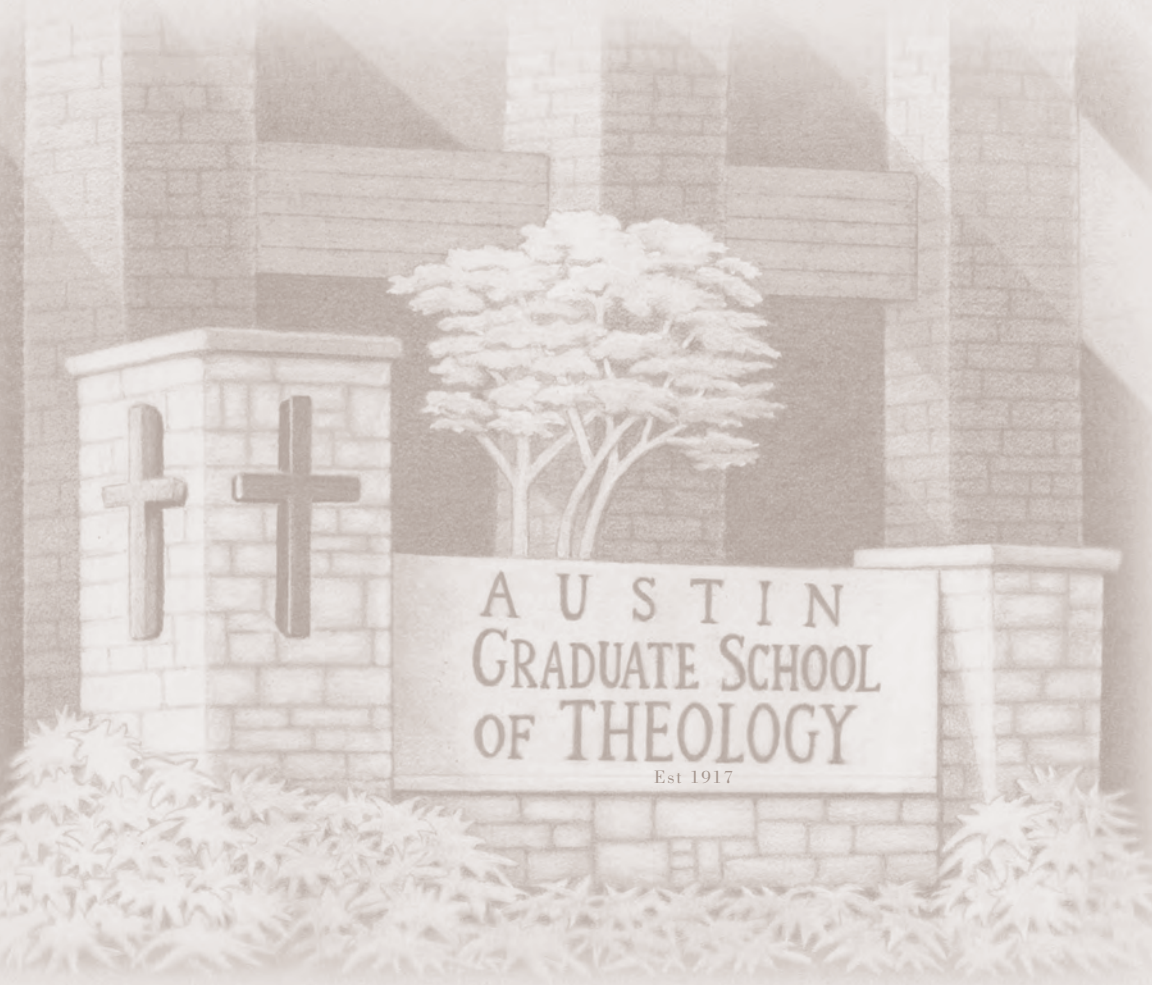
Number 30 / 2018

CHRISTIAN STUDIES



CHRISTIAN STUDIES
SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE CHURCH

A PUBLICATION OF THE FACULTY OF AUSTIN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Volume 30 / 2018

Christian Studies (ISSN–4125) is a publication of the faculty of Austin Graduate School of Theology. *Christian Studies* is funded by gifts from readers and friends of the graduate school. Subscription is free upon request. Back issues are available for $3.00 each, plus postage. Correspondence should be addressed to Keith D. Stanglin, Austin Graduate School of Theology, 7640 Guadalupe Street, Austin, Texas 78752. *Christian Studies* is indexed in ATLA Religion Database. Web Site: www.austingrad.edu.
Email: christianstudiespress@austingrad.edu.

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Consistent with Protestant churches, Churches of Christ have rejected the five so-called false sacraments and accepted baptism and the Lord's Supper as the proper sacraments of the church. Last year's issue of *Christian Studies* was focused on the theme of baptism. As a follow-up to those reflections, this issue is devoted to the "Eucharist," the early church's favorite word for holy communion. To distinguish it from the self-centered meal that the Corinthian Christians were celebrating, Paul called this meal the Lord's Supper, reminding the church who should be at the center of this practice.

Again, like other Protestant churches, churches of the American Restoration Movement rejected important aspects of the Roman Catholic Church's sacramental theology. As good Protestants, they have taken for granted that communion is to be given in both kinds (bread and cup). Furthermore, with other Protestants, Churches of Christ have rejected transubstantiation.

Where Restorationist churches have generally differed with other Protestants, especially those of Reformed and evangelical backgrounds, is in the frequency of the meal. Traditionally, Restorationist churches have insisted on participating in communion every Lord's Day and only on the Lord's Day. Because this practice has been distinctive among most of their American Protestant neighbors, Restorationist churches have concentrated much of their Eucharistic theology on the question of frequency—specifically, on defending weekly communion against its many detractors. It should be noted that the opponents of weekly communion are now fewer and farther between, since more frequent communion has become the ecumenical consensus. At any rate, as a result of the focus on frequency, other significant questions about the Lord's Supper have often been neglected or pushed aside in Churches of Christ.

Although the question of frequency is certainly important in its own right, this issue of *Christian Studies* intends to address other important issues related to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. What is it? How should we think about it? How should we practice it? How can our theology and practice of the Lord's Supper be improved? The result is a collection of articles that are biblical, historical, theological, and practical. Collectively, they examine a variety of

matters connected to the Eucharist, including related biblical themes, the presence of Christ, historical insights, and the proper communicants.

It is my hope that these articles will be beneficial to you in your own study and reflection on this central rite of the church's life. May the considerations in the following pages help us all be more faithful and thoughtful as we seek to practice and pass on the most holy faith.

Keith D. Stanglin
Editor
stanglin@austingrad.edu

Christ's Presence and the Thing Signified in the Lord's Supper

Keith D. Stanglin

I. Introduction

The doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper in Churches of Christ may be summarized in three words, corresponding roughly to points about frequency and purpose or efficacy: The Lord's Supper is a "weekly, Zwinglian ordinance." The strict connection between Lord's Supper and (each and every) Lord's Day has for two centuries distinguished Churches of Christ from most of our Protestant evangelical neighbors who commune less frequently, but has put us in harmony with Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and (much of) Lutheranism. The idea that the Lord's Supper is primarily and almost exclusively a memorial, and that it is simply an ordinance to be obeyed without the conveying of special grace, unites Churches of Christ with most Reformed and evangelical churches, but puts us at odds with the others. Thus, in sum, in contrast to their high, sacramental view of believers' baptism, Churches of Christ generally maintain and a low, Zwinglian view of weekly Lord's Supper.

My specific aim in this essay is to articulate a view of the Lord's Supper that raises the bar for the typical "low church." This practice of the church is more than simply an ordinance, a command to be obeyed in the sense of positive law. Rather, my thesis is that divine grace is conveyed in the sacrament by the presence of Christ mediated through the Spirit. This view will challenge the typical evangelical and Restorationist understanding of the Eucharist. To get a hearing among these churches, the perspective should be faithful to Scripture, which is of prime importance to evangelicals. Therefore, my first concern in this discussion is biblical faithfulness. I am concerned, second, to hear the

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voice of the great tradition of the church (a concern that distinguishes me from some Restorationists, though not all). The greatest minds of church history are the common property of all Christians. A third concern of mine, in line with the early American Restoration Movement, is greater ecumenical understanding, especially in areas of agreement. The view that I articulate should bring "low church" fellowships into closer conversation with "high church" communions, which have often been scandalized by the evangelical marginalization of the sacraments.

II. Sacramental efficacy *in genere*

A. Sacraments as Signs of Grace

Peter Lombard, channeling Augustine, writes, "What is a sacrament? 'A sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing.'… Also, a sacrament is a visible form of an invisible grace."… "A sacrament bears a likeness of the thing whose sign it is."… "…[T]he sacraments were not instituted only for the sake of signifying, but also to sanctify."[1] As Martin Luther observes, a sacrament must have a physical, visible sign; an internal, spiritual significance; and an intentional faith that makes it effective.[2] For Luther, a sacrament is the promise of forgiveness of sins conjoined with a sign, in which case there are properly two sacraments, baptism and Eucharist.[3] In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin opens his discussion of the sacraments with a definition consistent with all of the above. As did the Lombard, Calvin also quotes Augustine and, incorporating the same three elements of Luther's definition, Calvin writes that a sacrament is "a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him."[4] As the form of the promise of God, the sacrament is a "visible word,"[5] accompanied by the promise itself, which is communicated through preaching.

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[1] Peter Lombard, *The Sentences,* 4 vols., trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007–10), IV.i.1 and 4.

[2] Martin Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods," in *Luther's Works,* American edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–86), vol. 35:45.

[3] Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," *LW* 36:124.

[4] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), IV.xiv.1.

[5] *Inst.* IV.xiv.6, quoting Augustine on the Gospel of John.

Based on this brief sketch, I will characterize the traditional understanding of the sacraments as follows. A sacrament is not simply any of the many legitimate practices and rituals of the church. It is a visible sign of invisible grace, practiced by Christ himself and instituted by him for the church, administered by the church, joined with the word of the gospel. What the sacrament or ordinance or sign signifies is actually linked to the sign. Grace is truly conveyed at the moment of the sacrament. Both baptism and Eucharist re-present the death and resurrection of Christ and convey the promised benefits to those who participate by faith. Let us call this a "high" view of the sacraments.

B. From Moment of Grace to Mere Symbol

Whence came the "low" view, the shift in evangelical Protestant sacramental theology? How did it happen that the church began to think of its sacraments as mere symbols? How did the sacraments go from being necessary for salvation, to being unnecessary for salvation, to being simply unnecessary or altogether eliminated? As it goes with so much of history, this also is a story of pendulum swings. The Roman Church was perceived by Protestant reformers as having, in many ways, a superstitious doctrine and practice of sacraments. This stems, in part, from a sacramental view of the cosmos in general, namely, that the material world is infused with the divine presence, the transcendent made immanent. This infusion is reflected, in a special and unique way, in the incarnation. When God "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14), the divine nature had a new kind of direct contact and relation with the world, and, as a result, human nature was divinized. Medieval iconodules saw in the incarnation a paradigm for thinking about God's special presence and power in relics and images. From an iconoclastic perspective, the sacramental view of the cosmos, when taken to an extreme, can approach panentheism and, when it comes to individual relics and images, can look indistinguishable from idolatry.

To the mind of most reformers, this sacramental view had been taken to an extreme in the late medieval Western church, and idolatry was the result. In an effort to correct the error, Protestants tended to remove the material from the liturgy and the sacred from the material cosmos. For many reformers, this de-sacramentalization of the cosmos meant the removal of special divine presence not only from relics and images, but even from the sacraments of baptism and communion.

With regard to the sacraments, there had always been a distinction between the sign (*signum*) and the thing or reality signified (*res significata*), that is, between the visible matter and form, on the one hand, and the grace to which they pointed, on the other. This common distinction, however, became a separation in the thought of Ulrich Zwingli. I will not speculate now on why this is the case. Besides exegetical reasons and a reaction to the late medieval situation that I have described, some have posited Zwingli's openness to Platonic philosophy, which in some forms results in a de-emphasis on the material world. Whatever the reason, Zwingli, more than anyone before him, separated the sacramental sign from the thing signified. We can call this the "Zwinglian separation." What Zwingli separated the Enlightenment, for reasons of its own, attempted to divorce entirely: "symbol and reality have been broken apart."[6]

Although this separation was not persuasive to Martin Luther or ultimately to Lutheran orthodoxy, it does reflect well the anti-institutional impulse of the Protestant Reformations as a whole, including the Lutheran branch. The Protestant critique of the Roman Church's sacraments, begun in earnest in 1520 with Luther's *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, led to the reduction from seven sacraments to two, as well as to the further demotion of the two that remained. Just as Scripture alone is sufficient without the teaching magisterium of the church, so also justification and absolution are available by personal faith alone without the need for grace dispensed through the church's sacraments. The emphasis on faith, Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers ended up marginalizing the institutional church. Relationship with God became predominantly personal and individual, not something experienced primarily in the gathered church or mediated through its sacraments.

As a result, the Sunday service was no longer centered around a Mass, mumbled by a priest in a language that the people, and perhaps even the priest himself, could not understand. The clergy, whose primary task had been to administer seven sacraments, was now given the principal task of preaching. With Reformed and radical Protestants, for the first time in the history of the church, there could be a Lord's Day service without the Lord's Supper. In the absence of holy communion, preaching became the new sacrament, the *conditio*

[6] Ronald P. Byars, *The Sacraments in Biblical Perspective*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 11.

sine qua non and central component of the worship assembly, in the words of the Westminster divines, "effectual to salvation."[7] Of course, preaching was neither intended nor did it have to supplant sacraments; the word simply could have been joined more deliberately to the sacraments. But supplant it did, at least for many Protestants, who began to focus on internals and preaching to the exclusion of externals and the sacraments. The baptistery and table (or altar) were no longer front and center, but the pulpit would soon, literally, take center stage.

Evangelicalism has been the proper heir to Zwinglianism, perpetuating the separation between the sign and the thing signified. In some fellowships—namely, Quakers and the Salvation Army—the unnecessary role of the sacraments has been taken to the logical conclusion, and so they are not practiced at all. Friends rejected "outward" sacraments, claiming that true communion is an "inward" communion with God and true baptism is baptism with the Spirit. After all, if the inward reality of grace is conveyed ordinarily apart from the outward sign, then the outward sign retains symbolic import, at best, and, at worst, it can be distracting and divisive. Most of these churches, though, continue to practice the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. When I say "low church," I affectionately mean the type of evangelicalism that practices the sacraments but has a very low or non-sacramental view of them, as opposed to an ecclesiology that views the church as the means of grace. Such "low" churches, which I take to be the majority of self-described evangelicals, generally insist that baptism has nothing whatsoever to do with the conversion process and that the Eucharist, infrequently practiced, is a mere symbol of Christ's body and blood. As Ronald Byars characterizes this way of looking at the sacraments, they are, in the minds of many Christians, "justasymbol."[8] This low-church mindset tends to promote what John Webster has called "sacramental minimalism." Webster notes that such sacramental minimalism "has attached itself to some bits of the evangelical tradition."[9] At least as regards North American evangelicalism and its various exports, the suggestion that "some

[7] See "Westminster Larger Catechism (1647)," Q&A 154–55, in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 4, 1600–1693* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 340.

[8] Byars, *Sacraments*, 10.

[9] John Webster, "On Evangelical Ecclesiology," in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 187.

bits" of evangelicalism have been infiltrated with sacramental minimalism is vastly understated. As will be demonstrated, even when some evangelical theologians acknowledge the sacraments as "means of grace," they often do not intend to indicate the uniqueness of the sacraments, but instead list them alongside other Christian practices, such as prayer, discipline, Spiritual gifts, and evangelism.[10]

III. Efficacy of Eucharist

A. Its Marginalization in Evangelicalism

1. Merely symbolic (memorial)

How exactly is Christ present with regard to the Eucharistic elements? In the biblical account, Jesus simply says, "This is my body…. This is my blood" (Matt 26:26–28). Thus early Christians, with few exceptions, simply repeated the realist language of the New Testament without specifying any particular theory. Therefore, the ambiguity of the New Testament with regard to how Christ is present in the Lord's Supper carried over into the early church. After noting this lack of clarity in the patristic language regarding the presence of Christ at the Eucharist, Jaroslav Pelikan writes,

> Yet it does seem "express and clear" that no orthodox father of the second or third century of whom we have record either declared the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist to be no more than symbolic (although Clement and Origen came close to doing so) or specified a process of substantial change by which the presence was effected (although Ignatius and Justin came close to doing so). Within the limits of those excluded extremes was the doctrine of the real presence.[11]

This ambiguity of language explains how theologians on both sides of subsequent medieval and early modern debates over the question of real presence could likewise appeal to the New Testament and patristic writings. These works simply did not resolve the controversies that later, more precise definitions raised. It was left to the later centuries to speculate either, on the one

[10] E.g., Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 950–61.

[11] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971–89), vol. 1:167.

hand, that the consecrated elements become the literal body and blood of Jesus, or, on the other hand, that they are only figuratively so. And, sadly, along the way, it also became more customary for churches to choose one side and then condemn the other.

It is well known that, although both Luther and Zwingli rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation and its later medieval interpretation, nevertheless they could not agree on what to put in its place. It is the primary dispute, chronologically and otherwise, that divided the communions later known as Lutheran and Reformed. Based on the words, "This is my body,… this is my blood," Luther insisted on the literal, bodily presence of Christ, whereas Zwingli insisted that the statements are metaphorical. It depends on what the meaning of "is" is. For Zwingli, "This is my body" means, "This represents my body." Thus, Zwinglians emphasized that there is no bodily presence of Christ in holy communion, and that the benefit that comes from partaking of the meal is primarily, or perhaps exclusively, one of remembrance. As this polemical concept has developed in evangelicalism, it has tended to emphasize what the Lord's Supper is not—namely, the literal bodily presence of Christ. When the negative point against "real presence" becomes the focus, it resembles what evangelical theologian Millard Erickson calls the "doctrine of the real absence."[12]

John Calvin spent much time and energy trying to articulate a Eucharistic doctrine of presence that both Lutheran and Reformed believers could affirm. Although Lutherans finally would not subscribe to Calvin's views, Calvin inclined to stronger language than the Zwinglians with regard to the "spiritual presence" of Christ.[13] With this in mind, the language used by modern evangelicals Erickson and Wayne Grudem sounds more Calvinian than Zwinglian. They both affirm the presence of Christ, that we meet him in holy communion. Erickson mentions that the Spirit makes Christ "real in our experience," and Grudem is pleased to advocate the "spiritual presence" of Christ.[14]

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[12] Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1123.

[13] The entire issue of *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 18/1 (2016) includes helpful essays and primary sources related to Calvin's role in the so-called *Consensus Tigurinus*, including the events before and after it.

[14] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1122–23; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 995–96.

If the mode of Christ's presence is ambiguous in the church fathers, the efficacy of the Lord's Supper is a little clearer. The early and medieval church commonly thought about the Eucharist in terms of conveying grace. Because the Lord's Supper grants "communion and union" with the divine nature, drawing God's people into "uniform theosis," (Pseudo-)Dionysius the Areopagite passes on the tradition of calling the Eucharist the "sacrament of sacraments" (*teletōn teletē*).[15]

Evangelical theologians are a little more guarded than the Areopagite. Erickson speaks much about the Lord's Supper being beneficial and effective, but he never quite defines what that efficacy is. The Supper does remind us of the death of Christ and symbolize the unity of believers.[16] For Grudem, he speaks of the "spiritual blessing," "spiritual nourishment," and "spiritual participation in the benefits of the redemption that he [Christ] earns."[17] Both writers stop short of emphasizing the idea of grace being conveyed.

In Churches of Christ, although some have stressed the presence of Jesus at the Table and the meal as a means of grace,[18] language about the Lord's Supper is usually Zwinglian. As in many Reformed churches, it is a commemorative feast.

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[15] Dionysius the Areopagite, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* III.i, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne Migne, 161 vols. (Paris, 1857–66), vol. 3:424C-D; ET, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Paul Rorem, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 209. *Teletē* means "perfector" or can refer to mystic rites. That he means it in the former sense is clear from the later discussion at ibid. IV.iii.12; ET, 232.

[16] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1123–24.

[17] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 990, 996.

[18] E.g., in line with Alexander Campbell, note E. G. Sewell: "Proper attendance upon the Lord's Supper is a wonderful means of grace to strengthen the hearts and lives of Christians in all things connected with the service of God." E. A. Elam: "Every time the Supper is observed, Jesus is present." For these quotations, both of which come from the 1915 *Gospel Advocate*, and for further discussion of sacramental theology in Churches of Christ, see John Mark Hicks, "Stone-Campbell Sacramental Theology," *Restoration Quarterly* 50/1 (2008): 35–48, here 42 n. 34.

2. From Frequent to Infrequent

As for frequency, the New Testament provides implicit evidence that holy communion was taken when the church gathered on the first day of every week (see Luke 24:1, 13, 30–35; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:20, 33; 16:2; Heb 10:24–25).

The earliest Christian worship manual, the *Didache* (ca. AD 70), prescribes meeting every first day of the week for the Lord's Supper.[19] The earliest Christian description of a worship assembly, Justin Martyr's first *Apology* (ca. AD 155), describes meeting on Sunday for the Lord's Supper, a practice so central to the assembly and Christian life that the elements were taken by the deacons and distributed to those who were absent.[20] By the third century, there is some evidence of the Lord's Supper also on other days in addition to Sunday. It came to be offered daily in some places. But weekly Lord's Supper on Sunday remained the norm and continued throughout the early and medieval periods of church history. However, the laity in the West partook less and less frequently, and expectations for participation became very low. By 1215 (Lateran IV), it was mandated that Christians should come to church to confess sins and take the Eucharist at least once a year at Easter.[21]

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[19] *Didache* 14:1: "But every Lord's Day of the Lord gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving (*Eucharistēsate*) after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure."

[20] Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 67: "And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons."

[21] Lateran IV (1215), Canon 21, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 1:245: "All the faithful of either sex, after they have reached the age of discernment, should individually confess all their sins in a faithful manner to their own priest at least once a year, and let them take care to do what they can to perform the penance imposed on them. Let them reverently receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least at Easter unless they think, for a good reason and on the advice of their own priest, that they should abstain in receiving it for a time. Otherwise they shall be barred from entering a church during their lifetime and they shall be denied a christian burial at death."

Thus, by the thirteenth century, many Christians were partaking of the frequently offered Mass only once a year. By the early fifteenth century, the laity was allowed to take communion only in one kind, justified by the doctrine of concomitance; only the clergy could have the cup, too.[22] So, on the eve of the Reformation, even though the church celebrated Mass weekly (and even daily), most people did not partake frequently, and if they did, it was only the bread. But, the "Mass" or "divine liturgy" was still being celebrated every Sunday, even if only the clergy were partaking.

In addition to their insistence that the laity be given communion in both kinds, another obvious change introduced by Protestant reformers had to do with frequency. Recall that the sacramental nature of the Lord's Supper had been questioned by many Protestants, so they did not want people to think superstitiously about the bread and cup or to offer divine worship to the elements, and they didn't want the ceremony of the sacrament to overshadow or trump the preaching of the word. In addition, former Roman Catholics were not accustomed to their own weekly participation. So the Lord's Supper was offered in the church less frequently. Yet Protestant believers generally celebrated the Lord's Supper more frequently than most Roman Catholic laity actually did—every quarter or month. But this is the first time in the history of the church that a congregation's Sunday service would go by without celebrating the Lord's Supper. Some reformers wanted it more frequently. Calvin preferred weekly Lord's Supper: "The Lord's table should have been spread at least once a week for the assembly of Christians, and the promises declared in it should feed us spiritually."[23] One point that Calvin made was that partaking only once a year reflected and encouraged spiritual laziness, the "torpor of the sluggish."[24] His assumption is that the Lord's Supper is a time for covenant renewal, confession of sin, and getting our lives right with God. One should not approach the Table with unrepented sin. But the magistrates in Geneva wouldn't have weekly communion. Indeed, for most Protestants, quarterly or every other month became the normal frequency for the Lord's Supper; at

[22] Communion in one kind was decreed at the Council of Constance, session 13 (15 June 1415), in *Decrees*, 1:418–19. According to the doctrine of concomitance, only the bread was necessary, for the blood was also contained in the body.

[23] *Inst.* IV.xvii.46.

[24] *Inst.* IV.xvii.46. This is the language of Henry Beveridge's translation, to be preferred over the McNeill/Battles edition's "inertia of indolent people."

most, monthly. This move to displace the Eucharist ensured that preaching would become the new sacrament and center of the Lord's Day assembly, without which no Sunday service would be complete. In one generation, much of Europe went from celebrating the sacrament without an intelligible proclamation of the Word to the proclamation of the Word without the sacrament.

Some evangelical theologians today seem fairly open to weekly Lord's Supper. Grudem notes that, if it is planned and executed well, the Lord's Supper could be done once a week.[25] Erickson does not specify how often the Lord's Supper should be taken, but he is concerned with the Eucharist becoming "routinized" by observing it "so frequently as to make it seem trivial or so commonplace that we go through the motions without really thinking about the meaning."[26]

Perhaps actual evangelical practice is more telling than the opinions of professional theologians. Monthly or quarterly Lord's Supper is probably still the most common practice among evangelicals. The Lord's Supper, accompanied by the Word and once the center of the Lord's Day assembly, has been, in most Protestant churches, replaced by preaching, and, most weeks, without sacrament. And now, with the decline of preaching, many evangelical assemblies have, on most Lord's Days, no Eucharist and very little preaching. It is now the music or concert, often reductionistically referred to as "worship" and juxtaposed to the preaching, that functions as the new center and, in effect, the new sacrament of evangelicalism. Thus, much of Western Christianity has gone from sacrament without word to word without sacrament to, now, concert without word or sacrament.

B. Eucharist, the Sacrament of Sanctifying Grace

1. Real, Spiritual presence.

I would like to advocate for consideration—among Churches of Christ and evangelicals at large—of the real, Spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist. A brief glance at a couple of biblical passages will help to clarify my position.

[25] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 999.
[26] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1126.

In Luke 24, it is the first day of the week, resurrection day itself, and two disciples walking to Emmaus are joined by a third traveler, whom we know to be the risen Lord. They do not recognize him or, in that sense, see. Then they invite him to stay and eat, and the guest quickly becomes the host. He takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them, all liturgical indications of Eucharist. At that moment, they see or recognize him "in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35). And then, immediately, he disappears, and they do not see him. As Jesus' baptism is paradigmatic, so also this very first Lord's Day communion is a paradigm for all Lord's Suppers to follow. Jesus has disappeared from our physical sight; though we eat, he is no longer physically present at the Table. At the same time, our hearts burn within us because we do continue to recognize his presence in the breaking of the bread.

First Corinthians 10 is another passage that has much to teach about the Eucharist, most of it indirectly, yet at the same time clearly. The first point is typological. In speaking of Israel, Paul says that they were all baptized. He then observes that "they all ate the same Spiritual food and they all drank the same Spiritual drink, for they were drinking from the Spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:3–4). The context of the whole passage indicates a comparison between Israel and the Corinthian Christians, who, though sharing in blessings from God, are in danger of falling. In the midst of the discussion, Paul clearly links the bread and cup of holy communion both with the Spirit and with Christ. As God's chosen people, while we share physical elements, it is also Spiritual food and drink, and this nourishment is intimately connected with Christ, who, like the rock, is present with his people as the source of these blessings and who constantly accompanies ("follows") God's people in the wilderness period of testing.

Christ's special presence at the Lord's Supper is also evident later in the same chapter (1 Cor 10:16–20). As with many things in 1 Corinthians, we must find the positive point by listening to Paul's rebuke of the church. Their sharing in meals at the pagan temples made them "communers" (*koinōnia*) with those gods, or demons. You cannot do that, Paul says. Instead, your participation in the bread and the cup of blessing makes you communers with Christ. In this meal, you have communion, or *fellowship* (*koinōnia*), with the body and blood of Christ. To be communers with Christ means that, though God is omnipresent and his Spirit is always with us, Christ is present at the Table in a *special* way.

As noted, over the centuries, Christians have argued about what it means to say that Christ is present at the Table. The truth is located somewhere between the two extremes. The elements are not literal flesh and blood, and so 1) participation is not cannibalism. When the Word became flesh, he took on a real human body subject to all the same physical limitations of space, and so 2) his *body* in its human nature, to this day, is not omnipresent, not on thousands of tables at once consumed by millions. 3) When the Bible says Jesus is the Lamb, this doesn't mean he is a literal baby sheep with wool and a tail, any more than saying that this is his body, especially while he was at the Table with the Twelve, means that it is a piece of his literal, physical human body. On these points, Zwingli was correct.

At the same time, the elements are neither meaningless nor for mere remembrance. In this meal, God sends his Spirit to mediate the presence of Christ to those who partake, and so it's not just ordinary bread and cup anymore. It is similar to baptism. The gracious, efficacious presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper says no more or less than the salvific efficacy of baptism. There is nothing inherently special about the water, but God chooses to convey grace at an objective moment, through the application of the physical element. And so the water, by God's grace, becomes for us the means of salvation, a channel of justifying grace, the blood that washes away sins. There is no chemical change to the water; it's still just two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. It is not that the water can have no ordinary use before or after baptism, or that it cannot be drained into the same system as other waste water. Likewise, since the meal is communion with Christ, and since he said we must eat his flesh and drink his blood, then the bread and cup become for us the body and blood of Christ. There is no chemical, substantial, or literal change in the elements themselves. But as our communion with God is real, God chooses, through his Spirit, to mediate to us the real, Spiritual presence of Christ, conveying grace that sanctifies us as we eat. And so we say, with Scripture, that this is body and blood. The elements of bread and cup are holy things for the holy people of God. They are the body and blood of Christ, but not in a literal way that enables *latreia* of the elements or forbids any type of ordinary use after the Eucharist.

Based on these biblical passages, we can ask, "If Christ is not present in this meal, then what, after all, is the point?" The main point is that, as this is

communion with Christ, Christ is present—for our redemption and our sanctification. As long as this main point is affirmed, we should not condemn those groups who believe in the literal bodily presence, but we should grieve that those same groups have condemned the rest, and that, as in Corinth, the Lord's Supper has become a means of Christian division.

2. Sanctifying grace.

The point about whether grace is conveyed in the Lord's Supper is rather simple: If and when God is present with his people for their redemption, then grace follows. The grace that accompanies God's special presence in a liturgical context is clearly seen in Isaiah 6. The prophet, since he is "a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5), is certain that he deserves to die, and he is certainly correct. Rather than perishing, though, he is spared, his sinful lips cleansed with a burning coal, and he is given a task in God's kingdom. This is sanctifying grace. Such grace can also be seen in meals eaten in God's presence. In Exodus 24:9–11, the leaders of Israel ascend the mountain with Moses to eat in the presence of God. They see God, but God does not "raise his hand against" them (Exod 24:11). This is grace. In John 6, the immediate context is not Eucharistic, but the language clearly is. Following on the heels of the pre-Eucharistic feeding of the 5,000, Jesus says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (John 6:54). If Christ is present in the Eucharist, as already established, then grace follows.

The sanctifying "grace" that Christ bestows on those who come to the Table in faith is a direct result of Christ's special presence. The invitation to come to God's Table is an act of divine grace. The sign—the physical eating and the nourishment that it provides—coincides with the grace signified—the spiritual nourishment that makes God's people partakers of the divine nature. Because holy communion draws God's people into closer union with him, it is, as the Areopagite recognized, the sacrament of divinization.

3. Frequency.

As we have observed, most Protestants do not take holy communion every Lord's Day. The early American Restoration Movement emphasized the Lord's Supper as a weekly Table, the center of the Lord's Day assembly. Thus,

frequent communion became a hallmark of the Restoration Movement and, if not a scandal, at least a puzzle to evangelicals. And this rhythm is still the case in Churches of Christ today. The Lord's Supper is taken every Sunday and only on Sunday. At its worst, it can become *ex opere operato*; it is how you "punch your card" or "make it count." At best, however, the practice accompanies the recognition that the first day of the week, the day of resurrection, has theological significance for the church, that there is something truly special and indispensable about the Lord's Day Eucharist.

Here is a thesis that should be tested: The same reason that the church gathers every first day of the week is the same reason the church eats the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. To put the point more clearly: Whatever reason one would like to give for not taking the Lord's Supper every Sunday should be as good a reason for not meeting for worship every Sunday. Whatever reason one would provide for meeting for worship every Sunday should be as good a reason for taking the Lord's Supper every Sunday. For example, if "x" is no good reason for one, it is also no good reason for the other. Therefore, why would one gather to celebrate the resurrection of Christ, on resurrection day, and omit the very meal that he gave us for its celebration?

The most common reason given by evangelicals against the weekly Eucharist is the danger of frequent communion leading to an empty ritual done by rote. This concern is mentioned by Erickson, cited above. This concern would make for a very weak argument against the regular practice of anything important. In fact, almost every Christian I talk to about this, regardless of their denominational affiliation, agrees that there is no good reason for not having the Lord's Supper every Sunday. Thus, many Protestants are coming around to more frequent, and even weekly, Eucharist. Many evangelical churches that have no denominational ties are taking the Lord's Supper weekly. Moreover, many churches that are tied to denominations that historically have not practiced weekly Eucharist are now reconsidering. There is no real theological point at stake in support of holy communion less than every Sunday.

Weekly Lord's Supper is, in fact, the emerging ecumenical consensus, confirmed in the World Council of Churches' *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*: "As the Eucharist celebrates the resurrection of Christ, it is appropriate that it should take place at least every Sunday. As it is the new sacramental meal of the people of God, every Christian should be encouraged to receive

communion frequently."[27] If we are concerned to elevate our thinking and language about holy communion, then perhaps the best way to begin to do this is through weekly Lord's Supper. Contrary to the old idea that frequent communion somehow cheapens it, weekly Eucharist rather emphasizes the importance and centrality of this practice and opens the door to thinking about the presence of Christ and the grace conveyed in the sacrament.

IV. Sacraments as God's work

One of the chief evangelical concerns with a high view of the sacraments is the concern that they would be thought of in terms of *ex opere operato*, that they are simply a work and, even worse, a work done regardless of faith. It should be clear that I am not advocating participation or efficacy of the sacraments apart from personal faith. But are the sacraments works, in the sense that Paul opposed them to faith? Is grace to be conveyed as a result of human work? Consider whether the Eucharist is a work. God gave us this meal as a means of grace, to unite us with Christ's death and resurrection. It is God who takes something ordinary and works something extraordinary through it. We are even served it. Is eating, chewing, drinking, and swallowing a work?

Evangelicals and Protestants need to recover the biblical vision of a sacramental cosmos and of a God who works in, with, and through material substance. Think, for example, of the tree of life. God chose a particular tree whose fruit would impart life. The tree itself was not magic and presumably was not even a unique species, but chosen by God to convey life in the eating of it. God, not the human eater, is the worker.

The Holy Spirit, as the bond of charity within the Trinity, is the gift of God's love to his people, through whom God's love has been poured out into our hearts (Rom 5:5). Perhaps what is needed is a more robust pneumatology in evangelical ecclesiology, one that allows and expects the Spirit to work in the church and to convey grace through the sacraments, as promised in Scripture. If, in the gathered assembly of God's people in worship, the Holy Spirit can work directly on, and Christ can be present to, the human heart through the means of a drum set and an electric guitar (as many evangelicals assume), then surely the Spirit can mediate Christ's direct presence for salvation and

[27] *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), Eucharist, III.31.

sanctification through the biblical means of water, bread, and cup, joined with the Word of gospel and grace.

As our hearts are restless until they find rest in God, the sacraments reflect the yearning of God to be present with his people. God is the one who invites us to the laver and to the Table. God, through the Spirit, tabernacles with us so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. As is the Holy Spirit himself, the sacraments also are a down payment and seal of God's promises and Christ's presence for our redemption. Perhaps they are not strictly necessary means, but the sacraments are ordinary means of God's justifying and sanctifying grace.

Finally, a practical-ecumenical suggestion: The criticism that comes from traditional Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches is that Christ is not present in the sacraments or ordinances of Protestant churches. If Protestants do not accept this criticism (as I do not), then it doesn't help for evangelicals positively to insist that Christ is not present in the Lord's Supper. Instead, for Orthodox and Roman Catholics who are willing to grant that the Spirit can work outside of their episcopal succession, biblical language would go a long way.[28] For those who are open to Protestant churches as being more than simply "ecclesial communities," a higher view of sacraments can be a small step toward greater unity of thought and worship.[29] Just as evangelicals should be able to say, with the New Testament, that baptism is "for remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), without immediately having to qualify it as not for remission of sins, so, when speaking the words of institution, we all ought to say, with the New Testament, that this "is" for us the body and blood of Jesus Christ (Matt 26:26–28), without immediately having to add the non-biblical word "represents." Simply using biblical language, without being scandalized by it, would help get evangelicals within earshot of the historic Christian tradition's and Scripture's doctrine of the efficacy of the sacraments. It also may enable

[28] This, sadly, does not include all Orthodox and Roman Catholic believers. I grant that, for Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics who insist that the true sacramental presence of Christ does not obtain outside of their bishops' administration, this point may be a non-starter. In this case, a conversation about ministry is necessary first.

[29] "Ecclesial communities" is the language of Vatican II's *Unitatis redintegratio*, which also recognizes the importance of dialogue on the sacraments. *Unitatis redintegratio* 22, in *Decrees,* 2:920: "For these reasons dialogue should include among its subjects the Lord's supper and other sacraments, worship and the church's ministry."

us all to gaze more clearly into the divine beauty to which these physical signs ultimately point.

Observing the Lord's Supper Today

Ted A. Campbell

Introduction

My great-grandfather and great-grandmother Campbell were members of the Braxton Church of Christ in Cannon County, Tennessee. After my great-grandfather died in 1906, my great-grandmother moved her three boys to Texas and she raised them in the South Park Church of Christ in Beaumont. A little more than a century later, in March 2011, her United Methodist great-grandson attended the Preston Road Church of Christ in Dallas and there was offered and received the elements of the Lord's Supper. My great-grandma Campbell in heaven can perhaps take some solace in the fact that I am now in communion with at least one Churches of Christ congregation.

I reflected on that experience and noted that the service of the Supper at Preston Road involved an elder of the congregation offering a simple prayer of thanksgiving for the bread and the wine (which tasted a lot like grape juice), then the elements were distributed to the congregation in the pews.[1] It reminded me of the simple prayers over the bread and wine in the second-century *Didache* document,[2] and I wondered if the distinguished second-century scholar Everett Ferguson had somehow influenced this congregation or its leaders.

But maybe not; maybe it was not just from Professor Ferguson. Part of the genius of the Churches of Christ has been their ability to discern what is at the

[1] Some of the wording of the first two paragraphs of the present article are derived from this blog post: Ted A. Campbell, "Why the Churches of Christ Were Right After All," https://heartcoremethodist.wordpress.com/2011/03/07/why-the-churches-of-christ-were-right-after-all/.

[2] *Didache* 9, in Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 357–59.

crucial center of Christian faith. Their historic reservations about imposing anything (like a piano) not explicitly mentioned in the New Testament has led to some lengthy disputes that other Christians may find baffling or amusing (for example, New Testament precedent for a kitchen in the church building), but it has also led them to think, perhaps in a more focused way than other Christian groups have been forced to think, about what is centrally Christian. And they have consistently discerned the Supper of the Lord at the historic core of Christian faith.

In what follows, I offer some contemporary reflections on observing the Lord's Supper for the broader family of Christians today, and those in Evangelical churches, in particular. In keeping with this, the following reflections are grounded primarily in New Testament texts, but with some reference to early Christian writers and a few later Christian poets and theologians whose works may illuminate the meaning of the Supper. I also offer a proposal as to how we can faithfully observe the Supper in the midst of contemporary worship contexts.

Thinking about the Lord's Supper at the Historic Core of Christian Faith

Let us begin by asking a simple question: Which words of Jesus are the oldest recorded words from him? A strong case can be made that they are the words, not in the canonical gospels, but in two "traditioning" passages in 1 Corinthians 11:23–25 and 15:1–11. The former has to do with what Paul himself called "the supper of the Lord" in 1 Corinthians 11:20. The passage in chapter 15 has to do with the primordial Christian "good news" or "gospel" (*euangelion*), the word used explicitly at 1 Corinthians 15:1. Both passages utilize technical language indicating that they had been orally handed down and received. The words translated "I handed on" (*paredoka*) and "I received" (*parelabon*) that appear in both of these passages (1 Cor 11:23 and 15:3) are terms utilized to designate the solemn handing-on and receiving of oral traditions. In fact, the word *paredoka* is the basis for the Greek word for "tradition" (*paradosis*).[3]

[3] Jerry L. Sumney, *Steward of God's Mysteries: Paul and Early Church Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 137–38 and 159–74. To this we may compare Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. "δίδωμι," 2:171–72 (sections on

Most New Testament scholars date 1 Corinthians to the decade of the AD 50s, before the writing of any of the canonical gospels.

New Testament scholar Jerry L. Sumney has examined, in particular, the passage in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 in a critical new study entitled *Steward of God's Mysteries: Paul and Early Church Tradition.*[4] Sumney's general concern is to respond to critics who claim that Paul himself "invented" the Christian message. On this reading, these passages about "receiving" and "handing on" or transmitting central elements of the gospel narrative really referred to Paul's claim to have "received" messages directly from God by direct revelation, rather than from the traditions of already-existing Christian communities. Sumney begins by explaining that the verbs "receive" and "hand on" were utilized in the technical sense of handing on and receiving set forms of words.[5] Here as in other traditioning passages, Sumney points out that the excerpted tradition includes words and phrases unparalleled in other writings of Paul—subtle differences between the accounts of the supper given in Mark's Gospel and in the passage from 1 Corinthians.[6] This suggests that the two traditions about the Supper had already diverged before the time of Paul and thus again it is unlikely that Paul simply "invented" or received by a direct divine revelation the wording he "handed on" in this crucial passage.[7]

Sumney points to the importance of the Supper not only as linked to the Jewish Passover meal, but also as connected to the common practice of solemn, covenantal banquets in the Hellenistic world.[8] Liturgical historian Paul F. Bradshaw has made a similar point in his study, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship*. Bradshaw finds ample evidence in the New Testament that "the regular sharing of food was fundamental to the common life of the first Christian communities, as it apparently had been to Jesus' own mission."[9] Bradshaw reads the passage in 1 Corinthians 11 as indicating that the earliest Christian

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"παραδοῦναι" and "παράδοσις"). See also Ted A. Campbell, *The Gospel in Christian Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13–30.

[4] Sumney, *Steward of God's Mysteries*, 133–58.

[5] Sumney, *Steward of God's Mysteries*, 137–39.

[6] Sumney, *Steward of God's Mysteries*, 139–42.

[7] Sumney, *Steward of God's Mysteries*, 142–45.

[8] Sumney, *Steward of God's Mysteries*, 148–56.

[9] Paul F. Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010; based on the earlier English version published by SPCK in 2009), 18.

communities fed poor people who typically had only bread for their diet, and Paul wanted to address those more affluent Christians who failed to recognize the needs of the poor in the Supper.[10] This occasion led to various ways in which the sacred meal recounting the sufferings and death of Christ came to be separated from actual meals or banquets (sometimes called *agapai*, "love feasts"; Jude 12 and some texts of 2 Peter 2:13, with parallels in other early Christian literature),[11] though the latter persisted for centuries in early Christian communities and a relic of it remains in the *antidoron*, the sharing of blessed but unconsecrated bread at the conclusion of the Eastern Orthodox Eucharistic liturgy.[12]

In thinking about the Lord's Supper today, then, it is important to begin with the recognition that teachings about the sacred meal that Paul called "the Lord's Supper" were solemnly transmitted among the very earliest words about Jesus Christ and among the most central, consistent actions of the earliest Christian communities. This is consistent with Luke's description of the core activities of the earliest Christian community in the second chapter of Acts. After Peter preached,

> … those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:41–42).[13]

The core activities described here include preaching, baptism, teaching, sharing (*koinonia*, here translated "fellowship"), "the breaking of bread," and "the prayers." Consistent with this, "the breaking of bread" in association with "the supper of the Lord" on "the first day of the week" or "the Lord's day"

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[10] Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship*, 20–23.

[11] References to love feasts or Christian banquets in early Christian literature include: Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8:2 (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 256–57); and Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 39:16–18, a translation given in James McKinnon, ed., *Music in Early Christian Literature*, Cambridge Readings in the Literature of Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 43 (item 74), and is also referenced in McKinnon's *The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), essay 8, "On the Question of Psalmody in the Ancient Synagogue," 95–96.

[12] Timothy [Kallistos] Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1993), 288.

[13] I have utilized the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) here and in other places unless noted otherwise.

became a consistent weekly practice of Christian communities (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10).[14]

Thinking about the Meaning of the Gospel Revealed in the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper unfolds the mystery of Christ's work on behalf of human beings: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). But it unfolds this mystery in a different way than the public proclamation of the gospel. Consider the public proclamation of Christ by Peter in Jerusalem in Acts 2:14–36 and by Paul in Athens in Acts 17:22–31. Peter's sermon was addressed to "Men of Judea," he referred repeatedly to prophetic utterances of the Hebrew Scriptures (Joel 2:28–32, Psa 16:8–11, 132:11, and 10:1), and he appealed explicitly to Jewish culture in the conclusion of the message: "God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).[15] Paul's sermon in Athens referred to an altar dedicated to "an unknown god," quoted Greek writers, never named Jesus, and referred to him only as "a man whom [God] has appointed" to judge the world and whom God raised from the dead as an assurance (Acts 17:31).

These public messages appealed to very particular cultural contexts and did not elaborate how Christ's work brought about human salvation.[16] Accounts of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament and in early Christian literature, by contrast, set the Supper within a distinctive Christian culture, an encoded language inherited from Judaism as well as Hellenistic sources in which the mystery of Christ's work could be richly unfolded. We can consider

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[14] Acts 20:7 ("On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread…"), 1 Cor 16:2 (an indication that collections from the church were received "on the first day of every week"), and Rev 1:10 ("I was in the spirit on the Lord's day …"), as well as the documented practice of early Christian communities. On the latter, see Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67:1–5, in Dennis Minns and Paul Parvis, trans. ed., *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 258–61.

[15] C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 20–27.

[16] Dodd, *Apostolic Preaching*, 25, makes the point, "The Jerusalem *kerygma* does not assert that Christ died *for our sins*" as Paul's *kerygma* (e.g., 1 Cor 15:1–4) did. But then, neither does the account of Paul's speech in Athens give a rationale for how Christ's work has brought about salvation.

five interpenetrating aspects of the mystery of Christ unfolded in the Supper: feasting and reconciliation, narrative and remembrance, thanksgiving, an atoning offering, and divine presence. In each case, we have to envision ancient contexts that might have been obvious to ancient participants, but which have to be called to mind today to illuminate these aspects of the Supper.[17]

Feasting and Reconciliation. The Supper originated with a common meal, although even by the time of Paul, the meal as a banquet was coming to be separated from its meaning as a sacred celebration (1 Cor 11:33, "If you are hungry, eat at home…"). But we should not lose sight of the basic meaning of the Supper as just that: a supper, a shared meal. Liturgiologist Laurence Hull Stookey has made the point that the Lord's Supper should be understood as connected to the prominent role of food and eating in Jesus' ministry: "Nothing is more plain from the Gospel accounts than that Jesus loved to eat and drink."[18]

We should also bear in mind that, as ancient people consistently understood it, a meal not only signified but brought about *reconciliation* between those who ate together. In these contexts, a meal was itself a sacred event, not like a school lunch that is just an occasion to feed everyone present. A meal involved an invitation to guests and acceptance of that invitation on the part of those who shared food together as a sign of fellowship or communion (*koinonia*).

Here's an illustration from the history of my own family. The Campbell family of Scotland are accused of horrendous treachery in the massacre of Glencoe (1692). It is a story elaborated and embellished in folk traditions, and the embellished story involves the Campbells plying fellow Scots of Clan Donald with a fabulous meal including plentiful liquor, then butchering the McDonalds in their drunken sleep. The story is horrendous not just because

[17] These five aspects are close to the ones listed in the WCC Faith and Order consensus document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982): "Thanksgiving to the Father," "Anamnesis or Memorial of Christ," "Invocation of the Spirit," "Communion of the Faithful," and "Meal of the Kingdom" (10–15). Following the New Testament texts about the Supper very closely, I have chosen not to focus on invocation of the Spirit (*epiclesis*) and instead have focused on offering (sacrificial) meanings embedded in the Supper. I will mention *epiclesis* below in discussing "Thinking about the Celebration of the Lord's Supper Today."

[18] Laurence Hull Stookey, *Eucharist: Christ's Feast with the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 20–22, quotation on 20.

of the murders: it is considered especially heinous because the murders followed a meal together. The story represents the violation of the sacred, ancient understanding that sharing a meal together brought about reconciliation of the parties involved.[19]

The element of reconciliation in a meal was embedded in the Reformation-age liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer, where the invitation to communion was extended to those "that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours."[20] This wording seems to take reconciliation with one's neighbors as a prerequisite for communion rather than something brought about by the Supper. Later revisions of the liturgy retained the reference to reconciliation but restated the prerequisite as an intention: the invitation is thus addressed to those who "seek to live in peace with one another."[21]

Narrative and Remembrance. Being grounded in the Passover meal that celebrated the narrative of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the Lord's Supper rehearses the narratives about God's deliverance of humankind in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 11:26). We call to mind the work of Christ, as he commanded in the Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24–25 and parallels).

The word used in the language of the New Testament for "memory" or "remembrance" is *anamnesis,* and although some very ancient Christian liturgies do not explicitly recite the narrative of Christ's institution of the Supper,[22] most Christian communities read the institution narrative itself as part of the *anamnesis* in the Supper. Most Christian communities not only call to mind the

[19] When I used to greet my friend and colleague Gary MacDonald at the Supper, I would say, "Peace to you and to the House of Donald." Gary replied, "And to you, and your kin loyal to Argyll." He was offering peace to the Campbells, and we need it. Gary reflected on our greetings in an article, "By Faith By Hope," published in the journal of Clan Donald, U.S.A., *By Sea By Land* (Winter 2014). This was subsequently republished (at my urging) in the *Journal of the Clan Campbell Society of North America* 42:2 (Spring 2015): 16–17.

[20] In the liturgy for Holy Communion in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer; in Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 399.

[21] United Methodist Church, services for Word and Table I and II, in *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 7 and 12.

[22] Specifically, the East-Syrian Liturgy of Addai and Mari; see Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship*, 44–45.

institution of the Supper, but also call to mind the work of Christ in salvation, the basic gospel message.

The ancient Coptic Church, for example, includes in its celebration of the Supper an explicit *anamnesis* of the work of Christ recited by the whole congregation as acclamations:

> Amen. Amen. Amen. We show forth, O Lord, Thy death, and confess Thine Holy Resurrection and Ascension into the heavens.
>
> We worship Thee, bless Thee, give thanks to Thee, O Lord, and entreat Thee, O our God.[23]

These acclamations are actually recited in Greek, though they are embedded in the Coptic-language liturgy, and this indicates that they date from an early period in the evolution of Egyptian Christianity, perhaps the fourth century. It was on the basis of this practice that the Catholic Church and Protestant churches revised services for the Lord's Supper in the twentieth century, incorporating congregational acclamations like the following:

> Christ has died.
>
> Christ has risen.
>
> Christ will come again.[24]

In this way, by reciting the institution of the Supper and by acclaiming the narrative of Christ's saving work, Christian communities fulfill Christ's command to "do this in remembrance [*anamnesin*] of me."

Thanksgiving. If you want to say "Thank you" to someone in Athens today, you say *Eucharisto*. It is the same word used to describe Jesus' actions in the Supper in the Greek language of the New Testament: he "took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks [*Eucharistēsas*], he broke it …" (1 Cor 11:23–

[23] Fayek M. Ishak, ed. and trans., *A Complete Translation of the Coptic Orthodox Mass and the Liturgy of St. Basil* (Toronto: Coptic Orthodox Church Diocese of North America, 1973), 95.

[24] *The Sacramentary: Approved for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1974), 507, 512, 515, 520–21. This form of acclamation is no longer approved in the Catholic Church but is still in use in Protestant church bodies: Rite II for the Holy Eucharist in *The Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church in the USA (1979), 363; and *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), 10, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 25.

24). The narratives in 1 Corinthians 11 and in Luke describe only a thanksgiving over the bread, but parallel passages in Matthew and Mark have the thanksgiving over both the bread and the cup (Matt 26:26–27, Mark 14:22–23).[25] Joachim Jeremias' now classic study of *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* locates the thanksgivings for the bread and the cup as parts of the established Passover *Haggadah* ritual as Jews practiced it in Jesus' time.[26] In this way the Christian Supper inherited thanksgiving prayers that had been part of the Jewish ritual.

The Lord's Supper is an act of thanksgiving: preeminently thanksgiving for the work of Christ celebrated in the Supper, but it contains simple acts of thanksgiving for bread and wine, and it serves as a weekly occasion for thanksgiving on the part of a Christian community.

An Atoning Offering. The three elements of the Supper named above are richly interwoven: a meal is a sign of reconciliation, an occasion for thanksgiving, and an appropriate place for reciting the narratives that shape a community's existence. Now it gets complicated for modern worshipers, because ideas about offerings and sacrifices seem so alien from our everyday experience. And yet, they are deeply embedded in the Christian Scriptures and Christian culture, and they enrich our unfolding of the meaning of the Christian gospel. It is important to recall that in ancient contexts, an offering to God typically concluded with a meal, so this element of the Supper is interwoven with feasting and reconciliation with narrative and memory and with thanksgiving.

Offerings were a huge part of ancient cultures and remain part of many cultures today. The Hebrew Scriptures describe a range of offerings and sacrifices, not unlike offerings that were used by other ancient peoples. Offerings and sacrifices were typically associated with meals and the conclusion of the offering ritual was very typically a shared meal in which the offered grain or oil or meat was consumed by worshipers. Ancient sacrifices typically involved 1) an offering on the part of a human being to a deity; 2) the transformation of that offering by cooking it; and 3) consuming the offering in a ritual meal.

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[25] Both Luke's Gospel and 1 Corinthians (11:25) have Jesus say, "and likewise the cup after eating" (my translation; Luke 22:17), where "likewise" (*hōsautōs*) might imply a thanksgiving of the cup parallel to the thanksgiving over the bread.

[26] Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 84–88, summarizing and concluding the preceding discussion, 41–84.

Participants could think of these three elements of offerings as 1) the offering of oneself to the deity, 2) the deity's acceptance of the offering, and 3) restored fellowship between the deity and the worshipers.

The New Testament associates Jesus' institution of the Supper with the Jewish Passover. The Gospel narratives associate the Supper with the Passover supper and with the sacrifice of Passover lambs (Matt 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7; John 13:1). Jesus said, "This is my body …" and "This my [or 'the'] blood …" in the context of a particular Jewish offering or sacrifice, and Paul's exhortation to remember that in the Supper we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" further associates the work of Christ with his atoning offering.

The letter to the Hebrews represents Christ's offering as a single offering that stands for all time:

> And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God," and since then has been waiting "until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet." For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Heb 10:11–14).

Ancient Christians understood that Christ's whole life was his offering, or, God's self-offering through him. They understood that Christ's death culminated the offering of his life and that his resurrection, like the smoke of an offering rising to God, was the preeminent sign of the divine acceptance of his offering: Christ "gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:2). In this particular context, we can envision how ancient Christians understood that receiving bread and wine in a sacred meal commemorating Christ's work meant that they received and experienced anew the benefit of Christ's saving work.

Divine Presence. But in what sense did ancient Christians understand that Christ is present in the Supper? Evangelical Christians have sometimes been derided as holding to a doctrine of the "real absence" of Christ, as if Christ could be present everywhere in the universe *except* in the celebration of the Supper! In the Reformation age, the discussion of Christ's presence in the Supper often centered on the literal meaning of Jesus' words, "This is my body …"

and "this is my blood …". But Paul's words about "discerning the body" in the Supper were also relevant:

> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died (1 Cor 11:27–30).

In the context of the first letter to the Corinthians, "without discerning the body" seems to have referred directly to those who ate without regard to poorer Christians, part of the "body of Christ" who did not have the sumptuous food that richer Christians could bring. But then again, it is not clear that Paul separated the body and blood of Jesus from the "body of Christ" that is the gathered Christian community.

Would Jesus say to those who refused to give food to the poor only that, "You have failed to serve the poor"? Or is it possible that he would say to them specifically, "'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave *me* no food, I was thirsty and you gave *me* nothing to drink…" (Matt 25:41–42; my emphasis). Failing to serve the poor in Corinth meant failing to serve Christ himself: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27). Christ was present, and he looked like the hungry sisters and brothers in the Corinthian congregation.

To say that the presence of Christ in the Supper is merely "symbolic" negates the presence of Christ among his people. As a historian, I am aware that Christians through the centuries claimed a unique or distinctive sense of Christ's presence in the Supper. They could speak in starkly realistic terms of Christ's presence, as in the early second-century letter of Ignatius of Antioch to the Smyrnaeans, where he derided the teachings of heretics who denied the bodily reality of Jesus as well as Christ's presence in the Supper:

> Now note well those who hold heretical opinions about the grace of Jesus Christ that came to us; note how contrary they are to the mind of God. They have no concern for love, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the oppressed, none for the prisoner

> or the one released, none for the hungry or thirsty. They abstain from Eucharist and prayer because they refuse to acknowledge that the Eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father by his goodness raised up.[27]

This does not offer any theory as to how the Supper could convey Christ's flesh, but I find it remarkable how it echoes Paul's concern for the poor at the Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:27–34 in conjunction with the presence of Christ among the body of the church.

Centuries later, John Calvin developed a more precise way to speak of the presence of Christ in the Supper. The literal body and blood of Christ were not on earth, he argued, because the body of Christ had ascended to heaven. But, he went on to explain, there is a unique or distinctive power (*virtus*) in the Supper "as if" Christ were bodily present.[28] Utilizing the term *virtus* ("strength" or "power") as a way to represent this divine power became a hallmark of the Reformed understanding of the presence of Christ in the sacrament and in fact of Anglican understandings of the presence of Christ in the sacrament in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[29] Charles Wesley's verse utilized both the words "power" and "virtue" in this sense:

> Let the wisest mortal show
> How we the grace receive,
> Feeble elements bestow
> A power not theirs to give.
>
> Who explains the wondrous way,
> How through these the virtue came?

[27] Ignatius of Antioch, letter to the Smyrnaeans, 6:2; in Holmes, ed., *Apostolic Fathers*, 252–55.

[28] John Calvin, *Institutes* IV.17.10–12, in John T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1370–73. McNeill used the term "virtualism" to describe Calvin's sacramental views in this edition of Calvin's *Institutes* (2:1370, note 27).

[29] Eric Richard Griffin, "Daniel Brevint and the Eucharistic Calvinism of the Caroline Church of England, 1603-1674" (ThD thesis, University of Toronto, 2000).

These the virtue did convey,
Yet still remain the same.[30]

And yet, despite his use of the technical language of Calvin's virtualism, Charles Wesley remained true to his poetic and spiritual vocation, refusing to concede any theory of Christ's presence, but concluding in adoration and mystery:

How can spirits heavenward rise
By earthly matter fed,
Drink herewith divine supplies
And eat immortal bread?
Ask the father's Wisdom how:
Christ who did the means ordain;
Angels round our altars bow
To search it out in vain.[31]

The Supper of the Lord richly unfolds the meaning of Christian faith for believers, with layers and layers of meaning embedded in ancient practices. It is a fellowship meal in which we are reconciled to God and to each other. It is a meal at which we recite sacred stories that describe the heart of our holy faith and give thanks to God for the work of salvation in Christ. It is a meal at which we "discern the body" of Christ and in which by grace we are empowered to experience the distinct presence of Jesus Christ.

Thinking about the Celebration of the Lord's Supper Today

What shall we do while angels bow around our altars to search out the mystery of Christ? It is not an easy matter these days, especially in Protestant and Evangelical churches. The Supper of the Lord, the very center of Sunday worship for centuries, now competes with a host of other activities. From the time of the Reformation, Catholic as well as Protestant churches instituted Sunday sermons for the instruction of the faithful. Some Protestant churches

[30]Charles Wesley, hymn from *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1745), no. 57, in J. Ernest Rattenbury, ed., *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 213.

[31]Wesley, *Hymns*, 213. Some contemporary versions do not capitalize "Wisdom," but Charles Wesley's printing had all nouns capitalized, and in this case, it seems clear by the colon following "the Father's Wisdom," that he meant "Christ, who did the means ordain" (immediately following the colon).

elected to have the Supper only monthly or quarterly, leaving most Sunday services centered around preaching for instruction. From the time of the Evangelical Revival in the 1700s, sermons combined with emotive congregational hymnody aimed not only to instruct congregants but also to inculcate appropriate religious affections. From some point in the late 1800s, the work of preaching to the unconverted, which from ancient times had occurred outside of church settings (for example, the sermons of Peter in Jerusalem in Acts 2 or of Paul in Athens in Acts 17), became a central facet of Sunday worship in many Evangelical churches, with messages aimed at a much broader audience that paid attention to external cultures that evangelization demands. By the late twentieth century, churches enthusiastically embraced musical and performance styles of contemporary cultures with elaborate uses of contemporary media. Meanwhile, the Lord's Supper could become merely an appendage, and its deep unfolding of the mystery of salvation in Christ could be seen as a positively harmful impediment to communicating with contemporary and relatively unchurched people.

I'm not going to solve that problem here, but I will make a suggestion that we carve out a little, quiet space—I will describe it as a "primitive" space—in the midst of worship, a space where we can retreat from the busyness of the modern world (and sometimes from the busyness of contemporary worship) and enjoy a hobbit-like primitive space ("in the quiet of the world, when there was less noise and more green") when we observe the Supper.[32] It might be a space that's uniquely congruous with the traditions of the Churches of Christ. If my perception is on target, there is a deep longing on the part of modern people to have at least some periods when they can retreat at least for a season to a simpler, more primitive environment. The celebration of the Lord's Supper would fit with that kind of primitive space, even in the midst of a modern worship service. But it will not be easy to carve out such a space in most churches.

And before we get to carving out that primitive space for the Supper, let's consider what wisdom the Christian tradition might have about celebrating the Supper. Consider three passages in particular, 1) Paul's discussion of the Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 alongside two other documents: 2) a

[32] The quotation is from the beginning of the sixth paragraph of the first chapter of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (originally published in 1937).

description of the celebration of the Supper in Rome in the AD 140s given by Justin Martyr in his *First Apology*,[33] and 3) a much more contemporary ecumenical consensus document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* that dates from 1982.[34] Together these documents reflect the following typical elements in the celebration of the Supper:

- the gathering of a Christian community on Sunday, perhaps with hymns of praise at the gathering and at other points;[35]
- reading the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments;
- an address/exhortation from the one presiding in the assembly;[36]
- the presentation of bread and wine;
- a prayer of thanksgiving for the elements that has an explicit memorial (*anamnesis*) of the work of Christ including the institution of the Supper;[37]
- the congregational response "Amen" to the thanksgiving prayer;
- distribution and consumption of the bread and wine; and
- a dismissal of the community with blessing and sending.

Many of these elements (gathering, hymns of praise, reading Scripture, address or sermon, dismissal) will be present in almost any Christian Sunday celebration. The elements that are unique to the Supper are the presentation of bread and wine, the prayer of thanksgiving over them, the congregational "Amen," and the distribution and consumption of the elements. These are the elements that I suggest should occur in a primitive environment of worship distinct from the rest of the service.

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[33] Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67:1–5, in Dennis Minns and Paul Parvis, trans. and ed., *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 258–61.

[34] The World Council of Churches Faith and Order consensus document 111, referred to above and referred to in the following notes as BEM.

[35] BEM suggests hymns of praise at the gathering.

[36] Following the address, Justin mentions the dismissal of the catechumens.

[37] BEM also suggests thanksgiving to God the Father and an *epiclesis* (invocation of the Holy Spirit) on the elements, along with the *anamnesis* of Christ's work of redemption including his institution of the Supper: 10–11, 13. See the text following on the Trinitarian structure of the prayer of thanksgiving.

The prayer of thanksgiving (*Eucharistia*) in the Supper was developed in the twentieth century in Protestant and Catholic services to have a trinitarian and creedal form, following the pattern of the Liturgy of John Chrysostom. In this form, the prayer includes:

- Thanksgiving to God the Father for God's work of creation and God's work of redemption. This is followed by a transitional hymn/prayer called the *Sanctus*: "Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of Hosts! Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest."
- Thanksgiving to the Son, beginning with the transitional hymn *Benedictus* that follows immediately after the *Sanctus*: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!" The thanksgiving to the Son includes thanksgiving for Christ's work of salvation and Christ's institution of the Supper. Here or at other points it may include thanksgivings appropriate to the season or for other concerns of the local congregation. It concludes with congregational acclamations of the work of Christ, for example: "Christ has died. Christ is risen, Christ will come again."
- Thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit, including a prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) on the congregation and on the elements of bread and wine. This section concludes with the congregation's "Amen."

With this in mind, I return to my proposal that the Lord's Supper might be included in a modern worship service that has three general parts:

- A *modern worship envelope* at the beginning of the service geared to a specific contemporary cultural environment (the gathering, opening music, reading of Scripture, and the message). In some communities, for example, this might take the form of contemporary Christian songs, but in others it might utilize *coritos* characteristic of Latin-American worship or music from other contemporary Christian communities.
- A *primitive worship core* including distinctive elements of the Supper (presentation of elements, a prayer of thanksgiving, perhaps following the Trinitarian pattern discussed above), the "Amen" of the congregation, and then the distribution and consumption of the elements.

- A return to the *modern worship envelope* with concluding music and the dismissal of the congregation.

One of the challenges of this worship pattern would be to incorporate dramatic transitions from the *modern worship envelope* to the *primitive worship core*, then from the primitive core space back to the modern worship envelope. I envision the *modern worship envelope* as taking place in a bright, modern space with electric lights and an electronic sound system. The transition to the *primitive worship core* would involve simultaneously extinguishing artificial (electric) lights, lighting candles or lamps, and muting the electronic sound system. The *core space* is thus an electronics-free, hobbit-like, natural, dark, wondrous, and mysterious space with candles or lamps and natural voices. The dramatic transition into this core space would take careful planning on the part of the worship team, as would the transition back to the worship envelope, bringing up the lights and sounds, and extinguishing candles or lamps.

To lay this out in a bit more comprehensive way, then, the worship pattern into which I envision incorporating the Lord's Supper would involve the following elements in sequence, adding some typical contemporary worship elements not mentioned in the schema of the Lord's Supper given above:

Modern Worship Envelope:	
	Gathering (with greeting and announcements).
	Opening music.
	Prayers of intercession (if used).
	Reading of the Scriptures.
	Message (sermon, homily).
	Creed (if used).
	Offering (if used).
Transition:	Dramatic transition to the primitive worship core; electric lights extinguished, candles and/or lamps lit; electronic sound system simultaneously muted; video projection system gradually dimmed. If churches that utilize musical instruments want to incorporate a primitive element from the Churches of Christ (and from ancient Christian communities), this would be the point for musical instruments to

	drop off to *a capella* (unaccompanied) singing. It might also include the vesting of worship leaders in communities, for example, that utilize stoles to designate the offices of elders and deacons.
Primitive Worship Core:	
	Presentation of elements of bread and wine.
	Blessing of the elements with thanksgiving to the Father, the remembrance of Christ's work including Christ's institution of the Supper, and possibly invocation of the Holy Spirit.
	The congregational response, Amen.
	Distribution and consumption of elements.
Transition:	Dramatic transition back to modern worship envelope: candles and/or lamps are extinguished; electric lights come up; video projection system comes up. If the congregation typically utilizes musical instruments, they would join in at this point, and if the congregation uses liturgical vestments, they might be taken off at this point.
Modern Worship Envelope:	
	Concluding music.
	Dismissal with blessing and sending-forth.

I have described this elsewhere as a pattern of "unblended" worship.[38] In the 1990s, some congregations developed "blended" worship as a compromise (an awkward compromise in many instances) between traditional and contemporary styles. The "unblended" approach described here separates out the worship core from the modern worship envelope, and rather than "traditional" worship in the core space, it presses towards a more primitive space inspired, in part, by the practices of Churches of Christ congregations.

[38] In an unpublished paper entitled, "A Vision of Unblended Worship." While visiting Rio de Janeiro in 1997, I had something like a vision of this pattern of worship with distinct modern, primitive, and then modern (again) worship periods.

Conclusion

On Saturday evening, February 17, 2018, I attended the Sacred *Qurbana*, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, held by a mission congregation of the Assyrian Church of the East in Dallas. The service was conducted in the Aramaic language that Jesus himself spoke, with clouds of incense, chanted with no instrumental music, utilizing the very ancient East-Syrian Liturgy of Addai and Mari.[39] It was in many ways like the liturgies of other eastern Christian churches including those of Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox traditions. In fact, this celebration was held in an Armenian (Oriental Orthodox) church building, with the explicit approval of the Armenian priest and congregation.

But as Assyrian Christians celebrate the *Qurbana*, unlike other eastern Christian communities, they invite all Christians to participate.[40] When I asked about this, the Assyrian priest smiled and said, "The body of Christ is for the whole world!"

The Lord's Supper is one of the most historic and central acts of a Christian community. When we offer it today, we offer the body and blood of Christ for the whole world. The world needs the body and blood of Christ. The Supper deserves our attention, our reverence, and our careful reflection on how we observe it in the midst of the world today.

[39] Mentioned above as being distinctive in not having the specific words of institution that other liturgies typically had.

[40] The custom of the Assyrian Church of the East is to require all participants, including those who are not part of their church tradition, to fast from midnight (for a morning celebration) or from noon (for an evening celebration).

Austin Graduate School of Theology
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 30 2018 ©

Royal Meals, Covenant Meals, the Messianic Banquet, and the Lord's Supper

R. Mark Shipp

The background of the imagery and elements of the Lord's Supper has long been fertile ground for research. In particular, scholars have tried to show connections between the Last Supper and banquets for Dionysus,[1] first-century AD common Greco-Roman banquet traditions,[2] and funerary banquets for dead ancestors.[3] Others have noted the close connection between Jesus' Last Supper and the Passover celebration, which was the occasion for the Supper, and two of the elements of that Passover meal which Jesus appropriated and reinterpreted.[4]

Dennis E. Smith, in *From Symposium to Eucharist*, has suggested that there is a line of continuity between banquet practices in the classical and Jewish worlds and the Eucharist.[5] Most pertinently, he connects the banquet furnishings, stages of the meal, posture at meals, and elements of the meal itself with Greco-Roman banquet practices (and to a lesser extent, Jewish practices, in terms of Jewish dietary laws). While his observations are illuminating, one

[1] Dennis E. Smith, "Messianic Banquet," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 788–89.

[2] Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

[3] Smith, "Messianic Banquet," 790.

[4] See, in particular, Joaquim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* 3rd ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1966). I have previously written in this journal about the Lord's Supper as the "Christian Passover." See R. Mark Shipp, "'This Is the Covenant in My Blood: The Lord's Supper, Passover, and Christian Community," *Christian Studies* 18 (2000-01): 5–13.

[5] Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 171.

might expect a meal in first-century Palestine to reflect Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions and procedures. For example, Jesus and the disciples' reclining at table for the Passover meal reflects common practice at meals. Also, that appetizers and wine were served at specific times during the course of a banquet may inform us as to the typical elements and sequence of such banquets but does not necessarily shed light on the Eucharist as a covenant meal.

Smith himself suggests that two elements of banquet traditions were specific to the Jews: Jewish dietary practice (i.e., kosher laws) and the motif of the "messianic banquet,"[6] although the latter does not represent a real, but rather an idealized, meal tradition. In this article, I suggest that there are at least three ritual meal traditions specific to Jewish ideology and history which provide a deep background and influence upon the Lord's Supper: meals at royal coronation and dedication rituals, covenant meals, and the messianic banquet.

Royal Coronations, Dedication Rituals, and Other Royal-Sponsored Meals

Meals at Coronations: Meals were served at coronation celebrations for new kings, sanctuary dedications, and important festivals or political events where the king is the host or figures prominently. In 1 Chronicles 12:38–40, "all Israel" comes to David to "make him king." Food is provided from all Israel, enough for three days of joyful feasting. While it is unclear in this passage that David is the host (all Israel came to David and themselves made provision for the feast), the connection of feasting in the presence of God's anointed king is clear.

Indeed, even the holding of a such a feast by one of the royal household was enough to provoke the rumor that "Adonijah has become king":

> Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fattened cattle by the Serpent's Stone, which is beside En-rogel, and he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the mighty men or Solomon his brother. Then Nathan said to Bathsheba the mother

[6] Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 171. Smith suggests that even the messianic banquet has similarities with Greco-Roman traditions, although it is specifically tied to Jewish history and traditions. I suggest that the most logical locus for Eucharistic theology and practice is not common banquet practices, but royal banquets, covenant meals, and the eschatological/messianic banquet.

> of Solomon, "Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king and David our lord does not know it?" (1 Kings 1:9–11).[7]

Similarly, when Solomon is "made king a second time" in 2 Chronicles 29, there is an anointing ceremony and the people "ate and drank before the Lord":

> And they ate and drank before the LORD on that day with great gladness. And they made Solomon the son of David king the second time, and they anointed him as prince for the LORD, and Zadok as priest (2 Chron 29:22).

Meals at Sanctuary Dedications: Two important sanctuary dedications with meals sponsored by the king are 2 Samuel 6:17–19 and 1 Kings 8:65–66. In 2 Samuel 6, David brings the ark into a tent he had prepared for it in Jerusalem, presides over the sacrifices, and distributes food to all Israel:

> And they brought in the ark of the LORD and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed, each to his house (2 Sam 6:17–19).

Similar to this passage is another dedication narrative, found in 1 Kings 8:65–66/2 Chronicles 7:8–10. In this narrative, Solomon installed the ark into the new temple, prayed a dedicatory prayer, and offered up thousands of sacrifices. The narrative ends with a feast:

> At that time Solomon held the feast for seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly, from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of Egypt. And on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, for they had kept the dedication of the altar seven days and the feast seven days. On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their homes, joyful and glad of heart for the

[7] Regardless of the obvious political implications the feast provided for those who supported Solomon over Adonijah, such a feast could be, and was, understood as a coronation feast.

> prosperity that the LORD had granted to David and to Solomon and to Israel his people (1 Kings 8:65–66).

Royal-Sponsored Meals at Festivals or other Important Political Occasions: Among the most striking royal-sponsored meals are those conducted by Hezekiah and Josiah, who each restored the Passover celebration in a manner not seen since the time of David and Solomon (see 2 Kings 23:21–23; 2 Chron 30, and 2 Chron 35:1–19). The Passover was a celebration conducted by extended families at home, but in these narratives the kings initiated a massive, national celebration, with the slaughter of thousands of animals.

Royal-sponsored meals also involved coalitions with other kingdoms and preparations for war. In 1 Kings 22/2 Chronicles 18, Ahab sacrificed numerous sheep and cattle for Jehoshaphat and his retinue in order to coax him into joining with him in battle against the Arameans.

Passion week as coronation and royal-sponsored meal: Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem in Matthew 21:1–16 is the public proclamation of his kingship in the line of David (i.e., riding on the royal donkey, as in Zech 9; the crowds crying out "Hosanna to the son of David"). Jesus' first act following his triumphal entry—his entrance into the temple—resonates with David's installation of the ark of the covenant in the tent in Jerusalem, likewise his first act after securing the city from the Jebusites, which is followed by a royal-sponsored meal. Similarly, the temple dedication narrative of Solomon in 1 Kings 8 is followed by a meal. In Matthew, the events which begin with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem end with the royal-sponsored meal with the disciples in the upper room. In that meal, Jesus refers to himself in Matthew 26:24 as the "Son of Man," language evoking the royal figure given a kingdom in Daniel 7:13–14.

Covenant Meals in the Old and New Testaments

Covenant meals in the Old Testament. Covenant ceremonies in the Old Testament often, perhaps typically, included a covenant meal. Whether the covenant was that between equal parties (a "parity covenant") or between unequal parties (a "suzerainty covenant"), it is not surprising that meals were a feature of such ceremonies.

One of the first such covenant meals is found in the parity covenant between Jacob and Laban regarding their mutual respect for each other's

boundaries. The covenant involves conditions on both parties, a physical sign of and witness to the covenant (the "heap" and the "pillar"), sacrifices offered, and a covenant meal. Laban says to Jacob,

> "Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I. And let it be a witness between you and me." So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. And Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." Therefore he named it Galeed, and Mizpah, for he said, "The LORD watch between you and me, when we are out of one another's sight. If you oppress my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me." Then Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me. This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm. The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country (Gen 31:44–54).

This narrative has two meals at the occasion of the covenant ceremony: one after raising the pillar and the heap of stones, and the other after the covenant sacrifice, both involving Jacob's family and the Arameans.

Perhaps the most significant covenant meal in the Old Testament is that depicted in Exodus 24, the covenant at Sinai. Moses and the 70, representing the whole congregation of Israel, go up on the mountain to sacrifice. After the covenant sacrifices,

> [Moses] and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank (Exod 24:9–11).

The Last Supper as a covenant meal. Not only is the meal in the context of the covenant ceremony, but the explicit connection of the "blood of the covenant" in Exodus 24:8 ("Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made

with you…") with the Sinai covenant ceremony, the shedding of Jesus' own blood, and the Last Supper:

> Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:26–29).

The "Messianic Banquet" in Old Testament Texts

The Messianic Banquet. Perhaps the least understood possible influence on the Lord's Supper is that of the so-called messianic banquet, where a feast is spread in the end times for all peoples and death and chaos are abolished.[8] This theme is most clearly seen in Isaiah 25:6–9:

> On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples, a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

This passage has several eschatological elements to it—that is, that the events described are set in some future, undisclosed time from the standpoint of the writer and depict a decisive end, or turning point, in history.[9] First, the

[8] Some have suggested that the messianic banquet has its deep background in the feasts of Canaanite deities, victory banquets for gods or kings, or the fertility cult. E.g., Beth Steiner, "Food of the Gods: Canaanite Myths of Divine Banquets and Gardens in Connection with Isaiah 25:6," in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27*, ed., J. Todd Hibbard and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 17 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), especially 107–15.

[9] James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Dunn suggests that the messianic banquet language is part of an entire complex of conceptions which "plugs into the Jewish expectation of the time" and raises questions in his mind as to whether Jesus and his followers "operated with

feast to be celebrated is on Mt. Zion, the "mountain of the Lord's house" and the city of the Davidic king. Second, this victory meal is universal in scope, a meal for all nations and not Israel alone. Third, at this future time, the reproach of Israel will be removed and death itself will be done away with.[10] Fourth, this banquet is connected with the forgiveness of sins.[11] Note that the "Messiah" is not mentioned as presiding over this feast, nor is he mentioned in the text.[12] The setting, however, is Zion, central to God's promises and covenant with David.

A similar passage is found in Jeremiah 31:10–14, where the Lord provides for his priests and his people in a superlative future:

> Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock." For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more. Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, declares the LORD.

Note again that a messianic figure is not mentioned in this text, but Zion, the city of the temple and the Davidic covenant, is prominent.

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a single, comprehensive story," instead of "glimpses of the beyond and flashes of insight" (Dunn, 398). Dunn connects the messianic banquet with conceptions and expectations of the coming kingdom of God (394 and 411).

[10] Dan G. Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration: An Integrative Reading of Isaiah 24–27* JSOTS 61 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 62–67; see also Paul Kan-Kul Cho and Janling Fu, "Death and Feasting in the Isaiah Apocalypse (Isaiah 25:6–8)," in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27*, especially 133–42.

[11] Brant Pitre, "Jesus, the Messianic Banquet, and the Kingdom of God," *Letter & Spirit* 5 (2009): 136.

[12] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 394, thinks that a "messianic figure" and a "messianic banquet" are sometimes, but not always, linked and were independent motifs.

Isaiah 55:1 also may give us a glimpse at an eschatological/messianic meal. In this chapter, the Lord extends an invitation to eat and drink truly satisfying food, sustenance linked with seeking the Lord (v. 6) and listening to his words (v. 2). Of special note is the connection of such a feast with the covenant given to David (vv. 3–4).

Eschatological Wedding Feasts. Similar to such eschatological, messianic banquet depictions are wedding banquets, a few of them also having eschatological or messianic dimensions.[13] Hosea 2 uses wedding motifs in metaphorical and eschatological senses. Israel is accused of thinking her "grain, wine, and oil" came from the Canaanite ba`als; God was about to take away these gifts he had given, drive Israel back into captivity, then betroth her again in a new wilderness wandering. There, God was going to take her to himself as a bride and provide her with grain, wine, and oil. This eschatological wedding was to occur in the context of a new, or renewed, covenant:

> And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD. And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel… (Hos 2:18–22).

This prophecy of a superlative future is in the context of Israel taking God's lavish blessings and using them in feasts to Ba`al.

The Messianic Banquet in Intertestamental Writings: In intertestamental writings the messianic feast takes on even greater significance, with the nations gorging on the carcass of the slain Leviathan and Behemoth (2 Bar 29:1–4) and, at Qumran, two messiahs—the "Priest" and the royal messiah—preside over the

[13] One thinks immediately of the royal wedding ceremony in Psalm 45, although no feast is explicitly mentioned (see vv. 10–17). Another wedding, this one replete with a wedding banquet, is Song 2:1–5. Eugene Boring connects the messianic banquet with a wedding celebration in several New Testament texts (Matt 22:1–14; Matt 25:1–13; Luke 12:35–38, etc.). See Eugene Boring, "Messianic Banquet," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* vol. 4, ed. K. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 67.

meal (1Qsa/1Q28a, the "Messianic Rule"). In 1 Enoch, the Messiah/Son of Man is clearly the one who presides over the feast. He sacrifices and provides food for the righteous ones, "who eat and rest and rise with that Son of Man for ever and ever" (1 Enoch 62:12–14).

The Messianic Banquet in New Testament Texts: There are several examples of eschatological banquets in the New Testament, utilizing motifs of divine victory over the enemy and wedding motifs.

The most commonly cited references to eating a banquet in the eschatological kingdom are Matthew 8:11–12 and Luke 13:28–29:

> I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:11–12).

> In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God (Luke 13:28–29).

The context of the first passage is Jesus' dialogue with the centurion, whose servant was ill. Jesus marveled at his great faith and may have been explicitly referencing Isaiah 25 when he says that many who would enjoy the eschatological banquet would come from "east and west," including Gentiles.[14] The context of the second passage is a kingdom parable, where the master of the household shuts the door on many who were "outside," but thought of themselves as household familiars, while others would be included at table who came from "east and west."

Two eschatological feasts are also mentioned in Revelation 19. The first is the invitation to the wedding feast of the Lamb and his bride:

[14] Pitre, "Jesus, the Messianic Banquet, and the Kingdom of God," 142, says that two views regarding the identity of those who came from east and west must be abandoned: 1) that only the restoration of a Jewish diaspora is in view, and 2) that this passage refers to the conversion of the Gentiles and condemnation of Israel. He suggests that these passages refer to the ingathering of both Jews and Gentiles into the kingdom.

> Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God" (Rev 19:6–9).

The second is a departure from the usual messianic banquet motif of the gathering of Jews/Gentiles to Zion in the eschatological kingdom. In vv. 17–18, an invitation to gather for "God's supper" is sent to "all the birds," to feast upon the flesh of his enemies:

> Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great" (Rev 19:17–18).

Any list of messianic or eschatological feasts in the New Testament should also include Jesus' Passover meal with his disciples in Matthew 26:26–29:

> Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Two aspects of the Last Supper in Matthew stand out in connection with the motif of the messianic banquet, discussed above relative to Isaiah 25: first, it is a banquet held for God's people on Mt. Zion; second, the banquet is connected to the forgiveness of sins; and third, it is an eschatological, end-time feast, celebrating a new kingdom.[15]

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[15] See Pitre, "Jesus, the Messianic Banquet, and the Kingdom of God," 145. Pitre suggests that the Babylonian Talmud *Pesaḥim* 199b is directly parallel to Jesus' action and words in the Last Supper:

From this brief survey of eschatological feasts in the New Testament, it may be seen that the same eschatological banquet motifs are found as in the Old Testament and intertestamental literature: a messianic banquet for all nations, Jew and Gentile; a covenant meal, with eschatological dimensions; and an end-time royal wedding feast.

The Last Supper as a Royal-Sponsored Meal, a Covenant Meal, and a Messianic Banquet

Something has already been said about each of these occasions for meals. I will now summarize these points in the context of Jesus' final week in Jerusalem as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew.

First, Jesus' Davidic kingship is clearly announced upon the occasion of his entry into Jerusalem. He is publicly announced as the "son of David," explicitly messianic language. Also, he rides into Jerusalem on the "royal donkey" (compare with 2 Sam 18:9; 1 Kings 1:33; Zech 9:9; Esther 8:8).[16] The spreading of branches before him is obscure, but tree branches are a common royal metaphor in the Old Testament.[17] He spends time in the temple, cleansing it and teaching in it, and the week ends with the meal he arranges in the upper room with his disciples.

Second, Jesus himself makes the connection explicit between his Last Supper with his disciples, a Passover meal, and the covenant at Sinai when he

> The Holy One, blessed be he, will make a great banquet for the righteous on the day he manifests his love to the seed of Isaac. After they have eaten and drunk, the cup of blessing will be offered to our father Abraham, that he should bless, but he will answer them, "I cannot bless…" Then David will be asked, "Take it and bless." "I will bless, and it is fitting for me to bless," he will reply…

[16] The animal conveyance denoting royal favor and prerogative is variable. In 1 Kings 1:33 it is a *pirdāh*, a female mule; in Zech. 9:9 it is a *hāmôr*, a donkey; in Esther 8:8 it is a *sûs*, a horse. In order for Matthew to make his point inescapably clear, he fulfills the messianic prophecy of Zech 9:9 by having Jesus ride two animals, a donkey and the foal of a donkey, disregarding Hebrew poetic parallelism.

[17] See, for example, Ezek 17; 19:10–14; 31:15–18; Dan 11:7, and many others. As a metaphor for Davidic rule, see Isa 11:1.

reinterprets the cup after the meal using the language of the Sinai covenant and the meal which followed it in Exodus 24.[18]

Third, Matthew makes the eschatological dimension of the Last Supper explicit when he says, "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29). The connection between the Last Supper and feasting in the kingdom in an eschatological messianic banquet is therefore also made explicit.

There are several points for Christians which should be underscored. The Lord's Supper is indeed a re-appropriation and reinterpretation of two of the elements of the Passover meal, but it is more than this. It is also a royal-sponsored meal, with Christ, the king, as host. It is a covenant meal, with roots in the covenant at Sinai and the covenant with David, but which also symbolizes and signifies a new covenant in the body and blood of Jesus the Christ. Finally, it is a messianic banquet, looking back upon such eschatological banquet passages as Isaiah 25:6–9, but pointing forward to the time when all the people of God will recline with him at table in the kingdom. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

[18] Possibly the "cup of redemption." see Shipp, "The Covenant in My Blood," 11–12.

"Till He Come": The Lord's Supper and the End Time

Allan J. McNicol

Those who are regular readers of *Christian Studies* will be aware that this essay will not be the first time that I have ventured into publication about the Lord's Supper. Among my discussions on the matter in the past I have produced both a catechetical book[1] and a theological treatise on the centrality of the Lord's Meal for the life and witness of the church.[2] In addition, I have concentrated on giving particular attention to the specific words of institution and phraseology attributed to Jesus that occur in the key founding biblical texts.[3]

[1] Allan J. McNicol, *Preparing for The Lord's Supper: Nourishing Spiritual Life through the Lord's Meal* (Austin: Christian Studies Press, 2007).

[2] Allan McNicol, "The Lord's Supper as Hermeneutical Clue: A Proposal on Theological Method for Churches of Christ," *Christian Studies* 11/1 (1990): 41–54.

[3] Allan J. McNicol, "The Words of Institution: Their Function in the Earliest Biblical Tradition," *Eucharist and Ecclesiology: Essays in Honor of Dr. Everett Ferguson*, ed. Wendell Willis (Pickwick Publications: Eugene, 2017), 87–107. This essay focuses on the Gospel accounts of Jesus' last meal shortly before his death. My essay, "Do This in Remembrance of Me," *Christian Studies* 18 (2000-01): 15–28, centers on the importance of Jesus' legacy for the church through his words of teaching and actions of bestowal of the bread and the cup to the disciples at the Table. Here I suggest that the prayers for the bread and the cup ought to be construed in a twofold way. First, based on Jesus' model, the prayer of thanksgiving for the bread should be understood primarily in the sense that the bread about to be received by the people of God is now blessed (i.e., consecrated) as spiritual food. Second, in the action of bestowal the words "Take eat, this is my body" are appropriate to be spoken by the presider at the Table. These may be verbalized either at the end of the prayer of thanksgiving or immediately after the prayer. They function as an invitation from Christ to continue to be nourished by the spiritual food of salvation that his expiatory death has provided. Likewise, a similar process is repeated with the cup. In this instance the words of bestowal that the biblical

One key part of the accounts of Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper that I have not addressed at length is Jesus' saying when he vows abstinence from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God has come (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18, and perhaps echoed in 1 Cor 14:26). I am deeply appreciative of having the opportunity to address this lacuna by concentrating on this saying for the importance it plays both for understanding the founding of the Lord's Supper and, more widely, probing the purpose of Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem and what he intended to do there during his last days.

If one looks carefully at these accounts of Jesus' vow of abstinence from the cup, one immediately notes a problem of order. Matthew and Mark have the vow of abstinence after the words of bestowal (Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25) whereas Luke has his account before the words of bestowal (Luke 22:18) where it acts as a kind of supplement to words about the paschal meal (cf. Luke 22:15–16).

Of course the Lukan account (Luke 22:14–20) is recognized as difficult to explain for several reasons—not the least being the textual problem of the so-called "longer ending" in Luke 22:19b–20.[4] But, for our purposes, I simply accept the most widely used text of Luke (Luke 22:14–20) as workable since it does not affect the main issue of the function of the vow of abstinence in the course of these events.[5] What is central in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and even Paul is that eschatological terminology (the kingdom come/the end) is connected with the taking of the cup.[6] Our task is to discover why this saying is

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account provide are not the same. Perhaps, pragmatically, 1 Corinthians 11:25b may be used because it has the liturgical advantage of the wording "Do this … in remembrance of me" (RSV). On the basis of the believer's faith in Jesus' resurrection from the dead she or he seeks spiritual nourishment by claiming the Lord's presence.

[4] Probably some later scribes had problems with Luke's account that we have in most texts because of its variations in order with Matthew and Mark in such an important passage. Thus, they made attempts to amend the text.

[5] One additional factor may be noted. The order of Paul's account in 1 Cor 11:25b–26 is fascinating. He starts off by mentioning the cup in 1 Cor 11:25–26. Then in 11:26 he refers to the bread and the cup ending with an echo of Luke 22:18 until he comes (cf. Luke 22:16). My own conclusion is that both Luke and Paul used a similar tradition on the Lord's Supper held by the Hellenistic Jewish churches in Damascus and Antioch in Syria. Luke has supplemented this tradition by one that informs use of the tradition later used by Matthew and Mark.

[6] This also applies to those who think that Matt 26:29/Mark 14:25/Luke 22:18 was once an isolated saying of Jesus spoken at another time. It is argued by some that it

connected with the Supper and why Jesus considered it was important to present it at the time of the founding of the Lord's Supper.

Jesus Faces the Future: A Clue to the Importance of the Lord's Supper Narrative

Over the years, due to writing and teaching regularly about the Lord's Supper, I often find myself fielding questions in this area. Interestingly, church members regularly ask about this particular saying. In one sense it is not a surprise. We regularly hear it spoken at the Lord's Table. Most of us blink a little and momentarily ask ourselves again, "Now what was the point of that?" So why is Jesus making a temporary vow of abstinence from participation in the cup? Was he expecting to join his disciples at the next Passover? Or, on the eve of his death, did he think that God would raise him to join believers at some significant event in the foreseeable future? But now two thousand years have passed. At best we have grounds temporarily to say to ourselves, "There must be something more than this!"

The purpose of this essay is to probe the "something more" behind this saying. Subsequently, I intend to pursue a course that will give attention to the wider direction of Jesus' life in order to find how and where these puzzling words fit into the total picture of his ministry. This will be the approach we follow in order to make sense of them today.

These words should strike us as interesting. From the point of time that Jesus was with his disciples at the Last Supper they represent a perspective on the future; and eschatological words (matters that involve the future) often intrigue us. The verse ends with the phrase, "until I drink it new (Matthew and Mark) in the kingdom of God." They are cryptic words. They must be viewed against the background of a much wider landscape. At least in some general sense this will have to involve, to some degree, a broad determination of what Jesus intended to accomplish by making his final trip to Jerusalem to confront its religious authorities who had not endeared themselves as his friends.

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was preserved and "accidentally" found its way into the tradition because of its connection with the cup. I find this highly unlikely because whether it be either in Matthew/Mark or with Luke it is remembered from the beginning as being connected with the Lord's Supper—one of the central texts for early Christianity.

Already we get something of a hint of this essential background in the passion predictions (Matt 16:21 par.; 17:22–23 par.; 20:17–19 par., et al.). But it goes much farther. It has spilled over directly into what is taking place at the Last Supper. For there, albeit in a very abbreviated way, are put on the table, as it were, Jesus' convictions about how the critical conclusive chapter in the story of God's relationship with his people Israel would unfold.

Thus, what the Gospel writers are telling us is that these comments of Jesus at the Last Supper were not the musings of another "would-be messiah" with a few of his key followers. Jesus is saying that Israel was in the throes of a series of key end-time or eschatological events getting underway. He is convinced that the time has come for radical renewal in Israel. The covenant could be traced back into antiquity spanning a period in excess of a thousand years. Now, astonishingly, the time has come for major change that will bring this renewal. It culminates a series of events of crucial significance for God's people.[7]

But before we sketch a more substantive picture of what Jesus was in the process of unfolding it will be necessary to respond to a potential objection. Some Biblical scholars have argued that this reading of the text exaggerates the significance that Jesus attached to the Last Supper. Who was Jesus to think that he was the one chosen by God to inaugurate the covenant of the end times? One can easily conceive that what happened in the upper room was a far more mundane event. Can't we say that the writers of the Gospels retrogressively have used the terminology of later practices in early Christian assemblies to describe what was taking place on that evening? Some have gone even further. Rudolf Bultmann claimed that much of the terminology used in early Christian worship, which was transferred to the Gospel accounts, was

[7] Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; cf. 1 Cor 11:25. This presumes that Jesus was convinced that the long-standing covenant of Exodus 24:8 was now in the process of a massive renewal. If this is not revolutionary enough this announcement is supplemented with a command given to the leaders of the new Israel that Jesus has called (the Twelve). They will observe this new eschatological event with a remembrance meal (Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25). It will inaugurate a time of continued participation in this new meal by believers until the arrival of the kingdom of God. Brad Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 17–19 notes that it is impossible for us to know what was in Jesus' mind about duration, but he must have pondered the fact that the Mosaic covenant had lasted a long time.

originally drawn by converts from the Hellenistic Mystery Religions.[8] To this day many continue to promote some version of this view. They cannot imagine that the Jesus they have constructed in their minds would be historically capable of saying and doing what the Gospels describe that he did at the last meal prior to his death.

But this surely represents not only a failure of imagination but a misconstrual of the view of the world that Jesus had embraced and expounded.[9] Not only this, it involves a serious misapprehension of how the earliest words and deeds of Jesus were transmitted. In this essay I am writing about some of the most important and explosive accounts of Jesus' short and memorable life. The close parallels in wording between the Gospels and Paul's writings (only a couple of decades after Jesus) indicate that they were part of a common tradition treasured by the church from its earliest days. Careful scholars have determined that some accounts we find in Paul and Luke on the Lord's Supper were part of a common tradition nourished by the churches in Damascus and/or Antioch in Syria (cf. 1 Cor 10:16–17; 11:23–26; and Luke 22:14–20); and, several decades later, the key terminology in Matthew and Mark remains very close to what we find in Paul.[10] Thus, I believe, we can have strong confidence that the Pauline and Synoptic Gospel accounts of what took place at the Last Supper are authentic representations of the events involving the last hours of Jesus' earthly life.

I now turn toward a more comprehensive picture of how Jesus viewed what God was doing with Israel in his ministry.

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[8] Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 151.

[9] This view will be discussed at some length below.

[10] Note the following comments of several widely known scholars. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis; Fortress Press, 1996), 588, "I find it simply incredible that so central a tradition that Paul recounts in 1 Cor. 11. 23-26 would have been invented wholesale by the early church without a firm basis in Jesus' actions." Also, Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 256. Presuming Markan priority, Lohfink states, "Since there is no serious reason to regard Mark's presentation of the Last Supper as a scribal construction by the early communities (who, after all, would have had the chutzpah to make up such a story about Jesus?) and since the tradition about the Last Supper that Paul cites in 1 Corinthians 11:23–25 agrees in central points with Mark 14:22–24, we may say that is how Jesus celebrated his last meal, and this is how he understood it."

The Wider Context of the Last Supper: Jesus' Mission as the Prophet of the Restoration of Israel

At the center of Jesus' mission was his steadfast conviction that Israel's story was in the process of entering a critical new phase.[11] Jesus believed that God had chosen Israel out of all the peoples of the world as the ones with whom he entered into a special covenant relationship (Exod 19:5–6; Deut 7:6–8; Amos 3:1–2). Through a long journey in history, often involving Israel's apostasy and exile, God spoke words of consolation that reaffirmed this special relationship (Jer 29:11–14; Isa 25:6–8; Psa 79:12–13). The Hebrew Bible presumed that the blessing of covenant would culminate with the arrival of a climactic time of restoration of God's blessings to Israel as part of a new world order (Isa 14:1; 56:2–7; 65:17–25; 66:22; Zech 2:11–12).[12] Jesus affirmed this theological vision as foundational. He believed the world was at the edge of the time when God was going to begin actualizing the fulfillment of these promises that involved the end time.

It is notable that the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry take this position. John the Baptist believed that a restoration of Israel was underway. He had launched a movement in Israel for the faithful to prepare for this time. His goal was to put in place a repentant community who would be ready to function as the basis of the coming era under a leader who would shortly manifest himself (Matt 3:1–3, 7–12; Luke 3:1–18; Mark 1:7). Of course, the New Testament presumes that the leader of this community would be Jesus. Shortly after John's execution Jesus is recorded not only as saying that the new era is at hand, but that the scriptural prophecies of the time of restoration were already in the process of fulfillment. He argued that John was the new Elijah (Matt 11:11–15; cf. Mal 4:5–6; Sir 48:9–10).[13] In such actions as his healings, exorcisms, and other demonstrations of power he reckoned that the time of fulfillment of

[11] This is discussed more fully in my chapter, "Jesus and the Restoration of the People of God," in *The Persistence of God's Endangered Promises: The Bible's Unified Story* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 77–96; also Ben Meyer, "The World Mission and the Emergent Realization of Christian Identity," in *Jesus, the Gospels and the Church: Essays in Honor of William R. Farmer*, ed. E. P. Sanders (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), 243–49.

[12] Meyer, "The World Mission," 245.

[13] Ben Meyer, *Christus Faber: The Master-Builder and the House of God* (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1992), 70–71.

God's promises to Israel was breaking forth. Above all, the selection of the Twelve (New Israel) dispatched in mission to announce that a new era is here was clear evidence that change was underway (Matt 10:1–23; 19:27–30).

Nevertheless, the course and time of this announcement had not progressed too far before it became readily apparent that there were major forces of resistance in Israel against Jesus' mission.[14] It was becoming clear quickly that he would have to confront the heart of old Israel's power structure. Thus, he reached a decision that when he went to Jerusalem for Passover he must openly confront the leadership, including the temple authorities. In deliberate imitation of the scriptural anticipations of the coming messianic leader (Zech 9:9), Jesus entered the city, temporarily hindering the normal process of operations that were considered necessary for its operations. Mark 11:15–17 gives a direct account. Although still minimal, Mark's description suggests that Jesus was engaged in interference with buying and selling the sacrificial animals that were used daily to redeem Israel from its sins. For many this seemed good evidence that he reckoned that the present temple was no longer valid.[15]

What it indicated was that Zechariah's vision of what would happen in the new time was in the process of taking place (Zech 14:21).[16] The old temple "was made with hands."[17] It was not the sanctuary of Exodus 15:17–18 that Jesus viewed that the Lord God was building. As Zechariah 14 had predicted Israel was now in the process of being regathered for the time of its restoration and its vital role in the salvation of the world (Isa 56:7; 61:1–4; John 2:19; Acts 7:2–50 esp. 7:46). By these actions Jesus had put his life in danger. Did he really think that he would provide the guilt offering that would take the place of the daily offerings in the temple to redeem Israel? If it were not through the centrality of the temple system how else could Israel be redeemed and restored?

It is precisely at this point that not only the temple authorities in Jesus' time, but many modern interpreters of Jesus became confused about his

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[14] McNicol, *Persistence of God's Endangered Promises*, 87–91.

[15] Peter Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 151–52.

[16] "And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day" (RSV).

[17] That is, its existence and operation were a product of human ingenuity (cf. Mark 14:58).

mission. Jesus faced the prospect of immediate arrest and, perhaps, martyrdom. What course did he choose to follow in order to bring about the restoration of Israel?

Over a century ago it was none other than Albert Schweitzer, the great humanitarian, who contributed to modern confusion on this point by writing a book on the life of Jesus that to this day is carefully studied.[18] Long before the days of the discovery of the scrolls at Qumran he argued that Jesus was an eschatological prophet. In a famous paragraph Schweitzer used the image of a "wheel" to describe Jesus as a figure attempting through his martyrdom to turn "the wheel of history" in the direction of the complete fulfillment of the age; but, alas, what resulted was that he was impaled on that very same wheel.[19]

Despite the drama of this far-fetched image a key observation of Schweitzer has persisted in the mind of most serious scholars of the life of Jesus. His conviction that Jesus believed that Israel had arrived at a critical point of its existence is true. Significant events were taking place that would mean that the path Israel was taking in its journey would never be the same. Schweitzer was

[18] Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. William Montgomery, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) [original translation in 1906]. It is hard to exaggerate the impact of this study in scholarly circles of the study of Jesus. I once heard Professor Wilhelm Pauck, a charismatic lecturer in historical theology, speak in hushed tones of being shown the large room where Schweitzer's book was written. A guide carefully pointed out to him that Schweitzer had placed all the German books on Jesus in the nineteenth century on the floor. After reading most of them he rejected their key proto-liberal claims about Jesus and argued that Jesus had an apocalyptic belief that the end of the age was immediately coming after his martyrdom which was about to take place. Then Jesus would drink the fruit of the vine new in the kingdom of God (Matt 26:29 par.). Cf. the introduction of John Reumann in Albert Schweitzer, *The Lord's Supper in Relationship to the Life of Jesus and the History of the Early Church*, trans. A. J. Mattill, Jr. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982) [original German text of Schweitzer, 1901], 10. Reumann conveniently points out something few know. Schweitzer wrote his thesis on the Lord's Supper long before his famous book on Jesus and afterward spent years attempting to understand the point of the Lord's Supper. He finally concluded somewhat oddly that Mark 14:25 par. was a genuine statement of Jesus. He interpreted it to say that Jesus never intended it to be a regular event in the life of his followers. Therefore, the endless Eucharistic argument in church history over the nature of the bread and the cup was a fruitless endeavor because much of what we have in the texts comes from the church at a later time.

[19] Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 370–71.

right about that. But on the other hand, his suggestion that the end of ordinary history had to take place in the very near future misconstrued Jesus' vision of Israel's restoration and salvation. Ironically, we know that because of what culminated in Jesus' words at the Last Supper.

What Schweitzer failed to grasp was that Jesus had already given much consideration to the potential rejection of himself and his followers by Israel. As early as the Matthean account of the dispatch of his disciples on mission he announces that he has come "not to bring peace but a sword" (Matt 10:34). He speaks of his mission as bringing a fire (ordeal) on earth (Luke 12:49–53). He has witnessed households and cities that have rejected his mission of bringing about the restoration of Israel (Matt 10:10–12; 11:20–24).[20] As he turned toward Jerusalem in preparation for his confrontation with the temple authorities, the intimation of his coming death is not only found in the passion predictions but in a host of other references (Matt 26:6–13; Mark 10:38–45; Luke 13:33–35; John 12:20–27). Daniel 7–12 had spoken about a period of ordeal for the saints. Before the full restoration of God's people and the time of salvation burst forth, a period of suffering and persecution must take place in Zion (Matt 24:37–39; Luke 12:49–53; 17:26; 23:28–31). Its duration would not be permanent, but it clearly would take time to unfold and precede the coming of God's new world.[21] As Jesus faced rejection by the leadership of Israel, the real question is what will become of his goal of the restoration of Israel? He is faithful to the heavenly Father. The matter in question is, "Would Israel, once again through unfaithfulness, snatch defeat from the jaws of victory if its present course is followed?"

On the eve of Passover, burdened with the destiny of his mission, Jesus gathered with his disciples. Now the Twelve, the anticipated future leaders of the restored Israel, gathered to hear his word about the situation. The time was short. Ben Meyer describes succinctly the crisis situation:

> … the last Supper becomes the positive counterpart to the cleansing of the temple.… here the new cultic act which Jesus bequeathed them [the disciples] on the night before he suffered and

[20] Additional passages are supplied by Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 211–17.

[21] Jesus may well have already alluded to this time of horrors in Matt 6:13/Luke 11:4 where the Greek word for "ordeal" or "testing" is found.

> died becomes their resource for the survival of the (coming) ordeal.[22]

Central to this "positive counterpart" was Jesus' expression about what would precipitate the restoration of Israel. It was clear that this restoration would not be spearheaded by the current elites in Israel's leadership. They were responsible for the crisis and the time had come for them to repent. But what would be the appropriate expiatory offering that would facilitate Israel's restoration and supply a potential path of repentance to allow them to fulfill their destiny? In just a few words of amazing economy Jesus expressed the essential desideratum: Jesus' own life would be the sacrificial offering for the expiation of Israel's sins and ultimately the salvation of the nations (Matt 26:26–72 par.).[23]

The Twelve would play a key role in this restoration. In retrospect it is striking that the Twelve hardly appear to be a likely replacement for those who exercised power in Israel. But perhaps we need to think again. In many ways as vanguards of the new covenant they resembled the original group of exiles under Moses' leadership who had escaped from Egypt. As Richard Bauckham has pointed out, it is characteristic of the God of the Bible that he draws leadership from the circles of ones who are the least in status.[24] Bauckham points to Israel itself (Deut 7:7) and the original situation of David and Hannah (1 Sam 2:3–8) as examples.[25]

It was the same with Jesus. He came from an obscure background. The new Israel would be a remnant drawn from people Jesus often described as "the little ones." Oddly, these marginalized people were the ones who truly

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[22] Meyer, *Christus Faber*, 116.

[23] The idea of the importance of expiatory sacrifice strikes contemporary people as somewhat odd. Yet students of Israel in the period of Jesus consider it as foundational to its religious setting. It was not only highlighted in key feasts such as Passover and the Day of Atonement but in the daily guilt offerings in the temple, as well as the reckoning that the lives of martyrs atoned for sins. In addition, such religious exercises as fasting, almsgiving, and prayer were often considered to have expiatory value. Cf. Ben F. Meyer, *The Church in Three Tenses* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 10.

[24] Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 49–54.

[25] Nevertheless, questions remain—especially about the wisdom of the presence of Judas. Clearly, the narrative documents his presence. It is interesting to note that later the Synoptic Gospel writers surround the account of the Last Supper with extended discussion about the warnings of betrayal (cf. Matt 26:20–25, 30–56 par.).

heard his word. They were prepared to relinquish any status or standing they had in the interest of living a life of service to others. Thus, Jesus announced that God's renewal of covenant with Israel will be carried forward by people such as these (Exod 24:6–8; Jer 31:31; Ezek 16:59–63; 37:21–28). They would be the ones who would embrace his work as the Suffering Servant offering himself as the expiatory sacrifice for the many (Isa 52:13; 53:12). It would be from their ranks in the coming time of testing that the fulfillment of God's promises for the restoration of Israel and ultimate salvation of the world will emerge.

Until He Comes

As stated earlier in this essay, our goal is to suggest a way to make sense of the words that follow the bestowal of the bread and the cup and that serve to conclude the words that Jesus spoke at the Last Supper (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25).[26] For Matthew and Mark they thus bring the proceedings to a climactic end. It is worthy of note that beside the theme of betrayal that surrounds the Matthean and Markan accounts we are on the edge of Gethsemane. There, facing the prospect of a gruesome death, Jesus makes the decision not to ask the heavenly Father to make an exception on his behalf to save him based on his special relationship (Matt 26:36–46 par.). So, in this critical hour he makes a vow not to participate in drinking the cup with the disciples again until the kingdom of God comes.[27] How do we hear this today?

At the bottom line I would understand this vow as an implicit promise of the renewal of table fellowship with the believer beyond death.[28] On the first day of the week, after having claimed the benefits of his death, we restate our conviction in the fulfillment of the entirety of Jesus' promise by hearing the word that we will join him in the kingdom after death.

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[26] Of course, we return to note that Luke has a different order as he continues to extend the account of what Jesus said at the Table (Luke 22:21–38). By placing the eschatological saying before the words of bestowal (Luke 22:15–18) he highlights the connection between what Jesus was now engaged in taking place (Passover) and Jesus' anticipation of the coming kingdom of God at some future time.

[27] The natural meaning of Luke 22:15–16 is that this would be like a renewed Passover meal.

[28] Meyer, *Aims of Jesus*, 218. As Meyer states, "Jesus did not aim to be repudiated and killed; he aimed to charge with meaning his being repudiated and killed."

But there is more. Albert Schweitzer thought there was nothing left for Jesus than to accept martyrdom and await an immediate cataclysmic end of the ordinary world (i.e., kingdom of God). Schweitzer was mistaken. Jesus died to bring about the restoration of Israel. In light of his repudiation it would be necessary for a way to be provided for Israel's needed forgiveness, proclamation of the gospel, and the renewal of its time-honored task of bringing the light of salvation to the nations. In short, a new transitory meal is inaugurated to celebrate the New Covenant that makes available atonement for Israel and all of those who choose to follow Israel's God. The Twelve, the pillars of restored Israel, will anchor the vital community of faith that will persist until God has finished his work in restoration and renovation of his created order. Unlike Schweitzer's reading, the vow of abstinence was God's way of providing for believers a précis of what would follow as the new order unfolded. This is yet another indicator that the church would emerge from his mission.

Yes, two thousand years have passed, and even the most faithful sometimes are left to wonder about ultimate fulfillment. But it may be worthwhile to note that hundreds of years after Moses many wondered about the durability of the covenant. All of the promises were far from being realized. It was in this time that a prophet in Israel arose and spoke about the future prospect of a time when God would finally be revealed as the King of Glory (Isa 24:23). The promises were reaffirmed. The prophet spoke about a time when his people would celebrate during a great banquet with him in "the kingdom" on "the mountain of the Lord" (Isa 25:7–8). The humiliation of God's people will be removed.[29] This is our narrative. Consequently, does the delay provide a plausible reason to give up? I do not think so.

As we await the triumph of the kingdom one final word should be given. Jesus did suffer a gruesome death. But the New Testament reminds us affirmatively that God raised him. In the language of that time, as Son of Man Jesus took his place as Lord with the heavenly Father (Dan 7:13–27). The vow of abstinence reminds us that until the last day he is no longer physically present with us. He is alive. He is the living Jesus with the Father. And in a special way, through participation of the consecrated bread and cup, he promises to come

[29] Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 256.

to us and bestow forgiveness and blessings in anticipation of our final union with him. Thus, above all, the Lord's Table is a celebratory feast.

Besides the founding accounts there are many places in the New Testament where this belief is echoed. But as I move to closure few are so striking as those we find in the book of Revelation—the closing of the canon. As early as Revelation 3:20 the heavenly Jesus is pictured as standing at the door of a self-satisfied assembly pleading to come and have fellowship around a table with the believers. Something akin to this promise is echoed throughout the book (Rev 2:7, 17; 7:16; 14:14–20; 19:7, 9).[30]

Beyond the canon one of the most fruitful ways this faith is maintained is through the creativity of Christian poets who have provided many of the words for our hymns. I close with one of my favorite verses:

> "Till He come:" O let the words linger on the trembling chords;
>
> Let the "little while" between in their golden light be seen;
>
> Let us think how heaven and home lie beyond that "Till he come."[31]

[30] McNicol, "In Remembrance of Jesus," 23–25.

[31] Edward H. Bickersteth, "Till He Come" (1861), in *Great Songs of the Church Revised*, (Abilene: ACU Press, 1986), number 383.

From the Sacramental Season to Observance on the Lord's Day: Learning from Barton Stone's Communion Journey

Jason Fikes

Historians have long noted that Barton Warren Stone (1772–1844) carried himself with a saintly demeanor, but this emphasis has almost entirely obscured the fomenting debates that swirled around him. A sharp-minded intellectual, Stone became an outsider because he championed strident, unconventional beliefs. His writings on the atonement, the Trinity, as well as his outright rejection of the Presbyterian synod's leadership led many contemporaries to dismiss him as a heretic. They simply could not understand or tolerate the questioning spirit and the primitivism with which he searched the Scriptures. But Stone saw himself as a Bible believing Christian following his conscience.

As he made his transition from the Presbyterian fellowship to a "Christian-only," Stone tenaciously held to his beliefs. But at the same time, he showed remarkable deference and tolerance toward others. One primary place where this patience was on display was in his practice of the Lord's Supper. Stone began as a student of the sacramental season and ended his life as a communicant observing the Lord's Supper every week. This article traces that journey, providing an overarching background for Stone's theology and practice at the table, as well as the priorities he considered important in the practice of communion. The heirs of the Stone-Campbell Movement do well in remembering Stone's deference, gentleness, and humility at the table.

Austin Graduate School of Theology
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 30 2018 ©

The Scottish Communion Season: From Cambuslang to Cane Ridge

The greater world of communion practices associated with the Presbyterian sacramental season has been unlocked through the painstaking work of Leigh Eric Schmidt.[1] His magnificent *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism* has uncovered forgotten sources and shown how Camp Meeting practices in America were clearly dependent upon earlier sacramental meetings in the Old World. On the surface, and certainly in the eyes of their many critics, these Holy Fairs were social gatherings with little actual substance. But on closer analysis, this festival-like atmosphere embodied the gospel through rich symbolism. For a majority of Scottish Presbyterians in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these meetings sustained a vital rhythm of spirituality left over from the Middle Ages.

At their core, the Holy Fairs were four-day meetings in which people traveled, sometimes great distances, to partake of the Lord's Supper with other Christians. However, preparation for the Holy Fairs took place long before the actual event as preachers encouraged their parishioners to enter into a season of fasting and prayer. These spiritual disciplines were seen as a key to avoiding distractions and the work of the devil. Frequent meditation and self- examination were also promoted through devotional books like Willison's *Young Communicant's Catechism*. Some individuals sought to renew their personal covenant with God by renouncing sin and accepting Christ with their whole heart. If faced with temptation, communicants could turn to devotional reading on Christ's sufferings in Scripture or to deeper moments of secret prayer.[2]

Pilgrimage to the meeting itself kindled bonds of friendship and love among participants as they became aware of a larger fellowship of Christians. These sentiments of shared devotion then were solidified though specific rituals

[1] Keith Watkins first pointed to the Scottish communion seasons in his essay "The American Eucharist: Ambiguous Sign of Unity," in *A Living Witness to Oikodome, Essays in Honor of Ronald E. Osborn* (Claremont, CA: Disciples Seminary Foundation, 1982): 42. Then, Watkins gave a brief background for Stone's Presbyterian table practices in "The Disciples Heritage in Worship," *Midstream* 26/3 (July 1987): 291. Both of these articles anticipated the research of Leigh Schmidt.

[2] For examples, see Leigh Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001): 119, 134–36.

embedded within the service. Participation in corporate activities—listening to sermons, standing in unison, congregational singing, shared moments of silence, and the passing of the elements—made considerable impressions on communicants. The final parting was often filled with tears and a joyous anticipation of the next meeting. Once they had returned to their homes, the immediacy of the moment would fade, and the cycle would begin again.[3]

The communion season in Scotland reached its height at Cambuslang in 1742, and in the New World, the meetings took a similar shape.[4] Cane Ridge, organized by Barton Stone in 1801, became the most widely publicized of these early gatherings.[5] It was attended with dramatic physical exercises—falling, barking, and jerking—first made famous at Cambuslang. Supporters understood these as confirmation of the mighty presence of God in their midst as they attended to communion.

But Cane Ridge was not the first communion service of its kind in America; in fact, Barton Stone planned this event after attending a sacramental meeting in Logan County held by James McGready (1763–1817). After seeing the work of God at this meeting, Stone traveled over the next few months to sacramental meetings in the surrounding counties. Then, in June, he announced his plan to host the meeting at Cane Ridge starting on August 6th.[6] Through a closer look at James McGready's ministry and sacramental preaching, we are introduced into the setting of Stone and the beginnings of the early Christian Movement.

The Sacramental Preaching of James McGready

Once, McGready shared with his hearers the first time he felt convicted of actual sin: it was following a service where he had communed improperly. In that moment, all of the sin of his life "stood up before him in awful array." His soul was tortured and he felt no relief, until Christ gave him rest through the

[3] Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 96–102, 153.

[4] In addition to Schmidt, see Newton Fowler, "Cambuslang: The Scottish Predecessor to Cane Ridge," in *Cane Ridge in Context: Perspectives on Barton W. Stone and the Revival* (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1992), 111–16.

[5] The best source book for Cane Ridge is Paul Keith Conkin, *Cane Ridge, America's Pentecost* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

[6] Newell Williams, *Barton Stone: A Spiritual Biography* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 51–52, 57.

ministry of the Holy Spirit. Then he warned his listeners, "An unworthy communicant in such circumstances as yours, is more offensive to the Almighty God than a loathsome carcass crawling with vermin set before a dainty prince."[7] Clearly, McGready's sacramental sermons had a menacing quality, and it is easy to understand why Stone "lost all hope" of being converted while in his audience.[8]

There was, however, a brighter side to his preaching. Like many of his contemporaries, McGready was gravely concerned about the tepid spiritual climate of the frontier following the Revolutionary War. Apparently, he desired to arouse both church members and unbelievers to their spiritual duties, and it was at the table that McGready offered Christians the opportunity to fulfill their greatest responsibility.[9] Here, they could encounter Christ:

> Every place where God and the believing soul hold communion … is solemn and dreadful; but as the sacrament of the supper is one of the most affecting institutions of heaven, and one of the nearest approaches to God that can be made on this side of eternity, and in which believers are permitted to hold intimate conversation with our blessed Jesus, we will particularly accommodate the subject to that occasion.[10]

As they met with Christ, they participated in an event that anticipated the coming Messianic banquet. All of those who partook in a worthy manner enjoyed this taste of heaven.[11] Their careful preparation and pilgrimage to the table climaxed in a "heavenly meeting" at the sacrament where Christ communed with his people along with the angels, and even departed Christian friends:

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[7] William Henry Foote, *Sketches of North Carolina, Historical and Biographical* (New York: Carter, 1846), 372.

[8] Williams, *Barton Stone: A Spiritual Biography*, 26.

[9] Kimberly Bracken Long, "The Communion Sermons of James McGready: Sacramental Theology and Scots Irish Piety on the Kentucky Frontier," *Journal of Presbyterian Hist*ory 80/1 (Spring 2002): 9.

[10] Keith Watkins, "The Sacramental Character of the Camp Meeting," *Discipliana* 54/1 (Spring 1994): 9. Quoting James McGready, *The Posthumous Works of the Reverend and Pious James McGready, Late Minister of the Gospel in Henderson Kentucky*, ed. James Smith (Nashville: J. Steam Press, 1837): 175. Also see Long, "Communion Sermons," 6.

[11] This theme was prominent among Methodist writers as well. See Lester Ruth, "A Little of Heaven Below: Quarterly Meetings as Seasons of Grace in Early American Methodism," (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1996): 145–90.

> And when our Lord's table is spread in the wilderness, and he holds communion with his saints, I think it is rational and scriptural to suppose, that the angels are hovering over the table … it is more than probable that some of their Christian friends and brethren, who once sat with them at the same table, and under the same sermons—with whom they spent many happy days and nights before, but now have left the world and gone home to the church triumphant above;—I say it is more than probable, that some of these will be mingling with the angelic band around the "heirs of salvation."[12]

In such a dramatic setting, it was not surprising that many were converted and others awakened to the power of God.

McGready's evangelical approach was not unlike other New School Presbyterians; it drew on the tradition of New England. But on the topic of the Lord's Supper, Keith Watkins has suggested that McGready seemed to harmonize its disparate traditions. On the one hand, he viewed the preparation for the ordinance as a time to enforce sober discipline. This was not unlike Jonathan Edwards or Increase Mather would have done in their eighteenth-century churches. But on the other hand, for McGready, the Lord's Supper was a means "for the most intense awareness of union with the Holy."[13] This line of thinking was more along the lines of Solomon Stoddard who viewed communion as a testimony of God's work that planted in participants a germ of faith that given time would blossom into good works.

In short, Barton Stone imbibed a variegated, robust sacramental theology as he participated in the communion season, and these teachings remained important to Stone. A little more than a year before his death in 1844, Stone composed a brief article entitled "The Bread of God" in which he celebrated the wonders of the flesh of Jesus using words similar to those of McGready. "Here indeed, is soul reviving food," wrote Stone, "The food of angels—food for eternity! And this too is the flesh of Jesus." He went on to celebrate the cross of Christ where sin was condemned and where "we see the love and grace

[12] James McGready, *Works*, 369. Quoted by Long, "Communion Sermons," 13.

[13] Mark F. Williams, "The Lord's Supper and the New Divinity," (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1999): 179–89. On the New School theology of Revival see George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale University, 1970): 31–58.

of God pre-eminently displayed."[14] Watkins has rightly noted that these comments, though not an interpretation of the Lord's Supper, were likely "an example of what this aged preacher might say on a Sunday when as an elder of a congregation he would stand at the table, presiding over the celebration of this weekly feast with the people whom he loved."[15] Stone had heard similar devotions during McGready's sacramental meetings, and even as an elder statesman, Stone continued to speak about the bread of God using similar language.

Growing Enthusiasm for Weekly Communion

When Stone began the *Christian Messenger* in 1826, he included a regular column entitled "Letters on Revivals." Through these monthly notices, Stone shared with his readers' firsthand accounts from revivals, and preachers eagerly shared their experiences from Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Missouri, Alabama, Indiana, as well as Tennessee. Throughout the correspondence, writers made regular allusions to the role of table of the Lord in their revivals.

For example, Thomas Allen (1797–1871), one of Stone's most frequent correspondents, described a refreshing four-day meeting in Harrodsburg, Kentucky as a comforting season for mourners:

> A great number surrounded the table of the Lord; among the number were many Methodists, whose hearts seemed warmed by the love of God; and some of the Presbyterians, members of Mr. Cleland's congregation, could not be restrained from uniting with God's people in commemorating the dying sufferings of our common Lord. They participated with us in every part of our worship, with much satisfaction throughout the meeting.[16]

Allen's note was typical, and Stone included letters like these that alluded to communion, as a happy scene where Methodists and Baptists surrounded the table together.

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[14] Barton Stone, "Titles Given to Christ, The Bread of God," *Christian Messenger* 13/4 (August 1843): 111, 113.

[15] Keith Watkins, "Naïve Sacramentalism: Barton W. Stone's Sacramental Theology," *Encounter* 49/1 (Winter 1988): 47.

[16] Thomas Allen, "Letters on Revivals," *Christian Messenger* 2/8 (June 1828): 190.

At first, *The Christian Messenger* cautiously addressed the topic of communion through a piece published pseudonymously under the name "Timothy."[17] Here, the author suggested that both Paedobaptists and Baptists wrong-headedly relied on creeds to set their terms of communion. Rather cynically, he suggested that both groups offered up the same prayer: "O Lord, our creed contains the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; we beseech thee, therefore, convert our neighbors and the world to our sect."[18]

Behind their amiable prayer meetings or open communion services was the specter of human invention. "Timothy" believed that these groups encouraged outsiders to attend their assemblies under pretense so that they might convert them to a new sectarian agenda. Consequently, the author searched for terms of communion with those individuals who desired to abandon man-made systems in favor of the Bible alone.

Stone made this point more emphatically in 1828 in an article entitled "Terms of Communion." Aware that Baptist leaders were debarring unimmersed individuals from the Lord's Supper, Stone challenged them to explain what rule allowed the unimmersed to participate in other social acts of worship. "Were our Baptist brethren to act consistently," Stone chided, "they should debar all unbaptized persons from fellowship in every act of worship, as well as the Lord's Table; or give good reason why they should commune in all but this."[19] In essence, Stone contended that the Lord's Supper was to be a symbol of unity and not an opportunity for exclusion. Christians should never believe that the table was too sacred "to be defiled by persons admitted to every other act of social worship."[20]

Stone appealed to Scripture as his sure guide as he adopted this outlook on communion. "I have no authority from Scripture to forbid me to commune at the Lord's Supper with them," Stone wrote to his opponents. In fact, Stone

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[17] Newell Williams has hypothesized that Stone employed "Timothy" as a pseudonym. See Williams, *Barton Stone: A Spiritual Autobiography*, 171–73. However, Barry Jones and Charles C. Dorsey correctly identified "Timothy" as Thomas Smith. See the *Index to the Christian Messenger* (1984), 86. My thanks to Jim McMillan for clarifying this point.

[18] Timothy, "The Communion of the Christians at the Lord's Table—No. 1," *Christian Messenger* 2/12 (October 1828): 272.

[19] Barton Stone, "Terms of Communion," *Christian Messenger* 3/11 (September 1829): 248.

[20] Stone, "Terms of Communion," 248.

argued that the New Testament actually confirmed his practice because the Lord Jesus communed with the apostles though they were baptized by John. Stone could not bring himself to push away any person who believed in the Lord's command to partake of the elements and who honestly desired to obey him. Stone asked his readers to consider why the supper should be made a religious engine of discord and division among Christians.

This attitude dissatisfied James Henshall who wrote to the *Christian Messenger* with grave concern about Stone's attitude of tolerance, believing that Stone's practice of open communion opposed the preservation of the gospel. In his reply, Stone made a distinction between "holy, pious people" and "Christians in the full sense of the term." The difference between the two groups was clear in Stone's mind—Christians were not ignorant of the command of immersion. Stone's admonition, however, was that Henshall and other believers patiently worship with the pious in an effort to reveal to them the truth.[21]

Stone also suggested that, rather than debarring persons from the Lord's table, churches adopt a stance whereby the elements are offered to all and that individuals decide for themselves whether they should partake or not. "With respect to debarring from the Lord's Table all the unimmersed, or to inviting all the immersed, we have no such commandment," Stone wrote to Stephen Roach in 1832.[22] Instead, he held out hope that Christians could examine themselves and determine whether they were worthy to communicate.

Clearly, Stone was painfully aware that the Lord's Supper symbolized solidarity with a local congregation, and he earnestly sought to practice communion in a different method without exclusionary creeds. As early as 1830, Stone had announced his firm commitment to weekly communion as he replied to a query from Elder John Scott of Indiana. When asked, "Did the ancient Christians take the Lord's Supper every Lord's day?" Stone first commented that it was impossible to determine how frequently the saints in the first century received communion. "It cannot be determined, how often whether once, twice,

[21] Barton Stone, "Reply to James Henshall," *Christian Messenger* 4/10 (September 1830): 236.

[22] Barton Stone, "Stone's Reply to Doctor Stephen Roach's Letter," *Christian Messenger* 6/2 (February 1832): 62–63.

or a dozen times a year," and in his mind, the New Testament never clarified this topic. However, Stone was inclined to believe that they took the Lord's Supper frequently. Then, from Scriptures like Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 11:29, Stone concluded that the holy ordinance was a principal part of their worship, and he summarized his support for frequent communion:

> These are all the passages in the New Testament on this subject, and these plainly to my mind prove that the practice of the ancient Christians was, to take the Lord's supper every first day of the week. This, we are informed by church historians, continued to be the constant practice of the church for the first three centuries after Christ. Whenever the church shall be restored to her former glory, she will again receive the Lord's supper on every first day of the week. Certainly then, christians should seriously take this subject into consideration and reform.[23]

Here, Stone's mind was set: the practice of weekly communion was both *viable and vital* to the restoration of primitive Christianity.

Mediating a Minor Disagreement

A short five months later, in 1831, Stone mediated a minor disagreement between two authors as they expressed different opinions about the practice of weekly communion. When John Alan Gano (1805–1887), a recent convert to the faith, published his first written contribution to the *Christian Messenger*, he took the words of institution in Luke 22:19 as his opening text. Explaining that partaking of the Lord's Supper was both a privilege and duty, Gano remarked, "Were we to stop [with these verses], we might readily conclude, that the frequency of our attention to it, was a matter … entirely left to [our] whim."[24] However, subsequent testimony included in the Book of Acts and Paul's letter to the Corinthians clarified for Gano that the early church carefully adhered to the instructions given that night at the Passover and diligently gathered together to break bread.

Then, commenting on the state of affairs in Kentucky, Gano lamented, "How striking, then, the contrast between the order presented to view in the

[23] Barton Stone, "Query," *Christian Messenger* 4/10 (September 1830): 228–29.

[24] John Alan Gano, "The Lord's Supper," *Christian Messenger* 5/2 (February 1831): 31.

gospel, and that exhibited around us!"[25] Whereas churches of the New Testament era organized their own local leadership to provide for pastoral needs, the modern church faced a paucity of both bishops and deacons. In the early days of the gospel, "its members were familiar, affectionate, and well acquainted," but in the church of his day a pervasive apathy dominated that discouraged Christians from even assembling. As a solution, Gano recommended that Christians organize their spiritual lives around a weekly participation in the Lord's Supper because "he that neglects those religious duties which are social or public is apt to neglect those that are private."[26]

Commenting on this article, Stone congratulated Gano for the Christian spirit with which he had conducted himself in writing on this topic. Keenly aware of the volatile nature of any discussion of the Lord's Supper, Stone added, "His arguments are plausible, if not convincing to all." Then, Stone expressed his desire to publish other articles that would investigate this subject further "by such as may think differently."[27] These brief comments showed Barton Stone's affection for his new brother in Christ and hinted at his shifting personal convictions regarding the importance of defending weekly communion .

John G. Ellis penned a sharp reply to Gano that questioned whether the biblical phrase "as often as ye do this" could be applied to weekly communion. "I cannot find the place," stated Ellis, "Where Christ or his apostles make it my duty to the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week." Additionally, Ellis wondered whether "the breaking of the bread" referred to the Lord's Supper at all.[28] While recognizing that communion was a religious duty, Ellis refused to practice the Lord's Supper weekly.

The following month, Gano wrote a four-page reply to Ellis' arguments dismissing each of them in turn. His conclusion was as equally emphatic as Ellis' attack:

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[25] Gano, "The Lord's Supper," 33.
[26] Gano, "The Lord's Supper," 33.
[27] Barton Stone, "Remarks," *Christian Messenger* 5/2 (February 1831): 34.
[28] John G. Ellis, "The Lord's Supper— Correspondence Between Elders," *Christian Messenger* 5/3 (March 1831): 61.

> Is there a single passage of Scripture that speaks of monthly meetings? Is there any authority in the word of God for communing only every three months, or once a year? Is not this remembering a crucified Savior in his institution very seldom? Who is to determine when we shall eat the supper, if the apostles have not?[29]

As would be expected, Ellis composed a three-page response to Gano reiterating his earlier claims. Following that article, Stone noted that both men desired to end their debate and trusted that each reader could make up his or her own mind. Stone then shared his opinion on the controversy:

> It must be acknowledged that but little is said in scripture with reference to the weekly communion, but all must acknowledge, that it was the practice in the first centuries of the church. Let us never make this subject a cause of debate and contention amongst us. My mind has been long in the belief that weekly communion was according to the truth, yet I could never find sufficient scriptural reasons to convince my brethren that it was a positive command. What satisfied me, could not satisfy them. We are all free, nor would I willingly take away the liberty of one Christian.[30]

Now certain that he could not persuade others to adopt the practice of weekly communion, Stone altered his focus as he wrote about the table and he attempted to quell controversy. When Brother J. Miller asked him in 1834, "Does Acts 2:42, 46 refer to the Lord's Supper" Stone replied, "I cannot give a decisive answer. The matter with me is doubtful."[31] Later in 1835, Stone printed the minutes of "The Conference in *Terra Confusa*," a parody where church leaders squabbled against each other. Among their greatest conflicts was the debate about weekly communion, and Stone criticized all parties involved in the disagreement:

> I have no objection against breaking bread every Lord's day where the church is unanimous; for as oft as you do it, do it in remembrance of Jesus; this neither forbids, nor positively enjoins weekly attention to it. Yet to make every first's day communion, a *sine qua non* of Christian fellowship and union is unauthorized by the

[29] John A. Gano, "The Lord's Supper— Correspondence Between Elders," *Christian Messenger* 5/4 (April 1831): 82.

[30] Barton Stone, "Remarks," *Christian Messenger* 5/5 (May 1831): 135.

[31] "Queries Proposed by J. Miller and Answers by B. W. Stone," *Christian Messenger* 8/5 (May 1834): 153.

> Scripture. In this the minority of the church alluded to, was wrong. The majority too were wrong in zealously opposing their good brethren who differed from them in opinion. They should have labored with them in the spirit of meekness, and forbearance, and for their comfort should have agreed more frequently to attend to their institution.[32]

Clearly, since the debate about restoring New Testament practice had become a barrier to Christian unity and forbearance had been lost, Stone lost interest in advocating for weekly communion. Instead, he reserved sharp words for the zealous that condemned those refusing to adopt a weekly celebration at the table. In 1836, he first reminded his readers that the early churches in Rome and Alexandria partook of the supper frequently and with great joy. Then Stone declared, "Happy we should have been, if we had done likewise; and happy should we yet be, if on this subject we be more tolerant toward each other."[33] Hating division among Christians, Stone continued, "Of one thing I am certain; that if they [the churches in Rome and Alexandria] affectionately remembered the Lord when they received the supper, they were right and accepted. Of another thing I am certain, they would have been wrong to have contended angrily against each other, divided and parted asunder."[34]

Conclusion

Those living in Stone's historical legacy can learn much from him. He understood the importance of the Lord's Supper and advocated for weekly communion as an act of social worship. But Stone also took the path of forbearance. Rather than coerce or manipulate, he chose to worship even with those with whom he disagreed. More strikingly, Stone accepted into his fellowship and worship those that disagreed with his personal beliefs about the importance of immersion and the power of weekly communion.

Frequent or weekly communion at the expense of love and forbearance was too high a price for Stone. He believed that true Christian fellowship was

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[32] Barton Stone, "The Conference in Terra Confusa," *Christian Messenger* 9/7 (July 1835): 152–53.

[33] Barton Stone, "A Few Abstracts from Eusebius and Socrates," *Christian Messenger* 10/8 (August 1836): 116.

[34] Barton Stone, "A Few Abstracts from Eusebius and Socrates," 117.

more than agreeing to a creed, to a mode of discipline, or even the taking of the Lord's Supper at some regular interval. Instead, Stone saw Christian communion as the process of sharing joys, sorrows, and the trials of life together. It was for this reason that he found exuberant zeal for proper patterns—even patterns regarding scriptural ordinances—to be somewhat distasteful.

Stone's openness to other believers in Christ stirred controversy all throughout his life as many other leaders preferred or even demanded uniformity in belief and practice. By contrast, Stone realized that each individual had to be convinced in his or her own mind and that the practice of patient, Christian friendship was a superior argument. An intellectual through and through, Stone pursued his faith with all the logical rigor that he could muster, and he never hesitated in pointing to his doubts even regarding what many would consider core creedal beliefs. But Stone grounded his practice of fellowship and communion in Christ-centered, loving relationships rather than personal opinions or arguments alone.

Consecrated to the Lord: Two Cheers for Closed Communion

M. Todd Hall

A few years ago, the leadership at a congregation I attended was presented with a situation that raised the uncomfortable question of whether or not unbaptized visitors should be allowed to receive the Lord's Supper. The church had been blessed by the presence of several seekers and new Christians. One Sunday morning, as the bread was passed, one of the seekers present in the service received the plate in passing and took a piece of the bread. As he did so, the person seated next to him (a relatively new and very zealous Christian) took hold of the seeker's wrist and said, audibly, "You can't take that, you're not baptized!" In shock, the seeker replaced the bread and passed the plate. Despite the inadvisable pastoral strategy, the incident illustrates why the question of whether or not a person who has not been baptized should be invited to partake in the Supper remains relevant for churches today.[1] Some have suggested that, insofar as Jesus' table practice was thoroughly inclusive—indeed, the open table was definitive of Jesus' ministry—the church should also maintain an open table.[2]

What should the church do regarding this question, especially in this age in which inclusiveness seems to be central to the ethic of the contemporary

[1] In happier news, the seeker was actually baptized two weeks later, and the communion-protector was advised toward more effective pastoral strategies.

[2] See, for example, John Mark Hicks, *Come to the Table: Revisioning the Lord's Supper* (Abilene: Leafwood, 2002), 169–71. Hicks argues that only those who are in open rebellion against the Lord should be excluded from the table.

church (and culture)? I will argue that the Table should be reserved for those who have, through belief, repentance and confession, been baptized into Christ.[3] My argument for this practice will be twofold. First, I will examine the biblical evidence and the practice of the early church regarding the partaking of the Supper by those who have not been baptized. While the evidence on either side of the question is thin, I believe that precedent favors reserving the Supper for the baptized. Second, in keeping with the methodology of my previous *Christian Studies* piece on baptism, I will argue that the Lord's Supper plays a vital role sociologically in the life of faith of a believer and a community, and that to receive non-baptized persons to the Table lessens the (trans)formative force of the ritual.[4]

The Biblical Witness

The nearest analog to the Lord's Supper in the Old Testament is the Passover meal.[5] It was, of course, in the context of the Passover meal that Jesus applied the elements to himself and his mission (and that of his covenant community) in the Lord's Supper. While not completely identified with the Lord's Supper in the New Testament, the Passover does provide insight, I believe, into the question asked in this essay. Let us examine the relevant texts here.

Exodus 12:43–49. At the institution of the Passover, we find the following text:

> And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. No foreigner or hired worker may eat of it. It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come

[3] To be clear, I do not argue for withholding communion from Christians of other traditions; instead I argue that churches should withhold the Lord's Supper from non-Christian "seekers" who attend their services.

[4] The argument for maintaining the Table for Christians alone is compelling, but perhaps not ultimately convincing (hence the subtitle of this piece). Still, it is an important question that deserves due consideration.

[5] See R. Mark Shipp, "'This Is the Covenant in My Blood': The Lord's Supper, Passover, and Christian Community," *Christian Studies* 18 (2000/2001), 5–13.

> near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you." (ESV)

At its inception, it is clear that the Passover is to be reserved for Israelites or those who sojourn with them *who have been consecrated* through circumcision.

Numbers 9:9–14. In response to a question raised by "certain men who were unclean through touching a dead body," (v. 6), the Lord replies,

> Speak to the people of Israel, saying, "If any one of you or of your descendants is unclean through touching a dead body, or is on a long journey, he shall still keep the Passover to the Lord. In the second month on the fourteenth day at twilight they shall keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it until the morning, nor break any of its bones; according to all the statute for the Passover they shall keep it. But if anyone who is clean and is not on a journey fails to keep the Passover, that person shall be cut off from his people because he did not bring the Lord's offering at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin. And if a stranger sojourns among you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its rule, so shall he do. You shall have one statute, both for the sojourner and for the native." (ESV)

The instruction here suggests that, again, those who sojourn with Israel must maintain covenant commitment in order to partake of the Passover. If we grant, then, that the Passover serves as an analog to the Lord's Supper, we must recognize that, at this point, the Passover has been reserved solely for those who have been consecrated to the Lord. And it is important to remember that the God of the Old Testament is not a xenophobe or a God who is only interested in caring for the covenant community. Indeed, in commanding Israel to preserve the overflow of their fields and vineyards for the care of the poor and the alien, for example, God extended his gracious bounty to both the Israelite and the alien.[6] In a real sense, while Passover was closed to those outside the community, God's gracious hospitality was open through the fields and vineyards of Israel.

Similarly, Jesus' open table invitation in the Gospels is more reflective of God's requirement for open fields than it is of his invitation to participate in

[6] See, for example, Deut 24:19–21.

covenant rituals. Jesus' table practice is thus an extension of God's merciful invitation into community, while the Lord's Supper remained exclusively for members of his covenant community.[7] The argument that Jesus' open invitation in the stories of the feedings suggests that the Lord's Table should be open to those outside the community of faith draws a false equivalence between Jesus' invitation into the life of faith and Jesus' invitation to the covenant meal. In doing so, it also places tension between Paul and Jesus in terms of table practice, for, as I shall argue below, evidence suggests that Paul also reserved the Lord's Supper for members of the covenant community.

1 Corinthians 10. Paul's discussion of idolatry and the Lord's Supper is especially instructive. Paul is speaking to the covenant community of Christ about the covenant community of Israel[8] who are meant to serve as an example (negatively) in the life of faith. Paul calls for the Corinthians to avoid sexual immorality and idolatry and explains that those who partake of the bread and cup are, *by virtue of their participation in the meal*, the one body of Christ. They must therefore avoid the feasts of the idols insofar as they are the "table of demons," and "you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons."[9] Paul would have the Corinthians exclude from the Lord's Table those who are under the discipline of the church.[10] It seems clear, as well, that those who are actively participating in the cults of the ancient world—which would have included almost universally those who had not been baptized into Christ apart from the Jews—would be barred from participating in the table as well, unless we suggest that only those who recognize they are dining with demons may not dine at Jesus' table.[11]

1 Corinthians 11. It is clear from 1 Corinthians 14:23 that non-baptized persons were invited to be present for the Corinthians' corporate worship. This is

[7] Cf. Luke 22:14—who was present at the institution of the Supper?

[8] Who had been "baptized into Moses" in passing through the sea, vv. 1–2.

[9] 1 Cor 10:20–21, ESV.

[10] Hicks, *Come to the Table*, 170.

[11] See Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 103, who argues that "Paul interpreted the 'communion' with Christ represented in the eating of bread and drinking of wine in a way that precluded Christian participation in any recognizable cultic meal in a pagan setting." I see no reason that this injunction would not be extended to non-Christians, unless Paul did not *actually* believe participation in the temple was dining with demons and was thus speaking metaphorically.

sometimes used as an argument for the inclusion of those who are not baptized in receiving the Lord's Supper. This argument is unsustainable in light of the purpose of the Supper as Paul expresses it in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11. Paul argues that the taking of the Supper is the proclamation of the Lord's death until his return, and that the meal is to be observed toward "discerning the body," (11:29) which, in context, refers to the body of Christ, the church. Throughout chapter eleven Paul argues that the Supper is a unifying ritual which binds the body of Christ together, and this is why the Corinthians risk so much in abusing it in their divisiveness.

Thus, the church which partakes of the bread is the body of Christ and, for Paul, this is an ontological reality with consequences that are more than "spiritual." This view of the church as the actual, literal (and not merely metaphorical) body of Christ is reflected in 1 Corinthians 6. Paul engages the same libertine attitude among the Corinthians which is found in chapter 10—"everything is permissible"—with a discussion of "body" and "bodies," suggesting that a Christian who engages in sexual congress with a prostitute brings some sort of actual union with the body of Christ (1 Cor 6:15).[12] The union of the body of Christ which is created and maintained through the Lord's Supper is real, for Paul, and thus, though Paul does not explicitly argue the point, the Supper should be taken solely by those who are part of the body of Christ.

The Patristic Witness

Didache. The Didache offers witness to the practice of the earliest church related to offering the Eucharist to those who are not in the body of Christ. It offers what is perhaps the first argument as to why non-believers should be excluded from the Table. Didache 9:5 explicitly says, "But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord, for the Lord has also spoken concerning this: 'Do not give what is

[12] This interpretation is based upon Paul's use of *soma* rather than *sarx* in this discussion. See Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 176f. Martin suggests that Paul's assumption is that in Christ "the individual body has no independent ontological status.… The man's body and Christ's body share the same pneuma; the man's body is therefore an appendage of Christ's body, totally dependent on the pneumatic life-force of the larger body for its existence. The man who has sex with a prostitute is, in Paul's construction, Christ's 'member' entering the body of the prostitute."

holy to dogs.'" In grounding this teaching in the teaching of the Lord, the Didache suggests that the church understood that the practice of closed communion had been instituted by Jesus himself, and had been thus practiced from the inception of the Supper.

Justin. Writing around AD 150, Justin (Martyr) records that

> [of the Eucharist] no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things which we teach are true, and has received the washing that is for the remission of sins and for rebirth, and who so lives as Christ handed down.[13]

By the mid-second century, then, Justin can describe as a matter-of-fact—without expecting contradiction—the exclusive Table practice of the church, in which those who have not been baptized into Christ (as well as those who are not living according to the teachings of Christ) are not allowed to participate in the Eucharist.

The Discipline of Secrecy. Daniel Napier has written previously on the third-century catechetical practice of the church, through which a "seeker" moved toward complete conversion and acceptance into the church.[14] In discussing the worship of the church, Napier explained that catechumens gathered each Lord's Day with the church, attending the first phase of the service known as "the liturgy of the catechumens." After this, the catechumens would be dismissed from the remainder of the service, including the Eucharist, the Lord's prayer, the creed, and baptisms.[15]

The Universal Practice of the Church. As far as I know, the church has always practiced closed communion until the last century or two. In the church of the fourth century, for instance, Christians visiting congregations in other regions carried with them certifications from their home bishops which allowed them admittance to the Eucharist in the parish of another bishop.[16] This practice remained in effect almost universally even through the Reformation, and,

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[13] Justin Martyr, "The First Apology," 66 In *The First and Second Apologies*, trans. Leslie William Barnard, Ancient Christian Writers vol. 56 (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 70.

[14] Daniel Austin Napier, "A Sound Conversion: Retrieving an Ancient Model of Christian Conversion," *Christian Studies* 26 (2013/2014), 47–63.

[15] Napier, "A Sound Conversion," 55.

[16] Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. N. E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), 132–33.

according to Hicks, Alexander Campbell himself excluded from the Lord's Table those who had not been baptized.[17]

The Sociological Importance of Closed Communion

Many scholars in many different fields have documented the loss of community and belonging in North America.[18] This loss is disturbing especially in the current climate of inclusiveness. In an age in which membership requirements are anathema, and boundaries defining members of groups are loosening considerably, one would expect a growing sense of community and a declining sense of alienation. But, in fact, the reverse is increasingly evident. Why is this so?

Philosopher Zygmunt Bauman has suggested that "liquid" is the proper metaphor for understanding our current sociological and philosophical reality.[19] All of the institutions and especially traditions that have held society together—the sociological "solids"—have melted (or are melting) under the relentless pressure of modernity. This lack of solidity leads to disconnectedness, so that even with (and perhaps because of) social media and virtual "friends" people find themselves despairing of true communion.[20] Working concomitantly with the relentless drive toward inclusivity and emancipation found in popular postmodernism, modernity empties of any real meaning (and thus formative power) many of the rituals and ceremonies that have bound

[17] Hicks, *Come to the Table*, 169. John Mark Hicks, "Alexander Campbell on Christians Among the Sects," in *Baptism and the Remission of Sins*, ed. David Fletcher (Joplin: College Press, 1990), especially 189–92.

[18] Several phenomena are explored as causes for this loss of community. See especially Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); John McKnight & Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010); Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

[19] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Malden: Polity Press, 2012).

[20] Cf. Turkle, *Alone Together*, 11–12: "Yet, suddenly, in the half-light of virtual community, we may feel utterly alone. As we distribute ourselves, we may abandon ourselves. Sometimes people experience no sense of having communicated after hours of connection. And they report feelings of closeness when they are paying little attention. In all of this, there is a nagging question: Does virtual intimacy degrade our experience of the other kind and, indeed, of all encounters, of any kind?"

communities together and given shape and meaning to the lives of members of these communities (e.g., St. Patrick's Day).

Human beings, however, have an intense need for both identity and belonging, as is made manifest in much of our society's constant search for various causes to take up—often mistaking political activism for community and identity. The irony of much of this activism is that it is often built toward tearing down traditional norms which are seen as exclusive and thus destructive of community. However, one cannot "belong" to a group without boundaries, insofar as the boundaries are the very defining characteristic of the group. Certainly, boundaries are exclusive—but exclusivity is a necessary condition of belonging. Boundaries define the privileges and responsibilities of individual members to the group of which they are a part.

Social scientists since Emile Durkheim have argued that rituals—exclusive to particular communities—are central to the creation and communication of culture.[21] Rituals pass on the stories that form the basis for human community, and they do so not merely in word, but also in action and deed. They are concrete expressions of the unifying narrative of a specific community, and they are thus often insensible to and exclusionary of those outside the community.[22] Rituals, ceremonies, and symbols that are exclusive to members of a community serve as strong bonds which provide both identity and belonging to those within the community.[23] In this way they are also formative for members of the community—shaping them into persons "of the story" of that particular community. They further serve something of an "evangelistic" function

[21] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1947).

[22] Though not necessarily *intentionally* exclusive, rituals are in their very formulation and social/cultural context by nature exclusive. E.g., the pledge of allegiance to the United States flag may be said by anyone, but only makes sense (and thus has meaning) in the context of U.S. citizenship. As a further example, one may certainly dress in sackcloth and ashes should one choose to do so, but one should not expect to be well received doing so without experiencing grief or engaging in deep repentance in a culture that identifies this ritual with those actions.

[23] I am collapsing, somewhat, the categories of rituals and ceremonies. For a more detailed discussion of the differences, cf. Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), especially chapters 12–13. While the ritual and ceremony serve different functions within a community (from transition to maintenance), both serve to strengthen the bond of the community in question through providing both exclusion and inclusion.

in their exclusivity, insofar as they invite outsiders to become insiders by passing through the rituals of transitions observed by the community.

These are precisely the roles that the Lord's Supper plays in the Christian community. At the Supper, Christians observe the ceremony that rehearses the story into which they have been born again—into which they have transitioned through baptism. Observance of the Supper—the Supper that is exclusively for the followers of Jesus—thus provides a rich symbolism and embodiment of a place for both belonging and identity. It also provides, in its exclusivity, a strong unity among the followers of Jesus.[24] Thus if communion is withheld from those who are not followers of Jesus, perhaps ironically, it maintains its ability to create a truly formed and transformed community.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show in this essay that the Lord's Supper is meant to be reserved for the community of faith, and that when this is so it serves its purpose of forming a faithful community more effectively than if the Table is opened to those who come from outside of Christ's church. Many objections and questions remain, of course, but it is my hope that churches will consider the practice of closing the Lord's Supper to those who have not identified with Christ as Lord, as has been practiced by the church since at least the second century. As the communities and social structures of the modern world continue to disintegrate, it is vitally important that the church maintain traditions and practices that will continue to offer a place of community and identity. Ironically, in order to do so, it is vital that boundaries be established and that some practices be withheld from those who have not identified with the community. The Lord's Supper stands as one of the central ceremonies for the church that is meant to be reserved for the community and is thus fully empowered toward its transformative function when it is practiced exclusively.

[24] Or at least it is meant to. As Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 159, explains, "For Paul and his co-workers, the corollary of unity in the body of Christ is strict exclusion from all other religious connections. That is, group solidarity entails strong boundaries."

Proclaiming the Gospel at the Table*

Mark E. Powell

When I grew up in the 1980s, nearly all of the communion meditations I heard followed a predictable pattern. The one presiding at the Table would read one of the Lord's Supper institution narratives (Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26), say a few words of general instruction, and then pray for the bread and the cup before distributing the elements.

In the early 1990s I heard my first extended communion devotional thought. For many, including myself, these longer reflections, approximately five minutes in length, were a breath of fresh air and made the Lord's Supper come alive in new ways. These extended devotional thoughts are now the standard practice in the churches where I worship.

In recent years, however, I have heard an increasing number of communion devotions that, while creative and even emotionally moving, did not proclaim the basic gospel message or prepare the church to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Not long ago I heard the following: "Last night I was watching the football game, trying to decide what to say for the Lord's Supper…." Next, the congregation was treated to a football analogy with a spiritual point before the prayer for the elements. In this instance and in others like it, the communion meditation is a "mini-sermon" or brief spiritual reflection with no clear and distinct rationale. It is worth asking if such devotional thoughts are an improvement over an unadorned reading of an institution narrative.

* Mac Sandlin, my colleague at Harding University, and Kip Long, worship minister at the Sycamore View Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, provided valuable feedback and recommendations for this article.

The purpose of this article is not to belittle those who lead Lord's Supper celebrations. In fact, I empathize with these leaders. I too have wondered what to say when asked to lead communion meditations, and I too have put the finishing touches on communion thoughts while watching a Saturday-night football game. Rather, my goal is to relieve some of the pressure of leading communion and to provide some guidance for those who are asked to serve in this way. What should we say when leading the assembly at the Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper and the Worship Assembly

The primary theological conviction guiding the following recommendations is this: the Lord's Supper should be the one place in the worship assembly where the church can expect to hear and experience the basic gospel message week after week. No matter which sermon is preached, which songs are sung, or which prayers are prayed, at the Table the church proclaims, enacts, and celebrates the gospel and what God has done for us through Christ. The ongoing, weekly rehearsal of the gospel has always been important, but it is even more so now that fewer and fewer Christians, not to mention non-Christians, actually know the gospel story.

Let me unpack this theological conviction in several ways. A thoughtful minister recently suggested to me that the church should preach more about sex, and I agree. So imagine a worship service where the sermon is about sex (or another important topic like money, prayer, suffering, or evangelism), and the Lord's Supper is celebrated in such a way that the gospel is not clearly proclaimed. Songs will be sung, prayers will be prayed, and an important sermon that is both biblical and relevant will be preached. People will even be more attentive than usual if the sermon is about sex. Yet is it possible that the church could go through an entire worship service and not clearly proclaim and celebrate the gospel? Could the church forget to clearly confess that the Son of God became human, died for our sins, was raised by the Father, ascended and reigns as Lord, poured out the Holy Spirit on the church, and is coming back one day? What about the searching unbeliever who decides to visit the worship assembly that Sunday? The unbeliever would better understand a Christian view of sex or some other relevant topic, but would he or she hear the basic gospel message? Perhaps a song or two might proclaim the gospel (God is gracious and works in spite of us), but did we intentionally remind

ourselves and proclaim to the world the good news at the Table? The point of the communion meditation is simple yet profound: the Lord's Supper is the place where the church proclaims, enacts, and experiences the gospel week after week.

We can further unpack this central theological conviction by noting that, despite our shortcomings, the Lord's Supper always proclaims and enacts the gospel in tactile and symbolic ways. At the Table the church feeds on and remains in our risen Lord when we eat the bread ("This is my body") and drink the cup ("This is my blood"). The elements offer a material reminder of Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation on our behalf. At the Lord's Supper the church shares table fellowship with God through our risen Lord and anticipates the feast to come in the new creation. Since the Lord's Supper is a rich, symbolic presentation and experience of the gospel, the words we say at the Table should reinforce the symbols and actions that proclaim and enact the good news.

There is a need for creativity in how the church tells "the old, old story," and the gospel is rich and multifaceted. Those presiding at the Table should emphasize different aspects of the gospel from week to week, but the basic message of communion devotions need not and should not be novel. We already have the topic, the gospel message. What remains is to discern how best to proclaim it in our time and place. In this case, weekly repetition is important and formative.

Word and Table

Before offering specific suggestions for leading communion devotions, it is helpful to reflect on the order of worship and especially the relationship between the sermon (Word) and the Lord's Supper (Table). Word and Table have been the two central loci of Christian worship since the writing of the New Testament. In the history of Christianity, Word has typically come before Table, although in Churches of Christ Table often precedes Word.[1] Either order is acceptable, and congregations may want to alternate the order from time to time.

[1] For a concise and accessible history of Christian worship, see James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

When the Word proclaims the indicative of the gospel—that is, when the sermon emphasizes what God has done for us in Christ—then I suggest that Table naturally follows Word. Here the sermon proclaims the gospel and God's promises, and the Lord's Supper is a celebration and experience of what God has done for us in Christ. At the Lord's Supper the church, filled with the Spirit, enjoys table fellowship with God through the risen Lord and celebrates the forgiveness of sins and the hope of new creation.

When the Word proclaims the imperative of the gospel—that is, when the sermon emphasizes how God calls us to live in Christ—then I suggest that Word naturally follows Table.[2] Such sermons include those on topics like sex, money, prayer, suffering, and evangelism. Here the gospel is proclaimed at the Table, and the sermon expounds upon the implications of the gospel for Christian living.

It is helpful for the preacher of the Word and the one presiding at the Table to communicate about the sermon topic. This communication is important, not so that the communion devotion will flow from and support the sermon *per se*, but so that both the communion devotion and the sermon, as well as other worship activities, will flow from and proclaim the gospel. In other words, the Table should not merely "set up" the Word. Rather, both Table and Word should "drive home" the gospel.

Confessing the Faith

When the Word stresses the imperative of the gospel, then I suggest that Word naturally follows Table, and the Table should clearly proclaim the gospel and God's promises. There are numerous ways to proclaim the gospel at the Table, one of which is to simply recite a concise statement of belief. There are several New Testament passages that summarize the gospel, and these passages could be read with or without additional comment. For instance, some biblical scholars believe that Philippians 2:6–11 is an early Christian hymn or

[2] The distinction between the indicative and imperative of the gospel in clearly illustrated in some of the Pauline letters. For instance, Ephesians 1–3 stresses the indicative of the gospel, and Ephesians 4–6 stresses the imperative. Colossians 1–2 stresses the indicative, and Colossians 3–4 the imperative.

confessional statement.[3] If so, this hymn or confessional statement may be the earliest extant statement of Christian belief.

> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
> who, though he was in the form of God,
> did not regard equality with God
> as something to be exploited,
> but emptied himself,
> taking the form of a slave,
> being born in human likeness.
> And being found in human form,
> he humbled himself
> and became obedient to the point of death—
> even death on a cross.
>
> Therefore God also highly exalted him
> and gave him the name
> that is above every name,
> so that at the name of Jesus
> every knee should bend,
> in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> and every tongue should confess
> that Jesus Christ is Lord,
> to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5–11, NRSV)

In this passage Paul concisely rehearses the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, exaltation, and second coming of Christ. Furthermore, Paul models how the indicative of the gospel shapes the imperative of Christian living. Just as Jesus humbled himself for our salvation (2:6–11), so we should humble ourselves for the sake of one-another (2:3–5). Paul quite naturally proclaimed and lived out of the basic gospel message (incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, exaltation, and second coming of Jesus), and the church is called to do the same. Representative texts that summarize the gospel message include Acts 10:34–43; Acts 13:26–39; Romans 5:6–11; Romans 8:31–39; 1 Corinthians

[3] See Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, rev. ed, Word Biblical Commentary 43 (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), 99–104; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 191–97; and Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black's New Testament Commentary 11 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 115–21.

15:1–11; 2 Corinthians 5:14–19; Galatians 4:4–7; Colossians 1:15–22; and 1 John 4:9–11.

In addition to proto-creedal material in the New Testament, there are numerous creedal statements from the patristic era, including baptismal creeds and informal "rules of faith" from authors like Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen.[4] Two early creeds that, throughout history and today, have enjoyed widespread support are the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed. Historically, leaders in the Stone-Campbell Movement in general and Churches of Christ in particular have had an aversion to creeds, especially to later, more-detailed statements like the Westminster Confession of Faith. We should reconsider, however, the importance of earlier statements like the Nicene Creed and Apostles' Creed and how these creeds were used in patristic worship.[5]

As an example of early creedal statements, consider the Nicene Creed, which is structured around the headings of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and follows the narrative of salvation history from creation to new creation.

> We believe in one God the Father all-powerful, Maker of heaven and of earth, and of all things both seen and unseen.
>
> And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only –begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things came to be; for us humans and for our salvation he came down from heaven and became incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, became human and was crucified on our behalf under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried and rose up on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures; and he went up into the heavens and is seated at the Father's right hand; he is coming again with glory to judge the living and the dead; his kingdom will have no end.

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[4] For a presentation and discussion of patristic rules of faith, see Everett Ferguson, *The Rule of Faith: A Guide* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015). The confessional statements of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen are found in Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds., *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 1:46–50, 56–57, 63–65.

[5] See Keith D. Stanglin, "The Restoration Movement, the Habit of Schism, and a Proposal for Unity," *Christian Studies* 28 (2016): 7–20, and Daniel A. Napier, "A Sound Beginning: Retrieving an Ancient Model of Christian Conversion," *Christian Studies* 27 (2013-2014): 47–63 for further exploration of the role of the creeds in the ancient church and ways they might be appropriated today.

> And in the Spirit, the holy, the lordly, and life-giving one, proceeding forth from the Father, co-worshiped and co-glorified with Father and Son, the one who spoke through the prophets; in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. We confess one baptism for the forgiving of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and life in the age to come. Amen.[6]

The Nicene Creed concisely rehearses the biblical narrative and confesses the triune God; creation; the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, coronation, and second coming of Jesus; the church; baptism for the forgiveness of sins; and the general resurrection. The Nicene Creed, therefore, provides an outline of the faith that Christians have confessed throughout history. A congregational recitation of the Nicene Creed or Apostles' Creed before the Lord's Supper provides a powerful summary of the gospel and unites our confession with that of other Christians throughout time and space.

Congregational singing before the Lord's Supper is a familiar practice in Churches of Christ. In fact, Alexander Campbell noted that the hymnbook is "our creed in metre."[7] It is common to sing hymns about the cross before the Lord's Supper, but the song selections could be expanded to include those that offer a broader summary of the faith. Such songs include "In Christ Alone" (Keith Getty and Stuart Townend), "For All You've Done" (Reuben Morgan), "Because We Believe" (Nancy N. Gordon and Jamie Harvill), "There is a Redeemer" (Melody Green), "That's Why We Praise Him" (Tommy Walker), and the numerous songs based on the Apostles' Creed.

Experiencing the Faith

When the Word proclaims the indicative of the gospel, then I suggest that Table naturally follows Word and facilitates an experience of and response to salvation. Five central themes that deserve brief reflection, and that unpack the experience of and response to salvation at the Table, are (1) communion with God and God's people, (2) thanksgiving, (3) remembrance, (4) covenant

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[6] *The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*, in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 1:163. I discuss the Nicene Creed in more detail in *Centered in God: The Trinity and Christian Spirituality* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2014), 36–38.

[7] Alexander Campbell, *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (Bethany: Alexander Campbell, 1829), 12.

renewal, and (5) anticipation.[8] All five of these themes are prominent in the Lord's Supper institution narratives (Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26) and are suggestive for the church's celebration of the Lord's Supper today.

The Lord's Supper is a time of table fellowship with God and God's people. Contemporary celebrations of the Lord's Supper often obscure its most basic characteristic as a shared meal. Jesus' last supper with his disciples was a Passover meal. In the Old Testament, religious feasts and especially peace and thanksgiving offerings were viewed as a shared meal with God and God's people.[9] Even today and across cultures, hospitality is shown through the sharing of food and drink, and our fondest times with loved ones often occur around a meal. As the terms "communion," "Lord's Supper," "Table," and "breaking bread" suggest, communion is a time of table fellowship with God and God's people, both the local congregation and the church throughout time and space.

The theme of table fellowship is rich and multifaceted. For instance, the theme of table fellowship reminds us of Jesus' presence. The risen Lord is present at the meal and is the host who invites us to the Table. Jesus is the one on whom we feed and is the one who gives life to our bodies through the bread and the cup. Similarly, the theme of table fellowship reminds us of Jesus' acceptance of sinners. Many worshippers are deeply aware of their sin and do not feel worthy of communing with God, but Jesus eats with sinners. The Table reminds us that God has forgiven our guilt and removed our shame, and God is transforming us into Christ's image by the Spirit. The theme of table fellowship is also related to the unity of the church. At the Table, the church declares and experiences its unity in Christ, even in spite of its own divisiveness, as the local congregation eats together and joins with other Christians throughout time and space.

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[8] For a fuller presentation of these themes and others, see Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 250–56; and John Mark Hicks, *Enter the Water, Come to the Table* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2014), 146–49.

[9] See Exodus 24:9-11, where Moses, Aaron, and Israel's elders eat with God. For more information, see Frank H. Gorman, "Sacrifices and Offerings," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 5:20–32.

Representative texts that emphasize communion with God and God's people, other than the institution narratives, include Matthew 9:9–13; Luke 24:13–35; John 6:35–40, John 6:53–57; 1 Corinthians 10:14–17; and Revelation 3:20. Representative songs include "Come Share the Lord" (Bryan Jeffery Leech), "We are the Body of Christ" (David B. Hampton and Scott Wesley Brown), "Bind us Together" (Bob Gillman), "Here in this Place" (Chris Davis), and "Come to the Table" (Claire Cloninger and Martin Nystrom).

The Lord's Supper is a time of thanksgiving to God for our salvation and our many blessings. The term *Eucharisteō*, "to give thanks," is used in reference to Jesus' prayer of blessing for the bread and the cup, and "Eucharist" is the most common term for the Lord's Supper in the early church.[10] The Lord's Supper is a time of thanksgiving because of the salvation we have through Christ. In Christ our sin has been forgiven, we have been reconciled to God, and we have received the Spirit. Representative texts that emphasize thanksgiving, other than the institution narratives, include Ephesians 1:3–6 and 1 Peter 1:3–7. Representative songs include "Worthy is the Lamb" (Darlene Zschech), "Give Thanks" (Henry Smith), "Listen to our Hearts" (Geoff Moore and Steven Curtis Chapman), "Thank You Lord" (Gary L. Mabry), and "Thank You Lord" (Dennis Jernigan).

The Lord's Supper is a time of remembrance of what God has done for us in Jesus. Such remembering, however, is not simply bringing to mind events from the distant past but recognizing and participating in the significance of these events today. Jesus died for our sins, but he is also risen from the dead, reigns as Lord, serves as host at the Table, and is coming back one day. At the Table we remember the cross as well as the full implications of Jesus' work for us. Representative texts that emphasize remembrance, other than the institution narratives, include 2 Timothy 2:8 and the texts listed earlier that summarize the gospel message. Representative songs include "Above All" (Lenny LeBlanc and Paul Baloche), "The Old Rugged Cross" (George Bennard), "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (Isaac Watts), "Hallelujah! What a Savior" (Phillip P. Bliss), and "Had It Not Been the Lord" (Debbie Dorman).

The Lord's Supper is a time of covenant renewal. All the institution narratives speak of the "new covenant," especially in relation to the cup. When

[10] For instance, see *Didache* 9.1 and Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 66.

we celebrate the Lord's Supper we remember God's covenant allegiance to us and renew our covenant allegiance to God. As disciples of Jesus, we belong wholly to God and commit ourselves to participating in God's work in the world. Representative texts that emphasize covenant renewal, other than the institution narratives, include Romans 8:12–17; Romans 12:1–2; 1 Corinthians 15:50–58; Ephesians 4:1–6; Colossians 2:6–7; and Hebrews 12:1–3. Representative songs include "I Surrender All" (Judson W. Van De Venter), "I Am Mine No More," "My Jesus I Love Thee" (William R. Featherston), "How Beautiful" (Twila Paris), and "O To Be Like Thee" (Thomas O. Chisholm).

The Lord's Supper is an anticipation of the coming feast in the new creation, when God and God's people will dwell together and commune eternally. Communion, therefore, has past (we remember), present (we commune, give thanks, and recommit), and future (we anticipate) aspects. At the Lord's Supper the church both experiences in the present and anticipates in the future "that day when I [Jesus] drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29, NRSV). Representative texts that emphasize anticipation, other than the institution narratives, include Romans 5:1–2; Titus 2:11–14; and 1 John 3:1–3. Representative songs include "Come Share the Lord" (Bryan Jeffery Leech) and "How Great Thou Art" (Stuart K. Hine).

All five of these themes—communion with God and God's people, thanksgiving, remembrance, covenant renewal, and anticipation—are interconnected and provide glimpses into the nature of the Table and Christian salvation. These themes and my recommendations do not exhaust the depth and beauty of the gospel, but hopefully they provide concrete guidance for renewing our worship and practice of communion. If nothing else, the next time you are asked to preside at the Table, I encourage you to prayerfully discern the answer to this question: "How can I help the church more intentionally proclaim and experience the gospel at the Table?" If your words are a response to this question, then you can trust that God will use you, just as God has used countless others throughout history, to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26, NRSV).

Technology as Messiah

…[T]he question, "What will a new technology do?" is no more important than the question, "What will a new technology undo?" Indeed, the latter question is more important, precisely because it is asked so infrequently. One might say, then, that a sophisticated perspective on technological change includes one's being skeptical of Utopian and Messianic visions drawn by those who have no sense of history or of the precarious balances on which culture depends. In fact, if it were up to me, I would forbid anyone from talking about the new information technologies unless the person can demonstrate that he or she knows something about the social and psychic effects of the alphabet, the mechanical clock, the printing press, and telegraphy—in other words, knows something about the costs of great technologies….

Our unspoken slogan has been "technology über alles," and we have been willing to shape our lives to fit the requirements of technology, not the requirements of culture. This is a form of stupidity, especially in an age of vast technological change. We need to proceed with our eyes wide open so that we many use technology rather than be used by it.

Neil Postman, "Five Things We Need to Know about Technological Change"

Didache on the Eucharist

Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks as follows. First, concerning the cup: "We give you thanks, our Father, for the holy vine of David your servant, which you have made known to us through Jesus, your servant; to you be the glory forever." And concerning the broken bread: "We give you thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge that you have made known to us through Jesus, your servant; to you be the glory forever. Just as this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and then was gathered together and

became one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever." But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord, for the Lord has also spoken concerning this: "Do not give what is holy to dogs."

Didache (ca. 70)

Justin on the Eucharist

…[B]read and a chalice containing wine mixed with water are presented to the one presiding over the brethren. He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of all, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and he recites lengthy prayers of thanksgiving to God in the name of those to whom He granted such favors.

We call this food the Eucharist, of which only he can partake who has acknowledged the truth of our teachings, who has been cleansed by baptism for the remission of his sins and for his regeneration, and who regulates his life upon the principles laid down by Christ. Not as ordinary bread or as ordinary drink do we partake of them, but just as, through the word of God, our Savior Jesus Christ became Incarnate and took upon Himself flesh and blood for our salvation, so, we have been taught, the food which has been made the Eucharist by the prayer of His word, and which nourishes our flesh and blood by assimilation, is both the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.

Justin Martyr, *First Apology* (ca. 150)

Peter Lombard on the Eucharist

We are cleansed by baptism; we are perfected in the good by the Eucharist. Baptism extinguishes the ardour of the vices; the Eucharist restores us spiritually. And so it is excellently called 'Eucharist,' that is, good grace, because in this sacrament not only is there an increase of virtue and grace, but he who is the fount and origin of all grace is wholly received.

Peter Lombard, *Sentences* (ca. 1150)

Robert Milligan on the Eucharist

We must, therefore, simultaneously eat of the commemoration loaf and of the bread of life; and while we literally drink of the symbolic cup, we must also, at the same time, drink spiritually of that blood, which alone can supply the wants of the thirsty soul. *Unless we do this, the bread that we eat, can in no sense be to us the body of the Son of God; nor can the wine that we drink be in any sense the blood of the New Covenant, which was shed for the remission of the sins of many*.

Robert Milligan, *Millennial Harbinger* (1859)

Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry

The Eucharist, which always includes both word and sacrament, is a proclamation and a celebration of the work of God. It is the great thanksgiving to the Father for everything accomplished in creation, redemption and sanctification, for everything accomplished by God now in the Church and in the world in spite of the sins of human beings, for everything that God will accomplish in bringing the Kingdom to fulfilment….

Christ himself with all that he has accomplished for us and for all creation (in his incarnation, servant-hood, ministry, teaching, suffering, sacrifice, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit) is present in this *anamnesis*, granting us communion with himself. The Eucharist is also the foretaste of his *parousia* and of the final kingdom….

As the Eucharist celebrates the resurrection of Christ, it is appropriate that it should take place at least every Sunday. As it is the new sacramental meal of the people of God, every Christian should be encouraged to receive communion frequently.

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (1982)

Contributors

Ted A. Campbell is Professor of Church History at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University

Jason Fikes is Director of Abilene Christian University Press.

M. Todd Hall is Director of the Library and Assistant Professor at Austin Graduate School of Theology

Allan J. McNicol is A. B. Cox Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Austin Graduate School of Theology

Mark E. Powell is Professor of Theology at Harding School of Theology

R. Mark Shipp is Pat E. Harrell Professor of Old Testament at Austin Graduate School of Theology

Keith D. Stanglin is Professor of Historical Theology at Austin Graduate School of Theology

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