

WHEREFORE?
1 Corinthians 16:22

Some time ago -- I heard one man trying to persuade another to join him in a business venture, but the latter was just not going to be coerced. "Before I do one thing," he said, "I want to know all the whys and wherefores." That man was showing good sense. He was not going to act until he understood. He might get involved in something risky.

This ought to be our attitude in religion too. Certain religious acts -- or rituals -- like the Eucharist here -- ought not lightly to be entered into -- until we know at least some of the "whys and wherefores" -- until we understand what it is we are doing -- what we are getting ourselves into. After all -- this religious ritual may be involving us in some rather unearthly -- even risky -- commitments. So, don't leap to the Lord's table before you think.

Before we do one thing -- therefore, let me sum up the New Testament teaching on Holy Communion. The following is about as entertaining as the information on the label of a medicine bottle -- but as necessary -- that is -- if you plan to partake of it. Of course, if you are already familiar with the contents -- you don't have to read the label, just relax and swallow. But if you are uncertain as to the true content of Holy Communion -- and don't know whether you want to partake of it or not -- then listen carefully while I set down a quick New Testament analysis of the contents for you.

There are five classic elements in this sacrament.

The first is the New Testament belief that the supreme gift of the Eucharist -- what is literally given to those who partake of it -- is the real (not symbolic) personal presence of the risen, glorified Lord. The bread formula or saying used by the Christ -- "this is me". In effect, "though I shall not be eating any more meals with you, my disciples, you will often be breaking bread together, and when you do, think of me, for my real personal presence will be unseen in your midst, I will be with you. A fragment of one of the earliest liturgies used with the Eucharist were the words in 1 Corinthians 16:22 -- "Our Lord, come!" or "Our Lord is here!" and so he is. Not in symbol, but in fact. When we come to the Lord's table -- our Lord comes to meet us. He is here. Why, it is Easter morning.

Secondly, the Lord's Supper proclaims the cross of Christ. His cup saying or formula -- "This is my blood" -- means not only that Christ is present, but present as the savior who

initiates the New Covenant by His death. So, when we take the cup -- we take our place in the new covenant community -- we become Christ's men. When we take up the cup, we take up Christ's benefits -- but also His cross -- His responsibility. When we take the cup -- we are saying in dogmatic action -- "We are now willing to spill our blood for you, Christ." For, are we so willing? Think of "the coy eye wink" of success -- the beckoning finger of our sensate culture -- the lure of luxury's lap -- the conscienceless organization man and wife -- the burning racial hate. Are we Christians ready to take up Christ's cup? To drink it to the bitter dregs? Descend with our Lord into hell? God knows -- not I! Only let us look at our own souls -- and that's always a risky business even if "through a glass darkly".

The third New Testament element in the Lord's Supper is that it is a foretaste of the final reunion with Christ in glory, "Until that day in My Father's kingdom". No pre-Freudian, pre-Einstein wish projection is this and no Egyptian funerary rite either -- but a sure and certain hope. Life is no blind alley -- leading to the death rattle and the screams of those left alone -- but for the Christian an open road -- unto God. Christ waiting our coming as we wait here today for His. *Mysterium tremulum?* Of course. But so is the next day.

The fourth New Testament element in the Lord's Supper is that it is both a pledge and an expression of fellowship between Christians. True, once in the church -- we are never out of it -- for we are the church -- thus take it everywhere we go -- always in church (morning, noon, and night) -- but 99% of the time -- in the church scattered -- (sometimes I think about you through the week -- scattered all across town and country -- but still the church and I wonder how the church is doing where you are.) So, only occasionally the church gathered -- but gathered especially close at Holy Communion -- so close to God around this table -- so close to the vital core, the very heart of our religion -- one hope, one faith, one birth -- so come here brother men, fold to thy heart thy brother -- "here at least -- here at last -- no black hate -- no white fears -- no lingering family feuds - no schisms -- no, God, not here -- surely not here".

In the fifth and final place -- this Eucharist is just that -- Eucharist -- "thanksgiving". There is no magic in this act of the Lord's Supper -- and no sacrifice -- other than the offering to God of ourselves, our thanks and praise. "Here we offer and present unto Thee ourselves accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving fulfill in us the purpose of Thy redeeming love; through Jesus Christ our Lord"

When we cannot live as brother men under one Christ -- what we cannot do -- God can enable -- so the "Eucharist" -- the giving of thanks and praise to Him for our salvation -- "all honor and glory by unto Thee, O Father Almighty, world without end." Amen