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16th General Assembly, 1988, Appendix T, p. 516.

[Editor's Note: Texts of the various overtures connected with this matter may be found at the end of this document. Discussion of the subject began in 1984 with Overture 56 from the Session of the Cherokee Presbyterian church (presented to the Presbytery of North Georgia, but not adopted by the Presbytery). [cf. *M12GA*, 12-10, B, p. 44; 12-31, II, Item 9, p. 101; and 12-31, III, Item 9, p. 103.]

The Moderator of the Twelfth General Assembly, Rev. James M. Baird, Jr., appointed the following men to the Study Committee:

Teaching Elders:

Robert S. Rayburn, Pacific Northwest Presbytery, Chairman,
Edmund P. Clowney, James River Presbytery
Robert L. Reymond, Illiana Presbytery

Ruling Elders:

Frank C. Horton, Mississippi Valley Pby.
William Adams, Central Georgia Presbytery

1986 - The Committee presented its report to the Fourteenth General Assembly (1986), but by a procedural motion, all *ad interim* committee reports but one were postponed to the Fifteenth General Assembly (1987) [cf. *M14GA*, 14-46, p. 107; Appendix T, pp. 481-492]. On this same matter, Overture 12 also came before the Assembly in 1986 and was referred to the Study Committee [*M14GA*, 14-4, B, p. 49-50; 14-52, 28, p. 127]

1987 – By procedural motion the Report on Paedocommunion [see *M15GA*, Appendix V, pp. 537-549] was continued to the following year and docketed as the first item of business on Tuesday morning of that year. Also coming before the Fifteenth General Assembly was Overture 23 from Central Carolina Presbytery, which was carried over to the Sixteenth General Assembly [*M15GA*, 15-3, B, p. 48-49; 15-83, III, Item 33, p. 177].

1988– The Committee presented its report for the third time. Their Report, as it appears in Appendix T, is identical to what was previously published in the 1986 and 1987 *Minutes*.

Conclusion: In sum, the Assembly decided:

16-30 Ad Interim Committee on Paedocommunion.

TE Rayburn presented the minority report and moved it as a substitute but it was not adopted. The committee's report was adopted as amended:

1. That the PCA continue the practice defined in our standards and administer the Lord's Supper "only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves. *Adopted*
2. That the Committee on Paedocommunion prepare an annotated bibliography of sources both for and against the practice, and that resources be collected by the Committee for distribution to those who request them (at the requesters' cost) to study this matter further. *Adopted*
3. To answer Overture 12 to the Fourteenth General Assembly **in the negative** (14-4, p. 49 and 14-52, 28, p. 127.) *Adopted*
4. That those ruling and teaching elders who by conscience of conviction are in support of the minority report concerning paedocommunion be notified by this Assembly of their responsibility to make known to their presbyteries and sessions the changes of their views since their ordination vows. *Adopted*

REPORT OF THE AD-INTERIM COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE QUESTION OF PAEDOCOMMUNION

Classical Reformed theology has been virtually unanimous in judging that covenant children ought not be brought to the Lord's Table before the age of discretion. This judgment was supported by such theologians as Herman Witsius (1636-1708) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). They defended this judgment by a number of considerations.

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First, they distinguished between the meaning of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is the initiatory sacrament, the Supper is "the sacrament of nutrition by means of solid food."¹

Second, they saw a close relation between the meaning and form of the sacraments, and found the distinction applicable to the form as well. In baptism the recipient of the sacrament is passive. In the Supper the participant is active. The institution of the Supper by Jesus required the taking and eating of bread as solid food, a command that cannot be fulfilled by infants.

Third, they stressed the requirements for the worthy participation in the Supper. The Supper is to be eaten in memory of Christ's death, and in hope of his coming. In I 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.

Fourth, these Reformed writers recognized that one motive for the practice of infant communion in the Eastern Orthodox Church was a sacramentalism that viewed the bread and wine as imparting spiritual life. Bavinck replies to this that John 6:53 refers not to a sacramental eating, but to the spiritual and mystical eating of faith. He further argues: "Withholding of 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 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 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."²

The agreement of Reformed theologians on this issue is described with precise scholarship in a learned article presented to the committee by Robert S. Rayburn, the author of a minority report. At the same time, Dr. Rayburn argues that this theological consensus may be more broad than deep. Since the position had already been established in medieval Catholicism and was not effectively challenged in the Reformed churches, the Reformed divines tended to repeat the same arguments rather uncritically. In the literature assembled and on file with the committee, it is evident that a challenging case can be made for reversing the Reformed practice and for admitting little children to the Supper.

The case is made in a two-fold way. First, the analogy between the Passover and the Lord's Supper is appealed to. It is argued that since little children participated in the Passover feast, and in other sacrificial feasts, so, too, they should participate in the Passover feast of the New Covenant, the Lord's Supper. Participation in these covenantal meals is the right and privilege of those who are included in the covenant. Second, the parallel between the two New Covenant sacraments is stressed. Both are signs and seals of the covenant of grace. Neither adds any significant content that is not part of the covenant itself, and conveyed in the Word. If children have a right to be

¹ Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, Vol. II, ET (London, 1837), p. 456.

² Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. IV (Kampen: Kok, 1911), p. 642.

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admitted to one sacrament, they have the same right to be admitted to the other. In both cases requirements must be made of adults that could not properly be made of children, but these requirements are the same: repentance and faith. If parents can claim for their children the promise of the covenant signified in the sacrament of baptism, they can equally claim for them the same promise signified in the sacrament of the Supper.

To the argument that Paul requires conditions for worthy participation in the Supper that little children cannot meet, a ready answer is found. Paul is writing to curb disorder at the Supper, and has adults in view. Paedobaptists would not deny baptism to children because requirements may be stated for adults that children cannot fulfill for themselves (Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:13, 14).

These arguments for infant communion have been polemically applied by some. The Reformed practice has been accused of admitting children to membership among the people of God only to excommunicate them without process by barring them from the table. Or the Reformers have been accused of admitting the children, not to membership in the church, but only to a neutral area of potential membership, a kind of limbo between the church and the world.

It is the thesis of this report that, in spite of the excellent insights in the minority report and in other papers favoring paedocommunion that we have reviewed, the main argument is not sustained. The PCA is well advised to continue the classical Reformed practice of delaying the admission of children to the Lord's Table until they reach a level of maturity at which they can profess their faith and partake of the elements with discernment.

If the little children of believers are to be baptized but not yet admitted to the Lord's Table, the difference in practice must be grounded in a difference between the two sacraments. This report maintains that the two sacraments are to be distinguished, and that there is background in the Old Testament for that distinction. The distinction in the New Testament is even greater, however, because of the heightened fulfillment of the New Covenant.

In its simplest form, the distinction is between a covenant sign that requires the active participation of the one who receives it, and a covenant sign that may be applied to one who is not an agent, but passive in its application. Here we are talking about the sign itself, not about the requirements for the sign or the attitudes that should accompany the observance of the sign. When Bavinck and others describe circumcision and baptism as "passive" sacraments, they are first of all referring to the obvious fact that both may be applied to a tiny infant without its participation. The infant is in no sense the agent of the sacrament, but the one to whom it is applied. For participation in the the Passover or the Lord's Supper, however, some degree of active ingestion is required. This point seems to be taken account of in the present argumentation for paedocommunion. The minority report is not defending the practice of intinction by which a communion wafer is dipped in Eucharistic wine so as to make it possible for a nursing infant to swallow a minute amount of the elements. Rather, the minority report is proposing the participation, not of nursing infants who cannot yet take solid food, but of little children who have matured to the point of handling adequately a diet of solids.

Children participating in the first Passover would need further maturation beyond the nursing stage. The Passover meal consisted not simply of liquids and semi-liquids, but of roast meat, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. It is highly unlikely that an Israelite father would feel constrained to force such a diet on an infant that was

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newly weaned. The same would apply to the meat of the sacrificial meals such as the peace-offerings.

The point is simple enough. The Passover differed from circumcision in that children had to be older to participate in it. The nursing child, drinking milk rather than eating meat, could not at that stage participate in the Passover. The point of the distinction is clearly expressed by the author of Hebrews: "[You] are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food. For every one that partaketh of milk is inexperienced in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But solid food is for fulgrowned men, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:12-14).

Now advocates of infant communion are presumably ready to agree with this. Indeed, the paedocommunion advocated in the minority report might be described as "communion for little children," since it does not wish to make a case for providing communion to infants on the breast.

But when it is recognized that a certain level of maturity is necessary for a proper observance of the Passover, another possibility emerges. 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? 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?

We might expect that the active participation of the one celebrating a sacrament would be radically deepened in the fulfillment of the New Covenant. Certainly the distinction of the sacrament from ordinary meals is increased in the New Testament. To be sure, this, too, had roots in the Old Testament. The Passover was first celebrated in the homes of the Israelites about to leave Egypt, and was therefore a last family meal before their hasty departure. When God set his name in Jerusalem, however, the Passover was to be celebrated at the central sanctuary, and became distinct from family meals (Deut. 16:5-7). Jesus instituted the Supper not in a family meal in Bethany, but in the upper room with his disciples. Writing to the church at Corinth to correct abuses at the Lord's Table, Paul urges a greater distinction between the Supper and family meals, "What, have ye not houses to eat and drink in?" (1 Cor. 11:22, 34). He tells the hungry to eat at home, and to recognize the sacrament for what it is.

James B. Jordan, an advocate of infant communion, properly observes that his view is less sacramental.³ He stresses the common meal aspect of the Supper to urge that children, as members of the community of the covenant should not be denied access to the covenantal table. In a similar fashion, it has been argued that the manna, the daily food of Israel in the wilderness, had a symbolic and sacramental force, understood by the interpretation Jesus gave when he presented himself as the true Bread, come down from heaven to give life to the world. Since children ate of manna (there was nothing else to eat), and drank the water from the rock (there was nothing else to drink), and since their food and drink symbolized the life that Christ gives, they may now come to the table where the bread and the cup offer the same symbolism.⁴

The symbolism of the manna and of the water from the rock cannot be denied or minimized. Indeed, Israel should have received both with thanksgiving and faith; they

³ James B. Jordan, "Theses on Paedocommunion," in the Geneva Papers, Special Edition (Tyler, Texas, 1982).

⁴ Christian L. Keidel, "Is the Lord's Supper for Children?" Westminster Theological Journal XXXVII, pp. 301-341.

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should have perceived the symbolism. There is a sense in which we in the New Covenant should find the symbols of life in Christ in our daily bread. Yet the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is not simply an aspect of our family meals, or a simple community meal together. It is specifically instituted by Christ, and given a meaning by him that is repeated by the Apostle Paul in charging the Corinthians. Jesus did not simply give new meaning to the Passover. The new wine of the kingdom required fresh wineskins. Jesus instituted a new sacrament, using the wine that was no formal part of the original Passover, and the bread that was, but ignoring the flesh of the lamb or the bitter herbs in the dish. The sacrament is constituted as a memorial feast, pointing back to his sacrifice. By faith the participant confesses the meaning of the death of Christ and anticipates his coming again. Because Jesus has accomplished his atonement, the Supper is not simply a meal that contains elements of symbolism, including sacrificial symbolism. It is purely sacramental, an exercise of active faith. For this reason, not to discern the body of the Lord, but to regard it as a simple meal becomes a blasphemy that God will judge (1 Cor. 11:29).

The action of the sacrament lies in the taking and eating. "This do in remembrance of me." Participation in the supper is analogous to performing baptism as well as to receiving baptism. To be sure, this sacramental action has been obscured by liturgies that focus on priestly consecration of the elements, ceremonies in which the communicant is made as passive as possible, with the communion wafer being placed upon his tongue. But the Reformed doctrine of the sacrament has properly restored the emphasis to the active initiative of the believer in taking the bread and the cup. The Lord himself gives the bread and the cup; we take them in his name, to remember him. The form of the sacrament requires an active expression of personal faith. It differs significantly from baptism, for baptism is a form of blessing with the addition of a sign of cleansing. In baptism the name of the Lord is given to the one baptized in a formula of blessing. This can appropriately be done to one who does not know or understand the meaning of the blessing that is being pronounced. But 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.

The necessity of response seems to be acknowledged by those favoring infant communion. James B. Jordan and Glenn Davies both argue that a covenantal response of obedience to parents meets, at a child's level, the requirements for participation in the Supper: the self-examination and discerning the body of the Lord of which Paul speaks in the Corinthian epistle.⁵ An evident danger at once appears. If the quality of obedience to men (even parents) is made the condition of admission to the table rather than repentance and faith, the very meaning of the sacrament will be distorted.

Surely we must recognize not only the danger of regarding our children as outside the covenant of promise, but also the danger of minimizing the need for the active personal faith by which they claim for themselves those promises that have been claimed for them by believing parents.

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

⁵ Jordan, op. cit.; Glenn Davies, "The Concept of Covenantal Communion," an unpublished paper. The statements of Davies, in particular, raise the issue of the relation of faith to obedience in the covenant of grace. Is obedience the central response, so that faith can be inferred from it, or assumed to be an element in it, or is faith the leading response, with obedience as the fruit of it?

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the child to show forth, with understanding, the Lord's death till he come. Admittedly, Reformed practice has at times unduly delayed the time when a child may be prepared to respond in this active way by professing his or her own faith. Yet the need for preparation to participate in the sacrament has stimulated the development of catechetical instruction in the church as well as in the home.

The emphasis on what the sacraments have in common is well founded. Bavinck and other Reformed theologians have appealed to it in defending a delay in admitting children to the Supper: no grace is withheld that is not signed and sealed in baptism. But an appreciation of how the sacraments differ is also important. Participation in the Supper both manifests and requires an understanding of the meaning of union with Christ in his death, an understanding that lies beyond the level of maturity that is attained in infancy or early childhood.

This difference is pointedly stated in the *Larger Catechism*:

Q. 177. Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper differ?

A. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper differ, in that baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants; whereas the Lord's supper is to be administered often, in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him, and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves.

This study committee was erected at the direction of the Twelfth General Assembly "to reassess the PCA's current practice with regard to the Lord's Supper and her covenant children in the light of the overall teaching of Scripture." As a result of our study, we recommend that the PCA continue the practice defined in our standards and administer the Lord's Supper "only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves."

That the Committee on Paedocommunion prepare an annotated bibliography of sources both for and against the practice, and that resources be collected by the Committee for distribution to those who request them (at the requesters' cost) to study this matter further.

MINORITY REPORT

The authorities of Reformed theology render an almost unanimous judgment that covenant children before the age of discretion ought not to be brought to the Lord's Table.¹ According to our theologians, while being members of the covenant family of God and recipients of the promises of the covenant entitle our children to the sacrament of baptism, the same considerations are insufficient to confer upon them a right to the

¹ For a discussion of the pertinent biblical material consult C. Keidel, 'Is the Lord's Supper for Children?' *Westminster Theological Journal* 37.3 (Spring 1975): 301-341 and R. Beckwith, 'The Age of Admission to the Lord's Supper.' *WTJ* 38.2 (Winter 1976): 123-151. In my judgment, Keidel has exposed the vulnerability of the exegesis and biblical theology customarily invoked to support the exclusion of little children from the supper. Beckwith attempts to overturn Keidel's conclusions but does not succeed. He scores a few points against Keidel's reasoning but leaves the argument as a whole unscathed. Indeed, it may be that Beckwith has strengthened Keidel's case in providing full documentation of the fact that young children regularly participated in the passover in first century Judaism.

For a summary of the Reformed authorities cf. B. DeMoor, *Commentarius perpetuus in Johannis Marckii Compendium*, Pars V, Caput XXXI, xii, p. 643.

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Lord's Supper. The virtual unanimity of opinion on this question, though impressive, may, however, be deceptive. Certain considerations suggest that this consensus may be due less to the persuasiveness of the arguments commonly advanced on its behalf than to the absence of serious criticism of a custom which predated the reformation² and, consequently, to a relatively superficial examination of the question. The fact that paedocommunion never became for the Reformed a matter of dispute with the Catholics, the Lutherans, or the anabaptists made it more likely that little thought would be devoted to the question and that the arguments of authorities would be repeated without scrutiny from one generation to the next. Many of our theologians do not even raise the issue in their discussion of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper and the treatment given by others can only be described as perfunctory.³ One can only guess how they

² The opinion of Thomas Aquinas, for example, is similar to that of reformed writers. 'Sed quando iam pueri incipiunt aliqualem usum rationis habere, ut possint devotionem concipere huius sacramenti, tunc potest eis hoc sacramentum conferri.' [But as soon as children begin to have some use of reason, so that they are able to grasp the sanctity of this sacrament, then it is possible for this sacrament to be brought to them.] *Summa Theologiae*, Pars IIIa, *Questio LXXX*, *Articulus 9*. Thomas' statement suggests that he may have considered the age of discretion to be lower than it has ordinarily been thought to be in the Reformed church. Cf. the statement issued by Rome in 1910: 'Aetas discretionis tum ad confessionem tum ad s. communionem ea est, in qua puer incipit ratiocinari, hoc est circa septimum annum, sive supra, sive etiam infra.' [The age of discretion first for confession then holy communion is that in which the child begins to reason, that is, about seven years, more or less.] H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 17th ed., Friburg, 1928, p. 588 No. 2137. Cf. T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, Baltimore, 1963, p. 295. Among Reformed writers a variety of opinions is found as to the age of discretion. Some suggest fourteen years of age as roughly suitable for the generality of covenant children. More commonly it is held that the age for admission to the supper will vary from child to child for it depends upon spiritual capabilities and virtues which may be present in some very young children and absent in some much older. Cf. A. Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, Vol. IV, *De Sacramentis*, p. 194; Walaeus in DeMoor, *op cit.*, p. 647. 'Agnosco, multos nostrorum in alteram extremum peccare; qui existimant, nefas si alii plene iam adulti ad coenam admittantur.' [I know many of our men err to the other extreme who suppose it to be a mistake for anyone but a fullgrown adult to be admitted to the Supper.]; and Voetius, *Tractatus Selecti de Politica Ecclesiastica*, Series Secunda, ed. J. Hoedemaker, Amsterdam, 1886, p. 221. 'Quod ad Pueros, non possumus omnes ad parem aetatis mensuram astringere. Sunt enim in quibus cognitio spiritualis, studium ac zelus pietatis, mores graves ac compositi supplet defectum aetatis. Minime tamen probandum est, quod pariter omnes aut plerique post decimum quartum aetatis annum... ad communionem recipiuntur.' [With respect to children we are not able to bind everyone to the same measure of age. There are those in whom spiritual knowledge, devotion to piety, and a serious and settled character make up for a lack of years.]

³ This is strikingly demonstrated in the treatment of the question in two of the most thorough and authoritative dogmatics of the mature Reformed theology. Turretin merely assumes that the supper is for adults and makes mention of the matter only in his discussion of another question: 'An ex Dei praecepto omnibus et singulis fidelibus adultis utrumque Eucharistiae Symbolum administrari debeat? An vero usus Calicis Populo interdicendus sit?' The chapter thus titled is a defense of the communion in both kinds and infant communion enters the argument only incidentally. In rebutting a variety of arguments advanced in support of the practice of giving only the bread to the congregation, he notes that some have claimed the ancient practice of the *communio infantum* as evidence of the Father's support for the communion in one kind. Turretin admits that infant communion was common in the Latin church until the twelfth century but argues, citing Cyprian and Augustine, that it cannot at all be demonstrated that infants communicated in only one kind. *Instituto Theologiae Elenctiae*, 1688, *Locus XIX*, *Question XXV*, xxx. Turretin's entire presentation of the *Locus De Sacramentis* is an illustration of the profound influence polemics exerted upon the treatment of this doctrine in the Reformed manuals. Mastricht, the other hand, directly addresses the question of who should communicate, but takes but nine words and a nod at I Cor. 11:28-29 to answer in the negative regarding children. *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 1725, *Liber VII*, *Caput V*, xiii.

⁴ *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, Vol. II, ET: London, 1837, pp. 455-456.

⁵ Metrophanes, a Greek theologian of the 17th century, was sent by his patriarch to England in 1616 in order that he might receive instruction at Oxford in the doctrine of the Church of England. It was hoped that this

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would have responded to contemporary criticism of their arguments for they were not required in their day to defend their Position against substantial opposition.

That the common opinion of the Reformed church on this matter was and remains ill-considered can best be demonstrated, however, by an examination of the arguments offered on its behalf by two Reformed theologians of impeccable credentials: Herman Witsius (1636-1708) and Herman Bavinck (1845-1921). Both devote more attention to the question than is common and both present the received position against the background of the arguments of an advocate of the participation of covenant children in the Lord's Supper.

Witsius' comments regarding child communion appear in his discussion of the requirements for worthy communicating.

XXX. We may easily gather from what we have quoted from Paul what to think of the communion of infants. It appears to have been a custom in the ancient church to put the symbols of the holy supper into the mouths of infants just after baptism. A practice still observed by the Orientals. I will here subjoin the words of Metrophanes Critopulus Hieromonachus, confess. c. ix: 'But even infants themselves are partakers, beginning immediately upon their baptism, and afterwards as often as the parents will. And if any one should blame us for the communion of infants, we can easily stop his mouth. For, if he be an Anabaptist, we use this saying against him: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me," Matt. xix.15. Also that other: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you," John vi-53. But the prophetess Anna makes very much for us, who dedicated Samuel from his early infancy to God; who also requires the first-born of the Jews to be given up to him, from their very birth, though not yet endowed with a competent measure of understanding. But if our adversary be no Anabaptist, we will also use the very same arguments against him, which he uses for infants against the Anabaptists; that as they ought to be baptized, so also to be made partakers of the Lord's Supper. And thus with the help of God we have got the better of our argument.' Thus far Metrophanes.

XXXI. But we are of a quite different opinion. For, all the words of our Lord's command (with respect to this sacrament) are so expressed that they cannot belong to infants, who can neither receive the bread nor eat it, unless it be chewed for them or soaked. For 'babes are fed with milk, and not with meat,' I Cor. iii.2, Heb. v. 12. Infants cannot examine themselves nor discern the Lord's body, nor show his death, all which we have just heard the apostle requires of communicants.

XXXII. The arguments of Metrophanes are very easily refuted. For, 1st. It does not follow because our Lord was willing that young children should come unto him, and declared that theirs was the kingdom of heaven, that they are to partake of the supper. Christ is there speaking of spiritual and mystical communion with himself, which does not imply any sacramental communion whatever; but that only, of which the subjects he is speaking of are capable. Secondly. The nature of baptism and of the supper is different. Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration and ingrafting in the church; in the administration of which, the person to be baptized is merely passive; to the receiving of that the Scripture does not so universally require self-examination and the showing the

would better equip him to defend the Orthodox Church against the influence of the Jesuits, who were enjoying some success in the east due, so the patriarch supposed, to the inability of the ill-educated orthodox clergy to counter their teaching. Metrophanes also visited several Lutheran Universities. He later became patriarch of Alexandria.

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Lord's death. And therefore it may be properly applied to young children. But the supper is the sacrament of nutrition by means of a solid food; to the partaking whereof, the communicants are required to perform certain actions both by the body and the soul, of which infants are incapable, and therefore it belongs to those who are come to the years of discretion, and not to little children. Thirdly. Our Lord, John vi. 53, is not treating of a sacramental but of a spiritual and mystical eating by faith. For neither was the Eucharist then instituted or known; nor will any one readily urge such an absolute necessity for the eucharist as that without it none can be saved; which yet our Lord asserts of that eating of his flesh. Fourthly. The example of the prophetess Anna, who consecrated Samuel a little child to God, is not at all to the purpose. For nothing can be concluded from that, but that it is a part of the duty of parents to give up their children as early as possible to the obedience and service of God. 5thly. And what they pretend concerning the dedication of the first-born of the Jews to God, is still more impertinent. For that dedication of the first-born, previously to the setting apart the tribe of Levi, showed that they were God's, and to be employed to his service; in them the other children were accounted to be consecrated, and even the whole family; and in a word, they were types of Christ, in whom, as the first-born among many brethren, all the families of the earth are blessed. All which has nothing to do with the participation of the eucharist.

Bavinck's⁶ discussion adds further considerations to those advanced by Witsius. ...the children are excluded. Trent condemned only the necessity not the lawfulness of child communion. Among the Reformed Musculus⁷ agreed. He put forward these reasons: 1) that whoever possesses the thing signified has right also to the sign; 2) that, as appears from baptism, children are able to receive the grace of the new birth, they are also able without consciousness to be nourished in that spiritual life; 3) that Christ, the saviour of his whole congregation, is also the saviour of the children and feeds them all with his body and gives them all to drink of his blood; and 4) that the admonition to self-examination in 1 Cor. 11:26-29 is not intended by the apostle as a general requirement. But all these reasons lose their force in the face of these considerations. 1) In the OT there was a great difference between circumcision and the passover. Circumcision was prescribed for all male children, but the passover, not at once with the institution of it, but later in Palestine, was celebrated in the temple of Jerusalem. Very young children were in the nature of the case excluded. 2) In the same way there is a great difference between baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is the sacrament of the new birth, wherein the individual is passive. The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of growth in fellowship with Christ, of the nurture of the spiritual life, and it supposes conscious, active participation in those who receive it. 3) Christ instituted the Lord's Supper in the midst of his disciples, saying to them all: 'Take, eat, drink.' These words suppose that they would take the bread and wine from his hand. And Paul says that the congregation at Corinth came together in order to eat and gives no other impression than that only grown persons in possession of intellectual powers participated in the supper. 4) In 1 Cor. 11:26-29 the apostle emphatically sets forth the requirement that before the supper, men examine themselves so that they may distinguish the body of the Lord and not eat and drink unworthily. This requirement is set forth in an entirely

⁶ Gereformeerde Dogmatiek, Vol. IV, Kampen, 1918, pp. 641-642.

⁷ Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563) was an early Reformed theologian with extensive contacts with Lutheranism. He was a student of Bucer in Strassburg and later professor of theology in Bern. His *Loci Communes* was published in 1560, one year after the publication of the final edition of Calvin's *Institutes*.

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general fashion, directed to all participants in the supper, and therefore, in the nature of the case, excludes children. 5) Withholding the supper from children causes them the loss of not one benefit of the covenant of grace. This would indeed be the case if they were denied baptism. For no one can deny baptism to children except he think that they stand outside 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 benefits of it. He merely denies them a special manner by which those benefits are signified and sealed during the time it does not suit their age. The supper gives not one benefit which is not granted already beforehand through faith in the Word and baptism.

In this matter Witsius and Bavinck are thoroughly representative of the Reformed consensus and, so far as I am aware, they omit no important argument advance against paedocommunion by our theologians.⁸

In my judgment, careful scrutiny of these arguments against child communion will show them to be without substance and insufficient to turn aside the straightforward and fundamental considerations urged in support of the participation of covenant children in the supper by Metrophanes and Musculus.

1) The centralization of the passover in Jerusalem as one of the pilgrimage feasts, proves nothing. Women were likewise not required to attend and children did participate, indeed were required to participate, in other sacrifices and offerings (Deut. 12:4-7, 11-14; 14:22-26; 15:19-20; 16:10-11).⁹ If young children were excluded from the passover because they were incapable of understanding and thus worthy partaking, it is difficult to explain why they were welcome at these other sacrificial meals.

2) An important argument advanced by both Witsius and Bavinck is that there is a great difference between the two sacraments: baptism being the sacrament of regeneration and thus in it the individual is passive; the supper being the sacrament of nourishment and thus requires intelligent participation on the part of anyone who receives it.

It is to be observed, in the first place, that as it is used by the opponents of paedocommunion this argument is an instance of the fallacy of *petitio principii*. The argument begs the question because it amounts to the conclusion which must be demonstrated rather than a demonstration of the conclusion. No doubt, if the two sacraments differ in nature in this way, child communion is excluded; but this difference is precisely the point at issue. As an argument, therefore, it is worthless.

It may be said, however, that this conclusion regarding the sacraments is dubious for a variety of reasons. There is no doubt that baptism may be designated the sacrament of initiation and the supper the sacrament of nutrition. But this nomenclature

⁸ Cf. DeMoor, *op. cit.*, pp. 643-647; J. Murray, *Christian Baptism*, Philadelphia: 1972, pp. 76-79.

⁹ The force of these texts seems to me to be especially strong. To deny the supper to covenant children in the face of this Old Testament practice surely requires clear and straightforward instruction to that effect. Here is a commandment to partake of sacramental meals with our sons and daughters, which commandment has never been rescinded.

While it is sometimes maintained that young children, children younger than the age of discretion did not eat the passover, it is generally acknowledged that they did. L. Berkhof, for example, writes: 'Children though they were allowed to eat the passover in the days of the Old Testament, cannot be permitted to partake of the table of the Lord...' *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed., Grand Rapids: 1949, p. 656. The texts listed above together with the instructions for the passover given in Ex. 12 seem clearly to require that young children did participate in the passover and these other sacral meals. Cf. Keidel, *op. cit.*, pp. 307ff.

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signifies nothing in regard to the passivity or activity of the recipient of each sacrament, a subject never raised and a distinction never made in Scripture. Further, though commonly enough so designated in the Reformed manuals,¹⁰ it does a grave injustice to the statements of Scripture to distinguish baptism from the supper by designating the former as the sacrament of regeneration. Our Confession of Faith and catechisms rightly express no such diminished concept of baptism. Baptism signifies our union with the triune God in Christ and the whole of our salvation which flows from that union (Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 3:27-28; Col. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:13) and is the seal of the righteousness which is by faith (Rom. 4:11).¹¹ The signification of the two sacraments cannot by appeal to Scripture be shown to be fundamentally different.¹² In addition, the requirement of faith and repentance as conditions for the baptism of an adult renders the appeal to the "passivity" of the baptized without force. Certain "conscious activity" is required of an adult for and in baptism and for worthy participation in the supper. If the one activity does not constitute an objection to paedobaptism, it is difficult to see how the other would invalidate paedocommunion.

What is more, this argument assumes the doubtful premise that children born into a family would be denied nourishment for a number of years. It seems to me altogether odd that the distinction drawn by these writers between baptism as a sacrament of regeneration and the supper as a sacrament of nourishment should be employed as an argument against child communion. Something one must always see to on behalf of newborns is their nourishment! The fact that, after all, the supper, as the passover before it, is a meal ought to alert us to the unlikelihood that it is the intention of the Lord Jesus Christ that the adults eat while the little ones watch them eat.

3) The words of institution to which Bavinck appeals no doubt are meant to be understood, as are the words of the baptismal formula which are pronounced over infants. The spoken word often precedes the understanding, indeed gradually calls forth understanding and assent in covenant children as in adults outside of the covenant community.

Moreover, in this appeal to the command to take and eat, which obviously cannot be heeded by infants, a certain inconsistency in argumentation is exposed. This argument figures in several treatments of this question by Reformed authorities. Against the Orthodox practice of communion immediately after baptism--that is, in earliest infancy and before weaning--it has weight. However, to employ this argument at all raises the presumption that when a covenant child is able to take and eat he is to be admitted to the table. But, this is true of very young children. The Orthodox custom seems clearly to be contrary to the pattern of the passover,¹³ but very young children sat

¹⁰ Cf. Synopsis Purioris Theologiae, Editio Sexta, 1881, Disputatio XLIV, ii, p. 490: "Horum autem Sacramentorum primum est Baptismus, quod ideo Sacramentum regenerationis nostrae et initiationis in ecclesiam appellatur..." [The first of these sacraments is baptism which for that reason is called the sacrament of our regeneration and initiation into the church...] and Mastricht who entitles his chapters on baptism and the supper *De Sacramentis regenerationis* and *De Sacramentis nutritionis* respectively.

¹¹ ii Though not denying that the signification of baptism includes regeneration, John Murray writes: "There does not appear to be in the New Testament any passage which expressly says that baptism represents purification from the defilement of sin, that is to say, regeneration." *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

¹² Bavinck himself seems to acknowledge this in the final sentence of the portion quoted from him above.

¹³ Cf. Keidel, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-310. In addition, it is founded on a doctrine of the necessity of the sacraments which is clearly mistaken. That this false reason for infant communion receives some prominence in Reformed criticism of the practice (cf. Voetius, *op. cit.*, p. 221; DeMoor, *op. cit.*, pp. 644-

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at the passover table in Israel and very young children can take food and drink from an elder's hand. There seems to be an admission of this in the literature though without a reckoning with its implications.¹⁴

4) The appeal to 1 Cor. 11:27-29 cannot bear the weight which the opponents of paedocommunion place upon it. That the requirement of self-examination as stated here by Paul is, for our authorities, the principle argument against child communion is easy to demonstrate. It is the only argument advanced against the idea by many and is often presented as sufficient in itself to quell all debate.¹⁵ The cumulative effect of this

645) raises the possibility that paedocommunion was rejected over hastily as a result of its association in many minds with defective and dangerous views of the nature and efficacy of the sacraments.

¹⁴ Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xvi, 30 ["...the Supper is given to older persons who, having passed *tender infancy*, (qui superata teneriore infantia...), can now take solid food."]; DeMoor, *op. cit.*, p. 643 ['...Infantes recens baptizati...']; and Murray, *op. cit.*, pp. 77, 79 ["We can readily detect that there is in the elements used and the actions involved something that is not congruous with *early infancy*."] (My italics)

Too frequently one encounters in our literature a complete failure to reckon with the implications of the difference between the nursing infant and the weaned child or of the difference between the beginnings of understanding and conviction and the maturity of faith. For example, William Ames has nothing more to say on the question of the participation of children in the Supper than this; "But the Supper is to be administered only to those who are visibly capable of nourishment and growth in the church. Therefore, it is to be given not to infants, but only to adults." *The Marrow of Theology*, ET: Boston, 1968, p. 212.

¹⁵ In the following collection of citations, the quoted material in every case (with the possible exception of Heidegger whose context I was unable to examine) represents the entire statement on paedocommunion to be found in the work in question. T. Beza, *Quaestionum et Responsonum Christianamm Libellus*, Pars altera, 1580, p. 137 'Deinde quos aetas ipsa ostendit non esse suae ipsorum probation faciendae idoneos, non quidem ut indignos, sed ut nondum aptos commonefaciendos ne sibiipsis exitium accersant.' [Next those who by reason of their age show themselves to be unable to examine themselves, not indeed because they are unworthy, but because they are not yet able to be warned lest they should bring ruin upon themselves.]; Z. Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, ed. D. Pareus, ET: Columbus, 1851, p. 429. 'They are to be admitted to the Lord's Supper by the church, 1. Who are of a proper age to examine themselves, and to commemorate the Lord's death, according to the command: "This do ye in remembrance of me." "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread." "Ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." (1 Cor. 11:25, 26, 28.) The infant children of the church are therefore, not admitted to the use of the Lord's Supper even though they are included among the number of the faithful.'; Voetius, *op. cit.*, p. 220 'De Infantibus absolute Neg. hac una ratione, quod non possint seipsos probare et explorare, nec actualem habent resipiscentiam, fidem, novam obedientiam, mortis dominicae annuntiationem: super quibus se explorare debent. Atqui et istud et illud est requisitum necessarium a Cor. 11. v. 16. 28. 29. 30. 31.' [Regarding infants absolutely not for this one reason, that they would not be able to test and examine themselves, nor would they have actual repentance, faith, new obedience, proclamation of the Lord's death, concerning which things they ought to examine themselves. But, in fact, both the latter and the former are required in I Cor. 11: 16, 28-31.]; Synopsis Purioris Theologiae, *op. cit.*, XLV, xiv, p. 507: 'Quod enim hic circa Apostolos gestum, post Apostolos non ad Pastores modo, sed et reliquam Ecclesiam retulit, I Cor. 11...iisque in pietatis statu consistentibus (quantum quidem humanitus sciri potest, occultis Deo relictis) non autem, non Baptizatis Catechumenis, aut Lapsis... Unde ait Apostolus, Probet unusquisque seipsum, etc: [For what here happened with the apostles, afterwards the Apostle refers not only to pastors but also to the rest of the church, I Cor. 11 ... and to those living piously (so far indeed as it is possible humanly to know; the secret things being left to God) but on the other hand not to baptized catechumens, or to the lapsed... Whence the Apostle says, 'Let everyone examine himself, etc.]; M. F. Wendelinus, *Christianae Theologiae*, 1646, p. 549 'Igitur ab usurpatione sacrae caenae excluduntur. 1) Infantes: qui ad Domini caenam non sunt admittendi, 1. Quia memoriam mortis Domini non possunt recolere. 2. Quia se no possunt praeparare ad dignum huius sacramenti usum: Atqui utrumque requiritur a communicantibus. I Cor. 11. v. 24. 25. 26. 29. Interim veteres doctores, ex traditione Apostolica, quam pratenderunt, etiam infantibus caenam dominicam ad salutem necessariam esse iudicant.' [Then from the use of the holy supper are excluded

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repeated rejection of paedocommunion on the sole basis of a perfunctory appeal to 1 Cor. 11:28 and without attention to possible objections to this argument is to establish two impressions: 1) the consensus against child communion was so complete and so much taken for granted that neither argument nor careful reflection was thought to be required and 2) the reformed consensus on this subject has *never* rested on a substantial biblical or theological foundation.

As the context makes clear and as the commentators confirm, Paul's remarks are specifically directed against an impious and irreverent participation (a true *manducatio indignorum*). Much more would need to have been said before it could be concluded that Paul was speaking to the general question of who may come to the table, or to the question of children's participation, or that he intended to exclude them from the supper. We do not understand Acts 2:38 to deny baptism to little children, Rom. 10:13-14 to deny them salvation, or 2 Thess. 3:10 to deny them food.

An appeal to 1 Cor. 11:28 is rendered all the more dubious an argument against paedocommunion by the incontestable fact the Old Testament contains similar warnings against faithless and hardhearted participation in the sacraments, similar calls to self-examination before participating, even (as in I Cor. 11:30) threats of death for such offenders (Isa. 1:10-20; Amos 5:18-27; Jer. 7:1-29). Yet these warnings can in no way be said to have invalidated the practice or the divine warrant for family participation in the sacral meals as prescribed in the law.

5) A further consideration arises from the Reformed definition of a sacrament as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. The sacraments accompany promises made to

1) Infants: who are not to be admitted to the Lord's Supper, 1. Because they are not able to remember the history of the death of the Lord. 2. Because they are not able to prepare themselves for the worthy use of this sacrament: and both are required of communicants. I Cor. 11:24-26, 29. However, the Fathers, from the apostolic tradition, as they alleged, still judged, in the case of infants, the Lord's Supper to be necessary for salvation.]; J. Heidegger in H. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ET: 1950, p. 654 [After the first Supper all believers and true Christians are added to the number of communicants who have duly examined themselves and have learned these mysteries and shewn themselves to be clean and upright in life. Let each one examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup, I Cor. 11.28. In the number of these infants are not included.]; B. Pictet, *Theologia Christiana*, Pars Secunda, 1733, p. 651; 'Coena non debet administrari nisi adultis, non vero infantibus, ut crediderunt multi ex veteribus; nam maximum est discrimen inter Baptismum et Coenam. 1. Baptismus est sacramentum initiationis in Ecclesia; at sacra Coena est sacramentum institutum ad nutriendam animam et confirmandam fidem, per commemorationem beneficiorum Christi; primi sunt capaces infantes; secundi tantum adulti. 2. Illud confirmatur ex eo quod Paulus exigit examen ab its qui recipiunt sacram coenam, at examinis non sunt capaces infantes, non autem magis minim videtur, Baptizatos infantes non admitti ad coenam, ac non mirandum erat, si circumcisi infantes olim Pascha non comedebant.' [The Supper ought not to be administered except to adults, especially not to infants, as many among the ancients thought; for there is a great difference between Baptism and the Supper. 1. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the church; but the holy Supper is the sacrament instituted for the nourishing of the soul and for confirming faith through the commemoration of the benefits of Christ. Of the first infants are capable, of the second only adults. 2. That is confirmed by the fact that Paul demands examination from those who receive the holy Supper, and infants are not capable of examination; moreover it does not seem more surprising that baptized infants should not be admitted to the Supper than it was surprising that formerly circumcized infants did not eat the passover.]; J. a Marck, *Medulla Christianae Theologiae*, Editio Prima Americana, 1824, p. 290: 'Ad Communionem hanc admittendi sunt, non ...infantes baptizati, cum hi se ipsos probare, corpus Domini discernere, et Mortem eius annunciate nequeant...' [Baptized infants are not to be admitted to this sacrament since these would not be able to examine themselves, discern the Lord's body, and proclaim his death...]. Cf. Mastricht, note 10 above; Kuyper, *op. cit.*, p. 194; Berkhof, *op. cit.*, pp. 656-657. Our American Presbyterian manuals (e.g. those of the Hodges, Dabney, and Shedd) do not devote even this negligible attention to the question.

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members of the covenant community and the commandments of God which his people are summoned to obey. The sacraments do not add to the covenant revelation of God, they signify and confirm it. There is nothing in the sacrament which is not already and more comprehensively in the Word. Baptism is conferred upon covenant children precisely because God has made promises to them and summoned them to live for him even in their earliest days. On this understanding of the sacraments and without clear warrant otherwise in Scripture it appears difficult to justify withholding the seal and thus divorcing it from the promises which clearly have already been made and from the summons which has already been issued. The bearing of these considerations on the issue of child communion is illustrated beautifully by Bavinck's fifth argument, which appears to be less a reason than an apology for the exclusion of children from the table.¹⁶ Where does Scripture ever suggest that a participant in 'all the benefits of the covenant of grace' is to be denied the sign and seal of those benefits? Against Witsius it should be said that Christ's invitation to the children (Matt. 19:13-15) cannot be so easily judged irrelevant to this question. Spiritual and mystical communion with Christ most certainly does imply sacramental communion with him, for the one signifies and seals the other.

Another way of putting this objection to the received practice in the reformed church is to point out that the custom of excluding covenant children from the table can be derived from no principle of Reformed ecclesiology. The visible church is defined as "all those ... that profess the true religion, together with their children..." (*WCF XXV, ii*); the sacraments are said to be "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 further it is maintained 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" (*XXVII, v*). From these principles of our ecclesiology the practice of infant baptism is derived and by no application of these same principles is it possible to invalidate paedocommunion. On the contrary, paedocommunion seems to be as much the necessary consequence of this ecclesiology as paedobaptism.

Christian parents begin to teach their little ones at a very early age, indeed at the dawn of consciousness, that the promises of God are theirs to hold and the law of God is theirs to keep. If the Word can be given to them at such a tender age, the sign and seal of it not less so. The nurture of covenant children is continuum, having its beginning before a child is in full possession of rational powers. As the supper is a visible word, there is no reason why it too should not make its contribution over the whole course of the spiritual upbringing of a covenant child.¹⁷

¹⁶ Perhaps this consideration accounts for the fact that Murray is more tenacious in his defense of infant baptism than in his opposition to child communion. '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, 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 abandoning infant baptism.' *Op. cit.*, p. 77.

¹⁷ Cf. Psalm 22:9. Though in this case Murray is speaking of infant baptism, the following words may well be even more appropriate with respect to paedocommunion. 'It is objected that infants cannot understand the meaning of that which is dispensed. Of course they cannot. But that they derive no benefit from baptism or that it is not the divine method of signifying and sealing blessings to them is by no means a proper inference. The same objection would apply to circumcision and would impinge upon

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6) Certain practical considerations are further to be urged in support of the participation of young children in the supper. First, the impression which the Word is intended to make in this tangible and visible form seems in many ways especially suited to young children. Second, the celebration of the supper with their children, as well as preparation for it, would provide parents with a regular and most important opportunity for instruction and examination, as the passover provided in ancient times. Third, paedocommunion would reinforce a conviction, much needing reinforcement today, namely, that covenant children are to be holy and pure members of Christ's body, lovers of God and of the brethren from the very beginning. This in turn would reinforce the responsibility and the right of the elders to rule over the whole church, including children, even naughty children, whose naughtiness too frequently becomes, by the age of discretion, a wilfulness and rebellion which leads to death.

For all of these reasons I conclude that the burden of proof rests heavily on those who would exclude covenant children from the supper and that the common position of our churches cannot be sustained unless supported by better arguments than those which have historically been advanced on its behalf. "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son..."

There is, of course, a danger inherent in the practice of paedocommunion. That a young covenant child partakes of the supper could lead to a false presumption of salvation both in his own heart and in the mind of his family and church. This is precisely the danger inherent in infant circumcision and baptism and often sadly illustrated in the history of Israel and Christianity. But in our church there is agreement that the "risk" of infant baptism is best provided for not by the abolition of the divinely instituted order but by the insistence upon its practice only in the context of covenant faithfulness on the part of parents and church. It should be noted, on the other hand, that our present practice is not without dangers. At present we risk promoting superstition by divorcing the Word from the sacrament. Believing they have right and title to it, we 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. Our authorities vigorously deny this,¹⁸ but our practice suggests it. A further temptation

the wisdom and grace of God who instituted it. The same objection, if valid, would apply to Christ's blessing of little infants. This objection, in fact, rests upon the iniquitous assumption that all blessing is contingent upon conscious understanding of its import on our part. Are we to say, for example, that it is of no avail to the infant to be born and nurtured in a Christian family simply because the infant has no conscious understanding of the great blessing that belongs to him in the care, protection, devotion, and nurture of Christian parents?... The means of grace are the channels along which the saving and sanctifying grace of God flows. To be in the channel of grace by God's appointment is of deepest consequence. It is only worldlywise calculation and not reasoning inspired by the recognition of the methods of divine grace that can find force in this type of objection.' *Op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

¹⁸ Cf. Robert Bruce, *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper: Sermons on the Sacrament* preached in the Kirk of Edinburgh in A. D. 1589, ET: London, 1958, pp. 63-64: "Why then is the Sacrament appointed? Not that you may get any new thing, but that you may get the same thing better than you had it in the Word; Berkhof, *op. Cit.*, p. 654: "The grace received in the sacrament does not differ in kind from that which believers receive through the instrumentality of the Word. The sacrament merely adds to the effectiveness of the Word, and therefore to the measure of the grace received."

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in our practice to which I believe our children often succumb is disillusionment with the sacrament. Making covenant children, many of who have been believers from their mother's breasts, wait for the sacrament until adolescence or later naturally awakens in their hearts eager expectations of the sacrament's efficacy suddenly and permanently to raise their spiritual affections to a new pitch, expectations which are and cannot but be disappointed. The confusion, disappointment, and frustration of many earnest Christian people over the frequent failure of the sacrament to warm their affections, to bring tears, to leave its impression upon their hearts for days afterwards is a problem of real urgency today for pastors. Could it not be that our practice of delaying participation in the sacrament and, in that way, divorcing the Word from the sacrament tempts our children to think of the operation of the sacrament as being very different from the operation of the Word and creates exaggerated expectations for the sacrament which in turn have led to confusion and, not infrequently, disillusionment.

The majority of the committee very rightly has the highest regard for and loyalty to the doctrine and practice which we have received as our inheritance. Surely after four and a half centuries of virtual unanimity on the question of paedocommunion it is natural to be suspicious of what amounts to a charge that virtually without exception our theologians and our fathers and mothers in the faith have all these generations been deaf to the Lord speaking in the Scriptures concerning the place of our children at his table. Nevertheless, it is a most fundamental conviction of our church that the supreme authority for doctrine and practice must be the Lord Christ speaking in the Scriptures. Such unqualified submission to the Word of God requires not only that we constantly subject our doctrine to the test of fidelity to the Scriptures but that we willingly receive correction from the Word. This should be much easier, of course, if, as I have maintained, the doctrine or the practice has never received anything more than superficial consideration.

All respect to the committee for a report which presents the case for retaining our traditional practice with considerably more sensitivity, imagination, and discrimination than one will find in our standard authorities. Nevertheless, I can only conclude that the committee report fails adequately to answer the gravamen of the charges lodged against the practice of excluding our children from the supper.

It is, of course, conceivable that in the era introduced by Christ and his apostles there was such a heightening of the degree of required maturity for participation in the second sacrament as the committee report maintains. This is precisely what baptists have argued in denying the support for infant baptism which we derive from the connection between circumcision and baptism. Our theologians have acknowledged that there are differences between the pre-Christian and Christian economies but have rightly insisted both that these differences concern the form only and not the substance of the covenant of God in Christ with his people and that the membership and participation of the children of believers in the covenant community, the church of God, belong not to the form but to the substance of God's covenant and of the workings of divine grace.

Further, while such a heightening as might have implications for the admission of covenant children to the table lacks any direct textual support, it surely cannot be contested that a prima facie case can be made for the relevance of the practice of including children in the passover and other sacrificial meals for the church's practice of the Lord's Supper. Indeed, the case can be made for paedocommunion in precisely the way we are accustomed to argue for paedobaptism (e.g. there is no statement in the

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New Testament invalidating the practice of the Old; the theology of children and the membership of covenant children in the church of God upon which Reformed understanding of paedocommunion is based are seconded in the New Testament; there is no instance in the New Testament of what would seem to be a prerequisite for the argument that the Old Testament order has been superseded, viz., a record of or at least some hint of a covenant child being prepared for admittance or being admitted to the table in his adolescence or young adulthood; etc.). In addition it may be noted that certain necessary concomitants of our present practice wholly lack textual support (e.g. that there are two types of members in Christ's church and that adolescent or young adult members of the covenant community are required to "profess faith" for entrance into the fulness of their covenant privileges).

We would do well to remember that the self-evidence of the correctness of the traditional application of I Cor. 11:27-28 to the issue of paedocommunion is seriously impeached by the widespread practice of paedocommunion in the western church until the twelfth century and in the eastern church to the present and by the fact that the Lord's Supper was lost to the church's children in the west not as a result of a purification of the church's practice of the sacrament but rather as the result of a horrible corruption of it.¹⁹

I do not at all doubt that it is the desire of us all to be faithful to the Scriptures in this matter. For this reason I urge the church not to be precipitate in disposing of this question. Surely it cannot be denied that arguments of considerable weight, deriving naturally from the statements of the Scriptures and deeply embedded in Reformed ecclesiology, are being advanced in many quarters today in favor of rethinking our tradition. We give thanks to God for our forefathers and wish to be loyal to the rich and biblical tradition which they have bequeathed to us. But neither such gratitude nor loyalty to our historic doctrine and practice requires that we invest unqualified confidence in the infallibility of our authorities or in the correctness of every part of our tradition. No conviction as fundamental to our faith as the supreme authority of the Scriptures will remain untested. Let us take great care to ensure that it is the Scriptures and not the custom of centuries to which we are submitting ourselves. Even the Lord's disciples, accustomed as they were in their day to circumcized infants and children at the passover table,²⁰ had to be reproached by him for their failure to discern how unqualified is the welcome which is extended to our children in the church of God (Mk. 10:13-16).

You gave us his body to eat,
His holy blood to drink
What more could he have done for us?

Let us not deny it to little children
Nor forbid them
When they eat Jesus' body.

Of such is the kingdom of heaven
As Christ himself told us,

¹⁹ Cf. Keidel, *op. cit.*, pp. 301-304.

²⁰ Cf. Beckwith, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

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And holy David says also:

From the mouths of small children
And of all innocent babes
Has come forth God's praise
That the adversary may be cast down.

Praise God, you children
You tiny babes,
For he will not drive you away,
But feed you on his holy body.²¹

1. That the Assembly find the minority report to be in agreement with the Scripture.

Robert S. Rayburn

16-30 *Ad Interim* Committee on Paedocommunion.

TE Rayburn presented the minority report and moved it as a substitute but it was not adopted. The committee's report was adopted as amended:

1. That the PCA continue the practice defined in our standards and administer the Lord's Supper "only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves. *Adopted*
2. That the Committee on Paedocommunion prepare an annotated bibliography of sources both for and against the practice, and that resources be collected by the Committee for distribution to those who request them (at the requesters' cost) to study this matter further. *Adopted*
3. To answer Overture 12 to the Fourteenth General Assembly **in the negative** (14-4, p. 49 and 14-52, 28, p. 127.) [Ed.: see below for text] *Adopted*
4. That those ruling and teaching elders who by conscience of conviction are in support of the minority report concerning paedocommunion be notified by this Assembly of their responsibility to make known to their presbyteries and sessions the changes of their views since their ordination vows. *Adopted*

²¹ From fifteenth century Hussite communion hymns. The hussite reform in Bohemia included the restoration of the communion in both kinds, frequent communion, and communion for children. D. Holeton, 'Infant Communion--Then and Now,' Grove Liturgical Study No. 27 (1981) pp. 9-15.

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17th General Assembly, 1989,17-76, p. 129.

REPORT OF THE AD-INTERIM COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE QUESTION OF PAEDO COMMUNION

The Ad-Interim Committee on Paedo Communion was charged by the 16th General Assembly to provide for interested members of the church a bibliography of works for and against paedo communion. This bibliography and the collection of otherwise unavailable papers and articles to which it made reference was to be held by CE/P and provided for any inquirer at a cost to be determined by CE/P.

1. *Agenda for Synod 1988*, pp. 260-316, Report #26, *Acts of Synod 1988*, p. 560, Christian Reformed Church, 1988.
2. *Minutes of the 55th General Assembly of the OPC*, Report of the Committee to Study Paedo Communion, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1988, pp. 374-421.
3. Bingham, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Book XV, Chap. IV, Sect. VI. "The Communion not given to Heretics and Schismatics," Sect. VII. "Yet given to Infants and Children," pp. 170-181.
4. Beckwith, R., "The Age of Admission to the Lord's Supper," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38.2 (Winter 1976) pp. 123-151. (A rejoinder to Keidel's article infra.)
5. Coppes, L., Daddy, *May I Take Communion?: Paedo Communion vs. The Bible*, 9161 Vine St., Thornton, CO 80229.
6. Crawford, C., "Infant Communion: Past Tradition and Present Practice," *Theological Studies*, Vol. 31, pp. 523-536.
7. Davies, G., *The Concept of Covenantal Communion*, (A paper prepared for Norman Shepherd at Westminster Theological Seminary.)
8. Holeton, D., "Infant Communion--Then and Now," *Grove Liturgical Study* No. 27. (Especially informative on the Hussite Reform.)
9. Jordan, J., "Theses on Paedo Communion," *The Geneva Papers*, Special Edition, 1982, Geneva Divinity School. (Favors paedo communion.)
10. Keidel, C., "Is the Lord's Supper for Children?," *WTJ* 37.3 (Spring 1975) pp. 301-341. (A thorough biblio-theological argument for paedo communion.)
11. Lachman, D., *Study Committee on Paedo Communion: Minority Report*, Philadelphia Presbytery, May 1986. (Against paedo communion.)
12. Lester, T., Letter Advancing Paedo Communion, April 8, 1983.
13. Sutton, R., "Household Communion," *Covenant Renewal*, Vol. 11, No. 9.
14. Taylor, J., "Catechumens Not Admitted to the Holy Communion," *Works of Jeremy Taylor*, Vol. XV, Sect. II. "Of communicating Infants," pp. 501-508, London, 1828.
15. "The Paedo Communion Debate," *Journey*, November-December 1988.
16. Visee, G., "May--and Must--Our Children Partake of the Lord's Supper?," *Christian Renewal*, Mar. 17, Apr. 7 and 21, May 5, 1986. (Much interesting historical information and generally favorable to child communion.)
17. "Children at the Lord' Table: Talks on Paedo Communion" -- Covenant Communications, 26 Kathy Lane, Freeport, FL 32439

[Most of the above 16 articles may be ordered from the PCA Historical Center as a set for \$25.00 postpaid. We currently do not have copies of item 16 available. Also, item 5 is a booklet, and instead we offer a 9 page article by the same author in substitution for the stated title above.]

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OVERTURES CONNECTED WITH THE DISCUSSION OF PAEDOCOMMUNION:

1984 – Minutes of the Twelfth General Assembly, 12-10, B, p. 44

Overture 56: From the Session of the Cherokee Presbyterian Church

(Presented to the Presbytery of North Georgia, but not adopted by the Presbytery)

Whereas, Reformed theology has distinguished itself from various forms of “dispensationalism” in its understanding of the covenant of grace as providing an essential and organic unity between the Old and New Testaments; and

Whereas, one of the distinctive features of our Presbyterian understanding of this covenant theology has been the recognition of the *familial* character of God’s covenant dealings throughout Scripture with His church, by which He claims not only believers but their children as well; and

Whereas, this covenant embrace by God of our children has been understood as constitutive of church membership and the warrant for the administration of the initiatory covenant sign of baptism to them even in infancy as the door through which they enter the visible church of God; and

Whereas, there is a clear analogy between the sacraments of the Old and New Testaments, i.e., the initiatory sacrament of church membership (circumcision/baptism) preceding the sacrament of ongoing sustenance (the sacrificial-memorial meals of Passover/Lord’s Supper); and

Whereas, Exodus 12:4, 47 and I Sam. 1:4 seem clearly to indicate that the Old Testament sacrificial meals were familially administered and included all the members of the congregation who could ingest the elements; and

Whereas, it would seem inconsistent now to exclude our baptized children from the Lord’s Supper without clear biblical warrant; and

Whereas, the ostensible warrant of the requirements of I Corinthians 11:26-31 actually appears in the context of correcting a particular *abuse* of the Lord’s Supper, which *abusers* were not children but adults, thereby calling into question the propriety of their use in withholding communion from our children; and

Whereas, Luke 18:15-18, which indicates Jesus’ rebuke of the disciples for hindering the children (including infants) from receiving as members of His kingdom the blessing of His presence, is frequently cited as support for paedobaptism and would also seem to pertain to the spiritual presence of Christ in communion; and

Whereas, the exclusion of baptized church members from the Lord’s Supper is a serious form of church censure; and

Whereas, it was apparently the practice of the ancient Western Church for over a millennium to give communion to their small children and is the current practice of the Eastern Church;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Twelfth General Assembly appoint a study committee to reassess the PCA’s current practice with regard to the Lord’s Supper and her covenant children in the light of the overall teaching of Scripture.

The request for a Study Committee to reassess current PCA practice concerning children’s participation in the Lord’s Supper was answered in the affirmative. [M12GA, 12-31, III, Item 9, p. 103.]

1986 – Minutes of the Fourteenth General Assembly, 14-4, B, p. 49-50.

Overture 12: From Pacific Northwest Presbytery

Whereas recent studies have made it clear that the practice of the Presbyterian Church in America in denying the Lord’s Supper to weaned covenant children cannot be defended from the Scripture by some of the church’s members with our former confidence; and

Whereas as impressive case can be made for paedocommunion which is agreeable to the Scripture and consistent with reformed ecclesiology; and

Whereas we are a church determined that the Holy Scripture will be our authority for doctrine and practice and not the traditions of men, however honored and well-meant; and

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Whereas it would be a serious breach of a sacred principle for the Presbyterian Church in America to insist upon conformity to a custom some of its members no longer believe to be capable of satisfactory biblical demonstration; but

Whereas for more than four and a half centuries the reformed church has neither practiced paedocommunion nor given careful consideration to the issue; and

Whereas it is virtually certain to require many years to achieve in our church a uniformity of conviction regarding the place of covenant children at the Lord's Table;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Fourteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, meeting in Philadelphia, June 23-27, 1986, instruct the Committee on Judicial Business to prepare modifications of the *Book of Church Order* so as to permit 1) church sessions, at their discretion, to admit baptized children to the sacrament by right of the covenant and without regard to the procedures outlined in 57-1, 2, 4, 5; and 2) young children to be admitted to the Lord's Table without thereby incurring the obligation of voting in congregational meetings.

Upon motion of the Presbytery, I was directed to communicate that this Overture to the Fourteenth General Assembly received approval by the following vote of the Presbytery: For, 17; Against, 13. RE Don Robertson asked that his dissenting vote be recorded.

Attest: Richard A. Herbert, Stated Clerk.

1988 – MI6GA, 16-30, Report of the *Ad Interim* Committee on Paedocommunion.

3. To answer Overture 12 to the Fourteenth General Assembly **in the negative** (14-4, p. 49 and 14-52, 28, p. 127.) *Adopted*

1987 – Minutes of the Fifteenth General Assembly, 15-3, B, p. 48-49.

Overture 23: From Central Carolina Presbytery.

Whereas the Larger Catechism of the Confession of Faith of the PCA (1983) states in Q. 177 (p. 109):

Q. 177 Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper differ?

A. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper differ, in that baptism is to be administered once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ [Mt. 3:11; Titus 3:5; Gal. 3:27], and even to infants [Gen. 17:7, 9; Acts 2:38-39; I Cor. 7:14], whereas the Lord's Supper is to be administered often, in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul [I Cor. 11:23-26], and to confirm our continuance and growth in Him [I Cor. 10:16], and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves. [I Cor. 11:28-29]

Therefore, in order to comply fully with the last phrase of the direction of Q. 177 of the Larger Catechism of the Confession of Faith and Catechism of the Presbyterian Church in America, namely that "only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves,"

Be it resolved, that the Central Carolina Presbytery overtures the 15th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America to amend the *Book of Church Order* 58-4 to read, "...the Minister, at the discretion of the Session, before the observance begins, may either invite all who profess the true religion, and are communicants in good standing in any evangelical church, to participate in the ordinance; or may invite those who have been approved by the Session, after having given indication of their desire to participate *as those who are of years and ability to examine themselves.*"

Discussion:

Children—or for that matter any person who does not meet the test cited in I Cor. 11:28-29—ought not to be permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper.

Children, born within the pale of the visible church and dedicated to God in baptism, are under the inspection and government of the Church; and are to be taught to read and repeat the Catechism, the Apostle's Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. They are to be taught to pray, to abhor sin, to fear God, and to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. And when they come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal,

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appear sober and steady, and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord's body, they ought to be informed it is their duty and privilege to come to the Lord's Supper.

The years of discretion in young Christians cannot be precisely fixed. This must be left to the prudence of the Session.

When person baptized in infancy are to be admitted to full communion with the Church, they shall be examined as to their knowledge and piety, and shall in ordinary cases, with the approval of the Session, make a public profession of their faith, in the presence of the congregation.

Attest: Stephen O. Stout, Stated Clerk.

Carried over to the Sixteenth General Assembly. See 15-83, III, Item 33, p. 177 and 15-79, p. 163.

15-79. Procedural Motion.

The Assembly adopted a special order . . . that the Report on Paedocommunion be continued to next year [1988] and docketed as the first item of business on Tuesday morning.

15-83, III, Item 33, p. 177-178.

33a. That Overture 23, p. 49 be answered at the time the Assembly takes up consideration of the report of the Ad Interim Committee on Paedocommunion.

33b. That the Overture be answered in the negative.

Grounds: The WLC already speaks adequately to the matter. It is unnecessary to add this to the DFW.

Carried over to next year, see 15-79, p. 163 and 1988 : 16-3, C, p. 82 and 16-30, p. 119.