

The following is a compilation of handouts from Professor John Pless' TABLE TALK at the ACELC Conference on "Christ for Us: The Lord's Supper."

From the Syllabus for PMM 234- Pastoral Theology I (Prof. John T. Pless, Concordia Theological Seminary):

1. A paper on closed communion. Suppose your first call is to a congregation that has the following as its communion statement: "All baptized Christians who confess Jesus Christ as their Savior, examine themselves and repent of their sins, and believe that Christ is really present in Holy Communion are invited to receive the Lord's Supper with us." How would you formulate a theological response to this statement? Show how you would work pastorally to bring the practice into conformity with Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions?

Crafting a Confessional Communion Statement

1. Assumption: The practice of closed communion goes against the cultural grain of North American Christianity largely influenced by American Evangelicalism. In his book, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale University Press, 1989), Nathan Hatch points out that the Jeffersonian ideas of individual freedom and equality are congenial to Evangelicalism's emphasis on personal decision and the church as a spiritual democracy. Evangelicalism's stress on the autonomy of the believer and the immediacy of spiritual experience downplays the place of church (i.e., unity in doctrine) and the sacrament. Sacraments become metaphors open to individual interpretation and usage.
2. Closed communion is a confession of the truth of Jesus' words that give us His body to eat and His blood to drink for the forgiveness of our sins (see Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; I Corinthians 11:23-25)
3. Closed communion seeks to guard both the unity of the church (i.e., integrity of confession; here see Elert and Sasse) and protect the potential communicant from spiritual danger by eating and drinking in the Sacrament without discerning the body and blood of the Lord (I Corinthians 11:27-32).
4. Eating and drinking the Lord's body and blood together presupposes unity in the Lord's teaching (see Acts 2:42). The Sacrament presupposes oneness in the faith rather than creating it.
5. Communion statements sometimes say to little or too much. A well-crafted statement will be clear to the visitor. Wordy statements tend to assume that the guest has at his or her disposal a developed doctrinal vocabulary. On the other hand, a short statement might come across as negative and harsh. The best statements will clearly articulate our practice in an evangelical way with a winsome invitation for guests to set up an appointment to visit with the pastor.
6. The statement should, in some way, reflect the fact that admission to the Lord's Supper is made not on the basis of a personal confession of faith but is tied to the confession of the altar at which one communes. Note Elert: "Since a man cannot at the same time hold two differing confessions, he cannot communicate in two churches of differing confessions. If anyone does this nevertheless, he denies his own confession or has none at all" (182).
7. Pastors may wish to develop a longer tract that will go into more detail explaining the biblical and pastoral rationale for closed communion. Here see the 1999 CTCR Report, *Admission to the Lord's Supper: Basics of Biblical and Confessional Teaching*. For a sample of such a tract, see *What Your Eating and Drinking at This Altar Confesses* by John T. Pless (available on my webpage at www.ctsfw.edu/pless/documents)

Theologia III: Lord's Supper

Lecture: "Admission to the Lord's Supper"

Required Reading: "Closed Communion" and "Church Discipline and the Lord's Supper" in *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries* by Werner Elert, trans. Norman E. Nagel (CPH, 1966), pp. 75-107; Large Catechism V: The Sacrament of the Altar, *The Book of Concord-Kolb/Wengert*, 467-476; Augsburg Confession XXIV: 1-9, *The Book of Concord –Kolb/Wengert*, 69.

Additional Bibliography:

CTCR, *Admission to the Lord's Supper: Basics of Biblical and Confessional Teaching* (LCMS, 1999).

Klän, Werner. "The 'Third Sacrament': Confession and Repentance in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church" *Logia XX* (Holy Trinity 2011): 5-12

Lassman, Ernie V. "'Discerning the Body' and Its Implications for Closed Communion" in *A Reader in Pastoral Theology* edited by John T. Pless (CTS Press, 2002): 112-115

Lockwood, Gregory J. "Unworthy Reception of the Sacrament" in *Concordia Commentary: I Corinthians* (CPH, 2000): 396-410

McCain, Paul T. *Communion Fellowship* (International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1992)

Pless, John T. "Can We Participate Liturgically in the Atonement?" *Logia XIX* (Eastertide 2010): 39-48

Pless, John T. "The Lord's Supper in the Life of the Congregation" in *Divine Multi-Media: The Manifold Means of Grace in the Life of the Church* edited by John Maxfield (Luther Academy, 2005): 133-148

Sasse, Hermann. "Theses on the Question of Church and Altar Fellowship" in *The Lonely Way- Volume I: 1927-1939* edited by Matthew C. Harrison (CPH, 2001): 331-338

Sasse, Hermann. "Word and Sacrament: Preaching and the Lord's Supper" in *We Confess the Sacraments*, trans. Norman E. Nagel (CPH, 1985): 11-35

Wittenberg, Martin. "Church Fellowship and Altar Fellowship in Light of Church History" *Logia* (Reformation 1992): 25-59

Prof. John T. Pless