

All Did Eat, All Did Drink

~ Fr. Chori Jonathin Seraiah ~

Introduction

Article VII of the Thirty-Nine Articles states: "The Old Testament is not contrary to the New." They are in unison with one another in such a way that everything in the Old points to the New, and everything in the New looks back to the Old. They are as child and adult; two forms of the same person: the one revealed word of God growing to full clarity. As we can look back on the life of a man and see roots of his character in his childhood, so we can look back in the Old Testament and see the roots of the New Testament, not yet clear to the Patriarchs, but made clear to the Apostles by the work of the Holy Spirit Himself.

Hence, we should be able to see the Old revealed in the New and the New hidden in the Old. Yet, when we come to the issue of the sacraments — particularly for this study on the Eucharist — we find that not much is hidden. In fact, the root and direction of Communion is clearly pointed out to us in such a way that the growing return to the church's practice for the first millennium — communing all who are baptized, regardless of age — has more than historical precedent; it has biblical endorsement.

Who is Eating and Drinking?

There was a certain woman who loved and served the Lord daily. Her husband was a faithful man. She found that she was pregnant with their first child, and they brought the news to their church leaders. They were congratulated and then told by the pastor that he was terribly sorry, but the new mother would need to be excommunicated. In shock they asked for an explanation. The pastor said that since the unborn child would not be allowed to receive

communion, she would need to be excommunicated until the child was finished nursing. In dismay, the couple left the meeting. They returned home confused and depressed. The reader may find this to be a strange story, but though it has likely never happened, it gives a perspective that is useful for our discussion.

The Lord our God has made it abundantly clear that the unborn child partakes of all nutrition that the mother does; including ritual and sacramental food. Whatever our understanding is of the Eucharist and its recipients, this fact ought to play a part in our decision-making process.

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years. And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name *was* Manoah; and his wife *was* barren, and bare not. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou *art* barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean *thing*: For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance *was* like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he *was*, neither told he me his name: But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean *thing*: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. (Judges 13:1-7 — AV)

In Numbers 6 where the requirements and restrictions for Nazarite service are given, there is no mention of someone serving as a Nazarite “from the womb” as it is found here. The assumption is that those who take the vows will do so willingly later in life. Yet Samson is chosen by God even before his conception, to be a Nazarite during his entire life (which is a remarkable testimony to the grace of God, especially given the character of Samson’s life). In spite of this special appointment by God, there is no provision given to allow Samson to neglect the Nazarite dietary laws until an older age. As with all who take the vows, Samson had to abide by the Nazarite dietary laws throughout his life. Yet it does not merely begin when he is a youth; in fact, it comes before he is even conceived. While still in the womb, Samson was receiving nourishment from his mother, and thus, she had to abide by the Nazarite dietary laws for his sake.

Were the Lord to have overlooked this issue, I doubt any of us would have ever considered it. If any did notice, it would probably be chalked up to a special liberty by which God allowed that law to be ignored until his birth. Yet He does not overlook the issue. He sovereignly chose to call Samson before his conception, even though Samson himself could not do any actual service as a Nazarite until many years later. Whatever God’s reasons, it provides a remarkable testimony to His concept of ritual and ceremonial food as partaken by the unborn. They eat whatever the mother eats, even in the arena of specially declared sacred or common foods.

Aside from the fact that this is another clear statement that life begins at conception, there is something else that must be noticed. Even though Samson never actually has contact with the food that his mother consumed, the nutrients that are fed to him in the womb are considered by God either to be clean or unclean. Were she to consume food that was prohibited for a Nazarite, then Samson would be consuming it also. If he needed to

partake of a particular food, his mother needed to partake; if he needed to abstain from a particular food, his mother needed to abstain. In God’s order of things, ritual foods are received by the unborn infant in full strength; even to the degree of making one clean or unclean.

Consider also the other ritual meals and festivals that the Hebrews were commanded to participate in. This means that all unborn children partook of the first Passover; all unborn children partook of the feast of tabernacles; all unborn children ate the various burnt offerings, sacrifices, and freewill offerings that the entire household was commanded to eat (see Deut 12:6-7). This was not because of any accident — God created the pre-birth growth process this way.

The ramifications of this for Holy Communion are staggering. Every unborn Christian child is partaking of the body and blood of Christ each time his mother does (regardless of the theology of the parents). For children of parents who will bar them from the table until they make a profession of faith, the child goes through an amazing set of stages: first he is a communicant without any profession of faith, then he is ex-communicated until he can make a profession, then he is re-communicated.

There is another factor that is often missed in the discussion of the sacraments. There are some who point out that confirmation usually preceded the eucharist. This is overcome in the Eastern Orthodox church by the practice of chrismation. The newly baptized child is chrismated instead of confirmed and then immediately receives his first communion. Some Anglicans have encouraged a return to this practice. Regardless of our understanding of confirmation and its relationship to one’s first reception of communion, the church must come to terms with the fact that God has ordained that an unconfirmed (even unbaptized!) covenant child receive the Eucharist before he is born.

Even if the mother were to cease partaking when she learns she is with child, that discovery does not come until at least four to five weeks after the child was conceived; that leaves a good deal of time for the mother to have partaken of the Eucharist multiple times.

This is even more remarkable for those Christians who keep their children from the font until they make a profession of faith. Considering the fact that these Christians claim that it is wrong for “unprofessing” children to come to the table, there is an unavoidable dilemma here. The only consistent behavior for these parents (not to mention their pastors) is to bar the mother from the table until after the child is finished nursing! Truly if it is wrong to give the Eucharist to these children, then everything possible must be done to keep them from it – even if that means that others must suffer.

There is no reason to think that this is extreme. The Jewess who was experiencing her monthly cycle was ritually unclean and had to be excluded from the temple practices (Lev 15:19ff). Even her husband would be unclean if he touched her. She was not in sin, but she suffered because of her physical condition as a woman. The same principle would apply today for the woman who is ritually unable to partake of the Eucharist, since a child who was not yet allowed to partake of the bread and wine would prohibit her from partaking. Yet, no such known rule or practice exists.

All of the All

A further examination of the place of children in regard to ritual food consumption is helpful at this point. Turning again to the Old Testament, there is an instance where the people of God – men, women and children – are given special food by the Lord Himself:

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin,

after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and *there was* no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore *is* this *that* thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not? (Ex. 17:1-7)

In this passage, we see the provision of water for the people of God under Moses. The continued refrain of “all the congregation” begins this passage the same as we find it many others,¹ and this is important when it is seen how frequently this reminder of the unity of the people of God shows up. It was the entire congregation; not a portion, or a select group. It was the whole congregation that journeyed; the whole congregation was at Rephidim; the whole congregation thirsted and murmured against Moses. Notice their specific inclusion of the children of the congregation in their complaints: “us and our children” in verse 3. Yes, they did include the cattle in that phrase, but God says that Moses is to strike the rock so that “the people may drink” (vs. 6); the cattle are essentially an afterthought. The people naturally included their children in the grumblings. God also included their children, both

when He later made provision for them, as well as the times that He brought judgment upon them (see Num 16:27).

This is typical of the language that we find in other places in the Pentateuch: the people of God saw themselves as a unit that included their children. They did not invent this idea; God taught it to them long before. When the Lord speaks to Abraham He told him that He would establish the covenant between him and his seed after him “in [their] generations for an everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:7). This is spoken to a man who already thought in these terms, for Abraham was one who would “command his children and his household after him,” so that “they [would] keep the way of the Lord” (Gen 18:19).

In Exodus 16, God had already provided quail and manna for the people. Here in Exodus 17, He provides water to drink. God sustains His people in their time of need: men, women and their children. This is almost too obvious to mention it, but the point is important. When God provided the manna, when He sent the water from the rock, He gave it that all His people may survive. Yet this was not merely ordinary food. There was something beyond the average nutritional consumption going on here. The Almighty was sending to them both physical and spiritual food, and this food has a unique quality to it. That uniqueness would have been missed were it not for the interpretation of the Apostle Paul that will be seen below.

A Broken Body?

Most of the problems in the Corinthian church stemmed from the issue of division, and it could be argued that the resolution of their divisions encompassed the greater portion of Paul’s first epistle to them. The Apostle Paul did not discuss in particular the place of children in the church in the first letter to Corinth, and this is likely because it did not come up in debate or cause division itself. Whatever it was that Paul taught and

practiced, he did not see the need to defend it here. Yet the divisions that did exist have a direct application to Paul’s understanding of children, so viewing the schism itself will help to point in the right direction for laying out this concept. The following verses give evidence to their divisions:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Cor. 1:10)

For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there* is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? (1 Cor. 3:3)

For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. (1 Cor. 11:18)

As one seeks to understand the schismatic behaviors in the Corinthian church, the relationship to our current discussion can be easily seen. When the Apostle seeks to emphasize how every member of the church is necessary, he speaks in terms of a body. Given this view of the body, how would Paul likely have viewed children? Although he does not mention them in the context of the Eucharist, it is in this same letter that he has already said that they are “holy” (7:14) because of their covenantal status in the Christian home. At the least, the Christian child is separated from the children in the world. This is why he says “else were your children unclean” (7:14) – unclean, as the children of pagans are.

When he later refers to the parts of the body of Christ, he mentions those members “which seem to be more feeble” (12:22), and those that “lacked” honor (12:24). Paul says these “lesser” members of the church are “necessary” (12:22), even though we tend to think that they may be unimportant and easily dispensed with. Whoever these “feeble” members were, they were clearly

being considered by some to be less spiritual and therefore less significant in the church. Christians often think that children have an immature faith²; they are treated as less significant because they contribute less to the life of the church. Thus even though the original “feeble” members, who Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to receive, were likely not children, the point still stands because infants and children are even more “feeble” than whoever it was in the original setting.

With this context in mind, the background of the exhortation in First Corinthians chapter ten is evident: Division had grown out of a faulty concept of superiority within the baptized community. Before the Corinthians are told to examine themselves in chapter eleven, they are told about how God had worked with His people in chapter ten. If one reads chapter eleven as though chapter ten does not exist, then he is mutilating Paul’s words. Because of the clear sacramental significance of what Paul says in chapter ten, all of the words in chapter eleven must be read in light of these previous words:

And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” (1 Cor. 10:2-4)

All were baptized; all ate; all drank. It would seem odd (if not foolish) for Paul to make a statement like this if it did not fit in with his overall understanding of sacramental theology.³ If, however, Paul’s sacramental theology is fed by what we have seen above with Samson as well as with the “body” theology, then this would be natural. Although his concept of the unity of the body is not explained until chapter twelve and following, it is not disconnected from what he says here. The body is one cohesive unit, and the members are all participants in the life of the body. In fact, it may be better to say that Paul’s theology of Israel is what

feeds his theology of the body of the church. Since all of Israel was “baptized” and all of Israel “ate and drank” of Christ, therefore all of the church is a unified body and the sacramental life of that body must reflect that unity.

The fact that Paul is interpreting this meal in sacramental fashion is important. For any of the Israelites to have been excluded from the manna and quail, or from the water from the Rock, would have meant their starvation. It was not a small bite and drink as the Eucharist is today. Clearly they all partook, and Paul knew this. Yet he still goes on to emphasize that “all” ate and drank sacramentally. If he merely said “they ate and drank” the emphasis to “all” doing so would be lost. For our understanding of who is to eat and drink at the altar today, the implications of all eating the “same spiritual meat . . . [and] drink” is obvious.

Considering the ramifications of these “all” statements in chapter ten will enlighten our theology of the sacraments. Once when asked to show just one passage where infants were baptized, I referred to 1 Corinthians 10:2. The questioner responded: “well that doesn’t count, it’s the Old Testament.” Although the event was in the Old Testament, the reference is in the New, and this reference is given just a few verses before Paul speaks of how the oneness of the body relates to its participation in the Eucharist. In 1 Corinthians 10:17 Paul does not say, “most of us are partakers of that one bread because we are mostly one bread ourselves.” He does say, though, that “we are all partakers of that one bread” because we are ourselves “one bread.”

There apparently was a group in the Corinthian church that was excluding from communion those whom they saw as “feeble” or less spiritual. Yet this was not merely an exclusion from the coffee and donuts after service. It was an exclusion from the primary rite of Christian unity: the Eucharist. In 11:21 he points out the fact that

some of the Corinthian saints had barred other saints from the table merely because of their own gluttony. Whatever the circumstances, the Apostle was upset with them and gives one of his sharpest critiques by saying that they are despising the church and shaming those “feeble” members (1 Cor. 11:22). Paul says that there is nothing praiseworthy about what they are doing.

The Whole Body at the Rail

Paul’s concept of the place of every baptized member of Christ’s Church is laid out in first Corinthians, in some of the most explicit terms of any of his epistles. There exists a radical equality of every member of the church before God. Knowing the sectarian spirit that prevailed in the Corinthian congregation, this should not surprise anyone.

In accord with Paul’s statements in 10:2-4 and 10:17, he declares that all are baptized and partaking of the Spirit in 12:13, and this is essential if the church is to have true unity (12:12). A paraphrastic application of a few verses will help here: “If the baby shall say, because I am not the adult I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body?” (12:15); “if the whole body were an adult, where were the children?” (12:17); “and the adult cannot say of the infant, I have no need of thee” (12:21); “those children of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour” (12:23); “and whether one child suffer, all the members suffer with it” (12:26). Notice that this last phrase is not a command, it is a statement of fact: if a child is “suffering” then the body is suffering also (whether it knows it or not).

At this point it can be seen how Paul would have viewed the relation of little children to the Eucharist. God provided Christ for the infants in Israel to partake of; He acknowledged the sacred food consumption of unborn infants; the children in the Church

were holy members of the body of Christ; as full members they could not be excluded from full participation in worship. Those who were told to examine themselves were not infants or children; they were those who would be willing to exclude *any* baptized member of the body from the table merely because of some perceived weakness. The command, “let a man examine himself”, does not exclude our children from communion. Rather, it requires that they be present, because the only other option is a division in the body of Christ that cuts to the very heart of what “communion” means.

Would Paul have barred from the Eucharist those who were baptized, had partaken of the Spirit, were a part of the body of Christ, were going to receive resurrection bodies, were chosen by Christ to be in His church, were considered holy, and were to receive more honor than the rest? The proposal is hard to stomach. It reeks of radical division and disunity. It has to do with the rending of the body of Christ. This is the very issue that Paul attacks so vehemently in 1 Corinthians: there are to be no second-class Christians; all are one in Christ. The Eucharist is the one place more than any other that Paul attacks the disunity of the Corinthians. He specifically condemns their celebration where one partook and another was left hungry (11:21). Are not our children being left hungry when they cannot partake of the body and blood of the very Savior Who baptized them? the very Savior they are taught to pray to? the very Savior Who promises to receive the praise that He inspires on their lips?

Here then is a consistent train of thought in Paul’s writing: all Israel partook of the “pre-cross” sacred meal in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:2-4); all of the church partakes of the Eucharist (1 Cor. 10:17 & 12:13); therefore, “examine yourself” to see if you are acknowledging this essential unity in heart and practice (1 Cor. 11:28). If you are excluding any baptized member of the body for any reason other than disciplinary

barring, then you are in danger of yourself eating unworthily (1 Cor. 11:29).

The necessary participation of every member of the body is the very reason that he commands those who would ignore this truth to “examine themselves.” Without a realization of the necessity for every member of the body to participate in the Eucharist, we are left with division in the one place where union is supposed to be predominant. If anything, Paul’s command to examine oneself is a warning for us *not* to exclude the “feeble” children, rather than a warning to exclude them. What, in any of this, corresponds to the idea that little children must be able to give a profession of personal faith, before being allowed to act like members of the church that they have already been made members of?

When churches keep their children from receiving the body and blood of Christ, what are they saying to them? Regardless of what they may want to say, they are communicating to these children (and to one another) that the “feeble” members have to become strong before they will be allowed to receive Jesus. Yet Paul proclaims that we cannot say to these “less honourable” members, “I have no need of you” (12:21), because in doing so those members are made to suffer, and then the whole body will suffer (12:26). The church certainly has need of them, especially at a time when the cohesion of the body is supposed to be expressed. Christians today need to learn from the faith of these children, just as Jesus told the Apostles (Matt. 18:1-6).

Table Manners

My wife and I have always used the dinner table as the primary place to begin training our children in discipline. From the earliest days, we bring them to the table with us. We would put them in a baby seat and attach it to one of the chairs so that they were right there with us. As they grew we put them in a high chair. Sitting there, they would watch

us talk, interact, and share our food. They learned what our family community was like, and also what it meant to eat as a family. They heard us speaking and tried to join in by cooing and baby-speak. They would laugh when we laughed. They are created by God to learn by imitation.

We feed our children at the table, even before they are able to eat with utensils. They needed to eat to stay alive, and at the same place that we were feeding them, they were learning what it means to be a part of our family. No, they did not understand why they were eating (except that it satisfied their hunger), and no, they could not give an explanation of proper nutrition. Likewise, children do not need to explain the doctrine of the real presence of Christ, nor distinguish it from the doctrine of transubstantiation, in order to receive the Eucharist. Little children cannot explicate whether Jesus was talking about baptism or conversion when He said “you must be born again.” But if children do not need to explain such things before they are baptized, then how could we add special qualifications to the Eucharist?

In worship, the children are learning to be Christians. How we treat them, what we require of them, what we let them do, and what they hear, all will play a part in the Christians that they grow up to be. If we allow them to ignore the service, stay seated when everyone else is kneeling, and play on the floor while prayers are being said, we are teaching them a certain attitude towards God that will stay with them their entire lives. In the same way, if we go forward to the rail to receive the body and blood and leave the children in the pew, we are teaching them something, and it may not be something we want to teach them. How we explain the Lord’s Supper to our children (assuming that parents do explain it) will affect their theology as an adult.

When the western church took the Eucharist away from the children, it was “moving the ancient landmarks” (Prov. 22:28), and this

was completely contrary to the principles of authoritative tradition. Furthermore, it was not because of a “reforming” tendency or thrust, but because of new theological ideas. Now we have been apart from it for so long that many (most Protestants and many Anglicans) think the prevailing current practice is the norm. I cannot recall how many times I have been asked, “Where did

you come up with this new idea of paedocommunion?” It is not new, and I certainly did not come up with it. It is consistent with the theology of both the Old and New Testaments, and it is necessary for proper church unity. We have to start acting like “one bread” if we ever want to be one in truth.



Chori Jonathin Seraiah was ordained as a priest in the Reformed Episcopal Church. He currently lives in Abingdon, Virginia, with his wife and four children. He also enjoys an ice cold Mackeson Triple Stout and a good pipe.