

International Baptist Theological Seminary-Prague

**The love feast:
the church's self expression**

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Introduction

In the last years, I see an upcoming interest in churches and Christian communities for meals. The meals around the Alpha course are for many people the most vital part of the course. Relations are build there. In the same time, there is the Lord's Supper, in most of the Dutch Baptist churches on every first Sunday of the month. A supper where there is a strong emphasis on the memorial of Christ and his salvation work. Many times people ask 'Why is this such a somber meeting? So much silence, so less joy, sharing and community? Everyone takes the Supper for herself; it looks if it is only for the personal relationship with Christ. Is that what it needs to be? Also I was touched by the following remark of Osiek and Balch's 'What one eats, how, food in what condition, where, when, with whom, in what position... in what relationship to others are extremely significant cultural issues that communicate codes of identity and social relationships, whether actual or desirable'¹, briefly it says much about the practices of a community and this fits with the way of doing 'Theology in a Baptist way'²: from practices, to reflection on the practices. These two remarks triggered me to dive deeper in the history of the practices in and around the Lord's Supper, especially the practices of the early church and in the early anabaptist past.

In this essay, I want to explore the practices of the New Testament and the early church around the Lord's Supper/Eucharist and the love feast/agape meal.³ How are these connected to each other? What are the key practices around the Lord's Supper? Next I want to explore the thinking of Hubmaier about the Lord's Supper, and if and how the practices he described are related to the practices earlier described. Thereafter the crucial question is: 'what are the essential practices around the Lord's supper and agape meal both in the NT/early church and the communities around Hubmaier and how are they practiced in relation to their time.'

Before starting to look to the practices of the early church and the New Testament stories about the Lord's Supper, we need to look to the practices of meals in the Jewish history and the Greco Roman culture of that time, primarily to the banquets in that time. Let us first look to the Greco Roman banquets.

The Greco Roman banquets

Greco Roman banquets⁴ were special events where men are coming together to eat and talk, it was an element of the longer during *symposia*, the place to be when you want to discuss or have a party. These banquets were held in the homes of the wealthy class of that time who had big dining rooms, or where organized by and for members of a guild in clubhouses or temples. The banquets where not open tables, you had to be invited for the special occasion and were required to appear.⁵ The boundaries of the group were very close and related to the social status of men; the banquets formed their common identity. Especially the Greek banquets where 'men-only', unless it was a

¹ Carolyn Osiek and David L Balch, *Families in the New Testament World : Households and House Churches* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 45.

² Parush R. Parushev, "Doing Theology in a Baptist Way" (presented at the Doing Theology in a Baptist Way, Amsterdam, 2009).

³ I will use different words for it, as there are used different words during the time. The choice of words fits with the practice in the setting talked about.

⁴ Paul Fike Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast: Broadening Our Eucharistic Celebrations* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 9-16 and Eleanor Kreider, *Given for You : a Fresh Look at Communion* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 29, Osiek and Balch, *Families in the New Testament World*, 45-46 and Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig, *Meals in the Early Christian World : Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9-33, Ben Witherington, *Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord's Supper* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 33-38.

⁵ Smith and Taussig, *Meals in the Early Christian World*, 3.

family event, or the woman, was one of the 'entertainers', another word for a prostitute. In the Roman Banquets from the first century BC onward, women were allowed to participate during the meal with their husbands and left when the meal went over in the other *symposion* activities. Also, slaves were gradually accepted at the banquets. Before entering the house where the banquet was served, guest washed their feet at the entrance, or get them washed by a servant. Dependent on the wealth and background of people, bread and vegetables were the main part of the dish. Meat was for the rich. The social stratification became visible in most of the banquets, especially in the area where people are reclining.⁶ After the meal the second part of the *symposion*, the drinking party, started with a wine ritual in which the wine was libated to the gods and the cup of wine was passed and drunk. After that singing songs, music, philosophical discussions or games took place. Bread and wine in this way are symbols for the two parts of the banquets.

Jewish Banquets⁷

In many aspects Jewish banquets were the same as Greco Roman banquets. Because of the dedication of the wine to the gods and the kosher way of eating, Jews could not participate in the Greco Roman meals. Jewish meals opened and closed with prayer, the *berakoth* 'Blessed are you, Lord our God, Sovereign of the Universe ...'.⁸ The entire meal was a meal of thanksgiving, as was the whole life. 'Breaking the bread' was the main phrase for the shared meals.⁹ In Judaism, two Banquets are remarkably unique. First the Passover Seder, the meal of the unleavened bread, in commemoration of the liberation from Egypt, was yearly celebrated. Central in the Seder are the four cups of wine over which the *berakah*, the blessing was said, also the Hallel Psalms and thanksgiving Psalms were sung.¹⁰ Second the Messianic Banquet, an eschatological image for various groups, 'a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines'¹¹ a banquet which symbolized the coming of the Messiah. In short Jewish meals were meals of thanksgiving.

The Greco-Roman meals, the Jewish meals and the Christian supper all had much in common, the Lord's supper in that way was not a new practice. The Supper is strongly linked to the central culture of that time.¹² The meaning and the social order of the diverse meals and the practices around it were different. And this is where we will look at.

The meals of Jesus

As we saw, the Greco-Roman banquets were meals in closed social settings. Looking to the meals with Jesus it is clear that He chooses to go beyond that boundaries. He had dinner with all kinds of people: Pharisees, women, tax collectors and sinners. Luke told us the table talks of Jesus in which He lectured about what and who is the most important, about being a servant and being integer, He

⁶ Much more is to say about the meals and their ideals. Saturnalia, a symposion meal in which the roles are turned around is especially interesting on this item. See also Dennis Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet as Social Institution," in *Meals in the Early Christian World : Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 24–33.

⁷ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 21-28 and Kreider, *Given for You*, 25-29.

⁸ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 23.

⁹ Kreider, *Given for You*, 18.

¹⁰ Kreider, *Given for You*, 28.

¹¹ Isaiah 25: 6-9

¹² Osiek and Balch, *Families in the New Testament World*, 193-4 and Matthias Klinghardt, "A Typology of the Communal Meal," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation and Conflict at the Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9–22. In his article Klinghardt is focussing on the Greco-Roman meals and their keyrole in communityformation and social life. Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet as Social Institution," 24–33. Article of Smith focuses on Greek meal as model for Lord's Supper.

used meals as metaphors of the Kingdom.¹³ He also told the 'Parable of the Great Banquet'¹⁴ in which 'the poor, the crippled, the lame' were invited, an upside down Kingdom event compared to what was used in his time. He had an unplanned meal with the five thousand.¹⁵ As in the culture of that days, meals were essential, in the life of Jesus.

A common but very distinctive banquet

So it was also in a meal, during the feast of the unleavened bread that Jesus told specifically on his death and the new covenant.¹⁶ Jesus used the 'language of that time'; he broke the bread, thanked for it and thanked for the cups of wine. The last cup of wine was the cup of wine who symbolizes the end of the meal and the start of the second part of the *symposion* as in the Greco-Roman and Jewish tradition.¹⁷ He reinterpreted a special festive meal with common practices in a remembering meal with the foretaste of a new covenant, in which the Messianic Banquet is envisaged. But what did Jesus mean by "do this"?¹⁸ Is "do this" particular focused on remembering Jesus? Is "do this" as Eleanor Kreider states an 'invitation to his friendship and to vulnerable fellowship at his table'?¹⁹ Is "do this" an invitation in the way of 'My disciples, continue to enjoy *eating together*, continue to *bless God* and *share your food*. And especially *remember me, your Master*'.²⁰ Let us look to the practices of the Lord's Supper as described in the New Testament letters.

The love feasts

The Lord's Supper, fellowship, the breaking of the bread, the love feast are all different names with different accents describing the Christian meal practices. Following Stutzman²¹ I want to focus on agape meal or 'love feast', because the love feast is a real meal focussing on the whole of the meal or banquet including the communal fellowship meal, the remembrance celebration and the Messianic Banquet. This is an integral view in which the practices²² of the love feast are connected with the practices of the community of the church.²³

'Love feast' is a word only used in Jude 12. The letter of Jude is one big accusation to people who dishonour God and therefore the love feast. In the table talk of the Johannine last Supper,²⁴ Jesus

¹³ Luke 6:20f, 7:36-50, 10:38-42, 11:2f., 11:37-41, 13:28f., 14:1-24; 22:24-27, Matt. 8:1, 22:2, 25:10, 26:6-13, Marc 14:3-9, John 12:1-8. John Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000).

¹⁴ Luke 14:15-24.

¹⁵ Luke 9:12-17.

¹⁶ Mark:14:12-26, Matt. 26:17-30, Luke 22:1-36, John 13-17.

¹⁷ Kreider, *Given for You*, 26.

¹⁸ Luke 22:19, Matt. 26:26-29, Marc 14:22-25.

¹⁹ Kreider, *Given for You*, 20.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 20

²¹ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*.

²² I use the language of MacIntyre and Murphy by talking about practices and virtues. Practices are regularly complex cooperative activities which manifest internal goods and have standards of quality. Virtues are character based internal goods and give meaning to the practices. Nancey C Murphy, Brad J Kallenberg, and Mark Nation, *Virtues & practices in the Christian tradition: Christian ethics after MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, PA.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 21.

²³ There is discussion if the fellowship meal and the remembrance or ritual meal is one and the same, or that they are separated from the beginning. I am following the recent studies of Koenig, Kreider, Smith, Taussig and Witherington III who are arguing for a real meal or banquet in the line of the Greco-Roman banquets and the Jewish tradition. In this banquets where different parts to distinguish, as the meal, the celebration and the symposium part as last. Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption*; Kreider, *Given for You*; Smith and Taussig, *Meals in the Early Christian World*; Witherington, *Making a Meal of It*.

²⁴ John 13-17.

highlights the commandment to love each other as He loved them.²⁵ Love is the heart of the table community.

1 Corinthians 11 tells us about the meetings of the church in Corinth and the disorders during these banquets. It looks like some kind of potluck meal except that everyone eats what he brings himself.²⁶ It is more a Greco Roman *symposion* than a love feast of the *ekklesia* as it was meant to be.²⁷ It is as Hays states about failing to discern the body: 'those who act selfishly, focussing on their own spirituality and exercising their own social privileges...'²⁸ This is what Paul triggered to tell about the dishonouring of the meal in which Christ is remembered. Love feasts, a feast of *koinonia* it had to be!

The practices of the love feasts

So what had to be the actual practices of the love feast? Stutzman describes five practices with five underlying virtues:²⁹

1. Feet washing: submission. In the Johannine version of the Last Supper³⁰ the sharing of bread and wine was not expressed. The emphasis lies on feet washing as a way of submission and the long table talk in which love and submission are key themes. Especially in churches who read the Gospel of John, feet washing was a part of the love feasts. Feet washing is also a practice about forgiveness and being ready for what will come.³¹
2. Fellowship meal: love. The start of the meal, the banquet part, eating, sharing, talking or in a better word: *koinonia*, the heart of the love feast.³²
3. Preparation for communion: confession. The main goal of confession is the public confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 is talking about another meaning of confession which is focused on examining and preparation for communion. The context is, as described previously, in relation to communal disorders.³³
4. Kiss: reconciliation. The holy kiss of peace was a common practice in the church. Most times this kiss is accompanied by blessings: the peace of the Lord to you! It expresses the reconciliation with God and another, and it is familiarity in Christ.³⁴
5. Communion: thanksgiving. This is addressed in the synoptic gospels, the words of Jesus in which he reshaped the Passover tradition in remembering his life in eating the bread and drinking the wine.³⁵ In the same time, it has an eschatological focus: looking forward to what is to come.

Also, Kreider named five essential themes³⁶ in the love feast, she described them, not as practices and virtues, but there is a mayor overlay:

²⁵ John 13: 34-35, 15: 9-17, see also Ben Witherington, *Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord's Supper* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 63-85 on the feast in John 13-17.

²⁶ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 35-38.

²⁷ Witherington, *Making a Meal of It*, 38, 48-56.

²⁸ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 200.

²⁹ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, ix.

³⁰ John 13-17. The Last Supper in John is described as a Pre-Passover meal according to Stutzman. Ibid. 48.

³¹ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 55-67, Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption*, 94.

³² Ibid., 34-44.

³³ Ibid., 67-70.

³⁴ Romans 16:16, 1 Cor 16:20, 2 Cor 13:12, 11 Thess 5:26, 1 Peter 5:14, Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 52-55.

³⁵ Ibid. 44-51.

³⁶ Kreider, *Given for You*, 89-98. Kreider described that the emphasis is on 'discipleship, covenant, service, humility, economic justice, and care for the poor and weak.' ibid. 20 With 'rituals of hospitality, conviviality, blessing and shared food' ibid. 24.

1. Thanksgiving or *eucharistein*. That is why the love feast is also called Eucharist; thanksgiving practiced in the prayers around the table.³⁷
2. Remembering Jesus, Christians especially remembered Christ redemptive actions. But also because of the words “in remembrance of Me”.³⁸ According to Kreider these words meant the whole life of Jesus: His eating and walking with people, His way of living, not only His suffering and death. It also means following his memory, doing the way He did.³⁹
3. Feasting in the Kingdom praying “Your Kingdom come”, being people of hope who are living “then is now”⁴⁰ also as an image of Christ being really present in the love feast and the same time waiting until He comes.⁴¹
4. Sharing in the Lord: Jesus shared his life generously with us. By sharing in the generosity of Christ, we “become able to share with each other and the world in need around us”⁴². The church as the body of Christ is becoming visible.⁴³
5. Reconciling and peacemaking: made visible in the holy kiss, as written in 1 Peter 5:14, most times shared after the prayers at the start of sharing bread and wine. It is reminding us of the peace of Christ and a call to reconcile.⁴⁴

The first three themes of Kreider are an elaboration of the communion or thanksgiving of Stutzman. Stutzman uses the past, present and future together⁴⁵, Kreider splits them in three. For both views is something to say. The three belong together, and together it focuses on the *kairos* of the communion. Focussing on the three different themes it helps us to look to the development of the love feast during the centuries. Kreider does not address specifically the preparation or confession. Because there are some exciting things to say on the development of this practice, I will address this practice also. So I stay with seven practices of the love feast and will look at these practices in other eras.

1. Feet washing: submission.
2. Fellowship meal: love.
3. Preparation for communion: confession.
4. Kiss: reconciliation.
5. Communion: thanksgiving.
6. Remembering Jesus: remember and follow.
7. Feasting in the Kingdom: living “then is now”.

From a love feast to a commemorative meal

In Jude 12 and 1 Corinthians 11 already, a struggle is going on about the love feasts. It was the banquet of the upside-down Kingdom, and this was also for Christians a significant change according to their former lifestyle and in that way confronting. Rumours were going around that the love feasts became bacchanals.⁴⁶ Government restrictions made it difficult to meet in the evening. The clerical power raised also in serving the Eucharist. Gradually in the second century it changed from a love

³⁷ Ibid., 90-1.

³⁸ Luke 22:19.

³⁹ Ibid., 91-2.

⁴⁰ James William McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 30-1.

⁴¹ Kreider, *Given for You*, 92-5.

⁴² Ibid., 89-98, citation *ibid.*, 95.

⁴³ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 97-8.

⁴⁵ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 236.

⁴⁶ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 74.

feast with a real meal in a morning meeting with a symbolic meal⁴⁷ in which 'Do this ... in remembrance of Me'⁴⁸ stood centrally. The love feast became a separate meal for the poor.⁴⁹ In the time of the Constantine change and the era's afterwards, much changed around the Eucharist.⁵⁰ Transubstantiation became the leading theological view on what happened in the Eucharist. The kiss became a sign of orthodoxy, instead of a sign of peace. Feet washing became a practice of bishops and monks instead of a practice of all Christians. Confession as the public witness of faith and confession in relation to discerning the body of Christ changed in personal confession of sins. Only a symbolic meal remained.⁵¹

Hubmaier

Many centuries later in the time of the Reformation and the anabaptist beginnings major discussions started again on the Lord's Supper. Christians did not use and change social customs in another way, but were establishing social customs; it was the high time of Christendom. It was the time in which the power of the Roman-Catholic church began to decline.

Transubstantiation was the main view on what happened in the Eucharist during centuries. People were obliged to partake in the Eucharist once a year, got a small wafer and only the priest drank from the cup.⁵² Zwingli, Luther and other reformators discussed, amongst other themes, this way of celebrating the Eucharist. Hubmaier (1480?-1528), a former Roman-Catholic priest, later anabaptist pastor, lived in that time and was in close contact with Zwingli and influenced by the Swiss Anabaptist in the time he lived in and near Zurich.⁵³

Hubmaier began to write about the theology of the Lord's Supper from a new perspective. Hubmaier rejected the view of transubstantiation and searched for another opinion which confirmed his rejection. He radically stated that the Lord's Supper and baptism were 'human acts of commitment in response to grace'.⁵⁴ The Lord's Supper was not only a memorial of the suffering of Christ, but most of all an ethical call to replicate Jesus act of offering Himself. This was the real transformation. According to Hubmaier Christ is not present in the bread and wine, definitely since his ascension He is in heaven! It is by the Spirit that God is present in the church, in the people coming together in his name.⁵⁵ So, he said: 'bread and wine, ..., are tokens (...) of Christ's love by which we remember his gift of love and our calling to love'.⁵⁶ And, going further, the Supper is a sign of the reality now because 'The lord's Supper is the sign of the church as the body of Christ in the world'.⁵⁷ Hubmaier

⁴⁷ Witherington called also some other influences as a reaction to the growth of the Gnostics, the changing context of the Supper in relation to the growth of ascetism and the change in reflection of the Gentile Christians on the Eucharist. Witherington, *Making a Meal of It*, 99.

⁴⁸ 1 Cor. 11:24-25.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 108.

⁵⁰ Stutzman called this 'over-spiritualizing' the Supper because of the Constantinian shift, Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 111-2.

⁵¹ Ibid., 110-137.

⁵² Kreider, *Given for You*, 58.

⁵³ Brian C Brewer, *Pledge of Love: the Anabaptist Sacramental Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012), 11-40

⁵⁴ John D Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism: a Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Waterloo, Ont.; Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1993), 45.

⁵⁵ Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 48-64, Brewer, *Pledge of Love*, 54-60.

⁵⁶ Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 55 from Balthasar Hubmaier, *Schriften / Balthasar Hubmaier. Hrsg. von Gunnar Westin U. Torsten Bergsten. [Übers. D. Einl. Vom Schwed. Ins Dt.: Helga Bergsten]* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verl.-Haus G. Mohn, 1962), 103, 300.

⁵⁷ Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 57.

talked about the Supper as the “Pledge of Love” in which ‘believers themselves became Christ’s body as they pledged to imitate his love’.⁵⁸ In this way, Hubmaier transformed the Eucharist in a new love meal of the community. So it is exciting to see if and how the seven practices of the love feast as mentioned before, are related to the theology and practice of Hubmaier.⁵⁹

The seven practices in relation to Hubmaier’s theology on the Supper

Bringing the practices around the love feast, as described by Stutzman and Kreider, together I came to seven practices as expressed in an earlier section of this essay. In this section, I will look at Hubmaier’s view on these practices. In 1527, in the time he was pastor in Nicholsburg, Hubmaier wrote a liturgical pattern for the Supper.⁶⁰ This pattern is very helpful to look at the practices around the Supper, as are the comments of Brewer and Rempel on this pattern. In the same time, this pattern learns us that the practices of the Supper are practiced in quiet a regulated service instead of a meeting with a real meal.

1. Feet washing: submission

In Waldshut, 1525, Hubmaier practiced feet washing on the same day as he “shared bread”, just the day after he baptised a group of seventy-eighty people.⁶¹ In his further writings there is nothing to find about feet washing.⁶² Looking to the underlying virtue of submission there is more to say. Hubmaier stresses the imitation of Christ’s sacrifice; he stresses the incarnation of Christ and sees the Supper as an ethical reality based on the Johannine gospel.⁶³ In Christ incarnation and sacrifice, submission became visible. Imitating or following Christ means also submission to each other. That is what Hubmaier asked for in the second part of the pledge.⁶⁴

2. Fellowship meal: a public testimony of Christian love.⁶⁵

Hubmaier stayed by the symbolic meal with bread and wine, which had to be an orderly service in which there was no small talk, although there was a time for appropriate questions.⁶⁶ He called the Lord’s Supper the “Pledge of love”, a communion meal in which real bread and wine in ordinary cups are shared with all baptized believers.⁶⁷ It ‘is the primal sign that Christians are committed to live in love toward each other and the world’⁶⁸ he declared. This is also how he saw the incarnation; Christ was not incarnated in the bread, but, by the Spirit of God, in the community of the church in which Christlike love is working.⁶⁹ The Pledge of Love shaped the liturgy of the Supper and more than that it shaped his ecclesiology. Before sharing the bread and wine, the congregation was asked to commit themselves to the Pledge, as being read. Four times each member of the congregation was asked to

⁵⁸ Ibid., 63-5.

⁵⁹ Much more is to say about Hubmaier and the Supper, especially his Christology (Christ is not present in the Supper) and anthropology (free will; trichotomist or dichotomist) in relation to the Supper. Also his view on sacramentality is worth to discuss about. Unfortunately this is far beyond the questions of this essay. For more on this discussion I refer to Pipkin, Rempel and Brewer.

⁶⁰ Balthasar Hubmaier, H. Wayne Pipkin, and John Howard Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism* (Herald Press, 1989), 392-406

⁶¹ Henry Clay Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier: The Leader of the Anabaptists* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1905), 122

⁶² <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/F44ME.html>

⁶³ Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism*, 87.

⁶⁴ Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 403.

⁶⁵ Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 399.

⁶⁶ Harry Wayne Walker Pipkin, *Scholar, Pastor, Martyr: The Life and Ministry of Balthasar Hubmaier (ca.1480-1528)* (International Baptist Theological Seminary of the European Baptist Federation, 2008), 98-9, Brewer, *Pledge of Love*, 67.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 72. Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism*, 60,

⁶⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 70.

say 'I will': on loving God, on loving the neighbor, on accountability and reconciliation, and on testifying of the memorial of Christ.⁷⁰ Brewer states: 'The meal itself, ..., serves as a symbolic confirmation of this pledge of love'.⁷¹

3. Preparation for communion: confession and self examination⁷²

The first pledge is the pledge on loving God, a pledge in which God as Lord is proclaimed. In his liturgical pattern confession of sin and forgiveness plays an important role during a separate service, the day before the Supper. Self examination questions were asked, about believing that Christ gave his body and asking if someone has an 'internal and intensive hunger and thirst for this bread and drink.' Meaning that this bread and wine are only strengthening when someone is spiritually eating and drinking.⁷³ Other questions were if people were thankful to God for what they receive and if they are offering this thankfulness to others, according to Matthew 25. By stressing on feeding the needy, feeding the poor etcetera, Hubmaier stresses again and again 'loving you neighbor'.⁷⁴ So, in this self examination confession, thanksgiving and loving is interrelated.

4. Kiss: reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a fundamental practice in Hubmaier's liturgy of the Supper. He worked it out in the third part of the pledge about accountability and reconciliation. 'Reconcile yourself with all those whom you have offended abandon all envy, hate and evil will toward everyone...'⁷⁵ A clear call to reconciliation even in the case the kiss was not practiced.

5. Communion: thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is what the blessing or prayer is for in the Supper, according to Hubmaier. Blessing bread and wine is giving thanks to God for the bread and wine. The blessing is not the moment of transubstantiation, but the moment of giving thanks.⁷⁶ The first part of the Pledge is a moment of thanksgiving to God in the way of loving, honouring and adoring God.⁷⁷

6. Remembering Jesus: remember and follow.

On this point, Hubmaier has original thoughts which are different from other theologians in that time. In his early thought, the main purpose of the Supper is remembering Christ's suffering and sacrifice and a reflection on his absence. For Hubmaier, it means that a remembrance meal was a meal in which Christ could not be really present himself. Indeed, how could you remember a person who is present?⁷⁸ The Supper was far more than remembering Jesus, for Hubmaier it developed in a meal which 'commemorates the communion of the body of Christ with us'.⁷⁹ This is a 'reminder(s) to the congregation to act as Christ to each other through the bond of unity'.⁸⁰

⁷⁰ Ibid., 77-78, Brewer, *Pledge of Love*, 74.

⁷¹ Ibid., 73.

⁷² Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 393-7, Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 74,

⁷³ Ibid., 63 Brewer, *Pledge of Love*, 69, Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 397.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 395-403.

⁷⁵ Balthasar, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 403.

⁷⁶ Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 60.

⁷⁷ Balthasar, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 403.

⁷⁸ Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 60, 66, Brewer, *Pledge of Love*, 51-2.

⁷⁹ Hubmaier, *Schriften*, 103.

⁸⁰ Brewer, *Pledge of Love*, 58.

7. Feasting in the Kingdom: living “then is now”.

It is hard to find something about the eschatological vision of Hubmaier. In his liturgy, I could not find it. A little bit is to find in the way Hubmaier understood ‘the presence of Christ ... as historic and eschatological only’.⁸¹ Hubmaier spoke of judgment day as a day of accountability in which he hopes that ‘shepherd and sheep may held together’⁸² In the pattern he proclaimed 1 Corinthians 11:26 ‘until He comes’.⁸³ But he did not talk about the Supper as an image for the Messianic or Kingdom meal.⁸⁴ He also argued as mentioned earlier that Christ is not really present in the sharing of bread and wine.

Reflection

It is interesting to see that in Hubmaiers theology of the Supper, mainly described in ‘a form for Christ’s supper’,⁸⁵ many of the seven practices of the love feast are returning. Hubmaier primarily addressed the fellowship or love meal, not as a real meal but in the way of the Pledge of Love. He transformed the Eucharist with the emphasis on transubstantiation to a Supper of the Lord in which the body of Christ, the church, became visible. Hubmaier rejected transubstantiation so deeply that he used almost everything to come to another understanding of the Supper. That is why there are critical remarks to make on his Christological view on the Supper.⁸⁶ However, his strength is in bringing back the Supper to a love feast in which love to God, love to each other and love to the neighbor stood centrally. Next to this he brings submission, self examination and reconciling back to actual practices between people, instead of actions between clergy and laity or inner self examination on all kinds of sins. In Hubmaiers thought, I miss a view on the Supper in relation to feasting in the Kingdom. Maybe this is because judgement day was a significant issue in that time and thinking beyond that day was not an item of discussion.

Hubmaier did not bring the Supper back to a love feast, with a real meal, more than bread and wine. He kept it in a liturgical setting as was the common sense in those days. But he shows in a new way that ‘The Lord’s Supper is the surpassing act of the church’s self- expression. It is the prototype of the church’s life in the world, an action done in memory, gratitude, and imitation of Christ’s sacrifice.’⁸⁷ Hubmaier lived this with his life and took the consequences of this until his last day on which he died as a martyr.

The seven practices of the love feast were present when Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples. They stayed alive, in monastic traditions, on the edges of Christendom, and Hubmaier actualized them in the 16th century. The challenge for us today is: how could we actualise this seven love feast practices in our time? That is the core question related to how we “do this”.

⁸¹ Ibid., 58.

⁸² Balthasar, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 395, also on 397 he speaks on judgement day in relation to Matthew 25: “I was hungry and you fed me”.

⁸³ Ibid., 405.

⁸⁴ At least, I could not find anything on the relationship between the Supper and the Kingdom meal.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 392-408.

⁸⁶ But that is beyond this essay as mentioned earlier.

⁸⁷ Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism*, 87.

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