

**ABSTENTION FROM HOLY COMMUNION:**

**THE CASE STUDY OF THE CHURCH OF CENTRAL AFRICA  
PRESBYTERIAN BLANTYRE SYNOD – MALAWI**

**BY**

**MERCY CHILAPULA (NEE KALIPINDE )**

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PRESBYTERIAN BLANTYRE SYNOD – MALAWI**

**BY**

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**SUBMITTED IN TOTAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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**IN THE**

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**AT THE**

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**SUPERVISOR: PROF. D.T. WILLIAMS**

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**DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own research and that the conclusions therein are my own.

.....  
**Mercy Chilapula (Nee Kalipinde)**

**Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my father the late Mr. C.P Kalipinde and my mother Mrs. E. Kalipinde whose advice has planted many seeds in me of which this dissertation is the fruit.

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the **Synod of Blantyre** for allowing me to study at the University of Fort Hare.

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Many people have contributed towards the completion of this research, but some of the most helpful contributions were made by the following people and my sincerely thanks go to them for their invaluable contribution:

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## **Abstract**

This paper is a study on abstention of Christians, both men and women from the Holy Communion in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Blantyre Synod Malawi (CCAP). As a Presbyterian member of Blantyre Synod, Malawi, the researcher writes this paper as somebody who is concerned with this issue. It appears that on a communion Sunday, the church building would be filled up to capacity and other christians would be sitting outside. During the celebration of the Lord's Supper, many christians would walk out and only a few of the possible communicants are left to partake of the Lord's Supper. This paper would like to suggest that the problem is partly caused by the influences of culture.

In dealing with this topic a number of factors concerning the Holy Communion are covered in order to confirm the reasons and practices that lead to abstention. Notwithstanding the contribution of Chingota (1999) in his article on the sacrament and sexuality, this discussion presents a comprehensive report on why many christians abstain from the Holy Communion. Hence, the discussion begins with an overview of Malawian culture with the aim of providing beliefs and taboos that have influenced christians against the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In so doing an opportunity is presented for one to understand the influence that Malawian culture has on the Holy Communion. Central to this discussion is the understanding of the Lord's Supper, which is the foundation for the celebration of the communion to the general Christian community.

Equally important in this discussion is the qualification to admission and hindrances to participation, which by using literature reviews, many

scholars have helped me to participate in the debate on Holy Communion particularly on the issue pertaining to the abstention from the Lord's Table. In attempt to include more information on the subject, I have been compelled to include more findings from fieldwork discussion of the Holy Communion based on interviews that I conducted with a number of members. Currently, no one has written in detail about the experiences of ordinary Christians in the Presbyterian church of Blantyre Synod, and particularly the issue pertaining to the abstention of Christians from the Lord's Supper.

It is suggested that this dissertation will assist in finding a mechanism that the church can put in place in order to stop some of the beliefs and fears among Christians, thus, improve participation in Holy Communion and making it a celebration that is more inclusive.

While the dissertation concentrates on the Presbyterian Church of Blantyre Synod, a comparative material is presented from other Protestant churches as well as the Roman Catholic Church. This discussion is important because it investigates to the question of abstention from the Holy Communion, in not only the church of Blantyre Synod but also in other places where this problem is experienced.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
Declaration .....	i
Dedication .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Abstract.....	v
Table o. contents .....	vii
Keywords .....	x
Abbreviations .....	xi
 <b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
<b>BACKGROUND TO THE CHURCH AND ITS PROBLEMS</b>	
1.1 History of Blantyre Synod .....	1
1.2 Problem Statement .....	2
1.3 The aim of the study .....	6
1.4 Theoretical argument (hypothesis) .....	7
1.5 Methodology .....	8
1.6 Advantages and disadvantages of using various approaches .....	11
1.6.1 The questionnaire approach .....	11
1.6.2 The unstructured interview .....	11
1.6.3 The structured interview .....	13
1.7 Conclusion .....	13
 <b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
<b>FIELD WORK, DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS</b>	
2.1 Introduction .....	14
2.2 The field covered by the questionnaire .....	15
2.2.1 Interviews .....	15
2.2.2 Research strategies and data gathering .....	16
2.3 Research findings and analysis .....	17
2.4 Findings from the questionnaire .....	22
2.5 Ministers responses to the questionnaire .....	24
2.6 Problems encountered .....	25
2.7 Evaluation .....	26
2.8 Unworthiness .....	27
2.8.1 Marriage .....	30
2.8.2 Reverence .....	31
2.8.3 Discipline of excommunication .....	33
2.8.4 The reformed tradition .....	35
2.9 Future suggestion .....	37
2.10 Conclusion .....	39
 <b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
<b>MALAWIAN CULTURE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES</b>	
3.1 Introduction .....	40
3.2 Malawian culture – An overview .....	40
3.3 Influence of ritual and ceremony .....	43
3.3.1 Child birth rites .....	43
3.3.2 Puberty rites or initiation for boys and girls .....	44

3.3.3	Traditional marriages .....	46
3.3.4	Death rituals or memorial ceremonies .....	47
3.4	The issue of cleanliness and holiness .....	51
3.5	Biblical interpretation in relation to purity .....	53
3.6	Dealing with traditional beliefs and culture .....	57
3.7	Conclusion .....	59

## CHAPTER 4

### UNDERSTANDING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

4.1	Introduction .....	60
4.2	Background to the Lord's Supper .....	60
4.3	Names for the Lord's Supper .....	68
4.4	What the Lord's Supper is .....	72
4.4.1	Memorial .....	73
4.4.2	Proclamation .....	78
4.4.3	Participation .....	82
4.5	The presence of Christ .....	87
4.5.1	Transubstantiation .....	90
4.5.2	Consubstantiation .....	96
4.5.3	Reformed view .....	99
4.5.4	Memorial view .....	103
4.6	Real Presence .....	106
4.7	Evaluation of the views .....	109
4.8	The nature of the Lord's Supper .....	111
4.8.1	The Lord's Supper in the early Church .....	111
4.8.2	The Lord's Supper in the medieval period .....	113
4.8.3	The Lord's Supper in the reformation .....	115
4.9	The implications of the Lord's Supper .....	117
4.9.1	Union .....	117
4.9.2	Sacrifice .....	123
4.9.3	Anticipation .....	129
4.10	Conclusion .....	132

## CHAPTER 5

### THE PRACTICE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

5.1	Introduction .....	133
5.2	Administration of the Lord's Supper .....	133
5.3	The Elements of the Lord's Supper .....	135
5.3.1	The Bread – one loaf .....	136
5.3.2	The cup .....	139
5.4	Prerequisites to admission in the celebration of the Lord's Supper .....	142
5.5	How often should we partake the Lord's Supper .....	154
5.6	Preparation for the Lord's Supper .....	159
5.7	Responses to the Lord's Supper .....	165
5.8	Conclusion .....	168

## CHAPTER 6

APPLICATION .....	169
-------------------	-----

## CHAPTER 7

### EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION

7.1	Introduction .....	171
7.2	Recommendations .....	171

7.3	Conclusion .....	175
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	178 - 186
	<b>APPENDIX</b>	187 - 190

**Keywords.**

Blantyre Synod, Sacrament, unity, symbol, Lord's Supper, Christology, discipline.

**Abbreviations**

**CCAP** – Church of Central Africa Presbyterian

**NBD** – New Bible Dictionary

**BEN** – Baptism Eucharist Ministry

**WARC** – World Alliance of the Reformed Churches

**GAC** – General Administrators Committee.

**Mat** – Mathew

**Mk** – Mark.

**Lk.** – Luke.

**Jn.** – John.

**Eph** – Ephesians.

**Cor.** – Corinthians.

**Ps.** – Psalms.

**Rom** – Romans.

**Prov.** – Proverb.

**Rev.** – Revelation.

## CHAPTER 1

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### **BACKGROUND TO THE CHURCH AND ITS PROBLEMS**

#### **1.1 History of Blantyre Synod**

Blantyre Synod is one of three Synods of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (C.C.A.P) in Malawi. Ross (1996:15) observes that the early Scottish missionaries to Malawi established the church in 1876. According to Lamba (1983:46), the Mission took its name from Livingstone's birthplace in Scotland. Further, he observes that the mission station then thus came to be known as "Blantyre Mission."

The other Presbyterian Synods are Livingstonia and Nkhoma. Ross (1996:83) states that the Free Church of Scotland founded Livingstonia Synod, while Lamba (1983:42) observes that the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa founded Nkhoma, which is situated in the central region of Malawi. Apart from these three synods in the country, there are two others in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Weller (1984:122) notes that the name "Church of Central Africa Presbyterian" (CCAP) came into existence in the year 1924 and was adopted by two Scottish Synods namely, Blantyre and Livingstonia. Pachai (1973:120) observes that two years later in 1926, Nkhoma joined the union. Under this union, each Synod was allowed to maintain its constitution.

The Synod of Blantyre covers the entire southern region of Malawi and part of central region. The southern region consists of many tribes and traditions but due to intermarriages in the area, the cultural practices are virtually the same. The suggestion made in this dissertation is that in the southern region where the research was carried out, there are traditional beliefs and customs that influence the abstention of communicants from the Lord's Table.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

The researcher felt that the problem of abstention from the Lord's Supper in the church of Blantyre Synod needed to be addressed. This issue of abstention has been widely discussed by different forums of Blantyre Synod. It appears that Blantyre Synod Christians' ideas concerning the abstention from Holy Communion have been shaped by a number of reasons. These include among others Paul's teaching on the subject of the Lord's Supper. For instance, Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:29 says, "Anyone who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks damnation to himself or herself."

In this dissertation, the problems pertaining to being worthy or unworthy are discussed, because it seems probable that Christians of the Blantyre Synod understand the term "unworthy" in terms of being sinful and hence not being allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. Communicants of the Synod of Blantyre believe that the Lord's Table is not an ordinary table, it is something "set apart," sacred and it must be protected and handled with reverence. Due to

this conservative way of thinking many christians abstain from the Lord's Table.

Another contributing factor to the issue of abstention is that of cultural beliefs and practices. It is suggested that this entire situation came about because there are many traditional beliefs and taboos that still influence the lives of christians. With this background, communicants abstain from Holy Communion. Those who abstain can be categorized as follows:

Firstly, there are those who are neither baptized nor confirmed. In the church of Blantyre Synod Malawi, admission to communion is not encouraged if one is not baptized and confirmed as a full member. It has been noted that in the church of Blantyre Synod the basic theological principle is that baptism admits to communion. Secondly, there are christians who do not partake of Holy Communion because they are not officially married in the church. It appears that the Synod of Blantyre in Malawi makes a church wedding a precondition for receiving the sacrament of the Holy Communion. Lastly, there are also those believers who though they are in good faith do not partake of the Holy Communion.

Chingota (1999) notes that one of Calvin's teachings of order and discipline contributes to the abstention of christians from the Lord's Supper. He expresses the idea that whosoever would approach God as king of kings must be disciplined and well dressed. He mentions that dirty clothes must be washed and people must look smart before the presence of the Lord. This underlies the

belief that Christians of Blantyre Synod are expected to be without sin in order to qualify for the celebration of Holy Communion. Chingota's suggestion has to be examined.

The researcher will further investigate if there are other factors that contribute to the problem of abstention in the Church of Blantyre Synod. The paper also explores the Blantyre Synod's teaching concerning the Holy Communion in contrast with Jesus' teaching on table fellowship. Biblically, we learn that Jesus' table fellowship offers a significant clue to the direction of his ministry. Reumann (1985:140) notes that in spite of Jewish rules concerning not defiling oneself by eating with 'unclean' people, Jesus received sinners including tax collectors and outcasts. He points out that Jesus' ministry accepted the marginalized and did not discriminate against anybody. His table fellowship was open and without legal requirements. It is believed that in such fellowship we can see a picture of what the Kingdom of God will be like.

There is a strong note of forgiveness that runs through Jesus' table fellowship. It is in this fellowship that Jesus gives assurance of God's grace by eating with sinners as a friend (Lk. 19:1-10). Some see here the good news of justification by grace as later expressed in the Holy Communion. For those who were rejected by society to be invited to have fellowship with a Holy Man was a sign of restoration.

This implies that sharing a table means sharing life and it is a vital symbol of social solidarity (Burkhart, 1982:77). In imitation, the church of Blantyre Synod in Malawi should seek out to the helpless, find the desperate and welcome back the lost. It was in this type of situation that the 'prodigal son' discovered that in God's church repentance and forgiveness are more like a home banquet, the Lord's Table. It is likely that Jesus' understanding of his invitation was related to repentance because it includes a change of 'mental attitude' and participation in a new community. It can be understood as a challenge to the completely official religious system. It shows that God is interested in the outcast in a different way. Chilton (1994:31) observes that Christ's invitation was a sign of what the kingdom was and still is accessible to the outcasts who were considered sinners because they could not fulfill the requirements of the law.

In this situation, Jesus regards himself as a spokesperson for God who is able to open the kingdom to the outcast without standard procedures made by the temple system. Above all, worth noting in this problem is the point that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper repentant sinners are ready for forgiveness, that is their justification. We hope that this paper will contribute to the theological debate that challenges the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Blantyre Synod Malawi. The problem will be investigated in this dissertation.

### 1.3 The aim of the study

The main aim of this research is to investigate the theology of abstention from the Holy Communion and its reality in the life of christians in the church of central Africa Presbyterian Blantyre Synod Malawi. The study seeks to identify the reasons why to date, christians abstain from the Lord's Table. The researcher will endeavor to address concerns such as:

- What is the nature of exclusion of the ordinary christians by the church and what influences christians to voluntarily abstain from the Lord's Table?
- Is there any connection between culture and the way the church in Malawi presents the gospel?
- What are the arguments put forward by christians for abstention?
- Is there any mechanism for making christians understand the meaning of Holy Communion?

In the course of this, it is hoped to add to the understanding of the meaning of the Holy Communion for humankind. It seems ordinary christians do not know exactly why the Lord's Supper is celebrated. This is so because the Blantyre Synod church does not instruct christians on the importance of the sacraments of the Lord's Supper.

The study will examine the teaching and practice of the early fathers and their theology pertaining to the Lord's Supper and how this has influenced the understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper in the case under study.

Stibbs (1961:34) believes that the teaching and practice, which are observed, must be judged as right or wrong not simply in the light of the extent of its adoption but rather by asking whether it is according to the truth of the gospel.

The Church of Blantyre Synod regards Holy Communion as a meal that can be taken only by 'faithful members.' Nevertheless, Wainwright (1971:130) argues that Holy Communion was instituted as a special means of grace to the remission of the sins. The point that he makes here is that as christians receive the sacrament of Christ's body and blood they receive the Lord himself. Therefore, it is necessary that communicants partake of the Lord's Table to confess their unworthiness and to seek Christ's forgiveness and righteousness.

However, Jesus' idea of eating and drinking with sinners was performed to invite sinners to repentance (Lk.5:32). Therefore eating and drinking together in recognition of Jesus is the basic act of acknowledgement by christians of what God has done, is doing and will do through him. My question here is that if christians do not partake of Holy Communion what would be their response to the command of Jesus Christ. In fact, this has to be one of the concerns in this dissertation. Kendall (1989:120) believes that the church is a body where all people that Jesus died for must be welcome. In his view, he cites the example of Judas, a betrayer who was present during the celebration of the Lord's Supper, yet Jesus treated him with amazing love.

In this dissertation, it is suggested that the Church of Blantyre Synod must accept the fact that there will be Judases among her members and the issue remains of how to accommodate such people to the table of the Lord. The church of the Blantyre Synod should bear in mind that Christ continues to draw sinners into his transforming presence that they may pass from death to life and to his feast in the final kingdom, God is inviting all people for he has willed to have mercy on all (Rom. 11:32).

#### **1.4 Theoretical argument (Hypothesis)**

There are cultural factors that influence Christians' abstention from the Lord's Supper. The challenge in the Church of Blantyre Synod is to bring about a change by addressing the practices that Christians cite as valid reasons for abstention. This should be done in the whole Synod of Blantyre.

The central argument of this research is that the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Malawi, which is part of the body of Christ, has a justifiable role in welcoming Christians to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, if the Lord's Supper is to sustain its meaning.

The researcher is of the opinion that this paper might lead to the solution of abstention of Christians from the Lord's Supper encountered at present in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Blantyre Synod. It is hoped that the study might identify as accurately as possible the reasons for abstention and at

the same time suggest solutions to the cultural problems that the church is currently experiencing.

### **1.5 Methodology**

In order to understand the issue of abstention the study will discuss the problem from the historical perspective with emphasis on the theology of the reformed tradition. Nick Moore (1983:37) says that research is an attempt to describe and hear from the past at its many times. Further, he says that the historical method is good because by looking into the past, present events are put in place. Historical cases may allow the finding of answers to the question that would otherwise be unanswerable; for instance how far and in what sense did Jesus institute the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and why? In order to answer this question, historical cases must be investigated.

Therefore, this method shall be used in order to get deeper into the specific historical events that have taken place since the church of Blantyre Synod was established. In this situation, we hope that the element of history will help to develop a mechanism of how the Lord's Supper will be celebrated in future.

In this dissertation, the target is to investigate the beliefs that influence Christians' abstention from the Lord's Table. The researcher recorded views, feelings as well as the historical background of Malawian culture in relation to the issue of abstention. While Chingota (1999) suggested that culture

influences abstention, the research findings revealed that other beliefs also influence abstention. The interpretations were based on scrutiny of the concept of culture as it manifests itself in the life of ordinary christians in the case under study.

Traditional beliefs and taboos in general were examined with special emphasis on literary and linguistic knowledge. This was done through a sociological approach. Social analysis was utilized to measure the nature of exclusion. This has assisted the researcher in understanding better the role played by culture and how culture has influenced people's attitude in the society. This type of analysis has revealed that culture consists of the values of the members of a given group.

Chingota (1999) referred to culture as a reason against partaking of Holy Communion. The study examines how culture has influenced the abstention of christians from the Lord's Table. Qualitative methodology was used as a theoretic framework, as well as multiple strategies in the gathering of data. Moore (1983) summarizes qualitative methodology as an observation of what happens within a phenomenon as described imaginatively and constructively from different perspectives. The interview questions were not direct. This was done in order to encourage the freedom of participation and contribution of information as people tried to express their views.

Such vehicles as conversation and songs were used for the gathering of data. Johnson (1975) refers to this flexibility as a non-scheduled structural interview. It is non-scheduled structural because of its spontaneous and flexible nature, but it is structured in the sense that specific detailed information has to be gathered for comparing with that from other participants.

J. Bynner & Strimbley (1979) added that qualitative research focuses on understanding rather than on explaining social actions and events within their particular settings and contexts. In the interview a set of questions were employed. It was from this background that the interviews were conducted with different bodies and individuals within the Synod.

Hence, the questionnaire was prepared and targeted to focal discussion groups and interviews were conducted as follows:

- With the General Secretary and the Synod Moderator who holds the highest position in the Synod of Blantyre.
- With the Women's Desk coordinator who holds the key role position on Women's issue in the Synod.
- With the Presbytery Clerks and Presbytery Moderators.
- With congregational ministers.
- With church elders, both male and female.
- With members of the Women's guild,
- With congregational members, both men and women.
- Finally, with the youth, both boys and girls.

Interviews were conducted with an equal number of men and women for the sake of getting balanced views because many of the cultural factors involve gender issues.

## **1.6 Advantages and disadvantages of using various approaches**

### **1.6.1. The questionnaire approach**

The researcher used a questionnaire method that comprises both structured and non-structured questions. The importance for using the questionnaire is that there are certain advantages attached to the questionnaire that render it suitable for gathering the type of information needed by the researcher. Moreover, it permits wide coverage at a reasonable expense both in time and in effort. It also gives enough time to the respondent to attend to it. The only disadvantage is that sometimes the respondents fail to return the questionnaires for various reasons. Sometimes there is a possibility of misinterpretation and the results therefore can be affected.

### **1.6.2 The unstructured interview**

In the unstructured interview, the questions are open ended and are not restricted to a list of specific questions and so the researcher is free to repeat questions, ask additional questions, to proceed where there is promise, such as

when the respondent is providing useful information to the purpose of the research.

### **1.6.3 The structured interview**

In the structured interview, the researcher is restricted to a list of specific questions and so the researcher is able to get a general attitude from different respondents of various categories. This helps to address weaknesses and suggest ways in which the study can be made a success.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

The chapter rendered the background to the church and also stated the problem of abstention. In order to understand the reasons that cause Christians' abstention from the Lord's Supper, the researcher outlines the findings that communicants of Blantyre Synod base as valid reasons for abstention. These will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### FIELD WORK, DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the fieldwork and at the same time looks at the implementation of the gathered information. The intention therefore is to reflect an analysis of the questionnaire and interviews.

As described in the methodology, ministers church elders both men and women, members of the women's Guild, and the youth were randomly interviewed from rural and urban Presbyteries within Blantyre Synod. In the qualitative methodology, interviews and questionnaires were used as instruments in the investigation of the factors that cause abstention.

The findings were compared with the General Secretary's and the Synod Moderator's views since they are authorities of the Synod, and with those of the Presbytery Clerks and the Presbytery Moderators who are the in charge of the Presbyteries. Further, the findings were compared with the members' views from various Presbyteries.

## 2.2 The field covered by the questionnaire

### 2.2.1 Interviews

The research was conducted in eight of the thirteen Presbyteries of the Blantyre Synod. Out of the eight, four were from rural areas. Ministers and Christians were interviewed about their perception of the reasons for abstention and their attitudes towards the Lord's Supper. The research instruments were divided into two categories namely interviews and questionnaire. In the course of investigation interviews were done both in English as well as in a local language '*Chichewa*' for the following reasons:

- It was felt that many people do not feel confident putting confidential information in writing instead they feel comfortable when approached in a less formal manner.
- Another reason for holding interviews is that many people want to be familiar with the person who is seeking the information and want to get an assurance on how it will be used. They need the stimulation of the contact person in order to feel comfortable when giving responses. Very significant is the fact that the researcher knew that some of the respondents could not read and write, so it was also for this reason that the researcher decided to implement the interview as an additional technique for obtaining information on certain issues.

Furthermore, it was decided that the questionnaire should be used as a data collecting technique. In this investigation questionnaires were used for the following reasons:

- The researcher realized that the questionnaire could cover a wide area at a reasonable expense.
- It was also suggested that by using a questionnaire the respondent is given a freedom of expressing his or her views in written form.
- Again, by using this method the respondents do not panic because they are given enough time to attend to the questionnaire.

However, the researcher felt that the atmosphere through out the interviews was open and relaxed.

### **2.2.2 Research strategies and data gathering**

The field covered by the researcher was therefore to determine the perceptions that ordinary christians of Blantyre Synod have towards the Lord's Supper. The theoretical framework that investigated the fieldwork was that of qualitative methodology. This method was discussed fully in chapter 1.

It was pointed out that multiple strategies were utilized in gathering of data aiming at testing the hypothesis upon which this study was founded. It is in this that qualitative methodology is also used in the investigations of the study.

The intention is to describe the structuring of the gathered information and to discuss briefly the implementation of the findings. One of the possible options

that were used for the gathering of information was the one that has been included in this implementation. For instance, a structured questionnaire was used (interviews). A structured interview simply means gathering information by using prepared questions. In this study, it was felt that gathering data through this method is very necessary in order to come up with meaningful assessment of the hypothesis being tested.

Mostly, the information was gathered by means of dialogue and conversation. Such an approach is referred to as non-scheduled structured interview (Johnson, 1975). The fact that the interviews were non-scheduled helped the respondents to feel free and interact on the topic as much as they could since the researcher was looking for detailed information that could facilitate comparing ideas of different participants. The interviews were to that extent structured. In the research, the intention was to explore the reasons of abstention from the Lord's Supper as it relates to Malawian cultural practices, and factors that lead to the abstention.

A sample of the questionnaire appears as Appendix A at the end of this copy to indicate the type of issues that were discussed in this study.

### **2.3 Research findings and analysis**

The findings on the question of abstention from the Lord's Supper were gathered from 360 communicants from eight of the thirteen Presbyteries that

constitute Blantyre Synod. Out of the total sample, half of the respondents were female. This was done in order to elicit balanced views. Of the total sample interviewed only 50 agreed that they partake of the Lord's Supper regularly when it is served. Whereas 310 responded negatively due to the reasons, which are reflected latter in this chapter. It was found that out of the 310 abstainers, only 10 were from urban Presbyteries while 300 were from rural presbyteries. This suggests the conclusion that the issue of abstention is mainly experienced in the rural areas. Further, it was discovered that out of 300 abstainers 200 were women. This also justifies the conclusion that this issue of abstention affects more women than men.

In the findings, it was discovered that christians do not partake of the Lord's Supper for the following reasons:

- A number of christians revealed that there is in the church of Blantyre Synod an atmosphere of reverence that causes christians to stay away from the Lord's Table.
- Some members abstain from the Lord' s Table for the reason that they feel that the Lord's Supper is something that is associated with magic and connected with too many beliefs.
- A number of communicants revealed that they could not partake of the Lord's Supper due to cultural beliefs and traditional taboos.
- Women feel that they cannot partake of the Lord's Supper when they are menstruating and when they have just given birth.

- Women do not partake of Holy Communion when they are pregnant for fear of miscarriage. There is a belief that if a minister whose behaviour is doubtful celebrates the Lord's Supper it can cause illness that may result in miscarriage.
- Communicants both men and women abstain from the Lord's Supper when they are bereaved.
- Spouses regard themselves as impure when they have sexual relations the night before the communion service as a result they abstain.
- Spouses abstain from the Lord's Supper when a daughter in the family has been impregnated.
- Communicants abstain from the Lord's Table when they have quarreled either with friends or with their spouses.
- Unworthiness is one of the common reasons that were given by most of the respondents as a valid reason for refraining from the Lord's Table. In their explanation, they regard themselves as sinners because they do not live a good life. In other words, they mean that they are not perfect therefore; they feel that they do not deserve to partake of the Lord's Supper.
- Some do not partake of the Lord's Supper because they are not officially married in church.
- Others do not partake of the Lord's Supper because they are under church discipline.
- Others do not partake of the Lord's Supper because they are neither baptized nor confirmed.

- Many communicants expressed the problem of hygiene. This problem was mentioned in the congregations where they drink from one cup.
- Some said that they are unwilling to partake in Holy Communion because of the misconduct of the church elders and Ministers who preside over the Lord's Table
- Some complained that they do not come to the Lord's Table due to long services. It was revealed that in some congregations Holy Communion takes the whole day.
- Some christians feel that it does not matter whether they partake of the Lord's Supper or not. They say that to them Holy Communion has no relevance in their lives. As a result, they undervalue it.
- Others do not partake of the Lord's Supper due to ignorance that makes them think that they can do without it.

The reasons raised above contribute towards the abstention of christians from the Lord's Table. We do not claim that all the reasons are here mentioned but we hope that these findings may help to bring the whole question of abstention to light. However it is argued that the reasons raised above are not valid because they are against the gracious invitation of our Lord to his table which is remembering him as the one who gave his life a ransom for us. The point being made here is that despite the human merit it is suggested that repentance is the only criterion for accessing the table. This is why Paul in 1 Corinthians warns christians to examine themselves before partaking in the Holy Communion because, as the benefit is great if with penitent hearts and lively

faith Christians receive this sacrament so the danger is great if we receive the same unworthily, discerning the Lord's body. The point that Paul is making here does not apply to those who are truly penitent but to such as continue in sin without repentance. Therefore Blantyre Synod Christians should repent of their sins with honest confession in order to partake of the Lord's Supper.

During the interviews it was discovered that many Christians especially women abstain from the Lord's Supper for cultural reasons. The beliefs and taboos held by Christians on issues like menstruation, sexuality and many other rituals affect the Christians who grasp the reality of life from cultural norms presented at the traditional ceremonies.

Things are worsened by the fact that the church does not address these beliefs and taboos. During the interviews, ministers indicated that this problem has been in the church for a long time because the church of Blantyre Synod does not have any teaching aids, which could be used by ministers, to assist them in putting before their congregants the positive teaching on the Lord's Supper, which will enable them to understand and accept the Lord's command, "This do in remembrance of me." Further, it was revealed that even those who partake of the Lord's Supper do so for keeping their name on the communion roll knowing that by the act of handing in their cards they have kept themselves right with the Kirk session. However, ministers cited cultural beliefs as one of the main reasons why Christians stay away from the Lord's Table. The findings

indicate that the issue of abstention affects many christians in the Synod of Blantyre.

This study is not as rigorous in statistics and sampling as it would have been. However, it represents an exploratory piece of research and as such was intended to provide insights into trends and tendencies rather than measurable differences between respondents. Moreover, the nature of interviewing was such as to require great persuasion and we felt more appropriate to concentrate on valid and sensitive interviews than on statistical precision.

As regards, comparison between urban and rural respondents the findings show that there are more abstainers in the rural than in urban areas. The findings in this study show consistency to the problem of abstention due to major aspects of attitudes and behaviour differences in cultural practices and in terms of gender or level of understanding.

In this research, in order to show that the findings are not generalized trends have been identical only where several aspects of data point in the same direction.

#### **2.4 Findings from the questionnaire**

- i. A number of respondents agreed that many christians abstain from the Lord's Table. Further, many complaints were raised against the

authorities of the church of the Blantyre Synod who put much emphasis on the preaching of the word than on Holy Communion. In general, the respondents felt that there is need to teach christians more about the Lord's Supper.

- ii. The respondents were divided on the issue of the teaching of the church of Blantyre Synod that allows only those who are married in church to partake of the Lord's Supper. On this matter, some were in favour of it while others were against it.
- iii. The majority of the respondents felt that the traditional cultural beliefs that influence christians' abstention must be looked into. In fact, this showed that there are conflicting aspects that need clarification. I e taboos.
- iv. Respondents from the rural areas complained that Holy Communion is not celebrated regularly in the rural congregations.
- v. Most communicants indicated cultural beliefs as a common reason that has contributed a lot to the problem of abstention. Thus, christians avoid partaking of the Holy Communion due to cultural beliefs.
- vi. In general, the findings indicate a lack of motivation on the part of christians. In this regard, the researcher intends to take a closer look at the whole issue after the presentation of the ministers' responses.

## 2.5 Ministers responses to the questionnaire

Ministers revealed that other christians refrain from partaking of the Lord's Supper because they feel that it is associated with magic. There is the belief that if a certain act is correctly performed it will produce certain results automatically. Ministers also indicated that the literature, for example in the catechisms does not seem to encourage the hesitant to come forward to the Lord's Table. It is therefore suggested that the church should improve the literature on Holy Communion in order to motivate christians for the partaking of the Lord's Supper. Ministers recognized that christians avoid the Lord's Table because they are not motivated to participate in the Lord's Supper due to the character of the celebrant, in this case, the ministers and the church elders.

The researcher concluded that there are certain points of agreement found everywhere. Following are the results in a summarized form:

- There is great concern for intensifying the teaching concerning the sacrament of the Lord's Table.
- Respondents felt that the church of the Blantyre Synod should address the issue of cultural beliefs because many christians uphold a firm belief in their traditional customs.
- Respondents from various Presbyteries expressed the need for explanation of the concept of the ancestral veneration, which leads to christians' abstention. On this point, the researcher suggests that the church must address the practice of holding memorial ceremonies.

In view of all the findings gathered, there is an urgent need for a rediscovery of the meaning of the Lord's Supper in order to stop the problem of abstention.

## **2.6 Problems encountered**

It was very difficult to find the required information due to the following reasons:

Firstly, the Blantyre Synod covers the whole southern part of Malawi and part of the central region. The plan was to conduct interviews in all the thirteen Presbyteries in order to gather information from a wide variety of congregations both from rural and urban areas. This was not possible due to financial problems that limited the size of the sample to only 360 respondents from various Presbyteries.

Secondly, it was difficult to meet specific people selected for interview. This was due to difficulties in making prior arrangements since most of the appointments were made orally. Although in some areas proper arrangements were made, some people did not take the appointment seriously and did not turn up when the researcher called to interview them. Despite the constraints, it is suggested that the outcome of the research was not affected.

## **2.7 Evaluations**

From the findings the researcher came up with the following observations:

Firstly, Holy Communion had more support in urban areas than in rural areas.

This was true for both men and women though with a certain degree. This may have been probably due to the higher standard of education of the urban members, which helps them to be liberal in their way of thinking.

Secondly, there were more objections to the Holy Communion in rural areas among both men and women. This may have been due to level of understanding as well as a lack of teaching about the Lord's Supper, which has made rural christians more conservative in their way of thinking.

Thirdly, most of the clergy agree that many christians abstain from the Lord's Table both in urban and rural areas. This is reflected in the answers, which they gave as outlined in the next topic.

Finally, it was indicated in the findings that many women abstain from the Lord's Table. One minister commented during the research that women object to partaking of the Lord's Supper because men have indoctrinated them. This may not have been necessarily true because those who abstain from the Lord's Supper gave their reasons for abstention, which seemed to come from their consciences. In the findings, statistics were utilized to assess the nature of abstention. Conflicts have been shown to exist between christianity and

cultural beliefs. In this discussion, the majority of the respondents as main reasons for abstention have identified traditional beliefs and customs.

The findings from the questionnaire and interviews are presented. Here, the researcher continues the discussion of the results in a summarized form and attempts to interpret the findings as far as possible in the context of the reformed tradition with the Blantyre Synod situation as its background.

However, the researcher observes that there are other reasons that were frequently mentioned by the respondents in almost all the eight presbyteries where the research was conducted. Hoping that abstainers might be persuaded to consider very seriously to this practice and accept the Lord's invitation to his table, the researcher has come up with an interpretation of some of the main reasons that christians regard as valid reasons for abstention. These are as follows:

## **2.8 Unworthiness**

The researcher discovered that of all the reasons that cause christians to abstain from the Lord's Supper, unworthiness is the most common reason. It was also discovered that some communicants stay away from the Lord's Table because they believe that they do not deserve such a great privilege. Communicants have been heard to say 'I am not worthy to come to the Lord's Table.' For instance, being unworthy for them may mean that they are sinners. They feel

that they do not live a good life. In other words, they mean to say they are not perfect. To respond to this problem, the Blantyre Synod members must know that to stay away from the Lord's Table is a mistake because there is no one worthy of receiving of the Lord's Supper. This is to say every person falls far short of the glory of God. In another sense, none of those who partake of the Lord's Supper is perfect. However, Christ invites all christians to dine with him in spite of our weakness and to refuse his invitation is to make light of it. In addition, it means cutting ourselves off from the means of grace by which we may receive God's forgiveness and assurance of his forgiveness and help in a special way.

My question to those who abstain because they are not perfect is whether they are smitten with shame when they realize how imperfect they are and whether they are not sorry about their unworthiness. Quoting an example from the Gospel according to Luke 18:10-14 there is a story about a Pharisee who is a good example of a self-righteous man .On the other hand there was a publican who was also a humble man. According to the scriptures, the publican was deeply conscious of his sin, and stricken to the heart by the guilt of it. He drew near in penitence to the throne of grace, earnestly seeking God's mercy. The same should apply to the Blantyre Synod christians who persists in saying, "I am not worthy" but cannot really mean what they say, because they refuse to avail themselves of the blood of the New Testament shed "for many for the remission of sins."

In addition, the Gospel according to Mark says, "People who are well do not need a doctor," said Jesus, "but only those who are sick I have not come to call respectable people but outcasts" (Mk.2:7). Because we are sinners, we may say before we come to the Lord's Table: "we are not even worthy to gather up the crumbs." Nevertheless, the bread and wine made out of wheat and grapes can be used to express God's creating and forgiving love.

In the church of Blantyre Synod Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:29 have contributed towards the abstention of christians from the Lord's Table. It seems the words give a terrible picture and exaggerate the details of the external tortures so that when communicants are confronted with such words they refrain from the Lord's Table for fear that by partaking unworthily they might incur such a fate. To respond on this issue, Blantyre Synod christians must recognize that what is celebrated at the Lord's Table is not our unworthiness, but the worthiness of Jesus Christ, and Christ extends his invitation to all and welcomes those who constrained by love of him, would seek strength to make their lives more worthy of him. Therefore, for all christians who come humbly and sincerely, seeking help and guidance there is the same loving welcome that Jesus gave to the disciples.

Above all, Blantyre Synod communicants must recognize that these words of Paul do not only remind them that they are imperfect but also challenge them to look beyond themselves to the great mercy of God. However, they are to see in the symbols of bread and wine set before them in the Lord's Supper, the

divinely appointed means of his grace whereby Christ supplies strength to make good our weakness. Furthermore, they must be assured that the only worthiness they can bring to God is to offer him with their own unworthiness that his mercy may make them worthy.

### **2.8.1 Marriage**

In the problem statement as well as in the findings, it is indicated that Christians do not partake of the Lord's Supper because they are not officially married in church. It seems that the church of Blantyre Synod makes weddings a precondition for receiving the Lord's Supper. Yet, marriage is not a sacrament as it is in the Roman Catholic Church. To answer on this one, it is true that in the church of Blantyre Synod marriage is not a sacrament as it is in the Roman Catholic church but it is sacramental in the sense that marriage has a sacred character. Therefore like every covenant made with God it is permanent. As such Christians are encouraged to officiate marriages in church in order to sit at the Lord's Table.

Moreover, Christians must recognize that marriage is one of the solemn vows that Christians make when they are being accepted in the society. Above all Christians must recognize that God divinely instituted marriage. Therefore, Christians must realize that by making wedding a precondition for receiving the Lord's Supper the church obeys to what the Lord instituted, in this case

marriage. This is so because faithfulness in marriage is an illustration of faithfulness in the christian life between God and christians.

Christians are to stand by their vows of marriage in order to celebrate the Lord's Supper because any violation of this vow is made to God since he instituted marriage. Therefore, the church of Blantyre Synod should motivate christians to obey God through this vow and then come forward to the Lord's Table.

### **2.8.2 Reverence**

The findings also indicate that ordinary christians of the Blantyre Synod believe that the Lord's Table is not an ordinary table, it is something "set apart", sacred and it must be protected and handled with reverence. Due to this, many christians abstain from the Lord's Table due to fear.

Whatever the case it is true that there is this general atmosphere of quietness, deep emotion and sincere reverence for the service of Holy Communion in the church of Blantyre Synod. Because of this, only a few communicants come forward to the Lord's Table. To answer on this, christians must know that an attitude of reverence to the Lord's Table must be commended. This is to say reverence is necessary in our daily lives and even in some aspects of church administration. It is suggested that where there is such apparent 'familiarity' with sacred things, christians begin to lose their sense of awe before the

Almighty. Here in the celebration of the Lord's Supper the invitation is to his table, and christians are unfeeling and unthinking, if they tremble not at all.

It is suggested that christians should tremble and come forward to the Lord's Table. Here it is observed that for many years the main emphasis of religious thinking in the Synod of Blantyre has dwelt a lot on warning against irreverent approach so much so that it has had the effect of deterring earnest souls from approaching the Lord's Table at all.

However, the Synod of Blantyre must dwell on the Gospel principles that are to extend the Lord's invitation to all its communicants. This is to say the church must regard the invitation to the Lord's Table to be of more importance than the warnings. christians must be challenged that reverence by itself is not essential. What is expected of them is to come forward to the Lord's Table and receive God's forgiveness. Above all the Lord's Supper is not supposed to be taken lightly, without serious thought or without good persuasions that one has first accepted Christ as his/her personal Saviour.

### **2.8.3 Discipline of excommunication**

In the church of Blantyre Synod, discipline is another reason that prevents Christians to partake of the Lord's Supper. In order to answer this issue let us look at the scriptures. In the letter of Paul to the Corinthians, Paul says, "it is commonly reported that there is fornication among the members, and of such a sort that even the Gentiles would be ashamed to confess it" (1 Cor.5:1). In v.2 he complains, "and ye are puffed up and have not rather mourned, he that has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already as though I were present, concerning him that has so done this deed." Now these are the instructions: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." This is an important and solemn passage on church discipline.

Further more, let us also look at 1 Corinthians 5:5 which says, "Deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved." This verse might have two meanings. First, either you are the Lord's or you are Satan's. You are either on the Lord's side or you are on the devil's side and Paul envisages someone professing to be on the Lord's side, which is attempting to come to the Lord's Table, yet, who really belongs to Satan. Therefore, Paul says put him away to where he belongs, that is outside the fellowship of those who are on the Lord's side. A second possible explanation

might be that here Paul was saying that God in his mysterious providence sometimes allows his children to be tempted. The Lord allowed Job to be tempted, similarly permitted Simon to be tempted as well. In addition, it may be that in Corinth God was allowing these believers to be tempted in order that they should experience the saving power of the Spirit. Either of these meanings may explain the words of v.5 but the burden of what Paul is saying to the Corinthians is that the fellowship of the Lord's Table requires that all those whose conduct is openly contradictory to that for which the table stands, must be put out of the fellowship.

In the letter to the Thessalonians chapter 3 v.6 it says, "Now we command you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us." Here again is an instruction to exercise church discipline so that the fellowship of the Lord's Table must not be spoiled. Boer (1976:40) observes that in the early church those who broke the accepted laws were disciplined. He believes that discipline is in line with the scriptures. He gave his evidence from Hebrews 10:26-27 "If we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment." The point that Boer wants to make here is that penitence has to prove the genuineness of sorrow for sin before the sinner can receive forgiveness. In the church, discipline is devised so that on the one hand, the sinner might be humbled and

thus saved, and on the other hand, the purity of life in the church could be upheld.

In this case, Blantyre Synod Christians must know that church discipline is for the preservation of the purity of the fellowship, and there is a close connection between church discipline and the Lord's Supper. The erring in this respect is excluded for a while from church fellowship. This is to say the act of excommunication implies nothing if it does not imply exclusion from the Lord's Table. Therefore, in this manner Christians must know that excommunication is a pastoral measure not a punishment. Christians of the Blantyre Synod must realize that if the supper is the private communion of the individual and God, then the church has no right to exclude anybody from it.

Nevertheless, since it is not only the private relation between the individual and God and since it is horizontal and binds Christians together, then of course, such discipline must be exercised.

#### **2.8.4. The reformed tradition**

In one of the questionnaires, a minister wrote that the issue of abstention in the Synod of Blantyre increased with the practice of the "fencing the table." He said that this practice originated from the reformed faith. In his explanation, he cites an example of the first book of the common order, where the manner of the administration of the Lord's Supper includes an exhortation, which debar

from the Lord's Table those guilty of various type of sins, "all that be in envy or malice, all such as live a life directly fighting against the will of God," not excluding any penitent person, however grievous his/her sins may have been, but only those who continue in sin without repentance. Further, he referred to the directory for public worship where provision was also made in the service of communion for an exhortation, warning and invitation. In his explanation, he argued that the original purpose of these injunctions was to deter the impenitent and encourage penitence; but the way in which they were carried into effect, especially in the church of the Blantyre Synod made them more of deterrence than an encouragement even for those who were ready to partake of the Lord's Supper. He observed that in the church of the Blantyre Synod fencing the table became more rigid and detailed. The prohibition being made at the expense of the invitation with anxious searching for the marks of spirituality, thus burdening many tender consciences and causing many who needed it to refrain. He revealed that the church of Blantyre Synod is dwelling too much on the warnings not enough on the invitation as a result many people abstain from the Lord's Table.

It is suggested that the Blantyre Synod Church must base the sacrament of the Lord's Supper on the reformed theology. The reformed tradition and biblical views indicate that the Lord's Supper requires on the part of those who receive it, faith, repentance and self-examination. Nevertheless the Lord's Supper is open to both men and women whatever their gifts.

## 2.9 Future suggestions

The researcher feels unable to suggest a solution to the current situation as far as Blantyre Synod is concerned. This might be left as a major assignment to future researchers to investigate further the issue of abstention before it deteriorates the spiritual life of the Christians of Blantyre Synod. However, in order to put this issue into a sort of perspective the following steps must be put into place:

- i. In congregations where the Lord's Supper is not celebrated regularly there should be an improvement of the frequency of the celebration. This is not to suggest that more frequency of the celebration will solve the problem of abstention. However, it requires that the Lord's Supper be seen for what it is and that the Christians of Blantyre Synod come to respect its meaning.
- ii. Steps must be taken to produce teaching guides that would be acceptable to ministers and adherents in the Synod of Blantyre outlining the problem of abstention and indicating how it may be viewed and tackled.

Above all the idea is that in the church of Blantyre Synod a period of patient instruction and intensive investigation and change is necessary. Traditions that block obedience to the observation of the Lord's Supper must be dealt with. The church must function in a tension that considers the necessity to obey the scriptures and the necessity to bear patiently with those who are abstaining otherwise the status quo will continue.

The researcher felt that there is something wrong with the Blantyre Synod church's practice of the Lord's Supper. Let the church transform the celebration of the Lord's Supper in order to assist christians to recover the truth as it is in Jesus. The Blantyre Synod Church must be reminded that the Lord's Supper incorporates christians into the history of the world's salvation. Therefore, she must be aware that the Lord's Supper concerns the history of the world whereby christians are to proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ that affect the whole world.

In this manner, the church of Blantyre Synod has a significant role to play in bringing back to the Lord's Table those who have excluded themselves. The church should engage herself in teaching the believers that the Lord's Supper brings out the saving significance of the Lord's death. They must realize that the Lord's Supper is an expression of unity within the body of Christ that is the church. The church of Blantyre Synod should reflect on stereotypes like the menstruates, those not married in church and the bereaved and work at dealing with them.

It is suggested in this study that there are no biblical reasons that exclude people from the Lord's Table. The table is open to all communicants. The requirement for participation is faith in Jesus Christ and therefore all cultural reasons that bar people from the celebration of the Lord's Supper are not valid. The church needs to take a further step in teaching members that the Lord's

Supper serves the glory of God. In the final kingdom, God will be overall. Indeed the people who partake of the Lord's Supper are imperfect in their obedience but in the final kingdom, their submission to the rule of God will be total.

However, Christians must realize that to make one's communion is to bear witness to the faith in a way that attendance at church service is not. The Lord's Supper is a meal and the Bible's favorite picture for the kingdom. At the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Christ is present in the final eyes of faith at his table; in the final kingdom, we shall see him face to face (1 Cor. 13:12a). Above all to make Eucharist is to celebrate the world's redemption.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

The chapter presented the findings to the problem of abstention. In the findings we have come across a number of factors that contribute towards abstention from the Lord's Table. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Blantyre Synod Christians must attend the Lord's Supper for this is the Lord's invitation and his demand on his church. In order to understand ideas about abstention from the Lord's Supper, the researcher discusses how the Malawian culture has influenced Christians' ideas and practices against the Lord's Supper.

## CHAPTER 3

### MALAWIAN CULTURAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter briefly renders an overview of Malawian culture and some of the influences on the abstention happening at present in Blantyre Synod. The chapter reflects on Malawian traditional practices in relation to the issue of abstention from the Lord's Supper. In this regard, the idea is not to condemn culture but to seek tools that can analyze culture in order to persuade Christians who are in bondage to it. Moreover, the chapter identifies some negative aspects of culture with the aim of creating awareness of them and calling for possible change.

#### 3.2 Malawian culture – An overview

The people of Malawi are quite diverse. Chilambo (1995:14) notes that Malawian society consists of many ethnic groups, each of which has different traditional practices. Kauta Msiska (1997:45) observes that this diversity exists even among people of the same tribe living in different areas. He suggests that each tribe has its own way of doing things. Ott (2000:266) describes culture as “that whole complex which includes knowledge beliefs, ideas, values and any other capabilities and habits generally shared by all members of a society.”

It is something that is dynamic, constantly changing to meet new challenges being faced, finding new interpretations and new ways of coping and constantly creating a new people. The intention in this study is to investigate the cultural practices that contribute towards christians' abstention from the Lord's Table which are experienced in the church of Blantyre Synod Malawi.

Malawian history encourages the researcher to focus her attention on particular rituals and performances within a past culture and through interpretation of them to gain access to that distant world. Lamba (1983:25) notes that as far back as we can trace, Malawians had to cope with a variety of social changes such as the coming of invaders such as the Ngoni and the Yao, the slave trade and the coming of the missionaries. He observed that despite all the changes that Malawians have gone through, it seems that many people have retained the traditions of the past and adapted them to suit the condition in which they live today. It is believed that although new cultural influences can be seen in Malawi today, the hold of the older traditional culture is still strong. Therefore, it is also believed that one factor in abstention from the Lord's Table, which is experienced in the church of Blantyre Synod, is a result of people sticking to their old traditions and practices. The basic problem is that many christians of Blantyre Synod still hold to the traditional customs and hence have difficulty in fitting them into the teachings of the church concerning the Holy Communion.

Some rituals greatly influence the lives of Christians. Schofeleers (1997:27) suggested that puberty and death are the most important transition periods among Malawians. In the southern region and part of central region where this research was done, there are matrilineal groups who ethnically form part of the largest group. In matrilineal culture, female issues are therefore important.

Breugel (2001:177) suggested that the most common marriage custom is "*lobola*". Lane (1990:78) suggests that the family is the most important social unit in Malawian society. She cites the example of how a man is responsible by custom for the well being and education of his sister's children. In Malawi families are close knit.

Ott (2000:259) notes that traditional Malawian culture is communal. Further he observes that the communitarian togetherness is seen in the celebration of common feast during initiation rites and memorial rites for the dead. In this manner sharing a meal is an important symbol of social solidarity. For this reason Malawians have a special recognition of it. In particular, Malawi is widely known as the "Warm Heart of Africa."

The most important element in Malawian tradition is the emphasis on the life of members of the same extended life. It is believed that Malawians tend to find their identity and meaning in life through being part of their extended family. This reality in Malawi might be described by Mbiti's statement "I am because we are" (1989:106).

Relating culture to the problem of abstention, it is surprising that Malawians will eat and drink their ordinary meals together but refuse to do so when Christ invites them. It is suggested that as eating and drinking together express human relationship and solidarity of the community, like wise christians are to partake the Lord's Supper to express their strong relationship with Christ. Furthermore, Malawian meals proclaim what they are about just as Jesus' willingness to eat with sinners gave a message of love to the world. Therefore, christians should partake the Lord's Supper in order to appreciate the love of Christ.

### **3.3 Influence of ritual and ceremony**

#### **3.3.1 Childbirth rites**

This is a ceremonial announcement that marks the idea that the mystery of birth has been accomplished. It is claimed to be a declaration of a sacred presence. Breugel (2001:178) suggests that the essential rite of birthing marks the celebration. In Malawian tradition, the Yao tribe has a ritual called "*likambako*" to protect the newly born baby.

Makumbi (1967:53) observes that the baby is bathed in water prepared with medicinal leaves and an amulet is tied around the neck and waist of the baby. Ott (2000:120) notes that parents have to avoid sex for a period of six to nine months in order to protect the baby from other diseases. It is believed that

when a husband sleeps with his wife shortly after the birth of a baby before her period is over, the husband catches a disease. Here as in puberty rites, ritual impurity is attached to childbirth blood. Ott (2000:427) observes Malawians see not contradiction in their faith in Jesus Christ as he underwent all the Jewish birth rites. It may be considered that this protecting ritual is a kind of traditional baptism.

### **3.3.2 Puberty rites or initiation for boys and girls**

In Malawian tradition, puberty is considered the most important of transition. Chilambo (1995:34) observes that one of the purposes of initiation is to teach young people the secret of life and the roles that they may play in society. People believe that initiation plays a very significant role for the growth and the development of the youth. Ott (2000:191) notes that circumcision is considered the most important ceremony that marks boys for adulthood. Moreover, Schofeleers (1997:29) believes that female puberty appears to be the most important transition. He notes that in many tribes emphasis is put on the girl child, as it is believed that transmission and preservation of life depends on her. Mrs. Kamoto observes that the emphasis on women's initiation is understood to be very important. (Interview with Mrs. Kamoto). Further, She argued that many women do not see any problem with holding and practicing rituals and have continued to do so as an expression of their gratitude to their ancestors. Beliefs and taboos she argued, have affected the participation of women in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. However, amongst female

ceremonies girls are taught to handle carefully their menstruation flows as it is considered the most important thing that marks a girl's change from barrenness to fertility.

Christians of the Blantyre Synod base their argument of initiation ceremonies on Old Testament laws of Moses. They believe that in the Old Testament, the significance of circumcision was so great that an Israelite could be cut off from the covenant if he was not circumcised because he disobeyed God's law (Ex.4:25-26). Likewise, Malawians believe in initiation of both boys and girls. Malawians regard initiation as having significance in enhancing the unity of morality of the youth and the community at large. In puberty, the emphasis was on education and transition from childhood to adulthood. However the scripture says, the ritual of physical circumcision was abolished forever as a necessary sign of belonging to God's covenant people (Acts15:8-10). Instead, it has been replaced with the ritual of baptism as the sign that one has become a member of God's covenant people.

Ott (2000:474) believes that Malawian rites of initiation constitute a fertile soil for the rite of christians' initiation. However, Schoffeleers (1997:28) observes that in the initiation 'camps' instructions are based on tribal values, customs beliefs and taboos of the community that are repeated in a variety of songs and proverbs. This indicates that initiation involves commitment to the practices of traditional religion.

Relating this to the issue of abstention, it is suggested that there is nothing wrong with the traditional beliefs but the problem is the way in which all the beliefs have come to be understood and interpreted by Blantyre Synod christians. In other words the point that is being made here is that in this problem of abstention culture is giving a negative impact.

### **3.3.3 Traditional marriages**

In Malawi according to Chilambo (1995:35), customary marriages are the most common form of marriage. Furthermore he notes that before Christianity, the majority of Malawians were involved in customary marriage. This implies that many Malawian christians must have gone through the traditional system before they eventually married in church. The point being made here is that traditional beliefs have impact on customary marriage so much that members neglect the christian marriage. This has also contributed to the problem of abstention since those who are not married in church are not allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. In other words in the Blantyre Synod church, admission to communion is not allowed if spouses have not blessed their marriage in church. In other words in the Blantyre Synod church, admission to communion is a proof of proper married life. According to protestant theology, christian marriage is very important. Rev G. Mputeni argued that christian marriage is necessary if people are to guard themselves against an immoral life. God as order of creation, he argued, instituted marriage. (Interview with Rev Mputeni). It must be said, however, that an over emphasis on the church wedding as a

precondition to the Lord's Supper must be investigated and address christians on the requirements for the admission to the Lord's Supper because there is an aspect of intermarriages which makes christians to abstain from the Lord's Supper. It is suggested that traditional beliefs have impact on customary marriage so much that members neglect the Christian values of marriage.

### **3.3.4 Death rituals or memorial ceremonies**

Another factor that contributes to the abstention of christians from the Lord's Supper is that of funeral beliefs. One example of such beliefs is "*chikumbutso*". Chilambo (1995:36) believes that this belief may affect the individual, the family as well as the community at large. According to Ott (2000:194), death is understood as the 'gate' to being an ancestor. There is a belief among the Lomwe and the Yao tribes that the death ritual sends off the departed and normalizes life for the survivors. For instance, he gives a common saying among the Chewa that: "*munthu ali ndi masiku awiri: kubadwa ndi kufa*" (there are two important days in life of a person, the day of his birth and the day of his or her death). This is to say birth and death rites are the most important rites in Malawian culture.

In the memorial service, according to Phillip (1965:63) the substitute prescribed as sacrifice is often a bull, which is slaughtered and is taken with traditional beer. In so doing the people believe that the sacrifice will turn away the anger of the ancestors causing problems. In this manner, the memorial

service is then often prescribed to deal with the problem. During the service, ritual prayers are said.

Phillip (1965:63) believes that it is common among the Lomwe for a deceased person memorial stone to be unveiled a year after the funeral which gives the family and friends another opportunity to gather in remembrance. He notes that some rituals are performed at this time towards the agents of death. .

In Malawi, many christians still hold memorial ceremonies to lay a cross at the grave, during which time the deceased family slaughter a cow and the whole community gathers to eat in remembrance of the departed. This is what is called 'sadaka' among the Yao and 'Chikumbutso' among the christians. 'Chikumbutso' is considered a rite of passage that symbolically leaves sorrow behind and brings the family members back into the normal life. However, Garnet (1987:24) arguing against such practices says:

*Are you then so stupid that you believe that old heathen nonsense? That the spirits leave their graves to eat the beast? Have you ever seen a grave open and spirits come out to eat? Have you ever seen the flesh of a beast eaten by anyone but a human? Yes, you might have seen it eaten by rats*

The point being made here is that christians should not trust in sacrificing to ancestors. Further, he suggested that christians should do away with the sacrificing to ancestors and be clothed with the garment of forgiveness for all their sins before daring to partake of the Lord's Supper.

Barclay (1967:96) notes that in the early church the custom holding funeral feast was widespread in the Old Testament. Evidence is found in Jeremiah 46:17, "No one shall break bread for the mourner to comfort him for the dead; nor shall anyone give him the cup of consolation to drink for his father or his mother." In this case, Jeremiah objected to the memory of the dead.

Augustine, one of the church fathers, speaks of the lavish repasts in the cemeteries and forbade them asking that all over they be abolished by the bishops. Ott (2000:472) observes that the fact that these rituals are mentioned in the Old Testament gives Malawians a reason for practicing them, as they see no contradiction in this with their Christianity.

Relating this ritual to the issue of abstention, Christians must realize that the Lord's Supper is the ritual of death that they must observe regularly in order to keep the truth of Jesus' death in their minds. Therefore, if death is so important in culture then the Lord's Supper is vital because it is a meal with the resurrected One. Blantyre Synod Christians must attend the Lord's Supper in order to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. Here it can be suggested that Christians should regard the gospel as the basis for the participation to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The point being made here is that Blantyre Synod Christians should be led by the Gospel in order to form a culture which is Christ centered. In other words they should abandon the beliefs and taboos which separate them from fellowship with Christ. Unless the Blantyre Synod Christians abandon the yoke of traditional culture and develop fully

Christianity, the benefit of the Lord's supper will not be experienced and the abstention will not be stopped. The scripture says in Romans 5:6 "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ dies for the ungodly." Therefore, Blantyre Synod Christians must abide by the good news that "by the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ" not just one problem or crisis has been solved, but the very root of all humankind suffering and sorrow, has been overcome. The Bible tells us that "Jesus Christ has abolished death and brought immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim.1:10). They must be assured that by Christ's death, they are rescued from all bondages. The blood of Jesus has cleansed them and therefore they are declared righteous in God's eyes (2 Cor.5:21) In response, these Christians must totally abandon the beliefs and practices that influence them to refrain from the Lord's Supper and return to the Lord's Table. This is so because these rituals prevent Christians from partaking of the Lord's Supper because they are regarded as sacred or "set apart" so people believe that they are to be handled with reverence.

According to traditional beliefs during the ritual avoidance the Lord's Supper is regarded as a taboo because the ritual status of the partaker is viewed as incompatible to that of the Lord's Supper hence communicants stay away from the Lord's Table.

### **3.4 The issue of cleanliness and holiness**

According to Malawian tradition there are some factors related to sexual purity that have to be examined when dealing with the issue of abstention from the Lord's Table, since it is another factor that contributes to the issue of abstention. During interviews it was discovered that a considerable number of members would not take partake of the Lord's Supper for reasons such as that of being under discipline and that of not being confirmed or baptized.

However apart from these reasons, it also became apparent that some people stay away for reasons related to sexuality. These ideas are supported by Jewish tradition of the Old Testament in the book of Leviticus 12 and 15. The Israelites had prescribed laws that had to make loyal to Yahweh and this was to be through purification. They had to struggle to be clean and maintain their relationship with God. With this background from the Old Testament, issues of menstrual and pregnancy are therefore a problem. In the interview, it was affirmed that issues of sexuality influence church members abstention from the Lord's Supper.

Contributions from women of various Presbyteries showed clearly that women are regarded as unclean when they are menstruating. This is so because rituals of impurity owing to their status of womanhood surround them. Breugel (2001:199) believes that from the Malawian cultural perspective regardless of tribal affiliation, there are taboos associated with menstruation, pregnancy and

childbirth. Traditionally, a woman is prohibited from seasoning her relish with salt during her menstrual periods; she is not allowed to have sexual relation. The husband is also required to refrain from committing adultery because that might cause sickness and that it is an abomination.

According to Chingota (1999:7) there are three kinds of sickness: - firstly there is illness which is associated with pregnancy and childbirth, another type of illness is associated with puberty and initiation rites and another illness which is associated with death. He believes that each one of these has its own prohibition – normally characterized by abstinence from sexual relation until the danger period is past.

Looking critically at Malawian culture, we can summarise that sexuality and menstruation are regarded as the most serious taboos that cause Christians' abstention from the Lord's Supper. This issue of sexuality and menstruation is based on Jewish tradition where these conditions are regarded as impure and are incompatible with sacred things. This implies that according to the Malawian perspective, traditions can interfere with people's obedience to God. However, when we read the scriptures according to Mark 5:25-34 we see Jesus healing the woman with a flow of blood. The woman was seen as cursed and ritually "impure" and source of pollution among the people. She touched Jesus' clothes and was healed. By doing this, Jesus shattered the purity laws that enslaved women. Jesus' attitude towards women was a radical break with rabbinical Judaism, the Old Testament and the Mosaic Law. The point that is

being made here is that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper holiness does not mean mere sinlessness or moral perfection but rather an active response to God. In the same way, the Church of Blantyre Synod should not compromise with the rituals but should critically analyse them and give its clear stand on the issue of abstention that is currently experienced.

### **3.5 Biblical interpretation in relation to purity**

According to Chingota (1999) the Malawian attitude towards the Lord's Supper stems from the church's doctrine of God as being pure and holy. The fear therefore exists that those who would dare to approach the holy table unworthily might fall sick and die. The point here is that the belief that menstrual blood cause sickness indicates that they are wrong, and therefore result in abstention. Many tribes believe that anything as abhorrent as menstruation would be deemed as rendering one as unworthy and sinful. According to the traditional point of view, women in their periods would be regarded unclean. Sexual intercourse with a partner at that time would also be regarded as bringing dirt to oneself and immoral.

From this perspective, it is argued that the church's understanding of God in interaction with the traditional religious heritage, influences the interpretation of some biblical passages greatly. Biblical passages such as Leviticus 12 and 15 are for example used at puberty initiation rites of passage. The following

quotation from Leviticus 12 illustrates the points – the Lord spoke to thee children of Israel saying –

*If a woman will be with child and she bears a son she shall be unclean then on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then for thirty-three days, she shall stay in the menstruation blood. Anything that is Holy she shall not touch and she shall not enter the Holy tent until the completion of the days of her menstruation. But if it is a daughter she gives birth to, then she shall be unclean for fourteen days as her menstruation. When the days of her menstruation are completed whether for a son or a daughter she shall bring to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to the priest, a one-year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a dove or a turtle – dove for sin offering. He shall present it before the Lord so the priest shall cover over her and purify her from the impurity of her blood. This is the law for the woman who gives birth to a son or a daughter. However, if the woman cannot find a lamb then she shall take two turtle doves or two doves, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering and the priest shall cover over her and purify her.*

This passage indicates that the instructors of initiation rites normally emphasize the ritual opposition between a place of worship and the status of women during the menstruation period or after childbirth, whereas they are ritually unclean then, the place of worship is sacred and holy. A woman should therefore not be exposed to the sacred and holy during this time.

From this perspective, it is argued that those who have just given birth and those who are in their periods may not touch or handle the elements of the Lord's Supper (Chingota 1999:10). People believe that the biological situation would render women ritually unclean. Some couples would even go to the extent of abstaining from sexual intercourse before their participation in the Holy Communion in order to enhance their state of purity (Manda, 2001). Not keeping to these prohibitions evokes feelings of guilt. Because of their sense of

great awe, deep reverence for the mysterious and the holy, ordinary Christians do regard the Lord's Table with deep respect. The Lord's Supper is therefore regarded as having transcendental theological status, and it should therefore be approached and handled with great respect.

However, it is suggested that this understanding of the Bible and particularly the interaction between traditional socio-cultural views and certain biblical passages may be one of the reasons why Christians of Blantyre Synod do not partake of the Lord's Supper. These biblical texts are interpreted literally and as a result, they influence Christian's decision.

This example of biblical interpretation in the Malawian context has shown that many factors are involved in the issue of abstention in the church of Blantyre Synod. Socio-customs deeply influence the interpretation of the Bible with regard to the status and roles of ordinary Christians in the church.

However, Malawians should know that the purpose of the rules of purity according to Malina (1981:143) is to facilitate access to God and not to close God's people from access to him. In his point he gives biblical support from Mark 2:27 that "the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath". This explains that God does not need rules to protect him from the dishonor and outrage of men (Malina, 1981:143). God is open to all humankind. This we read in Matthew 5:45 that he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good. The idea of purity before God requires a clean heart in an individual. In this case, the principal mechanism needed for Christians to partake of the Lord's

Supper is to abandon all taboos and beliefs and surrender their lives to God's will. Thus in the interpretation of the parable of the clean and the unclean (Mk.7:14-23) what comes out of a human being is what defiles him or her. This confirms that it is harder to get rid of evils which are in us than those which are outside. Only Jesus can wash our hearts and make us clean.

Beliefs concerning menstruation come from African tradition and are further influenced by the Old Testament Law of Moses. Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that if we are in Christ we are new creations (2 Cor.5:17). The old has gone and the new has come. Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (Jn.1:29). The consequences of disobedience, the punishment of God, are taken away. The rule of man over woman resulted from the disobedience and signified the breaking away from God. Liberation from sin is therefore liberation from any other kind of oppression, domination, exploitation or discrimination that may appear in human relationships. This is God's originally intended order that is restored through Christ.

Therefore the Blantyre Synod women should attend the Lord's Supper knowing that both men and women are one in Christ Jesus, there is no longer male or female (Gal. 3:26-28). We are all heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). The same Paul says we are justified by grace through faith. The purpose of Jesus' resurrection is our justification (Rom. 4:25). We are not justified because of gender. The truth is that God in Christ has willed to justify

those who put their faith in him. Once justified by grace we all become instruments in the hands of Almighty God.

### **3.6 Dealing with traditional beliefs and culture**

From what has been discussed in chapter 3, it can be confirmed that cultural beliefs are influential to the lives of christians. In chapter 2 findings have revealed that christians avoid the Lord's Table due to various cultural beliefs. In chapter 3 it is indicated that birth, initiation and death rituals influence christians abstention from the Lord's Table. It is therefore concluded that culture gives a different concept to the christians understanding of the Lord's Supper. Further more, it is observed that Blantyre Synod christians in a way are following Jewish tradition of the Old Testament who were familiar with the Old Testament law. For instance, discussions in chapter 3 revealed that initiation ceremonies influence abstention from the Lord's Supper. Looking critically on the issue of initiation the researcher agrees with Haenchen (1971: 460) who believes that circumcision is not essential for salvation. He further states that that this is why Gentiles were not circumcised to become christians. It is therefore suggested that since God recognized Gentiles, Blantyre Synod christians must believe that they shall be saved by the grace of the Lord just like Gentiles. It is believed that God cleansed gentiles hearts and created inward purity. This implies that circumcision and great mass of legal prescription cannot be expected of them. This does not mean that circumcision has no legal obligations but in other words these obligations do not concern

'immorality' but are just society principles. The scripture says, "Christ is the end of the law" (Rom 10:4) but Moses gave the law while grace and truth came by Jesus. In traditional culture, it is believed that the aim of initiation is to bring a union with divine powers and to mediate an imperishable life. While in Christian culture communicants receive divine powers through baptism and the partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Another area of concern is that of menstruation. In the Church of Blantyre Synod, women do not partake of the Lord's Supper when they are menstruating or when they are pregnant and also when they have just given birth. To answer on this problem the scriptures from Gal 3:26-28 assures us that sex does not exclude anybody from fellowship with God. Christians as believers are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ ( Gal 3:26) and that they are all one in Christ (Gal 3:28). This implies that it is not God's will that women in their biological situation should not attend the Lord's Supper. It is therefore suggested that women should not cite cultural beliefs and taboos as valid reasons for staying away from the Lord's Table.

Concerning the issue of the funeral rites christians should know that when they partake of the Lord's Supper they are celebrating the funeral of Jesus Christ. It is suggested that christians should partake of the Lord's Supper because in the celebration of the Lord's Supper the remembrance is closely linked to the death of Christ and those who celebrate the Lord's Supper have a share in the saving significance of Christ's death. Therefore in this study it is suggested that by

coming to the Lord's Table, Christians testify that they are liberated from cultural bondages.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, an overview of Malawian culture has been provided. From the discussion, it has been indicated that the Lord's Supper is obscured by beliefs and taboos that people have created for themselves. With regard to the role that biblical interpretation plays in this matter, it has been indicated that it is particularly texts on ritual purity (Lev.12&15) that have been used against the partaking of Holy Communion.

However, the question of purity and spirituality before the Holy One of Israel ultimately does not depend on purity of an individual; it comes from our Holy God himself. Christians must realise that the only criterion is preparedness by faith in the presence of the risen Lord. Therefore, the researcher appeals to all Christians to partake of the Lord's Supper in order to show their understanding of life and at the same time maintain the right relationship with God. It is suggested that everything that may appear in the celebration of the Lord's Supper should harmonize with and stand the test of that message which the New Testament brings. In other words, the gospel is the true remedy for all that influence Christian's abstention from the Lord's Table.

## CHAPTER 4

### UNDERSTANDING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

#### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the survey of traditional customs and taboos, which contributes towards christians' abstention from the Lord's Supper, were discussed.

In this chapter, a reflection on factors that affect the understanding of the Lord's Supper will be discussed in such a way that they will be exposed for further discussion. The intention is to seek a deeper understanding of the reality of the Lord's Supper that is consonant with biblical teaching and the tradition of our common inheritance. Tracing the biblical foundations of the Lord's Supper, its historical background, significances, effects and future promises will do this.

#### 4.2 Background to the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper originated with the Last Supper, Jesus' meal with his disciples on the night before his death but it has echoes from long before (Milne, 1982:235). Further more, Martin (1975:114) believes that the Lord's Supper was founded in the setting of the Passover meal which was the great

festival both of the individual family, and of the Jewish nation as the family of God. Moreover, Hargreaves (1961:241) observes that the Lord's Supper was instituted in the evening when Christ last met his disciples during Passover supper. He indicates that the Synoptic Gospels (Mt.26:26-29, Mk.14:22-25, Lk.22:19, 1 Cor.11:23-26) regard the Last Supper as the Passover celebration and put the date of the meal at the official Passover hour. Despite the differences in details between Mark14:22-25 and 1 Corinthians 11:20-30, it is suggested that the Lord's Supper was a Passover meal that Jesus had with his disciples before crucifixion.

The Gospels of Luke and John present the events of the Last Supper. However the Passover theme can be traced in Luke 22:15 which says, "after the disciples had gone to make ready the Passover, and when the hour had come Jesus sat with the twelve disciples", he says, "with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." From that word, it would seem to be understood that this was the true Passover meal at which our Lord and his disciples were seated.

Flame (1975:36) believes that the Lord's Supper was instituted during the paschal meal. This we read in the synoptic Gospels, Matthew 26:17-29, Mark 14:12-26 and Luke 22:7-17, which relates the supper with an account of the preparation for Paschal meal: on the first day of the unleavened bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed his disciples said to him "where do you want to eat the Passover" (Mk.14:12). In addition, Schillebeeckx (1963:311)

observes that the Last Supper is an anticipation of Christ's death. This implies that the Last Supper was celebrated in the context of the Jewish Passover. Therefore the occasion for the meal was the Passover.

Turning to John's Gospel we may see some events that occurred after the meal, which Luke has been describing. In v 28 it reads, "Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall lest they should be defiled; but they might have the Passover." Evidently, the hour of the Passover was to come, as far as the Jewish leaders were concerned. Yet, the passage in Luke our Lord is said to be partaking of the true Passover. The Last Supper here is understood to be expressing the whole content of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Also important were the meals of Jesus with his disciples after resurrection (Lk.24:13-35).

Equally important is the fact that the Lord's Supper is rooted in the Last Supper "on the night He was betrayed." Milne (1982:237) believes that the Last Supper was a traditional meal to which Jesus gave a new meaning. Hargreaves (1961:241) observes that the synoptic gospels regard the Last Supper as the Passover celebration and put the date of the meal at the official Passover hour. However, John gives a different impression suggesting that the Last Supper was held "before the feast of the Passover" (Jn.13:1). Wittenberg (1991:45) seems to believe that the Lord selected the night of the Passover meal as the setting for this action.

Out of the above reasons, we may take note of the following points; firstly, that the supper of which our Lord partook was a Passover meal. Secondly, whatever date it was and by whatever Jewish permission, it is evident that our Lord was at a genuine Passover meal. In this regard, the view taken in this study is that the Lord's Supper occurred during a Passover meal.

The context of the Passover meal for the initiation of the Lord's Supper is extremely significant. The book of Exodus gives the background of the Passover. Slemming (1966:60) observes that the Passover was an annual celebration that remembered the exodus or the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage within Egypt. In particular, it drew attention to God's instruction to them to sprinkle blood from a sacrificed lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. During the night, an angel passed through the land of Egypt and slew the first born of every household but "passed over" the homes that were sprinkled with blood. Every year, Jews have had a special celebration. The intention was to keep in mind a public thanksgiving for God's redemption of the Israelites in Egypt (Ex. 12:14).

Clay (1979:6) observes that the celebration of the Lord's Supper was born in the context of Passover. Jesus was crucified on the eve of the Passover Sabbath (Mk. 15:42) and he rose on the first day of the week. Jesus is likened to the Passover lamb that was sacrificed. The death of Christ is known to be redemptive because the body will be "given for you." The blood will be "poured out for you." The very reality of the bread and wine separated on the

table points to the violent separation of the body and blood. Just as the paschal Lamb was the sacrificial victim whose death marks the establishment of the old covenant, so Jesus is the Lamb of God whose death atones for sin and seals the new covenant. In this new covenant, people are freed from the bond of sin and are given the promise of eternal life.

It was during the Passover meal that Jesus changed the traditional form of a meal and gave it a new meaning. During the Passover, Jesus took bread and instead of speaking about the deliverance from Egypt, he gave it a new meaning. "This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." At this point, he was asking his disciples to keep the meal in remembrance, not of the deliverance from Egypt but of the far more wonderful deliverance, the eternal salvation, bestowed on us through his sacrifice.

Kevan (1966:27) suggests that Jesus did not formally abolish the Passover, but the new meaning he gave to the bread and wine overshadowed all thoughts of the deliverance from Egypt that even his Jewish disciples soon gave up keeping the Jewish Passover, and all Christians, Jewish and Gentile alike kept instead our Lord's sacrament of his body and blood.

Mahoney (1993:63) seems to believe that under the old covenant, the original Passover was composed of roast lamb and unleavened bread. The blood of the lamb that was applied to the doorposts and lintels of homes was a sign to God. "When I see the blood I will pass over you," he told them (Ex. 12:13). In this

case, the celebration meal of the new covenant is the Lord's Supper at which Christians eat bread and drink wine as Jesus did at the Last Supper.

Paul suggests a reinterpretation of the Old Testament Passover when he says that the church is like unleavened bread and that Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed (1 Cor. 5:7). Harrison (1985:140) made a parallel between the old and the new covenant. He said that the old covenant made at Sinai was sealed by the sprinkling of blood on the altar representing God and his people (Ex. 24). While in Paul's account of 1 Corinthians 11:26 Jesus explained the cup as the new covenant of his blood. Harrison (1985:140) makes an observation that while as the old covenant was with one nation, the new covenant is with all nations. He further indicates that the community of the old covenant was Israel and the community of the new covenant is the church (all Christians).

Likewise, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are looking back to the events of Easter when Jesus was crucified. We look back and remember how the death of Christ redeemed the human race that had fallen into sin. In other words, we remember how the death of Jesus on the cross destroyed the power of sin and evil in the world. Through celebrating the Lord's Supper, we look back and remember how our freedom from sin and our forgiveness and cleansing and salvation all relate back to what Jesus did on the cross. Everything that we receive from God like the gift of eternal life and of forgiveness stems from the event of Christ death. His body was broken and his

blood spilt, the sacrificial Lamb for the sins of the whole world was slain. By speaking of his death in the Passover context Jesus was showing his disciples that his death was a liberating event. Like the exodus from Egypt, Christ's death marked deliverance and a greater one by far. The Lord's Supper therefore is the New Passover, the meal of the new covenant. It is the memorial of his death and resurrection and the anticipation of the supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9).

In this regard, the Blantyre Synod Christians must know that in the Lord's Supper, by the promise of God they receive the forgiveness of sin and a new life. Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that by the death and resurrection of Christ God has triumphed over the forces that threaten them. On the other hand Christians of Blantyre Synod must be assured that the death of Christ freed them from their bondages be it beliefs or taboos. The death of Christ liberates them from the sinfulness experienced under the old covenant. Blantyre Synod Christians must believe that the new covenant with Christ brings forgiveness and transformation. Therefore, they must partake of the Lord's Supper knowing that there is constant renewal of covenant.

The death of Jesus is a greater liberation from rituals and taboos that influence Christians' abstention from the Lord's Supper. This is to say customs and sexual impurities can claim no right to be barriers that can keep people away from his table. Christ having died, now lives and we live in him, feasting with him and sharing with others the peace of God that passes all understanding.

Blantyre Synod christians must realize that it is only through faith that people are reconciled to God as their Lord and to each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord. However, of different beliefs or tribes christians are called into visible corporate unity. Blantyre Synod christians must know that the will to stay away from the Lord's Supper is opposite to God. In the Old Testament, all the Israelites were obliged to attend the Passover feast. Likewise, Blantyre Synod christians must regard the Lord's Supper as one of the greatest occasions in their lives that summons them to experience in the present, the riches of their origin and their goal. Therefore, these christians must attend the Lord's Supper. They must realize that separation from God and each other is the supreme threat and danger that Christ died to overcome. Blantyre Synod christians must be challenged that to abstain from the Lord's Table on any grounds of traditional taboos is to despise God's gift and to reject Christ.

They must believe that the blood of the cross liberated them from all their guilt and fears of the unknown. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Rev. 5:6). Paul says, "Christ has suffered the penalty for the sin of many, He has redeemed us from the curse of the law." All are included in the suffering and the death of many. "One has died for all, therefore all have died" (1 Cor. 5:14). This assures us that the death of Christ obtained redemption for humankind. Therefore, these christians must know that when they are invited to the Lord's Supper they are summoned to sit at his table and to share in the feast what his finished sacrifice has permanently provided. As God's work of reconciliation has been accomplished in Christ, they must

accept that their task is to witness and work for its realization in the world. By partaking of the Lord's Supper, Christians accept the fact that their lives were rescued by the life sacrifice of Christ. They acknowledge that Christ is a Lamb of promise. Isaiah 53:6 says, "All of us like sheep have gone astray but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him." Christians must know that by these words forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given to us in the Lord's Supper. They must know that in the Upper Room some of the disciples who were with Jesus were sinful men too, who were aware that their Lord knew them through and through. They attended the Lord's Supper because they knew that Christ's love was big enough to cover all their sins. Blantyre Synod Christians must attend the Lord's Supper with the assurance that their sins are forgiven. They should always claim the protection of the atoning blood of Christ. They must believe that the blood of Christ is on the lintel of their hearts as it was on the lintels and doorposts when the angel of death passed the blood sprinkled home of the Jews long ago in Egypt.

#### **4.3 Names for the Lord's Supper**

Christians have differing names for this holy meal but all of them signify the one sacrament. In this dissertation, the term the Lord's Supper is used. This term has been chosen because it is commonly used in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian. However, in order to get the scriptural meaning of the Lord's Supper we will examine various names by which the Lord's Supper is known and how each name claims some basis in the New Testament.

Berkhof (1939:646) observes that Protestants commonly use the term “Lord’s Supper” which is derived from 1 Corinthians 11:20. The point that Paul wants to make here is that there is more to the ceremony than simply consuming food together. Paul believes that through Christ’s death, he has brought into being a new community loyal to him as sovereign. Hucks (1992:13) notes that the name indicates a meal. He believes that sharing the tokens of Christ’s body and blood is a way of setting forth the basic gospel message.

In addition, Hodges (1976:340) observes that the word ‘supper’ designates what is now called meals of the Jews. Conzelmann (1975) claims that the term Lord’s Supper evolved from an actual meal called ‘*Agape*’. The word ‘*Agape*’ (love feast) was occasionally used to include the Eucharist. In another sense Judaism provided the immediate background to the Christian practice and concepts. However, Barclay (1967:28) suggests that the term Lord’s Supper is rooted in the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples. Further, he stresses the idea that this supper is the Lord’s. It is not a supper in which the rich invite the poor as their guests and then ill-treat them, but a feast in which the Lord provides for all in rich abundance. Once again Paul reminds Christians of the One who owns and presides over this covenant meal. In other sense, Paul’s focus is on Christ’s presence with his people now as well as in future (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Thus, the Lord’s Supper is our covenant meal through which we acknowledge Jesus’ kinship and authority over our lives. Christ himself is

our host at the Lord's Table receiving our renewed pledge of loyalty to him and his kingdom.

Another name that the Lord's Supper is known by is 'communion.' This term comes from Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 10:16. Kevan (1966:13) notes that the word communion comes from the Greek word *koinonia* which means, "sharing together." He interprets communion as a joint participation in the services of Christ. Christians are reminded by this term that they are not in Christ by themselves. Instead, they are together in Christ and they share with one another in Christ. The word "communion" in this context means our togetherness in Christ Jesus. The term "Holy Communion" originates in this expression and refers to the inner unity of believers one with another through their union in Christ.

The Lord's Supper is known by two other terms. The first one is found in Acts 2:42, it is called 'the breaking of bread,' and it refers to the opening act of an ordinary meal (Acts 27:35) as well as religious ceremony (Acts 2:42). The second one is in 1 Corinthians 10:21 it is designated as the "Lord's Table." Laverdierre (1966:288) observes that the Lord's Supper is called the breaking of bread because it was during the time of sharing, fellowship with the Lord and with others that the disciples recognized Christ after resurrection. Kilpatrick (1983:67) observes that the breaking of bread has remained noticeable part of the Lord's Supper to the present time. In other words, the breaking of bread symbolizes our shared life in Christ. However, Letham

(2001:5) suggests that the Lord's Supper is known as the Lord's Table. Here, the word table is connected with the gracious provisions spread for the entire service. This table is a place to which all are invited and at which Christ himself is the Host. The Lord's Table symbolizes and even brings about that unity.

Later on in history, the Lord's Supper came to be known as the "Eucharist." This word according to Clay (1979:5) comes from the Greek word *Eucharistia*, which is translated as "giving of thanks" or "thanksgiving." In this respect, the Lord's Supper is the great thanksgiving that we make in gratitude for all that God has done for us, and given to us in Jesus Christ. The word thanksgiving is seen in the giving of thanks ( Matt26:27) and it emphasises that this service is both a remembrance of God's saving acts in time and place at Calvary, and also a joyful messianic feast in faith and love and fellowship. This term reflects the impression that this service has become the main occasion for christians to give thanks. Christians pray for the world and with gratitude offer their lives to God. In the Eucharist, christians celebrate his victory over death. This is to say they pledge allegiance to Christ as Lord, and are fed as one church, receive this sign of his love and are marked as his.

Above all, the Lord's Supper is an important ordinance of the church that Christ commanded all his followers to partake of the Lord's Supper. Macquarrie (1975:481) observes that there is a parallelism between Baptism and the Lord's Supper. He believes that while Baptism is the rite of initiation

into fellowship, the Lord's Supper is the rite of continued fellowship both with Christ and with one another.

The Lord's Supper is a way of communication; it speaks to us of the death and resurrection of Christ. In the same manner, Baptism is also described as sharing with Christ in his death and resurrection. (Rom. 6:3-11). The Lord's Supper is celebrated in obedience to the Lord's command. Blantyre Synod Christians must believe that by partaking of the Lord's Supper they express their loyalty to Christ. In another sense, they should know that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Christians symbolize their mutual communion with Christ who is the source of their life. In the church of Blantyre Synod Christians partake the sacrament of Baptism and avoid that of the Lord's Supper. It is suggested that to accept and cherish one sacrament and to turn away from the other reveal an attitude to Christianity that is lacking in balance. Christians must know that both sacraments are means of grace freely offered to sinners.

#### **4.4 What the Lord's Supper is**

The Lord's Supper is a reminder of our present relationship with Christ and of his presence with us. Moreover, the Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church through partaking of the bread and the wine memorialize the death of the redeemer and anticipate his second coming. However there are various ways of understanding the Lord's Supper.

#### 4.4.1 Memorial

The Lord's Supper according to Barclay (1967:11) is an act of remembrance which has at its center the historical action of Jesus. Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me." The point here is that we remember Christ and therefore we 'do' the Lord's Supper. It is here that the Lord's Supper differs from other services of remembrance. The point being made here is that memorial is the most significant concept to this study, for it is through historical remembrance that the once for all nature of the death of Christ transcends the limitation of time and becomes actual and effective through the ages right into our life time. Whiteley (1964:178) believes that this remembrance has nothing to do with a solemn death ritual but rather allows the past event to be present for us. This means that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper the act of salvation of the past becomes present. Hence, it becomes actual and effective through the ages right into our lifetime. Therefore, to remember Jesus is to do much more than remember in the sense of simply thinking of him as a figure in the past. Clay (1979:8) observes that the Greek word in the New Testament is *anamnesis* which means, "to call" out of the past into the present. Furthermore, Stibbs (1961:45) cites an example of the Jews at the celebration of the Passover who recalled their deliverance from Egypt and point out that in the act of their remembrance the past becomes present.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, emphasis is put on the idea that this is a commanded remembrance, which is ordained by Christ. In Luke 22:19, we

have the words that we use almost every time at the Lord's Table: "This do in remembrance of me." Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that it is on these words that the permanence of the Lord's Supper celebration is based. The scriptures give us the account of the first occasion of the disciples' obedience to this command. In Acts 2:42; it says "they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." Again in v.46, it says they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God. Acts 20:7 reads: "upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread" and I Corinthians 10 contains a reference to the Lord's Supper in such a way as assumes its regular observance. In chapter 10:16 Paul introduces it as one of those familiar things: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

We may also note in passing that the tense of the Greek verb "do" suggests repetition. The Lord's Supper was a thing to be done repeatedly. In 1 Corinthians 11:23 Paul uses the expression, "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup." It would seem from the book of Acts 2:42 that they observed the Lord's Table every day. Subsequently, from Acts 20:7, it would appear that it had become by that time a weekly practice on the first day of the week. Thus from the word's of institution and from the practice of the early church we learn that when we gather round the Lord's Table from time to time, we meet

to do that which we have been commanded to do. This is to say our observance of the Lord's Supper is by the authority of the Lord himself.

In this case, the Lord's Supper is a meal of remembrance, but it is not "a mere memorial." Clay (1979:5) believes that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper christians remember that the same Jesus who died for our sins, God raised him from the dead. Therefore, a christian's faith is placed firmly in the context of the history of redemption that Jesus won by his death.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, our remembrance is of a person faced with death but who carries our shortcomings in order to express the victory of God. In this regard, Allmen (1969:27) believes that the *anamnesis* will always ground our history of salvation. Dix (1945:245) notes that *anamnesis* is always associated with praise and thanksgiving that links the memorial of death and the joyful element of thanksgiving in the meal. Jeremias (1966:253) believes that in a way *anamnesis* gives an eschatological meaning and becomes equal to the prayer of our Lord comes – *Maranatha*. However, the command "Do this in remembrance of me" establishes the Lord's Supper as a rite whereby the church restores the historical remembrance of Jesus. Barclay (1967:126) believes that the keynote for this *anamnesis* must always be joy. However, Clay (1979:8) observes that in the 1936 order of service book, this keynote is absent. It is unfortunate that many people in the Blantyre Synod think of the Lord's Supper as a solemn occasion, while the observation of this sacrament is meant to be a joyful celebration.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, communicants should be happy knowing that Christ has forgiven their sins. It is believed that happy is a person who realizes afresh all that Jesus has accomplished for him and all humankind. Thurian (1960:11) observes that as Christians become conscious of the renewing grace and power, their response would be that of joy, knowing that the Lord's Supper reunites believers with one another and with our Lord.

Therefore, Blantyre Synod Christians must know that in the Lord's Supper, we remember Christ's death and we affirm his living presence with us and anticipate his final triumph. Paul says that "every time you eat this bread and drink this cup" you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor.11:26). This is to say that every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we recall and appreciate what Christ has done for humankind.

In the church of Blantyre Synod, it is rare to find actual rejoicing at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In this Synod, gladness and praise would be regarded as a lack of reverence and considered out of order. As a result, what Jesus intended as a celebration of thanksgiving has become more like a funeral service. In the church of the Blantyre Synod, the Lord's Supper is an occasion where one senses the dark clouds of death rather than a bright rainbow of life. The atmosphere of the celebration of the Lord's Supper has also contributed to the abstention of Christians from the Lord's Table. However, Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that communion is a harvest time. People celebrate the

fact that Christ who was dead is now alive and has become the first fruit of a mighty harvest. There is joy from the assurance that when Christians are forgiven they receive eternal life from Christ. Therefore, the Lord's Supper in this manner is an occasion of joy and happiness.

The researcher observes that the church of Blantyre Synod is as off balance in one direction as the Corinthians were in another. The Corinthians lacked reverence and respect but the church of Blantyre Synod lacks joy and gladness in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is suggested that in the Church of Blantyre Synod, a reformation be brought to the Lord's Table. The church needs to break out of a lifeless, joyless ritual and celebrate the cross with gladness and praise. Christians must know that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper they are to remember the fact that Christ's work of salvation was fully completed at the cross. This implies that Christians are to celebrate the salvation that Jesus brought to humankind. However, the suggestion is that the church of Blantyre Synod re-examine its liturgy in order that Christ be remembered in his victorious death not with pity but with joy. Therefore, communicants are to partake of the Lord's Supper because it is a permanent memorial. It is a permanent memorial in the sense that Christ open up a new life which never finishes (Rom 6:9). The Lord's Supper impels us to obedience to the commandment of the Lord "until he comes." When Christians partake of the Lord's Supper they accept the fact that Christ is vitally alive once more in the presence of his followers. Christians should know that through faith in Christ and partaking of him, they would live forever. They should know that

remembering this great act of Christ is of great benefit to the believers because it sets them the cost of their sin, the great love and mercy of God, the great gift of salvation bestowed upon them and the present benefits of being adopted sons and daughters of God. The effect is to strengthening the believers' joy and obedience. This implies that if Blantyre Synod Christians do not attend the Lord's Supper, they are not remembering the past. In other words they are not acknowledging the salvation of Jesus Christ. Therefore in the church of Blantyre Synod, Christians should attend the Lord's Supper because it is a memorial of salvation.

#### **4.4.2 Proclamation**

The Lord's Supper is a meal that proclaims a particular aspect of God's truth. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:26 emphasized that whenever the Lord's Supper is celebrated, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. The Greek word for proclamation according to Conzelmann (1975) is *katangelo* which means to put forth a message, to preach, teach or declare something. In this case, the Lord's Supper is an official message that is centered in the memory of Christ's death.

Allmen (1969:26) believes that the idea of proclamation is essential to the understanding of the supper. He further observes that the words and acts of Christ stand at the heart of the celebration. Scott (1962:143) adds that the meals that Jesus shared during his ministry "proclaim" and enact the nearness of the

kingdom. Barclay (1967:112) states that the *anamnesis* is the memorial of all that God has done for the salvation of the world. "It is not only a calling to mind of what is past, but is the church's effective proclamation of God's mighty acts and promises. Moreover, Thurian (1960:77) believes that through the *anamnesis* the preached word and the Eucharist meal reinforce each other.

Calvin (in Wallace, 1953:120) observes that the Holy Spirit links us to the risen Christ through the word. He believes that the Holy Spirit brings into one the proclaimed word and links to the written word and the living word through whom God reveals himself. This is to say proclamation is an activity of the Spirit "representing" Christ or making him present. This signifies that proclamation is essentially a work of the Spirit within the church. At the same time, the purpose of the Spirit is that the risen Christ bearing the marks of Christ's passion should live on in his people. The Spirit stimulates the bread and wine in order that the church should be empowered. In this way, both Christ and the church are bound together in the one action of the eternal being.

Christians gather at the Lord's Supper to proclaim his saving act for our redemption. Barclay (1967:112) notes that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper Christ makes effective amongst Christians the eternal benefits of his victory and renews our response of faith, thanksgiving and self-surrender. He further believes that Christ, through the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist, builds up the life of the church, strengthens its fellowship and furthers its mission. The identity of the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16) is both expressed

and effectively proclaimed by its being centered in the partaking of his body and blood. In the whole action of the Lord's Supper and by his presence given through bread and wine, the crucified and risen Lord, according to his promise, offers himself to his people. This is to say unfortunate results can follow when one ministry overshadows the other. When sacraments of the Lord's Supper are neglected, too much weight can be placed upon the conscious response of the individual to a message.

Deluz (1963:160) observes that Jesus proclaimed his death in the breaking of the bread and gave it to his disciples as a pledge of his love; in so doing, he shared with them the benefits of his passion. Therefore, the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of the death of Christ "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Christians eat the same symbolic elements, focusing on their common faith in Christ.

Macquarrie (1975:120) believes that the scriptures are a kind of 'memory' in which the revelation remains accessible. The proclamation communicates the divine revelation making it active in the present experience of the church. Marshall (1980:55) believes that the Lord's Supper proclaims the universality of the offer of forgiveness through the death of Jesus. His blood is poured out "for many." a phrase which emphasizes the vast totality of those for whom he died.

Relating this to the issue of abstention, Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that if they do not attend the Lord's Supper they are implying that they do not acknowledge the value of Christ's death for their sins. However, by attending the Lord's Supper they proclaim by faith the value of Christ's death and all it achieved in a reflective way that they may truly proclaim about Jesus Christ, how essential it is that we live in dependence on him. Blantyre Synod Christians are to partake of the Lord's Supper in order to proclaim the death of Christ until he comes.

The proclamation is one way of expressing the reality of Christ's death for the sins of the humankind. Christians of Blantyre Synod must know that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, they remember the past sacrifice of Jesus Christ and affirm their certainty of his coming triumph. Christians of Blantyre Synod should believe that every time they celebrate the Lord's Supper they are proclaiming in the most public sort of way exactly what they believe. I Peter 2:9 confirms the purpose: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, and a people claimed by God for his own, to proclaim the triumphs of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light". Therefore, Christians are to partake the Lord's Supper because by doing so they proclaim that they live by faith in the Son of God who loved and died for them. Furthermore, by partaking of the Lord's Supper Christians proclaim their deliverance from sin through the death of Christ. By partaking of the Lord's Supper, they acknowledge that all their blessings come from this source. Furthermore, they believe that the Lord's Supper is the occasion to

acknowledge their dependence on his redeeming work and their recurring need of its cleansing power. So by partaking of the Lord's Supper they repeatedly proclaim in praise and prayer to thank God for his amazing grace. Above all proclamation of the Lord's Supper implies acceptance of salvation.

#### **4.4.3 Participation**

The Lord's Supper is also understood as a participation of individuals who belong to one body of Christ. In the gospels according to John 15:1-8, Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches no branch can itself bear fruit. A branch separated from a stem becomes a dead wood, is not of any use except for fuel."

In this regard, Blantyre Synod Christians are to partake of the Lord's Supper in order that they may be one with Christ. They must realize that by partaking the Lord's Supper Christ gives them victory over their sins, helping them to conquer their bad temper, irritability and pride. They must know that it is communion with the living Christ that helps them to act towards one another in love. In other words, the deepest secret of life is not found in the fighting against our temptations nor struggling to be worthy but in receiving Christ. Jesus says, "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I live in him" (Jn.6:56). "Unless you eat the flesh of the son of man drink his blood you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." By this, Jesus meant that we

are quickened by a real participation in him, which he described by the words eating and drinking. For as the eating of bread supplies the body with nourishment, so it is fitting that the soul should really and inwardly be a partaker of Christ in order that by his power it may be quickened into Spiritual life. However, the Blantyre Synod must acknowledge that eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood is a work of faith through which believers maintain communion with Christ.

In the supper, Jesus is like physical bread in that he provides sustenance for life. Yet he is superior to physical bread because the life he provides is spiritual and eternal. The partaking of his blood and flesh here refers spiritually to our consuming the truths about Jesus, believing in him with all our hearts and taking on his character as true disciples. In the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit so unites us in Christ that in receiving the bread and wine in faith we share his body and blood. Since we appropriate the benefits of Christ's atoning sacrifice by faith, the Lord's Supper is much more than a mere memorial meal. Participation in the Lord's Supper means revitalization of our life through Christ's sustaining power, providing us with life and joy. This is to say the symbolism shows that "we are as dependent on Christ for spiritual life as we are on food and drink for physical life." So long as Jesus remains in us through his Spirit, he becomes the source of our Spiritual strength. It was in a manner that Paul testified, "it is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal.2:20). Just as we take bread and wine into our bodies, so by faith we take Jesus into our lives and we go forward in his strength, not our own. The

essence of life is receiving the life of Jesus and growing by communion with Christ. This participation in the body and blood according to Jeremias (1966:237) is a sharing in the saving death of Christ. Bornkamm (in Marrow, 1986:148) states that “we receive the body of Christ, and by receiving it we show ourselves to be the body of Christ.” According to Paul, the experience of participation in Christ is actualized in the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 10:16). In verse 17 Paul uses the body of Christ in his characteristic way of signifying the church. Paul believes that common participation in the Eucharist loaf unites the many into one body, which is the body of Christ. Correspondingly, he understood the blood of Christ in the sense of the saving death of Christ, whereby he observes that to share in the atoning death of Christ is to become part of the redeemed community. Bornkam (1969:140) seems to believe that the command of repetition “do this in remembrance of me” is closely linked to the death of Christ and those who celebrate the Lord’s Supper have a share in the saving significance of his death. He believes that the “remembrance” not only gives the individual believer a share in the saving event of the cross, but also brings all the believers together into the unity of the community of the redeemed.

Thurian (1960:80) observes that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as members of one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for the good relationships in social, economic and political power. In this communion, all kinds of injustices like taboos and discriminative customs are radically challenged when christians

share in the body and blood of Christ. Christians are called to be in solidarity with the outcasts.

Erickson (1989:185) agrees that the life of a Christian is one of participation in the body of Christ. He believes that "as participants in the Lord's Supper we prove ourselves unworthy if we are not actively participating in the ongoing restoration of the world's situation and human condition." Wenham (1995:140) believes that it is Christ himself in the Lord's Supper who unites believers with one another. He transforms and renders them able to bring themselves as an offering and be his witness in word and deed. Thus, the communion that Christ grants in his supper transforms the faithful.

Allmen (1969:46) observes that participation in the Lord's Supper creates *koinonia*. Further he believes that by implication this is the basis for Paul's opposition to Christians partaking of pagan sacrificial rituals. "Do not be partners with demons" (1 Cor. 10:20). "You cannot partake of both the table of the Lord and the table of the demons." This is the case with Blantyre Synod Christians who involve themselves in tribal rituals and finally fear to sit at the Lord's Table. Here, Blantyre Synod Christians must know that through participation in the Lord's Supper, they actually become, by grace through faith, participants in Christ and companions of God who is revealed in Christ. Thus, the Lord's Supper is a true participation in the fullness of the mystery of Christ. Therefore, those who partake in faith drink of one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

Christians of the Blantyre Synod should understand the fact that they are saved by union with Christ and it is in the Lord's Supper that Christians are united in the one body and blood of Jesus to which the bread and wine bear witness. Christ has taken the place of many. He has died for all and therefore all are dead in him (2 Cor. 5:14). They must admit that by eating the bread and drinking the cup, they express their acceptance of all that is signified by the body and blood of Jesus.

Wainwright (1971:75) believes that the eating and drinking is an outward expression of faith in Christ just as baptism is an outward expression of the willingness to be spiritually cleansed from our sins. Thus the Lord's Supper becomes the occasion for expressing one's acceptance of Jesus Christ and the salvation which he offered and the fact that the supper is a repeated occurrence indicates the continual dependence of the believer on Jesus and his/her continual need for forgiveness. Above all the Lord's Supper becomes not merely an occasion for the proclamation of the gospel and for the expression of our acceptance of it but also a means of assurance that we are truly accepted into the people of God on the basis of what Jesus did for humankind. Therefore, Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that by partaking of the Lord's Supper they testify to the fact that they are in fellowship with Christ who saved them from their sins. Christians must attend the Lord's Supper knowing that by partaking of the Lord's Supper God's power will ignite in them a desire for deeper faith and a more victorious life. Moreover, Moltmann (1977:67) adds that only those who participate are "in". Therefore, Blantyre

Synod Christians must attend the Lord's Supper in order to recognize that they belong to the body of Christ. They are to partake of the Lord's Supper because in so doing they participate in the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection and are actually being nourished and empowered by the risen Christ. Communicants are to partake of the Lord's Supper because in the supper Christ grants communion with himself giving life and renewing each member. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, communicants are united with God through Christ and with each other. In the participation communicants are stimulated and enabled by the Holy Spirit to offer themselves to God to serve one another in love within the body, and to fulfill their sacrificial function as the body of the whole world which God has reconciled himself in Christ.

#### **4.5 The presence of Christ**

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the common belief is that Jesus Christ is truly present. Baille (1957:98) notes that the idea of the presence of Christ arises from the statement in the Upper Room where he identified the bread with his body and the cup of wine with his blood. In addition, Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23 believes that the idea of the presence of Christ is to be found in the Lord's Supper. The burning issue in the problem of abstention is what precisely Christians need to bring to such a service at which they expect to meet their Lord. To respond to this one let us quote Paul's statement that says "Let us celebrate our Passover, provided we do this with the bread of purity and truth". This is also one of Calvin's rightful insistences on a "worthy reception".

He believes that the Lord's Supper is a communion with the risen Lord. Christ's body is there in the bread, not materially or physically as the Catholic and Lutherans teach. Neither is the reality of his presence conveyed in mental reflection as Zwinglian memorialism thought. Calvin (in Martin, 1975:81) emphasized the presence of the body and blood of Christ and also the eating and drinking with a view to communion. This "worthy reception" is linked with the activity of the Holy Spirit who uses the bread and wine as carriers of the divine presence made real in every generation.

Schweizer (1971:119) believes that in using the word 'body' Jesus was referring to his own person, saying that he himself would be with his disciples wherever they ate the supper. This implies that the Lord's Supper is a reminder of our present fellowship with Christ. Powers (1967:120) believes that Christ is truly present in the Lord's Supper. This presence takes place in the Eucharistic prayer, which is the memorial of Christ death and resurrection. He claims that the fact that Christ identified the Eucharistic elements with his body and blood indicate that his presence is often been centered in bread and wine. Bridges and Phipers (1981:23) agree with Powers (1967:120) that Christ acts through the Holy Spirit by his word, on the bread and wine, to make them into a place where the church may meet him corporally, so that bread and wine are the instrument through which the church can reach Christ in the fullness of his humanity and deity.

Clay (1979:9) observes that communicants are assured of their Lord's presence as they share in this sacred meal that Christ himself instituted, and he stressed that it is in the celebration of the Lord's Supper that communicants have communion with Christ. He emphasized that the Lord's Supper is the point above all, where Christ promised his returning presence to his followers. However, Stroup (1993:267) observes that Christ's present with Christians is not in the same way as he was present in the days of his flesh but he is present through the Spirit.

Moreover, Denney (1959:321) observes that the presence of Christ is not confined to the sacraments; he comes at other times and in other places. In fact, he lives in those who have received him by faith and whom he nourishes with his blood (1 Cor. 10:16). John, 6:56-63 says that by the same Spirit Jesus lives in those who eat his flesh and drink his blood. He is in them as his father is in him (Jn.14:19). In 1 Corinthians 11:23 Christ promises to his disciples, "Lo I am with you always even to the end of the world." In Matthew 18:20 Christ said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them". This shows that Christ is present in many ways to his people. Nevertheless, we are particularly reminded of our Lord's presence as we share in the sacred meal which he himself instituted, and it is here, therefore, above all, that we have "communion" with him. The fact is that the flesh and blood of Christ feeds our souls just as bread and wine maintain and support our corporeal life. Therefore, there would be no aptitude in the sign if our souls did not find their nourishment in Christ. This would not be possible if Christ had

not truly been one with us, and refreshed us by the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood.

Though it seems an incredible thing that the flesh of Christ, while at such a distance from us in respect of space, should be food to us, let us remember how far the secret virtue of the Holy Spirit surpasses all our conception. Congar (1980:233) believes that the words: "This is my body" although they were only spoken once, give and will continue to give until the end of the world, their existence and their virtue to all sacrifices. For this reason Christians must know that by the breaking of bread, the Lord truly represents the partaking of his body. Christians must attend the Lord's Supper knowing that the truth of the thing signified is also present. There are various views of how the presence of Christ occurs. Below are the four views discussed respectively:

#### **4.5.1 Transubstantiation**

This is the Roman Catholic view that conceives of the presence of Christ in the Mass in a physical manner. The doctrine of transubstantiation states that the bread and wine by priestly consecration are transformed into the real body and blood of Christ. This view according to Letham (2001:22), developed in the western church and eventually became dogma at the fourth Lateran council.

According to Barclay (1967:72), the fourth Lateran council said:

*His body and blood are contained in the sacrament of the altar under the species of bread and wine, the bread being substantiated into the body and wine into the blood by the power of God and the whole Christ*

*is contained under each species and of every part of each when separated.*

In this regard, the word transubstantiation is used in the Roman Catholic Church to indicate that God acting in the Eucharist effects a change in the inner reality of the elements. In another sense, the Catholics believe that there is a miracle of transformation in the Mass.

This view is based on the literal interpretation of the word of institution, 'This is my body.' In this view, Letham (2001:21) observes that Aristotle's philosophy was used to explain that while in consecrated bread the attributes remain the same, the substance alters and becomes the actual body of Christ. According to Berkhof (1933:326), the Roman Catholics believe that this doctrine makes the Lord's Supper a sacrifice. They believe that in as much as there is real presence of Christ in the Mass a sacrifice is offered to God. Furthermore, they believe that the sacrifice offered is propitiatory. However, the scripture says, "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb.10:10). "There remains no more sacrifice for sins" (Heb.10:26). Grudem (1999:390) observes that the Roman Catholic Church teaches that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ, therefore those who partake of the Lord's Supper are thought of as having fed upon Christ's very body and blood.

The understanding of this philosophy is in the distinction between "substance" and "accidents" in which one could change without the other. Roman Catholics were concerned to affirm that the 'substance' of Christ's body displaced the

substance of bread and wine. However, Wiles (1977:126) believes that transubstantiation is to be understood in the light of incarnation when the word was made flesh. He believes that bread and wine at the Eucharist become body and wine, just as God actually becomes fully human in Jesus Christ. For this reason Wiles (1977:126) regards the Lord's Supper as a constant renewal of the incarnation of God upon human kind. Shaw (1974:297) adds that Christ used the words "this is my body and this is my blood" in a figurative sense. Further he believed that the words; "this is my body", meant that bread and wine represents Christ's body and the blood.

The reformers opposed the doctrine of transubstantiation because they thought that it was contrary to the teaching of the Christ. Letham (2001:21) points out things that are necessary of them. One of it is a sign – in this case bread and wine. Second is the reality - that is Christ's body and blood. He believes that the elements in the sacrament are related to the reality they represent. He cites the example of baptism where water visibly represents cleansing from sin. Thus as water cleans our bodies, so in baptism we are cleaned from sin by the grace of Christ. Likewise, bread and wine sustain and nourish us physically so in the Eucharist we are nourished by Christ – we feed on him by faith to eternal life. However, in the case of transubstantiation, the sign is annihilated and the thing signified is put in its place. The argument being made about Transubstantiation is that it destroys the reality of this sacrament which demands that in the sacrament there should be the true body of Christ, which

was not there before. However, Letham (2001:21) suggests that the substance of bread cannot remain after consecration.

Barclay (1967:75) argues that this change in the element makes it a matter of magic rather than religion and the idea that elements change their substance begets an adoration and veneration of the elements which makes them look like an idol. The argument here is that if Christ is substantially present, it is obvious that the elements should be adored. Further, he questioned the idea that those who partake of the Lord's Supper are fed on Christ's very body and blood because it implies that God can be broken down and digested by worshippers.

Thus, Mahoney (1993:70) argues that bread and wine are not the real body and blood of Jesus but they represent the reality. Berkhof (1933:326) believes that Jesus stood before the disciples in the body and therefore could not very well say that he had his body in his hand. Further, he argued that scripture speaks of the bread as bread even after the supposed change has taken place. He says that Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:26,28 gives to the elements after blessing the very same names they had before it which shows that there is no change of substance.

Cunningham (1998:42) objected that it is contrary to common sense to believe that what looks and smells and tastes like bread and wine is indeed flesh and blood. Further he objected that this is equally contrary to our reasoning capacity, for this tells us that Christ's body cannot be both in heaven and on

earth at the same time; but according to the doctrine of transubstantiation, though the body of Christ remains in heaven, it is also present not in one place on earth but in thousands of places – wherever the priest has with good intention pronounced the words of institution.

Traditionally, the problem of transubstantiation is discussed in almost physical terms, although the Aristotelian metaphysics used in the doctrine of transubstantiation is meant to deny these connotations. What makes transubstantiation complicated is the analysis which begins from “being for” and progress to the assertion of “being there,” but it is necessary to maintain that “being there” in person must be different from being there in a symbol, and because of the function of a symbol an underlying continuity can be positive.

Transubstantiation has been the cause of superstitions of much idolatry. For instance if the bread is the actual physical body of Christ it follows that people must worship the elements. Further Letham (2001:22) believes that in the celebration of this sacrament if bread is the actual physical body of Christ left-overs must not be thrown away for one can not drop the body of Christ in the garbage.

Concerning the idea that bread and wine are changed into the real body and blood of Christ, Shaw (1974:298) observes that Priest reserve part of the consecrated wafers for giving to the sick or other absent persons at some future time. This is in direct opposition to the command of Christ “drink ye all of it.”

Moreover, the Priests deny the cup to the people on the reason that as the bread is changed into the body of Christ they partake by concomitancy of the blood together with the body. Further Shaw (1974:290) objected that when the priest is supposed to have changed the bread into the body of Christ he adores it with bended knee and rising, lifts it up, that it may be seen and adored by the people which is called elevation of the Host. The bread is also carried about in solemn procession that it may receive the homage of all who meet it; in short, it is worshipped as if it is Christ himself.

Above all, this teaching contradicts the biblical account of Christ's presence, at the same time destroys the true nature of the Lord's Supper, and gives rise to dangerous superstition towards faith. However, Protestants deny the change for the reason that it is contrary to their faith and they regard it to be a serious error that is destructive to a true meaning of a sacrament. Transubstantiation is declared contrary to the nature of this sacrament and contradicts the true biblical account of Christ's presence. The problem here is that the resultant theology of transubstantiation fails to say much more than that the body of Christ is 'present' and it introduces to many problems. For instance, it does not even explain the statement "This is my body." Even though Presbyterians do not accept the idea of Transubstantiation since it is not directly relevant, they do believe in a real presence of Christ. In the reformed faith, the emphasis in the sacrament is on the spiritual presence, using bread and wine as a means of receiving divine grace. In the church of Blantyre Synod, Christians believe that

the Lord's Supper is a real feeding on Christ spiritually by faith not on his physical body, but on his real spiritual presence.

#### **4.5.2 Consubstantiation**

Luther rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and substituted for it with the doctrine of consubstantiation. While he rejected Transubstantiation, he still believed that Christ is bodily present in the Lord's Supper and that who partakes of the elements receives his body. Further, he believed that there is a reality of communion with Christ and a reception of him in the supper. Luther rejected the need for priestly activity to consecrate the body and blood of Christ in the elements but still asserted a real participation of the faithful in Christ conveyed through Christ's body that was thought to be everywhere. According to Shaw (1974:302), the Lutherans believe that although the bread and wine are not changed into the body and blood of Christ, the communicants along with the symbols receive body and blood. This is called "consubstantiation," In the word "consubstantiation," the root 'con' comes from the Latin word 'cum' which means 'with'. Milne(1982:237) believes that Consubstantiation signifies that the substance of the body and blood of Christ is present 'in, with or under' the substance of the element. Luther (in Welch, 1954:51) assumed that the words "this is my body" surely meant the actual body of Christ. He further interpreted this to mean that when Christ had the bread in his hand, He held his body along with it. In this case,

everyone who receives bread also receives the body, whether he is a believer or not.

The Lutherans believe that Christ is present not just 'spiritually' but bodily. For instance Migliore(1991:222) observes that Luther believes that Christ's body is present in the bread as water is present in the sponge "in with under" a sponge and is present where ever the sponge is. Berkhof (1933:327) believes that the Lutheran doctrine has a notion of the ubiquity of the Lord's human nature for it presents Christ as locally present wherever the Lord's Supper is celebrated. In other words, the Lutheran view of the real presence required belief in the ubiquity of Christ's body and this according to Gerrish (1993:54), was defended on the grounds of the intimate personal union of Christ's two natures, the unlimited presence of his divinity was communicated to his humanity.

However, other reformers reject both the doctrine of transubstantiation and that of consubstantiation. Calvin according to Shaw (1974:303) teaches that the body and blood of Christ are as really but spiritually present to the faith of believers in the Lord's Supper as the elements are to their outward senses. Letham (2001:23) believes that Christ is not present in body at his table and therefore one cannot see him there after the flesh, but he is present spiritually and may be discerned by faith. From this it follows that the participation of Christ's body and blood in the Holy Supper is spiritual. There is an external representation and confirmation of it in the participation of the elements, which symbolize the broken body and shed blood of Christ.

Moreover Shaw (1974:301) observes that while the worthy receive outwardly the elements in this sacrament, they inwardly by faith receive and feed upon Christ crucified and the benefits of his death. Luther thought that the unfit and the ungodly are unfit for partaking of it. Luther seems to believe that they may receive the outward elements but they do not receive the thing signified thereby. Berkhof (1933:327) seems to agree that as they are unfit for communion with Christ, so they are unworthy of occupying a seat at his table. Further, he says that they may not dare to approach it without committing a great sin and exposing themselves to the judgment of God.

Luther based his argument on 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 that “whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” and that such “eat and drink damnation to themselves”. This does not mean that all unworthy communicants must necessarily perish eternally. The word “damnation” signifies judgment and the judgment intended must be determined by the context.

Shaw (1974:303) believes that the judgment inflicted on the Corinthians was chiefly of a temporal nature. This is signified by the word: “for this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep.” This is to say temporal judgment may still be inflicted for profaning this ordinance. He believes that if sin is left unrepented, it must, like other sins, expose to external punishment. For this reason, it must be the duty of church elders to carefully exclude the ignorant and ungodly from the Lord’s Supper.

In the teaching of consubstantiation, it was agreed that to admit the immoral and scandalous is to profane the Lord's Supper and to corrupt the communion of the church. Benoit (1958:41) argued that church elders can only judge from their knowledge of their external conduct and have no right to do this in the sight of God. He therefore suggests that everyone therefore ought to impartially and faithfully examine himself/herself as to his/her state before God and his consequent right to partake of the feast that he has prepared for his children. Paul enjoins self-examination as a means of preventing the sin of unworthy communicating. This teaching does not relate to the issue of abstention in the sense that in the doctrine of consubstantiation participation in Christ is thought to be every where while as in the reformed tradition according to Calvin the Lord's Supper can be an occasion of encounter and communion with the risen Lord.

#### **4.5.3 Reformed view**

In this view, Calvin according to the reformed tradition gives the interpretation of the words of institution "This is my body" and "This is my blood" (Mk.14:22-25, 1 Cor.1:23-26). Calvin (1989:120) believes that the relationship linking the bread and wine with Christ's flesh and blood is more mysterious and spiritual than local physical presence. McKim (1988:147) observes that Calvin stated that there is a real reception of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, only in a spiritual manner. Further, Calvin believed that the

Lord's Supper is a real means of grace, a channel by which Christ communicates to us. Furthermore, Barclay (1967:78) observes that Calvin agreed with Zwingli in the latter's rejection of Luther's position but denied Zwingli's claim that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper Christians worship an absent Christ. Instead, he held that Christ is truly and objectively present at the Lord's Supper, but by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the bread and wine become instruments and a vehicle for conveying Christ's flesh and blood, but mystically and spiritually, rather than a local physical presence. He believes that in the Lord's Supper Christians do not only remember Christ, but also receive Christ. Hesselink (1997:146) notes that both Calvin and Luther believed that Christ is present in some sense in the elements of the bread and wine when they are received by faith. He notes that Calvin emphasized more than Luther did the role of the Holy Spirit. Calvin believed that the essence of Christ's body was its power, and that the Holy Spirit communicates its power to us so that we receive the whole Christ in communion.

Milne (1982:238) observes that Calvin believed that there is a real reception of the body and blood of Christ in the supper only in a spiritual manner. He believes that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a real means of grace, a channel by which Christ communicates with us. Calvin expresses the matter in his first catechism as follows:

*In the symbols of the bread and the wine, "the Lord exhibits the true communicants of his body and his blood – but a spiritual one..." (Section 29). He later says: "Accordingly, body and blood are represented under bread and wine so that we may learn not only that they are life and food for us". The same truth is expressed more clearly later in the institutes: If it is true that a visible sign is given to us to seal*

*the gift of a thing invisible, when we have received the symbol of the body, let us know surely that the body itself is also given to us (4. 17. 10).*

From the above quotation, Calvin distinguishes a kind of realistic language between eating Christ's flesh and believing that we do. He observes that faith receives Christ and the promises but eating communicates a life-giving influence to the believer. Calvin expresses eating as a result of faith. He adds that the spiritual transaction, which occurs, possesses the nature of the nourishment. In this sense, the flesh of Christ is eaten by believing because it is made ours by faith (Inst 4 17.5). Berkhof (1939:654) summarizes that, the influence, though real, is not physical but is mediated by the Holy Spirit and is conditioned on the act of faith by which the communicant symbolically receives the body and blood of Christ.

Hesselink (1997:147) notes that Calvin resists Luther's notion that the body and blood of Christ are contained in the elements. Rather, he suggested that the elements are but "instruments by which our Lord Jesus Christ distributes them to us". Calvin emphasizes that Christ is present to us in the supper even though physically distant from us. However, Cullman (1967:120) observes that Luther and Calvin agree that communion with a present Christ who actually feeds believers with his body and blood is what makes the sacrament. He observes that most significant here is how the distant ascended Christ becomes one with us in the supper. In other words, the question between them was the manner in which Christ's body exists and is given to believers.

In this case, Calvin held that, whilst Christ is bodily in heaven, the Holy Spirit who feeds believers with Christ's flesh overcomes distance. Calvin believed that communication with Christ is effected in a two-fold representation. Firstly, it is represented by faith when the communicant lifts his heart to heaven where Christ is. Secondly, the Holy Spirit brings the influence of the body and blood of Christ down to the communicant

Thus, the Lord's Supper is a true communion with Christ, who feeds us with his body and blood. In this regard, Calvin confirms that Christians must believe about our being sufficient to break through all impediments that surmount any distance or place. Therefore, the real difference between Luther and Calvin lay in the present existence of Christ's body. Calvin held that it is in a place, heaven, while Luther said it has the same omnipresence as Christ's divine nature.

Berkouwer (1969:229) notes that Calvin agreed with Zwingli that there was no physical presence of Christ in the elements, but Calvin disagreed with Zwingli on the point that bread and wine are mere symbols of Christ's body and blood. In this regard, Calvin in (Milne 1982:238) emphasized that the Lord's Supper is more than a mere commemoration in the sense that there is a real though mystical presence of the body and blood of Christ conveyed to the communicant with Christ, though Christ is not bodily and locally present in the supper, is yet present and enjoyed in his entire person.

Calvin believed that the Holy Spirit mediates the presence of Christ's body in the bread and wine. Therefore, he rejected transubstantiation and instead used metaphors to show how seriously he believes that when we partake of the elements in the Lord's Supper we truly feed on the Lord Jesus himself. In relation to the issue of abstention, Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that what is expected of them in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, according to Calvin's teaching, is faith in Christ. Therefore, they should realize that by receiving the consecrated elements, they receive Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, for they are what Christ declared them to be.

Calvin's teaching is the one that is accepted in the church of Blantyre Synod Christians must know that because Christ is present spiritually in the Lord's Supper we are fed by faith upon the body and blood of our saviour symbolized by the elements of bread and wine and are nourished spiritually in our hearts and souls. Therefore, they must attend the Lord's Supper knowing that those who believe in him must eat his flesh and drink his blood not literally but sacramentally.

#### **4.5.4 Memorial view**

The memorial view is attributed to Zwingli, the Zurich reformer. According to Bromiley (1978:179), Zwingli denied that Christ was physically present in the supper. Instead, he believed that the Lord's Supper is a mere "*memorialism*" in which bread and wine were conceived as representing that which is absent.

Bridges & Phypers (1981:96) observe that Zwingli thought that the reception of the Lord's Supper is a mere commemoration of what Christ did for sinners. Zwingli thought that in the Lord's Supper, Christ is truly our food but he is received by faith not by mouth. Benoit (1958:150) agrees that Zwingli seems to believe that Christ is present in the Lord's Supper to the eye of faith.

Berkhof (1933:327) observes that Zwingli denied the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper but believed that the true communicant conceived of Christ as present in a spiritual manner. To Zwingli the Lord's Supper was a bare sign or symbol signifying spiritual blessings. This meant that one is nourished in faith as he engages in act that surely recalls the total meaning of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Milne (1982:237) observes that Zwingli regarded this act as a visible sign in which the gospel expresses in a way something that words could not convey.

Bromiley (1978:286) suggests that Zwingli misinterpreted the words of institution 'This is my body' to mean that Christians eat Christ's incarnated and crucified body. In other words, it is taken to mean that Christ's body is eaten under bread as in Luther's teaching.

Bridges & Phypers (1981:96) suggested that Zwingli interpreted Christ's words at the Last Supper to mean, "this signifies my body." For instance, he interpreted the Last Supper in John 6 this way. He believed that when Christ commanded Christians to eat his flesh and drink his blood, it was spiritual not literal eating required (Jn.6:63). Secondly, Zwingli believed that v. 64 was a

command to believe in Christ's passion. Further Zwingli believed that in heaven Christ is present only in humanity that is in his ascended body, while on earth Christ was present in his divinity. However, Bridges (1981:96) summarizes that Christ is both God and man, at once fully human and divine:

Looking at some of Zwingli's points critically they seem to point to the significance of the Lord's Supper and regard it as a seal of what God does for the believer in Christ yet he does not justify the idea. The impression remains that for him the Lord's Supper is mainly a mere sign or symbol, a memorial of the death of Christ and an act of profession on the part of the believer. The researcher feels that Zwingli's teaching does not relate to the problem of abstention in the sense that Zwingli's communion "adds nothing to the proclamation of the word and is not in itself a means of grace." However, in the reformed tradition Calvin regards the Lord's Supper as a spiritual communion with the risen Lord. Following the tradition of Zwingli, Christians may focus on the phrase "do this in remembrance of me" as the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

However, when a misunderstanding of the word "remembrance" is joined with a legalistic understanding of the Lord's Supper as the obedience to a divine command, the power of the remembrance as an act as well as a "making present" of the divine in one's life is lost. In other words, following Zwingli's tradition, the celebration of the Lord's Supper among Christians can deteriorate from a celebration of unity and grace to a habitual life. As Christ centered people, Christians are called to discern the presence of Christ in the Lord's

Supper. To speak of remembrance as the “making present” of Christ reminds us that the bread and the cup are not mere emblems but are symbols enabling us to experience and participate in the omnipresent grace of God. Therefore, christians must know that as we gather at this table we must remember that Christ is also present in faith as well as in memory.

#### **4.6 Real Presence**

In previous sections, we discussed how Christ is present in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Presence of Christ in this context is generally the ongoing relationship of Jesus to the christians as he promised. This topic, discusses further the issue of the real presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper that has been at the center of a controversy throughout the history of the church. This real presence is returned for the reason that in the Lord’s Supper christians encounters the risen Christ. In all the views except Zwingli, the point at issue is that the idea of a real presence according to Aulen (1958:111) is based on the utterance of Jesus himself: “This is my body” and “This is my blood.” Through these words, Jesus identifies himself in the act of his self-offering with the elements. This is to say Jesus gives himself, and whenever believers eat and drink his body and blood, they receive of his life (Jn.6:51). This identification of Jesus with the elements is seen from the command to eat and drink. The act of eating and drinking is required in order that Jesus, identified with the material elements, can fill the believers, body and soul, with his life. It is the receiving of Jesus into our lives, which brings empowerment. It follows that

believers need to eat Christ's flesh in order to be sanctified. Baille (1958:123) develops the idea that Christ took on flesh in order that the communicants might be joined to the godhead through consuming the same flesh.

In the controversies of the reformation, Luther rejected transubstantiation as a philosophy but emphasized his assertion of the real presence in the symbolic interpretation of Zwingli and the spiritualism of Calvin, who believed that Christ's body should be situated in heaven after the ascension, and that his presence in the Eucharist can only be through the spirit. Luther opposed the Swiss reformers because he thought that they were undermining the centrality of the incarnation.

Luther further defines the real presence as tentative. According to Gerrish (1993:54), Luther developed the theory of ubiquity in his understanding of the body of Christ. In his theory, Luther argued that bodies are present in three forms; they can be locally in a place. They can be divinely as angels. In addition, he believed that bodies could be present as God is present in all things. Foakes Jackson (1914:460) observes that Luther's idea at this point depends on the doctrine of the '*communicatio idiomatum*' by which the qualities of the divine are attributed to the human in the person of Christ.

Luther maintained this in order to emphasise the reality of the hypostatic union in which the flesh was united with the divine. For Luther the Eucharistic

presence is joined with the presence of Christ. This means that Christ's body in the physical form is ubiquitous.

The difference between the Eucharistic theology of Luther and Calvin lies in their Christology, mainly in their idea of the humanity of Christ. Calvin (Inst.4:17:9) states that the flesh of Christ only has 'power so great as to quicken us' by the virtue of its union with the word. Calvin did not allow the qualities of his divinity to be given to the humanity of Christ as Luther did, and as a result, Calvin did not regard Christ's humanity as effecting salvation as Luther did. Calvin (Inst.4:17:18) believes that Christ's body resides in heaven but his power can be everywhere through the power of the Spirit.

In the explanation of the real presence of Christ the secret lies in "the operation of the Holy Spirit". As Calvin said, the power of the Spirit "towers above all our senses" (Inst 4:14:10). The spirit unites things separated in space raising us up to Christ, and making bread and wine our spiritual food and drink. In this regard, the mode of the presence is that the Spirit.

Above all, Christ has not left us without his bodily presence in this journey, but he joins us to himself in the Lord's Supper in the reality of his body and blood (Pelikan, 1969:363). With this gift of Christ's presence in our midst, the church is truly blessed. As Jesus told his disciples in referring to his presence among them, "Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it"

(Mt.13:17). In the Lord's Supper, the church both receives the gift of Jesus Christ and gives grateful thanks to God for such a blessing. This thanksgiving is the only proper response, for this gift of himself in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The point being made is that the Lord's Supper is the point for communion between the risen Christ and us, and for our communion with each other. At any place, we are not yet at the precise point where his presence is revealed to us. Therefore, Christians should attend the Lord's Supper regularly in order to be spiritually empowered and filled with blessings. If Christians do not partake of the Lord's Supper, they miss all the benefits that Christ has for them. Communicants should partake of the Lord's Supper in order that Jesus identified with the material elements, can fill us body and soul with his life. If communicants of Blantyre stay away from the Lord's Supper, they lose Christ's benefits.

#### **4.7 Evaluation of the views**

Looking critically at the four different views concerning the Lord's Supper, it appears that they all rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation but still differed on three issues. Firstly, they differed on the mode of Christ's presence; whether it was a bodily presence or a spiritual presence discerned by faith. Secondly, they differed on how the believer partook of the body and blood, whether it is by eating or receiving it in the heart by faith. Thirdly, they differed in the idea of whether everybody who received the elements partook of the body and blood of Christ or only believing souls.

However, Atkinson (1981:275) observes that Luther thought the real corporal presence of the very body and blood of Christ 'in, with and under' the elements and that both believers and non-believers actually partook of both substances. On the other hand, the Lord's Supper according to Zwingli was only a seal or a confirmation of what a believer was already aware of. Zwingli held the spiritual presence of Christ but denied the corporal eating and drinking, teaching a spiritual participation in faith. Calvin's position was midway between those of Luther and Zwingli. Wendell (1963:333) notes that Calvin accepted Zwingli's idea of the symbolism of the words of institution. Further, he observes that Calvin rejected the corporal presence as well as the Lutheran teaching of ubiquity.

Instead, he believed in the real presence as well as the spiritual participation of Christ's body and blood by faith. The real presence of Christ is about his presence in the unity of his person and work. Relating this to the issue of abstention, ordinary christians of Blantyre Synod christians must realize that when we talk of communion it is about the presence of Christ. The Lord's Supper is not something to do with magic as transubstantiation and consubstantiation have suggested. It is true that christians argue about how important bread and wine are. Ordinary christians must recognize that bread and wine are about the centrality; about how much the gathered believers together take on the character and holiness of the One they love and worship. The Lord's Supper is an act of togetherness in part because the same shift of

physical and spiritual food and Christ goes into each of those who are there. In the Lord's Supper, the spiritual transforms us to bring us into union with Christ. Therefore, Blantyre Synod Christians must understand repeatedly that the only thing they are to do is to obey Christ enough to take and eat, since it is not what we do but what Jesus did that matters.

## **4.8 The nature of the Lord's Supper**

### **4.8.1 The Lord's supper in the early church**

Hucks (1992:29) observes that in the early Church the Lord's Supper was characterized by a large number of partakers. He further pointed out that in the fourth century, the celebration of the Lord's Supper became splendid and in some places, it was celebrated daily. Later on, the practice of attending the church service without receiving the Lord's Supper became common.

From the Apostolic church, the Lord's Supper according to Barclay (1967:107) was a weekly service. He further gives evidence that is stated in the Didache: "on the Day of the Lord come together, break bread and hold Eucharist"(14:1). The same thing applies to the Lord's Day, which is the memorial of the resurrection of Jesus. Barclay (1967:107) believes that because the resurrection happened on the Sabbath, the last day of the week was abandoned and the first day of the week (Sunday) adopted as the Lord's Day, their sacred day. The "breaking of bread" was the central feature of the church's fellowship (Acts.

2:42, 46). In the early church, the celebration of the Lord's Supper was connected with a "real meal". This was a meal in which people could eat their fill (Charles, 1995:27). Later on, Marshall (1980:111) observes that the Lord's Supper was detached from the rest of the meals and was meant as an occasion for fellowship and love among the members of the church. Hunter (1976:120) states that from the Apostolic times the sacraments seem to have been restricted to the baptized and a preparation by fasting and confession was often required. Hunter (1976:120) states that in the early church it was declared that none but baptized persons could be admitted to the Lord's Table. Only those who were baptized were allowed to commune with Christ, the rest were forced to leave by a categorical formula which quoted the gospel words: "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (Mt. 25:26). This, then, is the first enunciation of the rule of "closed communion", and the reason for it is plainly stated: that a person not yet baptized is not spiritually fit for the sacred eating. The same rule applies in the church of Blantyre Synod where only those who are baptized and confirmed are allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper.

Justin Martyr stated the earliest description of the Lord's Supper according to McKim (1988:136). It went like this: "For we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink but as Jesus Christ our Saviour being incarnate by God's word, took flesh and blood for our salvation. So also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation is

the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus.” This is why the early church was often accused of cannibalism. The idea was reflected in the imagery of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of God.

Macleod (1980:120) believes this belief was observed in the docetic heresy that denied the real incarnation. However, Minchin (1958:5) states that the idea of cannibalism is based on the idea that the worshipper absorbs the qualities of the victim; his strength and wisdom. In other words, the worshipper drinks the blood of the victim in order to take the qualities to themselves

Above all, worth noting in the history of the early church, is that although baptism was an obstacle to the partaking of the Lord’s Supper, it was given a place of exalted importance in the services of the church. In other words, there were many partakers in the Communion service. Relating this to the issue of abstention, it seems the church of Blantyre Synod has lost the nature of the Lord’s Supper which was based on love and unity.

#### **4.8.2 The Lord’s Supper in the medieval period**

McKim (1988:139) observes that the doctrine of transubstantiation developed during the Middle Ages. He noted that because of the doctrine, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper became more awesome and led to a division between the clergy and the laity. The laity gradually dropped away from the communion until by twelfth Century there were no communicants at all except priests.

Hucks (1992:30) observes the obstacles in this period was the language. Further, he notes that people could not participate because they could not understand the words of the liturgy which was conducted in Latin.

Bromiley (1978:283) observes that during the medieval period emphasis was put on the role of the clergy in offering the mass because the assumption was that sacrifice consisted solely in the death of the victim. In the medieval period, people believed that what was offered in the Eucharistic elements was the same body which was offered on the cross (Edward 2001:390). In another sense, the Eucharist was interpreted as the act of the Priest celebrating Christ's sacrifice. As a result, the conception of the real presence became material and carnal. Due to this, the laity became less involved in the celebration of the mass and became spectators instead of participants.

Bridges & Phypers (1981:74) observe that during the medieval period there were private masses done by the priests. They mentioned that one of such practices was that of reserving masses that made it lose its value. Because of the reservation, the Lord's Supper was so cheapened that it was regarded as a superstitious rite. Further, they observed that during the medieval period the Eucharist became a private means for securing private blessings.

Charles (1995:33) noted that there was a strong realistic interpretation of the presence of Christ that was observed in the bread and wine. Because of this, it

was believed that the communion administered close before or sometimes even after death indicates a strong belief in the presence of Christ.

During the medieval period, there was a problem of infrequency of partaking of the Holy Communion. Ambrose (in Charles, 1995:34) complained about the many who only received communion once a year, like the Greeks in the east. John Chrysostom (in Allmen, 1969:66) also complained about the infrequency of partaking communion. Charles (1995:34) believes that this was due to an increasing realization of human unworthiness. In that connection, this was done because of the rise of the requirement of abstinence and of the concept that people should abstain from sexual relations for a period before Holy Communion. In the medieval ages, the question of unworthiness received much attention. However, the reformers emphasized the sacrifice of Christ made once for all.

#### **4.8.3 The Lord's Supper in the reformation**

During the reformation period, the reformers rejected the sacrificial theory of the Mass and the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation (Berkhof, 1933:646). Hanson (1975:65) observes that the reformers were determined to 'make the language of worship comprehensible to the people.' This is to say they translated the liturgy into various languages in order to restore people's part in the liturgy. Following the reformation, many things changed completely; the Lord's Table was open to all, and there was a general rule that all adult

parishioners, except the notorious and the scandalous, should be communicants, and should diligently prepare themselves by the right standards of belief and by the behaviour demanded of communicants. The church exercised strict control over every one in the parish, and standards of admission were maintained by the practice of catechizing.

Hucks (1992:30) observes that it was during the reformation that attempts were made to reform some of the abuses of previous centuries. In this period, Martin Luther's major contribution was the addition of vernacular hymns and liturgy. He attempted to restore weekly communion but for a people who were used to annual celebration this was too much. The sermon, instead gained prominence as the focus of weekly worship.

Zwingli took a more radical view than Luther did. He gave scriptures supreme and sole authority and had little use for the sacramental use of worship. He rejected the Lord's Supper as the normal focus of weekly worship and instituted quarterly celebrations. Calvin had a high doctrine of the sacraments and advocated the Lord's Supper as the weekly focus of the worship. He like Luther was not successful. However, in the history of the Lord's Supper we may note that the worship life of the early church had its center in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Likewise, it is suggested that in the Church of Blantyre Synod the celebration of the Lord's Supper should reflect that of the ancient times where Christians actively participated.

## **4.9 The implications of the Lord's Supper**

### **4.9.1 Union**

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of unity among individuals who belong to one body of Christ. It gathers into unity the dimension of past, present and future. In another sense it focuses the past for it is done in remembrance of Christ. It has eschatological dimension, for it is done until his coming. But it is above all making present, in which both the past and the future events are in a sense realized in a moment. This unity is based on the partaking of one bread and one cup in one Christ. By the eating of the body of Christ and drinking of the cup of his blood, Christians become his 'body' - his congregation.

Meyer (1993:9) points out that in the supper the communicants are bound together and grow by communion with Christ. Calvin (1954:120) observes that the benefits of the redemption secured by Christ are communicated to the believer through union with Christ. He further believed that the union of believers with their head has special reference to the human nature of Christ. Christ's human nature was the means by which sacrifice was made, sin was punished and righteousness was secured. Christ accomplished his redemptive work by uniting himself with his people. Calvin put it thus: "becoming the son of man with us, he has made us sons and daughters of God with him; that by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; that by taking on our mortality upon us...."(Inst.17:2). Hence, Calvin says, believers enjoy a

“holy brotherhood” with Christ in his incarnation (Wallace, 1953:148). He believes that the Holy Spirit effects, an exchange of properties between the Son of God and humankind. Further, he says that as union with Christ depends solely on the work of the Spirit, the Lord’s Supper, which is a seal of this union, is efficacious only through the sovereign power of the Spirit. Therefore, as baptism is the sign and seal of this union, the Lord’s Supper nourishes and sustains it.

Calvin sees a personal union with Christ as the means by which we appropriate Christ’s benefits: he believes that through this union, Christ takes our sin as his own and we take his obedience as our own. In this manner, Jasper (1967:102) believes that the essential nature of the Lord’s Supper is unity. However, the early fathers stresses that the Lord’s Supper is a sign of and a means to unity. For instance, Ignatius says that the Eucharist is a sign of the unity of the people of God. Congar (1983:233) observes that there is one Eucharist as there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, one church, one bishop, one altar, Furthermore, in Didache 9:1 a similar theme is found. This is in the passage, which is related to the Eucharist where christians pray, “that the bread now broken and scattered upon the mountain may be reassembled and reunited into one”. For many of the fathers gathering in the Lord’s Supper symbolized the image of the church where children of God assembled receiving and awaiting their redemption.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper according to Benoit (1958:16), the communicants incorporate Christ into their lives. He believes that through partaking of the elements of bread and wine, Christians become one with the body and blood of Christ. In other words in this act, we now are one with him: he is the Head, we are the body. Therefore, Blantyre Synod Christians must know that by partaking of the Lord's Supper the believer is joined with Christ. They become the very body of Christ. Moreover, by partaking the Lord's Supper, Christ joins himself with humankind in the incarnation. Christ joins himself with Christians not only through faith but in all reality, he makes them his body. Wallace (1953:148) believes that as the word was joined with humankind in the person of Christ so the communicant is joined with Christ at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Thus, the incarnation takes place within the worshipping community. In recognizing this purpose and the effect of the Lord's Supper, Christians are warned by their standards not to lose sight of its commemorative character.

Allmen (1969:114) observes that the unity that results from the celebration of the Lord's Supper enables members of the church to become the body of Christ. Further, he believes that when Christians receive the body of Christ, the church becomes a united body. Benoit (1958:16) adds that this unity is from the work of Christ. In other words, this unity exists in the church because of Christ's death and resurrection. Gerrish (1993:176) states that Christ gives himself to the church in order to reconcile the world and the church to him. Through participation in this mystery, believers are fully united to Christ, as is

Christ to his church. In another sense, this signifies that as Christ lives in the church, so does the church in Christ.

According to Wallace (1953:150), this unity begins in baptism where the believer is clothed with Christ and received by Christ. Paul in Galatians 3:28 continues to confirm the union that is between the believers. Here, we see that instead of the barriers, the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of unity joining us all in the triumphant joy that the presence of the risen Lord gives to his church.

For Berkhof (1958:451) a Christian is an image of Christ. This idea is emphasized in the fact that through the Eucharist Christ enters the body and the soul and becomes one with the believer. This intimacy sustains the mystical union. Thus, as Christ was one with the Father, so the believer is one with Christ.

Heyns (1980:119) believes that it is not only the individual who is united with Christ but the community as a whole. He says that being united with Christ the believers are united with one another. Biblically, the Lord's Supper has been understood as a bond between the participants. For instance, Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:16 used the image of grains in the loaf to denote the unity of the church in Christ. Paul said, "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body" (1 Cor.10:17).

Central to the unity of Christ is the fact that the body of Christ can only be perfect if members are united to each other. In the body, each member depends on the other so when disunity arises the fellowship of the community is disrupted. In other words, the fellowship of the community of Christ is weakened when members within the body are full of enmity and disorder. In the state of separation in which the believers still find themselves, the Lord's Supper underlines the scandal of their confessional differences and at the same time their inability to overcome them of their accord. Reconciliation is therefore important for the sustaining of the "fellowship of the body". Division in the church causes the most damage to the fellowship of the body.

The union that is achieved through the Lord's Supper is the union of humankind with the Godhead. Benoit (1958:17) believes that through the incarnation and resurrection the community becomes a part of the Godhead. This is possible only through Christ. Christ unites himself with the communicant in such a manner that the two become inseparable. Marrow (1986:148) confirms that one does not remain distinct in itself but only fulfilled when the world is united to him and the world receives its salvation through the union with Christ. This signifies that the complete union of God the Father, Christ and believers, takes place at the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Relating the unity of Christ to the issue of abstention in the church of Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that abstention from the Lord's Table generates disunity that is enhanced if they partake of the Lord's Supper. This union is

open to all who are prepared to partake of the Lord's Supper. The union is not forced on anybody. Therefore, Malawians must know that all those who partake of the Holy Communion at the same time voluntarily unite themselves one with another. This union is brought about through Christ himself, as it was put in Acts 7:8 "May they all be one... so that the world may believe."

Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that the Lord's Supper marks the center and culmination of the whole life of the community. The findings have outlined many factors that cause abstention from the Lord's Supper. This dissertation, suggests that the Lord's Supper appears to be a witness to the unity of the church. Therefore, if Blantyre Synod Christians do not attend the Lord's Supper, it means that their attitude of staying away from the Lord's Supper becomes a demonstration of the division of Christians. Therefore, they must attend the Lord's Supper. Blantyre Synod Christians must know that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper Christ leads them towards union in his body with all communicants at all times at all places. Therefore, it is in this celebration of the Lord's Supper where Christ receives their hope of reaching this union and strengthens their will to strive for this union. Christians should know that each time they partake of the Lord's Supper their unity is strengthened and renewed. In another sense, are to partake of the Lord's Supper since union with Christ means Christians salvation.

#### 4.9.2 Sacrifice

The Lord's Supper is understood as a sacrifice of the church. Bridges & Phipers (1981:42) believe that the Lord's Supper depicts self-offering for us. Its function is to offer and set forth Christ to us. (Inst 4:14:17). This is to say that the Lord's Supper calls forth a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving from those who celebrate it. Equally, it offers a continuous challenge to its participants to present their bodies as living sacrifice to God that is their spiritual worship.

Dean Inge (in Wotherspoon 1928:247) believes that the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice of bodies that consecrate to service to God. Young (1975:137) seems to believe that the Lord's Supper is the central act of sacrifice observed by Christians. He further believes that the Lord's Supper is understood as a meal which believers share by commemorating the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. This is confirmed in the institutional language, which is sacrificial and points to the sacrifice to be accomplished on the cross.

Nevertheless, unlike the sacrifice of Christ himself, the Lord's Supper is not an atoning or an expiatory sacrifice. Christ is a propitiation for our sins that he has expiated (Rom. 3:25). This is to say that in the Lord's Supper Christ is not offered up to his father, as is the case with Roman Catholics. Christ's offering is the perfect redemption made once for all the sins of the world as the Bible says there is "one sacrifice for sins forever", the sacrifice of the cross, offered

once for all" (Heb.10:12). This is shown through Christians' celebration of the Lord's Supper. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Christians plead that the death of Christ prevails and has put away sin. Therefore, in the Lord's Supper, there is pleading, but there is no repetition of Christ's "sacrifice for sins". The cross is central to faith and it stands alone. Scott's confession in Clay (1979:10) observes that Priests are not mediators between Christ and his Kirk. Calvin notes that this belief dishonours Christ, suppresses his cross and passion and brings forgetfulness of his death and its benefits (Inst.4:18:2-6). In this regard, the Lord's Supper represents Christ's sacrifice to us. Calvin in (Inst. 4:18:13) believes that it is our own sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving that we both owe and render to God. As we pray to God to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, we offer ourselves as holy and living sacrifices.

Wotherspoon (1928:246) believes that prayer is propitiatory in the sense that it seems God is propitious to us, gracious, merciful and bountiful. Therefore, all Christian prayer is directly propitiatory as long as it is offered in the name and through the merit of Christ. Moreover, the Lord's Supper is of the nature of prayer but more. This is to say where prayer speaks of Christ crucified for us, the Lord's Supper shows his death and by what it shows, it appeals to God.

In the words of institution, Jesus said that his blood is being "poured out" (Mt.26:28, Mk.14:24, Lk.22:20) and that his body is being "given" (Lk.22:19). Both terms signify the sacrificial nature of his death. Further, the words of institution contain the important reference "for many" (Mt.26:28,

Mk.14:24) or “for you” (Lk.22:19). Here the ‘many’ according to Jeremias (1966:227) are understood as many people (Is.53:12), many sinners (Is.53:11). Although the many is understood to be Jews or Gentiles, it is significant that the reference is to the salvation wrought by the servant for many. The same is true for Malawian Christians of Blantyre Synod. Thus, Jesus presents his body and his blood in bread and wine as the means of divine grace, “for the forgiveness of sins” with his body and blood in the sacrament. He thereby bestows all the blessings and benefits of the atonement (Heb.9:14-16). Confirmed in the idea that while our sins would not have made it possible for us to share in the life of God, Jesus Christ was sent to remove this obstacle. His death was a sacrifice for our sins.

He “made purification for sins” (Heb. 1:3). He is “the propitiation for the sins” (Rom.3:25). In doing this, he fulfilled all that Old Testament sacrifice had foreshadowed. In the New Testament, his death is understood as a sacrifice. Jesus himself referred to his blood as ‘blood of the covenant’ (Mk.14:24), which points us to its sacrificial rites.

Paul in Ephesians 5:2 tells us that God “loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God”. This refers to a special sacrifice as in 1 Cor. 5:7 “for Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed”. Peter speaks of the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Pet.1:19). This indicates that Christ’s death was a sacrifice. This explains that by his work of atonement the Lord sacrificed himself for the sins of all people.

Christ is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn.1:29). Wallace (1953:143) believes that through Christ’s death and resurrection, he conquered sin and death and reconciled humankind to God.

The Lord’s Supper is understood as being central to the life of the Church. At the Lord’s Supper Clay (1979:6) observes that as the bread is broken in front of us, so we are able to remember that Jesus gave his body to be broken on the cross for us. In this regard when we break the bread and pour out the wine, we hold up the symbols that give expression to that “everlasting sacrifice”, and we pray that God will accept us in Christ.

To relate to the death of Jesus as a sacrifice is necessary in the sense that it presents the truth about his redemptive love, him as the only sacrifice that perfects and fulfills the Old Testament system. When sacrifice is defined without the death of the victim or ignoring the inclusion of the Lord’s Supper, the nature of the Lord’s Supper is misunderstood.

In this case, the Lord’s Supper is the memorial of this sacrifice. Christians must understand that a true confession can only be a response to the obedient life and death of Christ. They must know that Christ is the High Priest of their confession, and it is therefore in Christ’s name alone that they make a confession of sin. Because in so doing they show the cost of mercy and testify to the worthiness of Christ’s death. Jasper (1965:23) states that the church gathers to remember and represent the sacrifice of Christ in which we share

through the power of the Holy Spirit. He believes that through the celebration of the Lord's Supper we are joined to Christ's sacrifice and receive its benefits. Therefore, Young (1975:138) emphasizes that the Lord's supper is a sacrifice for sin in which the representation in sacramental form of the sin-offering made by Christ realizes in us God's all of atonement.

According to Delorme (1964:135), Jesus, as the one perfect sacrifice, is eternally present before the Father who eternally accepts. This assures us that in the Lord's Supper Jesus do not sacrifice himself repeatedly. Rather by the power of the Holy Spirit his one eternal sacrifice is made present and once again represented so that we may share in it.

As the letter to the Hebrews explains, Jesus is the one eternal High Priest who always lives to make intercession for the people before God. In this way, He surpasses the many high priests who used to offer sacrifices for sin in Jerusalem temple. The eternal High Priest, Jesus, offers the perfect sacrifice that is himself not something else. He entered once for all into the sanctuary not with the blood of animal but with his own blood thus obtaining eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12).

However, Minchton (1958:26) states that the Lord's Supper is the church's witness to the Lord's death, its meaning and its power. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the church 'remembers' Christ and preaches him to others. Equally important in the sacrifice is the fact that Christ does not need to leave

heaven to be with us. Jasper (1965:23) believes that we partake of the heavenly liturgy where Christ eternally intercedes for us and where the angels and saints constantly glorify “the one who sits on the throne and to the lamb be the blessing, honor and glory and mighty forever and ever.”

In the Eucharist representation of Christ’s eternal sacrifice, members share in the priesthood of all believers. In this case, the Lord’s Supper becomes the sacrifice of the church. Therefore, the church that is the body of Christ participates in the sacrificial offering of her head. In the Lord’s Supper the sacrifice of Christ becomes the sacrifice of the members of his body who are united with Christ to form one sacrificial offering (Catechism No.1368).However, the Lord’s Supper is a sacrifice to deal with sin and guilt and

reconcile humankind to God. Young (1975:138) observes that the Lord’s Supper is a communion sacrifice which draws humankind into fellowship with God and with each other, a meal in which we partake of his power and receive the strength to continue the battle against evil and sin within ourselves and in the world around us. Therefore, christians must realize that when the living Lord meets his followers in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper he actualizes the sacrifice anew in the gift of bread and wine. Blantyre Synod christians must recognize that as the Lord on the last evening included and incorporated his disciples in his sacrifice of love about to be perfected in death, so now he includes everybody everywhere and in all times in the eternally valid sacrifice and in the New Covenant established in his death. In this case, Blantyre Synod

christians' participation in the Lord's Supper involves dying to the old age and walking in the newness of life. In another sense, it involves "dying with Christ" and "living in the power of his resurrection"(Phil.3:10). The point being made here is that even if the sacrifice of Christ was made once and for all, the Lord's Supper needs to be repeatedly participated. This was why the Old Testament sacrifices were repeated. Hence, christians must know that the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice needs to be frequently observed .By partaking the Lord's Supper, christians acknowledge that christian life is taken repeatedly as the outward vehicle of continuing sanctification.

#### **4.9.3 Anticipation**

The Lord's Supper, according to Allmen (1969:66) is celebrated in expectation, it is a foretaste of yearning for fulfillment in anticipation of the coming of the messianic rule of justice, peace and freedom. Kevan (1979:60) observes that the Lord's Supper is characterized by the joy and jubilation of the messianic banquet that is to occur when the kingdom of God has finally come. Further, he points out that the Lord's Supper is the token and constant witness to the fact that the Lord Jesus is to return and that before us there stretches out the prospect of a glorious hope. In Paul's words recalling the institution of the Lord's Supper by Christ he actually adds: "for as often as you eat this bread and drink of the cup you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

Derlome (1964:136) observes that Paul in this case believes that the Lord's Supper which Christians celebrate now holds the promise and expectancy of the messianic feast in the coming kingdom. Thus, Malawians must realize that to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper now is to live by anticipatory participation. In other words, it is to claim the life of the future ahead of time.

In the words of institution of the Lord's Supper, there are also features that build to this great expectation. For instance in the Gospel according to Matthew 26:29 the Lord says, "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth this fruit of vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom". The same truth is recorded in Luke 22:16 and 18 where our Lord described his great desire to eat this Passover, and adds, "For I say unto you, I will not anymore eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God ....for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of vine until the kingdom of God shall come". These words recorded by Matthew and Luke link the Lord's Supper with other teachings of our Lord to the effect that they are onward and forward looking in direction. For instance Luke 14:15 in the middle of a conversation with Jesus about a great supper, when "one of them who sat with him heard these things, he said unto him, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God". In other words, in Jewish thought of the New Testament times the annual Passover meal pointed on to the consummation of things which are regularly described in Jewish writings as a messianic feast. A good

example of such a feast is expressed in Matthew 5:10 where Jesus fed a multitude as a sign of the kingdom.

Quick (1941:191) believes that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper Christians anticipate the joys of the age to come. He points out that the Lord's Supper is a concrete sign of God's promise of a new liberated and reconciled humanity in a new heaven and a new earth. In Luke 12:37 Christ urges his followers to be like those who wait for their Lord and says, "Blessed are those servants, whom when the Lord comes shall find them watching: verily I say unto you that, he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meet". Again speaking to the unfaithful in Luke 13:28 he says, "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. Moreover, they shall come from the East and from the West, and from the North and from the South, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God".

Further, the Lord says to his disciples in Luke 22:29-30, "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom". In Revelation 19:9 the Lord says, "And he says unto me, write: blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the lamb". Thus, our Lord chose his sovereignty to keep his disciples reminded of him by the institution of the feast, he was building not only on the expectation that was in every godly Jewish heart that the Messiah's glory and his vindication would be expressed in the form of a wondrous banquet. The

Lord's Supper is therefore, anticipatory; it points beyond itself to something bigger than itself.

Relating this to the issue of abstention, Blantyre synod christians must know that they must endeavor to abide by the purpose of this looking forward in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In the light of this, Blantyre Synod christians must realize that the Lord's return is an event that must be anticipated with watchfulness. Blantyre Synod christians therefore should believe this truth of the Lord's return and come back to the Lord's Table. They should believe that the Lord's Supper is a time of recommitment and anticipation. By partaking of the Lord's Supper christians renew their dedication to Christ in hopeful anticipation till he comes.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

The Lord's Supper stands in continuity with the acts of God in the Old Testament, that it brings out the saving significance of the Lord's death, that it is an occasion for communion with the risen Lord and anticipation of the heavenly banquet. Paul's understanding of the church as the body of Christ is closely related with the Lord's Supper. The celebration of the Lord's Supper was and still is a powerful stimulus to the reflection on the death of Jesus, and therefore in the church of Blantyre Synod, christians needs to attend the Lord's Supper. It has been shown that it is Christ who provides christians with bread and wine not people. Christ is present in the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, the question may be is Christ present in us after we have shared bread and wine with him?

## CHAPTER 5

### THE PRACTICE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

#### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, different views concerning the understanding of the Lord's Supper were discussed. As a result, a number of factors present themselves. At the same time, Calvin's teaching was considered the right teaching to be maintained in the church of Blantyre Synod Malawi.

In this chapter, a discussion of factors that affect the participation of Christians in the celebration of the Lord's Supper will be presented in such a way that hindrances are exposed for further discussion.

#### 5.2 Administration of the Lord's Supper

In the reformed tradition especially among the Presbyterians where this study is carried out, the minister, often assisted by the elders, who distribute the elements, administer the Lord's Supper. According to Macleod (1980:72), the elders carry the elements and set them before the communicants, each of them is expected to receive and appropriate them with his/her own hands. The words of consecration are regularly read during the ceremony. Macleod (1980:71) emphasizes that in serving "those lively emblems of the Saviour's love" to one another the whole body of Christians are bound together in love.

The communion always implies an active attitude upon the part of each recipient. Each communicant for himself/herself meets the present Lord. Each one receives and appropriates by faith, Christ, and all the sacrificial benefits of his redemption. What each receives he/she gives so that in watching the act of communion one seems actually to see the circulation of life in the body. Therefore, each binds himself/herself to deal with the brother/sister as the Lord has dealt with himself/herself. In this regard, Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that Christ is himself the nourishment of believers' souls. He is the living bread. This implies that under Jesus we are one mutually embraced in his everlasting love. Blantyre Synod Christians then should attend the Lord's Supper in order to renew their strength, remember their God and hold fast their hope unshaken to the end.

Paul believes that drinking the cup and eating the bread gives Christians a real share in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor.10:15-23). Likewise, when Christians eat and drink together, they proclaim that they will support each other in their common journey. Moreover, Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that eating the bread and drinking the wine together portrays their human responsibility and response. This part of celebration portrays faith in the person and presence of Jesus Christ. It indicates their faith in the life he offers both spiritual and eternal. In this manner, the Lord's Supper reminds them of their need to feed their lives daily by virtue of who Christ is and what he did for them. They must believe that by partaking of the Lord's Supper they indicate their desire to continue to have fellowship with Christ.

In the findings, one of the reasons for abstention is that of not wanting to partake of the Lord's Supper celebrated by a minister of dubious character behavior. It is believed that according to traditional beliefs and taboos this might cause illness. To answer on this problem Whale (in Macleod, 1980:60) argues that the validity of the sacrament is not destroyed because a person whose life is immoral has celebrated it. This is to say the power of God's grace cannot be diverted by the powers of human nature. However, Blantyre Synod Christians must know that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper Christ is the true celebrant. This is to say the action in the celebration is proper to Christ alone. He is the only one who can consecrate the elements. Therefore, the minister in this case is the instrument of God conveying every thing in the name of Christ. Our point here is to assure Blantyre Synod Christians that the ministers' virtue does not add or detract from the sacrament since Christ is the one who acts. They must realize that a sacrament is effective through faith therefore each individual is responsible to come to the Lord's Table in faith.

### **5.3 The Elements of the Lord's Supper**

The elements used to represent Christ's body and blood are bread and wine. Hucks (1992:37) observes that the scholarly consensus is that our Lord employed the earthly elements of bread and wine in his institution of the Lord's Supper. According to Tillich (1957:41-43), bread and wine are the symbolic elements of the unity of the body that the church has. He further

suggests that with the symbol of bread and wine Christians may see levels of reality that they could not see before. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, who and what Christ was, is passed on to the church through the symbols of bread and wine which gives the reality of God in Christ living among humankind.

### **5.3.1 The bread – one loaf**

The word 'bread' was used for food in general (Gen.3:19). It is a symbol of 'life' as the common food of humanity (Lk.11:3), and as representative of Jesus Christ himself (Jn.6:35). In the New Testament, according to Charles (1995:18) the Greek word that applies to bread in general is "*artos*." It refers to the basic food of the ancient world. He further notes that the more restricted Greek name for bread is '*azumos*' which is used for unleavened bread. However, Meyer (1993:10) notes that the fact that unleavened bread was used in the Passover, the synoptic Gospels (Mt.26:17, Mk.14:12, Lk.22:7) strongly suggest that unleavened bread should be used in the churches today. To argue against this, any kind of bread, whether leavened or unleavened can be used for the Lord's Supper. Christ used unleavened bread because it was at that moment on the paschal table.

In Matthew 26:26 we read that the bread, symbolically speaks of the body or the person of Christ as the one who was and is the bread of life come down from heaven. This is to say the bread remains bread but symbolizes the concept

of incarnation. In another sense it demonstrates the reality of the incarnation and the passion of Christ. The one bread was also used as the expressive of the unity of the church (1 Cor.10:17). This bread is the one that is mentioned in the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer (Mt.6:11). In this prayer, Jesus makes bread his sacrificed body and the sacrament of the unity of the faithful (1 Cor.10:16-22). Above all, bread is a symbol of communion between God and his faithful ones. It is not Christ's literal body as the doctrine of transubstantiation says, but it is the representative of Christ's body.

The reformation churches according to Macleod (1967:70) inherited the use of unleavened bread from the Roman Catholics and later changed to leavened bread, which was used by the Orthodox. Paquiere (1967:196) believes that leavened bread gives clearly the symbolic parallelism between daily bread as the product of our work and food for our body and Jesus Christ, the bread of life coming from above, which feeds our soul, for eternal life. This is so because Christ is the "bread of life" first by his word which opens up eternal life to those who believe (Jn.6:25-51) and then by his flesh and blood given for us to eat and drink (Jn.6:57b). Bread was often seen as signifying Christ.

In the Roman Catholic Church, wafers are used and the officiant breaks only one that he is to eat himself. Lavidierre (1966:120) notes that the consecrated bread is usually present in the shape of long strips of soft roll or crumbs cut beforehand, a piece of which the officiant breaks off for every communicant.

He observes that no whole bread is used to symbolize the physical body of Christ and his mystical body, the church.

However, in the reformed churches, especially the Presbyterian, the practical way is that of breaking first a whole loaf whether it be leavened or unleavened, and his gesture should be repeated in some way for every communicant. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper the custom of using a broken loaf is to be commended. It is suggested that the one loaf reminds christians of their only salvation in Christ; the pieces reminds them of their identification with Christ in his death and their dependence on him for their life and "belongingness" in Christ. This would be the proper way of giving this rite its distinctive significance as was defined by Paul in (1 Cor. 10:17) "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one loaf." Thus in the sharing of the bread, christians find the unity with God and with each other which is the strength of Christ's family, the church. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper according to the Presbyterians, the bread is eaten first before the wine is offered. It is suggested that the separation of the blood from the body stressed the reality of death, and that it is by Christ's death that the penalty of our sins is paid. The practice in the reformed churches especially in the Presbyterian has been generally to use ordinary bread as being symbolic of that by which our common life is nourished and sustained (Jeremias, 1955:38-40). In biblical revelation food and meal serve therefore to express the communion of life which God gives to his people. The manna quails of exodus prefigured true gift which comes from the mouth of God.

The point being made here is that since bread and wine are both God's work and human work therefore the action of eating and drinking portrays faith in the person and presence of Jesus Christ. Christians should partake of the Lord's Supper to acknowledge their faith in the life that Christ offers them, both spiritual and eternal. By partaking of the Lord's Supper Christians demonstrate their need to live daily by virtue of who Christ is. Partaking of the Lord's Supper indicates communicants' desire to continue to live in fellowship with Christ. Since bread is for food so when Blantyre Synod Christians stay away from the Lord's Supper it reflects their spiritual starvation.

### **5.3.2 The Cup**

Macleod (1967:71) believes that the cup manifests a sign of unity in the body of Christ. He observes that this cup was filled with the fruit of vine that was red like blood. Kevan (1966:27) observes that the cup with its content calls to mind the Lord's death as accomplished and reminds Christians that salvation has been accomplished and sins are therefore forgiven. In Hebrew 10:14-18 we read that this cup stands for the new covenant and that Christians have God's guarantee of the forgiveness of sins based on the finished work and death of Christ. The bread and wine are the symbols of Christ's presence with us and within us.

All the four accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper speak of "the cup". The content of this cup was most definitely wine. The references in Matthew 26:29 explain about the wine of the Jewish Passover ritual. In 1 Corinthians 11:21 there is corroboration that the early church understood wine as "fruit of vine." In addition, we read that some of the Corinthians sadly abused the Lord's Supper by becoming drunk. In the early church, according to the scriptures, wine was a normal part of life and was taken as a normal drink like soft drinks or water. In 1 Timothy 5:23 we read that Timothy consumed wine when he had abdominal problems, after Paul had advised him to drink wine. Surely, Paul's advice is an indication that wine is not evil in itself. Moreover, today medical opinion suggests that the regular consumption of a small amount of red wine has beneficial results for the health.

In the same manner Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 14, and in the gospel according to Mark 7:19, Jesus urged a liberal attitude to food and drink which could be used in contrast to the restrictions of the Jews. The only qualification that Paul made was that it might be necessary to restrict oneself for the sake of others. Nevertheless, in the church of the Blantyre Synod Christians do not refrain from the Lord's Supper because of the wine.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, according to the Geneva Catechism, "as it is the particular virtue of bread to nourish our bodies, to refresh and sustain us in this mortal life, so it pertains to his body to act toward our souls, i.e. in nourishing and quickening them spiritually." Likewise, as wine

strengthens, refreshes, and rejoices a man physically, so his blood is our joy, our refreshing and our spiritual strength. This is why Rahner (1981:24) pictures the Spirit as wine.

Here it must be noted that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the symbolic character lies in the fact that just as we are externally nourished and fed by the basic means of nourishment as gifts of creation, so we are internally and spiritually nourished and fed by Christ as the gift of grace.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, some use unleavened bread, after the Old Testament precedent, and some use unfermented grape juice, to avoid temptation to alcoholism. In the church of Blantyre Synod, wine is diluted with water and red wine is preferably used. Cyprian gave a theological significance to the mixture interpreting the water as the people and the wine as the blood of Christ mingled together so that "the people are made one with Christ"(Eph 6:3). In the supper, bread symbolizes Christ's body and wine is a picture of his blood. As he was crushed to death, so the grape is crushed to give juice, as Christ gave his blood.

Out of his death comes life. Therefore, Blantyre Synod Christians should realize that Jesus who participates fully in all their pain wants them to participate fully in his joy by attending the Lord's Supper. Blantyre Synod Christians should partake of the Lord's Supper in order to acquire the benefits of Christ's death which is obtained in the celebration of the Lord's supper.

#### **5.4 Prerequisites to admission in the celebration of the Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper is a spiritual meal of spiritual food and drink. Bearing in mind that the Lord addresses an invitation to his people urging them to receive him in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the researcher wants to discuss the qualifications suitable for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Relating to the issue abstention happening in the Synod of Blantyre let us take note of the parable of the wedding feast where the guest was condemned for being "unworthy" because he had no wedding garment (Mt.22:12). Relating this parable to the requirements needed for the celebration of the Lord's Supper Christians should know that Christ makes them sharers in himself. In other words those whom God called, He also freely justified not by imputing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins and by accounting and accepting them as righteous not for anything wrought in them or done by them but by Christ's sake alone

Concerning admission, the Lord's Supper presupposes faith and baptism in those who take part, something which has been required by the church from the beginning (Didache 9:5). It is in baptism that God's call comes to us to participate in the Lord's Supper. This implies that the Lord's Supper is only for professed Christians all who know Christ as Saviour. Likewise in the church of Blantyre Synod only baptized and confirmed Christians are admitted to the Lord's Table.

Nevertheless, Calvin in (inst 4.1.15) states that scripture does not bid us investigate whether there is anyone in the multitude whose unseemliness pollutes anybody. Moreover, Schmidt (1989:77) observes that believers are to examine the state of their souls before approaching the Lord's Table. Since the Lord's Table is not an ordinary table, believers need to be prepared. Foakes Jackson (1914:578) believes that communicants need to partake of the body and blood of the Saviour with awe and reverence. This is an attitude of worship that a believer must maintain. The believer must be aware of the presence of the risen Lord at the table. Above all the believer must approach the Lord's Table with greater reverence in acknowledgement of what Christ has done for humankind.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper the believer not only approaches the table with reverence, but also with willingness. Garret (1963:42) believes that as the Lord's Supper is a joyful occasion, one cannot approach it with sorrow, for the risen Lord gives his life to all who come and receive him in this sacrament. With his/her joyful attitude, the believer receives the promised spiritual food. Blantyre Synod Christians then should not abstain from the Lord's Supper due to cultural factors. In the church of Blantyre Synod both men and women refrain from the Lord's Supper for reasons related to sexuality. They believe that they cannot partake of the Lord's Supper if they have sexual intercourse a night before the Lord's Supper service. According to traditional beliefs, women in their period would be regarded as unclean and therefore are not supposed to partake of the Lord's Supper. Due to the rituals

observed by Malawians, the Lord's Supper is regarded as a taboo, so sacred that it has to be handled with care. Here, we want to suggest that those who abstain from the Lord's Table because of cultural factors do not understand the mysteries of the Lord's Supper.

Blantyre Synod Christians must realise that the Lord's Supper is an offer of grace not condemnation. Christians especially women who abstain themselves from the Lord's Table due to biological situations must attend the Lord's Supper because there are no biblical reasons that stop them from partaking of the Lord's Supper. In the church of Blantyre Synod, some Christians are conscious of their own guilt and attend the Lord's Supper infrequently. The fact is that they must obey the Lord's command and approach the Lord's Table as often as they can. This is so because the Lord's Supper is a permanent ordinance in the church of Christ, and is to be observed, "Till He comes."

Grudem (1999:394) observes that those who receive the sacrament without repenting are like Judas who betrayed the Lord. They pretend to be Christians by participation but betray Christ through the lives they lead. Further, he states that those who participate and remain unrepentant are worse than those who are possessed by the evil spirit. Schleiermacher (1928:653) believes that unworthy participation leads to destruction of the soul. Therefore, communicants must be aware that those who participate without repenting have to bear the punishment of God for they have rejected his grace.

Paul states that God does not want to inflict punishment on sinners but those who participate unworthily bring judgment upon themselves (1 Cor. 11:27). They disregard the benefits that God has given to people through the work of Christ. Scriptures command Christians to be holy as God himself is holy. For instance in I Corinthians 5:7-8 Paul instructs the congregation to remove the old leaven of malice and evil, and “to celebrate the festival with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” This does not mean that hypocrites as Judas cannot disgrace the table- it is a serious warning for self-examination which reminds people that their false behaviour is known by their omniscient creator.

However, believers must not regard the Lord’s Supper as a merely commemorative ceremony that took place in history. Much more, it is a reminder of what sin has cost God and what man owes to the Saviour. It is also a means of keeping in mind the believers’ duty to bear public witness to his faith in the atoning death of the Son of God.

Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that what makes a believer qualify for participation in the Lord’s Supper is the condition of his/her heart – a full commitment to Christ and faith in his sacrifice. This is so because Christ instituted the Supper only for his believers to confirm the faith of those who by faith have been saved through hearing his word. Since the Lord’s Supper is ‘the word made visible,’ it reinforces the gospel. Therefore, unlike baptism that may be administered to those who do not understand, God “does not similarly hold forth the Lord’s supper for all to partake of, but only for those who are

capable of discerning the body and blood of the Lord, of examining their own conscience of proclaiming the Lord's death, and considering its power (Inst.4.16.30). Since faith is a prerequisite for admission to the table, he whose confession and conduct reveal that he is unbelieving "should for a time be deprived of the communion of the supper until he gives assurance of his repentance" (Inst.4.12.6). In short, no one is to be received at the supper unless he first has made a confession of his faith. The point being made here is that what is required in the Lord's Supper is an honest confession. This is done through forsaking of sins. Rice (1954:89) believes that sin that is not forsaken is not honestly confessed. In this case, honest confession of sin mean that you despise it and you want to be cleansed. The bible says in Proverbs 28:13 "He that covers his sins shall not prosper, but who confesses and forsaken them shall have Mercy."

Relating to the issue of abstention, when a christian fails to partake of the Lord's Supper due to the reasons stated in the findings, it implies that they are disobeying the Lord's command. In other words, what is required of them is to get back into a position of righteousness before God, through repentance and prayer and partake of the Lord's Supper. However, this does not mean that sinless perfection is a prerequisite for partaking of the Lord's Supper. In other words, it means that the Lord's Supper calls christians to frequently confess their sins and open them to leading a new life. Therefore, Blantyre Synod christians must attend the Lord's Table.

The point being made about admission to the Lord's Supper is that partakers should not fool around with the Lord's Table. In other words, it is not possible to offer God acceptable worship and at the same time be harboring unrepented sin. In this case, it is better to let the communion elements pass by us than to partake if we know that there is unconfessed sin or an unresolved conflict with another person. The best way is to resolve the outstanding account, then come and partake. It is suggested that those who have confessed their sins must partake of the Lord's Supper. In the Lord's Supper God meets his own promise of proverbs 28:13 that "whosoever confesses and forsaken their sins shall have mercy." Therefore, christians must partake of the Lord's Supper knowing that they are worthy of the gift Christ has bestowed for them. The Lord's Supper calls christians to frequently confess their sins and open them to leading a new life.

Where christians refrain from the Lord's Table because of Paul's teaching, it appears that Paul is not saying that only the sinless can celebrate the Lord's Supper. If that were the case then none of us would be able to do so. What Paul is asking from christians is honesty and integrity in our worship. We need to confess and admit before God the areas in our life that are not right. Before we handle the elements of communion, we must reconcile ourselves to God and to those with whom we have broken relationships

The Lord's Supper according to Pelikan (1969:401) is for those who can actively exercise faith, and those who are able to confess Christ as their Lord

and Saviour. This means that children who have not yet come to years of discretion are not fit to partake of this sacrament. In the Catholic Church, those who are baptized and have reached the age of reason are allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper whereas in the Presbyterian Church only those who have reached puberty and have been confirmed are to partake of the Lord's Supper. In the early days of the reformation, there was participation of all believers in the Lord's Supper.

However, Bridge & Phipers (1981:128) believe that the Puritans brought the idea of 'worth' into the reception of communion. It was agreed that only those who are 'worthy' could partake of the Lord's Supper. Thus, elaborate lists were drawn up of those who should be denied the bread and wine, the immoral for example and the persistently quarrelsome.

The proper participants according to Heidelberg catechism quoted in Berkhof (1939:656) are as follows:

*Those who are truly displeased with themselves and yet trust that they are forgiven for the sake of Christ and that their remaining infirmity is covered by his passion and death who also desire more to strengthen their faith and amend their life.*

Moreover, Hesselinks (1997:153) believes that proper participants are those with tender consciences who are quite aware of their sins and unworthiness.

The organization and procedure of Blantyre states that: -

*The Lord's Supper is open to all who are truly sincere in their desire to break with sin and have pledged their allegiance to Christ in a public confession of their faith. The procedure advises that the wicked and*

*ignorant persons and those who know themselves not to be regenerate are not qualified (Colvin 1958:6).*

These views indicate that the right approach is that of appreciation for the work of grace in Christ. Despite this attitude, the partakers bring judgment upon themselves. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:24 says "Let us draw near to him with great love and let us not endure punishment." This shows that in participation the benefits of Christ are bestowed upon christians.

Henry (1962:120) equally believes that christians must approach the Lord's Table regularly and with reverence. He says that one has to be vigilant in order to partake of the Lord's Supper. Benoit (1958:17) adds that when the act of eating the Lord's Supper is performed with vigilance over one's soul, there is true communion with Christ and a communion of his Spirit with christians.

Roguet (1954:83) believes that christians must be worthy of the gift that they are to receive. They must strive after the knowledge of God and must abandon all worldly pleasures. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:17 "those with temporal matters may not be allowed at the table." This does not include sexuality and menstruation, as is the case with the Blantyre Synod Church. The Blantyre Synod christians cite cultural factors as valid reasons for abstention. It is assumed that both men and women are expected to refrain from sexual relations at least one week before the communion day and women are not allowed to partake when going through their menstrual periods (Chingota 1999). In this manner, christians must realise that the heart is most important in

the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Therefore, Christians are called upon to refrain from evil practices and beliefs because the Lord who is present at the table is a Holy God.

Calvin (in Hesselink, 1997:164) states that a disciplined life is the right qualification for approaching the Lord's Table. He further believes that one has to be convicted in order to partake of the Lord's Supper with a good conscience. Furthermore, Thurians (1960:120) believes that what is expected of the communicant is participation in the Lord's Supper with good conscience. He seems to believe that the reward of all labor is participation in the supper with a good conscience. He states that the labor that brings about this reward is not only fasting but sincerity and purity of the soul

Moreover, Charles (1986:36) believes that if the soul is not in a good state then a Christian cannot enjoy communion with Christ. He states that coming into the presence of Christ with a soiled soul is worse than handling the body of Christ with dirty hands. Here, Blantyre Synod Christians must note that it is the soul, the heart of a Christian that our Lord is looking for in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Therefore, Blantyre Synod Christians must abandon all other practices so that by destroying them they may rest fully in Christ and be contented with his grace alone.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, there is nothing else that makes the communicant worthy apart from the state of his/her soul. This is so because

salvation is by grace not by works (Eph. 2:8). The point being made about salvation is that justification is the forgiveness of all our sins and our acceptance before God. The price whereby this has been procured for us is the blood and the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, when Christians partake of the Lord's Supper they inwardly renewed by the power of God. Calvin in (Inst. 3:11:1) points out the connection between the divine acts of counting the believer righteous and making the believer righteous in which justification and sanctification is grasped.

The point that is being made here is that God in Christ stripped us of our own unrighteousness and clothed us with the righteousness of Christ. Paul stressed that believers are counted righteous because of the righteousness of Christ who stands in their place and fulfills the righteousness and obedience required by God of human beings. God affects his forgiveness by crediting sinners with the righteousness of Christ. This 'alien' righteousness lacks foundation in the sinners' good works. This is to say God's gift of forgiveness is not based on works but it is one aspect of the total work of divine grace in the sinner's life. Calvin points out that it is the soul that receives the body and blood of Jesus; therefore, it has to be in order to receive the King. Calvin (1979:120) draws the analogy between the robe of a king and that of the body of Christ. He says that if people regard the robe of a king as worthy and treat it with respect, how much more should they recognize the worth of the body of Christ. Calvin states that through the robe, they gain nothing but through the body of Christ, they gain life and access to eternal life. This indicates that preparing one's soul is a

token of appreciation for what Christ has done for human salvation. This is done in response to the love of God through Jesus Christ. Otherwise, the Lord's Supper would have no meaning. It is true that the Lord's Supper brings harm but this is because of irreverence. Hesselink (1997:164) observes that Calvin in his first catechism believes that the Lord's Supper has its own laws. He seems to believe that in the Lord's Supper those who are faithful and disciplined in their approach receive blessings while those who do not repent their sins bring destruction to themselves.

Roguet (1954:83) observes that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper it is important that members of the church as a whole take into account their moral condition. Paul in 1 Corinthians did not conceive of somebody outside the church. Paul believes that a Christian is baptized into the *koinonia* of Christ and finds his/her identity with the church. He/she becomes part of the body of Christ. Kanyoro (1997:120) states that the *koinonia* of baptism is bound with the *koinonia* of the Lord's Supper. She believes that this includes the oneness of those who partake together. She further believes that the *koinonia* of common partaking of the body of Christ is similar to the *koinonia* of baptism, which is based on the baptism into the body of Christ.

However, Hughes (1975:68) seems to agree that in both baptism and the Lord's Supper, the body of Christ comes first. He believes that through baptism Christians enter into the body of Christ and at the Lord's Supper Christians partake of that body. He points out that it is around the body of Christ that the

church gathers and gives thanks to God. This is done in unity because Christians are the very body of Christ. Whenever disunity arises, the church fails to be that which she was called to be.

Blantyre Synod Christians are to be reminded of the necessary conditions of the body. They are to partake of the Lord's Supper in order to overcome divisions. Above all, the obedient and faithful followers of Christ should partake of the Lord's Supper. If it is partaken of by the unfaithful, it brings damnation to the members. The refusal of communion to the unrepentant does not mean that the church wants to ignore them. Nevertheless, it is aimed at restoring the person to his/her former dignity within the community. This helps to lead the sinner to repentance. Hesselink (1997:167) observes that it is a pastoral measure not a punishment. Through this process the church, benefit from the Lord's Supper because the body in this manner heals.

To participate worthily, communicants need to approach the presence of the Lord with reverence. Christians must repent from evil and bring reconciliation among themselves. Christians must accept the forgiveness of sins offered to them by God through the blood of Jesus Christ. To approach the presence of Christ communicants need to have realized what God has done for them through the death and resurrection of Christ. In other words, to communicate rightly is to live through the act of saving faith.

Ordinary christians of the Blantyre Synod must partake of the Lord's Supper knowing that they are justified by God's grace through the redemption which is Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24). However, since they know that they are exposed to temptations, they need to renew the virginity of their faith and firmness of Christ's love. Since they are the people on the journey to reach the Promised Land.

### **5.5 How often should we partake the Lord's Supper?**

One of the earliest clear witnesses to how often the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the early church comes down to us through the Didache. In chapter 14, there is an indication that the Lord's Supper celebration took place weekly on the Lord's Day. For many centuries, the Lord's Supper continued to be celebrated with great frequency and great thanksgiving. Charles (1995:11) observes that in many places and by many christians the Lord's Supper was celebrated even daily. However it is argued that the Lord's Supper might lose its value when it is celebrated often.

Furthermore, Letham (2001:57) observes that there is no binding rule as to how often the Lord's Supper should be held. Wotherspoon (1928:85) seems to agree that the Lord's Supper was celebrated every Sunday. He gives evidence from the book of Acts that the christians met at one place for the fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2:42) and again in the same book of Acts 20:7 we read that "on the first day of the week when we gathered to break

bread". Through the scriptures, we know that the "breaking of bread" was placed at the center of worship. In the early church, a weekly practice was advised.

Wallace (1953:253) notes that Calvin in the "Article on church organization and worship at Geneva" of 1538 expressed his view that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated at least every Sunday. Again, in his (Inst.6 14.11.) Calvin stated that at least each week the table of the Lord ought to be spread for christians. Wallace (1953:252) believed that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently as far as the capacity of the people will admit. This indicates that Calvin favored weekly communion. As regards Scotland, the draft known as the first book of discipline contemplated only monthly communion but was not practiced and the book of common order suggested monthly communion. Chemnitz (1979:132) commenting on frequency says: -

*Christ did not want the use of this sacrament to be bound either to a certain time or to certain days except that Paul says that the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated when the church gathers to commemorate the death (1 Cor. 11:18-26). But it is certain that God wants us to use this sacrament not only once as we are baptized, but as often and frequently (1 Cor. 11:26). It is not for any man to give a specific answer to this, either with a number or with a certain measure other than as often as troubled conscience feels and recognizes that it needs those benefits that is offered in the supper for comfort and strengthening. Consciences are therefore not to be forced, but aroused to frequent use of this supper by earnest admonition and consideration of how necessary and likewise how salutary and profitable the use of this supper is for us. But he that does not attend this most holy table thereby clearly show that he/she, is a sinner in name rather than in fact, namely, that he is one who neglects and despises the command of his Savior who says: "eat and drink, and do this as often."*

The above quotation suggests that the Lord's Supper has to be celebrated with frequency in order to show its importance. This indicates that there is no

binding requirement to the frequency of the celebration of this sacrament. The same regularity should be practiced in the church of Blantyre Synod in order to justify the exclusion of all other ceremonies from a central place in the church. The researcher suggests that Christians must have the Lord's Supper frequently in order to sustain and confirm their faith. Blantyre Synod Christians must realize that in the Supper they draw strength from the Lord, there is cleansing through his precious blood as symbolized by the cup, and there is healing through his broken body, which is symbolized by the bread. The Bible says that by his stripes we are healed (Is.53:5, 1 Pt 2:24). Therefore the Blantyre Synod Christians must know that through the celebration of the Lord's Supper Christians can receive healing physically and emotionally, as well as spiritually if they appropriate it by faith.

Wainwright (1971:76) believes that Pliny's letter to Trojan (10:96) may be interpreted to mean that Christians met on Sunday. Probably the weekly idea according to Buchanan (1972:68) came with the disciples when they commemorated the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Even after getting all this evidence, the question remains, "How often should the Lord's Supper be observed?" Grudem (1999:80) observes that Jesus himself said, "as often as we will till Christ comes." The Bible gives no rule as to how often we should have it. The direct teaching of scripture was "as often as" In the early years this was complied with daily, as well as less frequently, since the Lord said as often as and they took him at his word. McNeil

(1953:1452) seems to agree that the Lord's Supper has to be frequently celebrated among all Christians. Believers might frequently return in memory to Christ's passions so that by such remembrance they sustain and strengthen their faith and proclaim his goodness.

Roguet (1954:81) observes that the Passover was commemorated annually. In the New Covenant, Easter is the annual renewal of the New Covenant and it comprises of eating the true lamb, which is Christ in the Lord's Supper. He further believes that the Christians' Passover is not only celebrated each year. Instead, it is celebrated every week, every Sunday. This way Christians commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to O'Donovan, (1995:169) the Lord's Supper should be celebrated often enough to keep the truth of the Lord fresh in the hearts of his people.

Schmidt (1989:184) suggests that in the Apostolic Church the Eucharistic act of breaking bread together was seen as a regular activity of fellowship, even a daily activity. Relating this to the issue of abstention, it is suggested that the church of Blantyre Synod should make an effort to celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly in all Presbyteries. For when Christians meet regularly at the Lord's Table, they renew their strength and deepen their faith in Christ.

All communicants ought to partake of the Lord's Supper regularly. If they do not it is a sign of disobedience that is signified in withdrawal from fellowship with fellow Christians. However, in the church of Blantyre Synod, the demand

for participation must be made, but must be made in the form of a gracious invitation and admission rather than a legal enactment. This very reason should rouse and impel us the more to partake of it frequently, especially since we know that the son of God gradually kindles increases and strengthens repentance and faith in us more and more through this means for this medicine has been prepared and provided for the sick who acknowledge their infirmity and seek counsel and help.

Very significant in the quotation of Chemnitz (1979:132) is the fact that there is a connection between Christ and the body of his people on earth, that to eat and drink the Lord's Supper when the church is in a divided state is to sin against the body and the blood of the Lord. Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:12 observes that one cannot sin against fellowship without also sinning against Christ. Thus, self-examination is in order with a view toward maintaining, and not violating, the unity of the body that is mandatory in the remembrance of the meal. Various visitations of God upon the saints occurred here because of selfish, loveless actions that resulted in divisions in the body (1 Cor.11:30). Thus repentance is in order so that the body would be healed and again reflect the oneness we have in Christ (1 Cor.11:31,32). The point at issue in this section is that christians are to partake the Lord's Supper regularly in order to maintain their relationship with their God through Jesus Christ.

The point that is being made here is that in order to bring the problem of abstention to an end the it is suggested that the Lord's Supper should be

celebrated frequently at least once in every month. This will assist christians to understand what the Lord's Supper is all about.

### **5.6 Preparation for the Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper is understood as an act of worship where union between God and humankind is closest and as such, preparation has always been most important to christians before the service. The researcher agrees with Clay (1979:7) that christians should attend the Lord's Supper and not leave it to whether they feel like it or not. Partaking the Lord's Supper is not a matter of how one is feeling but of obeying Christ's command, "Do this in remembrance of me."

In the Synod of Blantyre, many christians abstain from the Lord's Table. One reason for such is that they have never realized the conditions they must fulfill if they are to partake of the Lord's Supper. Another reason is that they have never understood its meaning. The researcher feels that abstention from the Lord's Table might have a weakening effect upon the life and witness of the whole church. In the church of Blantyre Synod only gentle persuasion and personal witness can deal with abstention.

In the preparation for the Lord's Supper, the idea is to pray and observe personal discipline when preceding the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Paul gives solemn warnings to the to "unworthy" partakers of the Lord's Supper.

However, the aim is to ensure our fitness to participate and thus enjoy the blessings. Schmidt (1989:77) believes that the spirit in which Christians approach the Lord's Table is of much importance. Calvin (1979:120) suggests that this is mostly done through self-examination and confession. The scripture in Matthew 13:58 says, unless we go in the right spirit Christ cannot help us, just as he could do great works among people who did not believe in him.

According to the Roman Catholics, preparations consist of auricular confession. Calvin (1979:250-253) states that the Priests order all those who are about to receive the supper to examine their lives carefully and anxiously so that they may not burden all their sins in the ear of the priest. Helm (1982:60) seems to agree with Calvin that preparation is viewed in line with confession. In his view, he states that:

*We are all sinners by nature, therefore we are held under the yoke of sin. Nevertheless, if the whole man lies under the power of sin, surely it is necessary that the stoutest bond restrain the will that is its chief seat. Paul says, it would not make sense that "it is God who it at work to will in us" (Phil 2:13), if any will preceded the grace of the spirit. Away with all that, preparations may bubble about. For even if believers sometimes ask that their heirs be conformed to obedience to God's law as David in a number of passages does.*

Calvin believes that if one wants to derive proper benefit from the Lord's Supper, he must bring faith and repentance (1979:250). Calvin further says that through repentance love is included for there is no doubt that a person who acknowledges Christ will also give whole-heartedly to the promotion of the unity which Christ has commended to us. However, it is not perfect faith or repentance is required. This is so because some people in the church of

Blantyre Synod, being far too insistent upon perfection, which cannot be found everywhere, are putting a barrier between themselves and the supper.

The original church catechism in the Book of Common Prayer asked this question: 'what is required of them who come to the Lord's supper? And the answer was: "To examine themselves whether they repent truly of their former sins steadfastly purposing to lead a new life; have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of his death, and be in charity with all people." Calvin (in Leith 1993:178) seems to believe that by partaking of the Lord's Supper communicants receive double grace, namely that of being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness. Secondly, that sanctified by Christ's Spirit they may cultivate a blameless and pure life.

What is needed in the preparation is self-examination and after that, Christians must realize that they are justified by God's righteousness. Communicants of Blantyre Synod must be assured that God receives them into his favor as righteous people. They are guests worthy of approaching the Lord's Table. By this, we mean their sins have been remitted and are accounted righteous by his grace.

In the 1936 order of service book, Clay (1979:8) notes that the minister says to those who came to receive the Holy Communion: "Ye therefore that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of

God, and walking from hence forth in his holy ways; draw near with faith and take this Holy sacrament to your comfort; and make your humble confession to Almighty God...”

The above words remind the christians of Blantyre Synod that a very important act of preparation before receiving the Holy Communion is self-examination. This is to say christians must look at themselves to see how far they are, or for that matter are not, and letting Jesus control their lives. In other words, they should find out how they are getting along with their lives as committed christians. In this regard, a committed christian is the one who has accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour. However, this has, or should have marked effects upon one's character. Paul in Galatians 5:22 gives an answer to what christian character is when he says; “the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self control.”

However, a workable act of self-examination is to ask ourselves some searching questions in order to discover how far these qualities or “fruits of the spirit” are present in our own life. As Paul told the Corinthians: “Every one should examine himself/herself first, and then eat the bread and drink the cup” (1 Cor. 11:28). Benoit (1958:41) advises christians to abandon themselves to God who knows them rather than analyzing themselves and scrutinizing every corner of their conscience. Blantyre Synod christians are to examine themselves and then abandon themselves to God and rely on his forgiveness and partake of the Lord's Supper.

Buchanan (1972:70) believes that there is no possible preparation for communion. He believed that it is difficult to find perfect preparation for communion because this would be a work while acceptance is by grace. He seems to suggest that preparation should be a private practice carried out by the discipline of an individual.

However what is necessary for the preparation is that christians should be aware of their commitment and involvement with fellow christians as they meet at the Lord's table every time. What is significant in the preparation is to respond in faith.

Wainwright (1971:80) believes that judgment takes place in the Lord's Supper according to the way in which a person responds when confronted by Christ. Denney (1959:281) believes that Christ made himself a sacrifice for our sins. The condemnation of sin which divine justice demands has been carried out in the death of Jesus, in which Father and Son cooperated for the sake of humankind's salvation. It is therefore the will of the Father and of Jesus the Savior who is an appointed judge that people should be acquitted. Thus, in the preparation for the Lord's supper the only condition is to believe in the Son and the One who sent him (John 3:18, 5:25) which includes recognition that the death of Christ was the divine condemnation of all sin, a recognition manifested in repentance for one's own sin. Relating this to the issue of abstention, communicants must realise that by giving their bodies to Christ in

the Lord's Supper a confession is made. Cavanaugh (1998:123) observes that the Lord's Supper requires a confession, that Jesus is Lord of all and that our bodies belong to him.

In the case under study, the idea of preparation for the Lord's Supper is not clarified. Because of that, Christians are not aware of what is expected of them in the preparations for the Lord's Table. For instance, it is not stated whether those who are not married in church should partake of the Lord's Supper or not. Because of uncertainties, Christians use their own reasons as excuses for abstaining from the Lord's Table.

The researcher's observations on the problem of abstention are that Christians are not aware of the orders of the liturgy as a result they stay away. On this point of preparation, it is suggested that the church of Blantyre Synod bring to an end the serious and terrifying tone of the preparation service of the Lord's Supper, which makes the communicants in the congregation frightened of their total unworthiness. Instead, the Blantyre Synod Christians must attend the Lord's Supper knowing that participation in the Liturgy serves as one way of preparation for the Lord's Table. It is suggested that the words "Lord have mercy" represent not only man's sinfulness, but also the Christians' penitence for their sins (Rom.3:23). It is understood that these words are an invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the participants. Therefore, Christians should attend the Lord's Supper, what is expected of them is to respond in faith and then through dependence on Christ's life, they should prepare their hearts so that they might

appropriate what Christ has provided. Blantyre Synod Christians should know that “repentance to God and ...faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21) is not the only way that leads Christians to conversion but is also the attitude which leads them to sanctification. Therefore repentance and faith are the ingredients in the preparation for the Lord’s Table. It is believed that when communicants approach the Lord’s Table in this way, the deepened fellowship becomes real.

### **5.7 Responses to the Lord’s Supper**

In the celebration of the Lord’s Supper Placher (2001:126) believes that the inclusiveness of the supper means not only that all should share together but also that all are welcome. The point that he wants to make is that in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, what is important is the response to the invitation. Kevan (1966:54) states that the Lord’s Supper reflects the degree of personal transformation achieved. He believes that at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper the communicant is empowered and nourished by the Spirit and becomes a changed person. In other sense, the transforming results of the Lord’s Supper should rather be seen in the daily life of the communicant. The communicant knows the awesome gift that he/she has received and shares it with others. In this case, the Lord’s Supper indicates our equal dependence upon Christ.

By receiving the body and the blood of Christ, the partakers receive the gift of the Spirit binding believers to work in harmony with one another. In this manner, the Blantyre Synod Christians must realize those who partake but neglect their responsibility to God and to humankind are like Judas who betrayed Jesus.

Equally important in the celebration of the Lord's Supper is having faith in Christ. For Calvin, faith is imperfect of itself; it is unstable and changeable, otherwise humankind would not continue to be sinners as long as they live on earth. He stresses that it is precisely because faith remains imperfect that believers need the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In this case taking faith seriously, for Calvin, means being aware of the conditions necessary for partaking the Lord's Supper. In this condition, Calvin believes that a communicant needs to be alert all the time so that he/she should not be distracted from his/her obedience to the Lord's command of the Lord's Supper.

Benoit (1958:18) believes that the Lord's Supper is thus for a communicant like a transfusion. The spirit of Christ is transfused into our spirit; Christ's life becomes ours so that thereafter it is his life that dwells in us. If we perform the act of eating with faith there takes place a true communion of Christ with us.

For Clay (1979:8) everything is through Christ at his table. This is to say that it is at the Lord's Table that the communicant incorporates the blessings of Christ. In John 6:58 Christ says as he lives through the father, "so he who eats me he/she shall eat because of me." Moreover, Kevan (1979:25) observes that

the Lord's Supper is a vehicle of peace to believers; it brings *koinonia* to the church. In this case, the Lord's Supper stands as an expression of fellowship. This is demonstrated in the Lord's Supper when all members partake of the same body. Blantyre Synod communicants must realize that refraining from eating at the Lord's Supper because of beliefs and taboos is dangerous to the fellowship of the body. In other words, it makes the Lord's Supper rite into something shallow and meaningless.

The communicants however are not left alone to fight against their temptations; Clay (1979:2) does not see the communicants struggling without receiving strength from God. The Lord's Supper in this manner becomes a comfort to the believer, and nourishment, which equips the communicant for spiritual battle. The strength of the food lies in the fact that we eat and drink the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. It is Christ as food that enables the communicant to fight against the devil. For Calvin, once the communicants partake of the Lord's Supper Christ dwells within them and therefore evil would flee. The blood of the Lord when received in the right manner drives away the devil from us and calls to us angels and the Lord of angels (Inst.17:4:9).

The central theme in the celebration of the Lord's Supper is faith and unity, which binds communicants together. However, a response that is worthy of the table is made when the communicant recognizes what he/she has received. At the Lord's Table, the communicants receive the body of Christ and other members are also glorified through contact with the body. This makes life a

true gift for others, because the Lord's Supper erases bitterness, resentments, regret and revenge as well as all jealousies and rivalries. The Lord's Supper transforms our past into a fruitful gift for the future and makes the communicants life one that can build the life of the community.

Blantyre Synod Christians must recognize that what they receive from the Lord's Table is the "cup of blessing." Through this cup, humankind has been freed from its errors and bondages and the truth of Christ has been unveiled. It is at the Lord's Table that communicants acknowledge that their failures have been not only personal but also communal, so that we stretch out our hands not only to God but also to our neighbour, hoping to have his forgiveness and love. By eating the bread and drinking the wine, Christians ask that God's kind of loving may be theirs. They ask for a new understanding and for God's gifts. It is believed that communicants extend the compassionate hand of charity and commitment towards both Christ and one another.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have seen that the Lord's Supper may be a call to the giving of ourselves to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. In the Lord's Supper, the Lord confronts each individual in judgment and salvation. The continuing existence of Christ's body and his future are assured as long as the community gathers to celebrate his death. This assures us that the Lord's Supper is the foundation and criterion of the unity of the church.

## CHAPTER 6

### APPLICATION

The study confirms that the Lord's Supper is the central celebration of the christians' liberation. In the Lord's Supper, christians celebrate Christ's total commitment to the human kind by sharing in a meal together. Here the whole drama of the passion and resurrection is re-enacted. The church celebrates the Lord's Supper to remember the love of Christ as demonstrated on the cross (Lk. 22:19). This implies that the Lord wants christians to partake of the Holy Communion so that they might be reminded of his wonderful love, his victory over death and his second coming. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper the bread, which is broken reminds christians that Christ's body had been broken for them. At the same time the wine reminds christians of Christ's blood which was shed for humankind as a sin offering (1.Pet 3:18).

In participation to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, communicants offer themselves through the elements and are sanctified by the Spirit. By receiving the Lord's Supper communicants testify about the saving power of "the Passover Lamb" of God, Jesus. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper christians communicate with Jesus. They eat the bread and drink the wine as a symbol that they are united to the head of the church, Christ.

This study discovered that in the church of Blantyre Synod christians abstain from the Lord's Supper due to various reasons. However it is confirmed that the reasons stated in chapter 2 should not be considered as valid reasons for staying away from the Lord's Supper. It is suggested that christians do not

partake of the Lord's Supper because they do not know exactly why the Lord's Supper is celebrated. Christians must be taught that to make ones communion is to bear witness to faith in such a way that attendance is not Therefore christians of Blantyre Synod must partake of the Lord's Supper.

The Blantyre Synod church therefore must teach christians that the Lord's Supper is an offer of grace not condemnation and that in any case christians must come to the Lord's Table so that they may grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. In the issue of abstention what is required is that communicants should offer themselves sincerely to Christ so that they might be cleansed from their sins. This can be done through true confession of sins. Thus as christians come to the Lord's Table in penitence and faith they find forgiveness.

## CHAPTER 7

### EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 7.1 Introduction

In chapter 2 the reasons for abstention are stated. This chapter attempts to give some resolutions to the problem of abstention. In the whole issue of communicants abstaining from the Lord's Table, it appears that no measures have been put in place to stop abstention. The church has ignored the causes of abstention. That alone is a sign of failure of the administration of the church. Therefore, it is suggested that Blantyre Synod should look into this matter seriously and come up with valid resolutions. Looking at how this issue has been handled, the Blantyre Synod church seems to forget that this issue affects even the future generations. The abstention of communicants from the Lord's Supper might cause the unity of the church to be questioned. This is a challenge to the Synod of Blantyre. However, bearing in mind that the church of God is eschatological and culture is dynamic the following recommendations are being made.

#### 7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

**7.2.1** It is recommended that the Blantyre Synod church through her ministers should intensively instruct communicants to understand that the Lord's Supper is not magical but symbolic. It strengthens the faith of the communicants. This faith is exercised during the reception of the

consecrated bread and wine and so christians grow in the assurance of the belief in God and in union with Christ.

**7.2.2** Findings revealed that communicants do not partake of the Lord's Supper because of the misbehaviour of the ministers. It is recommended that ministers should be exemplary and practice integrity among christians.

**7.2.3** It is indicated on page 19 that sexuality is one of the reasons for abstention. For example in chapter 3, it is indicated that spouses regard themselves as impure when they have sexual relations a night before the communion service. It is recommended that Blantyre Synod christians should not be too legalistic in attitude and observance to follow Mosaic Law but should exercise the importance of justification by faith.

**7.2.3** It is recommended that institutions such as Zomba Theological college, Chigodi Women's Center and Chilema Lay training Centre that deal with training of trainers should intensify teaching about Holy Communion in order to deal with the problem of ignorance.

**7.2.4** Unworthiness was one of the common reason that was given by most of the respondents as a valid reason for staying away from the Lord's Table. It is recommended that the church should use doctrinal sermons as teaching tools and vehicles for change. Christians must be taught that their response to God is not to make themselves better, but in humble recognition of their

own unworthiness to cast themselves upon Christ's mercy by trusting entirely to Jesus Christ as their personal saviour.

**7.2.5** It is recommended that the church must address marriage problems and encourage christians to wed in Church in order to partake the Lord's Supper.

**7.2.6** It also indicated that in rural congregations the Lord's Supper is not celebrated regularly. It is recommended that the Lord's Supper be celebrated more frequently both in urban and rural Presbyteries so that christians must understand what the Lord's Supper is all about.

**7.2.7** It is recommended that the Church of Blantyre Synod should study the cultural beliefs and taboos as they exist and being practiced by communicants. It is believed that it is only then that the church can know which taboos and beliefs need to be discarded as being influential to the causes of abstention.

**7.2.8** It is indicated in the problem statement that members do not partake the Lord's Supper because they are neither baptized nor confirmed. It is recommended that members should be encouraged to be baptised and confirmed in order to partake of the Lord's supper for this is the sacrament of initiation that precedes the Lord's Supper. This can be implemented by clarifying the to the christians the requirements for partaking of the Lord's Supper.

**7.2.9** The findings pointed out that there is too much reverence during the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is recommended that civic education be done in all the presbyteries. This can be implemented by holding seminars a week prior to the Lord's Supper.

**7.3** The church must address the christians on requirements for the admission to the Lord's Supper.

Since the New Testament says nothing about any particular conditions for participation of the Lord's Supper beyond a willingness to come to it in faith and with love for other believers, we recommend that the Lord's Supper should be open to all who wish to feed on Christ and profess faith in him. This is to say the un-baptized believers may take part although it would be normal for such people to undergo baptism immediately.

The New Testament welcomes sinners to the Lord's Table but also warns against the unworthy participation in a spirit of love. We recommend that the Blantyre Synod church in maintaining an open table should also remind participants of the solemn implications of the Lord's Supper.

The Synod should look into the need for renewal of Eucharist life and the methodology of teaching the communicants about the significance of the Lord's Supper.

The church should revitalize its policy of counseling those who do not partake of Holy Communion in order to stop the problem of abstention.

Finally, in the church of Blantyre Synod contextualisation is currently one of the biggest challenges. The study also witnessed that the word and sacrament is the heart of the church's life. It was realized that the Blantyre Synod has tended to be one-sided in this regard.

The church of Blantyre Synod, by neglecting the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is always in danger of degenerating from the churches of the word. This is to say that Blantyre Synod has failed to be the church of word and sacrament. The church needs to put in place a delegation as a movement towards a reformed recovery of the fullness of word and sacrament. We suggest that one of the concrete signs of this renewal movement is the more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper within Blantyre Synod.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

As seen in the discussion throughout this study, as well as in the recommendations, the aim was to investigate the reasons for abstention from the Lord's Supper. An attempt has been made to examine the reasons of abstention from the Lord's Table and the findings are as indicated on pages 18-20. Among others, the traditional beliefs and taboos have shown great influence on the abstention. According to the discussions in Chapter 3 it is confirmed that culture offers resources that influence the communicants to hold

firmly the beliefs and taboos. Some suggestions are given in the recommendation in order to stop the problem of abstention from the Lord's Supper.

It is suggested that the answer to the problem of abstention be rather for the church to engage in radical self-examination to investigate all the factors for which abstention is being practiced and quickly eliminate them. Wherever necessary the appropriate structures must be set in all the thirteen presbyteries in order to deal with the problem of abstention. The mechanism are discussed in the application as well as in the recommendations and furthermore the church should set up a "challenge delegation" within the Synod which will challenge the reasons that cause abstention and stimulate the church into eliminating them.

The aim of this study was to investigate the reasons of abstention and through the research findings this work has justified that this problem is currently experienced in the church of Blantyre Synod, and the study has brought the recommendations to challenge the practices. Therefore this study suggests that if the participation of christians to the Lord's Table is to prevail in the church of Blantyre Synod, beliefs and taboos must be dealt with. The findings indicate that the Lord's Supper is obscured by reasons that christians have created for themselves. These reasons among others are taboos and beliefs that separate them from fellowship with Christ. Nevertheless it is suggested that the celebration of the Lord's Supper was and still is a powerful stimulus to the reflection on the death of Jesus, and therefore christians need to partake the

Lord's Supper. The only criterion for partaking in the Lord's Supper is the surrendering of our lives to Jesus in repentance and faith. The Lord's Supper is considered as the foundation of the unity of the church. Therefore Blantyre Synod Christians are to attend the Lord's Supper in order to demonstrate this unity.

Finally, if this work will arouse interest for further research it is recommended that future scholars should include issues on reverence.

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APPENDIX 1  
QUESTIONNAIRE

General questions for Christian's

1. Do you partake Holy Communion?

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2. How often do you partake?

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3. How satisfied are you with the frequency of observation?

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4. If not completely satisfied, why?

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5. If satisfied, what makes you to be satisfied?

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6. What is your opinion regarding communion?

7. Do you personally gain anything thereby and has the Holy Communion

have any meaning to you?

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8. What do you think are the causes of abstention from Holy Communion?

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APPENDIX2

Questions for ministers

1. Do you value communion?

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2. What percentage of members takes communion in your congregation?

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3. Are you pleased with it?

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4. What do you think are the causes of abstention from Holy Communion?

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5. If it is Christians' problem how can it be rectified?

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6. If it is the church's problem what can be the remedy?

7. Should Christians perform traditional rituals?

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Questions for women

1. Do you avoid partaking Holy Communion?

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2. Why do you avoid taking Holy Communion?

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3. If it is because of the teaching of the church, what type of teaching stops people from partaking communion?

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4. If it is because of cultural practices, what type of practices stops people from partaking communion?

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