

November , 1986

Pastor Philip Schupmann  
1910 Richard St.  
Aurora, Illinois 60506

Dear Pastor Schupmann,

This is in response to your letter (n.d.) to President Panning in which you raised a question about a statement in The Shepherd Under Christ that permits the use of grape juice in the Sacrament. The undersigned were asked to respond to your question.

You refer to the sentence in The Shepherd Under Christ in which, as you wrote, "the exegetical determination seems to be made that 'fruit of the vine' is a generic term and therefore can include unfermented grape juice." Then you ask: "Is this really the judgment here or is that a casual statement that slipped in?"

Perhaps it would be good to look at that entire paragraph:

The other element is simply called the "cup" in the various accounts of the institution. That the content of the cup was wine is again a matter of historical knowledge, although no reference in Scripture to this element ever uses the word oinos. The Lord does refer to it as the "fruit of the vine" (Mt 26:29). The church has therefore very properly insisted on grape wine. Wine made from any other fruit should not be used. Since the term used for the contents of the cup is "fruit of the vine," the use of unfermented grape juice in case of an emergency cannot be considered invalid. Nevertheless, the church will avoid all doubt on the part of its members by using fermented fruit of the vine and may at times do so also as a confessional action over against anyone who claims that the use of any alcoholic beverage is sin.

You will note that a number of points are made:

1. That the content of the "cup" Jesus used was without a doubt wine (undoubtedly diluted with water as was the custom of the day);
2. That oinos, the specific word for wine, is not used in any of the institution accounts;
3. That the term "fruit of the vine" is used in Mt 26:29 and that therefore we are not free to use any other kind of wine than grape wine;
4. That the term "fruit of the vine" does not exclude grape juice;

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Instead of wine in Communion

5. That in case of emergency, therefore, the use of grape juice does not invalidate the Sacrament;
6. That, to avoid any doubt and at times as a confessional action, the church will use fermented fruit of the vine.

It is clear from the above, of course, as you also readily acknowledge in your letter, that The Shepherd Under Christ is not advocating the use of grape juice, but rather allowing for its use under extraordinary circumstances. Such a practice is consistent with the historical practice of the WELS. In Schaller's Pastorale Praxis (p 45), for example, it states:

Grape juice, wie man es jetzt haben kann, ist ebenfalls Gewaechs des Weinstocks, so dass gegen dessen Gebrauch im Notfalle nichts Triftiges eingewandt werden koennte (Grape juice, such as is now available, is likewise fruit of the vine, so that nothing cogent can be said against its use in case of necessity)

In his Dogmatics, Prof. J. P. Meyer raises the question, "Is the term 'fruit of the vine' broad enough to cover grape juice?" He does not answer that question in writing. One of the undersigned (Prof. Gawrisch), however, has recorded in his Seminary notes Prof. Meyer's answer: "'Fruit of the vine' is broad enough to include grape juice."

Pieper's Dogmatics also, by the way, does not absolutely rule out the use of grape juice. That Pieper recognizes that the fruit of the vine can be grape juice is seen in his concern that pasteurized grape juice might no longer be the fruit of the vine (Vol III, p 354), a needless concern, it appears. Just as pasteurized milk remains milk, so pasteurized grape juice remains grape juice. His point, as is true also of The Shepherd Under Christ, is that wine should be used lest we cause doubts to arise.

On what basis are statements such as the above made? They are based on this principle: Only what the Scriptures specifically require can be said to be something that is essential. In this particular situation, if the Scriptures had said oinos, then wine must be used. But since the Scriptures simply speak of "the cup" and then define the content of the cup as "fruit (geneema, "offspring," "product") of the vine," then wine cannot be insisted upon as being essential to the Sacrament.

We can draw a parallel with the bread. We know that unleavened bread was used the first time the Sacrament was offered. In the words of institution, however, unleavened bread is not specifically mentioned, but rather simply "bread." We are therefore free to use bread in either its leavened or unleavened form; but, since Jesus certainly used unleavened bread, we will use it also unless extraordinary circumstances would require the use of leavened bread.

So with the cup. We know that ~~grape wine~~ <sup>grape juice</sup> was used the first time the Sacrament was offered. In the words of institution, however, "wine" is not specifically mentioned, but rather simply "the cup," described

as the "fruit of the vine." We are therefore free to use the fruit of the vine in either its fermented or unfermented form; but, since Jesus certainly used grape wine, we will use it also, yet without excluding the possibility, under extraordinary circumstances, of using grape juice.

As to Lenski's statement that "this fruit of the vine" must be referring to wine and that therefore wine must be used, we offer the same response. There is no doubt that "this fruit of the vine," i.e., what Jesus' disciples had just drunk, was wine, mixed, no doubt, with water. But such a statement is not saying, "Wine (oinos) is essential to the Sacrament." It is the fruit of the vine that is specifically mentioned and which is therefore essential if it is to be a valid Sacrament.

We can draw another parallel with the bread. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 the Apostle Paul repeats the words of institution. Then, in v 26, he says, "Whenever you eat this (touton) bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." "This bread," referring to the bread Jesus used in the Sacrament, was without a doubt unleavened bread. But since the Scriptures do not make unleavened bread a specific requirement, but simply say "bread," we therefore do not have to be conscience-bound to use only unleavened bread.

You realize, of course, that we are in no way advocating the use of grape juice in the Sacrament. We are simply seeking to allow that which God's Word allows; although the circumstances when grape juice might be used would be few and far between, e.g., possibly with an alcoholic, although not necessarily even then. Many alcoholics have no trouble receiving the wine in Holy Communion. One who is very hesitant to receive wine, however, because he fears the effects of even a small amount of alcohol, should not on that account be deprived of the Lord's Supper since it is the fruit of the vine, not wine, that is essential to the Sacrament.

We hope that this has helped to answer your question in a satisfactory manner. We are sending a copy of this letter, as you requested, to Pastors Ziesemer and Bartels.

Cordially in Christ,

The Faculty Subcommittee

David J. Valleskey, chrm.  
Wilbert R. Gawrisch  
Armin W. Schuetze