

LORD'S SUPPER. †One of the Christian sacraments, in which the Church gathers to participate in a ceremonial meal of bread and wine that symbolize the body and blood of Christ. The celebration of the sacrament proclaims the death of Christ as the source of life in him.

I. Institution

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus on the night of his betrayal (Matt. 26:20–29; Mark 14:17–25; Luke 22:14–30). The name Lord's Supper occurs only at 1 Cor. 11:20, but the intention of a ceremony of memorial, fellowship, communion, proclamation, and anticipation is clear in the New Testament passages that deal with the institution and celebration of the meal. On the first day of Unleavened Bread, as he and his disciples were eating the last Passover, Jesus announced that one of the twelve would betray him. He then blessed and broke the bread and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Concerning the cup, he said, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:26–28). *See* LAST SUPPER.

II. Significance

Several aspects of the institution of the Lord's Supper indicate its meaning. First, most modern interpreters agree that the literal elements are in some way symbolic of the atonement of Christ. The bread and wine are metaphors of the work of Christ on the cross. As bread is eaten for sustenance of life, so the offering of the body of Christ provides life for the Christian. As the wine is poured out and gives life, so Jesus poured out his life on behalf of many for their forgiveness. The elements of the Supper are then visible words that convey the teaching of Jesus concerning redemption.

The aspect of betrayal as the context of the institution of this sacrament in the Gospels is also referred to by Paul (1 Cor. 11:23). The followers of Jesus, in celebrating the Supper, show their allegiance to him in contrast to the treachery of Judas. By celebrating the Supper, Christians are not mourning Jesus' death or reenacting the emotions of the event, but are showing their appreciation of it as the basis of their life; the Supper shows the Christian's relationship to Christ—fidelity to the Lord.

Another aspect of the Lord's Supper is its relationship to the Passover and the transition to the new covenant. The Supper was instituted during the Passover feast and was apparently intended as an extension of it. Paul suggests a reinterpretation of the Old Testament Passover when he says that the Church is unleavened, and that "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (5:7). The Church no longer celebrates Passover because it now celebrates the Lord's Supper instead; the Supper is the sign of the blood (Exod. 12:13) and the mark of the distinct redemption of the Church on the basis of the death of Christ. The statement of Jesus, "This is my blood of the covenant," was taken to mean that with his death the new covenant would be established (Mark 14:24). The Supper portends the fulfillment and accomplishment of the primary purpose of Jesus' ministry; he was about to reach his goal—his hour had come (cf. John 12:23; 13:1; 17:1; cf. 7:6, 8), his "time" was "at hand" (Matt. 26:18).

In the institution of the Lord's Supper the participation of all of the disciples was emphasized in the words, "Drink of it, all of you." The intention of sharing, communion, and participation was identified and passed on as an integral part of the celebration, as can be seen from the statement of Paul, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation (RSV mg. "communion") in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16).

The substitutionary nature of the atonement and the forgiveness of sins are important aspects of the Lord's Supper as well. Jesus said that the blood of the covenant would be "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Just as in the Old Testament the covenant was ratified by the shedding and sprinkling of blood, so the new covenant was established in the same way, and this is symbolized in the Supper: "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22). Resurrection was an important aspect of the institution of the Lord's Supper; Jesus said, "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29). The apostles in particular understood this as a reference to the resurrection, and later they referred to the fact that God had made him manifest to those who "ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:41). This aspect of the celebration of the Supper looks forward with joy to the coming of the Lord, the resurrection, and the kingdom. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of "the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

III. Theological Reflection

The interpretation of the celebration of the Lord's Supper (Eucharist, from Gk. *eucharistéō* "be thankful, give thanks") involves a critical point of difference between Roman Catholic and Protestant theology. Roman Catholics take literally the phrases "This is my body" and "This is my blood." In this interpretation, the elements (bread and wine) are wondrously converted into the actual body and blood of Christ at each celebration of the Mass (transubstantiation) and then offered to God as a new sacrifice of Christ. In Roman Catholic theology, the sacrament of Holy Eucharist is an offering that accomplishes something—it is a means of grace. In Protestant theology, the body of Christ was offered to God once on the cross—a historic, never-to-be-repeated sacrifice. The Lord's Supper is therefore not a sacrifice but a symbolic celebration, a reminder, of the fact that on the cross Christ has already accomplished redemption for mankind.

Bibliography. J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: 1977); I. H. Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: 1981); E. Schweizer, *The Lord's Supper According to the New Testament* (Philadelphia: 1967).¹

Lord's Supper, The

Lord's Supper, the, the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples prior to his death. The early Christian celebration known as the Lord's Supper receives this name from Paul's reference to 'the supper of the Lord' in 1 Cor. 11:20. Its origin is Jesus' last meal with his disciples. Even if the synoptic Gospels are correct in describing this 'last supper' as a Passover meal (in John,

¹ Myers, A. C. (1987). *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary* (663–664). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Jesus' last meal is eaten *before* Passover), that meal should still be viewed in the context of the table fellowship that was a distinctive feature of Jesus' ministry.

The words 'after supper' in the tradition quoted by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:23-25 indicate that the Lord's Supper was originally a full meal, introduced by the blessing and breaking of the bread and concluded by the blessing and passing of the cup. Today, however, it is widely assumed that by the time 1 Corinthians was written the bread and cup were taken together at the *end* of the common meal, as a special sacramental act.

In earliest Christianity the Lord's Supper was pervaded by intense eschatological expectation. Fervent hope for the new age, to be inaugurated by the risen and exalted Jesus upon his return to earth, is obvious in Mark 14:25 and Luke 22:18 and is echoed in 1 Cor. 11:26.

Most scholars think that the words spoken over bread and cup were a crucial part of the Lord's Supper liturgy from the beginning. Nevertheless, it is not possible to determine what the original 'words of institution' were, for, as even a cursory comparison shows, the different versions are by no means identical in their details (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-22; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; cf. John 6:35-59). In all the Gospels, as in 1 Corinthians, the bread and wine are connected with Jesus' redemptive death, but the different writings reflect distinctive understandings of the Lord's Supper.

1 Corinthians, in fact, reveals two views of the Supper—that of Paul's 'opponents' and that of the apostle himself. Apparently some of the Corinthian Christians thought that they could participate in pagan cults at will because the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper ensured salvation. Paul, in response, draws a parallel between the eucharistic bread and wine and the spiritual food and drink (manna and water from the rock) that nourished the ancestors in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:1-4). He argues that as the ancient 'sacrament' did not protect the ancestors from God's judgment when they committed idolatry, so the Lord's Supper will not magically protect Christians who partake of the cup of demons (1 Cor. 10:6-22). The cup of blessing is rather a 'koinonia of the blood of Christ'; the bread is a 'koinonia of the body of Christ.' The Greek word *koinonia* can be translated 'fellowship,' 'communion,' or 'sharing.' Some think that Paul's emphasis is on partaking of bread and wine as a means of communing with the Crucified and Risen One; others see partaking as a means of securing the benefits of Jesus' saving death. In either case, playing on a second sense of 'body of Christ,' Paul affirms that those who share bread and cup are bound together with each other: the many are made one by partaking of the one loaf (1 Cor. 10:17).

The apostle's emphasis is similar in 1 Corinthians 11, where he excoriates the Corinthians for the class consciousness and insensitivity to the poor that keeps the common meal from being the *Lord's* Supper. The tradition he quotes in 11:23-25 reminds the Corinthians of the meaning of Christ's death: the bread re-presents the body 'for you'; the shared cup actualizes the new covenant effected through Jesus' death (see Jer. 31:31-34). If the Supper is truly to 'proclaim the Lord's death until he comes,' it must be marked by loving concern for every member of the body. To eat and drink without 'discerning the body' is to incur divine judgment (11:29).

In Mark's words of institution (14:22-25) the phrase 'my blood of the covenant' probably echoes Exod. 24:8, and 'poured out for many' stresses the atoning efficacy of Jesus' death. Matthew makes the point even more explicit by adding 'for the forgiveness of sins' to Mark's cup formula (Matt. 26:28). Among the Gospels and 1 Corinthians, Luke's cup-bread-cup order is unique. Many scholars think that Luke's 'long text' (that is, 22:19b-20—not included in all ancient manuscripts—as well as 22:17-19a) is dependent on Mark plus a tradition similar to that

quoted by Paul. Luke (long text) is the only Gospel that, like 1 Corinthians 11, includes Jesus' command 'Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the Gospel of John Jesus does not institute the Lord's Supper during the last meal with his disciples, but the 'bread of life' discourse in John 6 (vv. 25-59) likely reflects the understanding of the Lord's Supper in the Johannine community. Scholars disagree, however, about what that understanding was. Jesus speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood as the means of attaining eternal life (6:53-58). At least three interpretations of these words are possible. First, the language is sacramental: when believers eat the bread and drink the wine they are partaking of sacred food and drink that gives eternal life. (Compare the view of Ignatius of Antioch, who in the second century described the eucharistic bread as 'a medicine of immortality' [Ign. *Eph.* 20:2].) Second, the language of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood dramatically suggests that one must *appropriate* God's salvation, made available through Jesus' death, by being spiritually united with the Crucified and Risen One. Third, in light of the emphasis at John 6:63, the shocking and offensive language in John 6 (e.g., vv. 51, 52-57; cf. v. 60) points to the scandal of the incarnation: to have eternal life one must commit oneself to Jesus as the revealer sent from God, the Word become flesh (John 1:14). *See also* Jesus Christ; Passover, The; Sacraments; Worship.

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'S SUPPER,SUPPER,THE LORD'S,LAST SUPPER,TH²

² Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row, P., & Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). *Harper's Bible dictionary* (1st ed.) (576–577). San Francisco: Harper & Row.