without condemnation, noting "that among the ancients in a case of necessity, in Communion of little children and of the sick, a dipped and infused sacrament was sometimes given."¹⁰ He adds that when the Council of Tours allowed intinction, it allowed this "slight departure from the form of the institution of Christ," because "they nevertheless considered both kinds so necessary that they preferred to counsel the giving of a dipped Eucharist."¹¹

In 1665 the theological faculty of Leipzig raised the concern of following the proper order of distributing the Sacrament when addressing an incident where the priest gave the cup before the host. They said,

In [this case], admittedly, the essence of the Sacrament is present but not according to such manner and in such arrangement as Christ ordained it and prescribed it to be administered by us in the institution of the Holy Supper... And we consider that the proper Sacrament can be given to the parish only so long as such a Holy Sacrament is distributed, not only in the material and substantial parts, but the form, i.e., the mode and arrangement in which Christ has distributed it and that we, too, should and must administer it—namely that the blessed bread must go first and the blessed cup follow thereafter to have its intended end as is the Lord's desire.¹²

While not addressing the matter of intinction in his *Pastoral Theology*, C.F.W. Walther does quote from Lutheran theologians also concerned about following the order of distribution as that given by Christ. "(Christian Timothy) Seidel remarks about a situation where the cup was administered first: "Such a reception of the Supper would have to be declared invalid because the words of the Founder have the force of a testament, which has been sealed by his death."¹³ Walther also notes that "Dedekennus communicates an opinion of the Marburg theologian Hyperius, according to which a preacher who had absent-mindedly made himself guilty of this reversal of order in the administration of the Supper would have to repent publicly before the church and so remove the offense which had been given."¹⁴

Discussion Questions:

1. In their argumentation against withholding the cup from the laity, how did the Lutherans follow the same argumentation of previous generations concerning intinction? Do the same principles apply?
2. What effect might be created in the minds of communicants by administering the Sacrament in ways not in keeping with the Words of Institution?
3. How does the church's historic practice inform our discussion on this matter today?

II. Current Developments

Given the strong prohibition against the practice of intinction as noted above, it might be surprising to learn that current practice in the Roman Church allows for it as one mode of distributing the Sacrament. When intinction is practiced, the priest or deacon is required to dip the host into the cup and then place it on the recipient's tongue. Self-administration is not allowed, (although it has been observed in some places that communicants have taken the host in the hand and then dipped it into the chalice themselves.)¹⁵ Among Anglicans, Resolution 118 of their 1948 Lambeth Conference stated no objection to intinction where conditions required it and stated that any part of the Anglican Communion had the freedom to sanction intinction as an alternative to the traditional method of reception via common cup.¹⁶ In 2012 the Presbyterian Church in America voted in convention to revise the *Book of Church Order* to prohibit the practice of intinction. Two-thirds of the PCA's 80 presbyteries were needed to approve the change, but the required number for ratification was not reached.¹⁷

The 1944 Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod briefly addressed the matter of intinction as an afterthought to a different question about whether the use of individual cups goes against the word of Christ. To that question the convention resolved, “And we hold that the manner and mode of distributing the bread, be it by breaking or by distributing in the form of a host and the mode and manner of distributing the wine, be it in one or two or more cups, do not belong to the essence of the Sacrament.”¹⁸ Nothing was found that would forbid the use of individual cups. A word concerning intinction was added, saying, “We definitely reject intinction, because while distributing the bread, the Savior said, ‘Take eat!’ Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22 and while giving the wine he said ‘Drink ye all of it!’ Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23. Intinction would be a direct violation of the words of institution.”¹⁹

If no exceptions to the prohibition had been acknowledged or addressed beforehand in the LCMS, the 1983 CTCR report, *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper*, did. The report addresses the problem of the alcoholic communing. It states, “The counsel of completely foregoing Communion is clearly unsatisfactory. In this situation, too, the actions of diluting the wine with water or intinction would be preferable.”²⁰ Later in the same report, the question is asked, “What is the propriety of intinction?” The answer given affirms that the consecrated elements offer Christ's body and blood to every communicant “regardless of the method of distribution.” It goes on to say, however, that “our Confessions and practice preserve the model of our Lord's distribution of the bread and then the wine.”²¹ The report affirms that those who commune by intinction receive the Body and Blood of Christ. At the same time, it states that there is value in preserving the order of Christ's distribution of bread and then wine. What that value is, the report does not say.

In their 1990 *Pastoral Theology*, editors Norbert H. Mueller and George Krause do not link the Sacrament's validity to any means of distribution either but say “the body and blood are offered to each communicant individually, that they may eat and drink according to the Lord's institution. While not calling into question the Christian churches which practice intinction, Lutherans understand that the word of Christ calls for each communicant to both eat and drink. Accordingly, intinction has not generally been practiced in Lutheran churches.”²²

Other Lutherans have declared intinction to be permissible under certain circumstances. H. P. V. Renner writes, “In Lutheran circles, it is customary to use one cup for all communicants as an expression of our fellowship with one another. However, special alternative arrangements, such as the use of intinction (dipping the bread in the wine) or individual cups, may be made for persons concerned about possible infection.”²³ In fact, whenever intinction has been practiced in recent history, it was offered as a solution to various pastoral or pragmatic concerns—illness, age, conservation of wine, speed of distribution, fear of spillage, sanitary concerns, etc.

III. Theological Considerations

Our desire is to be faithful to our Lord's command. For Luther, at the heart of the Words of Institution is the nature of the Sacrament itself, not the manner of distributing it. Jesus focuses on what He is giving, His body and His blood for the forgiveness of sins. So Luther asks not, "How shall we do this?" but "What is the Sacrament of the Altar?" "Where is this written?" "What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?" "How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?" and "Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?" (SC Sacrament of the Altar). Clearly, as noted also in Luther's questions, eating and drinking are a necessary component to right reception. As contained in our liturgies, the Words of Institution are a conflation of the four New Testament accounts. Each account describes the two distinct parts of the meal—the giving and eating of the bread interpreted as our Lord's body, and the giving and drinking of the cup interpreted as our Lord's blood. Where present in the texts, the Greek words are the common words for eating and drinking, ἐσθίω and πίνω.²⁴ One concern which intinction raises in the minds of some is how far one can stretch the meaning of "drink" and remain faithful to our Lord's command.²⁵

Beside the desire to be faithful to the Words of Institution, are there other theological reasons for keeping the distribution of each element and its consumption separate? Since the Supper was instituted during Passover, were Jesus' words and actions only a convenient reinterpretation of actions and elements that were already features of that meal? Removed from its Passover setting, would the elements need to be distributed separately or even distributed in the same sequence? By the time the Supper is celebrated in Corinth, Passover connections seem to have lessened if not disappeared. The frequency of celebration is more than annual. In chapter ten, Paul draws parallels between Israel in the wilderness eating the same spiritual food and drinking the same spiritual drink. He says that the cup is a participation in the blood of Christ and the bread is a participation in the body of Christ. In chapter eleven he teaches that the Lord's death is proclaimed by eating the bread and drinking the cup. Judgment falls upon those who eat the bread and drink the cup in an unworthy manner. Paul seems content to take the sequence as he had received it from the Lord and apply it to the Corinthian situation without modification.

Jesus' words in all four accounts give distinct significance to each element. (That at one point during the intervening meal Jesus dipped bread into the customary Passover *charoseth* mixture is not relevant here, even though proponents of intinction suggest it is. For He did not do the same with the bread and wine.) The words spoken in connection with the bread and over the cup highlight two aspects of our Lord's sacrifice: body broken, blood poured out. Isaiah foretold that the Suffering Servant would be led to the slaughter like a lamb, thus predicting a sacrificial death. Jesus' words, "for you" recall "for the many" of Isaiah 53. The flesh of the sacrificial Passover lamb was to be consumed by the participants after its blood had been drained. When Jesus described the content of the cup as "my blood of the covenant," he drew a connection to the blood used to seal the old covenant (Exodus 24) and also identified this as the fulfillment of the promised new covenant (Jeremiah 31). Blood from the sacrifice is atoning blood, to be sure, but in Exodus 24 it plays another role. The blood was sprinkled upon the altar and on the people to seal the covenant between the Maker and its recipients. Christ offers in the cup the blood that seals the (new) covenant, assuring participants that they share in the benefits which that new covenant established by Christ's sacrificed body.

Certain freedom has existed in our circles in the administration of the Supper. As for the elements themselves, a variety of types of bread and colors of wine have been used. As for distribution, a variety of postures have been employed: reclining at a table, kneeling or standing at the altar, and receiving the elements while seated in the pew. Pieces of bread have been torn or cut from one loaf, or wafers have been distributed either to the communicant's hand or placed directly in the mouth. Both common cup and individual cups are offered. In the preface to his *Deutsche Messe*, Luther suggested that all communicants first receive the bread; then return a second time to receive the cup.²⁶ Yet despite the many variations in distribution practiced in Christian liberty, in each case the sequence of distribution has remained the same: first bread is eaten, then the cup is drunk in accordance with the Lord's command. The command "Do this in remembrance of me" has been interpreted to refer back to the commanded separate actions of receiving and eating the bread and receiving and drinking the

cup, as the 1944 Convention Committee 7 declared, and even as the Small Catechism explains, "...for us Christians to eat and to drink."²⁷

Discussion Questions:

1. How specific need we be about the manner of eating and drinking of the Sacrament? Is chewing necessary? Do we drink any time we take in liquid, or only when we place lips on a cup? Would swallowing the bread while drinking from the cup be any different, practically speaking, from intincting the bread?
2. Combining the bread and the wine after the Words of Institution as is done with intinction is certainly not what Jesus did. Do we change the Sacrament when we do that?
3. Lutherans insist that the efficacy of baptism does not depend upon a specific means of administering it. Might the same hold true for the administration of the Lord's Supper?
4. How much variation in the practice of the Supper is permissible? Does variation in practice ever negate the Sacrament so that it is not Jesus' body or blood? Can variations in distribution practice cause doubt in the minds of communicants?

IV. Final Considerations

Important questions remain. If Synod disapproved of intinction in 1944, but various publications in the LCMS have viewed it more positively thereafter (to say nothing of the presence of intinction in practice in many LCMS congregations), what does that mean? Does intinction invalidate the Sacrament? If intinction does not invalidate the Sacrament, what, if any, *are* the consequences of a method of distribution that is unlike that of our Lord at the Last Supper? Although official ecclesiastical pronouncements spoke against intinction since AD 340, allowances for intinction in extraordinary circumstances were also acknowledged. Objections arose when the exceptional threatened to become regularized. Why was it a permissible exception in certain prescribed circumstances, but not permissible for regular use within the worship service? Finally, if Synod in convention has rejected the practice, would it not be appropriate for the Synod in convention to speak once more, either reaffirming or revoking the prohibition, since intinction is currently being practiced to varying degrees within the Synod?

Discussion Questions:

1. Should intinction be permissible at all? Why or why not? Under what circumstances? How much freedom should individual congregations have in a matter of communion practice such as intinction?
2. Sometimes one faces difficult choices in pastoral care and practice. Luther chose not to alienate or confuse the laity and so introduced the cup in Wittenberg slowly. Chemnitz notes that intinction was preferable to receiving only the body of Christ. How do such considerations influence our discussion of intinction and other matters of communion practice?
3. What is the relationship between Word and action in the Sacrament? At what point do concerns about the distribution make human actions more important than the Word in the Sacrament?
4. How do we determine the relevance of synodical resolutions such as the 1944 rejection of intinction today? Do past judgments always reign (consider, for example, Synod's 1850 resolution against public prayers by laymen and against *ex corde* prayers unless there is no approved written prayer available²⁸)?

Commission on Theology and Church Relations

Approved February 25, 2017

¹ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans. Fred Kramer, vol 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 422.

² Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, Studies in the Reformed Rites of the Catholic Church, Vol. 4 (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1982), 92.

-
- ³ Robert F. Taft, "Communion via Intinction," *Studia Liturgica* 26 (1996): 232.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid, 232-233.
- ⁶ Mitchell, 160-162.
- ⁷ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 247.
- ⁸ Ibid, 245.
- ⁹ Ibid, 63. "Now it is obvious that this custom, introduced contrary to God's command and to the ancient canons, is not right" (KW, 62). The argument seems to be that neither the Scriptures nor the tradition of the church support this practice. Notice how Melancthon begins his argument by citing Saint Paul, then Cyprian, Jerome, Gelasius [better Gratian], and Nicholas of Cusa. Until the rather recent withdrawal of the cup, church practice had conformed to "God's command."
- ¹⁰ Chemnitz, *Examination*, 421.
- ¹¹ Chemnitz, *Examination*, 423.
- ¹² George Dedekenus, ed. *Thesauri Consilium et Decisionum* (Jenae: In Verlegung Zachario Hertels, Buchhandlers in Hamburg, Gedruet bei Johann Nisio, 1671), 409.
- ¹³ C. F. W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, trans. John M Drickamer (Lutheran News Inc: New Haven, MO, 1995), 143.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Scott P. Rickert, "Reader Question: Why Do Catholics Receive Only the Host?" <http://catholicism.about.com/b/2009/10/16/reader-question-communion-and-intinction.htm>.
- ¹⁶ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1948/resolution-118-administration-of-holy-communion?year=1948>.
- ¹⁷ GPTS Online, February 11, 2013, <http://gptsnews.gpts.edu/2013/02/intinction-ban-fails-in-pca.html>.
- ¹⁸ Proceedings, 44th Convention of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 255.
- ¹⁹ Ibid. *N.b.*, Convention procedures in 1944 were different than they are today. In accepting the report of an LCMS committee, Committee 7, the convention thereby affirmed (or, in today's language, resolved) the Committee's judgment on individual glasses and intinction.
- ²⁰ *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, May 1983, 16.
- ²¹ Ibid, 31.
- ²² Norbert H. Mueller and George Kraus, eds., *Pastoral Theology* (St Louis: CPH, 1990), 105.
- ²³ H.P.V. Renner, *Together in God's Presence: A Simple Explanation of the Liturgy with Questions for Study and Discussion* (Adelaide, South Australia: Lutheran Publishing House 1989), 33.
- ²⁴ While the New Testament does contain figurative uses of each (cf. Heb 10:27 and 6:7), the context here speaks against such meanings in the Lord's Supper texts.
- ²⁵ Taft comments, "no one but a nominalist could by any stretch of the imagination call communion by intinction 'eating and drinking.'" Ibid, 229.
- ²⁶ AE 53:30.
- ²⁷ Kolb and Wengert, 362.
- ²⁸ SB 1850, pp. 32-3 (SB 2, pp. 143-4; 1850 *Protokoll*, Session IX).