

The Common Cup: Evaluated From A Biblical, Historical, and Medical Perspective

**Presented by the Reformed Presbytery In North America
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Having submitted an initial report to the members and adherents of the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton (January 26, 1999), and having now evaluated in the light of Scripture, history, and reason the responses submitted to the Session, the Session of the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton (PRCE) has now passed on to the Reformed Presbytery In North America the responsibility for presenting a final report.

The goals of the Presbytery in submitting this report have been: (1) Faithfulness to God and His inspired Word; (2) Consistency with our Subordinate Standards and other historical testimony; and (3) Edification to all members under the inspection of the Reformed Presbytery In North America who commune together around the Lord's Table. The Presbytery realizes that this report is merely a summary of our judgment on the common cup, and that there may be certain matters that have not been specifically or fully addressed herein. Such questions, concerns, or objections will be handled graciously and expeditiously as they are directed in an orderly manner to the Presbytery.

The practice of using a common cup at the Lord's Supper has become obsolete in Reformed and Presbyterian Churches for the most part, and, thus, to speak of resurrecting the practice may seem to some a mere novelty or innovation. A dispassionate consideration of the biblical testimony must be the supreme rule by which we judge all doctrine professed and all worship practiced ("Let God be true, but every man a liar" Romans 2:4). As in all such discussions, we encourage the reader to avoid hasty conclusions, to submit the argumentation presented in this report to the scrutiny of Scripture, and to appeal to the Lord through prayer that He might bring us all to one mind in the matter of the common cup.

Thus, in summary of our position, we find the use of a common cup at the Lord's Supper to be faithful, first and foremost, to the Scripture, and to be agreeable, secondly, to our Subordinate Standards (and other historical testimony). In the brief paper that follows, we will seek to demonstrate how we have come to these conclusions.

1. Biblical Testimony

a. The Singularity Of The Words Used

Without controversy, singular nouns, singular articles, singular pronouns and singular verbs are always used with regard to the cup at the Lord's Supper in all the related texts cited in the New Testament. Please note the following instances of the singular number in the New Testament to describe what is used to convey the wine to each communicant at the Lord's Table. Where *italicized* words are used in the scriptural citations below, it is to be noted that these words are not found in the original text. The words that are highlighted in **bold** do appear in the original text, and likewise, all appear in the singular number (thus indicating that a singular cup was used both by Christ and the apostles).

And he took **the cup**, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of **it** (Matthew 26:27).

And he took **the cup**, and when he had given thanks, he gave *it* to them: and they all drank of **it** (Mark 14:23).

And he took *the cup*, and gave thanks, and said, Take **this**, and divide *it* among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come (Luke 22:17).

Likewise also **the cup** after supper, saying, **This cup** *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you (Luke 22:20).

The cup of blessing which we bless, **is** *it* not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16)?

After the same manner also he took **the cup**, when he had supped, saying, **This cup** **is** the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it* in remembrance of me (1 Corinthians 11:25).

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink **this cup**, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink **this cup** of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27).

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of **that cup** (1 Corinthians 11:28).

Thus, to summarize this first argument, **never** do we find in the New Testament Scriptures the plural noun ("cups"), nor the plural article used with the plural noun ("**the cups**") , nor plural pronouns ("them" or "these"), nor the plural verb ("are") when referring to the vessel from which the communicants at the Lord's Supper drank. The Holy Spirit could not have been more clear in distinguishing the number of vessels used in the first institution and on subsequent occasions of the Lord's Supper as recorded in the New Testament: one common cup, not many individual cups.

b. The Division of Wine Within One Cup

Christ did not provide each disciple with his own individual cup at the institution of the Lord's Supper, but rather took one common cup and divided that one cup among all of the disciples. The act of dividing the cup among those who were sitting around the table implies that each communicant was using the same cup.

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, **Take this, and divide it among yourselves:** For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come (Luke 22:17, emphases added).

It is likely that the final evening which the Lord spent with His disciples before His death consisted of three distinct meals: (1) **the Passover supper** (the sacramental meal of the Old Covenant) which is the supper mentioned as being finished (John 13:1-2) before Christ washed the disciples' feet (John 13:4-20), announced the betrayer (Matthew 26:21-22; Mark 14:18-19;

Luke 22:21-23; John 13:21-25), gave the sop to Judas (John 13:26), and before Judas departed to betray Christ (John 13:27-30); (2) **an ordinary supper** (a non-sacramental meal to nourish the body) which followed the Passover supper (Matthew 26:21; Mark 14:18; John 13:21); and (3) **the Lord's Supper** (the sacramental meal of the New Covenant) which came at the end of the ordinary supper (Matthew 26:21:21; Mark 14:18; Luke 22:23; 1 Corinthians 11:25). Although the disciples most likely had in front of them individual cups from which they had been drinking at the ordinary supper, nevertheless, Christ did not institute the Lord's Supper by having the disciples use the individual cups that were before each of them, but rather took one common cup, blessed it, and gave it to His disciples commanding each one to drink from it and pass it to the next disciple (thus, dividing the wine within the one common cup among all the disciples seated around the table). The learned and godly George Gillespie has further elaborated concerning the significance of the verb ("divide") as used in Luke 22:17:

[I]t is not indifferent for a minister to give the sacramental elements of bread and wine out of his own hand to every communicant; **forasmuch as our Lord commanded his apostles to divide the cup among them, that is, to reach it one to another (Luke 22:17)**. Some of the interpreters are of [the—RPNA] opinion, that the cup spoken of by the Evangelist in that place is not the same whereof he speaks after (v. 20); but they are greatly mistaken; for if it were as they think, then Christ did again drink before his death of that fruit of the vine whereof we read, v. 18, which is manifestly repugnant to his own words. Wherefore, as Maldonat observes out of Augustine and Euthimius, **there was but one cup**; whereof Luke speaks, first, by anticipation, and, afterward, in its own proper place.... So that, to divide anything among men, is not to take it, but to give it. And who did ever confound parting and partaking, dividing a cup and drinking a cup, which differ as much as giving and receiving. Thus we conclude, that when Christ commanded the apostles **to divide the cup among them**, the meaning of the words can be no other than this, **that they should give the cup one to another; which is so plain that a Jesuit also makes it to follow upon this command, that Christ did reach the cup not to each one, but to the one, who would give it to his neighbor, the neighbor to the next one, and so on** (George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against The English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded On The Church of Scotland* , pp. 431, 432, emphases added).

c. The Command Given By Christ

It should be carefully noted that the Lord did not leave the decision up to the disciples as to whether they should use the common cup which He had blessed, or whether they should use their own individual cup from which they most likely had been drinking at the ordinary supper just prior to the Lord's Supper. The Lord did not suggest that the disciples drink from the common cup, but rather **commanded** His disciples to divide among themselves the wine within the one common cup which He had blessed:

Take this, and **divide** it among yourselves (Luke 22:17, emphases added).

Furthermore, the Lord **commanded all** His disciples to drink from the wine within that one common cup.

Drink ye all of it (Matthew 26:27, emphases added).

It may appear from the text just cited that Christ was commanding His disciples to drink all of the wine from within the cup. But what was literally **commanded** by Christ was this: "**Drink ye all** out of it" (or in other words, "**All of you drink** from this one common cup"). We find further confirmation that this was in fact the true meaning of the command given by the Lord, for all of

the disciples obeyed this divine command:

And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave *it* to them: **and they all drank of it** (Mark 14:23, emphases added).

Moreover, in Paul's account of the Lord's Supper, after the Lord had taken the one common cup, he cites the Lord Jesus as **commanding His disciples to do as he had done** (i.e. the Lord did not merely command his disciples **to say what he had said** in regard to the common cup). Thus, **the doing which the Lord commanded** would imply a permanent imitation of Christ's example in the use of the common cup:

After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: **this do ye, as oft as ye drink it** in remembrance of me (1 Corinthians 11:25, emphases added).

Although the approved examples of Christ (Luke 22:19) and of the disciples (Mark 14:23) give us sufficient warrant to follow them in the use of the common cup, yet the Lord has further strengthened their approved example by a direct command. We cannot disregard His commands with impunity without incurring His severe displeasure. The Corinthians are a testimony to all subsequent ages as to how jealously God desires both our outward and inward conformity to His Word when we come to the Lord's Supper:

For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (1 Corinthians 11:30).

d. The Regulative Principle Of Worship

We ought not to omit authorized symbols or prescribed actions in our observation of the sacraments. For the sacraments have not been instituted by man, but by Christ alone as Mediator of the Covenant of Grace. Will-worship is that corruption of worship whereby the creature offers to the Creator what he (the creature) deems to be acceptable rather than what the Creator has authorized.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.... Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in **will worship**, and humility, and neglecting of the body (Colossians 2:8,23, emphases added).

However sincere will-worship may be on the part of the creature, God neither accepts nor approves of worship which originates in the heart of man. Nor does He commend our addition or omission either of authorized symbols or prescribed actions in the sacraments.

What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: **thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it** (Deuteronomy 12:32, emphases added).

Consequently, not one stone should be left unturned in our effort to discern that form and manner which is most faithful to the testimony of God in administering the bread and the wine to the people of God. Moreover, the Second Commandment ("Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ..." Exodus 20:4) requires by way of a perpetual, moral commandment that not only Old Covenant worship be regulated according to God's revealed will, but that New Covenant worship be so regulated as well.

[W]e say that the Christian church has no more liberty to add to the

commandments of God than the Jewish church had; **for the second commandment is moral and perpetual, and forbids to us as well as to them the additions and inventions of men in the worship of God** (George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against The English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded On The Church of Scotland* , p. 289, emphases added).

As your ministers and elders, we must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, knowing that all which is unfaithful in our ministry and service will be consumed as fire destroys wood, hay, and stubble.

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

e. Not A Mere Circumstantial Or Cultural Consideration

We are also bound to follow the example of the Lord and His apostles in all matters wherein it cannot be discerned that extraordinary or cultural circumstances moved them to utter certain words or to perform particular actions. George Gillespie states the rule by which we judge whether a particular example of the Lord or of His Apostles ought ordinarily to be followed:

[W]e hold, that not only we ought to obey the particular precepts of the word of God, but that also we are bound to imitate Christ, and the commendable example of His Apostles, **in all things wherein it is not evident they had special reasons moving them thereto, which do not concern us** (George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies*, p. 428, emphases added).

Since we find no extraordinary or cultural circumstances that would move Christ to use a common cup in the administration of the Lord's Supper (especially as we consider that the disciples most likely had individual cups before them from the ordinary supper they had just completed), we must look upon the instituted use of a common cup as prescribed and ordinary (rather than circumstantial and extraordinary). Thus, the use of a common cup in the Lord's Supper is an authorized example to be followed.

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children (Ephesians 5:1).

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

f. The Oneness Signified In The Common Cup

Not only is the example of our Lord and of His apostles in using the common cup not extraordinary nor cultural, but also we find that the common cup is a sacred and significant symbol authorized by Christ in order to exhibit our communion and fellowship in the one body, one baptism, and one faith of Jesus Christ. Just as Christ has not authorized individual loaves of bread to be given to each communicant, so He has not authorized individual cups to be given to each communicant. Why? Because we who come to the Lord's Table express by our use of one bread and one cup our **oneness** in Christ and our **oneness** with each other in faith and love.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is *it* not **the communion of the blood of Christ**? The bread which we break, is it not **the communion of the body of**

Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16, emphases added)?

Since the wine within the common cup signifies the **one** New Covenant which Christ established with His chosen people ("This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" Luke 22:20), we pervert this biblical truth by issuing many individual cups, and rather teach (unwittingly) that there are as many New Covenants established by Christ as there are individual cups of wine used at the Lord's Table. When a Church gives to its communicants many different cups at the Lord's Table, it destroys that symbol of **oneness** which is so precious to the Church of Christ. To be perfectly consistent with such a marring of the symbol of oneness at the Lord's Supper, a Church that uses individual cups at the communion table should also use individual loaves of bread. The words of George Gillespie state the case very well:

Neither can they be said to divide the cup amongst themselves (which by the institution they ought to do, **in testimony of their communion**) when they are not within reach, yea, oftentimes not within sight of one another.... If there were such **a symbol of communion** in the paschal cup, that the receivers were to divide it amongst themselves, sure this ought to have place much more in the Eucharistical cup, **for the Lord's supper doth more clearly and fully set forth the communion of saints than the passover did** (Gillespie, *Works*, "Miscellany Questions, pp. 96, 97, emphases added).

The same emphases upon our union and communion with Christ and with those who faithfully profess Christ in both faith and practice is summarized for us in the *Larger Catechism* (emphases added):

Question 162: What is a sacrament?

Answer: A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his church, to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; **to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another**; and to distinguish them from those that are without.

Question 168: What is the Lord's supper?

Answer: The Lord's supper is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, his death is showed forth; and they that worthily communicate feed upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; **have their union and communion with him confirmed**; testify and renew their thankfulness, and engagement to God, **and their mutual love and fellowship each with other, as members of the same mystical body.**

Conclusion From The Biblical Testimony

The weight of evidence provided by these biblical arguments is (in our judgment) conclusive, and demonstrates that a single cup of wine was used by Christ and the apostles in the Lord's Supper, was commanded by Christ to be divided among the communicants at the same table, was authorized by Christ to symbolize our communion in truth and love, and was, therefore, instituted by Christ for the benefit of His church until He returns.

2. Historical Testimony

The Subordinate Standards of faithful Reformed Churches (including our own), and the testimony of other individual witnesses further corroborate the testimony of Scripture in demonstrating that the common cup ought to be used in the faithful administration of the Lord's Supper.

a. Subordinate Standards of Faithful Reformed Churches

It is important to note that although one may not find explicit reference to the words "one cup" in some of the following citations from various Subordinate Standards of faithful Reformed Churches, nevertheless, the stated means of distribution of the bread and the cup infer that one loaf and one cup were distributed and divided among all of the communicants at each table. The focus of the Presbytery (in regard to historical evidence) has been upon the era during and subsequent to the Protestant Reformation (although we have seen nothing that would alter our conclusions even from the period prior to the Protestant Reformation).

(1) *The Form Of Prayers And Ministration Of The Sacraments as practiced in Geneva (1556).*

In the English speaking congregation of Geneva (1556), worship was directed according to that biblical form approved by both John Calvin and John Knox, entitled, *The Form Of Prayers And Ministration Of The Sacraments*. Carefully note how the bread and the cup are said to be distributed among the people (i.e. distributed and divided among themselves). For to divide the same cup among the communicants is in essence to prescribe that one common cup be used by the communicants.

This done, the Minister breaketh the bread, and delivereth it to the people, **who distribute and divide the same amongst themselves, according to our Savior Christ's commandment, and in likewise giveth the cup** (*Works of John Knox*, [Bannatyne Club: Edinburgh] 1855, 4:196, emphases added).

(2) *The First Book of Discipline of the Church of Scotland (1560).*

The following citation from *The First Book of Discipline* (1560) which was approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, states that we must follow the example of Christ as closely as possible, and in particular, it does not state that all should drink from many cups placed upon the table, but rather that all should drink from "**the cup** of wine" that is distributed:

The Table of the Lord is then most rightly ministered when it approaches most nigh to Christ's own action. But plain it is, that at that Supper Christ Jesus sat with his disciples, and therefore do we judge that sitting at a table is most convenient to that holy action; that bread and wine ought to be there; that thanks ought to be given; distribution of the same made; and commandment given that the bread should be taken and eaten; and **that all should likewise drink of the cup of wine**, with declaration what both the one and the other is, we suppose no godly man will doubt (*The First Book of Discipline*, "The Second Head—Of Sacraments", emphases added).

(3) *The Confession of Bohemia (1573).*

From *The Confession of Bohemia* (1573), which is also known as *The Confession of the Waldenses*, we find the faithful practice of serving one common cup to be of such significance that it is included in the section entitled, "Of the Holy Supper of the Lord" (Chapter 13, emphases added):

Moreover, we are further taught, that with this ministry, or Sacrament of the Lord, no other ought to be done, or taken in hand, than that one thing which was showed, ordained, and expressly commanded of Christ himself; as when he reached bread, severally and peculiarly, to his disciples, and in express words said, "Take, eat, this is my body:" **and like sort, when he reached to them the cup**, severally [i.e. separately—RPNA] and peculiarly [i.e. particularly—RPNA], saying, "Drink all ye of this, This is my blood."

(4) The Dutch Annotations (1637).

The Synod of Dordt (1618) commissioned a work of Annotations covering all of the books of the Old and New Testaments to be made available for heads of households (and students of the Scripture) in their study of God's Word. It was completed in 1637, and was published by the authority of the Synod of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. In as much as these Annotations were commissioned and published by the authority of the Synod of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, they have been included here as a Subordinate Standard of that Church. There is a noteworthy annotation in regard to the common cup found at Mark 14:23 (emphases added).

And took the cup, and having given thanks, gave (it) to them; **and they all drank of the same [cup—RPNA]**: [Namely, as Christ had commanded them, Matth. 26.27].

(5) The Government And Order Of The Church Of Scotland (1641).

Alexander Henderson, co-author of the Solemn League and Covenant and Scottish commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, presented in this helpful work the order used in the Lord's Supper within the Church of Scotland (1641). Herein it states that the very same cup used by the minister is then passed on to the nearest communicant.

After all at the Table have taken and eaten, the minister taketh **the Cup, and drinking first himself, he giveth it to the nearest [communicant—RPNA]**, saying, *This Cup is the New Testament, in the Blood of the Lord Jesus, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins; drink ye all of it, for as often as ye do eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come* (*The Government And Order Of The Church Of Scotland*, 1641, p. 23, emphases added).

(6) The Directory For The Public Worship Of God (1645).

The Directory For The Public Worship Of God ("Of The Celebration Of The Communion, Or Sacrament Of The Lord's Supper") approved by the Westminster Assembly and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland prescribes the following order and symbolic actions to be used in the Lord's Supper. Again, we note that the same cup which the minister takes in his hand is that which is given to "the

communicants” who are seated around the table.

In like manner the minister is to take the cup, and say, in these expressions, (or other the like, used by Christ or the apostle upon the same occasion:) “**According to the institution, command, and example of our Lord Jesus Christ, I take this cup, and give it unto you; (here he giveth it to the communicants;)** *This cup is the new testament in the blood of Christ, which is shed for the remission of the sins of many: drink ye all of it*” (emphases added).

From the above testimony, we acknowledge that not only do other Reformed Subordinate Standards authorize the use of a common cup (either directly or inferentially), but more significantly, our own Subordinate Standards (*The First Book of Discipline* and *The Directory For The Public Worship Of God*) authorize us to follow the practice of administering the Lord’s Supper by means of a common cup. Moreover, since *The Directory For The Public Worship Of God* was one of the documents that comprised the covenanted uniformity sworn to in *The Solemn League and Covenant*, we also declare it for that reason to be our duty to maintain and to practice the scriptural use of a common cup in the Lord’s Supper. Note first, what we are bound to uphold by way of solemn covenant before Almighty God in regard to worship in Article One of *The Solemn League and Covenant*:

[A]nd shall endeavour to bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church-government, **directory for worship** and catechising; that we, **and our posterity after us**, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us (emphases added).

Note, secondly, that on the title page to *The Directory For The Public Worship Of God* are inscribed the following words (which solemn words cannot be casually dismissed):

Agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, with the assistance of commissioners from the Church of Scotland, **as a part of the covenanted uniformity in religion betwixt the Churches of Christ in the Kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland**; with an Act of the General Assembly [of the Church of Scotland—RPNA], and Act of Parliament, both in anno [in the year—RPNA] 1645, approving and establishing the said Directory (emphases added).

Unless it can be demonstrated that the sharing of one common cup at the Lord’s Supper is without scriptural warrant, we are bound to follow the order and practice established for us in the *The Directory For The Public Worship Of God*. Furthermore, we as a Presbytery view ourselves as the ecclesiastical descendants of the faithful General Assembly of the Church of Scotland that adopted *The Directory For The Public Worship Of God*. If we were unilaterally to overturn a lawful direction issued by this faithful court (in a matter that is not merely circumstantial), we would fundamentally testify against the Presbyterian Form of Church Government which we have sworn to uphold, and thereby directly violate our solemn covenant with God. For the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland warned that opinions and practices contrary to *The Directory For The Public Worship Of God* ought to be viewed as opening the door to schism and sectarianism within both nation and church:

Whosoever brings in any opinion or practice in this Kirk contrary to the Confession of Faith, **Directory for Worship**, or Presbyterian Government may be justly esteemed to be opening the door to schism and sects: And therefore all depravers and misconstructors of the proceedings of the Kirk judicatories, especially the

General Assembly would take heed lest making a breach upon the walls of Jerusalem they make a patent way for Sectaries to enter (*The Acts of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland*, July, Session 21,1648, p. 396, emphases added).

So as to clarify one point of possible confusion, it has been noted that in *The Directory For The Public Worship Of God* ("Of The Celebration Of The Communion, Or Sacrament Of The Lord's Supper") there is a reference to "large cups" (in the plural) being used at the Lord's Supper. To what do these "large cups" refer? How can they be reconciled with the use of a common cup as presented in this paper?

Let us first consider the section in question from *The Directory For The Public Worship Of God* ("Of The Celebration Of The Communion, Or Sacrament Of The Lord's Supper", emphases added).

After this exhortation, warning, and invitation, the table being before decently covered, and so conveniently placed, that the communicants may orderly sit about it, or at it, the minister is to begin the action with sanctifying and blessing the elements of bread and wine set before him, (the bread in comely and convenient vessels, so prepared, that, being broken by him, and given, it may be distributed amongst the communicants; **the wine also in large cups**;) having first, in a few words, showed that those elements, otherwise common, are now set apart and sanctified to this holy use, by the word of institution and prayer.

First, this section must be interpreted in light of, and in a way that does not contradict the section that follows, wherein it is stated that the minister is to pass to the communicants at the table the same cup which he holds in his hand.

In like manner the minister is to take the cup, and say, in these expressions, (or other the like, used by Christ or the apostle upon the same occasion:) "**According to the institution, command, and example of our Lord Jesus Christ, I take this cup, and give it unto you; (here he giveth it to the communicants;)** *This cup is the new testament in the blood of Christ, which is shed for the remission of the sins of many: drink ye all of it*"(emphases added).

Second, just as it is stated that wine was to be placed in "large cups", so *The Directory For The Public Worship Of God* ("Of The Celebration Of The Communion, Or Sacrament Of The Lord's Supper") likewise states that the bread was to be placed in "comely and convenient vessels" ("vessels" in the plural). Thus, we see that there are several vessels containing in each one a loaf of bread, and several large cups containing in each one a portion of wine.

Third, it would appear that what is herein described by the vessels of bread and the large cups of wine is not that each communicant himself would eat a loaf of bread and drink a large cup of wine, but that each table of communicants would divide among themselves one loaf of bread and one large cup of wine. Thus, in a large congregation where it might take several successive tables of communicants to come, partake, and be dismissed, several vessels of bread and several large cups of wine would exhibit the kind of preparation necessary to maintain due order and edification for all the communicants.

Fourth, such a use of the vessels of bread and of the large cups of wine provides a reasonable explanation in the immediate context while offering no damage to the words and actions of the minister as noted previously:

I take this cup, and give it unto you; (here he giveth it to the communicants); . . .

(7) The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647).

Within *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (29:3), it is to be observed that after the minister has partaken of the bread and the cup himself, he is then to give both (the bread and the cup from which he has eaten and from which he has supped) to the communicants who are gathered together.

The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed his ministers to declare his word of institution to the people, to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to an holy use; **and to take and break the bread, to take the cup, and (they communicating also themselves) to give both to the communicants;** but to none who are not then present in the congregation.

That the divines of the Westminster Assembly and of the Church of Scotland intended the minister to pass the same cup from which he himself had just supped is demonstrated from the proof text cited: Mark 14:22-24 (especially verse 23).

And he took **the cup**, and when he had given thanks, he gave *it* to them: and they all drank of **it** (Mark 14:23, emphases added).

The cup which was in the hands of the Lord and for which He gave thanks was the same cup which he gave to the disciples and from which all the disciples drank.

(8) The General Meeting Of The Reformed Presbyterian Church (1913).

The Reformed Presbytery In America was discontinued as a judicial body in 1887 due to the death of Rev. David Steele (leaving only one minister and several ruling elders to continue the faithful testimony of the Reformed Presbytery In America). At the annual General Meeting of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (1913) under the heading of "Steps of Defection", there is referenced many steps of defection wherein the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) had fallen away from the biblical and historical attainments of the Church of Scotland between the years 1638 and 1649. There are included at this point in the Minutes a list of defections with commentary. Having listed these defections, they note the following:

These steps of backsliding which we have enumerated, with others that could be mentioned as: voting, office holding under this government, **and individual cups at communion** clearly indicate that the Reformed Presbyterian Synod of North America is treading the outer court (*Minutes Of The General Meeting Of The Reformed Presbyterian Church*, North Union, Butler County, PA, June 9, 1913, p. 41, emphases added).

b. Testimony of Individual Witnesses

(1) John Knox (1514-1572).

Mr. Knox (in his treatise against the idolatry of the Romish Mass) does not so much seek to establish the fact that one cup ought to be used in the Lord's Supper as much as he seeks to defend the orthodox practice of the whole congregation partaking together of the one cup in opposition to the popish practice of the priest alone drinking from the one cup. However, in so doing, Knox clearly defends the use

of the common cup in the Lord's Supper.

In the Lord's Supper, finally, **all do** eat of one bread and **drink of one cup** (John Knox, "A Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass is Idolatry," 1550, *Selected Writings of John Knox*, Kevin Reed, ed., [Dallas, Texas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications], 1995, p. 62, emphases added).

(2) David Calderwood (1575-1650).

Mr. Calderwood, the celebrated minister and historian of the Church of Scotland, is credited with writing two essays against abuses in worship entitled, *The Re-Examination Of Two Of The Articles Abridged: To Wit, Of The Communicants Gesture In The Act of Receiving, Eating, and Drinking; And The Observation Of Festival Days* (1636). In the first article, Mr. Calderwood labors to demonstrate that Christ did not serve each disciple individually the bread and the wine, but rather gave to them one loaf of bread and one cup of wine which the disciples divided among themselves by passing from one communicant to the next communicant.

Christ gave not the cup to every one out of his hand, which had been sufficient for dividing it, if no further had been intended. To drink of **one cup** representeth fellowship in one common benefit, but not that communication of mutual love and amity which is represented by reaching **the same cup** to [an]other [RPNA]. The guests at civil banquets of old, entertaining [an]other [RPNA] courteously, reached a cup of wine to [an]other [RPNA], which cup they called *philotesia*, metonymically, because it was a symbol of love or friendship, which name any man may justly impose upon the cup of the holy Supper of the Lord, sayeth Seukius antiquitarum convivialium, lib.3. cap.10 (David Calderwood, *The Re-Examination Of Two Of The Articles Abridged: To Wit, Of The Communicants Gesture In The Act of Receiving, Eating, and Drinking; And The Observation Of Festival Days*, 1636, pp. 17,18, emphases added).

(3) George Gillespie (1613-1648).

The learned and godly George Gillespie, faithful minister of the Church of Scotland and Scottish commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, emphasized the significance of the words of Christ in distributing the bread and the cup to the communicants gathered around the Lord's Table. In so doing, Gillespie has made the case for a common cup. For to divide the wine within a cup among the disciples implies that only one cup was used. Although a portion of this text was cited earlier under the category of Biblical Testimony, it is now cited as an additional instance of Historical Testimony as to the practice defended by Mr. Gillespie.

[I]t is not indifferent for a minister to give the sacramental elements of bread and wine out of his own hand to every communicant [as the Romish priest does to every communicant—RPNA]; **forasmuch as our Lord commanded his apostles to divide the cup among them, that is, to reach it one to another (Luke 22:17)**. Some of the interpreters are of [the—RPNA] opinion, that the cup spoken of by the Evangelist in that place is not the same whereof he speaks after (v. 20); but they are greatly mistaken; for if it were as they think, then Christ did again drink before his death of that fruit of the vine whereof we read, v. 18, which is manifestly repugnant to his own words. Wherefore, as Maldonat observes out of Augustine and Euthimius, **there was but one cup**; whereof Luke speaks, first, by anticipation, and, afterward, in its own proper place.... So that, to divide anything among men, is not to take it, but to give it. And who did ever confound parting and partaking,

dividing a cup and drinking a cup, which differ as much as giving and receiving. **Thus we conclude, that when Christ commanded the apostles to divide the cup among them, the meaning of the words can be no other than this, that they should give the cup one to another; which is so plain that a Jesuit also makes it to follow upon this command, that Christ did reach the cup *not to each one, but to the one, who would give it to his neighbor, the neighbor to the next one, and so on*** (George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against The English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded On The Church of Scotland*, [Dallas, Texas: Naphtali Press] 1993 [1642], p p. 431,432, emphases added).

(4) Francis Turretin (1623-1687).

Mr. Turretin, the able and faithful teacher at the Academy in Geneva and successor to Calvin, Beza, and Diodati, also defends the practice of passing to each communicant a common cup when he elaborates on Christ's command, "This do in remembrance of me":

This [command—RPNA] must be referred **to the entire action**; not only to the consecration, **but also to the taking of the bread and the wine**, as both communicants and administrators are regarded here, who are ordered to do the very thing which Christ commanded. The latter [i.e. the ministers—RPNA] to take up, bless, and break, and give; and the former [i.e. the communicants—RPNA] to eat the bread and drink the wine received. **Hence Paul with Luke adds these words not only to the distribution of the bread, but also to the handing of the cup because there is the same reason** (Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, James Dennison, ed. [Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing,] 1997 [1679], 3:452, emphases added).

(5) Wilhelmus a Brakel (1635-1711).

Wilhelmus a Brakel was among the most eminent ministers in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands during the Second Reformation. He emphasized the symbol of unity that is signified among those seated together around the Lord's Table in the use of the common cup.

Even if the world, as their [i.e. the Church's—RPNA] enemy, hates, despises, persecutes, and oppresses them, there is yet no reason for concern; they can readily miss its love, for they have better company and they refresh themselves in a sweet manner in the exercise of mutual love. **They confess this unity in the Lord's Supper by eating of the same bread and by drinking of the same cup.** "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor.10:17) (Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, Bartel Elshout, trans., [Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria], 1992, 1995 [1700], 2:577, emphases added).

(6) Herman Witsius (1636-1708).

Professor Herman Witsius ranks among the most notable theologians in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. In identifying the sacramental actions of the Lord at the institution the Lord's Supper, Witsius draws from the gospel accounts to demonstrate that the disciples all drank of the consecrated wine, and yet it is difficult to miss the point that the consecrated wine was from the same cup which the Lord gave to them.

The third action of the guests is, *to drink* the consecrated wine **out of the cup**. It is remarkable, that our Lord said concerning **the cup**, not only “take this, and divide it among yourselves,” Luke xxii. 17, but likewise added a mark of universality, “drink ye *all* of it” [i.e. drink ye all from it—RPNA], Matt. xxvi. 27. And we are told how they complied with this command, Mark xiv. 24, “and they *all* drank of it” [i.e. they all drank from it—RPNA] (Herman Witsius, *The Economy Of The Covenants Between God And Man*, [Phillipsburg: Pennsylvania], 1990 [1693], 2:455, 456, emphases added).

(7) James Bannerman (1807-1868).

James Bannerman served as Professor of Apologetics and Pastoral Theology in New College, Edinburgh within the Free Church of Scotland. In describing the symbolic nature of the bread and the cup in the Lord’s Supper, Professor Bannerman writes:

The broken bread representing the broken and crucified body,—the wine poured out, the shed blood,—the eating and drinking of them, the participation in Christ’s blessings to nourish the soul and make it glad,—**the “one bread” and “one cup,”** the communion of Christ with His people, and of them with each other, [a footnote cites 1 Cor.10:17 at this point—RPNA]—all these are no dumb or dark signs, but speaking and expressive of what it is intended to commemorate (James Bannerman, *The Church Of Christ*, [Edmonton, Alberta: Still Waters Revival Books], 1991 [1869], 2:133, 134, emphases added).

(8) Robert Lewis Dabney (1820-1898).

One of the premier theologians of the Southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS) was Robert L. Dabney who served as Professor at Union Seminary, Virginia. He also takes note of the oneness of the bread and of the cup.

The words *eis artos* [i.e. “one bread”—RPNA] (1 Cor. x:17) are not correctly represented in the English version. The proper force of the word, as may be seen in Jno. vi:9, is loaf, or more properly, cake; and the Apostle’s idea is, **that the oneness of the mass [or loaf—RPNA] of bread, and [the oneness—RPNA] of the cup, partaken by all,** signifies their unity in one spiritual body (R.L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, [Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner Of Truth Trust], 1985 [1871, 1878], p. 802, emphases added).

From where did the ordinary practice of individual cups at the Lord’s Supper originate? In the history of the Christian Church, the ordinary practice of individual cups at the Lord’s Supper is a relatively recent innovation, dating from the 1880s. There appear to have been extraordinary cases in which individual cups were used at the Lord’s Supper, but the exception was not made the rule within Reformed Churches (or within any other Church until the 1880s). For example, at the time of Calvin’s death, a plague broke out which ravaged Germany, France and Switzerland. Under such extraordinary circumstances,

The Protestant congregations, in some cases, assembled in open air, and when they celebrated the Lord’s Supper, the communicants, in order to avoid infection, brought each his own cup, and made use of it at the table (J.A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, Book 2, Chapter XXVIII, p. 366).

But how and by whom did the ordinary practice (rather than the extraordinary use) of individual cups at the Lord’s Supper originate?

We find that the use of individual cups, in modern times, was first suggested by Mr. A. Van Derwerken, of Brooklyn, N. Y., in the year 1882. In 1887 he wrote an article advocating the use of individual cups in the communion service; but being opposed by his pastor, he did not publish the article until a year later, when it appeared in the *Annals of Hygiene*, of Philadelphia. One year passed ere any one braved the idea of putting Mr. Van Derwerken's suggestion into practical use. In November, 1893, the Psi Upsilon fraternity, of Rochester, N.Y., celebrated the Lord's Supper with individual cups (Rev. J.D. Krout, *The Lutheran Quarterly*, "The Individual Communion Cup", *United Brethren Review* 17:2 [March-April 1906], pp. 101-105).

Conclusion From The Historical Testimony

Finding no historical testimony supporting the ordinary practice of individual cups at the Lord's Supper until the late nineteenth century, while identifying much testimony from the Subordinate Standards of Reformed Churches and from individual witnesses that the use of the common cup was the ordinary practice of Reformed Churches, we conclude that the practice of a common cup at the Lord's Supper has been the rule among Reformed Churches of the First and Second Reformations, and should likewise be the rule practiced by the congregations and members who are under the inspection of the Reformed Presbytery In North America.

3. Medical Testimony

The practice of passing a common cup from one communicant to another may yet be the occasion of some concern as it relates to communicating various bacteria or diseases. Is the use of the common cup a violation of the Sixth Commandment in an age wherein there are so many serious diseases that might be communicated from one person to another? Are we not only forbidden from taking the life of ourselves and others, but as well, required to preserve our own life and the life of others? The Presbytery has diligently sought to weigh this concern against the biblical testimony, historical testimony, and medical testimony available to us. Although we have chosen not to engage in evaluating specific medical testimony (in as much as the Session does not possess the expertise to make a conclusive medical evaluation of all the literature that is available), nevertheless, we would present the following principles which relate to concerns about disease and the use of the common cup.

1. Since God is one and His truth one, He cannot deny or contradict Himself.

He cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good (Numbers 23:19)?

Thus, if the use of the common cup is authorized by God (as established earlier in the section on Biblical Testimony), then the common cup cannot inherently be a violation of the Sixth Commandment. God cannot require us to preserve our lives and the the lives of our children, and at the same time institute the Lord's Supper by the use of the common cup (if the common cup **necessarily** jeopardizes our lives and the lives of our children). Therefore, we must acknowledge that there is no inherent contradiction between our observation of the Sixth Commandment and our use of the common cup. For to acknowledge any real contradiction in God's commands is to make God the author of that contradiction (which no true Christian will profess).

2. This is not the only age in which serious, (even life-threatening) diseases have existed—they have been rampant ever since Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper with the common cup. In fact, it might be argued that communicable diseases were far more detrimental in past ages due to the lack of medical knowledge and technology which we now enjoy in the present age. This fact is demonstrated by David Fisher who contrasts the life expectancy of those living during the seventeenth century in early America with those living during the late twentieth century in modern America.

But mortality also made a difference in another way: the chances of living a biblical span of seventy years were approximately 20 percent at birth, compared with 80 percent today [1989—RPNA]. The odds of reaching the age of seventy were highly unfavorable—in fact, four to one against [it—RPNA] (David Fisher, *Albion’s Seed—Four British Folkways In America*, [New York: Oxford Press], 1989, p. 104).

Thus, if it is a **necessary** violation of the Sixth Commandment to use the common cup today (due to serious life-threatening diseases), then it was also a violation of the Sixth Commandment in past ages as well (even at the first Lord’s Supper). But since such a conclusion is unthinkable (even blasphemous), we must declare that there is no inherent violation of the Sixth Commandment in the use of the common cup.

3. Is it not more loving to avoid the possibility of diseases being spread at all by the use of individual cups at the Lord’s Supper? We would submit that such an argument unwittingly and indirectly strikes at the very love of Christ who established the Lord’s Supper by giving the wine unto His disciples in a common cup, and then commanding them (and us) to do likewise. Are we more loving than Christ? If Christ’s love were in the least compromised in authorizing the use of a common cup at the Lord’s Supper, God would certainly have authorized the use of individual cups instead. However, since the Good Shepherd’s love was not compromised in the least when he first instituted the use of a common cup at the Lord’s Table, neither is the under-shepherd’s love compromised by the lawful use of the common cup at the Lord’s Table.

4. Is it not more prudent and wise to use individual cups in light of the many contagious diseases that one might possibly contract today? There are many ways in which we may contract various contagious diseases that exist all around us everyday. Serious diseases may be passed from one person to another at gatherings of the Church in using a common loaf of bread at the Lord’s Supper (as the bread is passed from one communicant to the next), by shaking hands with one who has coughed or sneezed, by opening a door which many unclean hands have handled, or even by simply breathing the same air. Bacteria and viruses do not isolate themselves and confine themselves to the mouth, but travel as well by touching, coughing, sneezing, and exhaling. If it is not wise to use a common cup, perhaps it is not wise to use a common loaf of bread, or to shake hands with one another, or to stand too close to anyone for fear that we might contract a contagious disease. Such an argument, carried to its logical end, leads to the corporate death of the visible body of Christ gathered together in one place for worship, common meals, or church fellowship. Furthermore, are we wiser than Christ who constituted the Lord’s Supper with the common cup? Do we know more than Christ who established the common cup? All of these questions about the transmission of contagious diseases could have been easily avoided had the Lord (who knows all things) simply given each disciple his own individual cup. Christ did not do so, even though in Him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

For these reasons, we do not believe that the mere possibility of contracting a contagious disease should alter the ordinary practice of the Church of Christ in administering wine in the sacred symbol of a common cup as was authorized by the Lord. Although, the ordinary practice of the Church ought not to be modified for reasons of mere preference, is the Church at liberty to make any exceptions when some compelling consideration (rather than a mere preference) demands it? We would answer this question in the affirmative and cite the words of Christ to that effect.

And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, **when he had need, and was an hungered**, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, **which is not lawful to eat but for the priests**, and gave also to them which were with him (Mark 2:25,26, emphases added)?

From the above text, we note that Christ made an exception to a law regarding divine worship in the Old Testament. Due to the hunger of David and his men (for the background to this historical account we refer the reader to 1 Samuel 21:1-9), the Lord allows an exception to the following ordinary rule:

And it [i.e. the consecrated show bread—RPNA] shall be Aaron's and his sons'; and they shall eat it in the holy place: for it is most holy unto him of the offerings of the LORD made by fire by a perpetual statute (Leviticus 24:9, emphases added).

Thus, we must acknowledge that according to the express example of Christ, there may be at times, reasonable exceptions made to the ordinary rules authorized by God in worship (especially when certain cases of conscience related to the Sixth Commandment present themselves to the Church of Jesus Christ). For example, what should be done with one who was formerly addicted to alcoholic beverages and truly fears that one sip of wine will lead him back to the same sinful lifestyle from which he has recently been delivered? Or what about the person who is so severely allergic to any alcoholic beverage (or perhaps to any grape product) that it is feared that even one drink will cause a very negative reaction (whether headaches, vomiting, a rash over the whole body, or problems with breathing)? Or what measure should be taken with the person who fears that sharing wine in a common cup is likely to bring upon him, his wife, and his children some contagious disease? What are the possible options people might suggest in resolving such cases of conscience?

1. The Presbytery might instruct those who have such fears, and by this instruction seek to eliminate their concerns (due to allergies, former addictions, or transmission of serious diseases).

Response: Although instruction from God's Word should always be a tool we use in helping people to overcome fear, should the Presbytery or the Session censure those whose fears continue to hinder them from coming to the Lord's Supper? When there is no contempt expressed for the Lord's Supper itself (but rather an expressed desire to enjoy the Lord's Supper), is it godly or loving leadership to censure those who abstain from coming to the Lord's Table for fears related to the Sixth Commandment? When they sincerely believe they would be violating their conscience (due to the Sixth Commandment), should we totally disregard such a conscientious concern and censure them? The Presbytery does not believe we should approach the sheep among us in such a high-handed manner (especially if there are other legitimate options available to us).

2. The Presbytery might leave those who refrain from coming to the Lord's Supper

due to such fears in a perpetual state of virtual "excommunication." Thus, they would not be permitted to come to the Lord's Supper until they were willing to use either the wine or drink from the common cup (even if to do so would lead them into a conflict of conscience wherein they believe they would violate the Sixth Commandment).

Response: Are we not commanded to love the weak brother and to avoid placing a stumbling block in his path according to Romans 14:23 (wherein he would unnecessarily be compelled to violate his conscience)? If it is possible for the Presbytery to allow an exceptional accommodation for such fears where no contempt for the sacrament is manifested, and where the accommodation is not imposed upon others who do not share the same fears, then love for the brethren would compel us to endeavor to use such an accommodation if one is available.

3. The Presbytery might administer grape juice in individual cups to those who are former alcoholics or who are allergic to alcoholic beverages while administering wine in a common cup to all others seated around the Lord's Table.

Response: However, to begin to make changes in the elements for a few would over time likely lead to the removal of the common cup from all those sitting around the Lord's Table, as the desire for individual cups increased. For there might be some who are served grape juice (i.e. the former alcoholic and those with allergies to alcohol), and yet others who are served apple juice (i.e. those with allergies to any grape product), and still others who are served wine in their own individual cups (i.e. those who fear contracting a contagious disease). The effect of such an accommodation would be to impose permanently (rather than temporarily) the use of multiple cups at the Lord's Supper (so that an exception becomes the general rule). Such a practice would have the effect of losing sight of the sacred symbol of the common cup altogether. Such a practice would also become a practical nightmare in seeking ways to remember who was suppose to receive what type of cup and with what in the cup.

4. The Presbytery might administer the common cup by giving each communicant a spoon so as to scoop wine out of the common cup as it is passed around the table and in so doing to avoid transmission of communicable diseases.

Response: This would mean that those who are allergic to wine (or grape products) or those who fear falling back into a sinful abuse of wine would be prevented from coming to the Lord's Table since the common cup would contain wine. Furthermore, this accommodation would lead the Presbytery to impose upon all members (even those who do not share the fears of others) a lawful but unwise method of partaking of the wine. Although to use a spoon is lawful (for we judge the means of transmission of wine from the common cup to the mouth to be indifferent), nevertheless, the Presbytery believes the use of a spoon to be unwise (for accommodations made to brethren in the Church ought not to be at the expense of imposing that practice upon all who come to the Lord's Supper, especially if there is another means of accommodation free of such an imposition) . At that point, an accommodation to certain members becomes a rule for all members.

5. The Presbytery might administer wine or grape juice in individual cups to all who come to the Lord's Supper.

Response: This option also imposes an accommodation to certain members upon the whole, so that for the sake of a few, the whole Church must use individual cups. This, again, would make an exceptional case into a general rule, and remove from us the blessed symbol of our communion together in one faith and in one Lord. Such

an ordinary practice would violate both the testimony of Scripture and the testimony of history.

6. The Presbytery might administer wine in a common cup to all who come to the Lord's Table. But in so doing, the Presbytery might make the following accommodation to those who fear taking either the wine or grape product (due to an allergy or previous addiction), or to those who fear being exposed to some contagious disease: those with such cases of conscience might lift the common cup as closely as they can to their lips without actually drinking from it.

Response: Although they have not actually drunk from the cup, the Presbytery would argue that they have yet preserved the instituted element of wine and the sacred symbol of the common cup at the Lord's Table apart from imposing their accommodation upon any other communicant. However, can it be said that they have partaken of the Lord's Supper? Yes, we believe they have partaken in faith, even if they have not actually tasted of the wine in the common cup. If there is no contempt for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and if they do earnestly desire to partake out of the common cup with the Church (but cannot do so due to various cases of conscience as enumerated above), we would argue that their faith and intention are regarded as the act itself. Such an accommodation has been practiced by faithful Reformed Churches of the past as we shall demonstrate.

First, consider that such an accommodation was extended to certain members of the Reformed Churches of France by their General Synods as early as 1560.

The Bread in the Lord's Supper shall be administered unto them, who cannot drink Wine; they protesting seriously, that it is not out of contempt that they do forbear it; besides they doing their utmost endeavour for it, yea bringing the Cup as near unto their Mouth as they can, and taking and touching it with their Lips, all occasions of offence will be by this means in this case avoided.

Forasmuch as when the Lord's Supper is administered, sundry diseased Persons come unto it, which causeth many that are in health to be shy of taking the Cup after them, Pastors and Elders shall be admonished to use their greatest prudence, that godly order may be kept up and observed in this case (*Synodicon in Gallia Reforma, or The Acts, Decisions, Decrees, and Canons of those Famous National Councils of the Reformed Churches in France, 1:xlvi*; *Discipline of the Reformed Churches of France, Chapter XII, Canon VII and Canon X*).

May he be admitted to communicate in the Bread only at the Lord's Table, who hath an Antipathy against Wine? Yes, he may, provided that he do his utmost to drink of the Cup; but in case he cannot, he shall make a Protestation of his Antipathy (*Synodicon in Gallia Reforma, or The Acts, Decisions, Decrees, and Canons of those Famous National Councils of the Reformed Churches in France, 1:20*; The Second Synod at Poitiers, 1560, Chapter VI, XXXI).

Secondly, we note Francis Turretin's defense of this position as it was practiced by the Reformed Churches of France. Turretin is defending this very accommodation (practiced by the Reformed Churches of France) against the attack of those who would say that the Reformed Churches of France (and any other church that allows for this accommodation) are no better than Rome who withholds the cup from the people.

XXXVI. The article of discipline of our churches by which the abstemious [i.e. those who cannot drink wine—RPNA] are excused from the use of the cup, provided they show reverence only by the movement of the cup to the mouth (by which they follow the institution of Christ and do not abstain from it through contempt but from inability), cannot help the Romanists (cf. “The Discipline of the Reformed Churches of France,” 12, Canon 7 in Quick, *Synodicon* [1692], 1:xlvi). (1) Our practice differs widely from the Roman [Catholic Church—RPNA]. It is one thing to bear with the weakness of those who cannot use wine; another to take away from and prohibit the cup to those who are without such weaknesses. The former is done by us; the latter by the Romanists. (2) The article of discipline is a work of charity and accommodation (*synkatabaseos*) towards a few out of unavoidable necessity. But the dogma of the Romanists is an absolute and simple interdiction towards all without necessity and against the express command of Christ. (3) The discipline does not intend that the species of the sacrament should be divided; nay, it intends that the sacrament should be retained entire and be conjointly extended and distributed to the people by the ministers (although both species cannot be received by the abstemious, but only one). But the Roman doctrine and practice wishes the sacrament to be divided and communion mutilated by the priests. According to us the abstemious ought not only to desire the cup, but also to do everything to overcome their weakness; but the Romanists so take away the cup from the people that it is wrong for them to ask for it or to touch it. In one word, while according to our opinion nobody is kept from the use of the cup; nay, pastors are commanded to offer both kinds and believers to do all they can for its reception; by the Romanists the use of the cup is expressly forbidden to the people. It is evident that there is a great and wide difference between our opinion and theirs.

XXXVII. Now although the abstemious receive the sacrament only under one kind, their communion is not on that account to be considered wholly profitless (*illusoria*). (1) The entire sacrament is extended to them by the minister and if they are compelled to abstain from one kind [i.e. from the wine in the common cup—RPNA], it is not done spontaneously and contemptuously, but from sheer weakness and unavoidable necessity. (2) Although the species in the sacrament are indivisible by the ordination of God, this has respect to those only who can use them and not to others (whom he himself dispenses by the obstacle placed in their way). For as he made the law, so he alone can dispense from it whom he pleases; and separate the species in certain cases, who joined them and willed them to be joined. (3) The defect of use (or of either species through the taste) can in some measure be supplied both by the wish and from the sight, touch, smell and other sensations. (4) Although both signs are not received, they do not cease to be made partakers of the whole thing signified, which is indivisible (Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, George Giger, trans., James T. Dennison, ed., [Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing], 1997 [1696], 3:463-464).

Thirdly, the Presbytery cites a work written by Rev. John Ley (1583-1662), one of the chief Presbyterian members of the Westminster Assembly, who also addressed a very similar case of conscience in regard to a member who in that particular case could not partake of the bread in the Lord’s Supper (perhaps due to some allergic reaction). This extended quote begins by Mr. Ley laying out two positions in

resolving that case of conscience (which some had proposed and used), and then Mr. Ley presents a third position which He himself embraces (and which the Reformed Presbytery In North America likewise proposes as most faithfully resolving the various cases of conscience that may come before us in matters related to the Lord's Supper).

I incline to conform to a third option, which is a kind of medium betwixt those two, viz. neither to substitute other elements (as Calvin, Beza, Polanus and others would have it); nor wholly to forbear or debar others from the receipt of the sacrament, as some other Protestants have conceived most convenient, when bread and wine, or either of them, cannot be had; but if there be either an antipathy [i.e. an aversion—RPNA] against either kind [i.e. against either the bread or the wine—RPNA] or want of either, to be content with that which may be had and taken. . . . But beside Brentius, there be many more that so resolve; for as the Reformed Churches in France, in twenty several synods have confirmed this canon for the communion, "Pastors ought to administer the bread of the holy Supper unto them that are not able to drink wine, they having made a Protestation, that they do it not in contempt, and [rather—RPNA] framing themselves to drink (so far as they shall be able). Namely, they shall take in their hand, to prevent scandal" (Ch. 12. Art. 7. MS).

Which Constitution, I account of more weight because it is not like they did either not know or not consider the decisions of Geneva, before mentioned; and it is worthy [of—RPNA] observation in two points especially.

1. That the Communion can be received in one kind [i.e. with one of the elements—RPNA], in case of necessity, when both cannot be had or not received; for then to take the one [element—RPNA] in deed, [and—RPNA] the other [element—RPNA] in desire, may suffice. . . .

For first, in such a case, he that receiveth one kind, receiveth Christ, and with Christ, both his body and blood, so that though he have not the integrity of the sacrament (for the outward elements), he may the essence and efficacy of it; and though it be imperfect in respect of the sensible materials, yet it is better to have it imperfect, than not at all; as it is better to have a piece of a book, of Canonical Scripture, or but a verse, if he can have no more, than none at all. Besides it seemeth [a—RPNA] hard measure to debar any from their participation of both parts of the sacrament because God hath enabled them to partake of one, especially if they much desire it, and be inclined to scruples and discomforts, if they be kept without it. . . .

The second observable point in that canon of the French Church is that when it is so received, all scandal and offence must be carefully declined; for if the party cannot drink wine, he must yet take the cup into his hand (as before hath been said) and profess a willingness to do it, and thereby he professeth his judgment and consent with the Church against several heresies, [such as those—RPNA] condemning and denying the lawful use of wine, as the Severean, who held that Satan and the Earth were the parents of wine; and of the Tatiani, who (because the Lord findeth fault with the people, by the prophet Amos that gave the Nazarites wine to drink) thence conceived that he condemned wine altogether; as Hierome [i.e. Jerome—RPNA] observeth

upon that text, Amos 2. vers. 12; and of the Manichees, who accounted wine the beginning of darkness, yet forbear not to eat the grapes from whence it was pressed; of the Turks, who pretended a prohibition from heaven, by an Angel against the drinking of wine; of the Aquarii, who refused it upon pretence of more sobriety; and especially of the Papists, who deny the necessary use of it to the laity by virtue of Christ's Institution. Lastly, hereby they profess against scandal or offence unto the congregation by doing otherwise than they [i.e. those heretical groups just mentioned—RPNA] do (John Ley, *A Case Of Conscience Concerning The Sacrament Of The Lord's Supper: When Either The Bread Or Wine Is Wanting, Or When There Is A Desire, Yet With An Antipathy To Them, Or Disability To Receive Them*, pp. 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, [London], 1641).

Thus, the Presbytery would ask anyone who believes he cannot eat of the common loaf of bread or drink of the common cup of wine to make his concerns known to the Presbytery or to the Session (whichever may be the proper judicatory overseeing the administration of the Lord's Supper to that member). We will upon such a notification give counsel concerning the above mentioned cases of conscience that will enable the communicant to come to the Lord's Supper with God's people. It is our desire not to prevent a single member from coming to the Lord's Supper due to some case of conscience that might be resolved in accord with the Word of God, our Subordinate Standards (and those of other faithful Reformed Churches), sound judgment, and bowels of mercy. After all, it is not a weakness, fear, or case of conscience that should prevent our members from coming to the Lord's Supper, but only ignorance and scandal according to The Larger Catechism (Question 173, emphases added):

Question 173: May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, be kept from it?

Answer: Such as are found to be **ignorant or scandalous**, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ has left in his church, until they receive instruction, and manifest their reformation.

If any communicant is very ill or has contracted some communicable disease, we would ask that such matters be brought privately to the attention of the Presbytery or the Session (depending upon which court is administering the Lord's Supper to that member) so that appropriate counsel might be given to those who are ill (for their own sake, as well as for the sake of their fellow brothers and sisters communing together around the Lord's Table).

Conclusion From The Medical Testimony

As stated at the outset of this section, the Presbytery is not a medical panel, and, therefore, does not have the expertise to properly evaluate all of the medical literature that is available. On the one hand, we do believe that the use of the common cup is the ordinary rule articulated in Scripture for the faithful receiving of the Lord's Supper. On the other hand, we do not believe that various fears, weaknesses, allergies, or any other true cases of conscience ought to prevent those from coming to this sacred meal who desire to enjoy communion with Christ and His people (and who have given no evidence of contempt for this holy sacrament). For we believe that in such cases, we must heed the words of Christ spoken to the Pharisees:

But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless (Matthew 12:7).

Thus, the Presbytery offers an accommodation to those dear brethren among us having genuine cases of conscience which allows them to join with the whole Church at the Lord's Supper, and yet an accommodation which does not impose itself upon the whole Church, whereby an exception to a few becomes a rule to the many. If in the future this accommodation for genuine cases of conscience should become the general rule among the vast majority of the Church, the Presbytery would judge it necessary to reconsider what steps ought to be taken so as to avoid making an accommodation in exceptional cases of conscience the general rule and practice among the membership.

Conclusion

Having considered the matter of the common cup from a biblical, historical, and medical perspective, the Presbytery In North America wholeheartedly embraces the practice of the common cup as that which is founded upon the truth, and commends this practice to all its members and friends.