

Introduction

STUDIES ON THE ORIGIN of the Lord's Supper and its interpretation based on the accounts in the gospels and in Paul's letter to the Corinthians have resulted in a number of divergent views and theologies. Based on the synoptic accounts, the common view was that the Lord's Supper was based on the Passover meal.¹ But this view has been challenged on many grounds; the details will be discussed in chapter 4. Some scholars see its origin in some other prevalent Jewish meals and thus explain it on the basis of that relationship.² Another contentious study was that of Friedrich Spitta who proposed a double origin of the Lord's Supper.³ But this view became better known through the monumental work of Hans Lietzmann who also disagreed with the originating of the Lord's Supper from the Passover and proposed two separate origins of the Lord's Supper in the tradition of the early church. He traced one tradition to Paul and the other to the early Jerusalem tradition.⁴

1. For example, based on the Synoptic gospels, J. Jeremias and A. J. B. Higgins identified the Passover meal as the original setting of the Lord's Supper and therefore as the source for the orthodox form and theology of the Lord's Supper. Jeremias, *Eucharistic*; Higgins, *Lord's Supper*, 56–57; This view was supported by many others including I. Howard Marshall and G. Feeley-Harnik. Marshall, *Last*; Feeley-Harnik, *Lord's Table*.

2. Box and Oesterley suggested that the Lord's Supper corresponds to the *kiddush* meal which was held before the Passover. Box, "Jewish Antecedent," 357–69; Oesterley, *Jewish Background*, 157–58. H. Lietzmann and G. Dix suggested that the Lord's Supper was similar to the *haburah* meal; Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's*, 165–71; Dix, *Shape of the Liturgy*, 50–51; similarly, Otto, *Kingdom of*, 278. M. Black, sees the Pharisaic "Haburoth" meal as the prototype of the Eucharist; Black, *Scrolls and Christian Origins*, 115. Some see the possible influence of "Joseph and Aseneth" in the Lord's Supper, Burchard, "Importance of Joseph and Aseneth," 121–22.

3. Friedrich Spitta, "Die urchristlichen Traditionen," 1.207–337.

4. According to Lietzmann, the origin of the Lord's Supper can be traced back through the liturgy of the church. He identifies two types of liturgies: the first is the liturgy of

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On the other hand, some scholars see the antecedent of the Lord's Supper as some Hellenistic cultic meals, especially that of the sacred meals of the Mystery religions.⁵ The phrase "Do this in remembrance of me" has led some to identify it with a memorial meal like those of the funerary banquets held in commemoration of a loved one.⁶ The funerary meal tradition has some credence but such events were held only once a year, on the birthday of the deceased. Others are of the view that the Lord's Supper was based on a communal meal, a common Greco-Roman practice of those days, owing to the similarity between the Corinthian supper and Greco-Roman meal practices of that time. This is the view of E. Schweizer and others on the basis of NT text, and Jewish and other traditions.⁷

These scholars have postulated on the assumption that the Lord's Supper was based on a specific meal which in turn will help to interpret and develop the Lord's Supper theology. The problem here has to do with identifying which specific meal was the antecedent of the last supper of Jesus with his disciples. The above-mentioned debates show that there is no consensus among scholars on the origin and theology of the Lord's Supper. Nonetheless, the different theories proposing varieties of meals point to a fact that meal traditions did play an important role in ancient cultures and societies and this can be the key factor in understanding the Lord's Supper. Hence, this study will incorporate in its approach the theory that there was an ancient consensus that all meal practices were considered important and there was an existence of a meal tradition with features and significance common to different ancient cultures. In that respect all meal practices including the Lord's Supper partake of this common meal tradition. This will do away with the issue of the antecedent to the Lord's Supper which has been a contentious subject for many centuries.

Hippolytus, which he traces to Paul; the second is the liturgy of Sarapion, which he traces to the Didache. The Pauline tradition emphasizes the commemoration of the death of Jesus. The Didache tradition, which he also identifies with the early Jerusalem tradition, commemorated the table fellowship of Jesus with his disciples without reference to his death. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 172–215. This position has been reformulated in Mack, *Myth of Innocence*.

5. R. Bultmann and R. Reitzenstein conceived the Eucharistic meal as a representational rite like the "acted rites" of the mysteries; Bultmann, *Theology*, 149; Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions*, 77; Likewise Hyam Maccoby expresses the view that Paul was the originator of the Lord's Supper and it was based on the ritual meal of the Mystery religions, Maccoby, "Paul and Hellenism," 247–67.

6. Like the memorial meal of the Epicureans. Cf. Smith, *From Symposium*, 189.

7. Schweizer, *Lord's Supper*; Lampe, "Eucharistic Dinner Party," 1–15.

This study will then investigate the background, roles, and functions of the meal traditions in both Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts based on the literature and traditions of meal culture from antiquity to the early formative Christian centuries. The aim of this study is to unravel the importance of meal practices in the ancient societies and study the Lord's Supper in that cultural context. The term "fellowship meal" will be used instead of the common term "table fellowship," for the study of these meal traditions. First, because it does not always involve tables or other furniture as such; in its earliest rudimentary form, an animal skin or a woven rug, or mat would have been used probably to keep the food away from sand. Second, in order to emphasize one of the most important functions of the meal practices in ancient cultures in creating bonding among the participants.⁸ As the study will show these meal practices involved not merely associations limited to the sharing of communal meals, but involved greater roles and mutual responsibilities for the participants in the community. The definition of fellowship meal used here also pertains and is inclusive of all kinds of meal practices in the different settings and not only the formal meals eaten to observe special events.

This research will begin with a study on the fellowship meals in the ancient world, their structures, ideologies, functions in society. The purpose is to find how the meal traditions were understood and used by the different communities. The study will explore the link between fellowship meal practices and judgment both as a religious and social category. The term "exclusion" in the context of this research will refer to the discipline and punishment of offending members in the ancient societies through the fellowship meals. Likewise, the term "judgment" will be used to mean reward and blessing as well as retribution and punishment in the context of the wider fellowship meal tradition. Based on that, the study will investigate the Lord's Supper tradition, and how the meal traditions have shaped the origin and development of the Lord's Supper in the Early Church, especially in the multicultural Corinthian context. This will enable us to have a better understanding of the context in which Paul has expressed his view,

8. See the work of M. Douglas, who in her fundamental essay "Deciphering a Meal," 161–81, has shown that, dining was a socially structured gathering where sharing and consumption of food was a means of establishing a community or relationships. Secondly, to refer to the practice from its earliest rudimentary form, where an animal skin or a woven rug, or mat instead of a table, would have been used probably to keep the food away from sand.

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and thereby understand more clearly what he intended to say in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34.

This will also necessitate the study of the institution at the Last Supper by Jesus against the general background of the meal traditions, to the different levels of influences in the Gospel tradition as it was passed on to the believing community. The interrelationship between the Gospels' accounts and Paul's account will be investigated to help us in analysing how Paul's theology developed and the level of redaction that has taken place when he presents the theology of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, especially in regard to the judgment motif. Why does Paul connect judgment with the Eucharistic fellowship? How are those who are sick and dead connected with the abuse of the Lord's Supper? Is it based on Jesus' teaching or tradition? Or was Paul influenced by other Greco-Roman philosophies or traditions in Judaism to warrant such a teaching in Corinthians?

The meanings and values of the meal traditions in the different cultures can be a valuable aid to biblical exegesis and can shed light on the interpretation of the Lord's Supper and thereby understand its significance more fully.