

The LORD'S SUPPER during LENT?

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“Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came unto Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the Passover?” (Matt. 26:17) So it was that the disciples found themselves present at the last feast of the Passover and first Supper of the New Testament, the Lord's Supper. A small beginning, nevertheless, the first of many such suppers to follow in the history of Christendom. Many books have been written on this subject and many different forms have emerged yet the supper has remained for all churches an important and special event. As the times near in which we celebrate Christ's death, it would seem appropriate to reappraise our observance of this sacrament especially as to the proper time of its celebration. Rather than become involved in the “substance controversy” we will advance the thesis that both this institution and Lenten season would be more meaningful if celebrated in conjunction.

Our churches following the tradition of the Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-1619, have always celebrated the Lord's Supper every three months as stipulated by the Church Order, Art. 63. The choice of this interval was purely arbitrary, however the church fathers felt that a weekly observance of the sacrament too closely resembled the Romish Mass and tended to lower the sacrament to the role of the commonplace. We certainly agree that the sacrament must remain a special event. On the other hand, the synod felt the sacrament, as a means of grace, should not be withheld from the church for too long a period so as to become a strange and formidable event. For these reasons the Synod said the Lord's Supper should be celebrated every two or three months.

The origin of the supper and the time of its institution, however, was not considered to be significant in its celebration, for no mention is made either of celebrating the Lord's Supper on the day it was instituted or at any time during the Lenten Season. This seems inconsistent because almost all of the other Christian celebrations (Christmas, Easter, Ascension Day) are held at the time of the year in which they originated. Then we ask why this is not the case with the Lord's Supper and would not a change to include the sacrament in the Good Friday service be a change for the better.

Also, we note that in instituting the supper Christ says, “This do in remembrance of me.” In saying this he might mean that in eating this dinner the church should remember his death so that the supper might never become a mere social dinner like the present day Thanksgiving dinner. However, the converse of this statement is also a possibility; that is, in the time of remembrance, the church partakes of the Lord's Supper. In either case the Lord's Supper in its commemorative aspect and the Lenten Season seem to have a natural connection.

We have noted that the church order does not stipulate such a practice but neither does it forbid it. The fathers wisely left the details to the individual consistories. On the consistorial level the Good Friday service could be expanded to include the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Tradition should have very little to do with our final decision, for whether or not it is the practice of our church or that of any other to hold Lord's Supper on Good Friday, this does not prove that this either the Biblical injunction or the spirit of the institution. To say we have never done it, is to advocate a blind conformity to the traditional practices without any attempt to weigh their validity. One should never feel that the reformers made the only justifiable break

with tradition and that any subsequent change is the slaughter of a sacred cow. It is a protestant heritage that not the tradition of the church but only God's Word should rule our lives.

If we go once more to the church order we find this qualification to connection with the proper celebration of the sacrament, "that all superstition be avoided..." By superstition the fathers no doubt refer to the liturgics and formal ceremonies of Catholicism. Ritualism with its false emphasis on the outward sign is indeed dangerous but the other extreme, a complete neglect of both the ritual and the meaning behind it, is equally bad. The redeemed Christian who owes his whole life to Christ's redemptive work can hardly justify an attitude of complacency during the time of the year when He suffered and died that His people might live. We read of Christ that "when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. As grateful sons of Him, let us too steadfastly set our faces to Jerusalem, to the cross, to Christ our only salvation. The Catholics, Lutherans, and the Anglicans seek to concentrate upon the sufferings and death of Christ through fasting and additional partaking of Holy Communion. We frown on this practice because we say that Christ paid the debt and we have been made free, but we often fail to realize we have put away the awareness of God's great act of love we should reconsider any castigation of others.

Let us together then go to the Lord's house on Good Friday and listen to the form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper. "Let us consider now to what end the Lord hath instituted his Supper, namely, that we do it in remembrance of him..." And after Communion we can give thanks to God that "when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. Therefore shall my mouth and heart show forth the praise of God from this time forth forever more."

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