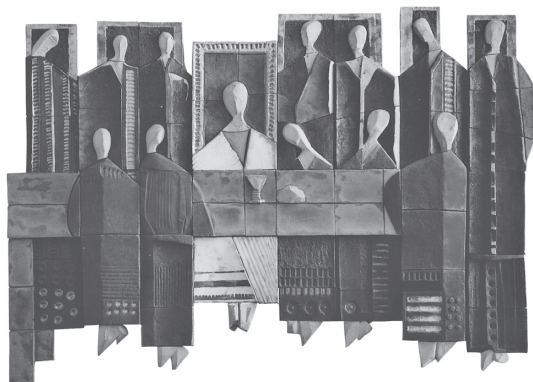


THE LORD'S SUPPER

FIVE VIEWS



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CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	7
1 THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW	13
<i>Brother Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C.</i>	
A Lutheran Response	32
A Reformed Response	34
A Baptist Response	36
A Pentecostal Response	38
2 THE LUTHERAN VIEW	41
<i>John R. Stephenson</i>	
A Roman Catholic Response	59
A Reformed Response	61
A Baptist Response	63
A Pentecostal Response	65
3 THE REFORMED VIEW	67
<i>Leanne Van Dyk</i>	
A Roman Catholic Response	83
A Lutheran Response	85
A Baptist Response	87
A Pentecostal Response	89

4	THE BAPTIST VIEW	91
	<i>Roger E. Olson</i>	
	A Roman Catholic Response.	109
	A Lutheran Response	111
	A Reformed Response	113
	A Pentecostal Response	115
5	THE PENTECOSTAL VIEW	117
	<i>Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen</i>	
	A Roman Catholic Response.	136
	A Lutheran Response	138
	A Reformed Response	140
	A Baptist Response.	142
	<i>Conclusion</i>	145
	<i>For Further Reading</i>	149
	<i>Subject Index</i>	155
	<i>Scripture Index</i>	159

INTRODUCTION

For several years I have been teaching the course “The Meaning of the Sacraments” at Regent College in Vancouver, and I have often wished for what you have in your hands: a concise summary of distinctive perspectives on the Lord’s Supper, written by those who hold these views and with responses by these same authors to the views of others. And now we have it. I am confident that this will be a valuable resource for those who want to learn more about the Lord’s Supper and, in particular, to make sense of the diversity of views regarding this central event in the life of the church.

How better to do this than by listening to those who represent each view? If we want to learn how others regard the Lord’s Supper, then we need a format that allows each perspective to be represented by someone who holds that view. As the instructor in the class, I can summarize the diverse views for the benefit of my students. How much more enriching to have them listen to someone who truly represents the view under discussion!

There is no doubt that on this important topic—the Lord’s Supper—we have some quite strong differences of opinion. That is evident in the essays gathered here. What is vital, then, is that we express our differences only after we have first attended to the other presenter, that we provide a rejoinder only after we have listened well. These essays are offered in the hope not so much that readers’ minds will be changed but that there can, at least, be new understandings: that we will better appreciate the views of the other, that we will learn from the other.

One of the challenges for a collection such as this is that even within each of the five views included, there is significant diversity of opinion. We have identified each of the views as *the* respective perspective—representing the Reformed, Baptist, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Pentecostal views. But as Roger Olson observes in his essay, there is no single “Baptist” view, so much so that one can genuinely ask if it is even possible to characterize a “Baptist” view, given the diversity of opinion within this camp. While this is especially the case with the view presented by Professor Olson, in some respects this could be said about the other views as well—though perhaps least so with the Roman Catholic view, which has a more centralized doctrinal tradition. But in each case, it is important to keep in mind that the author of the essay is speaking representatively and individually from the perspective with which they are identified—ideally, in a manner that acknowledges some diversity of opinion within that tradition.

Representatives from five theological traditions speak here about the meaning of the Lord’s Supper from within that tradition, whether Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist or Pentecostal. Some readers may feel a little overwhelmed to read that there are five views—and in many respects, five quite different views. And others will immediately recognize that there are voices not included in this collection: what of the Orthodox, Anglican-Episcopalian, Methodist, and perhaps also the Disciples of Christ, African American and other perspectives? And this is a fair question; indeed, when one of the contributors to this volume submitted his essay, he wondered whether there should not be a sequel: “Five (More) Views of the Lord’s Supper”!

Unfortunately, considering additional views in this collection, having more views at the table, would make this into a cumbersome project. Some limit had to be set. We hope that a majority of readers will find this volume helpful in providing at least these views as an aid to understanding their own tradition and as an aid to a greater appreciation of the views of others with whom they might be in conversation on this topic.

As the editor, I felt it particularly important to include the Pentecostal view—as a recognition of the explosive growth of the Pentecostal church movements of the past century.¹ This growth has been matched by an

¹ See the comment of Vinson Synan, for example, in *The Holiness–Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. xi, where he observes

emerging Pentecostal theology in the last few years that needs to be both acknowledged and heard—so that those within Pentecostal churches can strengthen their own understanding of the Lord’s Supper, and that those of other traditions can better appreciate the emerging voices of Pentecostal theologians.

And this is our objective for all five views: for each essay, we are seeking understanding not merely of the Lord’s Supper but also of the views and perspectives of the other, traditions other than our own. And for this, we urgently need to move beyond caricature or a purely polemical engagement. We seek first to understand and to locate the perspective of the other within their theological context. Further, it is important to appreciate that within each of these views there is development. It is essential for us to appreciate that the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist, or the Lord’s Supper, has not been static since the Council of Trent. The Second Vatican Council demonstrated for Catholic Christians the vital connection between the Lord’s Supper and the church, for example; and further, there has been an explosion of creative and insightful theological reflection since Vatican II. Thus a volume like this can help readers of other traditions grasp a summary of recent developments and thinking within other views—be they Roman Catholic, Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran or, as noted above, Pentecostal.

Hence, this collection of essays is an exercise in ecumenism: seeking understanding so that the others, even if we differ from them, are a source of insight and learning. And even when, in the end, we differ—as we most assuredly do—what we will inevitably find is that this process strengthens our own understanding of this sacred event in the church’s life, the Lord’s Supper.

This book will help readers forge their own understanding of the Lord’s Supper. What will become apparent is that it is not possible, in the end, to say: I agree with every view and want to adopt bits and pieces of each perspective! Not possible! The reason, quite simply, is that there are substantial differences at the point of first principles: the fundamental reference

that Pentecostalism “deserves to be seen as a major Christian tradition alongside the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Reformation Protestant traditions,” reporting specifically that the number of Pentecostals and charismatics in the world number around 463 million.

points that shape each of these views. Hence, as you read these essays, it is helpful for you to consider each in light of the defining questions that shape one's understanding of the Lord's Supper—three in particular.

The person and work of Christ. We begin with Christology: one's perspective on the meaning of the Lord's Supper is deeply influenced by one's understanding of the nature and ministry of Christ. In particular, we can ask: What is the relationship of the Lord's Supper with the incarnation of Christ Jesus and thus with the whole of the created order? Then also: What is the relationship between the Lord's Supper and the cross—the work of atonement? Further, it is essential to ask: What is the relationship between the Lord's Supper and the resurrection and, indeed, the ascension? This leads to an issue that must also be at the table for dialogue: Is Christ present in this meal? If so, how?

The nature and mission of the church. From Christology we move to ecclesiology. The Lord's Supper is an event of communion and encounter between the risen and ascended Christ and his bride, the church. It is an act anticipating the great event described in the Revelation of John—the “marriage supper of the Lamb.” These are the two actors, one might say: Christ on the one hand, and the church on the other. Thus our understanding of this meal will inevitably be shaped not only by our Christology, but also by our theology for the church.

What does it mean to be the church? What is the church? How is the identity and life of the church sustained? And how does this identity find expression in this meal? There certainly are related questions: What is the relationship, if any, between the Lord's Supper and the ordained ministry of the church? And further, Who is welcome at the Table? To whom is it “open”? In particular, one might keep in mind another issue: What is the relationship between baptism and the Lord's Supper? Is baptism a prerequisite for partaking in the Lord's Supper? If so, why? Finally, what is the link, if any, between this sacred event in the life of God's people and their calling into the world? What is the connection or relationship between the Lord's Supper and Christian mission, the church's participation in the in-breaking of God's kingdom?

The nature of the Christian life and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Then also, we must ask: Of what benefit is the Lord's Supper to the

Christian? What does the Christian and the Christian in community gain from participation in the Lord's Supper? Is the Lord's Supper a means of grace? If so, what is the grace that is known through this practice? Is there benefit for the Christian as an individual, or is the benefit only known "in community," as we participate in the life of the church?

Then also, what is the necessary state or disposition (if any) of the Christian and of the church so that this benefit can be experienced? This includes a pastoral question: How might and should the Christian and the church approach participation in the Lord's Supper? In this context, notable related questions emerge: What is the relationship between the Lord's Supper and the Word, the preached Scriptures? What implications arise from the question of "benefit" that may affect the matter of frequency? How often should the Lord's Supper be celebrated? This naturally means that we attend to the relationship between the Spirit's ministry and the Lord's Supper. It is the Spirit that enables the life of the church and the life of the Christian; and so we ask: What is the relationship between the ministry of the Spirit and the Lord's Supper?

Many of these questions are raised in one of the most extraordinary documents in the history of the church and, without doubt, the most significant publication on the Lord's Supper in the last century: the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches' document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*. Released in 1982, it is the fruit of over fifty years of conversation and debate.² Readers of this collection of essays are urged to read *BEM* first, particularly the section on the Eucharist, so that they can properly sense how the stage has been set for this ongoing conversation between representatives of diverse theological traditions.

The *BEM* statement addresses the meaning of the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, under five headings: Thanksgiving, Memorial, Invocation of the Spirit, Communion, and Anticipation of the Meal in the Kingdom. It is helpful to read all these contemporary essays or perspectives on the Lord's Supper with the Eucharist section of *BEM* as a guide to the issues and questions that have shaped the conversation about the

²*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982) <<http://www.oikoumene.org/?id=2638>>.

Lord's Supper thus far. We begin to see how different views of the Lord's Supper tend to emphasize one dimension of meaning over another, and all too easily—because one dimension of meaning is especially important to a particular view—another dimension of meaning is neglected. For example, while reading an Anglican commentary on the Lord's Supper, I found the author observing that *BEM* was a good reminder to Anglicans that they had perhaps neglected the emphasis on the Eucharist as a meal of kingdom anticipation and that this perspective needed to be properly brought into the light, and then reflected in words of institution and in the prayers that accompany the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In my own free-church background, *BEM* for me was a revelation of a significant gap in my own tradition: that the emphasis on the invocation of the Spirit and the Spirit's ministry in the Lord's Supper was virtually nonexistent. And this surely is, or at least was, a significant deficiency.

Notable for all Christians is the intentional manner in which *BEM* insists on a trinitarian vision or participation in the Lord's Supper: The Eucharist is a thanksgiving to the Father and in response to the Father's providential goodness, as the "fruits of the earth" are presented to the Father in faith and thanksgiving. The emphasis on the Lord's Supper as memorial recovers the ancient understanding of *anamnēsis*, making present what is recalled and thus providing a clear, or at least clearer, appreciation of the relationship between Christ's original sacrifice and the celebration of that sacrifice at the Lord's Table. The emphasis on the invocation of the Spirit, the epiclesis (*epiklēsis*), reminds Christians that this is ultimately the work of the Spirit in the church.

This benchmark document—*BEM*—has led to a remarkable flurry of studies and publications, evident most notably in the series of "responses" from diverse Christian denominations. It has aptly served to encourage ecumenical studies and clarify some of the continuing points of agreement and diversity of opinion. The authors of this collection certainly hope that the collection of essays you hold in your hand will also further this conversation.