Lord’s Supper

- Theological views of the Lord’s Supper
- Biblical/theological meaning
- Mode of observance

Theological Views

- Mass
  - Roman Catholic, Anglican
  - May derive from *ite, missa est* (go, you’re dismissed) to catechumens before Eucharist.
- Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:20)
  - Meal of fellowship shared with disciples.
  - Church originally had a meal with Eucharist.

Theological Views

- Eucharist
  - Means “to make thanks.”
  - Prayer of thanksgiving said with bread and cup.
  - Giving thanks for what Christ has done.
- Communion - fellowship with Christ and one another.
Theological Views

- Controversy over the real presence of Christ.
  - Whether, and in what sense, Christ is present when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated.
  - *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry:* the Eucharist is “the sacrament of his real presence.”
  - How to understand the words of institution: “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19).

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Theological Views

- Really present? Yes No
  - Physically
    - In elements
      - Catholic
      - Lutheran
  - Spiritually
    - In elements
      - Calvin
    - In community
      - Anabaptist
      - Zwingli

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Theological Views

- Roman Catholicism: transubstantiation.
  - Spelled out at Council of Trent.
  - Elements become body and blood of Christ.
  - Requires ordained priest and proper ritual.
  - “This is my body” (*Hoc est corpus meum*).
  - Aquinas: the accidents (outward form) doesn’t change but the substance (essence) changes.
  - Mass is a sacrifice (“host”).
Theological Views

- Lutheranism: consubstantiation.
  - Christ is present “in, with, and under” elements.
  - Argued physical presence on the basis of the *communicatio idiomatum* (communication of properties) of Christ’s divinity to his humanity.
  - Rejected idea that mass is a sacrifice.
  - Rejected sacerdotalism.
  - Still a sacrament (we receive forgiveness of sins and confirmation of faith).

- Reformed (Zwingli): memorial view.
  - Disagreed with Luther about *communicatio idiomatum*. Christ’s body is in heaven.
  - No physical or spiritual presence of Christ.
  - Lord’s supper is a commemoration of Christ’s sacrifice (“Do this in remembrance of me”).
  - Also said it was a pledge of loyalty to Christ.
  - Some say he later taught spiritual presence.

- Reformed (Calvin): spiritual presence.
  - Agreed with Zwingli that Christ’s body is in heaven.
  - But Lord’s Supper is a means of participation in Christ.
  - Christ is present in the elements through the Holy Spirit.
  - Participants are spiritually nourished and brought into closer communion with Christ.
Theological Views

• Anabaptists: presence in the community.
  – Christ was spiritually present in the church.
  – Emphasized horizontal as well as vertical.
  – Emphasized community aspect (1 Cor. 10:17).
  – Pledge themselves anew to Christ as Lord and to one another in the body of Christ.
• What about your tradition?

Biblical/Theological Meaning

• Words of institution must be symbolic.
  – Could be proleptic.
  – Reinterpreting the Passover celebration.
• Act of obedience to Christ’s command.
• Reminder of Christ’s table fellowship, a sign of the inbreaking kingdom of God.
• Memorial of Christ’s work for us.
• Proclamation of the gospel.

Biblical/Theological Meaning

• Looks forward to Christ’s return.
• A community act (one loaf, one body).
• A participation or sharing in Christ.
• An opportunity to reaffirm commitments made at baptism.
• Is Christ’s presence at Eucharist unique?
  – My position: not unique, but provides a focus.
  – An occasion of grace.
Biblical/Theological Meaning

- Has past, present, future dimensions.
  - Past: Christ’s death and resurrection.
  - Present: celebrate our fellowship with him and with one another; reaffirm our commitments; proclaim the gospel.
  - Future: look forward to messianic banquet, marriage feast of the Lamb.
  - It’s a celebration, not a wake!
  - Has an ethical dimension.

Mode of Observance

- Some observe it in the context of a meal.
  - Practice of the early church (cf. 1 Cor.).
  - Agape meal (love feast).
  - Brethren: threefold communion (footwashing, love feast, bread and cup).
- Who leads and who participates?
- It is a meal for believers.
- Discipline is important in some traditions.

Mode of Observance

- What elements should we use?
  - Depends on one’s theology.
  - Are we recreating the Last Supper, or symbolizing the Lord’s Supper?
  - Can we contextualize the Lord’s Supper?
- How often do you celebrate it?
  - Theological and practical issues.
  - Threefold communion can’t be done in Sunday morning worship; usually held twice a year.
Case Study

As a pastor, you make a hospital call on the husband of a member of the pastor-parish relations committee. The woman has been opposed to your efforts to start a contemporary worship service. The husband is not a Christian, but his illness has made him receptive to spiritual things. He asks you to serve him communion. His wife is adamantly opposed to the idea, saying that such a thing would desecrate Christ. What do you say to them? What is at stake?