Lord's Supper
A Brief Historical Overview

"In the apostolic period the Eucharist was celebrated *daily* in connection with a simple meal of brotherly love (the *Agape*), in which the Christians, in communion with their common Redeemer, forgot all distinctions of rank, wealth, and culture, and felt themselves to be members of *one family* of God." (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church,* vol. 1 -- *Apostolic Christianity*, p. 473)

For many centuries, and in many different parts of the world, the Lord's Supper continued to be celebrated with great frequency and great thanksgiving. "In many places and by many Christians it was celebrated even *daily*, after apostolic precedent, and according to the very common mystical interpretation of the 4th petition of the Lord's Prayer -- 'Give us *this day* our *daily bread.*'" (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church,* vol. 2 -- *Ante-Nicene Christianity*, p. 236)

Cyprian (died 258 A.D.; beheaded for his faith during the bloody persecution of Emperor Valerian; a church leader in Carthage, North Africa) spoke in his writings of the "*daily* sacrifice" of the Lord's Supper. So also did Ambrose (died 397 A.D.), who was one of the most distinguished of the 4th century Church Fathers, and a leader of the church in Italy. Chrysostom (345-407 A.D.), the most popular and celebrated of the Greek Church Fathers, complained of the small number of people who showed up for the "*daily* sacrifice" of the Lord's Supper. Augustine (354-430 A.D.; influenced by Ambrose in Milan; became one of the most influential leaders of the Western Church; and lived at Hippo, North Africa) indicated that the observance of the Lord's Supper *varied* from place to place. Early on there was no set pattern; some observed it daily, some weekly, some at other times. Basil (died 379 A.D.; one of the most noted church leaders in Asia Minor) wrote, "We commune *four times in the week*, on the Lord's Day, the fourth day, the preparation day, and the Sabbath."

These few references (a great many more could be cited) indicate sufficiently that in the early centuries of the church's existence, the *frequency* of observance was varied, and it was not considered a point of contention. The direct teaching of Scripture was "as often as," and in the early years this was complied with *daily*, as well as less frequently, with such diverse practices not being made tests of faith or fellowship. The Lord said, "As often as," and they took Him at His word. It is a fact that the frequency has always varied over the centuries, but it was not until *much later* in history that a *specific time* was ordained by various groups as the *only* acceptable time to observe the Lord's Supper, and thus their preferences and perceptions were made precepts, tests of faith, and conditions of fellowship and even salvation.

Another major characteristic of the *early* observance of the Lord's Supper was its *lack of formality and ritualism*. It was observed very simply and in connection with a fellowship meal (The Agape -- "Love Feast" -- Jude 12). "The disciples followed their Lord's example, celebrating a love feast, which would be enriched with memories of their Master and teaching from His nearest disciples, and closing with the more solemn thanksgiving for the broken body and the cup of blessing which Jesus had consecrated." (Hastings, *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church,* vol. 2, p. 68)

The Lord's Supper began, "we believe, as a fellowship meal -- the Love Feast" (William Barclay, *The Lord's Supper,* p. 57) The Didache (*The Teaching of the Lord by the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles*, which was written sometime between 70-110 A.D.) also indicates (in chapters 9 & 14) that the Lord's Supper and the Agape

meal were celebrated together. However, by the beginning of the 2nd century, the Lord's Supper and the Agape began to be separated from one another in many places. This was due to several factors, primarily: The abuses that were creeping in. (see: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Jude 12; 2 Peter 2:13)

"At first the communion was joined with a 'Love Feast,' and was celebrated in the evening, in memory of the last supper of Jesus with His disciples. But as early as the beginning of the second century these two exercises were separated, and the communion was placed in the morning and the love feast in the evening." (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2 -- *Ante-Nicene Christianity*, p. 239)

By the 4th century the abuses connected with the Love Feast were so numerous that it was finally prohibited in a great many locations. Because of these repeated abuses, it is not surprising to discover in church history that "the Eucharist has been detached from its setting as part of a common meal." (Hastings, *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, vol. 3, p. 375)

This process of dissociation proved to be slow, however, and varied in different places. Ignatius (died around 117 A.D.; torn apart by wild beasts in the Roman Amphitheater; a leader in the church at Antioch) wrote near the time of his death that the Lord's Supper and the Agape were still very much united in some parts of Asia Minor and at Antioch.

As the Agape/Love Feast separated from the Lord's Supper it began to undergo some changes. By the 3rd or 4th centuries it had become a *charity meal* in a great many places. Augustine describes it as a supper provided for the poor. Chrysostom says it is a meal provided by the rich for the poor and that it occurs *following* the Lord's Supper. In the *Didascalia* it is described as a meal specifically for widows and the elderly women of the congregation.

By the middle of the 4th century, the church leaders began to debate the worth of the Agape meal. The abuses seemed to be outweighing the benefits. The Council of Laodicea (367 A.D.) forbade its practice in the church; however, the Synod of Gangra allowed it to remain. The Synod of Hippo (393 A.D.) and the Synod of Carthage (397 A.D.) both attempted to ban the Agape Feast and to ensure that it was never linked with the Lord's Supper again. Finally, at the Council of Trullan (692 A.D.) it was forbidden altogether as being sinful. "The Agape became a casualty because human nature debased a lovely thing until it became a handicap rather than a help to the Christian fellowship -- and it is one of the tragedies of the life of the Church that it should have been so." (William Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 61)

As the church began to grow and develop, it became increasingly organized, and with the organization came the rise of ceremony, ritual, and tradition. This impacted every area of church life and practice, including the Lord's Supper. No longer was it a simple memorial meal shared by Christian families in their homes and with fellow believers. Instead, it came to be viewed as a *Sacrament*, with a host of laws and regulations surrounding it. This "doctrine of the *sacrament* of the Eucharist" has taken this simple "feast of the Savior's dying love" and transformed it into the "innocent cause of the most bitter disputes and theological controversies" among God's people. (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3 -- *Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity*, p. 492)

The elements of the Lord's Supper (the bread and fruit of the vine) were fought over: Does one use leavened or unleavened bread? This became a major point of controversy and division between the Roman and Greek

churches. Does one use wine or grape juice? If one uses wine, does he mix it with water, and if so ... how much? Does one stand, sit, or kneel when receiving the elements? All of these questions and literally *hundreds* more, became points of division among the people of God!

In time, the elements were viewed as being sacred, thus requiring special laws to regulate their use. Hippolytus (died about 235 A.D.; martyred during the persecution of Emperor Maximius; he was from Rome) taught that believers must show the most intense reverence for the elements of the Eucharist. It should be received early in the day before any other *common* food was in the stomach; none of it must be dropped or spilt, which would defile it on a dirty floor. It was a common practice at this time for members of the church to take some of the bread home with them to use in a daily, family communion after morning prayers. This was known as *Domestic Communion.* (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2 -- *Ante-Nicene Christianity*, p. 239 ..... and: Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, p. 266)

Hippolytus warned the members of the church that they must never "leave the sacred bread about the house where an un-baptized person, or even a mouse, might accidentally eat it." Later, it would be taught that should a mouse eat a crumb of the bread that had fallen to the floor, it would thereby receive eternal life! Thus, to keep from infesting Heaven, the elements had to be protected!

Cyril of Jerusalem (active around 350 A.D.) began to develop an elaborate ceremonial system for the Lord's Supper. Those leading must ceremonially wash their hands; great care must be taken that none of the elements are dropped; the elements are referred to as "the fearful presence" upon the Holy Table. "The communicants are directed to receive the bread in hollowed palms, the left hand supporting the right." (Chadwick, *The Early Church*, p. 267)

Basil and Chrysostom both spoke of the Lord's Table as a place of "terror and shuddering." Before the end of the 4th century, in the Eastern churches, it was thought necessary to screen off the Lord's Table with curtains so that "common people" could not "look upon" the elements and thus defile them by their gaze.

This awe and fear (with its accompanying commandments and regulations and rituals) came from a rising belief that the elements in some mysterious way, after they had been blessed with prayer, were transformed into something more than mere bread and wine. Some taught that the elements literally became the body and blood of Jesus; others taught that Jesus merely indwelt the elements in some spiritual sense; still others felt that there was nothing special in the elements themselves, but that they merely represented the body and blood of Jesus. Thus, the seeds were being planted for what was to prove the biggest single controversy surrounding the Lord's Supper in church history.

Ignatius believed that the elements became the actual body and blood of Jesus and that they had the power, when eaten, to impart eternal life. He referred to the elements as "the medicine of immortality; the antidote to death." Agreeing with this highly mystical view were: Justin Martyr (died about 165 A.D.) and Irenaeus (died about 200 A.D.), just to name a couple. Men like Tertullian (died about 230 A.D.) and Cyprian (died 258 A.D.) continued to teach that the elements were mere symbols.

Justin Martyr began to develop the idea that for the celebration of the Lord's Supper to be valid it must be performed by a Bishop or other recognized church official. Gregory of Nyssa (331-394 A.D.; younger

brother of Basil of Caesarea) taught that it was by "virtue of the priestly blessing" spoken in the presence of the elements that the elements were miraculously transformed into the glorified body of Christ.

With the *sacramental* view of the elements, and also the view that they were somehow more than mere bread and wine, came the *sacrificial* view of the Lord's Supper. This view maintains that since the elements actually become the body and blood of Christ, the Lord's Supper is therefore an actual *re-sacrifice* of Jesus Christ. This was an "un-bloody" re-sacrifice of our Lord for the forgiveness of sins; thus, the Lord's Supper had the power, when eaten, to forgive sins. This would later come to be called the *Sacrifice of the Mass* (or, just "Mass").

James Cardinal Gibbons (1834-1921; a prominent American Roman Catholic scholar; wrote *The Faith Of Our Fathers* (in 1826) in which he sought to explain the various doctrines of the Catholic Church) explains the *Mass* this way: "The sacrifice of the Mass is the consecration of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, and the oblation ('offering of a sacrifice') of this body and blood to God, by the ministry of the Priest, for a perpetual memorial of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The Sacrifice of the Mass is *identical* with that of the cross, both having the same victim and High Priest -- Jesus Christ. The only difference consists in the manner of the oblation. Christ was offered up on the cross in a bloody manner, and in the Mass He is offered up in an un-bloody manner. On the cross He purchased our ransom, and *in the Eucharistic Sacrifice the price of that ransom is applied to our souls*."

For centuries the religious world debated the Lord's Supper. They debated whether the elements actually transformed into something other than what they were. If they *did* transform, then *how* did they do it? -- This they also debated. A memorial feast designed to stress our unity had become the battleground of the religious scholars, and it resulted in tremendous division in Christendom. BUT ... the controversy had only begun!!

Throughout the coming centuries, and into the Middle Ages, the major controversy centered around the question concerning the *nature of the elements*. During this time three major views fought for dominance:

1. The Conversion Conception. This view taught that the elements became the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. This view triumphed in the Eastern Church at this time. John Damascene (675-749 A.D.; one of the most honored theologians of the Eastern Church) said that the Holy Spirit performs a miracle on the elements at the moment when the priest consecrates them, thus "changing them into God's *actual* body and blood. The bread and wine are not merely figures of the body and blood of Christ (God forbid!), but the deified body of the Lord itself." Thus, the *literal* body and blood of Jesus are offered up again in the Lord's Supper.
2. The Dyophysite View. This was also known as the "Two Nature View" or the "Spiritual View." The elements are said to have *two* natures: A *physical* nature in which they *outwardly* remain visible as bread and wine, and a *spiritual* nature in which they *inwardly* become the actual body and blood of Christ; this inward nature being visible only to the eyes of faith. Since this was the view strongly held by Augustine, the Western Church adopted this view for quite some time.
3. The Symbolic View. This view stated that the elements are nothing more than what they appear to be: Mere bread and wine. However, they are *representative* of the body and blood of Christ. They are

symbols of the reality, not the reality itself. As the struggle for dominance between the two previous views was being waged over the centuries, this latter view was largely overlooked.

Paschasius Radbertus (800-865 A.D.; a devout, but superstitious, monk from France) was the first to clearly teach and write about the doctrine of *Transubstantiation*, which would later be adopted by the Roman Catholic Church. Although he never actually used the term itself (this would not occur for another two centuries), nevertheless he is the one credited with formulating the doctrine. In his book *On The Body And Blood Of The Lord* (831 A.D.) he writes, "The *substance* of bread and wine is *effectually changed* into the flesh and blood of Christ. After consecration there is *nothing else* in the Eucharist but the flesh and blood of Christ ... the *very flesh* which was born of Mary, and suffered on the cross and rose from the tomb ... although the *figure* of bread and wine remain to the senses of sight, touch, and taste."

The chief opponent of this view at this time was Ratramnus (died about 868 A.D.; a monk from the monastery at Corbie, France). His view was a cross between #2 and #3 above. He wrote that "the body and blood of Christ are *mysteriously present*, yet are *not the same* as that body which was hanging on the cross." (William P. Barker, *Who's Who in Church History*, p. 234)

This man was also "the first to give the symbolical theory a scientific expression. He regarded the sacrifice of the mass not as an actual (though un-bloody) repetition, but only as a commemorative celebration of Christ's sacrifice." (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 4 -- *Medieval Christianity*, p. 549, 551).

The belief that the elements actually became the body and blood of Jesus led to some of the most outrageous debates: What would happen if a mouse or insect consumed some of the elements? Would they live forever? What happens to the bread and wine after they enter the human body? Is the actual body and blood of Christ eliminated as common human waste?! The advocates of transubstantiation insisted it was a "diabolical blasphemy" to even suggest that the Lord's body and blood would be passed out of the human body as excrement. Those who dared to suggest such a thing were branded as heretics, and called *Stercorianists*. Pope Sylvester II (reigned from 999-1003 A.D.; the first Frenchman to be named Pope) declared that the elements are *preserved inside one's body* until the final resurrection!

A couple of centuries later the controversy flared up again through the teachings of Berengar (1000-1088 A.D.; head of the Cathedral School at Tours, France; a forerunner of Christian Rationalism, he strongly criticized the authority of the Catholic Church). After much study he came to the conclusion that the doctrine of transubstantiation was "a vulgar superstition contrary to the Scriptures, to the fathers, and to reason ... an absurdity and an insane folly of the populace." His teachings produced an uproar in the religious world.

His chief opponent was Lanfranc (1005-1089 A.D.; a traditionalist whose friendship with William the Conqueror led him to England in 1070 A.D., where he became Archbishop of Canterbury, a position he held until his death). Berengar was condemned by several synods and councils of the Catholic Church:

1. The Roman Synod under Pope Leo IX in April, 1050.
2. The Synod at Vercelli, September, 1050.
3. The Synod of Tours in 1059 under Pope Nicholas II (it was at this council that the rules for electing popes were formulated). Berengar, fearing death, recanted and admitted that a person actually *chewed*

the very body of Christ *with one's teeth*, and then he threw his books into the fire. Upon returning to France he immediately began speaking out again against the Catholic Church.

4. The Synod of Poitiers in 1075, at which he was almost killed, and his friends withdrew from him in fear for their own lives.
5. The Lateran Council of February, 1079, held in Rome under Pope Gregory VII, again forced him to recant or face death. Berengar recanted and returned home in defeat; broken by his cowardice in the face of death. He spent the remaining 9 years of his life as a hermit on a deserted island.

Berengar's viewpoint, and his struggle with the Catholic Church, however, were not soon forgotten. Throughout the Middle Ages those who opposed transubstantiation were referred to as "*Berengarians*." Because of her struggle with this man, the Catholic Church began to formulate and solidify her doctrine on the Eucharist. In the first half of the 12th century we first encounter the word "*Transubstantiation*" --- first used as a *noun* by Hildebert of Tours, and first used as a *verb* by Stephen of Autun. It became the official doctrine of the Western (Roman Catholic) Church at the *Fourth Lateran Council* of 1215 A.D., and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274; his system of theology serves even to this day as the basis for all Roman Catholic theological instruction) became its champion. *The Council of Trent*, which met off and on from 1545-1563, again reaffirmed this doctrine.

With the triumph of the doctrine of transubstantiation came other subsequent abuses of the Lord's Supper. This "sacrament" came to be viewed as the supreme religious function of the Church. The elements were adored, worshipped, and given almost magical powers; people claimed to be healed simply by eating them. The elements were also regarded as being so sacred that in time the cup was withdrawn from the people for fear they would spill a drop of it on the ground. (It was only in rather recent times that the cup has been restored to the laity.) The scholars defended this action by maintaining the whole of Christ was in *either* element, thus the laity did not need to partake of the cup, but only of the bread. Water was to be mixed with the wine which symbolized: (a) Water and blood came forth from Christ's side on the cross, and (b) water = God's people, wine = Christ; the two combined = the union of Christ with His people (the church). *The Synod of Cologne* (1279) and *The Synod of Lambeth* (1281) prescribed 2 or 3 drops of water per cup as being sufficient.

The Eucharist (the "Mass") was regarded as being able to confer grace. "As a *sacrament* it benefits those who partake; as a *sacrifice* its benefits accrue also to persons who do not partake, living and dead. It has the power to remove sins, both venial and mortal" (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church,* vol. 5 -- *The Middle Ages*, p. 720). It didn't take the priests long to realize that the Mass not only gave them great power over the laity, but that "each Mass had a marketable value." (Everett Ferguson, *Church History: Reformation and Modern*, p. 6) As one can imagine, numerous legends and superstitions arose concerning the Eucharist. For several examples, see Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 5 -- *The Middle Ages*, p. 721-729.

The abuses of, and the numerous false and ludicrous teachings surrounding the Lord's Supper played a major role in bringing about what has come to be called The Protestant Reformation. The major leaders of this movement of protest and reform were Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. Each of these men held somewhat different views on the Lord's Supper.

Martin Luther (1483-1546). By the year 1520, Luther had rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, but he continued to believe that the actual body and blood of Christ were *present* in the elements. He developed the teaching (later called "*Consubstantiation*") which maintained that the real flesh and blood of Jesus *joined with* or *mingled with* the elements of the Lord's Supper. Thus, Luther believed that the presence of Jesus in the elements was real, but he did *not* believe it was the result of any "priestly miracle of consecration."

"The Lord's Supper was for Luther a divine sign of the communion (fellowship of unity) of all believers with one another and Christ." (Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era: 1500-1650 A.D.*, p. 127) Luther sought to restore the Lord's Supper "to its primitive character as a commemoration of the atoning death of Christ, and a communion of believers with Him ... Luther observed a *weekly* communion as the conclusion of the regular service on the Lord's Day." (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7 -- *Modern Christianity: The German Reformation*, p. 492)

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531). He sparked the Reformation in the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland about the same time Luther started the Reformation in Germany. (A man by the name of Guillaume Farel (1489-1565) brought the Reformation to the French-speaking sections of Switzerland.) Zwingli rejected Luther's view as being too close to the Catholic view. He believed the elements were merely symbols, and that Christ was present in the elements only symbolically, and not literally.

Zwingli taught that every practice not clearly commanded in the NT writings should be abolished, thus he stressed the preaching of the Gospel, and observed the Lord's Supper in connection with an Agape (Love Feast), as he believed the Scriptures directed. This was to be a congregational observance and not something a priest did alone in front of the congregation he taught. The communion service was held very simply and solemnly, and was observed *four times a year*: At Easter, Whitsunday (Pentecost), the beginning of Autumn, and Christmas. (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 -- *Modern Christianity: The Swiss Reformation*, p. 60-61, 247) The first celebration of this "*reformed communion*" was in April, 1525.

Zwingli also taught that the Lord's Supper was a sign of our *unity* with one another. "For Zwingli, the sacrament creates union with each other, and renews union with Christ, and it does both by bringing to our remembrance, through the signs of the bread and the wine, the death and sacrifice of Christ. For Zwingli, the Lord's Supper is a memorial in which we find, through the remembrance stimulated by the signs of the bread and wine, closer union with each other and renewed union with Christ." (William Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 78)

John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvin was born, raised, and educated in France, but did most of his work in Geneva, Switzerland where he spent the last decades of his life. He established a school in Geneva from which his converts spread out into all of Europe. Calvin has sometimes been called, "The only *international* reformer." Calvin agreed with Luther that the body of Jesus was really in the elements, but he felt it was there spiritually rather than physically. He considered Zwingli's interpretation, that the elements were merely symbols and nothing more, "too profane." Calvin favored a *weekly* observance, but did not make this a point of contention, as he believed the statement "as often as" dictated a non-regulated, heart-felt observance. In most of the Calvinistic churches at this time it was actually celebrated "*once a month* in a simple but very solemn manner by the whole congregation." (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 -- *Modern Christianity: The Swiss Reformation*, p. 373-374)

Calvin made *preaching* the central element of the assembly, rather than the Lord's Supper (as a response to the Catholic Church, which had made the Eucharist the central element of the service). In the design of the church buildings following this time this emphasis can be clearly seen: In most Protestant church buildings the pulpit is in the center and the Lord's Table to the side (or below the pulpit), whereas in most Catholic Church buildings the Lord's Table is in the center, and the pulpit is off to the side.

Although there was a great deal of agreement between these three great reformers, yet the few differences between them kept the Swiss and German Reformations from ever merging. The movements of Zwingli and Calvin, however, did eventually join forces, and after 1580 were known as the *Reformed Church*. This was basically because Calvin and Zwingli were willing to "agree to differ ... for the sake of maintaining unity in what they considered the essentials" (Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era: 1500-1650*, p. 195). Although Luther and Zwingli at first agreed to refrain from dispute over their differences and to study the matter together in Christian love, their differences soon became the cause of bitter disputes. Because they disagreed with him, Luther simply could not "recognize the Swiss as his brethren" (Grimm, p. 197). The disputing continued until it was finally brought to an unhappy end at *The Marburg Colloquy* (October 1-3, 1529) when the two reformers essentially admitted their differences could not be resolved and went their separate ways. Luther, convinced that the Swiss had perverted the entire Bible, refused to have any fellowship with them.

As for the Catholic view, it was again reaffirmed in *The Council of Trent* (1545-1563). It had not really changed, although further abuses continued to creep in. It was held that the Lord's original sacrifice on the cross "availed for *original* sin and that the sacrifice of the Mass availed for *daily* sins, deadly and venial alike." (William Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 87) This led to a traffic in Masses which Luther condemned in his sermon on "*The Babylonish Captivity of the Church*." Luther stated, "This abuse has turned a divine sacrament into an article of trade, the subject of bargaining and business deals, upon which the entire maintenance of priests and monks depends."

In a sense, all the Catholics had to do was sit back and let the Protestants fight it out among themselves. "The Eucharistic controversy broke the political force of Protestantism, and gave new strength to the Roman party." (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7 -- *Modern Christianity: The German Reformation*, p. 630) The reformers became so intent on fighting one another, that they lost sight, to a large degree, of what it was they had originally sought to reform. Luther, who had a bad temper, was one of the worst. Calvin wrote, regretfully, of "the vehemence of Luther's natural temperament, which was so apt to boil over in every direction," even to the point of "flashing his lightning upon the servants of the Lord."

John Calvin tried valiantly to unite the Reformation Movement, but with little success. In a letter dated November 25, 1544 to Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575; he succeeded Zwingli upon the latter's death in 1531, and carried on the Swiss Reformation; "in an age which emphasized differences, Bullinger sought for points of unity, did not demand rigid uniformity, and treated fellow Christians who differed with him with love") --- (William Barker, *Who's Who in Church History*, p. 52), Calvin asked him to "keep silence" against the "fierce invectives ... and harassments" of Luther. "You will do yourselves no good by quarreling, except that you may afford some sport to the wicked." Calvin said that if "they see us rending each other asunder" then the efforts to preach the gospel will be destroyed. "Even should he have provoked us, we ought rather to decline the contest than to increase the wound by the general shipwreck of the church!" The letter in its entirety is a monument to the peacemaking spirit of John Calvin, who said of Luther in this letter, "Even

though he were to call me a devil, I should still not the less esteem and acknowledge him as an illustrious servant of God!"

One of the most important things to come out of the Protestant Reformation was the return of the Scriptures to the common people. For centuries the Bible had been declared the exclusive right of priests and high church officials. It was chained to the front of the building, and for a common man to possess a copy of the Bible was punishable by death. Many men who translated the Bible into the common language of the day so that people could read it were burned at the stake!

However, when the Scriptures were finally given to the people, and the people began to study them for themselves, they not only realized that a great many falsehoods were being taught by the church leaders, but they also realized that many of the reformers had not gone far enough to restore the whole Truth. This led to what has been called The Radical Reformation. This consisted of various movements led by a host of "left-wing reformers." Most historians have lumped these various movements under the term The Anabaptists because all these various movements had one point they all agreed on: Opposition to infant baptism.

The "Anabaptists" did not like the term (it came from a Greek word meaning "to baptize *again*") because they did not believe their baptism to be a *second* baptism. They preferred the name *Baptists*. These radical reformers were less interested in *theology* than in the *practical application* of biblical teachings. They insisted that the services of the church be very simple and that they contain nothing that could not be found in the primitive NT church. "The Lord's Supper was merely a remembrance, a meal of fellowship, signifying a union with Christ and the brethren. It should not be celebrated in a church building, for fear of encouraging 'false devotion,' but in private homes and in the evening, according to Christ's example." (Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era: 1500-1650*, p. 267) The "Anabaptists" left their imprint upon the teachings of many later groups, including: The Hutterites, the Mennonites, the Independent churches, the Quakers, and the Baptists.

The nature of religious practice in the United States owes its origin, to a large extent, to the religious controversies of 17th-century England. These controversies dealt primarily with church organization and practice. Probably the group that most influenced later American thought and practice was The Puritans. Such groups as the Episcopalians, the Presbyterians, parts of the Anglican Church, Congregationalists, and the Baptists find their roots in Puritanism. In 1628-1630 the Puritans arrived in America and established the *Massachusetts Bay Colony* with the intent of organizing a "*Godly* commonwealth" in the wilderness of this new land.

In the religious history of America since that time many movements have risen and developed into new churches. Revivalism, with its stress on evangelism and emotionalism, resulted in the growth and expansion of such groups as the Baptists and the Methodists. Again, many of these groups owe much of their thinking and practice to the Puritans. At the center of the Puritan community life stood the meeting house which was filled with high square pews. These were purchased by the members. "Worship was simple, unadorned, edifying, and protracted. The principle service began at 9 o'clock in the morning. The emphasis fell upon the sermon, which generally lasted about one hour, though on occasion it might be stretched to two or three. There were *two Sunday services*, with an additional *weekly afternoon meeting* that featured an exposition of Scripture by the Minister. *A Cappella* congregational psalm-singing was a distinctive feature of Puritan

worship with an elder or deacon pitching the tune and directing the singing. The Lord's Supper was celebrated *once a month*, but as a memorial rather than a sacrament." (Clifton E. Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States*, p. 78-79) In 1677, *Solomon Stoddard*, a Puritan minister, began to allow "unconverted church members" to partake of the Lord's Supper "because it might serve as a means by which they would become converted." This practice came to be known as "*Stoddardeanism*."

The movement that most directly affects the *Churches of Christ* is one that has come to be called by many The Restoration Movement. This was an effort to unite all the Christians who were scattered throughout the various groups and movements into one harmonious, loving fellowship of true believers, united around Christ rather than various creeds and practices of men. Although this goal was held in common by many men in many locations, it came to the fore with Thomas Campbell (1763-1854). Campbell was of Scotch-Irish origin and was a minister for the Presbyterian Church. He arrived in the United States in 1807. He was a scholar of the Word and came to "despise the *trivialities* which rent asunder the Christian community." (Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States*, p. 308)

With regard to the Lord's Supper, he rejected the Presbyterian's "close communion" rule, and "invited *all* Christians to participate in the communion, regardless of the denominational connection" (Olmstead, p. 308). Charges were filed against him and the Synod advised him to find other employment. At this time Thomas Campbell became a "free-lance minister" and preached in various communities in private homes. His central theme was the sole authority of Scripture and the unity of all believers. In 1809, he and his followers organized the *Christian Association of Washington*, whose motto was: "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." This was not viewed as a separate church, nor did it intend at this time to become one, but was seen as an independent society determined to achieve reform within the Christian community at large. That others might rally to this reformation cause; Campbell prepared his "*Declaration and Address*," which was published in September, 1809.

In October, 1809, his son, Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) came to America to join his father. Alexander was a scholar of the Bible in its original languages and assisted his father in preaching from house to house. In May, 1811 the Christian Association organized itself into an independent church which was named *Brush Run Church*. Thomas Campbell was elected as its Elder, Alexander was the Minister, and four deacons were chosen. "From its incipience, the church observed the Lord's Supper *weekly*." (Olmstead, p. 309) From 1813-1830 the *Brush Run Church* was a part of the *Redstone Baptist Association*, but the Campbell's emphasis on baptism finally led to a split with the Baptists. The Baptists also favored a less frequent observance of the Lord's Supper than that favored by the Campbells. The Baptist practice is best stated as follows: "As to the time, place, and frequency of the ordinance, no Scriptural directions are given. These are left optional with the churches. They are usually observed on Sundays, but not necessarily. As to the Supper, our churches have very generally come to observe it on *the first Sunday of each month*." (Edward T. Hiscox, *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, p. 20)

As a result of several issues which arose in the *Stone-Campbell Movement* which could not be successfully resolved among the members, a split occurred resulting in three new groups at the beginning of the 20th century: *The Disciples of Christ, The Christian Church, and The Church of Christ*. With regard to the Lord's Supper, the *Churches of Christ*, more so than the others, have agreed with the personal preferences of the Campbells, and practice a *weekly* observance.