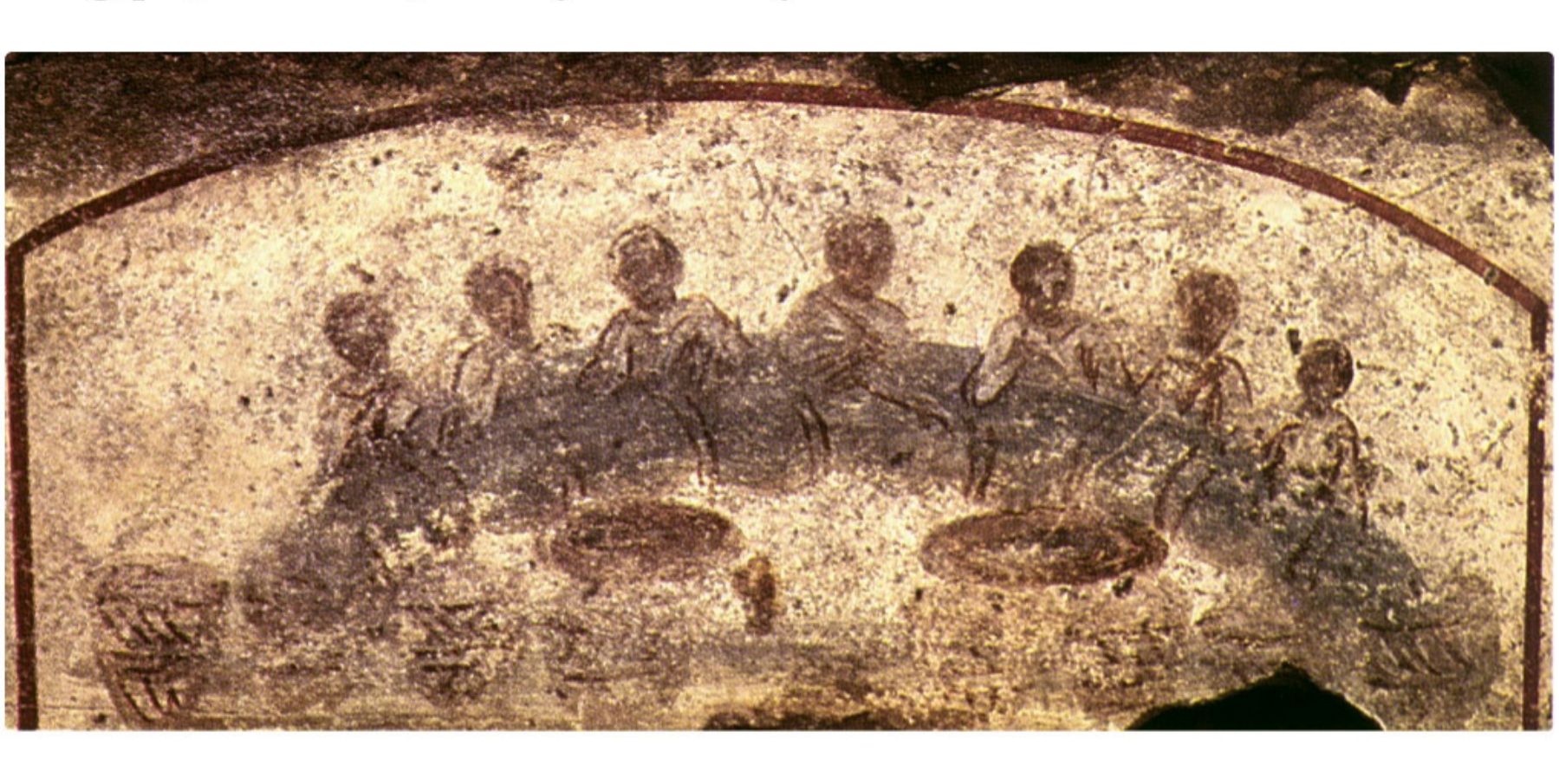
The Agape (Love Feasts) in Early Christianity



The New Testament contains cryptic verses about the common meal referred to as a "Love Feast" or *Agapae* around the Lord's Supper. The following post is a collection of Patristic, Historian and Scripture references to the Common Meal. Here are a few examples, with Jude 12 being the most clear reference::

> "These are the men who are hidden reefs in your ***love feasts*** when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted;" - Jude 12 NASB
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> "*Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house*, they were taking their [fn]meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,..." Act 2:46 NASB
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> Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, - 1 Corinthians 11:20 NASB
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> "But when you give a ***reception [banquet]***, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, Luke 14:13 NASB

According to various historians, the Early Church met in homes for a common meal. After the meal (or sometimes before), the baptized Christians would withdraw from the rest of the meal's attendees to celebrate the Lord's Supper in private. This practice lead to much speculation that the Lord's Supper with related to the Mystery Religions that had similar practices. The Love Feast (Agapae) was a common meal available to everyone whom visited the house church, and the excess food was distributed to the poor. The food was supplied in part by all who attended.

Luke Timothy Johnson cites the following Patristic sources as proof of the common meals general practice.

***Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity*, pg 142 n.24, Luke Timothy Johnson**

> "Lietzmann's basic argument is that evidence for a later distinction between a form of ritual meal called the *agape* (that did not contain the words of institution) and the Eucharist (which did make express rememberance of Jesus' words over the bread and cup) point back to the beginning of Christianity, when there were two "primitive types" of sacred meals.
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> Note 24: The main evidence for such a meal is the *Apostolic Traditions* of Hippolytus, 113.8 (see also the *Canons of Hippolytus* 32); *The Apostolic Constitutions* 2.28; the *Epistula Apostolorum* 15; and Tertullian, *Apology,* 39. The use of *agape* and *agapan* in Ignatius, *Rom.* 7.8 and *Smyr.* 7.1 is less decisive. See Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper,* 161-7. Note 25. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper,* 206"

Here are the full quotations that Luke Timothy Johnson listed in Note 24:

Apostolic Traditions, *Chapters 25-39 , Hippolytus*

> Chapter 25 When the evening has arrived, with the bishop present the deacon shall bring in a lamp. 2 The bishop, standing in the midst of all the faithful present, shall give thanks. But he shall first greet all by saying, "The Lord be with you." 3 And all the people shall respond, "And with your spirit." 4 Then the bishop shall say, "Let us give thanks to the Lord." 5 And the people shall respond, "It is proper and just. Greatness and exaltation and glory are due to him."6 But he shall not say, "Lift up your hearts," because that is said for the oblation.7 And he shall pray thus, saying, "We give thanks to you, O God, through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, because you have enlightened us by revealing the incorruptible light. 8 Therefore, having finished the length of a day, and arriving at the beginning of the night, and having been satisfied with the light of the daywhich you created for our satisfaction, and since we now do not lack a light for the evening through your grace,we sanctify you and glorify you,9 through your only Son our Lord Jesus Christ,through whom to you with him be glory and might and honorwith the Holy Spirit,now and always, and throughout the ages of the ages.Amen.10 Then all shall say,"Amen."11 After the meal they shall get up and pray, and the children shall sing songs, along with the virgins.12 Afterwards, the deacon holding the mixed cup of the oblation shall say a psalm from among those in which is written Alleluia. 13 Then, if the elder orders it, more from the same psalms. After this, the bishop shall offer the cup, saying one of those psalms appropriate to the cup, all of which should include Alleluia. 14 When the psalms are recited, all shall say, "Alleluia," which means, "We praise he who is God. Glory and praise to him who created all the world by word alone!" 15 When the psalm is completed, he shall bless the cup and give of the pieces of bread to all the faithful ones.
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> ***Chapter 26 When they dine, the faithful present shall take from the hand of the bishop a small piece of bread before taking their own bread, because it is blessed. Yet it is not the eucharist, like the body of the Lord. 2 Before they all drink, they shall take their cups and give thanks for them. Thus they will eat and drink in purity. 3 However, give the catechumens exorcised bread and cups***.
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> Chapter 27 The catechumen may not take part in the Lord's Supper. 2 At every meal, those who eat shall remember him who invited them, because he requested that they might come under his roof.a Lit. recline at
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> Chapter 28 Eat and drink in moderation. Do not drink to drunkenness, so that no one will mock you and so that he who invited you will not be grieved by your disorderly conduct. It is better that he continue to pray to be made worthy so that the saints may come to him. For indeed, as he said, "You are the salt of the earth." 2 If you are all assembled and are offered a dinner gift [*Gk apophorêton]*, accept it.3 When you eat, eat sufficiently and not to excess, so that the host may have some left that he can then send to someone as leftovers of the saints, so that the one to whom it is sent may rejoice.4 Let the guests eat in silence, without arguing, saying only what the bishop allows. If someone asks a question, it shall be answered. When the bishop answers, all shall remain silent, praising him modestly, until someone else asks a question.5 And if, in the absence of the bishop, the faithful attend the meal in the presence of an elder or a deacon, they shall eat in the same way, honorably. Everyone shall be careful to receive the blessed bread and from the hand of the elder or deacon. Similarly, the catechumen will still receive exorcised.6 If laypeople only are gathered, they shall behave modestly, for a layperson cannot make the blessed bread.
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> Chapter 29 Each shall eat in the Name of the Lord. For this is pleasing to God that we should show ourselves as zealots even among the pagans, all of us being unified and sober.
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> Chapter 30 Whenever someone wishes to invite older widows to a meal, he shall send them away before sunset. 2 If he cannot receive them in his own home due to his ecclesiastical office, he shall give them food and wine and send them away. Then they may eat it at home as they please.
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> Chapter 31 All shall be diligent to offer to the bishop the firstfruits of the fruits of the first harvest. 2 He shall bless them, saying, 3 "We give thanks to you, God, and offer to you the firstfruits of the fruitswhich you have given to us as food, having nourished them by your word, commanding the earth to bring forth all kinds of fruitfor the pleasure and nourishment of men and all animals. 4 For all this we praise you, God, in which you have been our benefactor, adorning all creation for us with various fruits,5 through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,through whom to you be glorythroughout the ages of the ages.Amen."
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> Chapter 32 These are the fruits which he shall bless: the grape, fig, pomegranate, olive, pear, apple, blackberry, peach, cherry, almond, and plum. But not the pumpkin, melon, cucumber, onion, garlic, or any other vegetable.2 Sometimes flowers also are offered. The rose and lily may be offered, but no other flowers.3 With all foods, give thanks to the Holy God, eating them to his glory.
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> Chapter 33 No one must eat anything on Paschaa before the oblation has been made, for with one who acts thus, it will not be counted as a fast. 2 If a woman is pregnant, or if someone is sick and cannot fast for two days, let them fast on Saturday, taking bread and water if necessary. 3 If are at sea or for any other necessity did not know the day, when they have learned it they shall fast after Pentecost. 4 For the Passover which we celebrate is not a type, for the type has indeed passed. For this reason it no longer happens in the second month, and one should fast when one has learned the truth.a Or Easter
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> Chapter 34 Each of the deacons and sub-deacons shall serve the bishop. The bishop shall be told who are the sick, so that if it seems good to him, he may visit them. For the sick are greatly comforted that the high priest remembers them.
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> Chapter 35 The faithful, as soon as they wake up and are risen, before beginning work, shall pray to God, and then go to their work. 2 But if there is any instruction in the Word, they shall give this preference and go there to hear the Word of God for the strengthening of their souls. They shall be zealous to go to the church, where the Spirit flourishes.
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> Chapter 36 The faithful shall be ***careful to partake of the eucharist before eating anything else***. For if they eat with faith, even though some deadly poison is given to them, after this it will not be able to harm them.
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> Chapter 37 All shall be careful so that no unbeliever tastes of the eucharist, nor a mouse or other animal, nor that any of it falls and is lost. For it is the Body of Christ, to be eaten by those who believe, and not to be scorned.
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> Chapter 38 Having blessed the cup in the Name of God, you received it as the antitype of the Blood of Christ. 2 Therefore do not spill from it, for some foreign spirit to lick it up because you despised it. You will become as one who scorns the Blood, the price with which you have been bought.
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> Chapter 39 The deacons and elders shall meet daily at the place which the bishop appoints for them. The deacons especially should not fail to meet every day, except when illness prevents them. 2 When all have assembled, they shall teach all those who are in the assemblya. Then, after having prayed, each one shall go to the work assigned to him.

** I couldn't find a reference to 113.8, so I believe it refers to Chapter 26 above*

Canons of Hippolytus 32, **Hippolytus**

> 35. That deacons may pronounce the benediction and thanksgiving at the love-feasts when a bishop is not present.

The Apostolic Constitutions 2.28, **Hippolytus**

> OF AN ENTERTAINMENT, AND AFTER WHAT MANNER EACH DISTINCT ORDER OF THE CLERGY IS TO BE TREATED BY THOSE WHO INVITE THEM TO IT.
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> XXVIII. If any determine to invite elder women ***to an entertainment of love, or a feast, as our Saviour calls it, [Luke xiv. 13.]*** let them most frequently send to such a one whom the deacons know to be in distress. But let what is the pastor's due, I mean the first-fruits, [Compare Teaching, chap. xiii. p. 381.—R.] be set apart in the feast for him, even though he be not at the entertainment, as being your priest, and in honour of that God who has entrusted him with the priesthood. But as much as is given to every one of the elder women, let double so much be given to the deacons, in honour of Christ. Let also a double portion be set apart for the presbyters, as for such who labour continually about the word and doctrine, upon the account of the apostles of our Lord, whose place they sustain, as the counsellors of the bishop and the crown of the Church. For they are the Sanhedrim and senate of the Church. If there be a reader there, let him receive a single portion, in honour of the prophets, and let the singer and the porter have as much. Let the laity, therefore, pay proper honours in their presents, and utmost marks of respect to each distinct order. But let them not on all occasions trouble their governor, but let them signify their desires by those who minister to him, that is, by the deacons, with whom they may be more free. For neither may we address ourselves to Almighty God, but only by Christ. In the same manner, therefore, let the laity make known all their desires to the bishop by the deacon, and accordingly let them act as he shall direct them. For there was no holy thing offered or done in the temple formerly without the priest. "For the priest's lips shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth," as the prophet somewhere says, "for he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty." [Mal. ii. 7.] For if the worshippers of demons, in their hateful, abominable, and impure performances, imitate the sacred rules till this very day (it is a wide comparison indeed, and there is a vast distance between their abominations and God's sacred worship), in their mockeries of worship they neither offer nor do anything without their pretended priest, but esteem him as the very mouth of their idols of stone, waiting to see what commands he will lay upon them. And whatsoever he commands them, that they do, and without him they do nothing; and they honour him, their pretended priest, and esteem his name as venerable in honour of lifeless statues, and in order to the worship of wicked spirits. If these heathens, therefore, who give glory to lying vanities, and place their hope upon nothing that is firm, endeavour to imitate the sacred rules, how much more reasonable is it that you, who have a most certain faith and undoubted hope, and who expect glorious, and eternal, and never-failing promises, should honour the Lord God in those set over you, and esteem your bishop to be the mouth of God!

Epistula Apostolorum 15, ***Hippolytus***

> 15 But do ye commemorate my death. Now when the Passover (Easter, pascha) cometh, one of you shall be cast into prison for my name's sake; and he will be in grief and sorrow, because ye keep the Easter while he is in prison and separated from you, for he will be sorrowful because he keepeth not Easter with you. And I will send my power in the form of mine angel Gabriel, and the doors of the prison shall open. And he shall come forth and come unto you and keep the night-watch with you until the cock crow. And when ye have accomplished the memorial which is made of me, ***and the Agape (love-feast)***, he shall again be cast into prison for a testimony, until he shall come out thence and preach that which I have delivered unto you.

Apology 39, ***Tertullian***

> Chapter XXXIX.
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> I shall at once go on, then, to exhibit the peculiarities of the Christian society, that, as I have refuted the evil charged against it, I may point out its positive good. [Elucidation VII.] We are a body knit together as such by a common religious profession, by unity of discipline, and by the bond of a common hope. We meet together as an assembly and congregation, that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with Him in our supplications. This violence God delights in. We pray, too, for the emperors, for their ministers and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation. [Chap. xxxii. supra p. 43.] We assemble to read our sacred writings, if any peculiarity of the times makes either forewarning or reminiscence needful. [An argument for Days of Public Thanksgiving, Fasting and the like.] However it be in that respect, with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more stedfast; and no less by inculcations of God's precepts we confirm good habits. In the same place also exhortations are made, rebukes and sacred censures are administered. For with a great gravity is the work of judging carried on among us, as befits those who feel assured that they are in the sight of God; and you have the most notable example of judgment to come when any one has sinned so grievously as to require his severance from us in prayer, in the congregation and in all sacred intercourse. The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honour not by purchase, but by established character. There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God. Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, [On ordinary Sundays, "they laid by in store," apparently: once a month they offered.] if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one [A precious testimony, though the caviller asserts that afterwards the heathen used this expression derisively.] another, for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves will sooner put to death. And they are wroth with us, too, because we call each other brethren; for no other reason, as I think, than because among themselves names of consanguinity are assumed in mere pretence of affection. But we are your brethren as well, by the law of our common mother nature, though you are hardly men, because brothers so unkind. At the same time, how much more fittingly they are called and counted brothers who have been led to the knowledge of God as their common Father, who have drunk in one spirit of holiness, who from the same womb of a common ignorance have agonized into the same light of truth! But on this very account, perhaps, we are regarded as having less claim to be held true brothers, that no tragedy makes a noise about our brotherhood, or that the family possessions, which generally destroy brotherhood among you, create fraternal bonds among us. One in mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another. All things are common among us but our wives. We give up our community where it is practised alone by others, who not only take possession of the wives of their friends, but most tolerantly also accommodate their friends with theirs, following the example, I believe, of those wise men of ancient times, the Greek Socrates and the Roman Cato, who shared with their friends the wives whom they had married, it seems for the sake of progeny both to themselves and to others; whether in this acting against their partners' wishes, I am not able to say. Why should they have any care over their chastity, when their husbands so readily bestowed it away? O noble example of Attic wisdom, of Roman gravity—the philosopher and the censor playing pimps! What wonder if that great love of Christians towards one another is desecrated by you! For you abuse also our humble feasts, on the ground that they are extravagant as well as infamously wicked. To us, it seems, applies the saying of Diogenes: "The people of Megara feast as though they were going to die on the morrow; they build as though they were never to die!" But one sees more readily the mote in another's eye than the beam in his own. Why, the very air is soured with the eructations of so many tribes, and curiæ, and decuriæ. The Salii cannot have their feast without going into debt; you must get the accountants to tell you what the tenths of Hercules and the sacrificial banquets cost; the choicest cook is appointed for the Apaturia, the Dionysia, the Attic mysteries; the smoke from the banquet of Serapis will call out the firemen. Yet about the modest supper-room of the Christians alone a great ado is made. Our feast explains itself by its name. The Greeks call it agapè, i.e., affection. Whatever it costs, our outlay in the name of piety is gain, since with the good things of the feast we benefit the needy; not as it is with you, do parasites aspire to the glory of satisfying their licentious propensities, selling themselves for a belly-feast to all disgraceful treatment,—but as it is with God himself, a peculiar respect is shown to the lowly. If the object of our feast be good, in the light of that consider its further regulations. As it is an act of religious service, it permits no vileness or immodesty. The participants, before reclining, taste first of prayer to God. As much is eaten as satisfies the cravings of hunger; as much is drunk as befits the chaste. They say it is enough, as those who remember that even during the night they have to worship God; they talk as those who know that the Lord is one of their auditors. After manual ablution, and the bringing in of lights, each [Or, perhaps—"One is prompted to stand forth and bring to God, as every one can, whether from the Holy Scriptures, or of his own mind"—i.e. according to his taste.] is asked to stand forth and sing, as he can, a hymn to God, either one from the holy Scriptures or one of his own composing,—a proof of the measure of our drinking. As the feast commenced with prayer, so with prayer it is closed. We go from it, not like troops of mischief-doers, nor bands of vagabonds, nor to break out into licentious acts, but to have as much care of our modesty and chastity as if we had been at a school of virtue rather than a banquet. Give the congregation of the Christians its due, and hold it unlawful, if it is like assemblies of the illicit sort: by all means let it be condemned, if any complaint can be validly laid against it, such as lies against secret factions. But who has ever suffered harm from our assemblies? We are in our congregations just what we are when separated from each other; we are as a community what we are individuals; we injure nobody, we trouble nobody. When the upright, when the virtuous meet together, when the pious, when the pure assemble in congregation, you ought not to call that a faction, but a curia—[i.e., the court of God.]

*Romans 7.8, **Ignatius***

> Chapter VII.—Reason of desiring to die.
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> The prince of this world would fain carry me away, and corrupt my disposition towards God. Let none of you, therefore, who are [in Rome] help him; rather be ye on my side, that is, on the side of God. Do not speak of Jesus Christ, and yet set your desires on the world. Let not envy find a dwelling-place among you; nor even should I, when present with you, exhort you to it, be ye persuaded to listen to me, but rather give credit to those things which I now write to you. For though I am alive while I write to you, yet I am eager to die. My love [Some understand by love in this passage, Christ Himself; others regard it as referring to the natural desires of the heart.] has been crucified, and there is no fire in me desiring to be fed; [Literally, "desiring material."] but there is within me a water that liveth and speaketh,[The text and meaning are here doubtful.] We have followed Hefele, who understands by the water the Holy Spirit, and refers to John vii. 38. saying to me inwardly, Come to the Father. I have no delight in corruptible food, nor in the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became afterwards of the seed of David and Abraham; and I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life.
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> The prince of this world would fain carry me away, and corrupt my disposition towards God. Let none of you, therefore, who are [in Rome] help him; rather be ye on my side, that is, on the side of God. Do not speak of Jesus Christ, and yet prefer this world to Him. Let not envy find a dwelling-place among you; nor even should I, when present with you, exhort you to it, be ye persuaded, but rather give credit to those things which I now write to you. For though I am alive while I write to you, yet I am eager to die for the sake of Christ. My love [Some understand by love in this passage, Christ Himself; others regard it as referring to the natural desires of the heart.] has been crucified, and there is no fire in me that loves anything; but there is living water springing up in me, [Comp. John iv. 14.] and which says to me inwardly, Come to the Father. I have no delight in corruptible food, nor in the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became afterwards of the seed of David and Abraham; *and I desire the drink, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life.*

*Smyrna 7:1, **Ignatius***

> Chapter I.—Thanks to God for your faith.
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> I Glorify God, even Jesus Christ, who has given you such wisdom. For I have observed that ye are perfected in an immoveable faith, as if ye were nailed to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, both in the flesh and in the spirit, and are established in love through the blood of Christ, being fully persuaded with respect to our Lord, that He was truly of the seed of David according to the flesh, [Rom. i. 3.] and the Son of God according to the will and power [Theodoret, in quoting this passage, reads, "the Godhead and power."] of God; that He was truly born of a virgin, was baptized by John, in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled [Matt. iii. 15.] by Him; and was truly, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, nailed [to the cross] for us in His flesh. Of this fruit [i.e., the cross, "fruit" being put for Christ on the tree.] we are by His divinely-blessed passion, that He might set up a standard [Isa. v. 26, Isa. xlix. 22.] for all ages, through His resurrection, to all His holy and faithful [followers], whether among Jews or Gentiles, in the one body of His Church.
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> I Glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who by Him has given you such wisdom. For I have observed that ye are perfected in an immoveable faith, as if ye were nailed to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, both in the flesh and in the spirit, and are established in love through the blood of Christ, being fully persuaded, in very truth, with respect to our Lord Jesus Christ, that He was the Son of God, "the first-born of every creature," [Col. i. 15.] God the Word, the only-begotten Son, and was of the seed of David according to the flesh, [Rom. i. 3.] by the Virgin Mary; was baptized by John, that all righteousness might be fulfilled [Matt. iii. 15.] by Him; that He lived a life of holiness without sin, and was truly, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, nailed [to the cross] for us in His flesh. From whom we also derive our being, [Literally, "we are."] from His divinely-blessed passion, that He might set up a standard for the ages, through His resurrection, to all His holy and faithful [followers], whether among Jews or Gentiles, in the one body of His Church.

Adolf Von Harnack also describes the common meal in his History of Dogma, Vol 1. The Didache was discover within Harnack's lifetime, so its influence on him is throughout his writings, especially considering the commentary he has written on that ancient document. However, Harnack is right to see in the Didache instructions about a common meal that was abused by itinerant self-proclaimed apostles, whom would come to poor churches to acquire free meals and resources. The Didache contains instructions about ministers who linger too long.

History of Dogma, ***Vol 1. Chapter III. Section 7, Adolf Von Harnack***

> §©7. The Worship, the Sacred Ordinances, and the Organisation of the Churches.
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> It is necessary to examine the original forms of the worship and constitution, because of the importance which they acquired in the following period even for the development of doctrine.
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> 1. In accordance with the purely spiritual idea of God, it was a fixed principle that only a spiritual worship is well pleasing to Him, and that all ceremonies are abolished, ἵνα ὁ καινὸς νόμος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ ἀνθρωποποιητον ἔχῃ τὴν προσφοράν. But as the Old Testament and the Apostolic tradition made it equally certain that the worship of God is a sacrifice, the Christian worship of God was set forth under the aspect of the spiritual sacrifice. In the most general sense it was conceived as the offering of the heart and of obedience, as well as the consecration of the whole personality, body and soul (Rom. XIII. 1) to God. Here, with a change of the figure, the individual Christian and the whole community were described as a temple of God. In a more special sense, prayer as thanksgiving and intercession was regarded as the sacrifice which was to be accompanied, without constraint or ceremony, by fasts and acts of compassionate love. Finally, prayers offered by the worshipper in the public worship of the community, and the gifts brought by them, out of which were taken the elements for the Lord's supper, and which were used partly in the common meal, and partly in support of the poor, were regarded as sacrifice in the most special sense (προσφορὰ, δῶρα). For the following period, however, it became of the utmost importance, (1) that the idea of sacrifice ruled the whole worship, (2) that it appeared in a special manner in the celebration of the Lord's supper, and consequently invested that ordinance with a new meaning, (3) that the support of the poor, alms, especially such alms as had been gained by prayer and fasting, was placed under the category of sacrifice (Heb. XIII. 16); for this furnished the occasion for giving the widest application to the idea of sacrifice, and thereby substituting for the original Semitic Old Testament idea of sacrifice with its spiritual interpretation, the Greek idea with its interpretation. It may, however, be maintained that the changes imposed on the Christian religion by Catholicism, are at no point so obvious and far-reaching, as in that of sacrifice, and especially in the solemn ordinance of the Lord's supper, which was placed in such close connection with the idea of sacrifice.
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> 2. When in the "Teaching of the Apostles," which may be regarded here as a classic document, the discipline of life in accordance with the words of the Lord, Baptism, the order of fasting and prayer, especially the regular use of the Lord's prayer, and the Eucharist are reckoned the articles on which the Christian community rests, and when the common Sunday offering of a sacrifice made pure by a brotherly disposition, and the mutual exercise of discipline are represented as decisive for the stability of the individual community, we perceive that the general idea of a pure spiritual worship of God has nevertheless been realised in definite institutions, and that, above all, it has included the traditional sacred ordinances, and adjusted itself to them as far as that was possible. This could only take effect under the idea of the symbolical, and therefore this idea was most firmly attached to these ordinances. But the symbolical of that time is not to be considered as the opposite of the objectively real, but as the mysterious, the God produced (μυστήριον), as contrasted with the natural, the profanely clear. As to Baptism, which was administered in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit, though Cyprian, Ep. 73. 16-18, felt compelled to oppose the custom of baptising in the name of Jesus, we noted above (Chap. III. p. 161 f.) that it was regarded as the bath of regeneration, and as renewal of life, inasmuch as it was assumed that by it the sins of the past state of blindness were blotted out. But as faith was looked upon as the necessary condition, and as on the other hand, the forgiveness of the sins of the past was in itself deemed worthy of God, the asserted specific result of baptism remained still very uncertain, and the hard tasks which it imposed, might seem more important than the merely retrospective gifts which it proffered. Under such circumstances the rite could not fail to lead believers about to be baptized to attribute value here to the mysterious as such. But that always creates a state of things which not only facilitates, but positively prepares for the introduction of new and strange ideas. For neither fancy nor reflection can long continue in the vacuum of mystery. The names σφραγίς and φωτισμός, which at that period came into fashion for baptism, are instructive, inasmuch as neither of them is a direct designation of the presupposed effect of baptism, the forgiveness of sin, and as, besides, both of them evince a Hellenic conception. Baptism in being called the seal, is regarded as the guarantee of a blessing, not as the blessing itself, at least the relation to it remains obscure; in being called enlightenment,287 it is placed directly under an aspect that is foreign to it. It would be different if we had to think of φωτισμός as a gift of the Holy Spirit, which is given to the baptised as real principle of a new life and miraculous powers. But the idea of a necessary union of baptism with a miraculous communication of the Spirit seems to have been lost very early, or to have become uncertain, the actual state of things being no longer favourable to it; at any rate, it does not explain the designation of baptism as φωτισμός.
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> As regards the Lord's Supper, the most important point is that its celebration became more and more the central point, not only for the worship of the Church, but for its very life as a Church. The form of this celebration, the common meal, made it appear to be a fitting expression of the brotherly unity of the community (on the public confession before the meal, see Didache, 14, and my notes on the passage). The prayers which it included presented themselves as vehicles for bringing before God, in thanksgiving and intercession, every thing that affected the community; and the presentation of the elements for the holy ordinance was naturally extended to the offering of gifts for the poor brethren, who in this way received them from the hand of God himself. In all these respects, however, the holy ordinance appeared as a sacrifice of the community, and indeed, as it was also named εὐχαριστία, a sacrifice of thanksgiving. As an act of sacrifice, all the termini technici which the Old Testament applied to sacrifice could be applied to it, and all the wealth of ideas which the Old Testament connects with sacrifice could be transferred to it. One cannot say that anything absolutely foreign was therewith introduced into the ordinance, however doubtful it may be whether in the idea of its founder the meal was thought of as a sacrificial meal. But it must have been of the most wide-reaching significance, that a wealth of ideas was in this way connected with the ordinance, which had nothing whatever in common either with the purpose of the meal as a memorial of Christ's death, or with the mysterious symbols of the body and blood of Christ. The result was that the one transaction obtained a double value. At one time it appeared as the προσφορά and θυσία of the Church, as the pure sacrifice which is presented to the great king by Christians scattered over the world, as they offer to him their prayers and place before him again what he has bestowed in order to receive it back with thanks and praise. But there is no reference in this to the mysterious words, that the bread and wine are the body of Christ broken and the blood of Christ shed for the forgiveness of sin. These words, in and of themselves, must have challenged a special consideration. They called forth the recognition in the sacramental action, or rather in the consecrated elements, of a mysterious communication of God, a gift of salvation, and this is the second aspect. But on a purely spiritual conception of the Divine gift of salvation, the blessings mediated through the Holy Supper could only be thought of as spiritual (faith, knowledge, or eternal life), and the consecrated elements could only be recognised as the mysterious vehicles of these blessings. There was yet no reflection on the distinction between symbol and vehicle; the symbol was rather regarded as the vehicle, and vice versa. We shall search in vain for any special relation of the partaking of the consecrated elements to the forgiveness of sin. That was made impossible by the whole current notions of sin and forgiveness. That on which value was put was the strengthening of faith and knowledge, as well as the guarantee of eternal life; and a meal in which there was appropriated not merely common bread and wine, but a τροφὴ πνευματική, seemed to have a bearing upon these. There was as yet little reflection; but there can be no doubt that thought here moved in a region bounded, on the one hand, by the intention of doing justice to the wonderful words of institution which had been handed down, and on the other hand, by the fundamental conviction that spiritual things can only be got by means of the Spirit. There was thus attached to the Supper the idea of sacrifice, and of a sacred gift guaranteed by God. The two things were held apart, for there is as yet no trace of that conception according to which the body of Christ represented in the bread is the sacrifice offered by the community. But one feels almost called upon here to construe from the premises the later development of the idea, with due regard to the ancient Hellenic ideas of sacrifice.

Didache (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)

> CHAPTER XII.—RECEPTION OF CHRISTIANS. 1. But let every one that cometh in the name of the Lord be received, and afterward ye shall prove and know him; for ye shall have understanding right and left. 2. If he who cometh is a wayfarer, assist him as far as ye are able; but he shall not remain with you, except for two or three days, if need be. 3. But if he willeth to abide with you, being an artisan, let him work and eat; but if he hath no trade, 4. according to your understanding see to it that, as a Christian, he shall not live with you idle. 5. But if he willeth not to do, he is a Christ-monger. Watch that ye keep aloof from such.
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> CHAPTER XIII.—SUPPORT OF PROPHETS. 1. But every true prophet that willeth to abide among you is worthy of his support. 2. So also a true teacher is himself worthy, as the workman, of his support. 3. Every first-fruit, therefore, of the products of wine-press and threshing-floor, of oxen and of sheep, thou shalt take and give to the prophets, for they are your high priests 4. But if ye have not a prophet, give it to the poor. 5. If thou makest a batch of dough, take the first-fruit and give according to the commandment. 6. So also when thou openest a jar of wine or of oil, take the first-fruit and give it to the prophets; 7. and of money (silver) and clothing and every possession, take the first-fruit, as it may seem good to thee, and give according to the commandment.
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> CHAPTER XIV.—CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY ON THE LORD'S DAY. 1. But every Lord's day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. 2. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. 3. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, saith the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations.

For more information on the Common Meal, see Jurgeon Moltmann's ***Church in the Power of the Spirit***, Section on the Lord's Supper. pg242ff.

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Diana
February 8th, 2019 - 19:43

This is really great information. I was curious about how the early church did thier "Love Feasts." Thank you!

(REPLY)

Diane Villafane
May 6th, 2020 - 03:57

Very informative post. However, I think the Greek word is "agape".

(REPLY)

Wyatt
May 7th, 2020 - 20:34

That's an epic misspelling that no one has caught for 7 years. 😛

(REPLY)

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