

THE LORD'S SUPPER

IN a brief ceremony Jesus Christ, on the eve of his crucifixion, entertained his apostles exclusively to a special meal of bread and wine with thanksgiving as a memorial of himself. This meal was historic and peculiarly great because of its spiritual significance. St. Paul termed it "The Lord's Supper"

A thorough examination of what is now obtaining in the "Christian" world as compared with the rule and example of the Scripture, reveals that some churches have deviated from what the Initiator of "The Lord's Supper" did, and taught. In this issue of *The Weekly Sermon*, we are going to take a critical view of certain wrong teachings and practices. The Bible provides for criticism and there are striking precedents. Jesus Christ himself criticised the Pharisees for their wrong doctrines and hypocrisy. (Matthew 15: 1-20; 23: 23-33). And true Christians follow his example.

We must first of all go back to the origin of the Lord's Supper. It was instituted by Jesus Christ himself at the time he and the twelve apostles sat together to eat the Passover lamb in the evening of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. St. Matthew states as follows: "And as they were eating. Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." – Matthew 26: 26-28; see also Mark 14: 16-25; Luke 22: 14-20.

Today, the Lord's Supper is commonly known among those professing Christianity as the Holy Communion, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Memorial Supper or the Lord's Evening Meal. But as regards its true meaning, and as to how, when or to whom it should be administered there are disagreements among the various church denominations.

In his book *The Teaching and Practice of the Church of Rome in India*, Rev. W. P. Hares, C.M.S. Missionary, Gojra, Panjab, wrote: "We, who are members of the Church of England or of its daughter Church...are also members of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church founded by Jesus Christ and His Apostles, and as such we celebrate the Holy Communion according to the custom of the Primitive Church...Romanists also claim to be members of the Catholic and Apostolic Church, and they celebrate the Holy Communion, which they more commonly describe as the Mass, after the Roman custom; but when we compare their service of the Mass with our service of Holy Communion a very big difference appears both in doctrine and in practice." (Page 243)

Catholic Church

Now, it will be of interest to know what the Roman Catholic Church teaches about the Lord's Supper. Defining "The Sacrament of the Eucharist", *A Catholic Dictionary* has this to say: "A

sacrament of the New Law in which, under the appearances of bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ are truly, really and substantially present, as the grace-producing food of our souls... The Holy Eucharist is the *living* Christ; as a living body is not without its blood, or living blood without a body so Christ is received whole and entire under either form of bread or wine... The special sacramental effect is the spiritual nutrition of our souls analogous to the effect of food in our bodies.” (page 177).

The mode by which “the wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body of Christ and of the whole substance of the wine into the Blood” is, according to the Council of Trent, known as “transubstantiation”. (Sess. xiii, can. 2) Father Makair in his *True Christian* states: “The Priests of the Catholic Church CHANGE the bread into the body of our Lord, and the wine into His blood.” (Page 72)

No one to our knowledge, has made a stronger case in defence of the Roman Catholic faith about the “Holy Eucharist” than the two well-known Catholic scholars – James Cardinal Gibbons in his *The Faith of our Fathers*, and John A. O’Brien. Ph.D. LL.D., in his *The Faith of Millions*. Cardinal Gibbons opens the chapter on “The Holy Eucharist” with this statement: “AMONG the various dogmas of the Catholic Church there is none, which rests on stronger Scriptural authority than the doctrine of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.”

But if it is proved from the Scripture – which Catholics now admit is the decider of, and guide to Christian arguments on doctrine and practice-that the Catholic teaching on this issue is wrong, then it will not be difficult to see, accept, and follow the TRUTH.

The arguments of Cardinal Gibbons and John O’Brien are similarly based on the same text with reference to the words of Christ in John chapter six. Jesus Christ said: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” The Jews who did not understand the spiritual import of his words disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Then Jesus told them more emphatically: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye, eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” – Read John 6: 48-54.

John O’Brien argued that the words of Christ in the text just quoted were not figurative but literal and that the Jews understood them to be so. He added: “That they understood Jesus to speak literally is unmistakably evident from their immediate response.” (*The Faith of Millions*, page 257.) And Cardinal Gibbons stated: “But the best and the most reliable interpreters of our Saviour’s words are certainly the multitude and the disciples who are listening to Him. They all understood the import of His language precisely as it is explained by the Catholic Church. They believed that our Lord spoke literally of His body and blood.” (*The Faith of our Father.*” page 237.)

Spiritual Things

To say that the unbelieving Jews and faithless disciples whose lack of spiritual understanding was not in doubt, are “the best and the most reliable interpreters of our Saviour’s words”, is very unfortunate. In this the Roman Catholic Church, we say with humility and sincerity, has gone astray. We agree that “the multitude” and those disciples who withdrew from following Jesus took his words as literal hence they were confused. Many of the disciples said: “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (*verse 60*).

Jesus Christ, having known that many of his disciples took his words to be literal and so nursed some grudge for him, asked them, “Doth this offend you?” (*verse 61*) He was aware that those disciples were already carried away by their fleshly thoughts and could not therefore understand spiritual things. (Romans 8: 5, 6; 1 Corinthians 2: 14) Then he said: “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” (*verse 63*) This particular verse (which in the *Douay Version* is *verse 64*) explains the core of the whole matter to the effect that the words of Christ were not literal but spiritual, metaphorical or figurative. Thus the entire structure of the Roman Catholic teaching on this subject is demolished.

The words bread, meat, milk, wine and water are sometimes used in the Bible figuratively to mean the word of God or good doctrine. (Isaiah 55: 1-3; Ephesians 5: 26; Hebrews 5: 12-14) When Christ warned his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees, they mistakenly thought that he meant the ordinary or literal bread; but when he explained further, “then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees”. – Matthew 16: 6-12.

To eat the flesh of a man literally is cannibalism or to drink any kind of blood, even the blood of beasts, is a sin. And Christians are warned to “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood”. (Acts 15: 28, 29; see also Leviticus 17: 10, 14.) How could Christ in violation of the strict law of God have asked his disciples to eat his real flesh or drink his blood literally. It is unthinkable.

Jesus Christ did not say or mean that the bread was his real and substantial living body or that the wine was his actual blood. Rather he pointed out that the wine was the “FRUIT OF THE VINE.” (Matthew 26: 29) The teaching of the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine has no support of the Scriptures; it is a fiction and must be rejected as such.

The truth is that the bread and wine were emblems or representations of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Moffatt's Translation of the Bible renders Matthew 26: 26-28, thus: "Take and eat this, it MEANS MY BODY... Drink of it, all of you; this MEANS MY BLOOD..." This is explicit. The bread and wine are not his very body and blood.

In the Roman Catholic Church the practice is that they give only the bread to the communicants while the priests alone drink the wine. They teach that "Christ is contained whole and entire under each species". But Jesus Christ who is the author of the Supper separated the bread from the wine. And he gave both the bread and wine SEPARATELY to the apostles. (Matthew 26: 26-29) This is clear enough. The Roman Catholic Church is therefore wrong in their method of observing the Lord's Supper. "Transubstantiation" is nothing but superstition. Christ did not change the bread and wine into his flesh and blood and he never vested the power to do so on anyone. The apostles did nothing to change the example and pattern of Christ's institution.

Remembrance

The practice of certain churches in giving the bread and wine to everyone of their adherents is unscriptural. Their explanation that the "Holy Communion" is a "nutritious food to the soul" and an "antidote for sin" has no basis in the Bible; it is a lie. It is plainly shown in the Scriptures that the purpose of the Supper was to commemorate the death of Christ until his second presence. Said St. Paul: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." – 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26.

It is noteworthy that when Christ instituted the Supper it was ONLY the apostles he made to partake of it. If he had intended it as food for the saving of souls or remedy for sins, he would have given it to all his disciples-both men and women. But he did not. Not even the 70 disciples of Christ who were next to the apostles in maturity took it.

The fact is that Christ intended the observance of the Supper only for the Anointed Christians who are of the class of the apostles. They are men who devote their lives wholly by giving up their secular work to the preaching of the gospel and in that they proclaim the Lord's death. Anyone who is not of this class of consecrated Christians, the Saints, ought not to partake of the Supper because it is a damnable sin to do so. In the Bible no woman or child ever took it. There were many faithful women disciples of Jesus and children followers or admirers in his days but NONE of them partook of the bread-and-wine spiritual feast-NOT EVEN MARY HIS MOTHER. Why? It is because it is meant for the SAINTS, the ANOINTED Christians only, who are members of his body (cabinet). The danger in taking the Supper unworthily is shown in St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians. As it is written: "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and

drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (die)." – 1 Corinthians 11: 27-30.

Those who, like the disorderly Corinthian Christians, think that the Lord's Supper is daily food which they must always feed on, should take warning and cease from gluttony over this matter which is purely spiritual. St. Paul cautioned: "And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation." – 1 Corinthians 11:34.

There is a lot of abuse with regard to the Lord's Supper among professed Christians. In the Anglican Church, Tiverton, England, a 76 year-old widow shared her holy communion of bread and wine with her terrier dog! The report states: "Mrs. Florence Fox said she had given little 'Pip,' a piece of the bread and lick of wine every Sunday for two years at the communion rail." (*Daily Times*, November 22, 1966, back page.)

Moreover, the observance of the Lord's Supper was not meant to take place daily or weekly or monthly as many church denominations, Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches alike, are doing. It was a commemoration of the death of Christ (1 Corinthians 11: 23-26) which should be done but ONCE a year.

There is a point which we have always called people's attention to but which many, too, have lost sight of, and that is the fact that the Lord's Supper was not instituted to be celebrated for eternity but for a limited period of time. St. Paul said: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." (1 Corinthians 11: 26). This shows that its observance would cease at the appearing or second presence of Christ.

Watchtower

The Watchtower Society whose members call themselves "Jehovah's Witnesses" is aware of this fact. But because of their inconsistency, though they believe that Christ has come in spirit, they continue to celebrate the Lord's Supper up till now. Recently a crazy man even celebrated it with them by actually eating the bread but not drinking the wine in their hall in Warri. This, obviously, is a case of desecration. They may say that the responsibility is upon the madman but why should the Watchtower men have allowed it if carelessness or over-zealousness had not overshadowed their sense of propriety?

In their book *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God*, they wrote: Since the antitypical Passover Lamb Jesus Christ died on Nisan 14 in the year 33 C.E. well over nineteen hundred anniversary dates have presented themselves. However, the annual celebration of the Lord's evening meal is not to continue on endlessly as long as this earth endures. The apostle Paul said that by this observance the true Christians would proclaim the Lord's death only until he arrives. (1 Corinthians 11: 26) Of course, at the time that he arrives and is present, there is no need to

hold an observance 'in remembrance of him, for he is no longer departed and absent, but he is returned and is in company with his disciples.'" (Pages 134-135).

But the Society says that physical facts – already seen may be taken "as competent and reliable evidence establishing the fact that Christ Jesus came to his temple in the spring of the year 1918." (*The Harp of God*, page 247) If Christ arrived since 1918, why do the Watchtower witnesses continue to celebrate the Lord's Supper till now? Is this not a glaring instance of inconsistency and contradiction on their part?

There is need, therefore, for people to be critical and to be wary in accepting the doctrines of religious groups because of the spiritual dangers involved in swallowing falsehoods. In this matter of the Lord's Supper, many people have been led into errors by their religious leaders (Isaiah. 9: 16) owing to their ignorance of the Scriptures. However, there is still room for them to repent and follow the truth, which Jesus says would make the believers free. And we are praying for them.