

THE VARIETY OF THE LANGUAGE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER
IN THE *EUCARISTIAM INSTITUIT*¹
(MATTHEW 26.26-29, MARK 14.22-25, LUKE 22.15-20, AND 1 CORINTHIANS 11.23-26)

The purpose of this paper is to explore the language used in the New Testament about what commonly is called communion or the Lord's supper. It will be argued that, contrary to traditional practice in many Churches of Christ, the New Testament traditions reflect a broader scope of ideas and wording about the Lord's supper. The last supper of our Lord, as it is sometimes called but never referred to as such in scripture,² is set within the context of the celebration of the Jewish Passover. In this context of what appears to be a seder meal, we find terminology about the blessing of (*eulogeo*) and giving thanks for (*eucharisteo*) bread and wine. But this celebration about the deliverance of the people of God from bondage in Egypt takes on a new meaning with its radical interpretation by Jesus. On this occasion, Jesus identifies himself with the foods or nutriments of the meal. In this way, just before his death by crucifixion at Golgotha, Jesus proclaims his solidarity with the pain and suffering of the world and sets in motion a powerful means of reconciliation to God.³ According to Jesus, as he speaks about the blood being poured out in his death, it is "for many for the forgiveness of sins." And, Jesus adds as he alludes to his resurrection, it is in anticipation of the celebration "in my Father's kingdom."

¹This is the heading for *Die Einsetzung des Herrenmahles* ("the institution of the Lord's supper") in Aland (1993), 284. Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise indicated.

²A better description might be "the first supper of the new covenant" or "the beginning of the festive meal of the Lord."

³See comments in Barron (2021), 71; Hicks (2002), 139-140. Paul (1960), 375, 377, says that "in the compressed lines of the Institution we seem to have a summary of the plan of redemption. . . . Here within a brief compass in the Institution of the Supper the whole panorama of redemption is set out."

There are only a few, brief passages of scripture that mention the “institution” of the Lord’s supper—Matthew 26.26-29, Mark 14.22-25, Luke 22.15-20, 1 Corinthians 11.23-26, and reflected perhaps in John 6.51-58.⁴ These passages, due to their terseness, have produced a multitude of conflicting interpretations that have divided Christians since the beginning of the church.⁵ It is not my intent to discuss any development of the various interpretations of the Lord’s supper. Rather, it is my desire to look at the language used in the New Testament about the Lord’s supper and raise the issue of whether or not Churches of Christ have incorporated fully the same language in their weekly observances of communion.⁶

In the passages listed above, we learn about the supper of the disciples with their Master and about the communion of believers in Christ with one another. We hear about the blessing of the bread and the wine and the giving of thanks for the foods or nutrients of the meal. We hear the words of Jesus that identify his body, which is given, and his blood, which is poured out or shed, with the bread and the wine—“this is my body . . . this is my blood.” We are told about the instructions, typical of the leader of the Passover seder, that Jesus gave to his followers—to eat (the bread) and to drink (the cup, the fruit of the vine, the wine). We also are told about the connection that Jesus makes with his death or his blood, which is poured out or shed “for many,” and “the covenant.” Similarly, we are told about the anticipation of Jesus, after his death, to

⁴For detailed discussion of the OT background for these passages, see Beale and Carson (2007), 90-91, 229-232, 381-383, 736.

⁵See the recent work by Hoping (2019), 58ff.

⁶Of course, meaning and understanding do effect practice, and especially so concerning a central tenet of Christian faith such as the Lord’s supper. Further, since Churches of Christ are congregational in polity and practice and do not adhere to a set or standard liturgy, it may be impossible to ascertain any common language for the Lord’s supper apart from trends and personal judgments based on subjective impressions. Obviously, I cannot render any judgment on the practice of the numerous churches that I have never visited.

celebrate with his disciples “in my Father’s kingdom.” He says, “I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” And, in their writings to fellow believers, we are informed by Luke and Paul about the “new covenant” and the command from Jesus, “Do this in remembrance of me.” To this command from the Lord, Paul adds this explanation, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” What we have in these few scriptures is simple but profound, a core practice of Christianity that has been observed since its initiation in that Jerusalem upper room (see Mark 14.15; Luke 22.12).⁷ As Paul Maier says, “With these words, Jesus inaugurated what became the longest continuous meal in history, for soon his followers would start celebrating what they later called The Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion, in which someone, somewhere in the world, has been offering up bread and wine in a similar manner nearly every moment since.”⁸

⁷In this regard, the statement by Geoffrey London, “Preface” to Leeson (1943), is pertinent: “The Sacrament of the Holy Communion has the simplicity and the complexity of all spiritual truth, as of the Gospel which contains it. Its meaning can be and is grasped by the simple-hearted without conscious analysis; and in the end after study and reflection have done their part, its manifold complexities of meaning are again resolved into an enriched simplicity.”

⁸Maier (1991), 126-127. Compare Barron (2021), 2, who writes: “In one of his sermons on the Eucharist, the great English Catholic preacher John Knox made the following observation. The vast majority of Jesus’ commands—to love one enemies, to turn the other cheek, to forgive seventy times seven times, etc.—have been rather consistently disregarded. . . . However, Knox says, amid all of these commandments honored . . . there is one command of Jesus that has, up and down the centuries, been massively obeyed. Throughout the long history of the Church, through a whole series of dramatic successes and failures, despite the stupidity and wickedness of so many Christians, the command ‘Do this in memory of me’ has been and continues to be obeyed. It is as though Christians, in all of their sin, have realized from the beginning that the spiritual life depends upon the Eucharist the way that physical life depends upon food, oxygen, and water. And so, almost despite themselves, they do what Jesus told them to do in his memory.”

The Lord's Supper as Passover Meal

The exact phrase “the Lord’s supper” is used only one time in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 11.20. This is an early interpretation (ca. AD 55/56) by the apostle Paul about what had become a common and frequent practice by the followers of Jesus.⁹ Another possible indication of early interpretation of the Lord’s supper is Luke’s use of the phrase “breaking the bread” in his Acts of Apostles (ca. AD 60-70).¹⁰ Both Luke and Paul emphasize what should be understood as axiomatic from what we learn by reading the *eucharistiam instituit* in the synoptic gospels, namely, this Christian celebration is a meal. Paul uses the word “supper” (*deipnon*),¹¹ and Luke uses the word “bread” (*artos*)¹² but never refers to the “cup” (*poterion*) in the book of Acts.¹³ The Greek word *deipnon* indicates “the main meal of the day, which would ordinarily be served toward evening.” In the New Testament, it is used “primarily of a formal meal or feast, a banquet” but also is used “in cultic context.” The Greek word *artos* means “bread or loaf of bread” and can be used “of food or nourishment in general, especially in the context of dining.”

⁹For an excellent overview of the background for this early Christian practice, see Barron (2021), 26-38, “The Sacred Meal in the Life and Ministry of Jesus”; cf. Hicks (2002), 53-65.

¹⁰Acts 2.42, 46; 20.7, 11; cf. 27.35 and “festival of Unleavened Bread” in 12.3 and “days of Unleavened Bread” in 20.6; Luke 22.1, 7; 24.30, 35. On Luke’s use of “breaking bread” as a shared meal that may have included focus on the Lord’s supper, see Dunn (1996), 35, 268, 341. He says, “We may assume that on some occasions at least the meal included a shared commemoration of the Last Supper (cf. 1 Corinthians 11.23-26). But Luke has not gone out of his way to make this plain.” See similar comments by Barrett (1985), 60ff.; Cullmann (1953), 14ff. Hicks (2002), 83-98, however, argues convincingly that the Luke/Acts corpus intends for “breaking bread” to be understood as the Lord’s supper. Barron (2021), 110, calls “breaking bread” NT shorthand for the Eucharist or the Lord’s supper.

¹¹For NT uses of *deipnon*, see Matthew 23.6; Mark 6.21; 12.39; Luke 14.12, 16, 17, 24; 20.46; John 12.2; 13.2, 4; 21.20; 1 Corinthians 11.20, 21; Revelation 19.9, 17.

¹²For the ninety or so uses of *artos* in the NT, see Moulton and Geden (1978), 109-110.

¹³But see Luke 11.39; 22.17, 20, 42. Moulton and Geden (1978), 844; Danker (2009), 295.

Further, “by extension, *artos* is applied to manna and is frequently connected with God’s gift of Jesus Christ as source and sustainer of transcendent life.”¹⁴ In 1 Corinthians 11.20, 21, and in Acts 2.42, 46; 20.7, 11, these words—*deipnon* and *artos*—show that a meal is being eaten by the early disciples of Jesus.

The specific meal in the *eucharistiam instituit* is the Passover, and Jesus is precise and calls the gathering with his closest disciples “this Passover” (*touto to pascha*; Luke 22.15).¹⁵ What Luke defines with the words of Jesus, Matthew and Mark highlight with the preparations that Jesus instructs the disciples to make (see Matthew 26.2, 17, 18, 19; Mark 14.1, 12, 14, 16; cf. Luke 22.1, 7, 8, 11, 13). And the connection with Passover is apparent, since this is the season of the year that brought the Lord and his disciples to Jerusalem (e.g., John 11.55; 12.1; 13.1; 18.28, 39; 19.14; cf. John 2.13, 23; 6.4). Jesus says, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then, after he gives thanks for the cup, he adds, “For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22.15-17). The “it” that Jesus will not eat is the Passover meal itself, as is explained by Jesus as “the fruit of the vine” that he will not drink. And the “it” that will be fulfilled in the kingdom of God is likewise the Passover meal, as is explained by the phrase “until the kingdom of God comes.” Jesus here is not tweaking the meal, that is, Passover versus Lord’s supper. Such an interpretation is to view the record of the meal anachronistically. Jesus rather is telling his disciples that a momentous

¹⁴Danker (2009), 56, 85.

¹⁵See Hicks (2002), 68ff., “The Passover Context of the Last Supper”; cf. from Maier (1991), 125-128, in Appendix One: A Passover Seder? For a different interpretation, see Hoping (2019), 45ff., who argues, wrongly I think, that the Last Supper was a farewell meal of Jesus with his disciples and not the Passover seder.

change is going to take place, a change that involves his suffering and the ushering in of the kingdom of God.¹⁶ Jesus **is** the meal. He **is** the Passover Lamb. Little wonder all three synoptic gospel writers provide no further comment on these terse words of Jesus—“this is my body . . . this is my blood.” What they could not know at all during the supper, they came to accept with wonder after the Lord’s sacrifice and his subsequent resurrection and ascension.¹⁷

For some reason, in our churches we seldom refer to the Lord’s supper as a meal, even though “supper” in our culture implies more than a snack or the tokens of sustenance. Perhaps we think that this demeans the “religious” significance of the observance. Maybe we think it is not a meal in the regular sense. Or, it could be a problem with our tradition, that is, a pinch of cracker and a thimble half filled with grape juice hardly can be called a meal by any account except for starvation rations. Whatever our rationale, we would do well to follow the example of our Lord and think of his supper as a true supper, a meal offered to us by him and shared with him, a meal of **the** Passover Lamb. Paul says, “For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.

¹⁶Compare the reading of Luke’s narrative by Bock (2002), 360-361. He says, “Jesus then notes that he will not celebrate this meal again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom. Jesus is anticipating a day, made possible by his suffering, when the Passover will be celebrated in a context of complete fulfillment. This cannot be a reference to the Lord’s Supper of the church, because even that looks forward to another day when the Lord returns (1 Corinthians 11.26). Jesus appears to be looking to the time of the celebratory banquet table fellowship when all that the Passover represents, along with its tie to his approaching suffering, is realized. . . . Granted, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper quickly broke with its Jewish roots, but that was because Jesus had transformed the meal into a new celebration that led to its being celebrated more than once a year. The meal became a recognition of Jesus’ death and resurrection, a fact that his followers could commemorate on any given worship day.”

¹⁷Paul (1960), 361, observes that “it is not the Bread of Life discourse in John 6 which interprets the breaking of the bread at the Supper, but rather the revelation of ‘the breaking of the body’ upon the cross which throws its light back and illumines his words and actions both at the Supper and in the discourse in the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel.”

Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5.7).¹⁸

The Lord’s Supper as the Body and the Blood of Jesus

In our Lord’s identification of the bread as his body and the cup (i.e., its contents) as his blood, the aspects of a meal remain—eating and drinking. The underlying Greek words for “eat” (*esthio*) and “drink” (*pino*) in the *eucharistiam instituit* are common words and need no further explanation.¹⁹ When Jesus blesses the loaf, he says, “This is my body.” When he offers a thanksgiving for the cup, he notes, “This is my blood.” His words are direct and powerful. Maybe Jesus intended to produce a visceral response in his disciples, to get to the heart of the matter, to avoid being routine or superficial, to drive inward to the very soul, the spiritual center.²⁰ These words of Jesus raise the issue of primary nourishment and sustenance for any

¹⁸Here, “celebrate the festival” is from the verb *heortadzo* (used only here in the NT), meaning to celebrate, keep, or observe a festival. The cognate noun, *heorte*, is used generally of a festival and in the NT is used of Passover or Tabernacles. See Danker (2009), 136; Moulton and Geden (1978), 349-350. On Jesus as the sacrificial lamb in the NT, see John 1.29, 36; Acts 8.32; 1 Peter 1.19; Revelation 5.6, 8, 12, 13; 6.1, 16; 7.10, 14, 17; 8.1; 12.11; 13.8; 14.1, 4, 10; 15.3; 17.14; 19.7, 9; 21.9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22.1, 3; cf. Barron (2021), 58ff.; Longman (2022), 91ff.

¹⁹See Danker (2009), 150, 284, 368; Moulton and Geden (1978), 389-391, 803-804.

²⁰This appears to be the intent of Jesus in his encounter with would-be followers, as recorded in John 6.51-58. The words of Jesus are quite graphic. He states, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” Afterwards, Jesus explained his words to his disciples. “Does this offend you,” he asked. “Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe” (John 6.61-64). Barron (2021), 75-80, calls this passage “The Scandal of John 6.” Compare the comments in Cullmann (1953), 93-101; Foster (2017), 82-84. On the sacraments in the gospel of John, see Dunn (1990), 168-171.

human being.²¹ To tone them down by saying they are metaphorical or symbolic is to miss the point completely.²² And it does not matter if we take his words literally or figuratively.²³ No one who does Christian theology supposes that early Christian practice condoned cannibalism. This is to misunderstand grossly the importance of the words of Jesus as he intended them to be understood and as reported by his followers. While these words of Jesus—“this is my body . . . this is my blood”—may be mysterious and perhaps even mystical, they are relevant to human need and in that regard understandable. You can call it real presence, true presence, consubstantiation, or even transubstantiation if you please, but do not neglect to say the words of Jesus—“this is my body . . . this is my blood”—when celebrating the Lord’s supper.²⁴ This is something that a child can understand, and this is the remembrance that Jesus enjoins us to practice—“do this . . .”

²¹See Fletcher, *Things that Last* (2021), 4-7; Schnabel (2018), 212-213.

²²See the brief discussion in Eichhorn (2007), 81-85, “The Real Body and Blood of Christ in the Communion.” Compare Barron (2021), 73-107, “If It’s A Symbol, To Hell With It,” which he concludes with these words: “This is why I tell people to be very careful when they approach the Eucharist. Were the elements simply symbols—inventions of our own spiritual creativity and desire—they would pose no particular threat. But since they are the power and presence of God, they will change the one who consumes them. When the communicant says ‘Amen’ and receives the proffered host and chalice, he’d better be prepared to live an eternal life.”

²³The problem, I think, is when you turn into a dogma, to be promulgated and defended at all costs, what you believe about these direct words of Jesus. But, no matter what, we should not let that deter us from embracing and using these words in our celebration of the Lord’s supper.

²⁴Bloomberg (2009), 386, makes an important point when he writes, “Later Christian theology would erect elaborate theological edifices on Jesus’ simple words here, debating such issues as transubstantiation, consubstantiation, and so on (i.e., when and how the bread and wine actually become Christ’s body and blood). All of this is anachronistic in the historical context, however.” See also the brief discussion in Hicks (2002), 72-76. To ease the tension, some suggest that Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic. But it is irrelevant whether or not the ipsissima verba of Jesus were spoken in Aramaic, since we have only his words in Greek in the received biblical text.

When observing the Lord's supper, why are we afraid to say the same words that Jesus said? Do we think we will be misunderstood? Was Jesus misunderstood by his disciples when he used these words? Do we infer that we will be accused of being Anglican, Episcopalian, or Roman Catholic in our practice of the Lord's supper? I have been in many Sunday services in Churches of Christ during my sixty plus years, but I have never heard the words—"this is my body . . . this is my blood"—used by the officiant at the Lord's table, except for the reading of the *eucharistiam instituit* before the distribution and the partaking of the emblems. Contrariwise, when I was a chaplain in the United States Air Force, I and others who led the Sunday services routinely used these direct words of our Lord during the Lord's supper. We broke the bread and gave it to the congregants with the words—"the body of the Lord given for you." We poured out the wine and gave it to the congregants with the words—"the blood of the Lord shed for you." But for the exception mentioned above, I still am waiting to hear these direct words of Jesus spoken while celebrating the supper of our Lord in a Church of Christ.²⁵

The Lord's Supper as Covenant Celebration

A vibrant and lengthy tradition of covenant exists in the Old Testament, a tradition that is bound securely to the promises of God first to Noah, then to Abraham, to the children of Israel through Moses, eventually to David, and indeed to "all flesh" and "all the nations."²⁶ The basic word is *berith* which occurs nearly three hundred times in the Hebrew Bible and means an "agreement, alliance, or covenant."²⁷ It is "a solemn promise made binding by an oath, which

²⁵If I remember correctly, in a recent online service at Otter Creek Church in Brentwood, Tennessee, the sister who led the Lord's supper used these direct words of Jesus.

²⁶See Burrows (1946), 10-13; cf. Snaith (1944), 94-130, 175-176.

²⁷Holladay (1971), 48-49. See entries in EHCC (1843), Volume I, 272-274.

may be either a verbal formula or a symbolic action. Such an action or formula is recognized by both parties as the formal act which binds the actor to fulfil his promise.”²⁸ Between humans, covenant can be initiated by either party, but between God and humans, the Lord initiates and graciously offers his covenant, since there is not strict parity between the parties to the covenant.²⁹ So, in scripture (i.e., word of God), God establishes his covenant. He remembers and will not break his covenant. He is bound by the oath he has sworn and is faithful to his covenant and maintains covenant loyalty. God’s covenant is perpetual or everlasting, and since it is between God and imperfect humans, it is a covenant of peace. It is to be kept by and not broken, forsaken, or transgressed by humans. If it is broken by humans, God will execute vengeance for his covenant. As tangible and visible reminders of the covenant, there are the book of the covenant, two tablets of the covenant, the tabernacle of the covenant, the ark of the covenant (with a curtain before and a mercy-seat over), the salt of the covenant, and the blood of the covenant. Above all else, in scripture (i.e., word of God), covenant belongs to the Lord, as it is called “my covenant” on numerous occasions. In other words, our God is a God of covenant.³⁰

²⁸George E. Mendenhall, “Covenant,” IDB (1962), Volume 1, 714.

²⁹Woods (2022) observes that in ancient Near Eastern literature, this distinction exists in the suzerainty treaty between rulers and their subjects versus the parity treaty between rulers and other rulers or between individuals of equal social rank.

³⁰See entries for “covenant” at Bible Gateway Online.

In the *eucharistiam instituit*, Matthew and Mark mention “covenant” in connection with the blood of Jesus, while it is Paul and Luke who introduce the idea of the Lord’s supper as celebration of “the new covenant” (*he kaine diatheke*).³¹

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26.27-28).

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14.23-24).

And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22.20).

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Corinthians 11.25).

None of the writers elaborate on the association of a meal—eating and drinking—with formal consent to, or ratification of, a covenant.³² But this is implied in the context of the Passover celebration of Jesus with his disciples. They do, however, highlight the emphasis of Jesus on his blood as “poured out” (*ekchunnomenon*)³³ for many for the forgiveness of sins. But the pouring out of the blood of Jesus, what he himself calls “the blood the covenant” (Matthew and Mark), or

³¹Moulton and Geden (1978), 201-202, list about thirty-three entries for *diatheke* in the NT, half of which come from the book of Hebrews. Danker (2009), 90, defines *diatheke* as “a formal arrangement or agreement for disposing of something in a manner assuring continuity . . . with focus on testamentary aspect, *last will and testament* (Galatians 3.15; Hebrews 9.16f.), and with focus on OT perspective of God’s unilaterally assumed obligation to confer a special blessing (Matthew 26.28; Luke 1.72; Acts 7.8; Romans 9.4; 2 Corinthians 3.6; Ephesians 2.12; Hebrews 7.22; Revelation 11.19).” For “new covenant,” see Luke 22.20; 1 Corinthians 11.25; 2 Corinthians 3.6; Hebrews 8.8, 13; 9.15; 12.24; cf. Jeremiah 31.31 (Hebrew, *berith hadasah*).

³²See, for example, Genesis 26.28-30 and the comments in Woods (1972), 68. Compare Barron (2021), 17-26, 47-57, “The Sacred Meal in the Old Testament,” as well as his discussion of the OT connection between covenant and sacrifice. Hicks (2002), 25-50, also surveys the OT covenant meals and their sacrificial aspects in “Communion in Israel: Eating with God.”

³³All the synoptic gospel writers (Matthew 26.28; Mark 14.24; Luke 22.20) use the same passive participle form of *ekchunno*, a late form of *ekcheo*, meaning “pour out” or, with reference to blood, “shed” (cf. Matthew 23.35; Luke 11.50; Acts 22.20; Romans 3.15; Revelation 16.6). Danker (2009), 120; Moulton and Geden (1978), 322.

“the new covenant in my blood” (Paul and Luke), seems to be part of that ritual meal that solidified the new compact or covenant between God and humans.³⁴ And because of its grand effects (i.e., bringing peace between God and humans),³⁵ this work of Jesus is to be celebrated with a meal in this manner (i.e., “do this in remembrance of me” in Paul and Luke). But like “this is my body . . . this is my blood” in the *eucharistiam instituit*, these words that connect the blood of Jesus to the new covenant are terse and direct. They state simply but forcefully something that God promised to do through several of his Old Testament prophets (e.g., Jeremiah 31.31), because the people of Judah and Israel had broken covenant with their Lord. This magnificent work of the heavenly Father was about to take place right before the very

³⁴For “blood of the covenant,” see Exodus 24.8; cf. Ezekiel 44.7; Zechariah 9.11; Hebrews 9.18, 20; 10.29; 12.24; 13.20.

³⁵On the work of Jesus and his blood as making peace between God and humans, see Ephesians 2.14, 15, 17; Colossians 1.20; Hebrews 13.20.

eyes of the followers of Jesus, in Jerusalem, namely, the ratification of God's new covenant with humans through the sacrificial blood of Jesus, his Son.³⁶

While we do not completely ignore the idea of covenant when observing the Lord's supper, we do not emphasize or give prominence to this significant connection. For some reason (I am not sure why), we do not seem to be comfortable with covenant theology. Is it due to its connection with rigid Reformed or Calvinistic thought, to certain strains of bizarre Premillennial or Dispensational teaching? Or, are we afraid of seeing in this meal for God's new covenant something different than our traditional truncated practice for the supper of our Lord? Thus, we think that we would not be following the New Testament practice to the letter. It is hard to know our rationale for minimizing this role of covenant in the Lord's supper, but we do. How often does the officiant at the Lord's table in our churches indicate that the wine (i.e., fruit of the vine or grape juice) is the blood of the covenant or the new covenant in the blood of Jesus that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins? Of course, we give perfunctory adherence to

³⁶Barron (2021), 65-67, aptly remarks, "This association [between the Lord's supper, the covenant, and sacrifice] is far from arbitrary or accidental, for it was made by Jesus himself, as he was summing up the meaning of his life in the company of his disciples on the night before his death. . . . In sum, the words of Jesus over the bread and the cup at the Last Supper effected a stunning gathering of the variety of strands of covenantal and sacrificial theology in the Hebrew Scriptures. The covenants and their accompanying sacrifices that mark the entire religious history of the Jews are being recapitulated, Jesus says, in me and my sacrifice. He undoubtedly knew that the horror of the Crucifixion would be so stark as to block any attempt to assign meaning to it. And thus, in the relative safety and intimacy of the upper room, Jesus calmly and in advance provided the interpretive key to the climatic action of his life. Why did Jesus invite his disciples to consume the bread and wine that he had radically identified with his sacrifice? In Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant, Yahweh had said, 'I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts' (Jeremiah 31.33). This means that the everlasting agreement would be written not on stone tablets but in the flesh of the people's hearts; it would not be an oppressive law externally imposed but a rule congruent with the deepest longing of the human soul. Jesus thus wanted them to ingest his sacrifice so as to appropriate it in the most intimate, organic way, making it bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. . . . And nowhere is this identification more complete than in the Eucharist, when a disciple physically consumes the incarnate Christ, the law par excellence."

this important concept of covenant, but it is reduced in importance by our predominant use of the word “testament” instead.³⁷ We are a “new testament” church not a “new covenant” church. We live according to the teachings of the “new testament” not the “new covenant.” And when we think of “testament” in these ways, we quickly think of a book of many books, the Bible, but most assuredly the last twenty-seven books of that Bible. We do not seem to be able to translate our idea of testament, or covenant, into what it really means. Maybe this is an unfair dichotomy, but again, how often have you heard at the celebration around the Lord’s table—“this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”? If we fail to explore the idea of covenant in the Lord’s supper, we do so to our own spiritual impoverishment. To acknowledge that this meal is the new covenant in the blood of our Lord is to deepen our knowledge of God’s amazing grace and his commitment to us as his creatures and his people.

The Lord’s Supper as Kingdom Anticipation

In the *eucharistiam instituit*, Matthew tells us that over the cup Jesus says, “I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26.29). Mark has the same wording with only slight variations (Mark 14.25). Luke, though, emphasizes the focus of Jesus on the coming kingdom of God and its fulfillment. This is why Luke begins his *eucharistiam instituit* with these statements of Jesus about the kingdom. But Luke seems to confuse the sequence of the Passover seder with his mention of an additional cup. He writes:

³⁷I do not care to discuss the fine line distinction between “testament” and “covenant” that is made by some scholars in a few NT passages (e.g., Galatians 3.15; Hebrews 9.15-17). The fact that no recent English translation of the Bible, except the NKJV and maybe a few others, uses the word “testament” for *diatheke* should settle the matter, but some detractors remain.

He [Jesus] said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took a loaf of 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 of me.” And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22.15-20).³⁸

Interpreters debate about this sequence of the Passover seder according to Luke’s narrative, especially since the traditional Passover, as far as we know, had several cups of wine. It seems unproductive, however, to try to link up the presumed two cups of Luke to the seder ritual.³⁹

What appears to be more plausible, in my opinion, is that Luke takes a thematic rather than any chronological approach to his information about this event. He first describes this Passover seder of Jesus and his disciples as an anticipation of the coming kingdom of God, an important theme in his writings.⁴⁰ Then he describes this Passover seder as the covenant sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus. In this arrangement it seems that Luke is following Paul who omits the idea of kingdom in 1 Corinthians 11.23-26 but includes the ideas of remembrance and the covenant in connection with the bread and the cup, respectively.⁴¹

³⁸Conzelmann (1969), 58, calls this text in Luke “very strange,” as he tries to unravel its odd sequence of cup–bread–cup. See also the comments by Barrett (1985), 71-72; Hicks (2002), 68-69, “The Passover Context of the Last Supper.” On the textual variations of Luke 22.17-20, see Metzger (1994), 148-150; cf. Ellis (1981), 254-256.

³⁹Plummer (1922), 495, notes, “identifications [of cups in Luke’s narrative] . . . are very precarious.” See also Foster (1986), 257ff. For an explanation of the four cups of the Passover seder, see Four Cups (online); cf. Hicks (2002), 70-72.

⁴⁰See Marshall (1988), 89-91, 128-136; cf. “Luke’s Eschatology” in Conzelmann (1961), 95ff.

⁴¹Could it be that both Paul and Luke, in their wording of the *eucharistiam instituit*, accommodate their versions to the evangelistic mission to the Gentiles? See Richardson (1960), 118ff., for many other possibilities.

What Luke and Mark call “the kingdom of God,” Matthew calls “the kingdom of my Father.” And, in all three accounts, there is the sentiment of Jesus about an interlude in his presence with the disciples but his anticipation to once again celebrate with them in God’s kingdom. Jesus says in Matthew and Mark, “I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when” And Luke records the Lord saying, “I will not eat it until I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until” The language of Jesus is very strong, as all three narratives complement each other. There is the preceding *lego humin* (“I say to you”) followed by the double negative *ou me* (“no, not”) with the verb. This is recorded twice by Luke who notes the expectation of Jesus with these words—“until . . . it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God,” “until . . . the kingdom of God comes.” Matthew and Mark put it more simply, as Jesus says, “when I drink it new with you in my Father’s [God’s] kingdom.” The point to be made is that this supper looks forward to the reunion of the Lord with his followers and the meal of celebration that will accompany this gathering. This meal will take place when Jesus returns, that is, when the kingdom of God comes (i.e., when it is fulfilled or brought to pass in God’s kingdom). And Paul, when he concludes his *eucharistiam instituit*, says the same thing without reference to God’s kingdom, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

I think our main difficulty in regarding the Lord’s supper as kingdom anticipation is that for some reason we have decided that the church is the kingdom and the kingdom is the church. They are one and the same in our thinking. We do not allow for any, or much, distinction in the

concepts. We have lost a sense of eschatology.⁴² We do not pray The Lord's Prayer (about which our Lord says, "pray then in this way"), because it says, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6.9, 10). Similarly, we do not emphasize the Lord's supper as kingdom anticipation, because we think that the kingdom already has come—completely, fully, totally—end of discussion. But it is to our own peril to think we have arrived at the consummation. So much evil that happens in our world, in our homes, in our lives, and in our churches should remind us that, in our fallen world, God's rule has not been accepted wholly. And our participation in God's kingdom through visible gatherings of the people of God (i.e., churches) should be ongoing, anticipatory, and forward looking. It is eschatological. Thus, we would do well to follow the example of the early church and include with our prayers around the Lord's table, "Maranatha" ("Our Lord, come," 1 Corinthians 16.22; cf. Revelation 22.20).

The Lord's Supper as Remembrance

It is Paul and Luke who introduce into their *eucharistiam instituit* the idea of "new covenant." They also lay stress on the meaning of the Lord's supper as a meal of remembrance or memorial with these words of Jesus, "Do this in remembrance of me" (*touto poieite eis ten*

⁴²I do not deny that God's kingdom has come, in a sense, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. See "Between Two Worlds: The Kingdom and the Church" in Bright (1981), 215ff.; "Fulfillment without Consummation" in Ladd (1974), 105ff. But reconciliation of heaven (where God rules completely, fully, and totally) and earth has not occurred yet (see 1 Corinthians 15.28; cf. the book of Revelation). That is why we should pray, as our Lord teaches us, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6.10). Longman (2022), 96-97, writes, "The Gospels announce one of the most prolific themes of the NT, namely the kingdom of God. . . . A fair reading of the NT material leads us to see that Jesus' coming, particularly his death and resurrection, inaugurates the advent of the kingdom, but that its full realization comes with his second coming. In other words, the kingdom is both present in an important sense, but also future in its full sense. The kingdom is 'already' here, but 'not yet' fully realized. . . . In an important sense, God rules all creation despite the resistance of some of his creaturely subjects. To say that his kingdom is 'not yet' refers to the fact that, because of that resistance, his rule is not completely manifest. The realization at the time of Christ's second coming will eradicate the resistance."

emen anamnesin).⁴³ Of course, this concept of remembrance (i.e., of Israel's exodus from Egypt) is implied as an important function of the Passover seder in the narratives of Matthew and Mark, but it is not so stated by either writer. The words *anamnesis* and *anamimnesko* are used infrequently in the New Testament and mean, as a noun, "a reminder" (active sense) or "remembrance, memory" (passive sense) and, as a verb, "to call to mind, to remind, to call to memory, to remember" (active sense) or "to be reminded" (passive sense).⁴⁴ This central focus of remembrance has a powerful and even pervasive place in religious thought and practice, including both Old and New Testaments, and especially in memorial rituals such as the Passover meal.⁴⁵ This is presumably due to its universal appeal to the psychological/spiritual nature of humans. But in the Lord's supper, memory of the sacrificial act of Jesus moves beyond personal remembrance to public remembrance, and this public remembrance becomes an act of proclamation. This is stated nicely by Max Thurian, a member of the ecumenical monastic community in Taize, France. He writes:

This memorial is not a simple subjective act of recollection, it is a liturgical action. But it is not just a liturgical action which makes the Lord present, it is a liturgical action which recalls as a memorial before the Father the unique sacrifice of the Son, and this makes Him present in His memorial, in the presentation of His sacrifice before the Father and in His intercession as heavenly High Priest. The eucharistic memorial is a recalling to us, a recalling by us to the Father, and a recalling of the Son to the Father for

⁴³Paul includes this instruction of Jesus two times, after the bread and after the cup. For the latter time, he adds, "as often as you drink it" (*hosakis ean pinete*), which he repeats in his closing remark about the supper (1 Corinthians 11.25-26).

⁴⁴Danker (2009), 27; cf. Arndt and Gingrich (1979), 57-58. The noun is used only in Luke 22.19; 1 Corinthians 11.24, 25; Hebrews 10.3; the verb is used in Mark 11.21; 14.72; 1 Corinthians 4.17; 2 Corinthians 7.15; 2 Timothy 1.6; Hebrews 10.32. Moulton and Geden (1978), 61.

⁴⁵See the thorough discussion by Karl-Heinz Bartels, "Remember," NIDNTT (1986), Volume 3, 230ff.

us. Hence the eucharistic memorial is a proclamation by the Church; it is a thanksgiving and intercession of Christ for the Church.⁴⁶

This role of public proclamation in the Lord's supper is why Paul, when writing to the brothers and sisters at Corinth, concludes his *eucharistiam instituit* with this summary: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

In our churches this is one of the key aspects about the Lord's supper that we do quite well, at least the personal remembrance. Each and every Lord's day as we partake together the bread and the wine, we remember our Lord and his death. We pause from our busy schedules, and we consider the meaning of his death and the power of his resurrection. This is what our Lord has asked us to do. But could we do better in our remembrance of this wonderful one who

⁴⁶Ibid., 244, quoting *The Eucharistic Memorial*, II, *The New Testament, Ecumenical Studies in Worship* 8 (1961), 35f.; cf. "Memorial and Act" in Paul (1960), 368-371; Hicks (2002), 71-72.

Barron (2021), 67-68, stresses that in the observance of the Lord's supper there is much more than a psychological remembrance of Jesus. He argues that "since Jesus is divine, all of his actions, including and especially the sacrificial act by which he saved the world, participate in the eternity of God and hence can be made present at any point in time. To 'remember' him, therefore, is to participate even now in the saving events of the past, bringing them, in all of their dense reality to the present day. . . . Those who are gathered around the altar of Christ are not simply recalling Calvary; Calvary has become present to them in all of its spiritual power. Due to the eternity of Christ, there is indeed a kind of collapsing of the dimensions of time at the Lord's supper, present meeting past—and both present and past anticipating the eschatological future. St. Paul caught this trans-temporality of the Eucharistic liturgy beautifully when, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, he said, 'As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Corinthians 11.26). In other words, here and now, at the Eucharistic assembly, Christ makes present both the past and the future."

And Dodd (1964), 94, writes, "In the Eucharist, therefore, the Church perpetually reconstitutes the crisis in which the Kingdom of God came in history. It never gets beyond this. At each Eucharist, we are *there*—we are in the night in which He was betrayed, at Golgotha, before the empty tomb on Easter day, and in the upper room where He appeared; *and* we are at the moment of His coming, with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump. Sacramental communion is not a purely mystical experience, to which history, as embodied in the form and matter of the Sacrament, would be in the last resort irrelevant; it is bound up with a corporate memory of real events. History has been taken up into the supra-historical, without ceasing to be history."

loved us and gave himself for us? It would help, I believe, in our “table recollections” to focus our attention on the Lord himself, rather than about a sporting event, current world affairs or politics, the country’s situation, or even an individual’s story about their faith in the Lord. The latter certainly is not inappropriate, but if we are to remember this Jesus who walked among us and who now sits at the right hand of the Father as he waits for his glorious appearing, then we should do our very best to give **Jesus** (not ourselves, not anyone or anything else) the place of prominence at the table. Remember that at the “last supper” Jesus stooped to wash the feet of the disciples, as they perhaps jockeyed for position to obtain the “chief” positions that were closest to the Master (John 13.1-20; see Luke 22.24-30; cf. Matthew 20.24-28; Mark 10.41-45).⁴⁷ Maybe an old-fashioned foot-washing in conjunction with the Lord’s supper would be useful for the spiritual health of the congregation.⁴⁸

To engage more fully the community of faith (i.e., the congregation) in this remembrance, why not use a responsive reading from one of the Messianic Psalms? The reciting together of The Lord’s Prayer is proper, as well as many of the ancient creeds. And if the church is queasy about these liturgical compilations, then recitation of any number of ancient New Testament hymns or passages about Jesus would be helpful to remember and proclaim as a congregation the life and work of our Lord. Singing appropriate hymns during the eating and the drinking is another way to involve the entire congregation during the supper. Further, the one who presides over the observance of the Lord’s supper should, in a formal and visual way, bring to the attention of the congregation the bread and the cup. And we need to pass (i.e., give and

⁴⁷John’s telling about this humble act of Jesus is part of his lengthy narrative that takes us into the intimacy of Jesus with those closest to him (John 12.12ff.; 13.1–17.26).

⁴⁸This is a common practice by Adventist churches. See Mueller (online).

distribute) the bread and the cup among the congregants once again.⁴⁹ In the *eucharistiam instituit*, Jesus took a loaf of bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. He did the same with the cup (i.e., he blessed it, poured it, and gave it to his disciples). The effect of this type of visual presentation of the bread and the wine is to cast our attention in a vivid way on the body and the blood of Jesus, which is what we are called to remember. Finally, we need to rethink our tradition of linking the formal “contribution” in the assembly to the celebration of the Lord’s supper. It often is said by the officiant that this is “separate and apart” from the Lord’s supper. So, if it is separate and apart, why do we always do it together?⁵⁰ In some Christian traditions, the gifts of the people along with the bread and the wine are brought to the table prior to the celebration of the Lord’s supper. This practice has precedence in early Christian liturgy. If we do not wish to retain a meaningful connection between the gifts of the people (i.e., the contribution) and the Lord’s supper, then perhaps we should make the contribution distinct and really separate and apart from it.

The Lord’s Supper as Communion with Jesus

As stated above, Paul is the only New Testament writer who uses the phrase “the Lord’s supper.” We do not know whether he coined this phrase himself or borrowed it from others. But what is interesting is that the apostle uses this description negatively, because some of the believers at Corinth were abusing the supper by their divisions and by their mistreatment of the poor among them. He writes:

⁴⁹In our truncating the ritual due to coronavirus, have we become lazy in our observance of the Lord’s supper?

⁵⁰Clyde Woods told me a story about a young boy in church who was queried about the contribution coming right after the Lord’s supper. He quipped, “They are paying for what they just got.” Woods (2022).

Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! (1 Corinthians 11.17-22).

Thus, the *eucharistiam instituit* from Paul comes in a context of correction, and it is as if he were saying, "Because of your partisan and contentious quarreling and your neglect of care for those poor ones among you, this shame and disgrace you bring upon your 'inferior' brothers and sisters make it impossible for you to eat the supper of our Lord which is a sharing or a communing with one another in the body and the blood of our Lord." For the Corinthians who are divided, Paul is concerned about their *koinonia*, since their "shared community life" or their "close association in a shared interest" (namely, the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus) had been ruptured.⁵¹ Since they were not in communion with one another, how could they in a meaningful way participate in the body and the blood of the Lord who had brought them together as a community in the first place? Paul's rebuke and instructions are appropriate.

The double focus on the Lord's supper in Paul's first letter to Corinth is important, as there are several considerations that define the rupture of *koinonia* among the believers at Corinth. There are the troubling divisions that Paul highlights at the outset of his letter (1.9-17; cf. 3.1-23; 11.17-22). There is the eating of meat that has been offered to idols and subsequently sold in the agora or marketplace (10.23-33; cf. 8.1ff.). This challenged the Corinthians' extent of

⁵¹Danker (2009), 203. For other NT uses of *koinonia*, see Acts 2.42; Romans 15.26; 1 Corinthians 1.9; 10.16; 2 Corinthians 6.14; 8.4; 9.13; 13.13; Galatians 2.9; Philippians 1.5; 2.1; 3.10; Philemon 6; Hebrews 13.16; 1 John 1.3, 6, 7. Moulton and Geden (1978), 552.

koinonia and varying opinions with regard to that. There are the festive meals of the prevalent Greek/Roman culture in order to honor the gods and goddesses (10.14-22; cf. 10.1-13). This challenged the Corinthians' limit of *koinonia* and again varying opinions with regard to that. There are issues of familial and social relations (1.18-31; 5.1-13; 6.12-20; 7.1-40), the resolve or settlement of legal disputes (6.1-11), the union of believers with unbelievers (6.12-20; 7.1-24), and proper conduct and order in the assembly of the believers (11.2-16, 17-34; 12.1-14.39). Paul is working with a hotbed of dissention, and it seems that he appeals to the Corinthians' sense of what the Lord's supper is all about—a communion, a sharing in the body and the blood of Christ.

Paul's interlacing of ideas as he works his way through the issues faced by the believers at Corinth is complex. It is best, for our purposes, to look at the passage that “jumps out” at us when we think about the Lord's supper as communion. In his *eucharistiam instituit* (1 Corinthians 11.23ff.), Paul is addressing the problem of divisions in the Corinthian church, and he does not use *koinonia*. In 1 Corinthians 10.16-21, Paul is addressing the problem of participation in the festive meals dedicated to the gods and goddesses and their attending sexual rituals, and here he uses *koinonia*. He writes:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing [*koinonia*] in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing [*koinonia*] in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake [*metechomen*] of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners [*koinonoi*] in the altar? What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners [*koinonous*] with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake [*metechein*] of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.⁵²

⁵²The other word Paul uses for share or partake is *metecho* which means “have a part in something . . . of sharing communally, partake of, with focus on food, 1 Corinthians 10.17, 21, 30.” Danker (2009), 230-231.

Paul here is emphasizing to the Corinthians the exclusiveness of the Christian's celebration of the Lord's supper. Since participation in or sharing in the ritual meal of sacrifice constitutes oneness with the altar (verses 17-18; see Hebrews 13.10; cf. Ephesians 5.2),⁵³ Paul warns, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons."⁵⁴ On this passage, Robert S. Paul comments, "For to eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord's Supper is to participate in the body and blood of Christ in such a way as to become partners with Christ."⁵⁵ Thus, communion with Christ and fellow believers necessarily excludes communion with unbelievers in cultic celebration.

We do well with this idea of the Lord's supper as communion, probably because the association of communion with the Lord's supper is ubiquitous among Christian churches.⁵⁶ At my home church, when it is time for the Lord's supper during the Sunday service, the slide projected on the big screen at the front of the sanctuary (i.e., auditorium) reads "Communion." We previously had a table, with the bread and the wine, just below the altar (i.e., the podium or raised platform at the front). But the table and the "emblems" have been removed, and there is only a lectern on the podium. Many churches still have a table with bread and wine for the

⁵³The word translated "altar" is *thusiasterion*; see Matthew 5.23, 24; 23.18, 19, 20, 35; Luke 1.11; 11.51; Romans 11.3; 1 Corinthians 9.13; 10.18; Hebrews 7.13; 13.10; James 2.21; Revelation 6.9; 8.3. Compare NT occurrences of *thusia*, which means "offering" or "sacrifice," in Moulton and Geden (1978), 464-465.

⁵⁴The word for "cup" is *poterion*, and the word for "table" is *trapedza*. Both indicate a meal and, in this context, a cultic meal. Both also have literal and metaphorical meanings; see Danker (2009), 295, 355.

⁵⁵Paul (1960), 366; cf. the explanation in Barrett (1985), 64ff.; see too the helpful and thorough discussion in Hicks (2002), 103ff.

⁵⁶It would be an interesting study to see if this connection by Christians is mostly in the United States, the western world, and/or worldwide.

Lord's supper. But since we do not connect well the idea of communion (i.e., a meal) with altar and sacrifice, even though these concepts are biblical and used by Paul in his discussion of the Lord's supper, it seems to be no problem to remove the bread and the wine from the table and even the table itself (due to hygienic concerns about the spread of coronavirus).

Perhaps we have not thought out the significant associations with the Lord's supper that historically we deemed to be necessary (e.g., the table). And all these ideas—altar, sacrifice, and table—come together in the notion of communion.⁵⁷ Paul does not separate the connections. Paul does not say that table is okay, but altar is not. Even the writer of Hebrews, who drives the strongest wedge between the rituals of the Old Testament and the rituals of Christian practice, says, “We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent [i.e., tabernacle] have no right to eat” (Hebrews 13.10).⁵⁸ He does not define this altar in so many words, but he exhorts, “Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Hebrews 13.15-16). It is not clear whether “altar” here in Hebrews is an

⁵⁷Barron (2021), 47, observes, “There can be no communion without sacrifice, and thus there is no Eucharistic table that is not, at the same time, an altar.” But see Hicks (2002), 130ff., on “The Shift from Table to Altar” in its historical development. The problem, though, may be semantic. The word “altar” seems to carry with it the idea of “sacrifice,” while the word “table” does not necessarily do so. In some contexts, however, “altar” and “table” are interchangeable. But while the two concepts overlap, they are not exactly the same.

⁵⁸The Greek of this verse seems straightforward in its affirmation of an altar for believers in Jesus where eating is done, *echomen thusiasterion ex hou phagein ouk echousin exousian hoi te skene latreuontes* (“we have an altar from which to eat [that] do not have authority the ones in the tabernacle serving”). Brown and Comfort (1990), 792. It is not necessary to see “altar” and “eat” as metaphors; so Guthrie (1983), 272-273; Hagner (1983), 227-228. If the writer wanted “altar” and “eat” to be so understood, he could have qualified these words with another word or phrase (cf. *Ierousalem epouranio*, “the heavenly Jerusalem,” Hebrews 12.22).

allusion to the Lord's supper, as it seems to be in Paul.⁵⁹ At the very least, though, this sort of language—altar, sacrifice, and table—to describe early Christian practice is not taboo for those first-century believers. Not only do we commune with one another around the table of the Lord, we commune at the altar with our God, through the sacrifice of the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁶⁰

The Lord's Supper as Proclamation of Jesus

The latter point, that we commune with one another, is stressed by Paul when he writes, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he

⁵⁹Bruce (1964), 400-402, Moffatt (1924), 234-235, and Witherington (2007), 361, say it is not. But Bengel (1857), Volume 4, 497, and Westcott (1952), 438, say it is. Westcott writes, "The sacrifice is one, the altar is one. . . . The fact of that Death was visibly set forth, and the reality of that participation pledged, in the Eucharist. The 'Table' of the Lord (1 Corinthians 10.21), the Bread and the Wine, enabled the believer 'to shew forth Christ's death,' to realize the sacrifice upon the Cross and to appropriate Christ's 'flesh and blood.' In this sacrament then, where Christ gives Himself as the support of His faithful and rejoicing people, the Christian has that which more than fulfils the types of the Jewish ritual." Interpreters are divided about what "altar" means, as the passage in Hebrews is a difficult one. Perhaps Vincent (1946), Volume IV, 567, who takes a mediating position is right when he says, "It is a mistake to try to find in the Christian economy some specific object answering to *altar*—either the cross, or the eucharistic table, or Christ himself. Rather the ideas of approach to God—sacrifice, atonement, pardon and acceptance, salvation—are gathered up and generally represented in the figure of an altar, even as the Jewish altar was the point at which all these ideas converged."

⁶⁰The dichotomy between altar and table, as expressed by Hicks (2002), 152-155, 185-186, may be too extreme. These concepts with respect to the Lord's supper are not, in my opinion, mutually exclusive. It seems that to dissociate completely the table from the altar is to abandon the idea of sacrifice, the idea of "this is my body . . . this is my blood," in the Lord's supper. But note by Hicks the connection of "altar" and "table" in other comments on pages 48, 75, 109, 110, 154. He writes, "We must distinguish between the altar and the table. The altar is the cross of Christ, but the table is the Lord's supper. The two should not be confused, but neither should they be disconnected. At the table we remember the altar and share in the altar's benefits, but the table should not be identified with the altar. The table remembers the altar by enjoying the communion secured by the altar. The table is the experience of peace and communion, which is celebrated with joy and thanksgiving. The altar is remembered and re-experienced in this communion, but it is not experienced as sadness but as good news. The fruit of the altar is the table, and the table is where we sit with Christ as we enjoy the benefits of the altar."

comes” (1 Corinthians 11.26).⁶¹ This meaning of the Lord’s supper as proclamation of the Lord’s death is found only here in the New Testament. Due to their divisions, Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians about the Lord’s supper repeats the phrase “when you come together.” In chapter eleven, he uses this expression five times. Notice what the apostle says.

Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together [*sunerchesthe*] it is not for the better but for the worse.

For, to begin with, when you come together as a church [*sunerchomenon humon en ekklesia*], I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it.

When you come together [*sunerchomenon*], it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper.

So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together [*sunerchomenoi*] to eat, wait for one another.

If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together [*sunerchesthe*], it will not be for your condemnation (1 Corinthians 11.17, 18, 20, 33, 34).⁶²

Paul is concerned that the existing social divisions among the Corinthians made it impossible for them to gather around the table of the Lord in a beneficial way. Rather, their ongoing fiasco (see verse 21), of a meal intended to bring together the people of God for nourishment and sustenance, caused them instead to “show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing” (verse 22). This is why he says, “When you come together to eat, wait for one another.” It is why he warns, “For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and

⁶¹See the focus on communal eating in the comments by Hicks (2002), 115-126.

⁶²See too 1 Corinthians 14.23, 26, on the use of *sunerchomai* to indicate the assembly or gathering of believers. Compare other NT uses in Danker (2009), 339-340, who notes the basic meaning of the word as “come together as a collection of persons.” Wainwright (1980), 46, suggests, “When the believers gathered for worship (the expressions ‘come together’ and ‘in one place’ have strong cultic connotations in the New Testament and in the post-apostolic writings), they assembled ‘in his name’ and he was there ‘in the midst’ of them (Matthew 18.20). It was ‘the Lord’s supper’ which they ate, with the bread and the wine as signs of his body and his covenant-blood, and this was a proclamation of the Lord’s death until he should come (1 Corinthians 11.17-26).”

drink judgment against themselves” (verse 29). It is why he exhorts those who eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord not to do such “in an unworthy manner” and to “examine yourselves” (verses 27, 28). Paul gives these instructions to prod the Corinthians to “discern” the body, which seems to refer to the body of believers (i.e., the church itself).⁶³ As Victor Paul Furnish remarks, “When believers neither discern nor are concerned for one another’s needs, ‘the body of Christ’ is being disregarded and violated (see 10.16-17).”⁶⁴ Thus, according to Paul, it is the celebration of the Lord’s supper, not the homily or the sermon, that holds the church together.⁶⁵ And in this togetherness, there is an important public statement about the death of Jesus.

This proclamation (*kataggello*) is public and open and concerns the death of our Lord.⁶⁶ In this respect, our churches do a good job with proclaiming the death of our Lord in the observance of the Lord’s supper. We make the celebration of the supper a regular occurrence

⁶³Danker (2009), 91, says that *diakrino* in 1 Corinthians 11.29, 31, means “evaluate, read, in the sense of careful discernment.”

⁶⁴“The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians,” NRSV, 2156.

⁶⁵Kreider (2016), 186, 194, notes, “At the heart of early Christian worship was table fellowship. Throughout the first three centuries Christian communities gathered once a week for a meal. . . . The Christians of the early centuries gave surprisingly little attention to the sermon.” Ayer (1913), 32, says, “The worship of the Christian Church in the earliest period centered in the eucharist. There are references to this in the New Testament. How far the agape was connected with the eucharist is uncertain.” Maxwell (1982), 5, states, “Christian worship, as a distinctive, indigenous thing, arose from the fusion, in the crucible of Christian experience, of the Synagogue and the Upper Room. Thus fused, each completing and quickening the other, they became the norm of Christian worship. Christian worship found other forms of expression, but these belong to the circumference, not to the centre. The typical worship of the Church is to be found to this day in the union of the worship of the Synagogue and the sacramental experience of the Upper Room; and that union dates from New Testament times.”

⁶⁶For *kataggello* in the NT, see Acts 3.24; 4.2; 13.5, 38; 15.36; 16.17, 21; 17.3, 13, 23; 26.23; Romans 1.8; 1 Corinthians 2.1; 9.14; 11.26; Philippians 1.17, 18; Colossians 1.28. Moulton and Geden (1978), 532. Danker (2009), 189, says that *kataggello* has the “connotation of broad dissemination” of an announcement or message.

every Lord's day, even though Paul does not specify any frequency for its celebration. He simply states, "as often as . . . for as often as . . ." (*hosakis ean . . . hosakis gar ean*; verses 25, 26). And we also emphasize the sacrificial death of Jesus in our partaking of the supper. He died for us, for our sins, for our redemption and our salvation. If visitors are present in our assemblies, they understand that the work of Jesus at Golgotha means so much to us that we dedicate this meal not just to remember him, not just to honor him, but to declare proudly and publicly his death by crucifixion! Such is an amazing thing when you realize that crucifixion was one of the world's most horrible and shameful forms of public capital punishment.

For many, this message of the cross would be shameful, but when we celebrate the Lord's supper as proclamation of his death, we feel no shame (cf. Romans 9.33; 10.11; 1 Corinthians 1.27; Philippians 1.20; Hebrews 12.2; 1 Peter 2.6; 1 John 2.28). For many, this message of the cross would be foolishness, but when we celebrate the Lord's supper as proclamation of his death, we do not feel foolish (cf. 1 Corinthians 1.18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27; 2.14; 3.19). Rather, we experience in the eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine the power and the wisdom of God.⁶⁷ And like the apostle Paul, we can say, "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6.14). This is because we believe that Jesus "himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness." It is "by his wounds" that we

⁶⁷Barron (2021), 71-72, notes that "those who gather, with intentionality and focus, at the altar of Jesus are not simply witnessing the event of the cross; they are sharing in it. And this participation changes fundamentally the manner in which they experience and interpret their own pain. And thus we can see, finally and fully, the intimate link between the meal and the sacrifice aspects of the Eucharist. Only in the measure that we are transformed through sacrifice, only when our sin and suffering have been dealt with, can we sit down in the fellowship of the sacred banquet. And thus we have come full circle. The Eucharistic liturgy is the sacred meal *because* it is a sacrificial offering. In the Blood of Jesus, the bliss of Eden is restored, and God and human beings are once again friends."

have been healed (1 Peter 2.24).⁶⁸ This is the healing and the freedom that we proclaim when we celebrate the supper of our Lord, and in that healing and that freedom we call both ourselves and others to live for righteousness.⁶⁹

Conclusion

In conclusion, we know very little about the exact way in which our Lord celebrated his final Passover seder with his disciples due to the terseness of the narratives about it.⁷⁰ Likewise, we know very little about the precise manner in which the early church celebrated the Lord's supper in their local gatherings.⁷¹ Paul perhaps gives us the most information about what happened when the believers in Jesus came together as a church (e.g., in the Corinthian letters), but this still leaves us wondering about many things. It would seem that due to a lack of details, we have a lot of latitude in how we celebrate the Lord's supper.⁷² Maybe the Didache and other writings by Christians in the early centuries had it right about the particulars of early Christian

⁶⁸Barron (2021), 64, writes, "On the cross, Jesus used, as it were, his own sacrificed body as a shield, taking the full force of the world's hatred and violence. He entered into close quarters with sin (because that's where we sinners are found) and allowed the heat and fury of sin to destroy him, even as he protected us. . . . By enduring the pain of the cross, Jesus did indeed bear our sins; by his stripes we were indeed healed. And this is why the sacrificial death of Jesus is pleasing to the Father."

⁶⁹On ethics and the Lord's supper (i.e., the challenge of the cross and the response of faith), see Paul (1960), 378-386.

⁷⁰Schnabel (2018), 206ff., gives a plausible overview of what transpired but states, "We do not know how exactly Passover was celebrated around AD 30." Keener (2009), 624-625, suggests, "Traditions like those that developed into the Passover liturgy probably remained fairly stable." Compare the reconstruction suggested by Blomberg (2009), 384.

⁷¹For possible variations in NT practice, see Dunn (1990), 161ff. Note also the ambiguity of NT practice as described by Conzelmann (1973), 50-54, 76-77.

⁷²For some creative ways to celebrate, see Hicks (2002), 155ff.

gatherings.⁷³ But traditions varied from locale to locale.⁷⁴ For sure, there is much that we do not know, but we do know enough. In the New Testament, we have important ideas connected with the supper and brief but precise words about the celebration. Many of these come from Jesus himself who paved the way for us in the wording to be used in the meal that is to honor, remember, and proclaim him. As believers in Jesus, who stand in the shadow of a long and varied tradition of eucharistic practice, those of us in Churches of Christ have leaned toward the themes of communion, remembrance, and proclamation, and we have not been as strong on highlighting the themes of the Passover meal, the body and the blood of Jesus, covenant celebration, and kingdom expectation.⁷⁵ We can do better. We can incorporate more fully in our practice the language from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul. Most importantly, we can say when

⁷³For translation of the Didache, see Goodspeed (1950), 11ff.; for its interpretation, see Lawson (1961), 63ff.; Richardson (1996), 161ff. For key documents in the historical development of the eucharist, see White (1992), 180ff. Goguel (1964), 257, cautions, “There is a sharp contrast between the importance of worship for primitive Christianity, and the scanty and sporadic character of the surviving evidence for it. To go through the documentary evidence from the beginning to the time of Justin Martyr is soon done. We know more about sacramental worship than the ministration of the word. But that is more apparent than real. What information we have refers to the religious and theological significance of the sacraments, not to the methods of administering baptism and celebrating the eucharist. Not until we come to the Didache have we any information about this, and what is to be found there shows that both the baptismal and the eucharistic liturgies were still very informal.”

⁷⁴On early Christian worship in general, see Kreider (2016), 185ff.; Goppelt (1970), 202ff. For development of the eucharist in the early church, see Jungmann (1959), 29ff.; C. H. Dodd in Micklem (1936), 68ff.

⁷⁵See, for example, in Lord (1904), sections on “Thoughts for the Lord’s Supper.”

we partake the Lord's supper—"this is my body . . . this is my blood . . ." ⁷⁶ Our Lord handed down to us in his word this important saying about his supper, and he expects us to "do this" until that day when we celebrate anew with him in our Father's kingdom. O Lord, come!

⁷⁶Barron (2021), 111, reflecting on the post-resurrection encounter between Jesus and two disciples on the road to Emmaus and their subsequent meal (Luke, chapter 24), says, "We don't fully understand who Jesus is until we sit down with him at the sacred, sacrificial banquet that makes present his saving cross. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup, we see him in his Real Presence. The Emmaus story—which we relive at every [Lord's supper]—demonstrates how tightly interwoven these motifs [banquet, sacrifice, and Real Presence] are. The sacrificed Christ makes the messianic banquet possible—and it is at that banquet that we feast on his Flesh, which is real food, and on his Blood, which is real drink."

APPENDIX ONE: A PASSOVER SEDER?⁷⁷

At sundown, the Twelve gathered with Jesus for dinner in the upper room. But what they ate has been vigorously debated across the centuries since then, because the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—state quite clearly that this was the Passover Seder or meal, whereas John insists that this was the day *before* the Passover. Numerous attempts have been made to harmonize these differences, some suggesting that the Passover may have been observed on two consecutive days that year, due to variant reckonings by the Pharisees and Sadducees, or by the Judeans and Galileans. Others claim that Jesus celebrated an intentionally early Passover, knowing what would happen the next day.

Following the Johannine tradition, the Eastern Orthodox churches to this day celebrate Holy Communion with regular leavened bread, whereas the Roman Catholic sacrament uses unleavened bread, wafers similar to what would have been eaten at a Passover meal. Lutherans and Anglicans generally follow the synoptic tradition also, while the rest of Protestantism uses either form.

But there can be no doubt that the mind of every Jew at this time was focused on the Passover festival, so the discrepancy may be nothing more serious than, for example, opening presents on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. The Passover itself commemorated the liberation of the ancient Hebrews from their enslavement in Egypt. While the firstborn male Egyptians were dying the dreadful tenth plague, the Israelites were secure behind doorways marked with lamb's blood, as they ate a dinner of unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and roast lamb, which had been cooked over an open fire on a spit made of pomegranate wood (Exodus 12).

The supper shared by Jesus and the disciples must have been similar—up to a point. Then a note of tension broke the happiness of the dinner, as the Teacher enlarged on a point he had already made while giving the Twelve an object lesson in humility by washing their feet. He had said, “Not all of you are clean.” Then, after another hint, he came out directly, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me” (John 13.21).

Innocently, they all inquired, “Is it I, Lord?” Judas joined in the question, lest he incriminate himself by silence.

Looking him coolly in the eye, Jesus replied, “You have said so. Do quickly what you are going to do” (Matthew 26.25; John 13.27).

Hot with embarrassment, Judas rose from his reclining position at the table and skulked out of the room. Probably Jesus had only whispered the identification, since the rest of the disciples merely thought Judas off on an errand.

Toward the close of the supper, Jesus introduced a momentous alteration into the usual Passover Seder. He took some of the remaining bread, blessed it and broke it, and then distributed it among his colleagues with the words, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” Wondering at his language, the disciples ate the bread.

Then he reached for the cup of red Passover wine standing in front of him. According to custom, it had been diluted, two parts of water to one of wine. Again he offered thanks and passed the chalice among them, saying, “Take this and divide it among yourselves. . . . This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22.17ff.).

⁷⁷From Maier (1991), 125-128.

With these words, Jesus inaugurated what became the longest continuous meal in history, for soon his followers would start celebrating what they later called The Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, in which someone, somewhere in the world, has been offering up bread and wine in a similar manner nearly every moment since.

The meaning of Jesus' words stems from a complex of ideas that lie at the very heart of Christianity. Just as in Old Testament worship, the flesh and blood of a sacrificed victim were offered separately, so Jesus was to be the new Paschal Lamb offered in sacrifice for sin. This new covenant was intended to be a direct fulfillment of the old, which had been established after the Passover liberation from Egypt. God was offering man a fresh contract or agreement in Jesus: his sacrifice on the cross would bring liberation, not from Egypt, but from the slavery of sin. The supper also foreshadowed the messianic banquet he would share with his followers in the future kingdom.

But all this was scarcely comprehended by the disciples at the time, and not until later would they reflect on Jesus' words and understand their meaning in full. For now, all they could do was wonder at the fresh tack taken by the Teacher and listen to his last discourses, which focused on the new commandment of love that he specified for all who would follow him. His closing words, which seemed strangely attuned to the future, promised the coming of a Comforter—the Holy Spirit—who would attend them.

Finally, they all sang a closing Passover hymn, and then Jesus uttered his magnificent concluding prayer, which began with ominous import: "Father, the hour has come. . . ." It had indeed. They filed out of the room and walked eastward through the darkened streets of Jerusalem toward the Mount of Olives.

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