

## Incarnate Word Tract Series #16 One Cup

### The Use of the Chalice for Holy Communion

A generation or two ago some Protestant groups within Christendom began to use individual cups in the administration of Holy Communion. Groups which generally did not believe in the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament and used grape juice instead of wine were the first to use these receptacles of glass, silver, or paper. They were originally designed to be passed down a church pew rather than to be administered at the altar.

The use of individual cups cannot be said to destroy the power of the Sacrament. But it is the use of the one cup or chalice that has scriptural, historical, and practical values far exceeding any values to be found in the use of individual cups.

#### Scriptural

On the night of His betrayal, our Lord “took the cup, when He had supped” and said “Drink ye all of it; this cup is the New Testament in my Blood . . .” (Matt. 26:26-28; Luke 22:17-20). St. Paul in his letters frequently speaks of the cup as being the way in which the Precious Blood is administered (I Cor. 10:16-22; 11:23-29). It is the method which the Holy Scriptures support.

#### Historical

From the first century on, the universal practice of the Church has been to use one cup for Holy Communion. The confessional writings of the Lutheran Church know of no other practice. Individual cups were unknown in Lutheranism until very recent times. The chalice is historical.

#### Practical

Pastors who have used both methods will testify to the handling convenience of the chalice as opposed to the dainty individual cups, which can so easily be dropped. Unnecessary time and work, often for several people, is involved in the preparation and washing of individual cups. These tasks are virtually eliminated by the use of the chalice. Furthermore, there is great possibility of irreverent disposal of the remaining Consecrated Wine when a small amount remains in many of the little glasses. Using the chalice permits convenient and proper disposal. It is practical.

#### Communion

Individual cups by their very nature are individualistic. This militates against the whole spirit of **Communion**. In Scripture, the bread of the Sacrament was one loaf, the wine in one cup. Thus St. Paul uses the Sacrament as an example of the Church’s unity (I

Cor. 10:16). Just as we receive the Body of Christ from one loaf and drink of one cup, so we are one Body in Christ. Early in the Church's history, individual wafers or hosts were introduced in order to accommodate larger numbers of communicants quickly. But the one chalice was kept in use throughout the entire history of the Church, including the period of the Reformation and thereafter, and thus the symbol of the unity of the Church was not lost. When the chalice is not used, this illustration of oneness—the Body of Christ, feeding upon the Sacrament—the Body of Christ) disappears. The very words “individual” and “communion” are mutually exclusive; one contradicts the other. “Individual” means isolated, independent, in solitude, separated, standing alone. It means almost anything other than “Communion”—together, joined, in unity, oneness, wholeness (I Cor. 11:20-22).

### **Cleanliness**

Distribution of Holy Communion from individual cups is popular even among some Lutherans in our day largely because of the claim that the chalice is unsanitary. Diseases, colds and bacteria are allegedly avoided by the use of individual cups. However, the truth is that wine has an alcoholic content as effective in killing germs as many anti-septics. Precious metals (gold and silver) from which chalices are made also act as germ killers. In administering the Consecrated Wine most pastors wipe the lip of the vessel and turn it after each person has received. Furthermore, the virtual impossibility of communicating illnesses through the chalice has been scientifically established.

To speak of sanitation in connection with the Sacrament of the Altar seems almost sacrilegious. The Lord of Life who comes to us in the chalice and the joy which is ours in receiving Him far surpass unfounded worries about cleanliness. It is difficult to imagine the Apostles hesitating to receive the one cup from their Lord in fear of one another's germs.

When Christians kneel together at God's altar, all ages, sexes, nations, and races receiving from one cup, we experience in concrete form the words of our Lord: “There shall be one fold and one Shepherd” (John 10:16).