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## **The Changing Forms of the Latter-day Saint Sacrament**

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# THE CHANGING FORMS OF THE LATTER-DAY SAINT SACRAMENT

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Ugo A. Perego

*Abstract: Partaking of bread and water each Sunday is a fundamental part of the theology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — a solemn moment in which the mortal Savior’s mission and ministry are remembered and pondered by those who partake individually and as a congregation. This paper explores instructions provided by the Savior himself as found in the Mormon canon of scriptures, together with a review of how this practice has changed over time as part of the LDS Church liturgy. Moreover, the meaning associated with this sacred ordinance is analyzed by way of the Savior’s teachings in ancient scripture through Mormon prophets in modern times, particularly in light of a more recent emphasis shared by the LDS Church leadership.*

At the April 2014 General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve taught:

When we are baptized, we “take upon [us] the name of Christ” and enter “into the covenant with God that [we will] be obedient unto the end of [our] lives.” *Each Sunday we renew that baptismal covenant by partaking of the sacrament and witnessing that we are willing to keep the commandments.*<sup>1</sup> (emphasis added)

Most members of the LDS Church would agree with this apostolic statement since it has been shared repeatedly and persistently as part of

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1 Robert D. Hales, “If Ye Love Me, Keep My Commandments,” General Conference April 2014, at <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2014/04/if-ye-love-me-keep-my-commandments>.

our theology. The single act of partaking of a small piece of bread and drinking water from a tiny cup each Sabbath seems, therefore, not only to epitomize the universal, atoning offering the Savior made of himself nearly two millennia ago but also to function as a restatement of the promises made at baptism.<sup>2</sup> In Latter-day Saint practice, this simple gesture is a manifestation of our willing submission to obey one of the Savior's last commandments given in his mortal ministry — to always remember him and follow in his footsteps. However, it appears that the sacrament as an extension of the ordinance of baptism, as currently understood in LDS theology, was not taught by the New Testament church nor in early Mormonism.<sup>3</sup>

One distinguishing aspect of current Latter-day Saint liturgical practice is the exactness required for the administration of the sacrament. For example, the supplications enunciated by the appointed priesthood holder must be read precisely as they are found in the scriptures — with the single exception of the authorized substitution of the word “water” for “wine” (Moroni 4:3, 5:2; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79; 27:2–3) — or else the presiding priesthood leader will direct the repetition of the prayer.<sup>4</sup> Other practices observed in the church today include the dress and grooming of the priesthood holders administering the sacrament (white shirt and tie), which is often required by local leaders, and the suggestion of partaking the emblems or passing the trays along the pews using exclusively the right hand. This emphatic attention to detail in preparing and administering this ordinance seems to imply that the sacrament is unalterable, and there are specific guidelines set forth to properly direct it. While these minutiae are not official church doctrine in actual observed practice, they are nevertheless widely taught and accepted.

Based on historical records discussed below, it appears that the eucharistic *modus operandi* restored by Joseph Smith and carried forth by subsequent leaders in the early period of this dispensation has evolved over time. The modification of the worship service as well as the occasional

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2 The fact that promises are made at the time of the baptism is not explicit in the baptismal prayer, but it is part of the baptismal Latter-day Saint homiletic tradition, including talks given at baptismal services. A frequently cited passage in this context is Mosiah 18:8–10. See *Preach My Gospel* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2005), 12: 203–12. See also Moroni 6:2–3 and D&C 20:37.

3 This issue will be discussed later in the paper.

4 *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 20.4.3.

introduction of new emphases, has continued to the present day. With this paper, I will review and summarize key doctrines and principles as found in the synoptic gospels (Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:17–20) and in the Nephites’ records (3 Nephi 18:1–12; 20:3–9), and how early church leaders may have understood and attempted to recreate the holy experience from the Upper Room, the place where the Lord’s Supper was first administered. Particularly, I will attempt to provide a framework for when these changes occurred and how they might have led to the development of this ordinance and subsequent efforts to restore its true meaning, to correct or resist formalism, and to reposition deity at its very center.

### **The Biblical Eucharist**

As Christ’s mortal ministry was coming to a close, he arranged for a final opportunity to share the paschal meal with his disciples. This was a special occasion, unique in setting and in scope. It is possible that the designated location for this event, a room on the upper floor with adequate furniture, was not a casual choice.<sup>5</sup> The host probably knew who the Master was and most likely had an opportunity to discuss the needed details beforehand. Within those walls, the transition from old to new covenant as prophesied six centuries earlier by Jeremiah was about to be fulfilled through Christ’s ultimate mission (Jeremiah 31:31–33). Significantly, this was not a large gathering but rather the Savior purposely chose to spend this moment with his inner circle of apostles. The prearranged venue, the ecclesiastical invitees, and the original teachings and rituals that took place in the Upper Room signify something more than a simple meal. Everything seems to point to a series of temple-like preparatory experiences that continued for forty days after the Savior’s resurrection: the evil one, Judas, was dismissed,<sup>6</sup>

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5 Mark 14:12–17. Matthew Henry notes, “Christ was far from affecting anything that looked stately in eating his common meals; on the contrary, he chose that which was homely, sat down on the grass: but, when he was to keep a sacred feast, in honour of that he would be at the expense of as good a room as he could get. God looks not at outward pomp, but he looks at the tokens and expressions of inward reverence for a divine institution” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 volumes [Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1970] at <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/mark/14.html>). Particularly verse 15 seems to indicate that even though the room was already furnished for the Passover meal, additional preparation by the disciples was needed for their special evening with the Savior.

6 Luke 22:3; John 13:27.

formal washings took place, instructions, and tokens were given, and covenants were stipulated.

After giving thanks and ensuring that everyone present partook of the sacred emblems, Christ added a few Messianic utterances: “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come,”<sup>7</sup> “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me,” and “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:18–20). Thus, as taken from Luke’s account, drinking from the first cup represented a promise of things to come — a future salvific day with eschatological implications or, as President John Taylor stated, “In the sacrament we shadow forth the time when He will come again and when we shall meet and eat bread with Him in the kingdom of God.”<sup>8</sup> The second cup signified the divine blood spilt freely and unconditionally for the apostles, who were representing all God’s children.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the meaning the Lord wished to impress on the disciples’ minds with this new rite was threefold: 1. reminding them of his role as their Redeemer; 2. calling them to do his work; and 3. foretelling his future reunion with them.

Matthew, who wrote for an audience familiar with Jewish traditions, added the clause “for the remission of sins” to the ordinance of the sacrament (Matthew 26:28), perhaps in reference to the Day of the Atonement. As biblical scholar Margaret Barker has stated, “his phrase ‘for the remission of sins’ immediately identifies [the sacrament] as the temple covenant, the covenant renewed by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement.”<sup>10</sup> Barker continues placing particular emphasis on the necessity of saving the Creation through the Lord’s own life and preserving the eternal covenant by the removal of sins. Thus, on the Day of the Atonement, the High Priest would first wash himself and then take the blood of the sacrificial goat (representing the life the Lord gave in our behalf) to sprinkle on the Mercy Seat and on the drapes of the Holy of Holies. Additionally, a second goat was released in the wilderness, symbolically carrying away the sins of Israel and mending the spiritual gap caused by the Fall.

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7 In his Inspired Version of the KJV Bible, Joseph Smith adds the following, “until it be fulfilled *which is written in the prophets concerning me. Then I will partake with you*, in the kingdom of God.”

8 *Journal of Discourses*, 14:185 (20 March 1870).

9 Darrell L. Bock, “Luke 9:51–24:53” in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1716–29.

10 Margaret Barker, “Creation Theology” at <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/CreationTheology.pdf>. See Leviticus 16.

Therefore, through the partaking of consecrated bread and wine, we also consecrate ourselves repeatedly by entering into a pre-temple covenant to remember the atoning sacrifice of the Savior and to keep his commandments in preparation for his millennial return, also by abandoning all our sins — or fallen state — in view of our paradisiacal legacy and by being reconciled with the divine. As will be reasoned hereafter, the exegesis of these biblical passages coupled with direct revelation may have resulted in the theological and liturgical restoration of the eucharistic ritual in this dispensation.

### **The Restoration of the Sacrament**

On April 6, 1830, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, the first and second elders of this dispensation, met with a few others at Peter Whitmer's humble residence in Fayette, New York, to organize the Church. Instructions pertaining to this gathering were given previously in a revelation known as "Articles and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ" (Doctrine & Covenants 20). Together with other business items, the first sacrament was celebrated as the priesthood brethren distributed the bread and wine to those in attendance.<sup>11, 12</sup>

Only a few months earlier while writing about the Savior's visit to the Nephites, Joseph and Oliver learned the necessity of the ordinance of baptism. Angelic manifestations, in response to their inquiry of the Lord, precipitated the restoration of proper priesthood authority, hence allowing for the ordinance of baptism to be administered in the Susquehanna River (Joseph Smith-History 1:68–72). Subsequently, a few more baptisms were performed prior to the organization of the church. However, notwithstanding they had priesthood authority and a number of early converts, Joseph Smith did not perform the first Eucharist until the church was officially organized. It is possible that Joseph was

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11 Doyle L. Green, "April 6, 1830: The Day the Church Was Organized," *Ensign* (January 1971) at <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1971/01/april-6-1830-the-day-the-church-was-organized>. The author states, "The sacrament of the Lord's supper was administered to those who had previously been baptized. As far as can be determined, this was the first time this holy ordinance had been performed by the Lord's chosen servants in this dispensation."

12 Scott Faulring, "The Book of Mormon: A Blueprint for Organizing the Church," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 60–69. See also Book of Mormon Central, "Was the Book of Mormon Used as the First Church Administrative Handbook?" at <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/why-might-the-book-of-mormon-be-called-the-first-church-administrative-handbook-of-the-0>.

instructed to wait for that significant occasion in order to celebrate the first sacrament in this dispensation. Regarding the event, he wrote,

We were, however, commanded *to defer this our ordination* until such times as it should be practicable to have our brethren, who had been and who should be baptized, assembled together ... when *also we were commanded to bless bread and break it with them, and to take wine, bless it, and drink it with them.*<sup>13</sup> (emphasis added)

The “Articles and Covenants” did not contain many details pertaining to the liturgy of the sacrament, and therefore it is of no surprise that the mode and frequency with which it was administered varied considerably through the following decades. As LDS historian Justin Bray phrased it,

With the vast [number] of interpretations of the Lord’s Supper, as well as limited instructions on the ordinance in Joseph Smith’s revelations, early leaders in the LDS Church seemed to incorporate aspects from their previous faith into the administration of the sacrament. These Latter-day Saints, for example, referred to the ordinance by several names, including the Lord’s Supper, the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, “breaking bread,” Communion, and the Eucharist. It took many years for all members to universally term the ordinance “the sacrament,” which was what the Lord called it in Joseph Smith’s revelations. (D&C 20:46)<sup>14</sup>

One such practice during the first years of the LDS Church was the collective kneeling during the blessing of bread and wine, a practice that the Community of Christ<sup>15</sup> has retained to this day. Interestingly, kneeling to pray and worship was not a common practice in biblical times, as the typical posture among Jews and Judeo-Christians during supplication was to remain standing (see Matthew 6:5; Mark 11:25; and Luke 18:11, 13).<sup>16</sup>

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13 *History of the Church*, 1:60–62.

14 Justin R. Bray, “The Lord’s Supper in Early Mormonism” in *You Shall Have My Word: Exploring the Text of the Doctrine & Covenants*, eds. Scott Esplin et al. (Provo UT: Religious Studies Center, 2012), 64–75.

15 Formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or RLDS Church.

16 It is possible that, like the manner of worship of Catholics, Joseph Smith believed that such formalism during the sacrament could help the Saints better



## The Development of the Eucharistic Rite

Even though the Lord commanded the Saints to “meet together often to partake of bread and wine” (D&C 20:75), it appears that the young LDS Church did not formally institute a weekly sacramental service on the Sabbath until a few years following that humble beginning at Peter Whitmer’s log home. In this regard, it looks as if the Protestant heritage of many early church leaders may have played a role in the infrequency of the communal events.<sup>17</sup> In fact, while Catholicism centers salvation on a journey characterized by rites and personal work, Protestant movements are stripped for the most part of such liturgies, and the occasional Eucharist becomes merely a token of praise and gratitude for a salvation that has already been granted entirely through the grace of Christ.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps to Mormons the theological implications of the sacrament were not fully explained or understood at first, and the eternal, delicate balance between mortal works and divine grace, as beautifully elaborated in 2 Nephi 25:23, was still in need of further elaboration. Consequently, changes that took place in the following decades pertaining to the Latter-day Saint ritual of administering bread and wine may have been the result of a progressive maturation in expanding the theological and liturgical invitation of remembering the works and grace shown by the Savior as described in the revealed sacramental prayers.

For Latter-day Saints, these initial years of eucharistic experimentation would commonly include partaking of bread and wine in a quantity similar to a normal meal, to the filling both physically and spiritually of those in attendance. For example, when the Salt Lake Temple was dedicated in 1893, the practice of eating large amounts during the sacrament was still popular. An eyewitness of that event, John F. Tolton, recorded in his journal that “Each participant was given a large tumbler with the Salt Lake temple etched into it and a napkin. Presiding Bishop Preston blessed the bread and ‘Dixie’ wine (from southern Utah), and the brethren were invited to eat till they

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empathize with the Savior when, in Gethsemane, he knelt in atoning supplication (Luke 22:41).

17 The Community of Christ still celebrates the Eucharist on a monthly basis, often on the first Sunday of the month. (Email exchange with Lachlan Mackay, Apostle of the Community of Christ. Copy in possession of author.)

18 Kathleen Flake, “Supping with the Lord: A Liturgical Theology of the LDS Sacrament,” *Sunstone* 91 (July 1993): 18–27.

were filled but to use caution and not indulge in wine to excess.”<sup>19</sup> Two probable theological reasons may have had an influence in the liturgical justification of a more abundant meal than what we are used to in our days. First, the Book of Mormon is significantly more explicit about the “filling” theme compared to the biblical account (3 Nephi 18 and 20). In both circumstances, all those who partook of the bread and wine “were filled,” likely not only spiritually but also physically. Second, Joseph Smith and his ecclesiastical associates might have viewed the events in the Upper Room as a pre-sanctification experience. For example, in the Kirtland Temple and in the School of the Prophets, the ordinance of washing of feet was accompanied by the partaking of the sacrament, just like the events that took place in the Upper Room as recorded in the New Testament.<sup>20</sup> The partaking of the bread and wine in remembrance of the Savior could not therefore be extrapolated as a stand-alone ritual but as an intrinsic and vital component with all other rites introduced while “feasting” on that last meal.

The restitution of all things (Acts 3:21) could be further corroborated by the restoration during the Kirtland era of the washing of feet,<sup>21</sup> not only as an act of humility as understood and practiced for centuries by traditional Christianity but also as an integral part of the necessary cleansing and consecrating process to become one with Christ.<sup>22</sup> Both in the School of the Prophets and in the early temples, almost every instance of washing of feet in the nineteenth century was performed in association with the administration of the sacramental meal, which symbiotic relationship led to the display of the gifts of the Spirit,<sup>23</sup>

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19 John Franklin Tolton, diary, 20 April 1893, as cited in Brian H. Stuy, “Come, Let Us Go Up to the Mountain of the Lord’: The Salt Lake Temple Dedication,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31/3 (Fall 1998): 101–22. A large piece of bread from the sacramental service that took place during the Salt Lake Temple dedication is displayed at the Daughters of Utah Pioneer Museum in Salt Lake City.

20 Keith W. Perkins, “Kirtland Temple,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 798–99. Also, “1883 testimony of Zebedee Coltrin,” *Salt Lake School of the Prophets Minute Book 1883*, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, 38 (hereafter CHL).

21 D&C 88:138–41.

22 Matthew Grow, “Clean from the Blood of This Generation: The Washing of Feet and the Latter-day Saints,” *Summer Fellow’s Papers 2000–2002*: 131–38.

23 On one such occasion in Kirtland, Missouri Bishop Edward Partridge recorded that those present “prophesied and spake in tongues & shouted hosannas. the meeting lasted till day light.” Edward Partridge, journal, March 1836, CHL; see also W. Phelps to S. Phelps, letter, April 1836. See also, John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, The Joseph Smith Papers at <http://>

powerful preaching of the word, and greater spiritual manifestations. One example is the theophanic experience recorded by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836,<sup>24</sup> which was preceded by days of physical cleansings, sacramental services, confession of sins, and a careful spiritual preparation.<sup>25</sup>

The task of blessing and distributing bread and wine during the first decades of the newly organized church was often left to the presiding authorities,<sup>26</sup> perhaps to emphasize the sacredness of the rite and Christ's communal role in the meridian of time. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, services, and worship began gradually to revolve more around the sacrament, even in the absence of a set format for administering it. Singing hymns or preaching during the sacramental feast, which often was the conclusive part of a meeting, was common.<sup>27</sup> President Wilford Woodruff wrote in his journal on 12 October 1883,

This was a day of fasting and prayer with the leaders of the Church. I took a Bath and wash[ed] in the Morning and went to the Endowment House at 9 o'clock to receive the washing of feet as it was done in Kirtland 47 years ago By the Prophet Joseph Smith as an initiatory ordinance into the school of the Prophets . . . *At the Close of this Ceremony we partook of Bread & wine as a sacrament as they did in the Temple in Kirtland which Closed the labor of the day.*<sup>28</sup> (emphasis added)

Other interesting aspects from that era that are no longer part of modern sacramental worship included murals behind the eucharistic altar, which was often located in a central position, the absence of children, and raising the hands by the priests offering the prayers during the recital of the blessings.<sup>29</sup>

The search for a balance between formal prescription on one hand and a focus on the spirit of the ordinance on the other characterized the development of liturgy that continued for the first century of the

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[www.josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/john-corrill-a-brief-history-of-the-church-of-christ-of-latter-day-saints-1839](http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/john-corrill-a-brief-history-of-the-church-of-christ-of-latter-day-saints-1839), 9.

24 Joseph Smith Papers, Journals Vol. 1, p. 219. See also D&C 110.

25 Joseph Smith Papers, Journals Vol. 1, p. 211–213.

26 Wilford Woodruff and Susan Staker, *Waiting for World's End: The Diaries of Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993): 13–15.

27 Bray, "The Lord's Supper," 67–75.

28 Woodruff and Staker, *Waiting for World's End*, 362.

29 James B. Allen and Glenn M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 372.

Church. By the turn of the century, Aaronic priesthood responsibilities had been assigned principally to boys twelve years old and up.<sup>30</sup> Changes in church practices, which included local initiatives focused on increasing reverence during the sacramental services, led to policy changes. Consequently, local leaders introduced excessive formalities in order to counteract potential immature behavior of youth. These instructions involved uniformity in dress and grooming, such as white, ironed shirts and black bow ties; military-like posture and manner of walking, including holding the tray exclusively with the right hand and keeping it at right angle while the left arm was placed behind the back; and proper passing of trays along the pews, among other things.<sup>31</sup>

These extreme formalisms and lack of uniformity in administering the sacrament among church units quickly became a concern to the General Authorities of the church, who “believed deacons and members wearing uniforms were more concerned with the outward appearance of those passing the emblems than the meaning of the sacred ordinance itself.”<sup>32</sup> By the end of the 1940s, most of these procedures were dropped in favor of a more “quietly natural and unobtrusive” ceremony, as instructed by then Presiding Bishop Sylvester Q. Cannon.<sup>33</sup> In commenting upon those days, Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said,

Since the administration of President Heber J. Grant, the First Presidency has emphasized the precaution through the General Handbook of Instructions to avoid any formalism, or uniformity in procedures. These instructions apply to the dress of Aaronic Priesthood youth who pass the sacrament. Boys should be neat and clean, but not required to dress uniformly. It also refers to any formalism, such as Aaronic Priesthood young men walking with one arm behind their

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30 William G. Hartley, “From Men to Boys: LDS Aaronic Priesthood Offices, 1829–1996,” *Journal of Mormon History* 22/1 (1996): 80–136.

31 “Field Notes,” *Improvement Era* 34/7 (May 1931): 417, 426.

32 Justin R. Bray, “Excessive Formalities in the Mormon Sacrament, 1928–1940,” *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 4/1 (1993): 61–75.

33 “Avoid Formalism in Church Worship,” *Presiding Bishopric Bulletin* (February 1935), CHL as cited in Justin R. Bray, “Excessive Formalities in the Mormon Sacrament.”

back, or standing with arms folded, or priests raising their arm to the square when blessing the sacrament.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, uniformity was to be achieved by avoiding uniformity and by focusing on the spiritual meaning of the eucharistic act. To facilitate this objective, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve issued the following recommendations in a 1946 letter: “The ideal condition is to have absolute quiet during the passing of the sacrament, and that we look with disfavor upon vocal solos, duets, group singing, or instrumental music during the administration of this sacred ordinance.”<sup>35</sup>

Although Mormons are not bound to the use of any specific food as physical emblems for the sacrament (D&C 27:1–2), bread was traditionally accompanied with the fruit of the vine until the turn of the nineteenth century. The revelation known as the Word of Wisdom (D&C 89) was received in 1833 but was not implemented for several decades.<sup>36</sup> The Lord clearly stated that wine was the exception and could be used as a symbol of Christ’s atoning blood as long as it was “pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make” (D&C 89:5–6). It wasn’t until 1902 and under the presidency of Joseph F. Smith that water replaced wine as the element of choice for the sacrament.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, the Community of Christ still uses grape juice in their services.

### **The Theology of the Sacrament**

Official teaching focusing on the theological aspects of the sacrament was not common in the early years of the church. In 1867, Joseph F. Smith was one of the first apostles to touch on the covenantal nature of this rite without elaborating on it: “We meet here in this Tabernacle and partake of the Holy Sacrament together as brethren in the bonds of the covenant.”<sup>38</sup> President Brigham Young in 1877 added the salvific

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34 David B. Haight, “Remembering the Savior’s Atonement,” *The Ensign* (April 1988) at <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1988/04/remembering-the-saviors-atonement>.

35 “Letter to Presidents of Stakes and Bishops of Wards,” May 2, 1946, as cited in Rulon T. Burton, *We Believe: Doctrines and Principles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Draper, UT: Tabernacle Books, Inc., 2004), 597.

36 Jed Woodworth, “The Word of Wisdom” at <https://history.lds.org/article/doctrine-and-covenants-word-of-wisdom>.

37 FairMormon, “Why do Mormons Use Water Instead of Wine for Its Sacrament Services?” at [http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormon\\_ordinances/Sacrament/Uses\\_water\\_instead\\_of\\_wine](http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormon_ordinances/Sacrament/Uses_water_instead_of_wine).

38 *Journal of Discourses*, 11:310.

component to the promises we exchange with the Savior at the time of the Eucharist when he stated,

Its observance is as necessary to our salvation as any other of the ordinances and commandments that have been instituted in order that the people may be sanctified, that Jesus may bless them and give unto them his spirit and guide and direct them that they may secure unto themselves life eternal.<sup>39</sup>

A few years later, in a talk given at the Salt Lake Tabernacle, Elder Charles Penrose complemented these teachings by restating the Lucan passage about the true meaning of the communal meal by stating,

We take this sacrament this afternoon not only in remembrance of the past but to direct our minds to the future. We partake of it to witness that we believe in the Atonement wrought out by the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Calvary and also that we expect his reappearance on the earth.<sup>40</sup>

This could be considered the golden age for theological understanding of the sacrament as an ordinance whose primary purpose was to reconnect with the Savior through a recurring process of promises exchanged and blessings assured. In 1921, President Heber J. Grant made the following statement that is particularly relevant to the core of the revealed sacramental supplications:

I rejoice in the inspiration of Joseph Smith, in translating the Book of Mormon, and giving to us those two wonderful sacramental prayers, *those two marvelous covenants* that all Latter-day Saints make when they assemble together and partake of the sacrament.<sup>41</sup> (emphasis added)

Thus, as once directed by the Savior, we are taught even in this dispensation that the theological meaning of the blessing of the bread and that of the cup are distinctively sanctioned — two inseparable promises, renewable weekly, that exemplify the Atonement making us as one with the Savior.

This theological approach underwent a slight (but notable) change when a new emphasis was given to the partaking of the communal

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39 *Journal of Discourses*, 19:92.

40 *Ibid.*, 22:82–83.

41 Heber J. Grant, “Increased attendance at sacrament meetings,” *Improvement Era* 24/7 (May 1921): 650 and at <https://archive.org/stream/improvementera2407unse#page/650/mode/2up>.

symbols. This new emphasis was evident at least by the time of the October 1950 General Conference when Elder Bruce R. McConkie, then a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, made the following statement:

So important is this [baptismal] covenant in the eyes of the Lord that he has provided for us a means and a way to renew it often. *The ordinance whereby we renew this covenant is the ordinance of the sacrament.*<sup>42</sup> (emphasis added)

His 1950 doctrinal explanation on the nature of the sacrament may have gone unnoticed at first, but at the April 1975 General Conference, it was unmistakably reiterated by President Marion G. Romney: “With the wording of the sacrament prayers in our minds as we partake of the sacrament, we renew our baptismal covenant each week.”<sup>43</sup> In the ensuing years, the new theological emphasis of partaking the sacrament as a function of renewing our baptismal covenant became more popular, and the number of instances in which it was officially taught from church headquarters dramatically increased (see figure below). In the last thirty-five years, nearly fifty talks at General Conference have contained the newly introduced doctrinal statement.<sup>44</sup>



*Increased usage in the past three decades of the teaching of the sacrament as a surrogate of the baptismal ordinance in General Conference talks.*

42 Bruce R. McConkie, “Children of the Covenant,” General Conference October, 1950.

43 Marion G. Romney, “According to the Covenants,” General Conference (April 1975), <https://www.lds.org/generalconference/1975/10/according-to-the-covenants>.

44 A search for the roots “sacrament” and “baptism” with all the related terms (i.e. sacramental, baptismal, etc.) was performed using a nine-step distance within the corpus of LDS General Conference talks available at <http://www.lds-general-conference.org/x.asp>. Conference talks searched were from 1851 to the present-day. I also double-checked this information with personnel at the LDS Church History Department. Elder McConkie’s statement could have come as a literal interpretation of 2 Nephi 31:7 and 13 where the baptismal covenant included the commitment of keeping the commandments, including that of being willing to take upon us the name of Christ.

During a special leadership training under the direction of the First Presidency just before the April 2015 General Conference, leaders of the church were instructed regarding the sanctity of the Sabbath, both during the Sunday meetings and at home. In speaking about the sacrament, Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve made a timely and essential rectification when he said,

The title “renewing our baptismal covenants” is not found in the scriptures. *It’s not inappropriate.* Many of you have used it in talks; we have used it in talks. But it is not something that is used in the scriptures, and it can’t be the keynote of what we say about the sacrament. ... The sacrament is a beautiful time to not just renew our baptismal covenant, *but to commit to Him to renew all our covenants, all our promises, and to approach Him in a spiritual power that we did not have previously as we move forward.*<sup>45</sup> (emphasis added)

From my observations, this clarification was received by many as a surprise, which in itself is not a surprise as for two thirds of a century teachings regarding the doctrinal purpose of the sacrament echoed what Elder McConkie may have introduced in 1950.

The use of the double-negative “it is not inappropriate” seems to emphasize that although we are not in error for making the association between baptism and the sacrament, we could probably do better in our teachings about the latter. With this apostolic statement, Elder Andersen may have initiated the process of repositioning the theological meaning of the eucharistic rite in line with the scriptures and with the teachings of the first century of the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although ongoing revelation to modern prophets is fundamental to LDS doctrine, the reason this reconsideration of a more scriptural interpretation of the sacrament is surprising lies in the fact that it is not an example of “enhancing and expanding” based on “ongoing revelation” but a retraction of teachings of modern prophets based on ancient scriptures.

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45 Neil L. Andersen, “Witnessing to Live the Commandments,” General Conference Leadership Training on the Sabbath Day Observance at Church (April 2015). Available to priesthood leaders.



## Conclusion

Joseph Smith once said, “Being born again comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances.”<sup>46</sup> Truman G. Madsen, in commenting on this prophetic statement, added,

... the fullest flow of the Spirit of God comes to us through His appointed channels or ordinances. The sacrament is the central and oft-repeated ordinance that transmits that power to us. Indeed, it is the ordinance that gives focus to all other ordinances. ... Eventually, through a lifetime, *His spirit can sanctify the very elements of our bodies until we become capable of celestial resurrection*. In baptism we are born once — born of the water and of the spirit. In the sacrament, we are reborn, over and over, of the bread and of the wine or water and *we are truly what we eat*.<sup>47</sup> (emphasis added)

With these words, Dr. Madsen effectively summarized the sacred relationship pertaining to sacramental covenants and their impact on our earthly journey and spiritual growth. Although not speaking with apostolic authority, he makes a clear distinction between the baptismal and the sacramental covenants, emphasizing a metaphorical transubstantiation not of the eucharistic emblems but of our souls when we partake of them.

As reviewed in this essay, details pertaining to the liturgy of the sacrament were not fully revealed at first, with the Lord patiently allowing ordinary men to develop the proper temporal framework and theological understanding associated with his instructions to reenact the sacramental covenants in this dispensation. This process required a few adjustments along the way, such as reducing excessive formalities in the first half of the twentieth century or the more recent addition of an innovative emphasis on renewing baptismal covenants. However, although as a church we may not fully appreciate or completely understand all the doctrinal implications of the sacrament, it is comforting to observe a continual effort to improve both the liturgy and the teachings associated with Christ’s communal invitation. Hopefully, we are sufficiently enabled to make an acceptable offering to the Lord when we approach

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46 Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (reprint, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 162.

47 Truman G. Madsen, “The Savior, the Sacrament, and Self Worth,” BYU Women’s Conference (1999) at [https://womensconference.ce.byu.edu/sites/womensconference.ce.byu.edu/files/madsen\\_truman.pdf](https://womensconference.ce.byu.edu/sites/womensconference.ce.byu.edu/files/madsen_truman.pdf).

the sacramental altar each week to eat of his bread and drink from his cup for the remission of our sins so that we can remember and follow his exemplary life, express gratitude for his redeeming sacrifice, and await his millennial return.

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