

## Remembrance (*anamnesis*)

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The Greek word *anamnesis* refers not to an individual act of memory but to a group recollection and appreciation of a series of events. Thus, Josephus says "those close beside him recalled (*anamnesis eiseei*) his exploits and marvelled at such a reversal of fortune" (*Wars* 3, 394), and in *Antiquities* 4, 189 Moses addresses the people saying, "I should be loath to leave you aggrieved by recalling these things to mind" (*eis ten anamnesis*).

The personal act of memory was expressed by *mneia*. New Testament references usually take some form like "I make memory of . . ." as in Romans 1:9; Ephesians 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 3:6; Philippians 1:3; Philemon 4; and 2 Timothy 1:3. *Mnemoneo* was similarly used of personal remembering.

### In Hebrews

There are only four instances of *anamnesis* in the New Testament. Three of them are associated with the institution of the Lord's Supper. The fourth is in Hebrews 10:3, "but in these sacrifices there is a reminder (*anamnesis*) of sin year after year." This refers, as in 10:1, to yearly sacrifices by Israel. Here again the remembering is a corporate remembering.

Paul uses *anamnesis* twice, quoting the words of Jesus in instituting the Lord's Supper. Jesus takes the bread and says, "This is my body (broken) for you; this do in the memory (*anamnesis*) of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24). Then he takes the cup and says, "This cup is the new *diatheke* (testament rather than covenant) in my blood. Do this whenever you drink in the memory (*anamnesis*) of me" (11:25).

The use of *anamnesis* both times shows that Jesus is not calling his followers to subjectively recapitulate their personal contacts with him but to participate in a common represen-

tation of who he was and what he did.

Paul's commentary on the tradition (11:23) is that eating the bread and drinking the cup of the Lord shows the world that Jesus died, and such eating and drinking must not become just another meal (11:26-34). In other words, the Lord's Supper is not to be approached like a Thanksgiving dinner where one might sentimentalize over Thanksgivings the family shared together in the past—or where one might mythologize the First Thanksgiving. It is, instead, to be a communal remembering that Jesus died for the sins of the world. The objective fact rather than a subjective response is to be paramount. Those who participate in the supper and those in the past who have participated in it are not important. It is Jesus Christ who is important in the Lord's Supper.

### In Luke

Like Paul's account, Luke's description of the institution of the Lord's Supper uses *anamnesis*. (The Mark-Matthew accounts lack the word and all else that would indicate that the meal was to be repeated.) The best manuscripts—all the major uncials except D—read "And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, 'This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance (*anamnesis*) of me'" (22:19-20).

In Paul the Lord's Supper stands out as one of the few events in the life of Jesus which are mentioned. In Luke it is just one of many events recorded. It is subordinate to the passion and resurrection stories. It takes up less space than the birth narratives. And yet it is given the status of an *anamnesis*, an event to be corporately remembered.

### Modern Implications

The New Testament presents the Lord's Supper not as a *mneia*, a per-

sonal memory, but as an *anamnesis*, a corporate remembering of Christ's death for the sins of the world.

Over the centuries, the subjective appreciation of Christ's sacrifice has tended to overshadow the objective passion. The Latin text of the *Augsburg Confession* says, "The Mass was instituted that faith on the part of those who use the sacrament should remember what benefits are received through Christ and should cheer and comfort anxious consciences" (24:30). Calvin goes farther and says, "Pious souls can derive great confidence and delight from this sacrament, as being a testimony that they form one body in Christ, so that everything which is his they may call their own" (*Institutes* IV. 2). This is the interpretation of the sacrament which is popular today. Ask Christians why they commune and most of them will speak in terms of what they get out of the ceremony, not in terms of a corporate remembering of the death of Christ. No one should deny that there are personal spiritual benefits derived from receiving the Lord's Supper. But the sacrament was not instituted that we might receive those benefits. They should be secondary, not primary.

A proper celebration of the Lord's Supper must focus on the death of Christ for the sins of the world.

The Lord's Supper is not an act of petition; it is an act of preaching the grace of God. As channels of God's love to the world, we are strengthened and made joyful, but we do not serve as channels in order to get the benefits but because we love the Lord.

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