

# CRYPTO-CALVINISTS AND OPEN COMMUNION

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Crypto-Calvinists (*secret or hidden Calvinists*) in the Missouri Synod love to support their doctrine of open communion by pointing out that Jesus knew that Judas was an apostate who was about to betray Him, and yet He still let Judas partake of His body and blood at the Last Supper. We therefore, they claim, should do the same and not exclude people from our altars.

This argument can be disposed of in two ways. First, it is not entirely certain that Judas was present when the Lord's Supper was instituted. We are told in the Gospels that at some point in the proceedings Judas left. He may have done so after the institution of the Sacrament, or he may have done so before. Therefore, any claim to base the practice of open communion on Jesus' treatment of Judas rests on uncertainty.

Second, even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that Judas was present and was allowed to partake of Christ's body and blood, this still does not support the crypto-calvinist practice of open communion. The Lord's Supper was instituted to be celebrated often by His church. No one in the Church is omniscient (*all knowing*) as was Christ. We cannot see into anyone's heart. At the Last Supper Judas' sin and unworthiness was hidden from view. To all external observation he was a faithful member of the church and one of the Twelve Apostles. If Christ allowed Judas to commune, it was to indicate how His church is to administer the Sacrament. As we include or exclude people from the Sacrament, we are to do so on the basis of what can be observed: their confession of faith and outward manner of life, and not on what may be believed or done in the secret recesses of their hearts. We cannot see into peoples' hearts and we are not expected to. Neither are we to pry into peoples' private lives. We are to admit or exclude people from the sacrament on the basis of their outward confession of faith and their outward lives lived either in harmony or out of harmony with it.

So, either way, the crypto-calvinist claim that Jesus practiced open communion by allowing Judas to receive the Sacrament is untenable and unacceptable.

Crypto-calvinists?!? The name was coined by orthodox Lutherans after the death of Luther to refer to those theologians who were outwardly professing allegiance to Luther's doctrine while secretly advocating a Calvinist rather than a Lutheran understanding of presence of Christ in the sacrament. They were, no doubt, furious over the name and the charge that lay behind it, but history has proven the charge correct. The Formula of Concord repudiates, among other things, crypto-calvinism.

Those in the Missouri Synod who advocate open communion are, despite their protests to the contrary, crypto-calvinists. On what do I base this claim?

*Their advocacy of the idea that "discerning the body" (1 Cor 11:29) refers to the church as the body of Christ.*

The Lutheran Church has always taught in accordance with Scripture that worthy reception of the Sacrament requires faith in the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the Supper. Orthodox Lutheran theologians have spoken with one voice through the centuries that when St. Paul says that unworthy recipients eat and drink judgment on themselves, not discerning the Lord's body, the body in question is the true body of Christ really present in the Sacrament.

(Even Calvin himself understood that discerning the body referred to the body of Christ in the Sacrament, however he may have erred otherwise on the presence of Christ: "He

who shall eat unworthily, eateth judgment to himself. He had previously pointed out in express terms the heinousness of the crime, when he said that those who should eat unworthily would be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Now he alarms them, by denouncing punishment; for there are many that are not affected with the sin itself; unless they are struck down by the judgment of God. This, then, he does, when he declares that this food, otherwise health-giving, will turn out to their destruction, and will be converted into poison to those that eat unworthily. He adds the reasons because they distinguish not the Lord's body, that is, as a sacred thing from a profane. 'They handle the sacred body of Christ with unwashed hands, (Mark 7:2) nay more, as if it were a thing of nought, they consider not how great is the value of it. They will therefore pay the penalty of so dreadful a profanation.'" – Calvin's *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*.)

The advocates of open communion in our circles, in order to make room for their position, are increasingly fond of the modern novelty that the body that the Corinthians were failing to discern was the church: the body of Christ. They were failing to recognize and discern their fellow believers, and for this reason, were coming under Christ's judgment. Now, quite apart from the interesting and puzzling question of exactly how one discerns the church, it must be pointed out that this novel interpretation is a move away from the doctrine of the Real Presence. By shifting our attention away from the body and blood of the Lord in the Sacrament toward the church, a subtle downplaying of the Lutheran understanding of the Sacrament is happening. And this move in a Reformed direction is being done by professing Lutherans who wish to allow members of heterodox churches to communion at orthodox altars.

I am not here speaking of those orthodox theologians who wish to see some connection or relationship between the Sacramental body of Christ and the church as the body of Christ, for these gladly admit that the reference in 1 Cor 11:29 refers primarily and necessarily to the body of Christ in the Sacrament. It is those who would move away from the one toward the other who are open to the charge of crypto-calvinism. They blunt the word of judgment regarding unworthy eating and drinking and shift attention from Christ's body and blood to the church.

*Their unionistic understanding of church fellowship.*

By claiming that the Bible imposes no "denominational restrictions" on baptized Christians who wish to receive the Sacrament, advocates of open communion assert their desire to admit to the Sacrament any baptized Christian who wishes to commune. They wish to let the individual decide for himself regarding participation in the Sacrament, and steadfastly refuse to deal seriously with the fact that an individual's membership in a particular church is a public confession of that individual's faith. (Claiming the modern phenomenon of "ambiguous denominationalism" an unwarranted cop-out.) This downplaying of the individual Christian as a confessor reflects Reformed latitudinarianism and not Lutheran confessionalism.

While the Reformed in their various forms have always been united in their rejection of Lutheranism, they have never been united among themselves about what they believe. In his writings against the Sacramentarians (his opponents who denied the Real Presence and later became what we know as the Reformed churches), Luther mocked them for being sure that "This is My body" didn't mean what Luther said it meant, but were unable to agree among themselves exactly what it did mean. Therefore, the churches of the Reformed wing of the Reformation have always maintained a certain latitude with regard to doctrinal formulations. The multitude of Reformed confessions and catechisms are accepted with qualifications (quatenus – "insofar as they reflect biblical teaching"). Lutherans, on the other hand, have always insisted on full and unreserved subscription to the confessional writings in the Book of Concord (quia – "because they are a right interpretation and explanation of biblical teaching") and have tended to regard lapses therefrom as moves in the direction of either the Reformed or Rome.

When we see in our midst, then, those who advocate the mixing of confessions at altar of the Sacrament of unity, what are we seeing but Reformed latitudinarianism in the guise of Lutheranism? While it may be technically true that the New Testament mentions nothing of today's multitudinous religious denominations, it is manifestly true that in the New Testament full unity in doctrine is absolutely essential to church fellowship. The orthodox are never to countenance heterodoxy but to counter it with the truth of the Word.

All denominations are founded on the basis of some form of confession over against other denominations. Why, otherwise, do they exist? A person who joins a particular church of a particular denomination, confesses by that joining, that church's doctrine, whether they fully understand it or not. It may be true, and undoubtedly is, that many do not take such confession seriously in our corrupt age. But orthodox Lutherans do, and must. Doctrinal error is dangerous and destructive to faith. Any concessions to ambiguous denominationalism in the Lutheran Church is, therefore, crypto-calvinism.

In the years after Luther's death, Philip Melancthon and his followers began conceding things all over the place in the interests of furthering unity with the Reformed and peace with Rome. Had it not been for the firm faithfulness of gnesio-Lutherans like Martin Chemnitz, Lutheranism would have disappeared. We can never thank God sufficiently for men like Chemnitz, Gerhard, Walther and others, who held the line and spoke the truth. And one of the best ways to render thanks is to abide in the same confession of the pure Word of God and not to succumb to the temptations of an unbelieving age.