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FEAST AND YEAST:
A STUDY OF TWO CATEGORIES OF EUCHARISTIC MOTIFS OF THE EARLY
CHURCH LATER RECOVERED BY LUTHER AND CHEMNITZ

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
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requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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Reader

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INTRODUCTION

The witness of the early church Fathers teaches us that the Lord's Supper gives more than any one mind at any one moment can rejoice in and be grateful for. This reflects not just the limits of the human mind, but rather the manifold gifts God desires to give by means of his Supper. The Fathers knew there is so much given in the Lord's Supper that there is every danger the communicant might fail to appreciate how much is happening when nothing appears to be happening. Today, one suspects that many are a little too comfortable with their understanding and celebration of the Lord's Supper. A casual, almost spontaneous approach to the Lord's Supper betrays a narrowness of thought and faith.

So it is good to allow the early Fathers to speak once again. It is good to travel to their distant lands, not for nostalgia's sake, nor for the historical thrill of it, but to be startled and inspired by their living witness. Raymond Johanny writes,

... in a world in which technology is increasingly gaining the upper hand over man, we need space to refresh ourselves. Men need to draw breath and slake their thirst. They need a faith that is sure of itself. Far, then, from being a retreat into the past, this [is] a pilgrimage to the life-giving wellsprings; its aim is to make possible a vital grasp of the Eucharist as expressed and experienced by the early Christians. It is good for us to acquire a sense of what life was like for the early Christians and to see what their hopes were. In so doing, we rediscover our true selves.¹

One way to gain a better understanding of one's own culture is to live abroad. When one lives abroad, the attractive and the unattractive characteristics of one's own culture are often drawn into sharper focus. One way to gain a better understanding of how we celebrate the Lord's Supper is to learn how the early Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper. Have we

¹Willy Rordorf, et al. *The Eucharist of the Early Christians* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1978), vii.

lost anything over time? Have we made innovations over time? Ezra Gebremedhin writes,

In the days when Cyril taught and wrote, the mark of a good theologian was not innovation, but conformity: conformity to a teaching tradition and to doctrinal formulations hallowed by many decades of "orthodox" usage. The Church of antiquity reserved its praises to those who spelled out, defined, redefined and underlined the cumulative witness of men of faith and virtue Innovators . . . introduced (in the opinions of their opponents in any case) dissonance into the theological symphony of the Fathers who had preceded them The fact that Cyril was basically a guardian of a given heritage — of a tradition arising from and molded by the Scriptures, the Fathers and the councils of the Church, explains why he has been called the "Seal of the Fathers."²

As a result of this resistance to innovation, we will not notice many mutually exclusive differences between the Fathers and how they celebrate the Lord's Supper. The differences that exist often point to the riches of the Lord's Supper that cannot be exhausted. The differences also "provide an index of the Church's development. They show how the Church responded to local challenges and how various Churches related to one another."³ But even more interesting are the similarities between the Fathers. Sasse writes,

There were various opinions and differing views on the interpretation of the Sacrament, but, in spite of this great variety, there was no doubt about the doctrinal content of the Sacrament. To take the most elucidating example, no theologian of the Early Church ever doubted that, according to the Words of Institution, the consecrated bread *is* the body, and the consecrated wine *is* the blood of Christ; the differences referred only to the theological theories about the right understanding of the doctrine on which all were agreed.⁴

²Ezra Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing, An Inquiry into the Eucharistic Doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria* (Motala, Sweden: Tryckeri AB, 1977), 17.

³Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 190.

⁴Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Adelaide, Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), 11.

Similarly, LaVerdiere writes, "all the Churches celebrated basically the same Eucharist. The early Churches had a great sense of apostolic tradition, nurturing in them fidelity to Jesus and what he did when he broke bread with his disciples, especially at the Last Supper."⁵

The first purpose of this thesis will be to explore the Lord's Supper as it was understood and celebrated by the early Fathers. The subject of our focus will be the two categories of motifs employed by the early Fathers. The first category will study how the early Fathers thought of the Lord's Supper as food. These motifs are collected under chapter one and will consider how the early Fathers saw connections between the Lord's Supper and food (such as the Passover meal, food for the journey, etc.) The second category will study how the early Fathers thought of the Lord's Supper as yeast. These motifs are collected under chapter two and will consider how the early Fathers believed the Lord's Supper to be active and transforming within the communicant. This chapter will show, for instance, how the body and blood of the Lord actively mingle with the human body, changing its nature, not unlike yeast mingling within a batch of dough.

There will need to be some constraints placed on the first two chapters to control the scope of the thesis. Obviously it will be impossible to do a thorough survey of nine centuries of Fathers, east and west. No attempt will be made to show how these motifs developed chronologically or geographically. Rather, this thesis will only show *that* the motifs developed. Adolph Harnack writes:

Scripture itself supplied various allegories in connection with this matter, using flesh of Christ as equal to the Church, flesh of Christ as equal to His words, etc., since John VI. as compared with the words of institution supplied endless scope for speculation

⁵LaVerdiere, 190.

and rhetoric, since the consequences and the terminology of the dogma of the Incarnation were on the same lines,— and in addition, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and certain ideas of the Church,— since finally the sacramental and sacrificial elements were at one time kept strictly separate and at another ran into one another, the utterances of the Greek Fathers in reference to the Supper constitute as a rule the most forbidding portions of their works. But to give a logical solution and orderly reproduction of their thoughts is not at all the historian's business, for in attempting such a task he would constantly be in danger of missing the meaning of the Fathers. For this reason we here renounce any such attempt.

Though primary and secondary sources will be used throughout; an irregular sampling of the Fathers is anticipated. This section will be organized and driven by the motifs, not by geography or time. Care will be taken to refrain from citing quotes that are redundant. Preference will be given to citations that add something new and important to the motif. The Patristic literature on the Eucharist covers almost nine centuries, and so it is impossible to treat it in any way that is comprehensive in a study of this size. All one can do is choose those texts that are most significant. Special attention will occasionally be given in the footnotes to some contemporary citations that are germane and eloquent; to withhold them would be scandalous! Finally, along the way, we will admire the language of these great orators. It will be obvious that their language flows from their faith, a faith that pierces through appearances to see what is actually happening.

The benefit of this approach is that we will be able to acquire what should amount to a good picture of the richness of the motif. We will have a perspective of the motif the Fathers could not have had, either because communication with their contemporaries was sluggish and limited, or because they had limited access to the writings of their predecessors and obviously no access to the writings that would follow after them. We will be able to look at the motif

and the contributions the Fathers made to the motifs, like transparencies placed on top of one another.

A recognized liability of this approach is that it gives systematic form to the teaching of the early church Fathers who never intended their work to be pulled into a synthesis. Normally the faith and practice of the Lord's Supper is quite harmonious across the Fathers, though occasionally clustering these Fathers together will result in a thorny coexistence. But again, this study is driven by the motif and not by how well one Father's confession of the Lord's Supper interacts with another's. Together, they celebrate the gifts God gives in his Supper more beautifully than any one of them does by himself.

A brief, transitional chapter (chapter three) will ask, "What happened to these motifs in the Middle Ages?" This chapter will attempt to show that the Middle Ages produced a theological climate in which it would be difficult for the early eucharistic motifs to thrive. That is, these motifs were overshadowed by such developments as the mass as sacrifice, relics, indulgences, shrines, the elevation of the host and Mariolatry.

Chapter four of the thesis will study how Martin Luther and Martin Chemnitz adopted and used these motifs, bringing them into brighter light.⁶ Again, this section will be organized around the same two categories of motifs: feast and yeast. We will show that Luther and Chemnitz had more to do with reviving the motifs of the early Fathers than any of the other Lutheran reformers of the era. Moreover, we will show that these two reformers complemented each other. The classic motifs of the church benefited from both of their efforts. Luther and Chemnitz rescued these motifs from the obscurity imposed upon them

⁶The rationale behind selecting these two reformers will be explained later in the paper.

during the Middle Ages.

Another brief transitional chapter (chapter five) will ask once again, what happened? We will notice these motifs did not become in any way integral to the confession of the Lord's Supper in the Formula of Concord. This section will explore why these motifs never made it into the Formula of Concord in a significant way. As a direct result, and perhaps also because our society is still influenced by platonic thought, these motifs are not a significant part of the present-day Lutheran understanding and celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Throughout this study, it will be clear the author believes these motifs are helpful and worth preserving and passing on. Inasmuch as they have receded back into the shadows of history, we are the poorer for it. To put things back into perspective, it should be noted that this has always been the case with the Lord's Supper and always will be. The Dark Ages, in at least the eucharistic sense, were not that different from our own, nor from the time Jesus first instituted the Lord's Supper. "This is a hard teaching," said many of the disciples. "Who can accept it?" The motifs of the early church do not make the teaching any easier to swallow, nor should they. It is not the task of the church to mitigate the scandal of the Gospel. So the one looking to make the Lord's Supper more believable, ought to look elsewhere for help other than from the early Fathers. If anything, these motifs only open a Pandora's box to minds that are rational and logical. O'Connor writes,

To a Jew the notion of eating flesh and drinking blood was a horror. Indeed, through the prophet Ezekiel [Ezek. 39:17-19], God had used the imagery of having their flesh and blood eaten as the ultimate disgrace to be visited upon sinners Now at Capernaum the Eternal One who had inspired those words was telling them that, at his sacrifice, they and not animals would indeed eat the Flesh of the Mighty and drink the Blood of the Prince of the princes of the earth. Knowing the shock created by the very thought, Jesus added immediately, "Yet there are some of you who do not

believe" (Jn. 6:63-64).

The scandal of the Mystery has never gone away; it is for many just too much to accept. Flannery O'Connor, in one of her letters, recalls a visit she made to another well-known author and former Catholic. This latter said "that when she was a child and received the Host, she thought of it as the Holy Ghost, he being the 'most portable' Person of the Trinity; now she thought of it as a symbol and implied that it was a pretty good one. I then said, in a very shaky voice, 'Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it.' That was all the defense I was capable of, but I realize now that this is all I will ever be able to say about it, outside of a story, except that it is the center of existence for me; all the rest of life is expendable."

It is surely true that the Mystery of the Eucharist can be propounded in such a way that all of the "shock value" contained in the words of Jesus is removed by anticipation. Such a form of pedagogy or catechesis, however, departs from the approach taken by the Lord himself. It can happen that, by removing the shock, one will remove as well an accurate appreciation of the Eucharist, thereby obviating the response in faith that is necessary to accept Christ's words. Jesus may have intended to shock. Indeed, on the occasion of his synagogue talk at Capernaum, he let the words stand by themselves, refusing to give any explanation that would soften their impact. What he taught was beyond human nature's ability to comprehend The Lord, however, was looking for faith, faith in himself and faith in his words, well aware, as he himself said, that no one could offer such faith "unless the Father draw him" (Jn. 6:44). And so many found the saying too much to take. They went away.

Through the centuries the Church has consistently refused to mitigate the shock contained in the words of the Lord at Capernaum. Her pedagogy is like her Master's. Recognize in all its fullness what it is you are expected to believe and pray that the Father will lead you to accept. Let him accept it who can. Dissent to the Church's teaching is not only a phenomenon of the twentieth century; it has always existed. And this dissent has touched upon not merely secondary issues but frequently upon those most central to the . . . understanding of Jesus' message. None more so than the Eucharist.⁷

Though the hermeneutical practice which made possible many of these rich motifs was often recklessly allegorical, the pendulum has swung far to the other side. Adolf Harnack writes,

Since these developments took place most of the churches of Christendom in the East and West have been fettered and enslaved by a "doctrine of the Supper" and a "ritual

⁷James T. O'Connor, *The Hidden Manna, A Theology of the Eucharist* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 94-6.

of the Supper," which must be reckoned amongst the most serious hindrances which the Gospel has experienced in the course of its history The "doctrine" of the Supper has been treated in such a way as in the first place to sanction the dogma of the Incarnation, and in the second place to gather up to a point the entire confessional system of doctrine and the conception of the Church. In the whole history of religions there is probably no second example of such a transformation, extension, demoralization and narrowing of a simple and sacred institution Christians felt so comfortable in the darkness of the mystery; they laid hold of this or the other extravagant form of expression without being afraid of being corrected or being forced to pay respect to a fixed form of words sanctioned by ecclesiastical usage. Anything that sounded pious and edifying, profound and mysterious, could be freely used in connection with the mystery.⁸

Though the author does not consider doctrine that which "fetters and enslaves," Harnack, nevertheless, does have a point. The Fathers of the church had no four-volume set of Christian dogmatics serving as their touchstone. The earliest Fathers were, in a sense, not constrained by historic heresies, or even commonly accepted hermeneutical principles. They could write with relative abandon as far as ecclesiastical oversight was concerned.⁹ It would

⁸Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Vol. 4. Trans. E.B. Speirs and James Miller (London: Williams & Northgate, 1898), 288.

⁹It has become clear that the early Fathers as a whole had no reservation about using John 6 (especially verses 22ff.) as a Lord's Supper text. Whereas the Fathers love to use this text as the basis for their eucharistic motifs, many today are reluctant and hesitant to use this text. James Voelz believes we need not necessarily reject this text as a direct reference to the Lord's Supper. After discussing the pros and cons of considering it a eucharistic passage, Voelz proposes a solution. "I believe that in the discourse on the Bread of Life, our Lord is speaking of heavenly sustenance which He gives for His own, for the people of God. What is that heavenly sustenance? It can properly be thought of, I believe, in specifically eucharistic (i.e., oral eating) terms But it can *not only* be thought of in such specifically eucharistic terms This discourse is worded in such a way that its words *cause* Christian hearers to think about the oral eating of the Sacrament of the Altar, and eating which occurs in the case of all communicants, while at the same time they point beyond the oral eating to the spiritual eating, an eating which occurs only in the case of believers when one believes the proclaimed Gospel or receives by faith the blessings of Holy Baptism or of the Holy Supper. . . . They are, in short, a sort of *double entendre*, with some parts of the discourse applying more strongly to one member of the meaning (the verses before verse 51, e.g., applying more strongly to the more general spiritual eating), and

be some time before the councils of the church would check their thinking, at which time some of these Fathers *became* the historic heretics! Harnack writes,

. . . the point that is most worthy of note is, that in reference to the elements phrases were used by the Greek Fathers of a later period, which, as applied to the dogma of the Incarnation, had to be discarded as Gnostic, doketic, Apollinarian, or Eutychian and Aphotodoketic! People spoke naively — up to the time of Johannes Damascenus, at least — of the changing, transformation, transubstantiation of the elements into the Divine. No attempt is made to form definite ideas regarding the whereabouts of their material qualities; they are wholly and entirely deified.¹⁰ In a word, the views held regarding the Lord's Supper were for a long time Apollinarian-monophysite, and not dyophysite.¹¹

So this thesis is not about proper hermeneutics. It is about the faith of the early church and of Luther and Chemnitz as they celebrated the motifs of the Lord's Supper. Can we rejoice with them and learn from them? Can we, with a little discretion, also preach and teach these motifs to the benefit of our people?

Prompting this study and making it important is the contention that the current understanding of the Lord's Supper in the Lutheran Church is rather narrow when compared to that of the early church. Today, we emphasize the Lord's forgiveness for the individual

other parts applying more strongly to the other member (the verses following verse 51 applying to the more specifically eucharistic oral eating)" (James W. Voelz, "The Discourse on the Bread of Life in John 6: Is it Eucharistic?" *Concordia Journal* 15:1 (January 1989): 29-37.

¹⁰Harnack later cites Isidore of Pelusium as an example of one who erred by deifying the eucharistic body. Harnack writes, "Isidore of Pelusium had demonstrated that the eucharistic body passed through the same stages of deification (*theosis*) as the real. 'It is partaken as capable of suffering and mortal; for it is broken and is bruised by our teeth; yet it is not destroyed, but is transformed in the communicant into the immortal body'" (Harnack, 301).

¹¹Harnack, 286.

communicant almost to the exclusion of other gifts the Lord is giving in his Supper.¹² We speak, for example, of the strengthening of faith and fellowship, but usually without the aid of the classic motifs, so these gifts take on a mysterious, ethereal aura. At the risk of using a pun, there's precious little to sink one's teeth into. Let there be no mistake. This is still the Lord's Supper, still something to celebrate. But could the Lord's Supper be even more than this? Does the Lord desire to give us even more than this? Is there more that can be said, than has already been said? Is there more that would only add to the reasons for rejoicing without making unwelcome or dangerous innovations, innovations that would put us into the company of the anathematized? Do the motifs only detract from the main theme of forgiveness, or are these motifs really rich variations on a theme?

Yngve Brilioth writes,

The problem is . . . the connection of the forgiveness of sins with the eucharist. It is clear that in the early church this matter never took anything like the central place which it gained in the later Roman and the Lutheran churches . . . It seems that in the primitive church there was no special penitential discipline in connection with the eucharist. Not as sinners but as holy, Christians joined in the sacrifice. So it is in the Didache; there is no system of discipline; grievous sinners are without doubt treated as excluded from the church's fellowship. It was evident enough that the faithful themselves could claim no sinlessness, and they also needed forgiveness; but the confession of sins was put outside the actual eucharist.¹³

Brilioth is probably overstating the case here. There are ways of talking about the forgiveness

¹²The forgiveness of sins and strengthening of faith given in the Lord's Supper are, unfortunately, often received with less anticipation and joy, for they are perceived as redundant gifts. That is, they are gifts already given with the service of confession and absolution and with the service of the Word.

¹³Yngve Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice, Evangelical & Catholic*, trans. by A.G. Herbert (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1930), 66.

of sins without always using the words "the forgiveness of sins." Reading through the early Fathers, as a whole, they seemed constantly aware that the Lord's Supper delivered the forgiveness of sins. Brilioth's point, however, is a good one: forgiveness was not as exclusively central to the Lord's Supper as it is today. Brilioth continues,

The danger of Protestantism is, that its justifiable opposition to the external form has all too often involved the loss of the inwardness of mystery; and the result has been that the holy rite has sometimes become like an empty shell, not without didactic value, but robbed of its deepest religious meaning. For wherever mystery, the apprehension of the supernatural, is present in living power, it is bound to find for itself some outward expression — as by the solemnity and dignity of the service, or by a "holy silence," full of sacred awe and of meanings which words cannot express¹⁴

Lutherans normally resist being lumped together under mainline Protestantism. To the extent, however, that Brilioth's criticism applies to us, a study of the church Fathers (and of Luther and Chemnitz, I would add) can help us recover that "holy silence" and "sacred awe" for which we yearn.¹⁵

By surveying the eucharistic faith of the Fathers, and of Luther and Chemnitz, it is the goal of the thesis that we will have a better understanding of who we are as the Lord's people receiving his Supper. A goal of this paper to stir a new appreciation for what the Lord intends to give us in this Supper, knowing no age or group or study can exhaust the riches available here. If the job is done well, that is, if this study allows the saints of old to witness once again to their faith, the reader will never approach the Lord's altar in quite the same way.

¹⁴Brilioth, 68.

¹⁵We may even be inspired to sing those distribution hymns with zeal, when normally we would be putting the hymnal away!

CHAPTER I

LORD'S SUPPER AS FEAST ACCORDING TO THE FATHERS

The Passover meal

Although this study could easily be swallowed up by the discussion of how the Lord's Supper relates to the Jewish Passover meal, at least some mention should be made of this important connection. Louis Bouyer writes,

The materials from which the Christian eucharist was formed are something quite different from mere prime matter. They are stones that have already been polished and skillfully worked. And they do not come from some demolition yard where they would have then been refashioned without concern for their original form. Quite the contrary. It is in a studio which has consciously inherited both a long tradition of experience and its finished products that these will be prepared for their new function. And this will not be to do away with the first results but to complete them, through some refinishing in which not a jot of the original engraving will be effaced.¹⁶

In short, memorial meals were already happening.¹⁷ The Lord's Supper serves as the culmination and completion of these meals, and is only new in the sense that this is now to be understood "in remembrance of me" which encompasses everything. LaVerdiere writes,

The early Christians did not celebrate the Eucharist as the Passover, which was a yearly feast. They celebrated it weekly, "on the first day of the week," the first day of the new creation. But since the Eucharist commemorated Christ's fulfillment of the Passover in his dying and rising, it had great Passover significance. Dying with Christ in baptism, the Christians were buried with him and entered into a new life with him. Participating in Christ's Passover by baptism, they celebrated his Passover, the

¹⁶Louis Bouyer, *Eucharist, Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer*, trans. by Charles Underhill Quinn (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 15-6.

¹⁷The Agape Meal (or Love Feast) will not be considered as a eucharistic motif. First, the emphasis of the agape was alleviating the needs of the poor. Second, by the mid-third century agape and eucharist go their separate ways and by the end of the patristic age, the agape had all but disappeared (cf. Everett Ferguson et al, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* [New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990], 16-7).

Christian Passover, weekly. In the Synoptic Gospels, Christ's Passover was also the Christian Passover.¹⁸

Cyril alludes to this connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper, when he writes,

Just as Israel was delivered from the tyranny of the Egyptians, and having loosed its neck from the yoke of bondage, was now free; and fleeing from the violence of the tyrant passed with dry feet . . . through the midst of the sea, and journeyed onwards to the promised land, so must we too, who have accepted the salvation that is in Christ, be willing no longer to abide in our former faults, nor continue in our evil ways, but manfully cross over the sea, as it were, of the vain trouble of this world, and the tempest of affairs that is in it. We pass over from the love of the flesh to temperance; from our former ignorance to the true knowledge of God; from wickedness unto virtue; and in hope at least, from the blame of sin unto the glories of righteousness, and from death unto incorruption. The name therefore of the feast on which Emmanuel bore for us the saving cross was the Passover.¹⁹

Chrysostom likes to show how the Lord's Supper is the culmination and end of the Passover.

He writes,

For if the type was a deliverance from such bondage, how much more will the truth set free the world, and will He be delivered up for the benefit of our race. Wherefore, I would add, neither did He appoint the sacrament before this, but when henceforth the rites of the law were to cease. And thus the very chief of the feasts He brings to an end, removing them to another most awful table, and He saith, "Take, eat, This is my body, Which is broken for many."²⁰

Anyone who has ever been to a Passover meal knows how important food is to the entire memorial. It remained important as it was adapted by the apostolic church. Though the

¹⁸LaVerdiere, 193

¹⁹Gebremedhin, 95-96.

²⁰Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 10, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1899), 491. Hereafter referred to as *NPNF*.

Lord's Supper was no longer accompanied by a full meal, the idea of food was still closely related to it. They thought of the Lord's Supper as much more than just a thin wafer and a thimble full of wine. The Lord's Supper retained the image of a feast as lavish as the banquet for the prodigal son, or the feast of the Passover, a feast that could quench one's thirst and allay one's hunger. Tertullian writes that the communicant "feeds upon the abundance of Christ's body, that is, the eucharist."²¹ Elsewhere Tertullian says our "flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ so that the soul too may grow fat on God"²² and "The returning penitent is fed with the best food in the Father's house."²³ And though the bread and wine may be given in small portions, Theodore of Mopsuestia explains the Lord is withholding nothing.²⁴ That is, we receive the entire Christ:

Each one of us takes a small portion, but we believe that we receive all of Him in that small portion. It would, indeed, be very strange if the woman who had an issue of

²¹Rordorf, Willy, et al., 148.

²²Rordorf, Willy, et al., 148.

²³Johannes Quasten, *2 Patrology*, Vols 1-3 (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1962), 336.

²⁴Similarly, Hermann Sasse writes, "that Jesus Himself understood the Last Supper as a sacrificial meal in this sense is shown by the clear connections between the action and the words of Jesus on the one hand and the Passover celebration and sacrificial thought in the Old Testament on the other. . . . Partaking of blood is forbidden in the old covenant because according to Lev. 17:11 the body's life is in the blood and because the life belongs to God. But the life of Jesus has been offered up for men. It should be for their benefit. For here men do not bring a sacrifice to God through a priest, but the High Priest offers Himself as a sacrifice to God for the sake of men. That Christ gives His blood to those redeemed by Him to drink is the strongest expression of the fact that He sacrifices Himself for men entirely, unreservedly, and completely. He gives His whole life for men without any kind of reservation. That is the sacrifice of perfect love . . ." (Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, trans. by Norman Nagel [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985], 89ff.).

blood, received the Divine gift by touching the border of His garment, which was not even part of His body but only His garment, and we did not believe that we receive all of Him in a part of His body.²⁵

Not only do men feast with one another, they feast with God and his angels. Origen writes,

. . . when we carry the soul's hopes far from earth and set them on the blessings which "eye has not seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man imagined": then we communicate the flesh of the Word of God. The person whose understanding is perfect and whose heart is purified can feed on it; he is the one who truly offers the paschal sacrifice and celebrates the feast with God and his angels.²⁶

Other church Fathers would not have the Lord's Supper being received as anything other than the same as that which Jesus celebrated the night he was betrayed. John Chrysostom writes, "Believe that there takes place now the same banquet as that in which Christ sat at table, and that this banquet is in no way different from that. For it is not true that this banquet is prepared by man while that was prepared by Himself. Today as then, it is the Lord, who works and offers all. We assume the role of servants; it is He who blesses and transforms."²⁷ Justin also urged caution when thinking of the motif of food. He writes,

For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by

²⁵Quasten 3, 421.

²⁶Rordorf, Willy, *et al*, 189.

²⁷Quasten III, 481.

transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.²⁸

Food for the journey

Following on the heels of the Passover is the motif of food for the journey. God's people are pictured as making a spiritual journey through life, a journey whose ultimate goal is the promised land, our heavenly home. The Lord's Supper equips us for this journey. Cyril of Alexandria writes,

We must explain then what it is from which we pass over, and on our journey to what country, and in what manner we effect this journey. Just as Israel was delivered from the tyranny of the Egyptians, and having loosed its neck from the yoke of bondage, was now free; and fleeing from the violence of the tyrant passed with dry feet, in a manner which was wonderful and beyond the power of language to describe, through the midst of the sea, and journeyed onwards to the promised land, so must we too, who have accepted the salvation that is in Christ, be willing no longer to abide in our former faults, nor continue in our evil ways, but manfully cross over the sea, as it were, of the vain trouble of this world, and the tempest of affairs that is in it. We pass over from the love of flesh to temperance; from our former ignorance to the true knowledge of God; from wickedness unto virtue; and in hope at least, from the blame of sin unto the glories of righteousness, and from death unto incorruption.²⁹

Ambrose considers the provisions made in the desert with what is given us, which is better by far. He writes,

Now consider whether the bread of angels be more excellent or the Flesh of Christ, which is indeed the body of life. That manna came from heaven, this is above the heavens; that was of heaven, this is of the Lord of the heavens; that was liable to corruption, if kept a second day, this is far from all corruption, for whosoever shall taste it holily shall not be able to feel corruption. For them water flowed from the rock, for you Blood flowed from Christ; water satisfied them for a time, the Blood satiates you for eternity. The Jew drinks and thirsts again, you after drinking will be

²⁸Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1899), 185. Hereafter referred to as *ANF*.

²⁹Gebremedhin, 95-96.

beyond the power of thirsting; that was in a shadow, this is in truth.³⁰

Augustine knows that journeying (especially by foot in the Middle East) creates hunger and thirst. Journeying through the desert builds an appetite. He writes,

Do not think that thou art drawn against thy will. The mind is drawn also by love. Nor ought we to be afraid, lest perchance we be censured in regard to this evangelic word of the Holy Scriptures by men who weigh words, but are far removed from things, most of all from divine things; and lest it be said to us, "How can I believe with the will if I am drawn?" I say it is not enough to be drawn by the will; thou art drawn even by delight. What is it to be drawn by delight? "Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart." There is a pleasure of the heart to which that bread of heaven is sweet. Moreover, if it was right in the poet to say, "Every man is drawn by his own pleasure," — not necessity, but pleasure; not obligation, but delight, --how much more boldly ought we to say that a man is drawn to Christ when he delights in the truth, when he delights in blessedness, delights in righteousness, delights in everlasting life, all which Christ is? Or is it the case that, while the senses of the body have their pleasures, the mind is left without pleasures of its own? If the mind has no pleasures of its own, how is it said, "The sons of men shall trust under the cover of Thy wings: they shall be well satisfied with the fullness of Thy house; and Thou shalt give them drink from the river of Thy pleasure. For with Thee is the fountain of life; and in Thy light shall we see light"? Give me a man that loves, and he feels what I say. Give me one that longs, one that hungers, one that is traveling in this wilderness, and thirsting and panting after the fountain of his eternal home; give such, and he knows what I say. But if I speak to the cold and indifferent, he knows not what I say. Such were those who murmured among themselves.³¹

St. John Chrysostom writes that we should be as vigilant as the Jews, even more so, who ate in haste on their way to Palestine.

How many now say, I would wish to see His form, the mark, His clothes, His shoes. Lo! thou seest Him, Thou touchest Him, thou eatest Him. And thou indeed desirest to see His clothes, but He giveth Himself to thee not to see only, but also to touch and eat and receive within thee. Let then no one approach it with indifference, no one faint-hearted, but all with burning hearts, all fervent, all aroused. For if Jews standing,

³⁰*NPNF* 10, 323.

³¹*Ibid.* 7, 169.

and having on their shoes and their staves in their hands, ate with haste, much more oughtest thou to be watchful. For they indeed were to go forth to Palestine, wherefore also they had the garb of pilgrims, but thou art about to remove unto Heaven.³²

Real food

Many of the early Fathers considered it a great threat to the Eucharist if it were spiritualized, spoken of in light, ethereal terms. For some it has been a great temptation over the centuries to remove the offense and scandal of eating God's flesh and drinking his blood. Like Jesus at the wedding in Cana, the church uses bread and wine, matter; for contrary to what the gnostics think, creation is good. Irenaeus of Lyons writes,

That wine, which was produced by God in a vineyard, and which was first consumed, was good. None of those who drank of it found fault with it; and the Lord partook of it also. But that wine was better which the Word made from water, on the moment, and simply for the use of those who had been called to the marriage. For although the Lord had the power to supply wine to those feasting, independently of any created substance, and to fill with food those who were hungry, He did not adopt this course; but, taking the loaves which the earth had produced, and giving thanks, and on the other occasion making water wine, He satisfied those who were reclining [at table], and gave drink to those who had been invited to the marriage; showing that the God who made the earth, and commanded it to bring forth fruit, who established the waters, and brought forth the fountains, was He who in these last times bestowed upon mankind, by His Son, the blessing of food and the favour of drink: the Incomprehensible [acting thus] by means of the comprehensible, and the Invisible by the visible.³³

Irenaeus argues that rejoicing in God's good creation adds a certain assurance to the Lord's Supper that the gnostics can never have.

But the Jews do not offer thus: for their hands are full of blood; for they have not

³²Ibid. 10, 495.

³³ANF 1, 427.

received the Word, through whom it is offered to God. Nor, again, do any of the conventicles of the heretics [offer this] . . . But how can they be consistent with themselves, [when they say] that the bread over which thanks have been given is the body of their Lord, and the cup of His blood, if they do not call Himself the Son of the Creator of the world, that is, His Word, through whom the wood fructifies, and the fountains gush forth, and the earth gives "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." Then, again, how can they say that the flesh, which is nourished with the body of the Lord and with His blood, goes to corruption, and does not partake of life? Let them, therefore, either alter their opinion, or cease from offering the things just mentioned.³⁴

To counteract the tendency to spiritualize the Lord's Supper, some Fathers, such as Chrysostom, take pains to bring the Lord's Supper back down to earth, in all its lowliness.³⁵ Though there appears to be no causal relationship between the threat of spiritualizing the Supper and the rise of the sacrificial aspect of the Lord's Supper, it certainly gave those thinking of the Lord's Supper as an ongoing sacrifice plenty of opportunities to speak of the Lord's Supper in raw, lowly terms. For example, Chrysostom writes, "The Church sees the Lord lying in the crib wrapped in swaddling-clothes — an awful and wonderful spectacle; for the Lord's table takes the place of the crib, and here also lies the body of the Lord, not wrapped in swaddling-clothes, but surrounded on all sides by the Holy Ghost."³⁶

Many of the early Fathers believe that God does not spurn matter, but delights in it, and gives his gifts to us through the means of matter. One suspects this is one reason their

³⁴Ibid. 1, 486.

³⁵In this same style of writing, St. Thomas Aquinas would later write, "By the power of the Sacrament there is contained in this Sacrament — as far as the species of bread is concerned — not only the Flesh but the whole Body of Christ, that is, his bones, nerves, and other such things" (Quoted in O'Connor, 278).

³⁶Harnack 4, 297.

writing is so visually oriented. Chrysostom, for one, does not shrink from bold (if not repugnant) allusions to ordinary food in order to make a point. It seems Chrysostom was particularly concerned about not letting the motif of food be spiritualized, even if it smacks of cannibalism. He writes: "In proof of his love he has given us the body pierced with nails, that we might hold it in our hands and eat it; *for we often bite those whom we love much.*" "Christ permits us to glut ourselves on his flesh." "In order then that the disciples might not be afraid, he drank first, and thus introduced them undismayed into the Communion of his mysteries; therefore he drank his own blood." "Reflect, that the tongue is the member with which we receive the awful sacrifice." "Our tongue is reddened by the most awful blood." "He has permitted us who desire it not merely to see, but to touch and eat and bury our teeth in his flesh, and to intermingle it with our own being."³⁷

Some of his expressions are stronger still. He writes, "What the Lord did not tolerate on the Cross [i.e., the breaking of His legs], He tolerates now in the sacrifice through the love of you; He permits Himself to be broken in pieces that all may be filled to satiety."³⁸

The Inscription of Pectorius is a poem, the first five verses of which are the acrostic *Ichthus*. In it, the Lord's Supper is food "sweet as honey" and Christians are encouraged to "Eat with joy and desire, holding the Fish In thy hands. I pray, give as food the Fish, Lord and Savior."³⁹

Though the Lord's glory is masked by lowly food, St. John Chrysostom would not

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Quasten 3, 480.

³⁹Ibid. 1, 13.

have the altar casually approached, nor the hosts casually received. He seemed concerned that people would grow weary of the miraculous.⁴⁰ He consistently urged Christians to approach humbly and with awe. He calls the Lord's Supper, "a table of fear," "an awe-inspiring and divine table," "the frightful mysteries," "the divine mysteries," "the ineffable mysteries," "the mysteries which demand reverence and trembling." The consecrated wine is "the cup of holy awe," "the awe-inspiring blood" and "the precious blood." Moreover, the Eucharist is an

⁴⁰John O'Connor speaks of this same concern. He begins with a quote from Numbers 21. Shortly after the Lord provided manna for his people, they began to grumble again. The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost — also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" O'Connor writes, "Even the miraculous wearied them, and they grumbled against it. Type that it was, it is sobering to reflect that we can say the same of the Eucharist: we are sick of it; it bores us; it does not satisfy. And we turn to other foods. . . . It is probably true of most [Christians], at one time or another in their lives, they have experienced that same terrible distaste for the Eucharist. It is not only 'the shadow of the Valois' who 'is yawning at the Mass'; it is an affliction that has troubled many. Having tasted and seen that the Lord is good (cf. Ps. 34:8), wickedness and sloth (or perhaps some trial -- one even permitted or caused by the Lord himself can lead, if only for awhile, to what is even a contempt for the Bread of heaven. . . . Elements of this spiritual sadness are quite natural, using 'natural' here of the fallen state that at times so distorts and twists our emotions, passions, and better instincts. One can think of our relationships with those we love, how at times the very presence of the beloved will, for no apparent reason, stir up in us some emotion of annoyance or distaste or even revulsion. It is like the feeling of the husband who, although he loves his wife, looks across at her and feels regret at having pledged his life with her, or of the priest or religious who, fundamentally joyous in his or her vocation, awakes one day with the feeling, 'I can't take forty more years of this type of life.' Unlike the temptations that must be fought by running from them, spiritual sadness must be banished by a peaceful, steady reflection on the beauty of the divine realities. Running away is the answer indeed when continuous thinking will only increase the incentive to sin, as is the case in sexual matters. Meeting the challenge head on is the answer when persevering reflection will take away the incentive to sin. And the latter advice is that which is to be followed in the case of spiritual sadness, [now quoting Thomas Aquinas] 'because the more we reflect on spiritual things so much the more pleasing do they become, thus causing spiritual sloth or sadness to cease'" Finally, O'Connor suggests that one who is growing weary of the Lord's Supper reflect upon the words of Jesus in John (6:27,33): "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. . . . For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (O'Connor, 293-6).

"awe-inspiring and terrible sacrifice," "a fearful and holy sacrifice," "the most awe-inspiring sacrifice." Pointing to the altar, he says: "Christ lies there slain," "His body lies before us now." "That which is in the chalice is the same as what flowed from the side of Christ. What is the bread? The Body of Christ." "Reflect, O man, what sacrificial flesh you take in your hand! To what table you will approach. Remember that you, though dust and ashes, do receive the Blood and the Body of Christ."⁴¹

Food for ascetics

But what should those do who are fasting? How do they celebrate the Lord's Supper without breaking their fast? Tertullian tells them to receive the body of Christ, but not eat it until after their fast has ended. Presumably, they were to take the consecrated host home with them until the proper time.⁴²

Strict ascetics such as Ignatius also used the motif of food, but their spurning of ordinary food was woven into their understanding of the motif. Ignatius writes,

For though I am alive while I write to you, yet I am eager to die. My love has been crucified, and there is no fire in me desiring to be fed; but there is within me a water that liveth and speaketh, saying to me inwardly, Come to the Father. I have no delight in corruptible food, nor in the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . . and I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life.⁴³

⁴¹Quasten 3, 480.

⁴²Rordorf, Willy, *et al*, 147. It is known from other sources that it was not uncommon to take the consecrated bread and wine home so that the Lord's Supper could be celebrated on days when there was no liturgy (*ibid.*).

⁴³*ANF* 1, 76-7.

The motif of food takes on a different meaning with Ignatius. He begs his readers to "suffer me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ."⁴⁴ This takes the Lord's Supper to its logical, though not necessarily biblical, conclusion. If the Lord's Supper makes us one with the Body of Christ, then it is only right that we follow in his path. Martyrdom is simply the imitation of Christ in his passion and death.

The entire thinking of Ignatius in this matter is a dynamic prolongation of the eucharist. Like the eucharist, and on the basis of it, martyrdom derives its value from the passion of Christ and leads to resurrection. Through identification with Christ and through the complete gift of self that martyrdom entails, Ignatius will fulfill in himself the radical meaning of the eucharistic sacrifice; as far as possible, he will make real in himself the eucharistic mystery that is celebrated in the sacrifice of the altar.⁴⁵

Cyprian also speaks of the Eucharist leading to martyrdom, but takes a more moderate position. We become an offering or sacrifice, we become the eucharist, in everyday acts of charity. As Christ gives himself in the eucharist, we, Christ's body also give ourselves. The ultimate eucharist then is martyrdom, where we are "placed upon the threshing floor of the Lord . . . like winnowed grains of precious wheat . . . and like heavy clusters of ripe fruit in the vineyard of the Lord." Martyrs shed their blood "like wine pressed from the grape."⁴⁶ Martyrdom is not something Cyprian would take delight in, as Ignatius did. Rather, he sees it

⁴⁴Ibid., 75.

⁴⁵Rordorf, Willy, *et al*, 65.

⁴⁶Ibid. 174-5.

as something difficult and requiring much preparation.

The food of babes

Sometimes, specific foods are spoken of other than wine and bread. Clement of Alexandria uses the term "milk." Those to whom Christ has given rebirth through Baptism are nurtured by his milk, which is, of course, his Supper.⁴⁷ In the liturgy of communion for the newly baptized, written by Hippolytus of Rome, three chalices are called for. The first, containing water which points to the cleansing of Baptism, the second being a chalice of milk and honey, pointing to the Promised Land of salvation, and the third being the chalice of consecrated wine.⁴⁸

The anonymous author of Ode 19, believed to be of Jewish background, took pains to make it explicitly a Trinitarian meal. He also takes this usage of language to daring heights. It cannot be said with certainty, though, that the author was thinking of the Lord's Supper. He writes in Ode 19:

A cup of milk was offered me,
And I drank it in the sweetness of the Lord's kindness.

The Son is the cup,
And the Father is he who was milked;
And the Holy Spirit is She who milked him;
Because His breasts were full,
And it was undesirable that His milk should be ineffectually released.
The Holy Spirit opened Her bosom
And mixed the milk of the two breasts of the Father.
Then She gave the mixture to the generation without their knowing,

⁴⁷Gebremedhin, 66.

⁴⁸Quasten 2, 193.

And those who have received (it) are in the perfection of the right hand.
The womb of the Virgin took (it),
And she received conception and gave birth.
So the Virgin became a mother with great mercies.
And she labored and bore the Son but without pain
Because it did not occur without purpose.
And she did not require a midwife,
Because He caused her to give life . . .
Hallelujah.⁴⁹

Similarly, Chrysostom reminds us how eager an infant is to latch on to its mother's breast and how profoundly disappointed the infant is when it is not nourished by the breast. Such should our attitude be towards the Lord's Supper:

See ye not the infants with how much eagerness they lay hold of the breast? with what earnest desire they fix their lips upon the nipple? With the like let us also approach this table, and the nipple of the spiritual cup. Or rather, with much more eagerness let us, as infants at the breast, draw out the grace of the spirit, let it be our one sorrow, not to partake of this food.⁵⁰

According to Clement, the Logos provides all that the child of faith needs. The Logos⁵¹ is father, mother, teacher and nourisher. Because the children have this food, they lack nothing that is needed.⁵² Clement writes,

⁴⁹James H. Charlesworth, ed. and trans., *The Odes of Solomon* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1977), 82.

⁵⁰*NPNF* 10, 496.

⁵¹The image, of course, is an ancient one. For example, it is found in Ezekiel: "Then he said to me, 'Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.' So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth" (Ezek. 3:3). It is frequently used by the Fathers in contexts that do not necessarily refer to the Lord's Supper, but only to knowledge or "gnosis." It would later be picked up again by Luther, who encouraged us to "read, mark, learn and *inwardly digest*" God's Word.

⁵²Gebremedhin, 66.

This food is fully sufficient for health and growth. "Eat ye my flesh," He says, "and drink my blood" (Jn. 5:53). Such is the suitable food which the Lord ministers, and He offers His flesh and pours forth His blood, and nothing is wanting for the children's growth. O amazing mystery! We are enjoined to cast off the old and carnal corruption, as also the old nutriment, receiving in exchange another regimen, that of Christ, receiving Him if possible, to hide Him within; and that, enshrining the Savior in our souls, we may correct the affections of our flesh . . . The flesh figuratively represents to us the Holy Spirit, for the flesh was created by Him. The blood points out to us the Word, for as rich blood the Word has been infused into life; and the union of both is the Lord, the food of babes — the Lord who is Spirit and Word.

Food for the head

The Lord's Supper not only has an impact upon our bodies. It has an impact on our thoughts and attitudes as well. Origen teaches the eucharistic bread is the Body of Christ, as well as the word of God, which is equally the body and blood of Christ. He writes, "It is said that we drink the blood of Christ not only when we receive it in the celebration of the mysteries but also when we receive his words in which life dwells, as he himself tells us: 'The words I have spoken are spirit and life.'"⁵³ Origen expands on this point:

The bread which God the Logos says is his body is the Logos himself as food of souls, the Logos who proceeds from God. Such is the bread that has come down from the heavenly bread and is placed on the table of which it is written: "You have prepared a table before me, in the sight of those who afflict me." And this drink that God the Logos says is his blood is the mighty Logos himself who fills the hearts that drink him with intoxication. Such is the drink contained in the cup of which it is written, "And your cup that intoxicates, how splendid it is!" . . . The words we speak at this moment are the flesh of the word of God to the extent that the food we give is not "vegetables" for weak stomachs or "milk" for little children. If our words are perfect and courageous, we give you the flesh of the Word of God to eat.⁵⁴

Similarly, Theophilus of Alexandria writes that what is fed upon in the Lord's Supper

⁵³Rordorf, Willy, *et al.*, 187.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 187-9.

is the Lord's Wisdom:

The divine gifts are laid forth, the mystical table is ready, the life-giving bowl is mixed. The King of Glory summons, the Son of God holds reception, the enfleshed Word of God urges us to come. The hypostatized Wisdom of the Father who has built for herself a temple not made by the hands of men, distributes her body as bread and bestows her life-giving blood as wine⁵⁵

For Cyril, we do not eat the divinity of the Logos as such. He writes, "we eat, not as those consuming the divinity (God forbid!) but rather the very flesh of the Logos which has become life-giving" ⁵⁶ Not only does the eating of Wisdom make us wise unto salvation, it also, as Cyril taught, turns man away from his brutish nature and his animal instincts and inclinations and lifts up his thoughts and attitudes. Commenting on the verse, "And she laid him in the manger"⁵⁷ Cyril writes, "He found man reduced to the level of beasts: therefore is He placed like fodder in a manger, that we, having left off our bestial life, might mount up to that degree of intelligence which befits man's nature; and whereas we were brutish in soul, by now approaching the manger, even His own table, we find no longer fodder, but the bread from heaven which is the body of life." Hippolytus of Rome writes that the Lord's Supper has an impact upon the bitterness of man's heart: ". . . Christ indeed gave, even His Flesh, whereby they who believe are nourished like little children, making the bitterness of the human heart sweet by the sweetness of His Word."⁵⁸ Ambrose writes, ". . . this food strengthens our

⁵⁵Gebremedhin, 66.

⁵⁶Ibid., 70.

⁵⁷Lk. 1:7

⁵⁸Quasten 2, 193.

heart, and this drink gives joy to the heart of man."⁵⁹

Daily bread

Some of the Fathers believed the "daily bread" petition of the Lord's Prayer is a reference to the Lord's Supper. Tertullian writes,

This petition "Give us today our daily bread" we understand rather in a spiritual sense, for Christ is our bread because he is life and bread of life. "I am the bread of life," he says, and, a little earlier, "The bread is the word of the living God that has come down from heaven." In addition, his body is a kind of bread: "This is my body." Consequently, in asking for daily bread, we are asking to live forever in Christ and never be separated from his body.⁶⁰

Cyril believes daily occurrence of sin is reason enough to receive this bread on a daily basis.

And according as we say, "Our Father," because He is the Father of those who understand and believe; so also we call it "our bread," because Christ is the bread of those who are in union with His body. And we ask that this bread should be given to us daily, that we who are in Christ, and daily receive the Eucharist for the food of salvation, may not, by the interposition of some heinous sin, by being prevented, as withheld and not communicating, from partaking of the heavenly bread, be separated from Christ's body And therefore we ask that our bread — that is, Christ — may be given to us daily, that we who abide and live in Christ may not depart from His sanctification and body.⁶¹

Just as we pray for daily bread, Basil the Great also urges Christians to commune every day.

It is good and beneficial to communicate every day, and to partake of the holy body and blood of Christ. For he distinctly says, "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood

⁵⁹O'Connor, 40.

⁶⁰Rordorf, Willy, et al, 141. See also Quasten 2, 337.

⁶¹ANF 5, 452.

has eternal life" (John 6:54). And who doubts that to share frequently in life, is the same thing as to have manifold life? I, indeed, communicate four times a week, on the Lord's day, on Wednesday, on Friday, and on the Sabbath, and on the other days if there is a commemoration of any Saint.⁶²

Chrysostom writes that reception of this food is not a matter of frequency, but of appetite.

What then? which shall we approve? those [who receive] once [in a year]? those who [receive] many times? those who [receive] few times? Neither those [who receive] once, nor those [who receive] often, nor those [who receive] seldom, but those [who come] with a pure conscience, from a pure heart, with an irreproachable life. Let such draw near continually; but those who are not such, not even once. Why, you will ask? Because they receive to themselves judgment, yea and condemnation, and punishment, and vengeance. And do not wonder. For as food, nourishing by nature, if received by a person without appetite, ruins and corrupts all [the system], and becomes an occasion of disease, so surely is it also with respect to the awful mysteries.⁶³

John Damascus speculates that God chose to work through food since eating bread and drinking wine is a normal part of daily life. That is, people are less likely to reject that which is familiar.⁶⁴

Bread and wine are used because God knows human weakness, which so often turns away from things little tried by use. Thus it happens according to his accustomed mercy to us that he effects the things that are higher than nature through those things that are naturally familiar to us. Just as in the case of Baptism — since it is customary for men to wash themselves with water and anoint themselves with oil — he has joined to the oil and water the grace of the Spirit and made them the bath of regeneration, so, since it is the custom of men to eat bread and drink wine and water, he has joined to them his divinity and made them his Body and Blood so that we might rise to what is

⁶²Quasten 3, 233-4.

⁶³*NPNF* 14, 449.

⁶⁴Cyril also writes, "For lest we should be terrified by seeing (actual) flesh and blood placed upon the holy tables of our churches, God, humbling Himself to our infirmities, infuses into the things set before us the power of life, and transforms them into the efficacy of His flesh" (Gebremedhin, 75).

above nature through things that are familiar and harmonious with nature.⁶⁵

Manners matter

Manners matter with this meal. Origen clues us into the care taken while handling the bread and wine, and uses it to make a point about similar respect for God's Word. He writes,

You regularly attend the various mysteries, and you know how reverently and carefully you protect the Body of the Lord when it is given to you, for you fear that a fragment of it may fall to the ground and part of the consecrated treasure lost. If it did, you would regard yourselves as culpable, and rightly so, if through your negligence something of it were lost. Well, then, if you show such justifiable care when it comes to his Body, why should you think that neglect of God's word should deserve a lesser punishment than neglect of his Body?⁶⁶

The Mystagogic Catechesis (attributed by many to Cyril of Jerusalem), contains the following rubrics,

After these things, you hear a chanter invite you with divine music to the Communion in the holy Mysteries, singing, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8). Do not entrust your judgment to the bodily senses but rather to undoubted faith. For when you are eating, you are not eating bread and wine but the antitype of the Body and Blood of Christ. Therefore when you come to receive, do not approach with hands extended and fingers open wide. Rather make of your left hand a throne for your right as it is about to receive the King, and receive the Body of Christ in the fold of your hand, responding, "Amen" Take care that you lose not even one piece of that which is more precious than gold or precious stones.⁶⁷

In similar fashion, but with more elaborate rubrics for the one receiving the Body and Blood, John of Damascus writes, "Let us draw near to it with an ardent desire, and with our hands

⁶⁵O'Connor, 77.

⁶⁶Rordorf, Willy, et al, 183.

⁶⁷O'Connor, 33.

held in the form of a cross let us receive the body of the Crucified One: and let us apply our eyes and lips and brows"⁶⁸ Apparently, it was the tradition in some parts of the Eastern Church to touch the forehead and eyes with the Host before putting it into the mouth. In any case, John was thinking of Isaiah 6 when he wrote,

let us . . . partake of the divine coal, in order that the fire of the longing, that is in us, with the additional heat derived from the coal may utterly consume our sins and illumine our hearts, and that we may be inflamed and deified by the participation in the divine fire. Isaiah saw the coal. But the coal is not plain wood but wood united with fire: in like manner also the bread of the communion is not plain bread but bread united with divinity. But a body which is united with divinity is not one nature, but has one nature belonging to the body and another belonging to the divinity that is united to it, so that the compound is not one nature but two.⁶⁹

Following this meal, like any other, God's people are encouraged to give thanks. Chapter ten of the *Didache* exhorts, 'When your hunger has been satisfied, give thanks thus All powerful Master, you created all things for your name's sake, and you have given food and drink to the children of men for their enjoyment, so that they may thank you. On us, moreover, you have bestowed a spiritual food and drink that lead to eternal life, through Jesus your servant.'⁷⁰

⁶⁸*NPNF* 9, 83.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰Rordorf, Willy, et al, 3.

Food for the dying

The Lord's Supper is for dying people.⁷¹ A prayer in the Liturgy of St. Basil requests that there be opportunity for this food shortly before death.

O Lord, grant that we, even until our last breath, may worthily receive a portion of your holy gifts as a provision for the journey to eternal life and for an acceptable defense before the dread tribunal of your Christ. Then, together with the saints who have been pleasing to you at all times, may we become partakers of your eternal

⁷¹O'Connor articulates beautifully why he cannot imagine dying without first eating and drinking the Lord's body and blood. He writes, "As Viaticum, of course, the Eucharist is also companion and source of strength for the final journey of life, the one that will end our exile and bring us to the mountain of God, where 'the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples . . . the best of meat and the finest of wines' and where 'he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever' (Is. 25:6-8). On that mountain we shall 'enter into his rest' (Ps. 95:11; 91:1). It is God himself who is our rest (Ps. 62:5). In Jeremiah 6:16 we read: 'This is what the Lord says: ' . . . Ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.' Of course, what happened is that God himself, who is the good way, as he declared to us when he came as man, saying, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life', repeated the invitation he had made through Jeremiah, saying, 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest' (Mt. 11:28). That same Lord present in the Eucharist is our companion on the way to that rest where, journey done, we shall see him face to face. It is the gift we desire for all the dead: 'Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord.' It is not the rest of sleep. It is the rest of God, the rest of the Lord, the rest promised to those who do not harden their hearts, who do not have hearts of stone but hearts of flesh, since it is a heart of flesh that is required in that rest whose activity is love.

"So essential does the Church consider the necessity of Viaticum for this final journey that she has legislated as follows in the 1983 Code of Canon Law: 'Christ's faithful who are in danger of death, from whatever cause it may proceed, are to be refreshed by Sacred Communion in the form of Viaticum

"Sacred Viaticum for the sick is not to be put off too long; those who have the care of souls are to be sedulously vigilant that the sick are to be refreshed by Viaticum while in full possession of their faculties."

"It is through Viaticum, the passageway to the future, that we shall finally pass beyond the appearances and behold the Lord face to face. 'Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me', we pray in Ps. 27:8-9. Implicit in that request is the desire for our eternal home, where we shall see the house of God, Jesus himself, face to face. [Now quoting Augustine] 'In the house of God there is endless festivity. There something is not celebrated only to have it pass away. There the choirs of angels keep endless festival because the face of God, present to them, gives a joy that has no defects.' It is there that we shall fully receive the Manna, hidden now under the appearances of bread" (cf. Rev. 2:17)(O'Connor, 298-9).

blessings that you have prepared for those who love you.⁷²

Where many today would point to their own works as an acceptable defense before the tribunal of Christ, the Fathers pointed to the Lord's Supper, where forgiveness is assured. This, again, is not making any man-made innovations. It is merely holding the Lord captive to his promises which the Lord loves for us to do.⁷³

Clement writes, "I [Jesus] give you food, I give you bread: my very self. He who has tasted this bread no longer experiences death. Each day I offer you a drink of immortality."⁷⁴ In short, to drink the blood of Jesus is to share in his immortality. Cyril writes that this food destroys death:

From early times, that is, from the first time of the present world, death ravaged those who lived on earth, until the hour of the meal, i.e. until the time of the table. But when the time of the holy table arose for us, that table which is in Christ and is mystical, from which we eat the bread which is from heaven and is life-giving, then death, which of old was fearful and most powerful, was destroyed.

To summarize, the Fathers thought of the Lord's Supper as real food and real drink, able to allay hunger and thirst. It is the food of the Passover, it is food that sustains us as we make our journey through the desert, it is the best food in the Father's house for the returning prodigal. And yet it is also the food of babes, providing all the nourishment necessary for faith and life. It is food for the dying, food for the living, food to be enjoyed often (even daily). It is food that gladdens our hearts and makes us wise unto salvation. Finally, the Lord's Supper

⁷²O'Connor, 336.

⁷³See Matthew 15:21-28 (the faith of the Canaanite woman).

⁷⁴Rordorf, Willy, et al, 118.

is food to be received by prepared hearts and minds, food to be received gladly and gratefully.

CHAPTER II

THE LORD'S SUPPER AS YEAST ACCORDING TO THE FATHERS

Yeast works through the entire batch

"A pinch of yeast" does not denote one motif, but rather a category of motifs that are all related. What binds them together is Christ's body and blood that transforms and vivifies the dying body of man. Just as yeast actively works through a batch of dough, so also the body and blood actively work in the body and blood of the communicant. His body and blood carry the freight of his life, not just spiritual, but also bodily life. Cyril of Alexandria has in mind a vivification happening in the Lord's Supper that is tailored also for the body.⁷⁵ He writes, "For it was necessary that not only the soul be recreated into the newness of life through the Holy Spirit, but that this gross and earthly body be sanctified and called to incorruptibility by a grosser and kindred participation."⁷⁶

In a letter to Nestorius, Cyril shows how it is the nature of the incarnation that makes vivification of the communicant possible. Cyril writes,

Proclaiming the death, according to the flesh, of the Only-begotten Son of God, that is Jesus Christ, confessing his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, we . . . are sanctified, having received his Holy Flesh and the Precious Blood of Christ the Saviour of us all. And not as common flesh do we receive it; God forbid; nor as of

⁷⁵ Sasse writes, "The question has often been asked why we should receive forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper after we have just received it in absolution. Attempts have been made to find a difference between the assurance of forgiveness given in absolution and that given through the Sacrament. There is no such difference, for one and the same grace is given through the Gospel and the Sacrament. However, it is true that the manner in which forgiveness is imparted to us in the Sacrament points to the fact that God's grace is meant for the whole man, body and soul, and that there is a connection between the participation of the 'vivifying flesh' of our glorified Lord and the resurrection of our bodies" (Sasse, *This is my Body*, 313).

⁷⁶Gebremedhin, 89.

a man sanctified and associated with the Word according to the unity of worth, or as having a divine indwelling, but as truly the Life-giving and very flesh of the Word himself. For his is the Life according to his nature as God, and when he became united to his Flesh, he made it also to be Life-giving, as also he said to us: Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his Blood. For we must not think that it is the flesh of a man like us (for how can the flesh of a man be life-giving by its own nature?) but as having become truly the very own of him who for us both became and was called Son of Man.⁷⁷

The Fathers (Cyril is especially strong here), loved to use analogies taken from the physical world to show how the vivifying body and blood of Jesus operates in the lives of those who participate in the Lord's Supper.⁷⁸ For example, Cyril writes,

Water is by nature cold, but when it is poured into a kettle and associated with fire it all but forgets its nature and goes into the energy of the victor. We too, in the same manner, even though we are corruptible because of the nature of the flesh, nevertheless leave our weakness and are transformed into life by being mixed with the true life.⁷⁹

In rapid-fire succession, Gebremedhin summarizes some of Cyril's motifs that are quite similar in nature.

Another is the analogy of a spark, which is buried in chaff in order to preserve the "seed" of fire. Through His own body, Christ hides the Eucharist in the believer like some seed of immortality which destroys all corruptibility. Elsewhere Cyril uses seed in the botanical sense when he says that in participating in his flesh, "the body of (Him who is the) Life may be found in us as a life-giving seed"⁸⁰ and a "seed of

⁷⁷*NPNF* 14, 203-4.

⁷⁸Gebremedhin writes, "Cyril regards Christ as the living and active agent also in the consecration and conversion of the elements. It is the *Risen Christ* who walks into the presence of the community of faith gathered around the Eucharist — just as He once walked into the midst of His disciples following His Resurrection" (Jn. 20:26ff.) (Gebremedhin, 65).

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 54.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 75.

immortality".⁸¹

Cyril also uses the analogy of a piece of bread which is dropped into wine or oil with the result that it is soaked to the point of saturation, to illustrate the effect of the life-giving power of the Eucharist. Furthermore he employs the analogy of the relationship between iron and fire for the same purpose. Though iron is only iron of its own nature, it can be filled with the energy of fire when it is associated with fire.⁸²

What Christ did for us on earth, according to Cyril, is what he does for us now in his Supper, in a greater way. He has greater impact not because the Jesus in the Lord's Supper has more vivifying power than the Jesus walking around in Galilee, but because the Lord's Supper offers a greater participation in the person of Jesus. Cyril writes,

And verily when he was raising the little daughter of the chief of the Synagogue saying, *Maid, arise*, He laid hold of her hand, as it is written, giving life, as God, by His All-Powerful command, and again, giving life through the touch of His Holy Flesh, He shews that there was one kindred operation through both. Yea and when He went into the city called Nain, and one was being carried out dead, *the only son of his mother*, again He *touched the bier*, saying, *Young man, to thee I say, Arise*. And not only to His Word gives He power to give life to the dead, but that He might shew that His Own Body was life-giving (as I have said already), He touches the dead, thereby also infusing life into those already decayed. And if by the touch alone of His Holy Flesh, He giveth life to that which is declared, how shall we not profit yet more richly by the life-giving Blessing when we also taste it? For It will surely transform into Its own good, i.e., immortality, those who partake of It.⁸³

The flesh and blood we receive in the Lord's Supper, for Cyril, is the very same flesh

⁸¹Ibid., 90.

⁸²Ibid., 55.

⁸³ *A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church*, 43 (James Parker & Co., 1874), 418-9.

and blood born of Mary, the same that raised Jairus' daughter, the same that hung dead on the cross, the same that rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, the same that will return with power and glory. To taste the body and blood present in the bread and the wine is as sure a contact with Jesus as was the touch of His hands when he healed Peter's mother-in-law.⁸⁴ Cyril doesn't distinguish between the manners in which Jesus gives himself to us.⁸⁵

We are what we eat

Another common feature of these analogies (by Cyril and others) is that they reveal in graphic form the ability of the Lord's body and blood to reach out and transform (*kata metabolen*) the communicant.⁸⁶ For example, Justin writes ". . .the food over which thanks

⁸⁴James O'Connor writes, "Indeed, Ignatius and Ambrose explicitly state what is found implicitly in all the Fathers (with the possible exceptions of Clement of Alexandria and Origen): the Eucharist is the same Body born of Mary, raised on the Cross, and raised into glory" (O'Connor, 45). This is one of those facets that is stunningly consistent between the Fathers as they believed and celebrated the Eucharist.

⁸⁵This Christology of Cyril was turned into liturgy, though scholars agree that Cyril never wrote a liturgy. In the *Anaphora of St. Mark*, just prior to the Communion, the priest utters, "This is in truth the body and blood of Emmanuel our God, Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe and I confess unto the last breath that this is the vivifying flesh which thine only-begotten Son our Lord and our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ took of the lady of us all, the holy Theotokos S. Mary: He made it one with His godhead without confusion and without mixture and without alteration. Having confessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate He gave it also for us on the holy tree of the cross by His own will, Himself for us all. I verily believe that His godhead was not severed from His manhood for one moment nor for the twinkling of an eye. It is given for us to be salvation and forgiveness of sins and life everlasting to them that shall receive it. I believe that this is so in truth. Amen" (Gebremedhin, 71).

⁸⁶In an essay written in 1916, Teilhard de Chardin describes this transforming work of the Lord's Supper. The communicant in this case actually feels the sensation of the Host beginning "to expand and grow bigger." The white Host soon enveloped not only the one kneeling — it continued to grow! Soon 'through the mysterious expansion of the Host the whole world had become incandescent, had itself become like a single giant Host It had penetrated, through

has been given by prayer of the word which comes from him, and by which our blood and flesh are nourished through a change (*kata metabolen*), is the Flesh and Blood of the same incarnate Jesus."⁸⁷

Augustine speaks of a twofold transformation.

Struck by the spear, his Body gave forth water and Blood, by which he took away our sins. Mindful of this grace, approach and share in this altar, working out your salvation in fear and trembling because it is God who works in you. Recognized in the bread that which hung on the Cross; recognize in the chalice what flowed from his side Therefore take and eat the Body of Christ, all of you who have already been made members of Christ in the Body of Christ. Take and drink the Blood of Christ Just as this is changed into you when you eat and drink, so you will be turned into the Body of Christ⁸⁸

Speaking to God, Augustine writes,

When first I knew you, you raised me up so that I could see that there was something to be seen, but also that I was not yet able to see it. I gazed on you with eyes too weak to resist the dazzle of your splendour. Your light shone upon me in its brilliance, and I thrilled with love and dread alike. I realized that I was far away from you. It was as though I were in a land where all is different from your own and I heard your voice calling from on high, saying "I am the food of full-grown men. Grow and you shall feed on me. But you shall not change me into your own substance, as you do with the food of your body. Instead you shall be changed into me."⁸⁹

the channels of matter, into the inmost depths of all hearts and had dilated them to breaking point, only in order to take back into itself the substance of their affections and passions'" (O'Connor, 281-2).

⁸⁷O'Connor, 19.

⁸⁸Ibid., 59.

⁸⁹Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by R.S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1961), 147.

Elsewhere, Augustine writes with striking simplicity. “. . .we may be what we receive”⁹⁰

Disparate people are given *koinonia*

The Lord's Supper also transforms disparate people into one, unified church.

The prayer of thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) of the *Didache* contains what is perhaps the earliest reference, outside of Paul, to the understanding of *koinonia* in the early church.

First, concerning the cup: We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David Thy servant, which Thou madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. and concerning the broken bread: We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which Thou madest know to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever.⁹¹

Note this communion is something that is happening *to* the bread. The pieces are not gathering themselves but are being gathered.

Cyprian echoes the *Didache* and expands on it. He writes,

When the Savior takes the bread that is made from the coming together of many grains, and calls it his body, he shows the unity of our people, which the bread symbolizes. And when he takes the wine that is pressed from many grapes and grains and forms a single liquid, he shows that our flock is composed of many who have been brought into unity.⁹²

John Damascus says the same, using the term *koinonia*. "We say *koinonia*, and so it is, for

⁹⁰*NPNF* 6, 282.

⁹¹*ANF* 7, 379-80.

⁹²Rordorf, Willy, et al, 172.

through it we have *koinonia* with Christ and partake of His flesh and deity, but through it we also have *koinonia* [among ourselves] and are united with one another. Since we receive of one bread, we all become one body of Christ and one blood, and members one of another.

We are united in one body with Christ."⁹³

St. Hilary of Poitiers writes that this unity finds its strength in the unity of the Word made Flesh in the Incarnation. He writes,

For if in truth the Word has been made flesh and we in very truth receive the Word made flesh as food from the Lord, are we not bound to believe that He abides in us naturally, Who, born as a man, has assumed the nature of our flesh now inseparable from Himself, and has conjoined the nature of His own flesh to the nature of the eternal Godhead in the sacrament by which His flesh is communicated to us? For so are we all one, because the Father is in Christ and Christ in us.⁹⁴

Cyprian writes that it is a unity not unlike that of the wine and water mingling together in the cup of the Supper.

But when the water is mingled in the cup with wine, the people is made one with Christ, and the assembly of believers is associated and conjoined with Him on whom it believes; which association and conjunction of water and wine is so mingled in the Lord's cup, that that mixture cannot any more be separated. Whence, moreover, nothing can separate the Church — that is, the people established in the Church, faithfully and firmly persevering in that which they have believed — from Christ, in such a way as to prevent their undivided love from always abiding and adhering.⁹⁵

Since *koinonia* is one of the gifts of the Lord's Supper, the *Didache* warns that this meal is not for everyone. "But let no one eat or drink of your Thanksgiving (Eucharist), but

⁹³Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. by N.E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 33.

⁹⁴*NPNF* 9, 141.

⁹⁵*ANF* 5, 362.

they who have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord hath said, Give not that which is holy to the dogs."⁹⁶ Cyprian repeats the warning. "Christ is the bread of life; and this bread does not belong to all men, but it is ours. And according as we say, 'Our Father,' because He is the Father of those who understand and believe; so also we call it 'our bread,' because Christ is the bread of those who are in union with His body."⁹⁷

This unity is so real, that John Damascus urges us to watch anxiously so that we do not take on another person's heresy. He writes,

With all our strength, therefore, let us beware lest we receive communion from or grant it to heretics . . . lest we become partakers in their dishonour and condemnation. For if union is in truth with Christ and with one another, we are assuredly voluntarily united also with all those who partake with us. For this union is effected voluntarily and not against our inclination.⁹⁸

It is an error to ask whether the Lord's Supper effects a unity that heretofore did not exist or whether unity is a precondition of the celebration. Ignatius seems to say both are the case. He writes,

Take ye heed, then, to have but one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to [show forth] the unity of His blood; one altar; as there is one bishop, along with the presbytery and deacons, by fellow-servants: that so, whatsoever ye do, ye may do it according to [the will of] God.⁹⁹

It is the Lord's Supper, then, that makes it possible for disparate people, people who may

⁹⁶Ibid. 7, 380.

⁹⁷*NPNF* 6, 282.

⁹⁸Ibid. 9, 84.

⁹⁹*ANF* 1, 81.

have nothing else in common in other areas of their lives, who may even be utterly estranged from one another in other areas of their lives, to be one in Christ. Cyril writes, "Through the Eucharist the faithful become concorporeal with Christ. The faithful are mixed with Christ on a level befitting man."¹⁰⁰

With this in mind, it is utterly unthinkable to the early Fathers that someone should die without having received the Lord's Supper regularly and recently. To receive Christ's body is to be already one with his body. To refrain (either through excommunication or negligence) is to be separated from the body of Christ. For Cyprian, the eucharistic body and ecclesial body of Christ are inseparable.¹⁰¹ Cyprian, "He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother."¹⁰² Cyprian expands on this:

God is one, and Christ is one, and His Church is one, and the faith is one, and the people is joined into a substantial unity of body by the cement of concord. Unity cannot be severed; nor can one body be separated by a division of its structure, nor torn into pieces, with its entrails wrenched asunder by laceration. Whatever has proceeded from the womb cannot live and breathe in its detached condition, but loses the substance of health.¹⁰³

In short, a person condemns himself when he separates himself from the church, even if he

¹⁰⁰Gebremedhin, 90.

¹⁰¹Raymond Johanny writes, ". . . for Cyprian the unity of the bread, the unity of the wine, the union of the water and wine in the cup (cf. . . . *Epist.* 63, 13), the unity of the people, the unity of the Church, and the unity of the eucharist all form a whole, the elements of which cannot be separated. To attack one of the elements is, in the long run, to attack the whole . . . They [those who break away from the Church] are cut off from the sources of grace because they have broken away from the unity of the body of Christ; they have lost everything in losing communion with Christ" (Rordorf, Willy, et al, 172-3).

¹⁰²*ANF* 5, 423.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 429.

sets up a different altar and says his own prayers. Cyprian writes,

Does he think that he has Christ, who acts in opposition to Christ's priests, who separates himself from the company of His clergy and people? He bears arms against the Church, he contends against God's appointment. An enemy of the altar, a rebel against Christ's sacrifice, for the faith faithless, for religion profane, a disobedient servant, an impious son, a hostile brother, despising the bishops, and forsaking God's priests, he dares to set up another altar, to make another prayer with unauthorized words, to profane the truth of the Lord's offering by false sacrifices, and not to know that he who strives against the appointment of God, is punished on account of the daring of his temerity by divine visitation.¹⁰⁴

Augustine exposes a unity that, at least on the surface, appears to be based on one's sanctification.¹⁰⁵

Consequently, he that dwelleth not in Christ, and in whom Christ dwelleth not, doubtless neither eateth His flesh [spiritually] nor drinketh His blood [although he may press the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ carnally and visibly with his teeth], but rather doth he eat and drink the sacrament of so great a thing to his own judgment, because he, being unclean, has presumed to come to the sacraments of Christ, *which no man taketh worthily except he that is pure.*¹⁰⁶

At the same time Augustine exposes a gradual progress towards salvation.

Believers know the body of Christ, if they neglect not to be the body of Christ. Let them become the body of Christ, if they wish to live by the Spirit of Christ Let him draw near, let him believe; let him be embodied, that he may be made to live. Let him not shrink from the compact of members; let him not be a rotten member that deserves to be cut off; let him not be a deformed member whereof to be ashamed; let him be a fair, fit, and sound member; let him cleave to the body, live for God by God:

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 427.

¹⁰⁵Perhaps Augustine believes the one who is outside the church is necessarily unclean, and the one within the church is necessarily (by God's work) clean. Perhaps he is assuming confession and absolution have already taken place. In either case, this would prevent one from drawing the conclusion that the Lord's Supper is no longer for sinners.

¹⁰⁶NPNF 7, 173.

now let him labor on earth, that hereafter he may reign in heaven.¹⁰⁷

Augustine takes the image of the broken bread being gathered together into one loaf to its logical conclusion. Normally Christ is regarded by the Fathers as the host and content of the Supper. Augustine now stretches that interpretation a little bit further. Augustine writes,

The power which is here referred to is unity, that we, being incorporated in his body and made his members, may be that which we receive . . . if then you are the body of Christ and his members, then that which is on the altar is the mystery of yourselves; receive the mystery of yourselves. You hear what you are, and you answer "Amen." Live as a member of the body of Christ, that your Amen may be truthful.¹⁰⁸

Dying people eat and drink immortality

Irenaeus of Lyons writes,

For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.¹⁰⁹

Elsewhere, Irenaeus comes to the same conclusion as he applies the image of the vine and the branches. He borrowed this metaphor from Paul who used it to explain the resurrection.

Irenaeus writes,

And just as a cutting from the vine planted in the ground fructifies in its season, or as a corn of wheat falling into the earth and becoming decomposed, rises with manifold increase by the Spirit of God, who contains all things, and then, through the wisdom of God, serves for the use of men, and having received the Word of God, becomes the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ; so also our bodies, being nourished

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 172.

¹⁰⁸Brilioth, 33.

¹⁰⁹ANF 1, 486.

by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed time, the Word of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God, even the Father, who freely gives to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption, because the strength of God is made perfect in weakness, in order that we may never become puffed up, as if we had life from ourselves.¹¹⁰

Similarly, Augustine also speaks of death being consumed. He writes,

Eternal life took death upon itself; eternal life willed to die; but of thee, not of itself; of thee it received that whereby it may die in thy behalf. . . . Accordingly, life took upon itself death, that life might slay death. . . . The same eternal life gave eternal life also to the flesh which it assumed. He came to die; but on the third day He rose again. Between the Word taking flesh and the flesh rising again, death which came between was consumed.¹¹¹

A thin line exists between medicine and poison

Perhaps one of the most familiar from this category of motifs comes from Ignatius. He writes when Christians come together to receive the Lord's Supper, they are also receiving "the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which prevents us from dying, but a cleansing remedy driving away evil, [which causes] that we should live in God through Jesus Christ."¹¹² Ignatius uses here technical terms from the medical profession of the day and applies them to the Lord's Supper. These terms would be repeated frequently by later Fathers. The terms bring out the active nature of the Lord's Supper. The body and blood are an antidote of the Good Physician capable of counteracting the deadly poison of sin which has plagued mankind since the Fall. Raymond Johanny notes the two expressions — medicine of immortality, and

¹¹⁰Ibid., 528.

¹¹¹*NPNF* 7, 171.

¹¹²*ANF* 1, 57.

antidote to death — are “positive and negative ways of expressing the saving power of the eucharist to free us from sin, purify us, and establish us firmly in the life of the risen Christ . . .

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Augustine points to the death of Jesus as the source of this medicine. He writes,

How great was your love for us, good Father, for you did not even spare your own son, but gave him up to save us sinners! How great was your love for us. . . . He who alone was free among the dead, for he was free to lay down his life and free to take it up again, was for us both Victor and Victim in your sight, and it was because he was the Victim that he was also the Victor. In your sight he was for us both Priest and Sacrifice, and it was because he was the Sacrifice that he was also the Priest Rightly do I place in him my firm hope that you will cure all my ills through him . . . otherwise I should despair. For my ills are many and great, many and great indeed; but your medicine is greater still Lord, I cast all my troubles on you You know how weak I am and how inadequate is my knowledge: teach me and heal my frailty. Your only Son . . . has redeemed me with his blood . . . I eat it and drink it and minister it to others; and as one of the poor I long to be filled with it, to be one of those who eat and have their fill.¹¹⁴

Far from static, the Lord's body and blood is active, alive and vivifying,¹¹⁵ and at times, lethal. In all these, man is always on the receiving end of the gifts. Whether he

¹¹³Rordorf, Willy, et al, 62.

¹¹⁴*Confessions* 10, 43.

¹¹⁵Pope Urban IV wrote, "Man fell by means of the food of the death-giving tree; man is raised up by means of the food of the life-giving tree. On the former hung the food of death, on the latter the nourishment of life. Eating of the former earned a wound; the taste of this latter restored health. Eating wounded us, and eating healed us" (O'Connor, 297). Aquinas also wrote of this dichotomy: "The good receive, the evil receive: But to an unequal fate, One to life or of damnation. Death for the evil; life for the good. See what disparate results for what is equally received" (O'Connor, 80).

receives a spark, heat, yeast,¹¹⁶ medicine, bread, oil, etc., it is passive¹¹⁷ reception that enables communion with the Lord. If it were up to human initiative, this communion would be impossible, and death would be eternal. But the body and blood carry the freight of life, and because it is God's life, it has the ability to vivify and transform.

Acquittal on the Last Day is given today

Since the Lord's Supper delivers forgiveness and life, it was only a natural step to talk of the Lord's Supper as promise, sign and pledge for acquittal on the Last Day. For the Christian, immortality is both a reality now, but will be fully manifested in the coming age.¹¹⁸ John of Damascus speaks of the Lord's Supper as that which consumes our dross, making us pure and acceptable. He writes,

The body and blood of Christ are making for the support of our soul and body, without being consumed or suffering corruption, not making for the drought (God forbid!) but for our being and preservation, a protection against all kinds of injury, a purging from all uncleanness: should one receive base gold, they purify it by the critical burning lest in the future we be condemned with this world. They purify from diseases and all kinds of calamities Being purified by this, we are united to the body of Christ and to His Spirit and become the body of Christ.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶Gebremedhin, 90.

¹¹⁷Because man is a passive receiver of the gifts in the Lord's Supper, it is not a large leap from passive reception to a mechanical reception of the Lord's Supper, one without understanding. Adolph Harnack writes, "The magical view of the Lord's Supper is . . . seen in the practice of children's communion, which first attested by Cyprian . . . became the rule in the East, after infant Baptism had been established. Participation in the Lord's Supper was even held to be absolutely necessary" (Harnack 4, 302).

¹¹⁸The Liturgy of St. Basil speaks of the Lord's Supper as "an acceptable defense before the dread tribunal of . . . Christ." (O'Connor, 336).

¹¹⁹*NPNF* 9, 84.

In the Inscription of Pectorius, the Lord's Supper is referred to as "the honey sweet food of the Redeemer of the saints" alluding to the Promised Land being a land of milk and honey, which can be enjoyed already here on earth. It reads, "Take from the Redeemer of the saints the food as sweet as honey: Eat with joy and desire, holding the Fish In thy hands. I pray, give as food the Fish, Lord and Savior."¹²⁰

This assurance of acquittal makes its way into the liturgy of Hippolytus of Rome. In a service of Communion for the newly-baptized, three chalices were employed and presented in the following order: first, the chalice of water, symbolizing the interior cleaning through baptism; second, the chalice of milk mixed with honey; and finally, the chalice of consecrated wine:

And then let the oblation at once be brought by the deacons to the bishop, and he shall eucharistize first the bread into the presentation which the Greek calls the antitype of the Flesh of Christ; and the cup mixed with wine for the antitype which the Greek calls the likeness of the Blood which was shed for all who have believed in Him; and milk and honey mingled together in fulfilment of the promise which was made to the Fathers, wherein He said, I will give you a land flowing with milk and honey; which Christ indeed gave, even His Flesh, whereby they who believe are nourished like little children, making the bitterness of the human heart sweet by the sweetness of His Word.¹²¹

Cyril writes, "We have been enriched with the unfading hope of immortality, the proud title of sons of God, grace here, and the reign of Christ hereafter."¹²² Irenaeus, returning to the popular vine and wheat metaphors, writes,

¹²⁰Quasten 1, 173-4.

¹²¹Quasten 2, 193.

¹²²Gebremedhin, 102.

And just as a cutting from the vine planted in the ground fructifies in its season, or as a corn of wheat falling into the earth and becoming decomposed, rises with manifold increase by the Spirit of God, who contains all things, and then, through the wisdom of God, serves for the use of men, and having received the Word of God, becomes the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ; so also our bodies, being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed time.¹²³

Conversely, Ignatius teaches that to reject the Lord's Supper is to risk eternal death. (It is interesting to note that, at the same time, he makes a connection between abstaining from the Lord's Supper and the lack of charity, as if there were a causal relationship. A similar connection is made in Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35.) Ignatius writes,

...they have no concern for charity with regard to the widow, the orphan, the oppressed, prisoners, emancipated slaves, the hungry, and the thirsty. They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, the same flesh that suffered for our sins and that in his goodness the Father has raised up. So it is that those who reject the gift of God die of their disputes.¹²⁴

This profound confidence of acquittal (hence resurrection) made its way into many of the early liturgies. Perhaps the earliest can be located in *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*.¹²⁵ If this is the work of Hippolytus, a date of A.D. 215 is implied. Since the work professes to reflect an earlier tradition, Jasper and Cuming believe it may be taken as a witness to Roman practice some fifty years earlier. As such it is the earliest surviving text of a eucharistic prayer. Immediately following the words of institution, the celebrant says “when

¹²³ANF I, 528.

¹²⁴LaVerdiere, 162.

¹²⁵cf. R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist, Early and Reformed* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 21ff.

you do this, you make my remembrance.’ Remembering therefore his death *and resurrection*, we offer to you the bread and the cup, giving you thanks”¹²⁶ The remembrance is in the eating and drinking, and it is focused on the death, with the resurrection inserted, in keeping with Easter being celebrated every Sabbath, but also in keeping with the Lord’s Supper delivering acquittal and resurrection.

To summarize, the Fathers believed that the body and blood of Christ under the bread and wine transform the communicant. Just as yeast actively works through a batch of dough, so also the body and blood of Christ actively work through our bodies and transform their natures. Where there were once disparate people, now there is the body of Christ. Where there was once unholy disunion, now there is *koinonia*. Where there was once only death, now there is immortality. The Lord's Supper gives *today* nothing less than acquittal for the Last Day. What Jesus did for us on earth (touching, healing, vivifying, etc.), he now does in his Supper, in a greater way.

¹²⁶Ibid., 23.

CHAPTER III

WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE MIDDLE AGES?

A time of decay

The early Middle Ages in Western Europe were, on the one hand, a period of preservation and reflection on the Patristic era, and, on the other hand, a time that witnessed the first major controversies concerning the Lord's Supper. For a thousand years Christendom had been celebrating the Lord's Supper relatively free from doctrinal strife surrounding the Lord's Supper. Macy writes,

Whatever incompatibilities may have existed in these different emphases by the Fathers in their discussions of the Eucharist seem to have gone unnoticed during their lifetimes. The theological efforts of the era were directed, for the most part, toward the great Christological and soteriological controversies. Questions concerning the celebration and explanation of the Lord's Supper were discussed in catechetical settings or as they contributed to the larger controversies.¹²⁷

Just as it took a long time for the Lord's Supper to be the center of doctrinal strife, so also it took a long time for the Lord's Supper to be the subject of formal dogmatic definitions. Only once did an ecumenical council have to handle a decision regarding the Lord's Supper. It was the Synod of 787 (Nicaea II). There they dealt with a relatively minor point, incidental to the synod itself, in which they rejected a resolution of the Synod of 794 which had declared there could be no image of Christ other than the elements in the Eucharist.¹²⁸

The conflicts which did eventually come were the direct result of heightened interest in

¹²⁷Macy, 20.

¹²⁸Sasse (1977), 11.

the Lord's Supper, not indifference or neglect.

. . . for about 500 years — strictly speaking, from the declaration *Ego Berengarius* of 1079 to the *Formula of Concord* of 1577 — Western Christendom was occupied with the quest for the Sacrament as never before, and never after.¹²⁹ The real problem which was under discussion for some centuries was the dogma of the Real Presence. It occupied the minds of the theologians as well as the imaginations of the laity . . . the whole piety of medieval Christendom finds its center more and more in the miracle of the Real Presence. Popular superstition, which expresses itself in legends about miraculous hosts; profound speculation by the schoolmen . . . the beautiful eucharistic hymns, the churches, altars, and tabernacles built as dwelling places of the eucharistic Christ; the new forms of eucharistic worship which grew out of the belief in the Real Presence after about AD 1200 . . . all testify to the growing importance of this doctrine for the medieval church, and explain why the new dogma was regarded as necessary.¹³⁰

Of course, the Real Presence controversies find their roots in the Christological controversies of the Patristic era. Hermann Sasse writes,

Every disease of the church becomes manifest at the Lord's Table. The schisms and heresies, for instance, against which Paul had to fight in the church of Corinth seem to have become noticeable first in the celebration of the Lord's Supper . . . the controversies over the Lord's Supper, which so often provoked the criticism of Christians and non-Christians — Holy Communion having become the cause of unholy **disunion** — go back to the time of the New Testament . . . every dissension concerning the Gospel necessarily expresses itself in a dissension over the Lord's Supper. Just as Christ's Church becomes conscious of its own nature as it gathers around the Lord's Table, so its weaknesses, errors, and sins also become manifest on that occasion. Each misunderstanding of the Gospel must needs lead to a misunderstanding of the Sacrament; each misunderstanding of the Sacrament is bound to lead to a wrong concept of the Gospel.¹³¹

Therefore, the patristic Christological controversies were destined to make their way

¹²⁹Ibid., 11.

¹³⁰Ibid., 18.

¹³¹Ibid., 2-3.

into the Lord's Supper. It was just a matter of time. Harnack writes,

From the beginning of the fifth century conceptions of the Eucharist were very decidedly influenced by the Christological differences. If the conception of the Eucharist was connected with that of the Incarnation, then it could not be a matter of indifference to the former, whether in the latter the two natures were held to be fused in one or to remain separate. *Monophysites and Orthodox, however, had always been and remained of one mind regarding the Lord's Supper.* Cyril argued over and over again for the Lord's Supper in support of the Incarnation and vice versa, and it was strictly due to him that the Church learned the connection between the two and never lost it . . . Cyril had no fixed doctrinal formula for the Lord's Supper . . . but since the body was to him, because of the one nature made flesh, God's body, it was in the full sense of the term "life-giving".¹³²

Surprising is the fact that there were no open, heated controversies surrounding the Lord's Supper until the Middle Ages. The early inconsistencies were left to the Medieval theologians to handle. Sasse writes,

If the Middle Ages could not see the incompatibility between Augustine and the great Bishop of Milan, how can we expect that Ambrose and Augustine themselves and their contemporaries noticed that actually two different ideas of the Eucharist appeared in the writings of these two Fathers? The two types of understanding of the Sacraments existed side by side. The Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ could be understood in a more realistic or in a more spiritualistic way. The difference could be tolerated because the question as to the actual relationship between the body of the crucified and risen Lord, on the one hand, and the body of Christ in the Sacrament, on the other, had not yet become a theological problem.¹³³

Similarly, McCue writes, "There were, in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, a number of theologians, largely Augustinian in their inspiration, who seemed to some to be evacuating the Eucharist of its content and substance. Their opponents, deriving more from Ambrose, seemed to the 'Augustinians' to be guilty of theological crudity and of a grotesquely physical

¹³²Harnack, 299.

¹³³Sasse (1977), 24-5.

conception of the Eucharist."¹³⁴ Sasse writes, "One must never forget that the Middle Ages were unable to discover the antagonism that existed between the two great Fathers [Augustine and Ambrose] who were regarded as incarnations of patristic authority, and that even the Reformation was so much under the spell of the authority of Augustine that even Luther followed him"¹³⁵

This plurality of theologies traced to the Fathers carried throughout the Medieval period. Indeed, it still exists today. Due to the distractions of the Christological heresies, this plurality of theologies was tolerated more by the early Fathers than it would be in the Middle Ages, when the Lord's Supper became the center of attention.¹³⁶ This does not mean that the early church did not possess very definite views on the Lord's Supper, nor does it mean that there was no dissonance between these views. It means "the dogma on the Sacraments was hidden in the liturgy. What the theologians wrote on the Eucharist remained a private interpretation of the content of the mass."¹³⁷

¹³⁴O'Connor, 82.

¹³⁵Sasse (1977), 18.

¹³⁶Brecht writes that by the time Luther and his contemporaries took on the topic of the Lord's Supper "only one of the two sides could be right; consequently, the other had to be of the devil, and that had to be stated clearly" (Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther, Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532*, trans. by James L. Schaaf [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990], 299). Luther's intolerance was quite obvious in the work *That These Words of Christ*, where "he had made about seventy-seven references to the devil. In this matter the devil was his real enemy, and it was better to speak frankly about him than to talk falsely about peace and moderation" (*ibid.*, 319). Luther was criticized for his intolerance. He responded that to Satan, one "must give the backside" (James M Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer, the Story of the Man and His Career* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986], 207).

¹³⁷Sasse (1977), 12.

Some were also content to lay aside such dissonance. Commenting on the words, "he who eats my flesh . . . has eternal life" (Jn. 6:54), John Chrysostom wrote of the disciples that chose to remain, "Still they obeyed and followed Him, and confessed that He had the words of eternal life. For this is a disciple's part, not to be over-curious about the assertions of his teacher, but to hear and obey him, and to wait the proper time for the solution of any difficulties."¹³⁸

So it was left to the Medieval church to evaluate the Patristic evidence, a church (living later under the influence of scholasticism) that was poorly equipped to do such work. Refraining from being over-curious was never a strength of the scholastics. No longer content to have the theology of the Lord's Supper hidden in the liturgy, scholastics wanted to apply reason to questions of faith. In so doing, they created an environment where there was little room for the eucharistic motifs of the early church.

The following will attempt to show that the Middle Ages produced a theological climate in which it would be difficult for the eucharistic motifs of the early church to thrive. We will attempt to show these eucharistic motifs were also overshadowed by other developments: the mass as sacrifice, relics, indulgences, shrines, the elevation of the host and Mariolatry.

The wisdom of man

An important forerunner of scholasticism was Peter Abelard (1079-1142). In his book *Yes and No* he took up 158 theological questions and showed that various authorities,

¹³⁸Voelz, 36.

including the Bible and the ancient Christian writers, did not agree on their answers. His purpose was not to discredit the authorities, but to show that theology must not be content with citing authorities. One can see that an environment not entirely friendly to the early Fathers is beginning to take shape.

The reintroduction of Aristotle into western Europe could only have a negative impact on the role of these motifs in the Medieval church. To the Aristotelian theologian, surely they appeared to be gross, crass, lowly ways of thinking about the Lord's Supper. Similarly, the energies of theologians such as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas were not put into propagating the eucharistic witness of the early Fathers. These were men who were excited about how philosophy might offer a better understanding of the Christian faith. Albert, for instance, made a clear distinction between philosophy and theology.

Philosophy operates on the basis of autonomous principles, which can be known apart from revelation, and seeks to discover truth by a strictly rational method. A true philosopher does not seek to prove what the mind cannot understand, even if the question at hand is a doctrine of faith. The theologian, on the other hand, does set out from revealed truths, which cannot be known by reason alone. This does not mean that theological doctrines are less sure. On the contrary, revealed data are always more certain than those of reason, which may err. But it does mean that philosophers, as long as they remain within the scope of what reason can attain, should be free to pursue their inquiry, without having to turn at every step to the guiding hand of theology.¹³⁹

Thomas Aquinas, with his Platonic bias, also attempted to turn a philosophy into an instrument in the hands of faith. Gonzalez writes,

By interpreting the Christian faith in Platonic terms, it was possible that Christians would come to undervalue the present world, which according to the Bible is God's

¹³⁹Justo L. Gonzalez, 1 *The Story of Christianity, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984), 316-7.

creation. It was also possible that the incarnation, the presence of God in a physical human being, would be pushed to the background, for Platonism was not interested in temporal realities — which could be dated and located at a particular time and place — but rather in immutable truth. There was therefore the danger that theologians would pay less attention to Jesus Christ as a historical figure, and more to the eternal Word of God — again conceived in Neoplatonic terms.¹⁴⁰

One can see that from this perspective, words such as “This is my body” would become the center of focus. Indeed, if the incarnation itself is pushed into the background as too temporal and physical, what chance do the motifs of feast and yeast stand? The incarnation and the Lord’s Supper are linked. If one suffers, the other will suffer as well.

With later scholasticism, this rift between philosophy and theology would only grow, and the questions that were posed became ever more subtle.¹⁴¹ Scholastic theology continued along its road of ever-increasing complexity. The study of Scripture and of early Christian literature was all but captive to the scholastics. The motifs of the early Fathers became ever more irrelevant. It would take a Renaissance to bring them back. Gonzalez writes,

As the Middle Ages drew to a close, many advocates of reform were convinced that the greatest ill of the church was the obscurantism of what soon would be called the “dark ages.” The printing press, the influx of Byzantine scholars, and the rediscovery of the artistic and literary legacy of antiquity gave credence to the hope that the furtherance of scholarship and education would produce the much-needed reformation of the church. If at some point in the past centuries practices had been introduced that were contrary to original Christian teaching, it seemed reasonable to surmise that a return to the sources of Christianity — both biblical and patristic — would do away with such practices.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰Gonzales I, 319.

¹⁴¹Gonzalez I, 362.

¹⁴²Justo L. Gonzalez, 2, *The Story of Christianity, The Reformation to the Present Day* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 10.

The bleeding host

The mass as sacrifice was also no friend to the eucharistic motifs of the early church. Sasse writes, ". . . all Christendom, Eastern and Western, regarded the Eucharist as a sacrifice, and the minister as a priest. No medieval Christian ever doubted that, for the idea that the mass is a sacrifice was deeply rooted in all liturgies."¹⁴³ Sasse believes the idea that the body and blood of the Lord are the sacrifice arises in the third century. "In the Early Church the people of God as a whole offer the sacrifice, the bishop acting in behalf of the people in saying the Eucharist; but in the middle of the third century Cyprian presents the idea of a special priesthood, a real *sacerdos* who offers in behalf of the people."¹⁴⁴

The New Testament reveals no other atoning sacrifice than the sacrifice which Christ made quite alone. The New Testament, in other words, does not support the mass as sacrifice. In an insightful quote, however, Sasse writes,

If we ask how it was possible that the "tradition" of the sacrifice of the mass could arise, and gain such an authority that up to the Reformation practically no theologian and no Christian, except a few Waldensians, had any doubts about it, our answer can only be this: The whole idea is another expression of that synergism which entered the church so early, and which became the most characteristic feature of Catholicism, Eastern and Western. Just as the *sola gratia* and *sola fide* of the New Testament were abandoned in favour of the theory that in the process of salvation God and man, divine grace and human freedom, must cooperate; just as Mary's *fiat* (Luke 1:38) was regarded as the necessary human answer to God's redeeming will, so the mass became a sacrifice in which Christ the High Priest and the human priesthood work together.¹⁴⁵

The mass as sacrifice (as another expression of synergism) served as a major distraction from

¹⁴³Sasse (1977), 15.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 16.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 17.

and overshadowing of the ancient eucharistic motifs. These motifs, as we have seen, highlight the gift character of the Lord's Supper. With the motif of feast, Christ is the host, Christ is the content, Christ is the giver and the gift. He puts himself into our mouths and our souls "grow fat on God." With the motif of yeast, Christ actively transforms us and not the other way around. "You shall not change me into your own substance, as you do with the food of your body. Instead you shall be changed into me." The gift character of these motifs are incompatible with the mass as sacrifice. This mass as sacrifice was so deeply rooted in the church of the Middle Ages, any opposing thoughts could hardly thrive.

Other eucharistic motifs replaced the classic motifs of the early church, but these new motifs reflected the mass as sacrifice that was developing. For instance, Coulton notes that a significant number of people were seeing terrible visions of a child being cut up to pieces on the altar, and these pieces being distributed. This vision became a recurring theme. For instance, two monks prayed for a week for a revelation from God, after which they went together to the Eucharist.

Then were the eyes of their understanding opened; and, when the loaves were laid upon the altar, it seemed to these three alone as if a little boy lay there. And, when the priest stretched forth his hand to break the bread, the Angel of the Lord came down from heaven having a knife in his hand, wherewith he cut that child, catching the blood in a chalice; thus, as the priest brake the bread into small fragments, the angel also cut the boy's limbs into little pieces. So, when the old man went up to receive the communion, to him alone was given bleeding flesh; seeing which, he was afraid and cried: "Lord, I believe that the Bread laid upon the altar is Thy Body, and the Chalice is thy Blood." And forthwith that portion in his hand was turned to bread, according to the mystery; and he took it in his mouth and blessed God. So the old men said unto him: "God knoweth man's nature, that it cannot eat of raw flesh; therefore doth He change His body into bread and His blood into wine, for those who receive it with faith." And they gave thanks unto God, that He had not permitted the old man's

labours to be in vain; and they went back to their cells rejoicing.¹⁴⁶

Similar to the above were relatively common visions of the "Bleeding Host" or the "Chalice full of Blood."¹⁴⁷

Enough splinters of the cross to build Noah's ark

Another development that overshadowed the early motifs of the Lord's Supper was the rise of relics (the remains of martyrs and saints). The practice of venerating relics was already established in the early church. At the time, "a relic was thus not so much a magical object in itself, at least in the early Christian centuries." It was more "a token of memory and affection, the outward manifestation of a blessing and the realization of a relationship with a special friend of God."¹⁴⁸ By the time the Middle Ages rolled around, relics had increased in number as well as in the powers attributed to them. Geary writes, "By 813 it was apparently assumed that all parish churches had relics, since the feasts listed by the Council of Mainz to be observed throughout the empire concluded with the 'feasts of the martyrs or confessors whose holy bodies rest in each parish.'"¹⁴⁹ By 1100,

every church, every altar, every nobleman, every king, every monastery, had relics sometimes in great quantity. They were instruments of state, of law and order, of

¹⁴⁶G.G. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 107-8.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁴⁸Everett Ferguson, et al, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), 779.

¹⁴⁹James Obelkevich, *Religion and the People, 800-1700* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 14.

personal well-being They were the object of huge commerce Even the Pope, whatever theoretical claims were made for him, in practice owed most of his authority to the fact that he was the guardian of the body of St. Peter. This brought men to Rome and made them listen to the voice of St. Peter mediated through his representative on earth Relics were the main channel through which supernatural power was available for the needs of ordinary life.¹⁵⁰

If every parish church was to have a relic, as well as every monastery, obviously the demand must have overwhelmed the supply. Striking evidence of this shortage is seen in the recommendation of the bishops at the Council of Chelsea (816). This recommendation also exposes the shift from reception of the hosts to the devotion of the hosts. "When a church is built, let it be consecrated by the bishop of its diocese . . . let the Eucharist which is consecrated by the bishop be placed by him along with other relics in a reliquary and let it be deposited in that same church. And if he is unable to find any other relics, nonetheless this alone is surely sufficient because it is the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁵¹

Thousands of pilgrims flocked to various relics believing the corresponding saint could grant miraculous healing. They also brought special protection of the saint to the community.¹⁵² Some more unscrupulous merchants of relics taught that relics conveyed the forgiveness of sin without the need of confession. People could now receive from relics (strength, forgiveness, a cure) what was formerly put into their mouths in the Lord's Supper. And that which made the relics attractive (their tangibility and physicality) is precisely what many find attractive about the motifs of the Lord's Supper. They are physical and tangible

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 34-5.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 14.

¹⁵²Ibid., 18.

(versus lofty and ethereal) ways of thinking about what the Lord gives in His Supper. The end result is the attention given to relics may have formerly been the attention given to the motifs of the Lord's Supper.

"Once the coin in the coffer clingelt . . ."

More competition for the motifs came with the rise of indulgences and shrines. Roots of the Roman Catholic doctrine of indulgences reach back to the early practice of penitential discipline. Penance evolved so that it was no longer regarded as a mere expression of sorrow for sin or even as the discharge of penalties. Penance became pleasing to God, meritorious, and compensatory for sin. An indulgence was originally a commutation (or relaxation) of penance, a relaxation of God's punishment of sin. The Crusades marked a time when indulgences evolved rather dramatically. Pope Urban II (1088-99) granted plenary indulgences on a large scale to members of the First Crusade. After this date pilgrims also could receive certificates of forgiveness if they journeyed to Palestine. Ruthkrug writes,

The loss in 1291 of the last Christian outpost in Palestine, together with the increasing reluctance of sovereigns and important sections of nobility to participate in future crusades, made the problem of indulgences acute: either Rome must make the Holy Land more accessible to European Christians or she ought more clearly to dissociate the granting of indulgences from crusade and from pilgrimage to Asian shrines.¹⁵³

The Holy See chose the latter. In 1300, the great year of Jubilee, Boniface VIII granted, for the first time, plenary indulgences for visiting a shrine located in Europe. As time progressed,

¹⁵³Obelkevich, 23.

both indulgences and shrines became more and more accessible.¹⁵⁴ By the time of the Reformation, 1,036 places of pilgrimage are located in Germany alone,¹⁵⁵ and indulgences were sold by traveling salesmen,¹⁵⁶ some less scrupulous than others.¹⁵⁷ In both cases, shrines and indulgences offer tangible "proof" of forgiveness, strength, power. Faith in "acquittal on the Last Day" being delivered with the body and blood was no longer necessary. Now the peasant could buy that acquittal dirt cheap, and take home a preprinted indulgence with his name and date filled in. No longer must his faith latch on to the present and future promises given in the Lord's Supper. Now his *hands* could latch on to the present and future promises spelled out on an indulgence. In this way, indulgences also served as competition for the faith and attention formerly evoked by the early eucharistic motifs..

Feast your eyes on this

¹⁵⁴Lohse writes that indulgences were "originally understood as affecting only the temporal punishments imposed by the church itself. Later, indulgences were issued releasing penitents from the temporal punishments of purgatory. Then, an indulgence was issued releasing the recipient from punishment and all guilt. Finally, indulgences were issued on behalf of members of the recipient's family who had already died, releasing them from the punishments of purgatory" (Lohse, 42).

¹⁵⁵Obelkevich, 20.

¹⁵⁶"No less a person than Luther's own prince, Elector Frederick the Wise, was a pious merchandiser of indulgences. As late as 1522 he sent his personal agent to Venice to purchase religious relics. Once a year, he put these on display so that people might gain release from the punishments of purgatory by visiting the exposition and piously viewing the relics. In 1518 the total value of the indulgence gained by viewing all the relics in this collection corresponded to the remission of 127,800 years of suffering in purgatory" (Lohse, 43).

¹⁵⁷Manchester aptly describes Johann Tetzel, for example, as a sort of medieval P.T. Barnum who always "exceeded his quota" (William Manchester, *A World Lit Only by Fire, The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance* [Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992], 134f.).

There were yet other innovations made in the Middle Ages that drew attention away from the eucharistic motifs. A new form of eucharistic service had arisen, where only the priest, or the priest together with his ministrants, partook of the Sacrament. The lay people were more or less spectators, satisfied (perhaps) by their own personal devotion and by watching what was happening on the altar. Their participation in the Lord's Supper was only vicarious, and it came when the host was elevated. Sasse writes,

There was one moment, indeed, when the thoughts of all were directed to the altar, namely, when during the *Canon Missae*, which was spoken with low voice, the transubstantiation took place. To indicate that moment, the blessed elements were shown to the people in the elevation for adoration. Not Holy Communion but elevation was now becoming the climax of the Catholic mass. It was obviously not accidental that the elevation was introduced into the church just at the time when the word and idea of transubstantiation arose in the late 12th century.¹⁵⁸

The implications are stunning. If Christ, because of transubstantiation, remains present after the celebration, he could and should be adored also outside the mass. So a new form of eucharistic piety emerged, the climax of which was the Feast of Corpus Christi.

One can speculate about the impact this had on the motifs of the Lord's Supper. Instead of the communicant feasting on the best food in the Father's house, the pious spectator feasted his eyes on the elevated host.¹⁵⁹ Instead of swallowing the "medicine of immortality,

¹⁵⁸Sasse (1977), 53-4.

¹⁵⁹The decay continued. "Beginning around 1300, peasants brought their horses into visual contact with the Eucharist on the feasts of Saint Leonhard and Saint George, patrons of knightly pursuits in previous centuries. The rite appears to have been a kind of equine communion. For this purpose churches were installed with special doors . . . Peasants would ride their smartly decorated animals through the doors into the middle of the church, to have them look either at the exposed Eucharist or at the 'windows' of the container housing it" (Obelkevich, 30).

antidote to death" with one's mouth, the worshiper hoped that by adoring the host, the Lord would work a miracle.¹⁶⁰ Instead of the Lord's body and blood actively transforming the communicant into the body of Christ, now the congregation is a gathering of individuals, each of whom held his own private devotion.

A new mediator

One more development that contributed to the overshadowing of the early motifs was the rise of Mariolatry. Coulton writes, "Very early [in the Middle Ages], Christ the Mediator becomes Christ the Judge; and another must needs be found to mediate between us and Christ, as Christ had stood between us and the Father. Jesus had taught the love of the Father; it becomes the Virgin's mission to teach the love of Christ."¹⁶¹ A good example of this is found in the writing of a Franciscan from approximately the year 1320.

We ought to imitate the man who has incurred the king's anger. What does he do? He goes secretly to the queen and promises a present, then to the earls and barons and does the same; then to the free men of the household, and lastly to the footmen. So when we have offended Christ, we should first go to the Queen of heaven and offer her, instead of a present, prayers, fasting, vigils, and alms; then she, like a mother, will come between thee and Christ, the Father who wishes to beat us, and she will throw the cloak of mercy between the rod of punishment and us, and soften the king's anger against us. Afterwards we should go to the earls and barons, *i.e.* the apostles, and ask them to intercede for us; then to the knights and esquires, *i.e.* martyrs and confessors; then to the ladies of the Queen's Chamber, *i.e.* the women saints; and lastly to the footmen, *i.e.* to the poor, for the poor should be persuaded by gifts of alms to

¹⁶⁰It should be noted that some of these new forms of eucharistic piety were lay driven. Not the arrogance on the part of the clergy, but the reluctance on the part of the laymen to take the blood of Christ for fear of spilling some of it (cf... Sasse [1977], 55).

¹⁶¹Coulton, 139.

intercede for us to Christ.¹⁶²

Among the common folk, Mariolatry grew to a fetishism. The Middle Ages thus made for themselves a new Redeemer, able to give all the gifts they felt they needed, gifts formerly given in the Lord's Supper. The result is a further receding of the classic eucharistic motifs into the shadows. Who needs to be thinking about motifs when Mary can give stir up some magic for you?

Though difficult to prove, hopefully it has been shown that the atmosphere of the Middle Ages was hostile toward early eucharistic motifs. The rise of scholasticism, together with the rise of the mass as sacrifice, relics, shrines, indulgences, elevating the host and Mariolatry all served as competitors for the hearts of the people. Common to all of the above developments is the aspect of magic, making God do what we want him to do. This can be seen in some of the abuses of the day. Coulton writes,

A woman stole a Host and put it in her hive to stay a mortality among her bees; "these little insects [*vermiculi*], recognizing their Creator, built from their sweetest of honeycombs a tiny chapel of wondrous cunning for this sweetest of guests; wherein, erecting an altar of the same material, they laid the Most Holy Body thereon." Another sprinkled it over her cabbages as a remedy against caterpillars; an unchaste priest, unable to seduce a woman, took the Host in his mouth to her, "hoping, if he might thus kiss her, to incline her will to his desires by the virtue of that Sacrament"; Jacques de Vitry tells of a woman who similarly stole it for a philtre . . . For this reason, all rectors and priests who give Communion unto the people are always enjoined to exercise the utmost diligence to see that the women communicate with mouths wide open, with tongues well stretched out, and with veils far removed from their faces. The more diligence is used here, the more witches are thus discovered.¹⁶³

¹⁶²Coulton, 140.

¹⁶³Coulton, 112-3.

The Lord's Supper survives

Ironically, the eucharistic piety of the people did not decrease during the Middle Ages; most agreed that it increased, with European piety reaching its apex around 1500. Of course there were all kinds of popular superstitions and extra-biblical beliefs surrounding the Lord's Supper. Through it all, the Lord's Supper remained essentially intact. In spite of all the abuses, the Roman Church still taught the body and blood of Christ are truly present in the Lord's Supper and distributed to those who will receive it. In a somewhat anthropocentric and, perhaps gilded remark, O'Connor writes,

The faith of that "common herd"— so derided by Berengarius and others — has always been true to Peter's original confession. ['Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God' (Jn. 6:68-9).] They are the ones who attended Mass, built the cathedrals in which it was offered, marched in the processions of Corpus Christi, spent nights of vigil in adoration and prayer, supported a sometimes decadent clergy so that they might not be deprived of the Eucharist, held firm when others doubted, and even gave their lives as martyrs for the truth of the Sacrament. With them were joined untold numbers of bishops, alone and in councils, priests, religious, catechists, and theologians who drew strength from the common faith and in turn nourished it.¹⁶⁴

Saying basically the same thing, but putting the glory where it is due, Luther writes,

If the doctrine is crushed at one place, it raises its head at another. The devil would rather annihilate it completely. That has been his aim from the beginning of the world, but he has failed. Wherever he attained his end in one country, the hour for it had come. But then the Gospel sprang up again at a different spot. Thus Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the text of the Gospel, and the ministry survived in the world under the papacy, although many abuses crept in to stifle it. Do you esteem it a small matter that the devil had to be pleased to leave Baptism intact? Ask the Anabaptists about this. Yet it survived. Who, do you suppose, preserves the Christians and Baptism? Not I. No one is able to do this. I cannot preserve one Christian or one Sacrament. Who, then, does this? It is an hour, and hourglass which God holds in His hand. He says:

¹⁶⁴O'Connor, 174.

"My dear man, don't touch them until the sand has run down." And if they say: "No, I must!" God replies: "My dear man, hold off; the sand has not yet run down." Though they are determined, there is still a secret and invisible power which restrains them.¹⁶⁵

Elsewhere, Luther writes,

Herewith, therefore, I now confess again before God and the whole world . . . that where mass is celebrated according to Christ's directive, whether it be among us Lutherans or in the papacy or in Greece or in India, although there is only the one form — which, of course, is wrong and a misuse, as is done in the papacy at Easter time and at other times of the year when they commune the people — that there under the form of the bread there is the true body of Christ, given for us on the cross; under the wine, the true blood of Christ, shed for us¹⁶⁶

Luther would also say that the manifold abuses of this era should serve as sufficient motivation to preach and teach the Lord's Supper regularly.

When celebrating the Sacrament we should preach a sermon and not forget Christ; for the Lord's Supper was instituted for the sake of the proclamation, so that no other Christ be worshiped. But this was not done. Christ established His memorial there and instituted the proclamation, but they perverted the Mass, relegated the proclamation into the background, and dragged indulgences, fables, tales, and other babbling into the foreground, so that only the name of the Mass survived.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵*AE* 23, 257 (1532).

¹⁶⁶Quoted in Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 301-2. (*WA* 38, 264, 26ff.; 266, 5ff.).

¹⁶⁷Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: American Edition*, vol. 23, (1532), gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 207. Hereafter referred to as *AE*.

CHAPTER IV

WHY CHOOSE LUTHER AND CHEMNITZ?

Not by a show of hands

Why choose Luther and Chemnitz in relation to the renewed interest in the eucharistic motifs of the early church? It is the contention of this thesis that these two had more to do with reviving the motifs of the early Fathers than any of the other Lutheran reformers of the era. Regarding the Lord's Supper they are arguably the two most important Lutheran reformers. With devastating accuracy, they blasted away at the abuses surrounding the Lord's Supper. In this sense, they picked up stones from the field so that the seed of the Gospel could grow unencumbered. They also made more contributions (not innovations) to the Lutheran understanding of the Lord's Supper than any of their contemporaries. Perhaps most important, Luther and Chemnitz complement one another.

Luther is one of those rare individuals who does not feel the need for the support of the majority or of his contemporary authorities. Luther knew that the truth could not always be arrived at by a vote of hands; he was not afraid to be the sole voice. He was not intimidated by opposition. He summarizes his attitude in the conflict with John Eck when he wrote, "I fear God, not you."¹⁶⁸ For Luther, it was necessary to be "rejected either by men or by God." To his friend Wenceslaus Linck, Luther wrote, "The more they threaten, the more confident I become." By this, he did not mean to convey that he was without fear, but that such opposition was a sure sign that he was in the right. "I know" he adds, "that whoever

¹⁶⁸Kittelton, 116.

wants to bring the Word of Christ into the world must, like the apostles, leave behind and renounce everything, and expect death at any moment. If any other situation prevailed, it would not be the Word of Christ."¹⁶⁹ Luther believed that popes and councils could err, and eventually this turned into the charge that popes and councils *did* err. Luther's *norma normans* was, of course, Scripture. All this made it impossible for Luther to utter that one little word "*revoco*." Whether he was prostrate before a cardinal, an emperor, or the pope himself, Luther could not deny what he knew was the truth.¹⁷⁰ The point is, Luther was one of those rare individuals who did not feel the need for the support of the majority, and may even have thrived on and enjoyed being a little thorn in the lion's paw. Late in his career, he said, "It is enough . . . I have worked myself to death. For one person, I have done enough. I'll go lie down in the sand and sleep now. It is over for me, except for just an occasional little whack at the pope."¹⁷¹

This made Luther the type of theologian who was not always running to the early Fathers for their endorsement. His style was a polemical one. When engaged in a heated debate, when his anger was roused, he was not disposed to take the time to unearth long silent

¹⁶⁹Kittelson, 116.

¹⁷⁰This unbreakable confidence in God's Word is demonstrated throughout Luther's career, but also later, when looking back at how the Reformation had unfolded. He writes, "I did nothing; the Word did everything. If I had wanted to stir up trouble, I could have brought immense bloodshed on Germany. In fact, I could have started such a game that even the emperor would not have been safe . . . I did nothing. I let the Word do its work . . . I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word . . . And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses on it. I did nothing. The Word did everything" (*AE* 51, 77).

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, 281.

motifs from the ancient Fathers. Though he was certainly aware of what the Fathers taught regarding the Lord's Supper (as we shall see), he did not feel the need to cite them directly and often. At times, he will quote a Father, but one senses it is for the sake of the reader, not for Luther's own reassurance. Luther used the eucharistic motifs of the early Fathers when they were not in mainstream usage. They never completely disappeared, they were never really forgotten, but Luther brought them out of the basement, dusted them off and showed them off. Luther knew these motifs, preached them, taught them, modeled his own illustrations after them, but he did not always feel the need to credit the Fathers as the original source of these motifs.¹⁷²

It is the contention of this paper, that if Luther had been the only one to preach and teach these motifs, there is a good chance Luther would have been dismissed as an innovator and the motifs dismissed as innovations. An idea will never outlive its creator (or rescuer for that matter) unless someone else is listening and becomes dedicated to its preservation and propagation. History knows Phillip Melanchthon as one who may not have had the resolve to

¹⁷²A well-known illustration is that of the iron and heat, originating from Origen and/or Basil. In the following quote, Luther takes this illustration, makes it his own, giving it his own variation, but never mentions an early church Father in the process. Commenting on the nature of Christ, Luther writes, "Unheated iron is, of course, still iron. But when fire and heat are added, and it glows, I can say: This iron no longer has the qualities of iron; it is like fire. To be sure, it is iron, but it is diffused to such an extent with fire that when you see or touch it, you cannot call it iron but feel only the fire. It burns you; it is fire that you see with your eyes. And now if you want to burn a hole through a barrel with it, or brand something with it, it is not the iron that does this; it is the fire. If I were to take cold iron, iron not aglow with heat, I could never brand anything with it. This requires a red-hot iron. On the other hand, the fire will not accomplish these same things without, and apart from, the iron, where the fire burns and bores. Thus the divine power is present bodily in the humanity of Christ and does what God naturally does, or does what the fire in the iron does. Only flesh and blood are visible. But faith sees a Man, sees flesh and blood which is like fiery iron; for it is permeated with the Divine" (*AE* 23, 123 [1532]).

teach and celebrate the Lord's Supper with such physical, lowly motifs. Melanchthon desired more flexibility regarding the real presence than some of these motifs allow.¹⁷³

Consulting the Fathers

Martin Chemnitz was the one who would not let the people forget these motifs. Martin Chemnitz was the one who, we will show, loved to quote the early Fathers verbatim. Martin Chemnitz was the one who made it impossible to dismiss Luther's motifs as innovations. That is, Chemnitz kept talking about the Lord's Supper in the way of the early Fathers. Because Chemnitz kept using these motifs, we cannot give Luther a fond wink and think in our minds, "there goes Luther again, having creative fun with the Lord's Supper." Chemnitz will not allow this. It is Chemnitz who is instrumental in lending a helping hand to Luther, showing that Luther is standing on solid ground, he is standing where many others (whom we gratefully regard as saints) have stood before.

Luther and Chemnitz complement one another. Whereas Luther did not always feel the need to cite the Fathers, Chemnitz saturates many of his works (e.g., *The Two Natures of Christ*) with quotes from the Fathers. In the Dedicatory Epistle to *The Two Natures of*

¹⁷³It is noteworthy that in his *Loci Communes*, Melanchthon does not employ any of the historic motifs of the Lord's Supper. Preus writes that the "verdict of the first two centuries of Lutheranism was that Melanchthon had sold out Luther on the Lord's Supper" (Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes*, trans. by J.A.O. Preus [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992], 12). He goes on to say that in Locus 13, "There is very little wrong with what he [Melanchthon] says. Much of it is laudable and edifying . . ." (*Ibid.*). Preus goes on to mention that it is what is absent in Locus 13 that is troubling, including any discussion of Christology, and what that implies for the Lord's Supper. "Thus, while it is hard to convict him of false doctrine on this matter, it is easy to see that he had a different attitude on the entire subject and thus said things quite differently" (*Ibid.*).

Christ, Chemnitz writes:

Thus also in our own time on the occasion of the controversy over the Sacrament I saw that a dispute concerning the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ, the communication of His attributes, and related matters was raging with heavy debate in the church. Danger signals were becoming evident on both sides, and since I was much concerned about this dispute, I decided that the safest way to educate and remedy my own simplicity would be to consult the Fathers of the church who, in the times of the pristine purity and learning directly after the apostles, were active in expounding this subject publicly and with characteristic diligence, and to hear them as they conferred among themselves and shared their well-considered and pious opinions on the basis of God's Word. For in this way, like Gregory's pygmies sitting on the shoulders of giants, we can more easily and correctly form a judgment on the basis of God's Word concerning this difficult question, we can acquiesce with more conviction to sound and simple teaching, and we can more safely escape the danger of falling. For I have noted in the Fathers themselves how carefully and reverently they use the statements and witnesses of their own predecessors when they enter into this discussion. However, the norm and rule of judgment must always be the voice of God as revealed in Scripture, to which all statements, even those of the most ancient scholars, must be subjected and according to which they must be examined and interpreted. To this end I have with considerable zeal and effort collected from approved teachers of the ancient church whose writings have come down to us certain notable citations which seem to serve a useful purpose in elucidating this discussion. I have subjoined them to the testimonies of Scripture, added a brief and simple interpretation, and so distributed them that one can note with what diligence and with what rationale the ancient church constructed the form of true doctrine and sound words concerning this mystery on the foundation of the Word of God, and from what notions and errors it preserved its faith and confession in the midst of this controversy.¹⁷⁴

In the *Lord's Supper*, Chemnitz recalls the "very excellent rule of Hilary:"

He reads best who looks for the meaning of the words on the basis of what is said rather than imposing his own ideas; who draws from the material rather than adding to it; who does not force the material to contain what seems best to him because he has, even before reading it, had a preconceived notion as to how it should be understood.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures of Christ*, trans. by J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 19-20.

¹⁷⁵Martin Chemnitz, *Lord's Supper*, trans. by J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 33.

Chemnitz also writes, "I had no desire to bring in anything new but simply was trying to retain the old, fundamental, and simple teaching and to repeat it out of Luther's writings."¹⁷⁶

The above quotes reveal the method Chemnitz liked to employ. Whether speaking on the hypostatic union of Christ or on the Lord's Supper, Chemnitz cannot help himself. He is always drawn to the witness of the Fathers. In this way, Chemnitz compliments Luther's strict adherence to the Scriptures as the source and norm for faith and practice.¹⁷⁷ As the popular adage goes, "If Martin [Chemnitz] had not come along, Martin [Luther] would hardly have survived."¹⁷⁸ One might also say, had it not been for these two, the motifs of the early church would hardly have survived. Teigen wrote, "One must read Chemnitz together with Luther."¹⁷⁹ It is for this reason that we turn our study to see how Luther and Chemnitz

¹⁷⁶Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, 21.

¹⁷⁷By no means does this imply that Chemnitz places the Fathers on the same level as Scripture. Chemnitz was determined to teach no more and no less than what the Scriptures taught. Chemnitz continually drives home the point that Scripture is the source for determining the essential nature of the sacraments and their divinely instituted use. In *The Lord's Supper*, pages 25-148 are devoted toward setting forth general principles of interpretation in the study of all Scripture and minutely examining the four Scripture passages which give the institution of the Lord's Supper as well as other Scripture passages concerning the Lord's Supper. Chemnitz "has the high resolve to follow the dictum of Augustine, 'What decides in matters of faith is not: 'This I say; that you say; that he says,' but 'Thus says the Lord' (Ex 2, 312). Chemnitz agrees with Cyprian who in 'speaking of the Supper says: 'We ought not to give heed to what someone before us thought should be done, but to what He, who is before all, did' (Ex 2, 312). (Quoted from Bjarne Wollan Teigen, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz* [Brewster: Trinity Lutheran Press, 1986], 17-8.)

¹⁷⁸Erwin L. Lueker, *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 153.

¹⁷⁹Teigen, *ix*.

employed the eucharistic motifs of the early Fathers.

CHAPTER V

THE LORD'S SUPPER AS FEAST ACCORDING TO LUTHER AND CHEMNITZ

The Passover Lamb

It's hard to find Luther discussing the Lord's Supper without discussing also the Lord's death. Luther believed the Lord's Supper is scarcely comprehensible apart from the context of the Old Testament sacrificial system, a "God-ordained means of grace for 'expiating' sin and 'propitiating' His righteous wrath."¹⁸⁰ A part of the Lord's Supper, then, is remembering why that death happened. It was no accident, but was the culmination and consummation of earlier sacrifices. Luther wrote,

The love of the Son of God is so great toward us that the greater the filth and stench upon us, the more He gives Himself to us, cleanses us, and takes all our sin and wretchedness, lifts them off our shoulders and lays them on His own back What does it mean that the Son of God should be my servant, and so utterly debase Himself that He should take the burden of my misery and sin — yes, the whole world's sin and death? He says to me, "You are no longer a sinner, but I am. I step into your place — you have not sinned, but I have. The whole world is in sin, but you are not in sin — I am. All your sins are to lie on Me and not on you" The Son of Man does the basest and filthiest work — not just wearing a beggar's tattered coat or old trousers or washing us like a mother washes a child, but bears our sin, death, hell, our wretchedness of body and soul. When the devil says, "You are a sinner," Christ interrupts, "I will reverse that, I will be a sinner, you shall go free."¹⁸¹

Chemnitz also speaks of the blessed exchange, but he prefers to use the words of the Fathers. For example, Chemnitz quotes Ambrose, "He took what is mine in order that He

¹⁸⁰Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 81.

¹⁸¹Ian D. Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 136. (WA 45, 199-203, 1537)

might impart to me what is His. He took it not to unite with it but to fill it” (360). He took our flesh, death, and sin. In return he gave his life, forgiveness, and righteousness. He gives these gifts in the Lord’s Supper.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that both Luther and Chemnitz see the link between the Lord's Supper and the Feast of the Passover. Luther writes, “All these [Old Testament] festivals -- and whatever others there may have been -- we celebrate by an allegory of the Spirit in one festival. For we observe the Passover every day, when we eat . . . the Lamb of God; that is, as Paul explains in 1 Cor. 10 [sic], we proclaim and believe that He was offered up for us.”¹⁸²

Luther believed at Calvary the forgiveness of sins was won, but is not there given out. At the Lord’s Supper, the forgiveness of sins is given out, but it was not won there.¹⁸³ This forgiveness is delivered with the body and blood of Christ, the very same body and blood that was given and shed on the cross.¹⁸⁴ “The sacrament was instituted to console and strengthen

¹⁸²*AE* 9, 157 (1525).

¹⁸³Luther wrote, "The passion of Christ occurred but once on the cross. But whom would it benefit if it were not distributed, applied, and put to use? And how could it be put to use and distributed except through Word and sacrament (*AE* 37, 193, 1528)?"

¹⁸⁴This prompts the thought that it can be a struggle for Christians to find consolation and strength in an event that happened nearly 2,000 years ago. Indeed, those churches that do not celebrate Holy Communion often try to make Calvary contemporaneous through other means, such as Passion Plays and the like. But in eating and drinking of his body and blood, the event of the cross, together with the resurrection, become a contemporaneous reality. The same Christ who was once sacrificed at Calvary now gives the same body and blood in the Lord’s Supper “for you.” Sasse asks, “Where has a historical event been more faithfully remembered than in the death of Christ in the Lord’s Supper of His church? There is no other event in the history of antiquity that is so imprinted in the memory of people and lives on throughout the world today. The Lord’s Supper has kept this memory so deeply alive precisely because it is even more than a memorial meal. It is not only a celebration of reminiscence like the Passover [or the Passion

terrified hearts when they believe that Christ's flesh, given for the life of the world, is their food and that they come to life by being joined to Christ."¹⁸⁵ Christ's body and blood are

not merely a food but a food of life, which satisfies you forever, quickens you, and delivers you from death, sin, and the devil Thus this is the greatest and the chief doctrine among those who profess to be Christians, for among heathen it is an object of offense that Christ's flesh is a food. It is still more offensive to man if he is asked to believe that it is a quickening food, a food that bears eternal life in it. But among Christians the doctrine that Christ's body is a quickening food, that it gives eternal life, is not offensive. This is the Christian's golden art, to believe and not doubt that forgiveness of sin and everlasting life come from eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood rather than from the Law or from good works, cowls, or tonsures.¹⁸⁶

Food for the journey

Luther speaks of the Lord's Supper as food for the journey. Exemplary of this is the comment, "Thus for us the sacrament is a street, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher, on

Plays], in which the human spirit recalled the past for itself, but it is a genuine, actual *bringing into the present* of God's redeeming act through the gift of the body and blood of Christ" (Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, trans. by Norman Nagel [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985], 91).

Though he was not thinking of the Lord's Supper at the time, Soren Kierkegaard wrote a beautiful prayer that could well apply to the Lord taking the initiative out of our hands in order to give himself to us. "Thou who has first loved us, O God, alas! We speak of it in terms of history as if Thou hast only loved us first but a single time, rather than that without ceasing Thou hast loved us first many times and everyday and our whole life through. When we wake up in the morning and turn our soul toward Thee — Thou art the first — Thou hast loved us first; if I rise at dawn and at the same second turn my soul toward Thee in prayer, Thou art there ahead of me, Thou hast loved me first. When I withdraw from the distractions of the day and turn my soul in thought toward Thee, Thou art the first and thus forever. And yet we always speak ungratefully as if Thou hast loved us first only once" (Perry D. Le Fevre, ed., *The Prayers of Kierkegaard* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956], 14).

¹⁸⁵Ap. XXII, 10.

¹⁸⁶AE 23, 171 (1532).

which and by means of which we journey from this world into eternal life."¹⁸⁷ Chemnitz also picks up on this motif, preferring to use the words of the Fathers as they speak of manna for the journey through the desert. Chemnitz quotes Augustine, "The manna is a symbol of the spiritual food which the reality of the Lord's resurrection made into the mystery of the Eucharist."¹⁸⁸

Chemnitz also quotes Origen, who writes, "Then, in a glass darkly, the manna was food; but now, in the full brilliance, the flesh of the Word of God is true food."¹⁸⁹ Finally, Chemnitz also quotes Ambrose in this regard, "Consider which is the more outstanding, the bread of angels or indeed the flesh of Christ, which is most certainly the body of life To the people of that time the water flowed from the rock, to you the blood from Christ."¹⁹⁰

One drop will do it

When we eat and drink the Lord's Supper, then, we are eating forgiveness, and drinking forgiveness. Luther writes, "It is proper to call this an eating and drinking of the forgiveness of sins . . . Just as one drinks wine to seal a sale, to show that it was a fair and just transaction which should be kept in remembrance and honored."¹⁹¹ Though the portions may

¹⁸⁷Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. by Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 319-20. (See *WA* 2, 753, 17).

¹⁸⁸Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, 245.

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 261.

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁹¹*AE* 37, 45 (1527).

be small at this meal, the grace is immeasurable. Like the Fathers before him, Luther rejoices that just a drop delivers all of the living Christ to the children of death. He writes,

Wir sind alle Kinder des Todes und werden begraben. Die ganze Welt klagt und schreit über den greulichen Tod Zeternordio. Aber aus dem Unblick des Todes will ich euch herausreissen und einen andern Tod dagegensessen, auf dass euer Tod euch nicht schrecke. Wenn ihr auf ihn seht, soll euer Tod euch nicht schrecken und verzagt machen. Dass wir sterben, die wir des Todes Kinder sind, ist nicht verwunderlich. Aber dass der Herr des Todes stirbt, dessen sollen wir gedenken. Wollen uns Tod und Sünde grimmig ansehen, dann lasst uns auf den Tod des Herrn schauen! Was ist's schon, dass die ganze Welt dahinstirbt! Was ist's denn? Gar nichts! Aber dieser Tod Christi ist ein göttlicher Tod, der Tod des Sohnes Gottes Ein Tropfen seines Bluts ist besser als der Tod der ganzen Welt, und wären es tausend Welten.¹⁹²

In his *Brief Confession*, Luther explains that when you receive even a small amount of bread and wine, you receive all of Christ. He withholds nothing. "When you receive the bread from the altar . . . you are receiving the same entire body of the Lord; the person who comes after you also receives the same entire body, as does the third, and the thousandth after the thousandth one for ever and ever."¹⁹³ The same fact applies to the blood of Christ. "You are drinking His entire blood; so, too, does the one who follows you even to the thousand times the thousandth one, as the words of Christ clearly say" Luther sums it all up by quoting a hymn from Thomas Aquinas, "One takes it, a thousand take it; this person receiving as much as that person; nor having taken it, is it consumed."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹²Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Epistel-Auslegung*, 2 ed. Eduard Ellwein (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 137f. (WA 46, 478-480, 1538)

¹⁹³*AE* 38, 292 (1544).

¹⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 293.

Don't touch, eat!

As did the Fathers, Luther also compares the eating and drinking we do with the seeing and touching of the contemporaries of Jesus. He writes,

But we trust our God, who has willed to be born of Mary spiritually and physically but not to be eaten and drunk by her physically or spiritually. By the shepherds and Simeon he wanted to be seen spiritually and physically but not born and not eaten. So, according to his good pleasure, he has permitted himself to be physically and spiritually handled, seen, heard, born, suckled, carried, touched, and the like by whomever he willed. But here in the Lord's Supper he wants to be neither born nor seen nor heard nor touched by us but only eaten and drunk, both physically and spiritually. Accordingly, by this eating we obtain just as much and arrive at the same point as they with their bearing, seeing, hearing, etc.; and he is just as near to us physically as he was to them, except that it had to be by another mode in order that he might be equally near everywhere in the world, which would not have been possible were he to appear visibly. Moreover, he has not denied to us even the seeing, but promised it, except that it is deferred and reserved until the Last Day, in order that faith may have room and we may not attain to salvation here in this miserable life. What more should he do?¹⁹⁵

When it comes to the Lord's Supper as food, human reason can be more of a liability than it is an asset. Luther writes,

This same physical Being, who was born of the Virgin Mary, will give you everlasting food. He Himself will be the Donor, the Baker, the Waiter, the Brewer, yes, the Cook, and also the Dish and the Plate that gives us the imperishable food. Christ means to say: "My flesh and blood which you behold is the real food which preserves you forever, which assures you of life even in the face of death." But someone may think: How is this possible? Where is the supply? Where are the butchers's stall, the granary, the pantry, and the cellar? For reason looks about for all these, and the mind is focused on them. But Christ declares here: "Eat. I will give you food, and this food is I Myself, My flesh and My blood." Christ does not want me to center my thoughts on my cellar, my storeroom, my grain, bread, and wine; all these I must put out of mind. I must forget about granaries and cellars and fix my thoughts on His flesh. But it sounds like madness to our reason when Christ says: "I will be the Donor, the Baker, the Brewer, and the Farmer. Yes, I Myself will be the Food; I Myself will be the Bread. It must be your concern to eat." The words "eat" and

¹⁹⁵AE 37, 94 (1527).

"food" are all-important. The fanatics still squabble about them.¹⁹⁶

Not magic, but wholesome food

In the Large Catechism, Luther notes that this sacrament "is appropriately called the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new man The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle but grow continually stronger."¹⁹⁷

Notice, Luther is not teaching that it is possible to receive the benefits of the Lord's Supper without faith. Faith apprehends and receives the gifts.

I believe that His flesh and blood are there, given for me, and that the flesh and blood are poured, as it were, into my faith as wine or beer is poured into a glass. This is my treasure: to eat, to drink, to think of, and to believe in, the flesh; to cleave by faith to the Man Christ and to His flesh, so that I may apprehend Christ Thus the Jews here (at Calvary) were baker and brewer: they baked and brewed Christ when He was crucified. Now it is up to you to get Him into your mouth, to eat Him, to lay hold of Him, to take Him into yourself, and to adhere to Him. That is faith.¹⁹⁸

As did the Fathers, Luther also teaches this meal is not for everyone, for the unworthy guest "dishonors, abuses, and desecrates him who is there present as certainly as did the Jews when they actually and in deed laid violent hands upon the body of Christ and murdered him."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶AE 23, 14 (1532).

¹⁹⁷LC V, 23f.

¹⁹⁸AE 23, 128-9 (1532).

¹⁹⁹S.D. VII, 60.

Regarding who is worthy or unworthy, Chemnitz writes, "Unwürdig essen heisst nicht, dass wir als arme Sünder solcher himmlischer Speise unwürdig seien; denn für arme Sünder ist es eingefesst."²⁰⁰ Chemnitz explains, "To eat unworthily means not to eat in such a way as is fitting for this Supper or as is worthy of the food which is distributed and received in this Supper" He then gathers from the passage where Paul is charging the Corinthians with the fact that "they were not coming to the Lord's Supper with any other spirit or in any greater reverence than in their private homes when they sat down to their own ordinary meals."²⁰¹

Bread that will not spoil

Chemnitz also speaks of the Lord's Supper as a heavenly food. He writes,

The very Son of God by this distribution and reception, which He willed with His own counsel and wisdom, determined to employ the service and work of our mouths. He did this not only by His Spirit or by the efficacy of His humanity, but rather with the very substance of His body and blood He joins as closely as possible to Himself not only the soul but also the very bodies of those who eat. And He accomplishes this not by some physical and outward mixing of the substances or by joining something to the food in our stomachs, but in a way whereby it becomes a heavenly and spiritual nourishment for both the body and soul of the believers unto eternal life.²⁰²

In *De coena Domini*, Chemnitz again draws from the Fathers and the classic illustrations. He quotes Irenaeus who says, "Just as that which is bread from the earth, when it receives the call of God is no longer common bread but the Eucharist, consisting of two parts, the earthly and the heavenly, so also our bodies when they share in the Eucharist which

²⁰⁰Martin Chemnitz, *Enchiridion* (Milwaukee: Verlag von Georg Brumder, 1886), 178.

²⁰¹Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, 158.

²⁰²*Ibid.*, 61.

consists of these two things are no longer subject to corruption but possess the hope of the resurrection.”²⁰³ Similarly, Luther calls it “Speise der Unsterblichkeit.”²⁰⁴

Though it is thought of as food, Chemnitz repeats the warning of the Fathers. This does not constitute Capernaitic eating. He writes,

Likewise Luther always and everywhere, and particularly in the book on the Word, declared that when he taught that the body of Christ was eaten in the Supper he did not understand this to mean that it took place in a visible or perceptible way, so that the actual substance of the body of Christ would be torn with the teeth, chewed up or butchered, masticated in the mouth, swallowed or digested, and changed into the substance of our flesh and blood, in the way other food is. For death has no more dominion over us (Rom. 6:9).²⁰⁵

Chemnitz knew that whenever the Lord's Supper was likened to food, others would

immediately let loose with some blasphemous slanders about Capernaitic eating of the body of Christ, or about the Cyclops who ate human flesh, or the Scythian slurping of the blood of Christ. For human reason neither knows nor understands any other kind of eating except the physical and gross eating by which the flesh of cattle is eaten or a cow eats hay.²⁰⁶

Good works will naturally follow

As a direct result of the gifts given with this food comes a change of attitude. That is, good works for the neighbor will naturally follow. The Fathers taught this, and so does Luther. He writes,

And here Christ declares that His food is to give me life; moreover, the Father has set

²⁰³Ibid., 169.

²⁰⁴Luther (*WA* 45, 199-203, 1537), quoted from Ellwein, 133.

²⁰⁵Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, 59.

²⁰⁶Ibid., 57.

His seal on this. Thus we are assured amply and abundantly in this chief doctrine that we are not saved through our good works but through Christ alone, when we eat His flesh and drink His blood. And no one will ever invalidate this; it will abide in heaven and in hell, for God has sealed it. Cling to this food of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit, and be assured that no one's works and alms give life; only this food, the body and blood of Christ, accomplishes that; then good works will follow automatically. I will do good works to my neighbor; I will feed and counsel him. Each has its proper place. The performance of good works is earnestly enjoined on those who possess this everlasting food and live in hope of eternal life. For our Lord God does not care for the alms of the ungodly, who do not have this everlasting food; nor do their alms aid them in obtaining eternal life. It is obvious that salvation cannot be due to good works performed after eternal life is already assured.²⁰⁷

To summarize, Luther and Chemnitz rejoiced to celebrate the Lord's Supper as a feast. From Passover connotations to food for the journey to small portions bearing all of Christ, Luther and Chemnitz are faithful to the early eucharistic motif of feast. It is food that changes our attitudes. It is food that evokes good works on behalf of our neighbors. It is food that makes of death a "*Kinderspiel*."

²⁰⁷AE 23, 18 (1532).

CHAPTER VI

THE LORD'S SUPPER AS YEAST ACCORDING TO LUTHER AND CHEMNITZ

Like a heated iron

Luther had inherited the teaching of Chalcedon that we cannot split Jesus the man from Jesus the Son of God. Similarly, just as the risen Christ cannot be torn away from the crucified Christ, so also in the Lord's Supper, the body of the risen Christ cannot be torn away from the body of the crucified Christ. Both are delivered in the Lord's Supper. Jesus said, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."²⁰⁸ Christ himself did not limit the *anamnesis* to his death. He simply stated "in remembrance of me." He gives us no permission or encouragement to divide the remembrance of his person into chapters or stages. His whole person is offered for remembrance.²⁰⁹

Not only he who is dangling dead from a cross, but also he who is sitting at the right hand of the Father is giving his body and blood to us. This is important to Luther, because this is what gives the body and blood the ability to transform the communicant. "We are talking about the presence of the living body; for we know, as St. Paul says, that death no longer has dominion over him."²¹⁰ Already in his *Great Confession Concerning the Holy Supper* Luther writes, "No, comrade, wherever you put God down for me, you must also put

²⁰⁸1 Cor. 11:25.

²⁰⁹To "remember Christ is to remember his benefits and realize that they are truly offered to us; and it is not enough to remember the history, for the Jews and the ungodly can also remember this" (A.C. XXIV, 31f.).

²¹⁰Ap. X, 4.

the humanity down for me. They simply will not let themselves be separated and divided from each other. He has become one person and never separates the assumed humanity from himself.”²¹¹ Luther, remembering Chalcedon, rejects both the comingling as well as the severing of Christ’s human and divine natures.

Chemnitz, also confessing the hypostatic union between Christ’s human and divine natures, shows what the implications are for the Lord’s Supper. He writes, “We must also demonstrate that the bread and cup are vivifying and saving, something which surely is not a natural or normal characteristic of the human body. But Christ’s body, by reason of the hypostatic union with the deity, has received and possesses this quality.”²¹²

The Lord's Supper vivifies first by delivering forgiveness of sins.

Luther wrote,

. . . if you want to have forgiveness of sins and eternal life, then come here! There stands your God; he offers you his body and blood, broken and shed for you The need [which drives us to the sacrament] is that sin, devil and death are always present. The benefit is that we receive forgiveness of sins²¹³

But where forgiveness is given, everything else comes with it, for “where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.”²¹⁴

The body and blood of the Lord also vivify simply by mingling and dwelling with the body and blood of the communicant. Chemnitz shows how this was already being confessed

²¹¹WA 26, 332-33 (1528), quoted from S.D. VIII, 84.

²¹²Chemnitz, *The Two Natures of Christ*, 22.

²¹³AE 51, 191-192 (1528).

²¹⁴S.C. VI, 6.

at Ephesus:

And the blood of Christ by that divine power of the Logos which dwells personally in it and is united with it cleanses our consciences from sin And when in the Lord's Supper we receive the body and blood of Christ, "we then receive the life-giving food and drink which impart and bring spiritual and eternal life to our souls and bodies," as the Council of Ephesus so correctly said.²¹⁵

Chemnitz also takes the classic metaphor of a heated iron and applies it directly to the real presence and the benefits, showing how it naturally follows that the Lord's Supper is also vivifying. He writes,

But the Fathers of Ephesus defined it this way on the basis of Scripture: The flesh of Christ on account of the union with the divine nature, which is life itself, is made life-giving or a life-giver, and it thus has the authority or power to give life, and this authority it exercises in the action of the Lord's Supper in the believers. And it gives life to those who eat just as a heated iron has the power to give heat, and does give heat, as we have explained in the foregoing.²¹⁶

In The Two Natures of Christ, Chemnitz takes pains to cite the early Fathers of the church for support. In a sense, Chemnitz is saying, "This is what we also confess. It is not new." Chemnitz quotes Cyril:

Since the flesh of the Savior has been united with the divine Logos, who is by nature Life itself, this flesh has become life-giving, and when we eat this flesh we also have life in ourselves, for we have been joined to this flesh which has been made life. For this reason in raising the dead He not only uses His power as God, but He also employs His flesh as a kind of cooperating agent.²¹⁷

Chemnitz also quotes Athanasius, "The body of Christ, contrary to its nature and because of the union with the Logos, did not dissolve but was preserved without corruption and

²¹⁵Chemnitz, *The Two Natures of Christ*, 334.

²¹⁶Ibid., 474.

²¹⁷Ibid., 467.

manifested in that body its highest power at the very time of His death, since it was the death of the whole human race.”²¹⁸ Whatever the flesh received from the Logos, “then those things may be given to us from His flesh for our sure possession.”²¹⁹ That giving happens in the Lord’s Supper.

Venom for death and the devil, medicine for life

Because the Lord's Supper effectively vivifies the communicant, it should have an impact on one’s fear of death, and how one prepares for death. Luther wrote,

Man hat bisher viel geschrieben und grosse kunst furgegeben, wie man sich solle zum tode bereiten und des Jüngsten tags gewarten, Aber damit die blöden gewissen viel betrubter gemacht, Denn sie haben nichts können zeigen von dem trost des grossen reichthumbs der gnade und seligkeit in Christo, sondern die Leute nur gewiesen durch eigen werck und gutes leben wider den Tod und Gottes gericht zu stehen. Dafur isst auch gesehen wird die tewre gnade, das, wer das Wort des Euangelij hat, gehet hin und thut sein befolhen Ampt und werck, er sen, wes stands er wolle, tröstet sich des, das er durch die Tauffe Christo eingeleibt, empfehet die Absolutio und zu sterckung seines Glaubens brauchet des Sacraments, Christo befilhet sein leib und seele, Was will sich solcher Mensch fürchten fur dem tode? Er kome, welche stunde er wolle, durch Pestilentz oder ander plötzlich unfall, schlaffend oder wachend, so ist er allzeit bereit und wol geschickt, denn er wird allzeit in Christo erfunden.²²⁰

A part of the Lord’s Supper, then, is celebrating the fact that Christ’s death would be the end of death and the devil. Borrowing a little from the bait and serpent motif, Luther writes that Christ is “ a little pill the devil will gleefully devour, but which will create such a

²¹⁸Ibid., 346.

²¹⁹Ibid., 348.

²²⁰WA 22, 307-308 (1536).

rumbling in his belly and in the world! . . . He will be death's venom."²²¹

Though venom for the devil, Christ's body and blood serve as our remedy.²²² Luther adopts the language of Ignatius who considers the Lord's Supper a "medicine of immortality, antidote against death."²²³ "We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also. Why, then, do we act as if the sacrament were a poison which would kill us if we ate it?"²²⁴ Luther also advises, "But those who feel their weakness, who are anxious to be rid of it and desire help, should regard and use the sacrament as a precious antidote against the poison in their systems. For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils."²²⁵ "Christus gibt nicht Gift, sondern eine ewige Arznei, die uns von Sünde und Tod erlöst."²²⁶ With so much to be lost by avoiding the Sacrament, Luther urges the Christian not to exclude himself "lest he deprive himself of

²²¹Luther (*WA* 47, 80, 21 and 37, 1538) quoted from Siggins, 256.

²²²With great insight, Umberto Eco writes, "The line between poison and medicine is very fine; the Greeks used the word '*pharmacon*' for both" (Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. by William Weaver [New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1984], 122.

²²³Cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephesians* XX,2 (MPG V, 661).

²²⁴L.C. V, 68.

²²⁵L.C. V, 70.

²²⁶Luther (*WA* 45, 199-203, 1537) quoted from Ellwein, 137.

life.”²²⁷

Luther also writes,

Denn es gibt wider ihn keine andre Arzenei als den Leib Christi, der für euch dahingegeben ist. Darum hat Christus das Sakrament eingesesst, wie der Text sagt: "dass ihr des Herrn Tod verkündigen sollt, bis dass er kommt" (Vers 26). Das ist ein anderer Tod als der der andren Menschen; denn der hilft niemand. Aber dieser Tod ist von der Art, dass er den Tod überwunden hat. Als der lebendige Gott soll er den Tod in sich töten. So gibt er uns den Sieg, wenn wir daran festhalten, dass er durch seinen Tod uns erlöst hat. Unser Tod lässt uns (im Tode) liegenbleiben, wenn wir nicht Christen sind; aber Christi Tod wird verschlungen durchs Leben. Der Tod Christi und sein Blut (das für uns vergossen ist) ist unser Leben und die Vergebung der Sünden.²²⁸

Chemnitz also latches onto this medicinal language when he quotes Basil the Great.

Though the following is not in direct connection with the Lord’s Supper, it would not require a long or unnatural leap to make the connection. Basil writes,

Therefore, learn the mystery that God was in the flesh in order to destroy the death which lies latent in the flesh. For just as medicine which is applied to the body drives out the poison, and just as shadows are dispelled by the introduction of light, so also death, which has dominion over nature, is dissipated by the presence of or union with the Deity.²²⁹

In his *Enchiridion* Chemnitz speaks very clearly of the Lord’s Supper being “medicine.” First, the one worthy of receiving this medicine is not the one who is pure, or perfect, “denn die Gesunden bedürfen des Arztes nicht, sondern die Kranken.”²³⁰ He also writes,

. . . weil die Gedächtnis des Todes Christi, welcher ist ein rechter Glaube, in wahrer Busse in uns muss erhalten, gestärket und gemehret werden, und aber durch des

²²⁷L.C. V, 59.

²²⁸Luther (*WA* 45, 199-203, 1537) quoted from Ellwein, 135.

²²⁹Chemnitz, *The Two Natures of Christ*, 354.

²³⁰Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, 180.

Teufels List, durch der Welt Aergernis und unsers Fleisches Schwachheit, Sicherheit und Bosheit leicht und bald kann geschwächt, verloschen und verloren werden, so hat Christus zur Erhaltung, Erneuerung und Stärkung seiner Gedächtnis in uns die heilsame, kräftige Arznei in seinem Abendmahl verordnet, nämlich die Niessung seines Leibes und Blutes zu seiner Wiedergedächtnis.²³¹

Knowing this property of the Lord's Supper should move us to "vielmehr dazu eilen, auf dass dadurch solches in uns angezündet, gestärkt und gemehret möge werden. Denn den Kranken, die schwach sind und gerne wollten Rath und Hilfe haben, ist diese Arznei verordnet."²³²

Though it is a medicine for some, it is a poison for others. Chemnitz asks the question,

Wie können sie denn an Christi Leibe, darinnen das Leben wohnt, den Tod essen? Nicht also, als wäre Christi Leib an ihm selbst eine giftige, tödliche Speise; sondern weil sie sich mit ruchloser Sicherheit und Unbussfertigkeit daran versündigen, denselben mit ungebührlichem Essen schmähen und gleich mit Füßen treten, so werd sie dadurch an dem Leibe des Lebens schuldig wie Judas, der ihn verrathen, die Juden, die ihn gelästert und gesteiniget, Pilatus, der ihn verurtheilet, die Kriegsknechte, die ihn gegeißelt und gekreuziget haben. Denn in Christi Fleisch ist wohl das Leben, es wirkt aber nicht das Leben in den Ungläubigen, sondern allein in den Gläubigen, gleichwie das Evangelium ist ein Geruch zum Leben den Gläubigen, und zum Tode den Ungläubigen.²³³

Koinonia with Christ

Implicit in this language is the assumption that the Christian receives not only the body and blood of the crucified Lord, but also the body and blood of the risen Lord with his mouth. It can vivify; it can kill. In either case, it is truly the body and blood of the Lord that goes into

²³¹Ibid., 176.

²³²Ibid., 181.

²³³Ibid., 179ff.

the mouth. Our lowly bodies enjoy *koinonia* with Christ's crucified but now glorious body.²³⁴ Chemnitz writes, "For through the bread we are united with the body of Christ, and through the body with Christ Himself, and through Christ with the Father. Thus we are made partakers (*koinonoi*) with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These things are the results of the salutary communion (*koinonia*) of the body and the blood of the Lord in the Supper."²³⁵

Chemnitz quotes Chrysostom "He has brought us together with Himself into one entity, as it were, through the bread which is distributed to us in the Supper. Nor does He bring this about only by faith, but He actually makes us His body." "We are not joined to the body of Christ only by faith and love, but in actual reality." "Therefore we so eat the body of Christ in the supper that we have the whole Christ with us."²³⁶

Chemnitz quotes Hilary to describe this union.

I ask whether Christ is in us today in the reality of His nature or if indeed only by the agreement of His will. For if the Word truly became flesh and if we truly receive the Logos as flesh in the Lord's Supper, how is one to think that by nature He does not remain in us, for having been born a man He took the nature of our flesh inseparably to Himself and joins His fleshly nature to the nature of eternity in the Sacrament by the communication of His flesh? . . . By the Lord's profession and by our own faith it is truly His flesh and blood. And when we eat and drink it, it causes us to be in Christ and Him in us. Thus He is in us through the flesh and we are in Him, and while we are in Him we are also in God. He is in the Father, therefore, through the nature of His deity, and we are in Him through His corporeal nativity. He is in us through the mystery of the sacraments.²³⁷

²³⁴1 Cor. 10:16

²³⁵Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, 143.

²³⁶Chemnitz, *The Two Natures of Christ*, 470.

²³⁷*Ibid.*

Chemnitz makes the action of this *koinonia* sound almost like a sort of dialysis. He writes,

Thus the humanity of Christ is the point of connection between us and God Himself, as Cyril says Therefore, in order that we might be able to lay hold on Christ more intimately and retain him more firmly, not only did He Himself assume our nature but He also restored it again by distributing His body and blood to us in the Supper, so that by this connection with His humanity, which has been assumed from us and is again communicated back to us, He might draw us into communion and union with the deity.²³⁸

Luther using a stunning, home-spun illustration, describes what happens when our lowly bodies

enjoy *koinonia* with Christ. He writes,

Now, because this poor bag of worms, our body, also has the hope of the resurrection from the dead and of eternal life, this body must also become spiritual and digest and consume all that is carnal in it. And that is what this spiritual food accomplishes: if a man eats it bodily, it will digest his flesh and transform him, so that he too becomes spiritual, that is, eternally alive and blessed, as Paul says (I Cor. 15), "It is raised a spiritual body." To use a crude illustration, the effect of this food is as if a wolf had devoured a sheep which proved to be so powerful a meal that it transformed the wolf into a sheep. Similarly, when we eat the flesh of Christ in a bodily and spiritual manner, this food is so powerful that it transforms us into it and turns carnal, sinful, natural men into spiritual, holy, living men. This we are already, but still concealed in faith and hope.²³⁹

Elsewhere, Luther writes, "If we eat Him spiritually through the word he abides in us

spiritually in our souls; if one eats Him physically He abides in us physically and we in Him.

As we eat Him, He abides in us and we in Him. For He is not digested or transformed but ceaselessly He transforms us, our soul into righteousness, our body into immortality. So the

²³⁸Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, 188.

²³⁹Luther (*WA* 23, 205ff., 1527) quoted from Schlink, 165.

ancient Fathers spoke of the physical eating."²⁴⁰ This is the difference between perishable food and imperishable food. "Perishable food is transformed into the body which eats it; this food, however, transforms the person who eats it into what it is itself, and makes him like itself, spiritual, alive, and eternal; as Christ says, 'This is the bread from heaven, which gives life to the world.'"²⁴¹

Where Luther then spoke of it being so powerful a meal that it turned the wolf into a lamb, Chemnitz comes to the same conclusion, though drawing from the early motif of the engrafted vine. He writes,

. . . weil in unserm Fleisch nichts Gutes, sondern die Sünde wohnet, daraus allerlei böse Früchte entspringen, so giebt uns Christus in seinem Abendmahl seinen Leib und sein Blut, auf dass wir also ihm, als dem rechten Weinstock eingeleibet, neuen, guten, geistlichen Saft von ihm empfangen mögen. Item, wir werden dadurch mit anderen Christen Glieder eines Leibes, 1 Cor. 10; so soll und wird auch dadurch die Liebe gegen den Nächsten angezündet, gemehret und erhalten werden.²⁴²

Gravitating toward visual imagery, Chemnitz summarizes Cyril: the Lord's Supper "draws the whole man to itself and by its grace fills him completely, just as a small amount of yeast leavens a whole lump and as when a person pours some melted wax into more melted wax"²⁴³ Chemnitz quotes Augustine, who personifies the bread: "I am sublime bread; you will not change me into you, as the bread of your flesh, but you will be changed into

²⁴⁰*AE* 37, 132 (1527).

²⁴¹*Ibid.*, 100.

²⁴²Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, 177.

²⁴³Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, 170.

me.”²⁴⁴ There is also a quote from Leo: “Participation in the body and blood of the Lord does nothing else than transform us into that which we have received.”²⁴⁵

As such, this food is particularly useful during times of persecution, illness and for protection against the evil one. Luther writes,

The holy martyr St. Cyprian, writing to Pope Cornelius how Christians should be strengthened by the sacrament for suffering in time of persecution, says, "Now indeed the 'peace' is necessary not only for the sick but also for the strong; nor is communion — the sacrament — to be granted only to the dying but also to the living, that we may not leave those whom we stir up and exhort to the battle naked and unarmed, but may fortify them with the protection of Christ's blood and body. For since we use the sacrament for the purpose that it may be a safeguard to those who receive it, we must equip those whom we wish to be safe against the adversary with the armor of the Lord's food. For how shall we teach or incite them to shed their blood in confession of his name, if we deny them Christ's blood when they are about to fight? Or how can we make them fit for the cup of martyrdom, if we do not first admit them to drink in the church the cup of the Lord by the right of communion?"²⁴⁶

My death has devoured your death

Again, all the above naturally has some implications for how the Christian should think about and prepare for death. The same faith that allowed Paul to speak defiantly of death prompted Luther also to speak defiantly of death. Paul asked “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁴⁷ Similarly, Luther wrote,

²⁴⁴Ibid.

²⁴⁵Ibid.

²⁴⁶*AE* 37, 122 (1527).

²⁴⁷1 Cor. 15:55-56 (RSV).

Darum ist das Sakrament gestiftet, dass ihr den Tod des Herrn verkündigen sollt. Ich sehe meinen Tod vor Augen und muss ihn erleiden. Ich sterbe nicht gern. Aber er wird dir nicht schaden. Geh hin und empfang das Sakrament. Da hör' ich (dass Christus sagt): Mein Tod hat euren Tod gefressen. Plagen mich Sünden: soll ich dann sagen: Jungfrau Maria, bitte deinen Sohn? Nein. Komm hierher, hör mein Wort, dass mein Blut für euch vergossen ist, und nimm darauf meinen Leib und mein Blut. Ist das nicht eine liebliche, barmherzige, gnädige Stiftung?²⁴⁸

"Mein Tod hat euren Tod gefressen." Death has not merely been tasted; it has been devoured! The last enemy turns out to be no enemy. He comes too slowly. That is, all gifts of the Lord's Supper are eschatological realities. When we eat this bread and drink this cup we receive nothing less than acquittal on the Last Day and eternal life, and not merely the promise, but the gift. Luther writes, "Da wird Christus zum Teufel sagen: Wer hat dir Macht gegeben, dass du den (der an mich glaubt) tötest und verscharrst? Durch Adams Sünde widerf ährt uns dies. Aber mein Tod (spricht Christus) ist stärker als Sünde, Blut und Tod aller Menschen."²⁴⁹ The body and blood of Christ are our assurance now for acquittal on the last day.

There is no difference between the hour when you begin to believe and that of the Last Day, except that you do not yet see and hold eternal life. On Judgement Day you will have no more than is yours today. The very flesh and blood of Christ are mine at this hour; they are present and live just as they will also live on the Last Day, only with this difference that I do not yet see and feel them, for they are still hidden and concealed in faith These are plain and clear words; they show us the source of our eternal life.²⁵⁰

Similarly, Chemnitz writes about the assurance of salvation delivered with the Lord's

²⁴⁸Luther (*WA* 45, 199-203, 1537) quoted from Ellwein, 136.

²⁴⁹Luther (*WA* 46, 478-480, 1538) quoted from Ellwein, 138f.

²⁵⁰*AE* 23, 143 (1532).

Supper:

. . . the human nature of Christ, its limitations having been set aside, has been removed from all the miseries and injuries of this world and now resides in the glory of the Father. But our nature, although according to the promise we have the hope of glorification, is still befouled with uncleanness, oppressed with miseries, and exposed to all the darts of Satan, the world, and the flesh. As a result our faith is under the cross and still terribly tossed about by temptations. Therefore in the Supper Christ offers us His own body and blood which have been exalted above all miseries into the glory of the Father. He does this in such a way that through them He joins Himself to this miserable nature of ours, so that with this most present and sure guarantee and seal He may give us the certainty that He does not wish us to remain in these miseries forever but that we shall someday be conformed to His glorious body which He offers to us in the Supper as a seal of our own coming glorification.²⁵¹

Luther taught the Gospel is in the eating and drinking of the Lord's body and blood.

He places forgiveness of sins, life and salvation into our mouths. This Gospel, this sacrament, will endure "till he comes."²⁵² It will carry us through to the end of the world and *through* the

²⁵¹Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, 191.

²⁵²Sasse writes that the Lord's Supper helps us to look forward to the Messianic meal in heaven, ". . . the wedding-feast of the future, when Christ as bridegroom and the Church as his bride will be united at the 'marriage supper of the Lamb' (cf. Rev. 19:9 and 19:7; 3:20 and the parables of Jesus in Matt. 22:2ff.; 25:1ff.; also Mark 2:19 and Hosea 2:21). The Lord's Supper is, at the same time, a feast of remembrance and a feast of hope -- hope in the deeper sense of the New Testament, hope for the advent of Christ in glory. In celebrating this Sacrament, the Church shows forth, proclaims, the death of the Lord "till he come." That is, the death of our Lord and his advent in glory belong together. This Sacrament, therefore, is the remembrance of the terrific hour when the Lamb of God was slain, and at the same time it is the joyful looking forward to the day when our redemption will be accomplished at the Supper of the Lamb" (Sasse, 1975, 324).

Similarly, Schlink observes: "The Christian's whole life . . . is spent between the two sacraments, in constant hastening to both sacraments. Hastening to Baptism is a going back, while approaching the Lord's Supper is a hastening forward. Thus both sacraments embrace the believer at every moment The daily approach to the Lord's Supper — even though the Christian does not receive it daily, his life is oriented to the next approach to the Lord's Table — is the advance to the crucified body of our Lord through whom forgiveness and with it life eternal are granted us. Returning to the cross on Calvary the way of the Christian is also a hastening forward to the returning Lord who in the Last Judgement will acquit us of all sins and will for all eternity free us from death and the devil. This acquittal is imparted to us through Christ's body

end of the world, when Jesus will drink with us in person at the triumphant feast.²⁵³ “Wie also das Sakrament, die Taufe und die Predigt Gottes Werk ist, so haben wir das Abendmahl von Gott empfangen, der es zuerst gestiftet hat; und es wird bleiben bis an das ‘Ende der Welt.’”²⁵⁴

So Luther speaks of the confidence we can have on the Last Day.

"Bis dass er kommt" (Vers 26). Da wird er offenbarlich erscheinen und sagen: Du hast teil an meinem Blut. Denn er sagt: "für euch gegeben." Glaubst du also, so empfängst du (die Seligkeit). Dann ist der Tod ein Kinderspiel. Ja er wird verschlungen werden, wie wir an jenem Tage sehen werden. Indessen sollen wir Dank sagen, dass Christus den Tod vernichtet hat, und sollen immerdar sprechen: Was ist schon meine Schwachheit, mein Tod? Ich höre, dass der Sohn Gottes den Tod erlitten und sein Blut vergossen hat, und zwar für mich. Die das glauben, sollen's mit dem Munde empfangen und es soll ein ewig selig Leben folgen und der Leib soll auferweckt werden. Denn der Tod, den Gott stirbt, ist, wenn er gegen unsern Tod gesetzt wird, das allerhöchste Heilmittel (wider den Tod). Die da glauben, sollen damit (vor Gott) bestehen; und es soll ihrer Seele und ihrem Leib Kraft geben am Jüngsten Tage, dass sie ewig selig werden.²⁵⁵

To summarize, Luther and Chemnitz were familiar with the eucharistic motifs of the early Fathers. They wrote about them, confessed them, preached them, taught them. They created their own versions of eucharistic motifs based on the eucharistic motif of yeast. They believed (as did the Fathers) that the Lord's body and blood transform and vivify the communicant, like a wolf that is transformed into a sheep. The Lord's death (the fruits of which are delivered in his Supper) devours our death. From medicine of immortality to

and blood in the Lord's Supper. Receiving the Lord's Supper we are united with Christ who in one person is the crucified and risen, the exalted and returning Lord" (Schlink, 180-2).

²⁵³Mt. 26:29

²⁵⁴Luther (*WA* 45, 199-203, 1537), quoted from Ellwein, 133.

²⁵⁵Luther (*WA* 46, 478-480, 1538), quoted from Ellwein, 138.

acquittal on the Last Day, to the gift of *koinonia*, Luther and Chemnitz were faithful to the yeast-like motifs of the early church.

CHAPTER VII
RECEDING INTO THE SHADOWS

Where did they go?

The early motifs which Luther and Chemnitz worked to bring out of the shadows have again receded back into the shadows. The motifs of the early church, though they will never completely disappear, are not an integral part of our current understanding and celebration of the Lord's Supper. They are not being taught as central to the Lord's Supper, either in confirmation classes or in the seminaries. Pastors are not preaching on them. Parishioners are not thinking about them as they approach the altar. The motifs of the early church have once again been silenced, and it is the contention of the author that God's people are the poorer for it.²⁵⁶

What happened? The beginning of this trend may be traced back to the Reformation era. We have seen that Luther and Chemnitz both knew and were attracted to the motifs of the early Fathers. However, these motifs were not employed in the Formula of Concord in any significant manner. They are virtually absent where one might expect to see them (including the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Small Catechism, and the Formula of Concord). In the Apology, there is a nice quote from Cyril connecting the vine

²⁵⁶Sasse writes, "It was a great loss when during the last centuries the Lutheran church more or less neglected the Sacrament of the Altar. This failure to realize the great gift of this Sacrament has impaired the whole life of our church, the life of our congregations, as well as the spiritual life of individuals. It has also deprived the sermon of much of the power that is inherent in the proclamation of the true Gospel" (Sasse, *This is my Body*, 327).

motif with the Lord's Supper²⁵⁷ as well as a brief reference to the motif of food.²⁵⁸ In the fifth part of the Large Catechism the motifs receive some brief attention. Regarding the motif of feast, Luther mentions the "food of the soul" (23), "daily food" (24), "Passover . . . for you, which you shall enjoy not just on this one evening of the year, but frequently, whenever and wherever you will" (47). Regarding the motif of yeast, Luther calls the Lord's Supper a "pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body" (68), and a "precious antidote against the poison in their systems" (70), and "a remedy" (78). In the entire *Book of Concord*, these are the only direct references to the classic motifs of the Lord's Supper. Is it enough? Assuming the *Book of Concord* still shapes and forms the Lutheran Church today, one can also assume that if these motifs had been given more of a home (in Art. VII of the Solid Declaration, for example), they would be having much more of an impact on today's Lutherans.

There are several possible explanations for the absence of these motifs, none of them completely satisfying. It is usually assumed that Chemnitz was primarily responsible for Article VII of the Solid Declaration. We have seen that he can hardly help himself; he loves to quote the Fathers and he loves to use their eucharistic motifs. Why, then were they not made central to Article VII where we would most expect to see them? The most obvious answer comes when one asks the question, "What was the intent of Article VII?" The intent of Article VII was to defend the Augsburg Confession of the Lord's Supper,²⁵⁹ rather than

²⁵⁷Apology X, 3.

²⁵⁸Apology XXII, 10.

²⁵⁹Cf. SD VII, 1.

confessing the rich motifs revolving around the Lord's Supper. It is not surprising, then that the Augsburg Confession is referenced more in Article VII (no less than twenty-one times) than in any other article in the Solid Declaration.²⁶⁰ One must at least ask the question: Does this constitute "confessionalism" going on already in the 16th century?

Kolb writes, "Too often Lutherans have faltered into a kind of confessionalism that seeks identity, security, and meaning by holding on to the confessional documents rather than continuing to confess their content, speaking of their Lord and His forgiving love."²⁶¹ Based on its stated goal, Article VII is concerned most with making positive assertions regarding the Real Presence while refuting any other type of presence espoused by the Sacramentarians. It can be argued, then, that the benefits delivered by the Lord's Supper were not the issue. Both the Phillipists and the Gnesio Lutherans could speak of the forgiveness of sins distributed with the body and blood. Since Article VII is not addressing the benefits of the Lord's Supper, but the nature of the elements, there was no need to employ the historical motifs. In response, one can ask, "Can the two be torn apart?" The whole Gospel is contained in the right administration of this sacrament. It is not easily dissected into two compartments: nature and benefits. The elements bear the blessings. Christ's incarnation, his redeeming death, his resurrection, the giving already now of future heavenly treasures, eternal righteousness, innocence and blessedness, the entire Gospel is in, with, and under the bread and wine. It is no wonder Luther made such a fuss in Marburg over the Lord's Supper. What the world

²⁶⁰The Apology is cited three times, the Smalcald Articles are cited twice, and the Large Catechism is also cited twice.

²⁶¹Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 133.

considered theological hair-splitting, Luther saw as the church standing or falling on this doctrine. Sasse writes, “Here is God who became man; here is Christ in his divinity and humanity. Here is the true body and blood of the Lamb of God, given for you, present with you. Here forgiveness of sins is a reality — and, with it, life and salvation. This Sacrament is the Gospel.”²⁶² The implication is that if the Sacrament is misunderstood, the Gospel will also be misunderstood.²⁶³ Why not remove room for misunderstanding by highlighting also that which is at stake? This could have been done by making a clear, concise confession of the benefits of the Lord’s Supper.

The argument can be made that these motifs do not carry the precision and apologetical content necessary for confessional documents. However, illustrations are used elsewhere in the Formula of Concord (cf. SD II, 19), why not in Article VII? Why are they not used in Article VII? The Formula of Concord does speak of the vivifying flesh of Christ, but it is not in Article VII in connection with the Lord’s Supper. It is in Article VIII, on the person of Christ, in reference to John 6, a passage the early Fathers loved but that many today are reluctant to use in connection with the Lord’ Supper. Moreover, these motifs have stood the test of time. In spite of being neglected for centuries at a time, they keep coming back. They have withstood the assaults and neglect of sacramental heretics for 1500 years or more. These motifs have proven their confessional value and durability.

The argument can also be made that Article VII is most interested in refuting a

²⁶²Sasse (1977) 328f.

²⁶³Sasse writes, “Each misunderstanding of the Gospel must needs lead to a misunderstanding of the Sacrament; each misunderstanding of the Sacrament is bound to lead to a wrong concept of the Gospel” (Sasse, 1977, 3).

figurative or metaphorical understanding of the Lord's Supper. Therefore, the authors of Article VII did not want to use illustrations and metaphors to refute illustrations and metaphors. However, many of these illustrations are thought of as "real" and efficacious; they are much more than simple literary tools. For example, the motif of medicine and poison in the Lord's Supper is more than just a motif for the Fathers, for Luther and for Chemnitz. The body and blood are truly medicine and poison. What more powerful way to make a positive assertion about the real presence than to talk about medicine and poison that works both on the soul and the body?²⁶⁴

One might argue that the ancient Fathers are not cited because the Sacramentarians also had their own list of references from the ancients, and a resulting battle of citations would not be helpful.²⁶⁵ However, Article VII does draw from the Fathers (albeit in a small way) in support of the real presence, making the above argument implausible.

One might argue the motifs are not included because of the constraints of space. But in Chemnitz's *Büchlein*, less than twenty pages are dedicated to the Lord's Supper. The catechetical style of the book promotes short, concise answers of confessions. Within this framework, Chemnitz still employs all the major motifs to confess the Lord's Supper. He also calls upon the ancient Fathers for support.²⁶⁶ Chemnitz considered these motifs so accurate

²⁶⁴Though beyond the scope of this study, it would be interesting to discover how, if at all, the sacramentarians used such motifs. Could they speak of a very real, vivifying medicine with the confidence and assurance of the early Fathers and of Luther and Chemnitz, or could they only speak of spiritual medicine within the sacrament?

²⁶⁵Martin Brecht writes, "Zwingli rejected the characterization of his view as 'a new error,' for he felt he had the support of the church fathers for his symbolic interpretation" (Brecht, 297).

²⁶⁶Cf. *Enchiridion*, pp.163, 173.

and effective that he chooses to use them, though he is working with limited space.

It is understood that Article VII does not have to say everything in order to confess the Lord's Supper. However, it would seem that great opportunities were missed to make positive, powerful assertions about the benefits of the Lord's Supper. Their absence did no great favor for the church of that time, evidenced by the persistent conflicts over the Lord's Supper. Their absence is noted, at least anecdotally and subjectively, among Lutherans today. That is, as they are absent in a clear, powerful manner in Article VII, so they are absent in a clear, powerful manner in the faith and practice of the Lutheran Church today.²⁶⁷

The motifs, as shown above, did receive some attention in the Large Catechism. Why was this not sufficient to make them central to our understanding of the Lord's Supper today?

²⁶⁷It is often assumed that Chemnitz was a major contributor to Article VII. Perhaps this is because of his subscription to the Formula of Concord, his authorship of *De coena Domini* and related pages in *The Two Natures of Christ*. Chemnitz reworked the Swabian Concord which was later blended into the Formula of Concord. Chemnitz also participated in the Bergen Abbey Conference (1577) at which the Formula of Concord was produced (Lutheran Cyclopedia, 153). In short, there are many indicators that he *could* have been the author of Article VII. George Fritschel gives Martin Chemnitz no credit for the confession of Article VII. He names those who wrote/rewrote the various sections of Article VII (cf. George Fritschel, *The Formula of Concord, Its Origin and Contents* [Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1916], 194) and Chemnitz is never cited. Though Fritschel does not provide the evidence that leads him to his conclusions, the author of this study suspects Fritschel's exemption of Chemnitz is accurate. We have seen that Chemnitz likes standing on solid ground; that is, he does not want to be known as an innovator when it comes to confessing the faith. He likes to show that there is really nothing new about what the Lutheran reformers were teaching. We have also seen that Chemnitz can hardly help himself. Whenever he confesses the Lord's Supper, whether it is in *The Two Natures of Christ*, or in the *Enchiridion* or in *De coena Domini*, he employs the classic motifs of the early Fathers. Kolb writes, "Christians cannot keep quiet about the truth" (Kolb, 113). Similarly, Martin Chemnitz could not keep quiet about the classic motifs of the Lord's Supper. For this reason, one is led to agree with Fritschel: Chemnitz could not have been the author of Article VII.

God delights in physical matter

Perhaps the answer to the above question is found in the fact that Western civilization is still, to an extent, held captive by neo-platonism. We are embarrassed by the physical and strive for the spiritual. We assume that our relationship with God grows closer as we move further away from the needs and desires of the body. Many of these early motifs unapologetically collide with Plato. What could the motif of a feast of rich food mean to a culture that considers matter (especially excessive matter around the waist) to be evil?

What does the close link between the incarnation and the Lord's Supper made by the Fathers mean to a culture that is still embarrassed about the idea of God taking on flesh? Earlier, we saw that those in the early Middle Ages deriving their understanding more from Ambrose than Augustine were accused by the "Augustinians" of theological crudity and of a grotesquely physical conception of the Eucharist. Is that also the case today?

In a wonderful quote, John O'Connor argues that God, far from being offended by matter, seems to take delight in it as observed by the wonders of his creation, but also by the incarnation and the Lord's Supper. O'Connor writes,

A certain disdain for the flesh has always run as a minor but not insignificant theme through human history, its religions, its philosophies, its activities. For some persons, matter and the flesh, the body and its activities have been seen as an impediment to the spirit, or as having no moral significance for the person apart from the orientation given by the spirit or mind or intention. In propounding its Eucharistic doctrine from the beginning, Christianity has had to combat this view of reality

It is always a source of wonder for a Christian to contemplate God's dealings with matter. The Creator of 'all things visible and invisible' appears to enjoy working with matter and has given it a wonderful multiformity. Consider some of its variety: from the smallest atom of inorganic material to the puzzle of a protein cell, to an amoeba; from water and air to a blade of grass, and trees, and the immensity of planets, stars and galaxies; the many species of animals; the human body in all its stages from conception to death; human faces — so similar yet so different because

each reflects or can reflect a personality that, even if it differs ever so slightly from another, is nonetheless unique. All of these show us something of God's extravagant use of matter. And all the aspects and phases of matter — if we could only view it as a whole while seeing all its parts — are, of course, only a reflection of his beauty — and of only a fraction of that since we may surmise that the spiritual order of creation is at least as varied, intricate and as astounding as the material creation.

God delights in matter. One might say that he surpasses every scientist in his fascination for its potentialities, its capacities for change, the varieties of its use. While so often in history the human race, which is matter and spirit, has renounced the former while pretending to seek the latter in its "pure" form, the Creator has sought to enoble matter. He leaves the Gnostics, the dualists, the Idealists, the transcendentalists, the Cahari to deal with 'spirit' and 'Reason' and 'ideas'. God himself deals in clay.

[Quoting Tertullian] "A great thing was being done when God constructed [man] from matter [i.e., clay]. It was honored as often as it experienced the hand of God, when he touched it, when he pulled at it, when he formed and shaped it. Reflect on God, totally occupied and given over to it, with his hand, his senses, his work, his counsel and wisdom, his providence, and especially his affection, which guided its features. For, whatever was expressed in clay, it was Christ, the future man, that was thought of, for he, the Word made Flesh, was then clay and earth."

So much then does God love matter that he has made it his own, in the Incarnation, in an inseparable union that will never end, a union that left his material Body, its chemicals and functions, all that they were by "nature", even while making that Body the "hinge of salvation"²⁶⁸ through which the divine power operates. In God's love for matter, he appears like a child playing with wet sand at a beach, making and unmaking, forming and changing, blotting out what is made only to fashion it anew. But, in all the changes, he respects the matter he created, which is always clay to its Potter

Taking insights from the Fathers of the Church, especially from Tertullian, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and St. John of Damascus, Aquinas taught that Flesh has become the instrument of salvation In the human nature he created for himself God worked our salvation. Now, raised in glory, it is through that human nature that God communicates to us the effects of the salvation he has won. Not by some remote action at a distance, but by person-to-person, even body-to-body, contact has God willed to save us in Christ . . . Eucharistic reception, then, is a touch that assimilates our own bodies to the Body of Christ. By a paradox, it is the food that absorbs the eater and not vice versa. This happens, of course, because in the conjunction of our bodies through Communion, the life-giving touch of Christ, as instrument of divinity,

²⁶⁸O'Connor is quoting Tertullian, who writes, "The flesh is the hinge of salvation The flesh is fed on the Body and Blood of Christ, so that the soul may grow fat on God" (O'Connor, 270).

is the stronger. It is true to say that in the process of receiving him, he receives us.²⁶⁹

This brings to mind the words of Solomon on the occasion of the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. Solomon prayed, "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built" (I Kgs. 8:27). The early Fathers did not fret over, but rather rejoiced in God's answer: "Take and eat, this is my body given for you Take and drink, this is my blood shed for you."

Confessing the Lord's Supper

We saw earlier that it is a temptation (especially in a society that has a rather schizophrenic relationship with matter) to mitigate the shock of the Gospel, make it less offensive and more reasonable and believable. Perhaps this is why the motifs of feast and yeast have receded back into history. They embarrass us. They press us to confess more than we are comfortable confessing, not because they say more than the Bible says, but because they delight in matter. They are flagrantly immodest and without shame. They are raw, brazen, and so easily avoidable. Like Melanchthon in his *Loci Communes*, we can say all the right words without being convicted of false doctrine, and still sell out the early Fathers, as well as Luther and Chemnitz.

If heresy is pushing a doctrine to the extreme, then these motifs push us to confess the Lord's Supper right to the uncomfortable edge, where faith seems tottery and unsafe. Though

²⁶⁹O'Connor, 268-271.

it is easier to stay within secure, comfortable confines, Christians were never called to be comfortable. Said another way, God's grace has always been shocking. To mitigate the Lord's Supper, then, is to compromise the Gospel. Christians were never encouraged to mitigate; we were called to rejoice in and confess the faith. Luther writes,

It is not the mark of a Christian mind to take no delight in assertions; on the contrary, a man must delight in assertions or he will be no Christian. And by assertion — in order that we may not be misled by words — I mean a constant adhering, affirming, confessing, maintaining, and an invincible persevering Nothing is better known or more common among Christians than assertion. Take away assertions and you take away Christianity.²⁷⁰

Similarly, Hesshus taught, “No one can remain silent in good conscience when there is opportunity to tell of the great and boundless benefits that God has given His people in Jesus Christ.”²⁷¹ This takes confession out of the defensive, apologetic stance and gives opportunity for confession to go on the offense. Kolb writes that Spangenberg

. . . insisted that Christians must confess the faith at all times. In response to those who suggested that no public confession was necessary at times when opponents were not pressing for a confession, he answered that God always presses for confession in order that His Word may come to unbelievers and so that false teaching can be revealed. Against those who argued that sufficient confession of the faith had already been given, he answered that the praise of God, as it takes place in confession of the faith, should continually be offered and renewed. He lauded the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, as well as the ancient creeds; but he pointed out that like the Scriptures, these would be silenced and perverted if believers did not confess afresh.²⁷²

It is ours to confess the Lord's Supper to a culture that may not want to hear about it,

²⁷⁰Luther (*WA* 18, 603), quoted by Kolb, 26.

²⁷¹Kolb, 108-9.

²⁷²*Ibid.*, 111.

that may find it shocking, embarrassing, unbelievable. Using the motifs of the early Fathers can assist in that confession of faith; they can help the hearers rejoice in the Lord's Supper without mitigating the shock of the Lord's Supper. Regarding the Lord's Supper, Luther wrote,

As in other matters pertaining to faith . . . it is not enough simply to teach and instruct, but there must also be daily exhortation, so on this subject we must be persistent in preaching, lest people become indifferent and bored. For we know from experience that the devil always sets himself against this and every other Christian activity, hounding and driving people from it as much as he can.²⁷³

In the closing paragraph of this section on the Lord's Supper, Luther reminds us once again, just in case we missed it earlier: "We cannot perpetuate these and other teachings unless we train the people who come after us and succeed us in our office and work, so that they in turn may bring up their children successfully."²⁷⁴ Elsewhere, Luther writes, "When celebrating the Sacrament we should preach a sermon and not forget Christ; for the Lord's Supper was instituted for the sake of the proclamation, so that no other Christ be worshiped." The error of the Middle Ages is that they "relegated the proclamation into the background, and dragged indulgences . . . and other babbling into the foreground."²⁷⁵ The motifs of the early church, with a little discretion, can help (if not inspire) us to preach the Lord's Supper with fresh vitality.²⁷⁶

²⁷³L.C. V, 44.

²⁷⁴L.C. V, 86.

²⁷⁵*AE* 23, 207 (1532).

²⁷⁶We have already seen some of the pitfalls that one can fall into. If these motifs are to be used in preaching and teaching, we should be careful to avoid confessing the Lord's Supper in the

To summarize, the motifs of the early Fathers receded into the shadows following the Reformation. There never was an overt campaign waged against these motifs, so it is difficult to know why they disappeared from common usage. We noticed the motifs received only scant coverage in the Book of Concord. We also hypothesized the motifs are embarrassing to a culture that is still held captive by neo-platonic tendencies. Finally, we submitted the need to confess, preach and teach these motifs.

way of *ex opere operato*. This is the magical view of the Lord's Supper, where there is little room for faith. Elert writes, "It cannot be denied that the danger of superstitious conceptions crops up here . . . It is equally impossible to deny that, like the idea of justification, the forgiveness of sins received in Holy Communion with the body and blood of Christ *has to have an eschatological culmination* (italics mine). 'For where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation'" (Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 319). Another potential hazard is the pitfall of divinization. Though given his forgiveness, his life, his salvation, we would never want to confess the Lord's Supper in such a way that God is no longer needed. A third caution is to become so caught up in the motifs that we forget the words, "This is my body. . . this is my blood. Do this in remembrance of me." We would also not want to follow some of the hermeneutical practices of the day which tended to be recklessly allegorical. Finally, some might question whether confessing the Lord's Supper in this way is in conflict with the doctrine of justification, specifically the emphasis on faith alone. Melancthon gave the answer in the Apology. He writes, "If they dislike the exclusive particle 'alone,' let them remove the other exclusive terms from Paul, too, like 'freely,' 'not of works,' 'it is a gift,' etc., for these terms are also exclusive. We exclude the claim of merit, not the Word or the sacraments . . ." (Ap. IV, 73). All this having been said, the author still finds these motifs terribly helpful for preaching and teaching the Lord's Supper with renewed vigor and vitality.

CONCLUSION

The motifs today

If the Fathers have taught us anything, it is that the Lord's Supper is "primarily something to be celebrated, not to be speculated on."²⁷⁷ They have also taught us there is every danger we might fail to appreciate how much is happening when nothing appears to be happening.²⁷⁸

The food of babes

Refreshment while on the journey

Medicine for immortality

Antidote against death

Poison to the devil

Acquittal on the Last Day

Drink of immortality

Best food in the Father's house for his prodigal son

A pinch of yeast that works through the entire batch

²⁷⁷Sasse (1977), 10.

²⁷⁸Annie Dillard writes, "On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? . . . The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets" (Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* [New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1982], 58). That's speaking in the way of the Law (power versus grace). Were Christ not to cover up his glory, it would be the Parousia, and crash helmets would not help us a bit. Yet Dillard's approach to the Lord's Supper has more in common with the "sacred awe" of Chrysostom et al. than it does with our easy going, casual approach.

This was the Lord's Supper for the early Christians. This was the Lord's Supper for Luther and Chemnitz. The centuries have made our environments immeasurably different, but many things are the same. The struggle is just as pressing, the hunger for the "bread of life" just as real. Having explored the faith of the early Fathers, having explored how Luther and Chemnitz rejoiced with them, one is made more sure of his faith . . . he is standing on solid ground, he has been given a greater hunger for the Lord's Supper, greater satisfaction upon eating and drinking, and a renewed desire to make others hungry too and to be satisfied with them. Chemnitz wrote, "The more we love it, the more diligently we will defend it and the more tenaciously we will retain the proper, simple, and natural meaning of the words of Christ's last will and testament so that these sweet consolations are not snatched away from us."²⁷⁹

The witness of the Fathers will follow the pattern already established by history, at times waxing, at times waning. Nonetheless the Fathers were gifted voices in a living church and in a church *in which they still live*, since the Lord's Supper gives them communion with us. No eucharist is ever celebrated except in union with all the saints. He feeds them now in heaven who fed them here on earth. Those who feast now, feast also with those in heaven. The middle-aged woman dying of cancer is at the communion rail, and she swallows the "medicine of immortality; antidote to death." The young woman, feeling profoundly sorrowful and unlovable because of a secret sin comes to the communion rail, and leaves knowing she just received acquittal on the last day. The high-school drop-out kneels at the rail

²⁷⁹Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, 194.

feeling more demonic than angelic, but swallows a little pill which will "cause such a rumbling in the devil's belly." The prodigal son is at the communion rail, and the best food of the Father's house is for him. The weary grandmother serving as mother during the week days to her grandchildren is at the communion rail, and manna to sustain her on her journey through the wilderness is placed into her hands. The one disenfranchised by his family and new to the community is at the communion rail, and taking a sip from the cup, he rejoices to be engrafted to the vine, a vine that reaches all the way to the heavens.

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