

Historical Notes

I. Christian Tradition

In the early church some celebrations of the Agape meal and the Lord's Supper seemed to overlap. The two eventually became quite distinct with the Agape meal or Love Feast dying out in the fourth century.

While the Lord's Supper has been practically universal among Christians throughout church history, the Love Feast has re-appeared at different times and among certain denominations.

The modern history of the Love Feast began when Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians in Germany introduced a service of sharing food, prayer, religious conversation, and hymns in 1727.

The Love Feast quickly became a feature of the Evangelical Revival and a regular part of Methodist society meetings in Great Britain and became an important feature of early of Primitive Methodism.

Some rural communities have maintained an annual Love Feast. In recent years churches have revived the Love Feast or Agape meal.

Aspects of the Agape, with the sharing of bread after the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy, are still observed in Orthodox Churches, where unconsecrated but blessed bread is shared after the Eucharist. Agape fellowship meals are also celebrated in parts of the Mar Thoma Indian Christian tradition.

2. John Wesley's Recollections

With the Moravians in Savannah

After evening prayers, we joined with the Germans in one of their love-feasts. It was begun and ended with thanksgiving and prayer, and celebrated in so decent and solemn a manner as a Christian of the apostolic age would have allowed to be worthy of Christ.

John Wesley's Diary, 8th August, 1737

During the First Year of Methodism

Mr. Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, Whitefield, Hutchins, and my brother Charles were present at our love-feast at Fetter Lane, with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, inasmuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty we broke out with one voice: "We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord."

John Wesley's Journal, 1st January, 1739

Establishing Methodist Practice

In order to increase in (the societies) a sense of all God's mercies, I desired that we might together 'eat bread' as the ancient Christians did, 'with gladness and singleness of heart'.

At these love-feasts (so we termed them, retaining the name as well as the thing which was in use from the beginning) our food is only a little plain cake and water. But we seldom return from them without being fed not only with 'the meat that perisheth', but with 'that which endureth to everlasting life'

John Wesley's 'Plain Account of the People called Methodists' 1748

3. Typical Order for a Love Feast in Wesley's Lifetime

Hymn
Prayer
Grace (sung)
Distribution of 'bread'
Collection for poor
Circulation of loving-cup
Address by presiding minister
Testimonies and verses of hymns
Open prayer and praise
Closing words from minister
Hymn
Blessing

From: Frank Baker's 'Methodism and the Love-Feast'

4. Primitive Methodist Tradition

Lovefeasts usually open with singing and prayer. A piece is then sung by way of asking a blessing; after which the bread and water are served out, the lovefeast collection is made, and a piece sung by way of returning thanks. The preacher makes a few remarks; the people rise in succession, and speak their own experience; and distant comers sometimes say a little about the works of God in other places. But none are allowed to run into useless exhortations drag out to tedious lengths, or to speak unprofitably of others; and above all not to reflect upon or find fault, either with individuals or societies. And it is the preacher's painful duty to stop all who attempt to trespass. He has to preserve the Lovefeast in its clear and pure course, in order that the people may grow into faith, and that the Holy Ghost may descend. Singing and prayer are occasionally introduced; and the lovefeast finally closes with prayer.

Appendix XI: 'Love Feasts' in the Preface to Hugh Bourne's Large Hymn Book (1824)

5. The Alport Farm Lovefeast held since at least the 1760s

'At one o'clock the Lovefeast began with the singing of a hymn, 'Jesu lover of my soul' being the favourite, and prayer followed by the breaking of bread. Baskets filled with substantial slices of cake were handed round by the stewards. Each person took a portion and a draught of water from the vessels offered, then the meeting was open for all to bear testimony to the faith they professed'.

From: The Hard Way Up: Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel (Ed) [Geoffrey Mitchell](#), 1968