


<p>The Lord’s Supper: A Comparative Study of the Reformed and Pentecostal Model</p>			<p>Cultural Studies</p>
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<p>Dr. G. U. Ntamu</p>	<p>Department of Religious and Cultural Studies. University of Calabar, Calabar-Nigeria.</p>		
<p>Ekpenyong Obo Ekpenyong</p>	<p>Department of Religious and Cultural Studies. University of Calabar, Calabar-Nigeria.</p>		

Abstract

The Lord’s Supper is a ritual which Lord Jesus Christ himself instituted and designed for the church to practice as a memorial of his death. Jesus instituted the ordinance of the Last Supper also known as the Lord’s Supper on the night of His betrayal. The Lord’s Supper, also known as “Holy Communion” is practiced by all Christian Churches. Yet, it has in fact kept back, and at a standstill does remain, right from history, what separate Christian groups from each other. This work analysed and explored comparatively the differences between the Reformed and the Pentecostal models of the Lord’s Supper. The paper concluded among others, that their major point of departure is the Reformed accept as true the actual attendance of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper spiritually or symbolically.

Introduction

While baptism is the initiatory rite, the Last Supper also known as the Lord’s Supper is the progressing ritual of the church. Erickson has defined the Lord’s Supper as “a rite in which Christ himself established for the church to practice as a commemoration of his death” (363). Stewart in the similar way has defined the Lord’s Supper as “the name given by the Apostle Paul to the event that commemorated the death of Jesus Christ on the cross” (1). On the night of His betrayal, Jesus instituted the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. According to the Christian Gospels, the Lord’s Supper was the final food the Lord Jesus ate with his Apostles and disciples previous to his death. Supporting this assertion, Cross and Livingstone write: “The Last Supper is the final meal that, according to Christian belief, Jesus shared with his Apostles in Jerusalem before his crucifixion” (958).

The Lord’s Supper supplies the basic tenet for the Eucharist, also known as “Holy Communion” or “The Last Supper”. According to Oxford History of Christian Worship, “scholars once looked to the Last Supper as the source of early Christian Eucharist traditions”. Every Christian Church practices “The Holy Communion”. Up till now on the other hand, there are a lot of diverse interpretations. It has really kept back, and at a standstill does continue, right from history, what keep apart difference Christian groups. At once, the Lord’s Supper is an issue which together and divides Christianity.

1. Significance of the Lord’s Supper

With the words “the new testament in my blood”; Jesus announces the inauguration of the New Testament or covenant, based on His sacrificial death (Matt. 26: 28, 1 Cor. 11: 25). Scripture teaches that the new covenant could only become valid by the death of Christ (Heb. 9: 15-18). The Last Supper is described in four passages: Matt. 26: 26-29; Luke 22: 15-20; 1 Cor. 11: 23-25; Mark 14: 22-25. Its significance according to The Full Life Study Bible relates to the past, the present, and the future.

1. The Past Significance

a. It is a remembrance (Gk. Anamnesis; “1 Cor. 11: 24-26, Luke 22: 19) of the death of Christ on Calvary for the believer’s redemption from sin and condemnation. Through the Lord’s Supper, we are once again confronted with the saving death of Christ and its redemptive significance for our lives”. The death of Christ is our ultimate motivation against falling into sin and for abstaining from all appearances of evil (1 Thes. 5: 22).

b. It is a thanksgiving (Gk. Eucharistia) for the blessings and salvation of God made available by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (Matt. 26: 27-28; Mark 14: 23; 1 Cor. 11: 24; Luke 22: 19).

1. The Present Significance

a. “The Lord’s Supper is a fellowship (Gk. Koinonia) with Christ and a participation in the benefits of this sacrificial death, as well as a fellowship with the other members of the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 10: 16-17). In this supper with the risen Lord, He as the host becomes present in a special way (cf. Matt. 18: 20; Luke 24: 35).

b. It is a recognition and proclamation of the new covenant (Gk. Kaine diatheke) by which believers reaffirm the Lordship of Christ and our commitment to do His will, to remain loyal, to resist sin, and to identify ourselves with the mission of Christ (Luke 22: 20; 1Cor. 11: 25; Matt. 26: 28; Mark 14: 24).

1. The Future Significance

a. “The Lord’s Supper is a foretaste of the future kingdom of God and the future messianic banquet when all believers will be present with the Lord (Matt. 8: 11; 22: 1-14; Mark 14: 25; Luke 13: 29; 22: 17-18, 30)”.

b. It looks forward to the imminent return of Christ for His people (1 Cor. 11: 26) and dramatizing the prayer, “Thy kingdom come” (Matt. 6: 10, cf. Rev. 22: 20) (1786-1787). At the Lord’s Supper, all the above significances are made meaningful only if we come before the Lord in true faith, sincere prayer, humility, and with total commitment to God, His word and His will.

Speaking on the significance of the Lord’s Supper, Ryle in his part affirmed “that it was ordained for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and of the benefits which we thereby receive. The bread which in the Lord’s Supper is broken, given, and eaten, is meant to remind us of Christ’s body given on the cross for our sins. The wine which is poured out and received is meant to remind us of Christ’s bloodshed on the cross for our sins. He that eats that bread and drinks that wine is reminded, in the most striking and forcible manner, of the benefits Christ has obtained for his soul, and of the death of Christ as the hinge and turning point on which all those benefits depend” (2). In collaboration with the above scholars, Piper asserts that the last supper is important to Christians for what it commemorates the suffering and death of their Lord and Saviour. He also adds that the significance of the Last Supper is recognized with the incredibly truth that it was established by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It was His personal request that we remember Him in this way (1). From the above, we can infer that the Lord’s Supper is believed to be seen as a monument to our Lord Jesus Christ. His significance also is based on the truth that it is the only New Testament church law reaffirmed by the exalted Lord Jesus in the scripture. This made the observing of the Lord’s Supper a serious business and should therefore be done in a totally respectful manner only to honour Christ Jesus. Its significance is also seen from the fact that Jesus Christ began this exercise on the very night when He was betrayed, in the shade of the cross. Christians are likewise to live in the similar way in the shade of their own individual cross and death to self now like their Lord and Master.

2. Major Views about the Lord’s Supper

2.1 The Reformed View

The Reformed view holds “that Christ is present in the Lord’s Supper, but not physically or bodily. Rather, his presence in the sacrament is spiritual or dynamic. Using the sun as an illustration, Calvin asserted that Christ is present influentially. The sun remains in the heavens, yet its warmth and light are present on earth. So the radiance of the spirit conveys to us the communion of Christ’s flesh and blood” (Erickson 365). The Reformed observation present the bread and wine as symbols of the actual, factual dead body of Christ that was crucified in the past and now is in heaven at the right hand of his father. However we suppose that there is an actual feeding taking place on Christ spiritually by confidence and not on his physical body, except on his actual, divine presence. This is proven by Romans chapter 8 verses 9-11, “it is by the spirit and only by the spirit that Christ dwells in us”.

According to Erickson, the idea that we really consume Christ’s body and sip his blood is ridiculous. Quite, factual communicants are religiously nourished as the Holy Spirit brings them into faster link with the person of Christ (365). We can therefore infer that although a believer can nurture himself/herself anytime and wherever on the

presence of Christ in his word, there is a particular nutritious obtainable in consumption of the Lord's Supper and hearing and listening to the preaching of the word of God. The elements of the Holy Communion represent the body and blood of Lord Jesus, and they also seal. It is in this vein that Berkhof suggests that "the Lord's Supper seals the love of Christ to believers, giving them the guarantee that all the promises of the covenant and the riches of the gospel are theirs by a divine gift. In exchange for a personal assert on and actual possession of all this wealth, believers expresses faith in Christ as Saviour and promise obedience to him as Lord and King" (651). The participant by taking the elements truly receives a new and continually the vitality of Christ through his/her expression of faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord. Churches in the Reformed tradition practice open communion and only committed Christians can participate in the Lord's Supper. Only ordained ministers have the right to administer the Holy Communion. The Holy Communion has been traditionally celebrated either four times a year or the first Sunday of the month. Some churches celebrate it weekly

2.2. Pentecostal View of the Lord's Supper

Across the whole world today, Christian Churches are celebrating the Lord's Supper which is also known as "communion". This is done in recognition of their oneness and unity in Christ Jesus. However, it is this same Lord's Supper that has led to a lot of historical debate and division within the Christian Churches as there are many different understandings of the meaning of the Last Supper.

Pentecostal view of the Last Supper is a little close to a Zwinglian explanation. This Zwingli view, "emphasized the function of the sacrament in bringing to mind the death of Christ and the efficacy on behalf of the believer. Thus, the Lord's Supper is essentially a memorial of Christ's death" (Hodge 627-628). John Gill, state, very simple that "it is "to show forth the death of Christ till he comes again, to commemorate his sufferings and sacrifice, represent his body broken, and his bloodshed for the sins of his people" (Imork 1). Karkkainen in Kyle Strobel notes "that there are at times emphases on the Holy Spirit's work in the ordinance of communion, pushing it towards something closer to a sacramental understanding" (2). Karkkainen then moves beyond this explanation "to offer emphases of distinction. One such emphasis is the Holy Spirit, noted above; another is the concept of healing applied to the Lord's Supper. Healing, of course, is a central reality in the Pentecostal worldview, and Karkkainen notes: In keeping with ancient Christian tradition in which the Eucharist was depicted as pharmakon or medicine, Pentecostals at times envision partaking in the Lord's Supper as a place for healing" (Strobel 2).

From the above, we can agree that the Pentecostal view of the Last Supper is not anything additional than a commemorative plaque commemorating death the of Christ. Although the Divine present of Christ is spiritually, the real eating of the bread and drinking of the wine shows the recipients' believe in him and in his redemptive work. A Pentecostal perspective of the Last Supper rejects the physical presence of Christ in the elements. The Pentecostals are pushing closer to a Reformed view than a Baptist as it seems to me, at the same time emphasizing their ecclesiological distinctive and pneumatological concerns. Most practice open communion. Only committed Christians can participate in the Lord's Supper.

Churches vary in how often they celebrate the Lord's Supper, such as weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Some Churches allow only ordained people to administer the Lord's Supper. Other Churches allow lay leaders to administer the Holy Communion.

3. Relating the Reformed Model of the Lord's supper to Pentecostal Model

Here we explore the points of convergence and divergence between the Reformed model and the Pentecostal model of the Last Supper. A major point of departure between the Reformed models with the Pentecostal model of the Last Supper is that the Reformed suppose Christ is not literally there inside the elements but there is a divine attendance of Christ. Most Reformed people or Calvinists believe in the actual divine attendance of Christ in the Holy Communion. Even though the elements do not experience transformation, Jesus presence in the Holy Communion is

not simply spiritual or symbolic. It is real. The Reformed believed the Holy Spirit unites the believers with the risen Christ who is in heaven in the Holy Communion. They also held that the Last Supper is a sacrament as well as a means of grace. That through, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, believers are spiritually nourished, and restored in a special way. This view affirms the importance of faith in receiving the benefits of the sacrament. Churches in the Reformed tradition practice open communion and only committed Christians can partake in the Holy Communion.

The Last Supper has been traditionally celebrated either four times a year or the first Sunday of the month. Some churches celebrate it weekly, whereas, the Pentecostals hold a view called the memorial view. In this view, Christ is said to be either spiritually present or only symbolically present. Pentecostals reject the idea of a “real attendance” of Christ in the Holy Communion. To the Pentecostals, the Holy Communion commemorates Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. It benefits participants’ spiritual growth in a similar way that renewing wedding vows may strengthen and nurture a marriage. In this way, the Lord’s Supper is another form of proclamation, like preaching or worshipping.

The point of convergence between the Reformed model and Pentecostal model of the Lord’s Supper is that both agree that only committed Christians can participate in the Holy Communion. They also agree that Last Supper has been traditionally celebrated either four times a year or the first Sunday of the month. Some churches celebrate it weekly. Another point of convergence is that both agree that only ordained ministers can administer the Holy Communion.

Conclusion

The Lord’s Supper also known as the Holy Communion is a directive prearranged by the Lord Jesus Christ to each Church age believer to bring into commemoration His unique person and finished work on the cross (Matthew 26:26-35; Luke 22:19-20), both of which provide the foundation meant for fellowship with God and each other as members of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). We act fine to give close attention to what happens at our Lord’s Supper has occupied center stage in the Church’s life. The Last Supper has forever been the major pull in Christian Churches. It has for all time been the prime-time event. The Holy Communion has for all time been on the whole major part of corporate worship in the local church. It was the one thing indispensable.

The point of convergence between the Reformed model and Pentecostal model of the Lord’s Supper is that both agree that only committed Christians can participate in the Lord’s Supper. They also agree that only the ordained ministers can administer the Lord’s Supper. Their major point of departure is the Reformed believe in the genuine attendance of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion while Pentecostals believe that the Lord Jesus is in attendance in the Holy Communion spiritually or symbolically.

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