

The Bible and the Didache

I. Summary

“If you can shoulder the Lord’s yoke in its entirety, then you will be perfect; but if that is too much for you, do as much as you can” (D 6). The notion of doing or performing what is asked is prevalent within this passage and in Christian teachings. The assigned selections portray an assortment of religious beliefs, rituals, and events. The opening chapters of the Didache illustrate two distinct paths: the “Way of Life” and the “Way of Death” (D 1). First, the path of life is expressed through a system of warnings that urge the reader to be obedient and enduring. One focus appears to be that of the suppression of “the carnal appetites of the body,” which appear to be a source of conflict with this path (D 1). The body appears to be a source of opposition to the path of life, and indulging in these appetites hinders progress. The *Didache* makes a point to list several items of concern relating to the carnality of the body, and temptations that should be avoided. For example, in chapter three warns against “the roving eye” and “anger,” which lead may lead to inappropriate sexual promiscuity or even murder (D4). This type of council warrants an urgency for moral behavior and civility in Christian culture. Self control is essential to this path of life as seen through the opposite path of Death, which depicts a lack of control. Maintaining control over these physical desires gives weight to spiritual matters. The description of the Way of Death appears to recapture in short much of what was mentioned previously. Acting as a guide to right action the descriptions of the Way of Life or Death portray a kind of moral codex for Christians. Similar to the New Testament’s Sermon on the Mount, these paths describe what actions are

appropriate and adequate to achieve either life through good moral choices and actions or the opposite to death.

Apart from the chapters on moral conduct, the majority of the assigned texts seemed to touch on a theme of spiritual food through symbols, metaphors, and allegories; the importance of nutrition of the spirit over the body. In the extreme the act of fasting prior to baptism could be a true subordination of body to the spirit (D3). The concept of relinquishing bodily nourishment for that of the spiritual was not entirely unfamiliar to Christianity. The act of fasting, giving up of food and drink for a length of time, is another example of physical nourishment to prove the temperance of the spirit over base needs of the body.

Pointing next to the sixth chapter in John, Jesus who was pressed by a multitude of people miraculously produced enough food from a few loaves of bread and two fishes to feed this large group of thousands. Just as in the Old Testament, manna was delivered to the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, so did Jesus feed the people to depict his connection to the divine (John 6:31-32). This event is significant not because of the miraculous ability to feed the people, but metaphorically that Jesus is “the living bread which came down from heaven” (John 6:51). Establishing Jesus as the deliverer of more than solely the physical needs of the body, he declares his role was to fill the spirit with nourishment, not just the body. Focus shifts from food as a merely a source of physical calories of to a more spiritual tone using common food to convey deeply spiritual sacred meals. Sitting to “eat and drink at [Christ’s] table in [his] kingdom,” portrays a divine spiritual meal in a high place. The imagery overlays the mundane meal to the weight of the spiritual and divine. Continuing on with the theme of spiritual food, the inauguration

of the Eucharist depicts food in a spiritual connection with Jesus.

Matthew and Luke's accounts of the Last Supper a Passover meal was served, as the early Christian followers including Jesus were in keeping of Jewish traditions, but a special ceremony was performed in addition with the blessing and drinking of wine and breaking and eating of bread. During the meal Jesus took bread and broke it inviting his disciples to eat "in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Partaking of the bread in remembrance of the body of Jesus seems to point towards a memory of his own physical actions, character, and teachings, much like those expressed in the Way of Life. He also considered himself the "Bread of life" and by partaking of this bread, the apostles were accepting of this type or model of life behavior (John 6:48). In addition to the symbolism of the bread, the wine represents Jesus' "blood of the new testament (covenant)" that would restore the partaker to a spiritual whole. (Matthew 26:28). Drinking of the wine as a token of a new covenant emphasizes the commitment of the individual. Not to belittle or make light, but a symbolic washing down of the body in commitment or covenant to act in accordance to Jesus' prescribed life style. The Eucharist according to both the Bible and the Didache is a symbolic representation of the body and blood of Christ.

A clear connection between physical and spiritual food can be drawn in Christianity, as well as the Didache, that God "hast given meat and drink to enjoy...,but to us thou has graciously given spiritual meat and drink, together with life eternal through thy Servant(Jesus)" (D10). The figurative language of eating both a physical and spiritual feast connects the need to nourish both the body and spirit with good moral thoughts and actions.

II. Evaluation

The *Didache* and *The Bible* offer images of food in both a physical and spiritual manifestation. The symbolic nature of food as a sustaining force acts as a powerful tool to convey deep spiritual connotations. Since every human being has experience with food and drink, and hunger and thirst, Jesus' metaphor of promising those who come to him "shall never hunger;... and never thirst" is provocatively brilliant (John 6:35). To teach using food provides level of understanding that all of humanity shares, since everyone has suffered the pangs of hunger and the parchedness of thirst. With the promise of a spiritual remedy to very humanized ailments Jesus offers himself as the link between the sacred and mundane after all he is human and divine inseparable. The ingesting of the bread and wine is more than a physical act, since this combined with the blessing joins the mundane with the sacred. John says that those who partake Jesus' emblems "eateth [his] flesh, and drinketh [his] blood, dwelleth in me and I in him," thus communing through food with the sacred. The body and blood of Christ appear to take on mystical properties that connect Christians with the divinity of Christ. (John 6:54-57)

Another theme that can be the depiction of an individual's experience of what can happen to one who is not spiritually fed. Jesus asks a question, during the Passover meal with his apostles, as to which is greater: "he that sitteth at meat or he that serveth," and he answered "he that serveth" (Luke 22:27). In answering his own question Jesus implied that to work is of greater worth than to sit at meat. In the example of Judas Iscariot, who eats with Jesus, but does not partake of him, spiritually, and later betrays him This life depicts the succumbing to the way of death even though Judas ate with Jesus he

neglected the spiritual feasts and thus remained on a physical level. (Matthew 26:21,25).

This example is a outline of experience that even those closest to the source of spiritual behavior are susceptible and free to choose their respective path (life or death).

III. Wider Relevance

In keeping with the context and scope of the semester these two themes of Spiritual food and choice of path seem to change the tone of past discussions of physical sustainability through food to that of a spiritual level. Even Christians were inclined to share in their interdependent culture through the giving of their “first fruits,” “batch of loaves,” and “a tithe” to the poor or holy men depending upon who was in need (D 13). This action falls inline with the theme of sustaining no only their prophets, local leaders, and poor, but their own spiritual sustainability in the offering, it being a personal sacrifice. This action of giving and not coveting, since both the giver and recipient are “joint participators” in their quest of “things immortal” (D 4).

In addition the theme of right moral action in providing a sustainable model for culture, the idea of spiritual food also adds a new dimension to the definition of sustainability. Jesus announced that “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom,” which symbolized his ability to drink now physically awaiting a latter spiritual drink (Matthew 26: 29). Sustainability connects us not only to our food in a physical manner by providing us sustenance, but in keeping with the values of sustainability we are connected to what we are partaking of in a spiritual manner as well.