

11-1-1969

# The Bread of Life Discourse in John 6: A Survey of Select Literature

Ronald Jones

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, chap8med@gmail.com

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THE BREAD OF LIFE DISCOURSE IN JOHN 6:  
A SURVEY OF SELECT LITERATURE

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A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for elective  
EN-199

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by

Ronald Jones

November 1969

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Advisor

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. THE PURPOSE OF THE EVANGELIST. . . . .	3
III. JOHN 6:25-34. THE PREFACE . . . . .	6
The Opening Verses, 6:25-28. . . . .	6
Jewish Eschatology, 6:29-31. . . . .	9
John 6:32-33 . . . . .	11
Manna as Teaching. . . . .	11
The Two-fold Significance of the Response. . . . .	13
The Request of the Crowd, John 6:34. . . . .	14
The Wilderness Imagery . . . . .	15
IV. JOHN 6:35-50. THE FIRST PART OF THE DISCOURSE . . . . .	18
The Assertion. John 6:35. . . . .	18
John 6:37-40 . . . . .	20
The Complaint of the Crowd. John 6:41 . . . . .	21
Reassertion. John 6:42-50 . . . . .	22
Thematic Nature of John 6:35-50. . . . .	25
A Roman Catholic View. Worden . . . . .	27
V. JOHN 6:51-58. THE SECOND PART OF THE DISCOURSE. . . . .	30
Thematic Material. . . . .	30
The Position of Raymond Brown. . . . .	30
The Position of George Stevens . . . . .	31
The Traditional Lutheran Position. . . . .	32
Flesh, Life, and Death. John 6:51 . . . . .	33
Flesh. . . . .	33
Life . . . . .	34
Death. . . . .	35
Reaction. John 6:52 . . . . .	36
Reassertion. John 6:53-58 . . . . .	37
Verse 53 . . . . .	37
Verse 54 . . . . .	38
Verse 55 . . . . .	40
Verses 56-57 . . . . .	41

VI. JOHN 6:60-63. THE AFTERMATH . . . . .	47
VII. CONCLUSIONS. . . . .	51
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	53

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The writer first became interested in this discourse during his vicarage year. The gospel lesson for Laetare is John 6:1-15, and as the writer looked at this pericope in preparation for a sermon, he found himself reading further into the chapter to discover Christ's words about Himself as the Bread of life. The final sermon, in fact, did not deal with the miracle of the feeding as such, but with a portion of Christ's discourse.

One of the fascinations of searching into such a text as this is to discover what other men have written and what conclusions they have drawn, particularly in a paper where research and reporting are the primary elements. From a bibliography which is still growing, six major works (Barrett, Bernard, Brown, Dodd, Lightfoot, and Stevens) and some supporting journal articles have provided the core for the paper which follows. In no way does the writer take credit for the thinking of these men. His only hope is that his reactions--when they are included--are an accurate analysis or observation on the particular man or men in question.

A paper of this type also has numerous presuppositions. The paper assumes, for the purpose of discussion, that one may legitimately treat the entire discourse and that there is no need to discard smaller or larger units because of the form-critical process and its conclusions. If one were to treat the positions of the form critics regarding this chapter of John, either as a whole or in

terms of its parts, one could easily write another paper on that topic alone.

Because of the scope of this paper, it is not possible to delve deeply into the theology of John except as these writers present it. To analyze the various words and concepts which John uses in this discourse is a major study in itself, one which would no doubt be both fascinating and useful. Such a study will be reserved for future work on the part of the writer.

It is also most difficult to treat the verses from John 6:25-58 without at least some reference to the larger context. That, too, could well be the basis for an additional study, for the narrative which precedes the discourse and the reaction of the disciples which follows are both vital to a fuller understanding of the words of Jesus.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PURPOSE OF THE EVANGELIST

Before one enters into a discussion of Christ's preface and discourse on the Bread of life, some introductory considerations are in order on what John may have intended in writing this chapter of his gospel.

As Lightfoot points out, with the one exception of the confession of Peter in verses 68-69, John emphasizes in Chapter 6 the inability of those who hear the words of Jesus to achieve any sort of spiritual understanding not bounded by material and physical considerations. But as he weaves this discourse together, it seems to be part of his purpose to show that Christ's redemptive activity is universal and that this redemption comes to all men in all periods of His earthly ministry, not just to His disciples in the moment and by means of His death. It is noteworthy, then, that in a chapter which includes the narrative of the miraculous feeding and an almost direct eucharistic reference, John emphasizes that Jesus gives the food in each case at the cost of His own life.<sup>1</sup>

Worden's article, "The Holy Eucharist in St. John," is very good in regard to such introductory concerns. Later discussion will deal with his eucharistic interpretation of the entire discourse, but his remarks still give a fine introduction to John's outlook and purpose. John's concern, as Worden points out, is with the fact that when the community celebrates the eucharist, it performs an act which gives proclamation to the death of the Lord, and that each one in the com-

munity eats the body and drinks the blood of that Lord. John gives an answer to the question of what each individual receives in the eucharist in terms of both the elements and the benefits, writing from within the community which looks to the celebration of the eucharist as the center of its life, as the bond of its unity, and as the pledge of its redemption. John leaves aside the question of the liturgical action of that celebration and concerns himself with the significance of the eucharist for each individual. Thus he says little about that action begun on the night before Christ's death: he says much about what the bread and wine which one eats and drinks really are, and what each recipient receives. Such a concern is consistent with John's preoccupation with the significance of Christ for each believer. What Jesus said and did are not as significant as what He is in the present for each believer.<sup>2</sup>

Dodd holds that Chapter 6 is made up of essentially one significant narrative and a discourse expounding on the symbolic significance of that narrative. The dominant theme is the Bread of life, symbolized by the bread which Jesus miraculously gives to the multitude.<sup>3</sup> The discourse as a whole moves from false and inadequate to better conceptions of the messianic nature of Jesus. The multitude seeks in Him a second Moses, who will restore the gift of manna in a way surpassing Moses himself. But Christ gives the Bread of life, something far better than manna, and He is that Bread. He is also the Life-giver, giving eternal life to those who are in union with Him.<sup>4</sup>

Brown's comment at this point is most noteworthy, for it may help to explain the total significance not only of the discourse on

the Bread of life, but also of other Johannine metaphors as well:

Under all these metaphors of bread, water, and life, Jesus is symbolically referring to the same reality, a reality which, when once possessed, makes a man see natural hunger, thirst, and death as insignificant.<sup>5</sup>

So the dialogue moves from miraculous bread already given and eaten (verse 26) to a heavenly bread newly promised (verses 27-34), then to a life-giving Bread that is Christ Himself (verses 35-50), and finally to the supreme Bread which is His own flesh (verses 51-58).<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps these introductory considerations have taken away from the impact of the discourse itself, but this should not be. John speaks in a way which is always vital, living, dynamic, and which holds the reader in his grasp while he conveys his message.

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<sup>1</sup>R. H. Lightfoot, St. John's Gospel. A Commentary (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), pp. 154ff.

<sup>2</sup>F. Worden, "The Holy Eucharist in St. John," Scripture, 15 (October 1963), 98f.

<sup>3</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 333.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>5</sup>Raymond Brown, The Gospel according to John (I-XII), in The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 29, 275.

<sup>6</sup>V. Ruland, "Sign and Sacrament: John's Bread of Life Discourse," Interpretation, 18 (October 1964), 450.

## CHAPTER III

### JOHN 6:25-34. THE PREFACE

In the preface to the Bread of life discourse, the concept of the food of eternal life is developed by analogies with the manna spoken of in the Old Testament as "bread from heaven" (Psalm 77:24 LXX, κῆν ἄρτον οὐρανοῦ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ).<sup>1</sup> The Bread of life theme reflects the hunger of the crowd and their search for Jesus, concepts reflected symbolically in the words of Amos, where the food or bread is divine word and wisdom (Amos 8:11 LXX, οὐ λιπὸν ἄρτου οὐδὲ δίψαν ὕδατος, ἀλλὰ λιπὸν τοῦ ἀκοῦσαι λόγον κυρίου).<sup>2</sup>

#### The Opening Verses, 6:25-28

John may have a deeper theological meaning for the awkward question which begins this section if he is considering more the question of Jesus' origins than of the simple geographical setting. He would then offer a theological answer to how Jesus had come to earth by mentioning the Son of man (verse 27) and the bread from heaven (verse 32). Jesus is the Son of man who has come down from heaven. But this is obviously not the concern of the crowd at this point, as the context indicates.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus here, as in other places within the discourse, does not give a direct answer to the question. Instead, He indicates to His hearers that their interest in Him is a purely physical one, based on His miraculous multiplication of the loaves. Their concern must now turn to a higher level of understanding, and so Jesus commands

them to work for the food which lasts forever and which gives eternal life instead of for perishable food. The Son of man both intends and has the power to give this food to all men, for He is the One sent by the Father.<sup>4</sup>

Verse 26 speaks of that insight into the sign of the loaves which is deeper than mere physical understanding. Yet one sees the difficulty of this understanding in the length of the discourse necessary for Jesus to explain what the sign really means. The miracle had been a sign of His power to give life to man--in the first part of the ensuing discourse through the bread of His teaching, in the latter part through His flesh--a power which He has because He came down from heaven.<sup>5</sup>

The discourse now takes the form of a sustained dialogue between Jesus and the crowd who have followed Him from Tiberias to Capernaum. With His first words Jesus at least implies that their witness to the sign concerned itself only with perishing, bodily food. They had seen, handled, and eaten the food which He gave, yet in a deeper sense they had not seen the sign at all.<sup>6</sup>

If the crowd had interpreted the sign correctly, any faith in Jesus which might have resulted would have been of an acceptable nature. But the crowd did not follow Jesus because they realized that He was their spiritual deliverer. They did not follow Him because they understood His mission, for verses 15 and 30 indicate their misunderstanding. They followed Him simply because of the material benefits, the loaves, which He had given them.<sup>7</sup>

The crowd received the unexpected and free supply of bread quite

gladly. They were even willing to honor the One who had supplied them as a miracle worker. Yet the true significance of what had happened eluded them, and they failed to realize that the loaves were a sign of heavenly food, the Bread of life. Thus for John--if not for the crowd--this sign did not only portend, but symbolically represented the truth of the gospel.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus identified the *βρῶσιν τὴν μένουσαν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον* as that which the Son of man gave. This food was in part a present gift and yet a gift to come.<sup>9</sup> The context is that of realized eschatology. In the synoptic gospels the messianic banquet takes place after this life or in the second coming, as in Matthew 8:11 or 26:29. But in John 6, this banquet is here already. Jesus is the Bread of life--although He has not yet announced that fact--for all those who believe in the One sent by God, and here Jesus speaks of Himself as that Son of man sent by the Father.<sup>10</sup>

The spiritual food which Jesus gives has some unusual qualities, for it is both abiding and permanent, an emphasis which continues throughout the discourse (verses 35,50,54,58).<sup>11</sup> Yet the sense at this point is not that the food lasts to eternity, even though Christ as that food is Himself eternal, but that as abiding food it produces eternal life in the believer. The Son of man, then, is the One from heaven who gives heavenly food. Even though man works, this food is still His gift.<sup>12</sup>

It is significant to note that in much of this preface, the crowd is more concerned with physical food than with truth. Their lesson is that there is one type of bread which gives eternal life instead of

earthly. They must earn that bread, but must face the realization that it is the free gift of the Son of man and cannot be earned. Jesus is that Son of man, and man receives life only in communion with Him.<sup>13</sup>

Jewish Eschatology, 6:29-31

In this discourse, Jesus' purpose was not to teach the nature of His relation to God unless it was necessary to support His messianic claims. Yet as He teaches of that Bread of life, He asserts both that He gives life and that the one required work of God is faith in Him.<sup>14</sup>

The response of the Jewish listeners to the demand for faith involves their own demand for a sign and a reference to the manna provided by Moses. The signs which they expected from the Messiah were mere miracles. When they see a miracle, however, they fail to see the sign. For John a sign is not a miraculous, but a significant act which symbolizes eternal truths for the eye which sees and the mind which understands.<sup>15</sup>

The reference to the manna is highly significant in this section of the preface. When one realizes that the renewal of the gift of manna had become a fixed feature in later rabbinic tradition of the eschatological expectation, then the miracle of the feeding and the dialogue take on new significance. Jesus had spoken of His messianic pretensions in terms of the multiplication of the loaves. The Jews, in turn, demand that He prove these claims by restoring the gift of manna, the *ἄρτος βρώτου*.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the eschatological expectation of the manna, there were apparently Passover associations as well. This would fit in well

with the reference to the time of the feeding, given in verse 4 as  $\tilde{\eta}\nu \delta\acute{\epsilon} \xi\epsilon\gamma\gamma\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma \tau\acute{o} \pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\chi\alpha$ . The Jews regarded the providing of manna for the people as the greatest of Moses' miracles.<sup>17</sup> And so the crowd now dares ask, "Moses gave that which came down from heaven. Can you do the same, and thus substantiate your claim to be the second Moses?" The loaves which they had eaten the day before were ordinary loaves from the hands of a small boy, certainly not bread from heaven as the manna had been. The crowd reflected their general belief that the Messiah would outdo Moses in the miracles which He would perform at His coming. So the crowd tells Jesus that they would expect something more wonderful than a simple multiplication of the loaves of anyone who claimed to be the Messiah (verses 14,27).<sup>18</sup>

Jesus had to work a sign--an additional sign--before the crowd would believe Him, and they even set up the situation by reminding Him that manna had sustained their fathers in the wilderness. The crowd also knew that the Messiah, the second Deliverer, would correspond to Moses, the first deliverer, in that He would once again give manna.<sup>19</sup>

The bread which they had eaten did seem different from the manna of old, for the manna could not be kept over from one day to the next (Exodus 16:19 LXX,  $\mu\eta\theta\epsilon\iota\varsigma \kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\lambda\iota\pi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\omega \acute{\alpha}\pi' \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}\upsilon \xi\iota \tau\acute{o} \pi\epsilon\omega\acute{\iota}$ .). There is no indication of that here, so the people object because the supply of bread which they had seen did not seem to compare with the heavenly manna which their fathers had eaten and enjoyed.<sup>20</sup>

The problem is one of degrees. The crowd readily admitted that Jesus had performed a miracle, but they wish a greater one. Whoever

makes a claim greater than that of Moses must substantiate his right to do so by an even more striking proof. Jesus does not answer this request for good reason: He cannot. No sign which He might perform could ever prove Him to be the Messiah. Rigid proof would create an even more difficult situation, for it would make impossible faith in Jesus, the work of God in verse 29. Many signs may suggest that Jesus is the Messiah, but one must still believe.<sup>21</sup>

#### John 6:32-33

Jesus does not answer the request for a sign. Instead, He gives an interpretation of what had already taken place. He even asks the crowd to see in the multiplication the very sign for which they had asked. Even though they have already eaten the loaves, however, they have not seen, and they look for more even though Jesus has not promised that anything significant would yet happen.<sup>22</sup>

#### Manna as Teaching

The symbolism which Jesus now used in applying the manna (the bread from heaven) to His revelation was not unknown in Jewish circles, although He certainly went beyond the Old Testament when He identified Himself as that Bread and as Revelation incarnate. The Jewish listeners were aware of pertinent references in their Scripture (Wisdom 16:20 LXX, ἄρτον ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ . . . ἀλλὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου ; II Esdras 19:20 LXX, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά σου τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἔδωκας συνεισέσαι αὐτοῖς καὶ τὸ μαννα σοῦ οὐκ ἀπιστήσας ἀπὸ στόματος .). Jesus told the crowd that their eschatological expectations had been fulfilled.

They had referred to the manna given by Moses, but that had only been a foreshadowing of the true bread from heaven, Jesus' own teaching. The crowd failed completely to understand this symbolism and once again operated only in physical terms. This provided the setting for the discourse itself, where Jesus would finally make His claim.<sup>23</sup>

Jesus did not really dispute the claims of the questioners as such. Moses had certainly given the Torah, symbolized by the manna, but the bread of the Torah was as little a life-giving knowledge of God as manna was the true bread. In this respect Moses did not give bread from heaven, which was only a gift of God given through Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Jesus contrasted manna with that true bread from heaven. Although manna does not seem to have been used as a symbol of the Torah, bread certainly had been. So it was a simple matter to consider the Torah as the bread of Moses and then to transfer to the manna. The true bread from heaven now superseded this bread of Moses.<sup>25</sup> The manna which Moses had given was not the true bread which God now gave them. In the first part of the discourse, this bread is Jesus Himself.<sup>26</sup> If, then, bread had been a symbol of the Torah in rabbinic thought, then John here contrasts Moses and Jesus, the law and Jesus' teaching.<sup>27</sup>

Stanley gives an excellent summary of the thought of manna as teaching:

With this exegesis provided by the Word incarnate who has become our interpreter, Israelite literature dealing with the manna comes to its full development. The divinely inspired interest manifested by the Old Testament authors receives an explanation: the real function of the manna is to provide a type of the Word become man, who accomplishes his mission of giving life to the world by instituting the holy eucharist.<sup>28</sup>

### The Two-fold Significance of the Response

The response of Jesus must have sounded very strange to the ears of the listeners: οὐ Μωϋσῆς δέδωκεν ὑμῖν τὸν ἄρτον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ .

The manna had certainly been the gift of God, but that was not the point of the response of Jesus. He questioned that Moses had given the manna, whereas God should have received the proper credit.<sup>29</sup>

The response of Jesus points out something else as well. The new age which He inaugurated was not one defined in purely physical terms, on the level of the flesh, but in terms of that which was real and eternal.<sup>30</sup>

Jesus thus corrected a two-fold misunderstanding on the part of those who questioned Him. In the first place, as Bernard points out, Moses did not give the manna, but God acting through him. Secondly, the manna, in a sense ἄρτος οὐρανοῦ, was not the true bread of God.<sup>31</sup>

Thus the bread which Moses gave was not the true bread, as Barrett notes, nor the law which he gave the true law. Both were parabolic of the true bread and the true law which God gave in His Son, who is Life.

Manna was in fact a valuable type of the bread of life; it came down from God to undeserving sinners who were preserved and nourished by it. But only in a crude way could it be called 'bread from heaven.' It was itself perishable, and those who ate of it remained mortal and liable to hunger.<sup>32</sup>

Lightfoot also states that Jesus clears up the two matters at hand. First, it was not Moses who had given the manna, but God. Second, God now gave in the person of His Son not a temporary, perishable manna which only satisfied a physical hunger, but the bread of God which came down from heaven and gave life to the world. Even at this point Jesus personified the bread, but He had not yet made the

absolute claim for Himself.<sup>33</sup>

A Lutheran professor, W. H. T. Dau, also dealt with the two-fold response of Jesus. Christ met the challenge of His questioners, Dau points out, with a two-fold denial of fact. It had not been Moses who had given them the bread to which they referred, for his power had been limited to that of an agent who receives both power and authority from a higher source. Nor was the bread which Moses gave the true bread, for it could only satisfy physical wants.<sup>34</sup>

#### The Request of the Crowd, John 6:34

One would do well to remember that all bread was the gift of God, yet this particular bread was not only heavenly bread, for the manna had been that, but also that which gave life in addition to physical nourishment. That it gave life was one of its first characteristics; another was that God offered it not only to a particular nation, as the manna to Israel, but to all men. So those who had referred to the manna likely welcomed the thought of Jesus that the true bread of God was that which both came down from heaven and gave life. They had awaited just that bread because of their acquaintance with the association of manna with heavenly food. Moses had given manna; the Messiah would give even more. The crowd wanted this bread, and they even ask for a perpetual supply: πάντες δὲς ὑμῶν τὸν ἄρτον τούτων.<sup>35</sup>

And so in response to the first question of the crowd, Jesus had dealt with the true bread which came down from heaven and which gave life to those who ate of it. Jesus Himself had come down, and therefore He is that Bread which comes down and gives life, as He will tell

the crowd in response to their request. In the discourse itself, Jesus is that Bread in the flesh. He comes in obedience to the will of the Father, an obedience which will lead to His death.<sup>36</sup>

#### The Wilderness Imagery

The preface to the discourse is important for Glasson because of its wilderness imagery. After Jesus had fed the five thousand, the people recognize in Him the second Moses and try to make Him a king. He was for them a Messiah along Mosaic lines, fulfilling the rabbinic expectation that the Messiah would repeat the signs of Moses. Jesus told them, however, that the gift of manna in the wilderness came from God, not from Moses. The manna had not been the true bread from heaven now available in Him, the Bread of life.<sup>37</sup>

The return of the manna had indeed been a feature of Jewish eschatological expectation. But for John, Jesus had fulfilled that expectation in the present. The Bread of life was thus the antitype of the earlier wilderness bread from heaven, and this new Bread was offered to all who came in faith.<sup>38</sup>

John also showed that the true Bread of life was not the Torah, but Jesus Himself, and he contrasts the true bread found in Christ with the Judaistic manna.<sup>39</sup> Yet he is concerned with something far more important than the mere fulfillment of a messianic sign in the feeding miracle. The spiritual bread treated in the discourse is far more important than any such miracle, for in the discourse, Jesus is the Bread of life, and John then develops the concepts of mutual indwelling and the eucharistic associations of the bread. The disci-

ples live because of Christ and Christ because of the Father. This goes far beyond all Mosaic or other messianic expectations.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 335.

<sup>2</sup>Raymond Brown, The Gospel according to John (I-XII), in The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 29, 273.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>4</sup>R. H. Lightfoot, St. John's Gospel. A Commentary (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), p. 158.

<sup>5</sup>Brown, p. 264.

<sup>6</sup>Dodd, pp. 334ff.

<sup>7</sup>J. H. Bernard, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John, in The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 1, 190.

<sup>8</sup>C. K. Barrett, The Gospel according to St. John (London: S.P.C.K., 1955), p. 237.

<sup>9</sup>Brown, p. 264.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>11</sup>Bernard, p. 191.

<sup>12</sup>Barrett, p. 238.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>14</sup>George Stevens, The Johannine Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), pp. 111f.

<sup>15</sup>Dodd, p. 90.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>17</sup>Brown, pp. 262ff.

<sup>18</sup>Bernard, p. 194.

<sup>19</sup>Lightfoot, p. 159.

<sup>20</sup>Bernard, p. 182.

- <sup>21</sup> Barrett, p. 239.
- <sup>22</sup> Dodd, p. 301.
- <sup>23</sup> Brown, p. 266.
- <sup>24</sup> Dodd, p. 337.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 83.
- <sup>26</sup> Stevens, p. 159.
- <sup>27</sup> Brown, p. 262.
- <sup>28</sup> D. M. Stanley, "The Bread of Life," Worship, 32 (September 1958), 484.
- <sup>29</sup> Bernard, p. 195.
- <sup>30</sup> Dodd, p. 336.
- <sup>31</sup> Bernard, pp. 194f.
- <sup>32</sup> Barrett, pp. 240f.
- <sup>33</sup> Lightfoot, p. 159.
- <sup>34</sup> W. H. T. Dau, "The Eucharistic Interpretation of John 6," Theological Quarterly, 19 (April 1915), 73.
- <sup>35</sup> Bernard, pp. 195ff.
- <sup>36</sup> Barrett, p. 70.
- <sup>37</sup> T. F. Glasson, Moses in the Fourth Gospel (Naperville, Illinois: Allenson, 1963), p. 45.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 107.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 90f.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

## CHAPTER IV

### JOHN 6:35-50. THE FIRST PART OF THE DISCOURSE

The reference in the preface to a physical manna linked to temporal needs gives Jesus the opportunity to contrast it with the spiritual nourishment for the permanent needs of the soul which the believer can receive through Him.<sup>1</sup> Jesus immediately corrects two errors stemming from the preface. The bread of life is not merely a commodity which He supplies. He is that Bread of life, and to eat of that bread means that one never hungers and eats again.<sup>2</sup>

In the preface Jesus had spoken of the bread coming down from God out of heaven to give life to the world. If one recalls that the Son of man was the only one who had come down from the Father (John 3:13), then one may have suspected before this point that Jesus refers to Himself as that Bread. But the crowd still does not understand, and thus Jesus must make specific identification of Himself as the life-giving Bread.<sup>3</sup>

#### The Assertion. John 6:35

The words  $\epsilon\gamma\acute{\omega} \epsilon\dot{\iota}\mu\iota \delta\acute{\omicron} \alpha\lambda\epsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma \tau\eta\varsigma \kappa\omega\eta\eta\varsigma$  tell the listeners that Jesus is the very gift He brings. While life may here be qualitative, Jesus also seems to indicate that He as that Bread has the power to bring life into being, for life proceeds from life.<sup>4</sup> He reveals in this saying that He is the life-giving Bread about which He has spoken in the preface. He does not merely give the gift which He brings from heaven: He is that gift, and the one who receives will never again

hunger or thirst.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that Jesus is the life-giving Bread means, according to Brown's sapiential emphasis, that He reveals the truth and comes as the divine Teacher to nourish men. In this claim as the personification of divine revelation, He moves beyond any Old Testament preparation.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus now moves into an explicit announcement of His personal claims. Those who were in dialogue with Him were prepared for the concept of heavenly bread, but nothing could have prepared them for such a mystical saying as  $\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\iota\mu\ \delta\ \alpha\epsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \psi\omega\eta\varsigma$ ; or for the claims which that saying involved. Such a pronouncement did not carry conviction to them. They were looking for a sign patterned after the provision of manna but greater to a degree befitting the second Deliverer, the One greater than Moses.<sup>7</sup>

The  $\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\iota\mu$  occurs seven times in John. When used--as here--with a predicate, it reflects Jesus' dealings with men rather than revealing any essence. Jesus as the Bread of life nourishes men with His presence.<sup>8</sup> It is true, according to Dodd, that if the story is taken at face value the words may mean no more than "It is I." Yet in view of the importance of this formula in John--as opposed to the synoptic parallels--one should more probably understand the equivalent of the divine name, "I am," of the Old Testament.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus also goes on from this point. He has identified the Bread which comes down from heaven as Himself, the Son of man. He has identified Himself as that Bread of life which delivers men from hunger and thirst. He also now indicates that men take this Bread by coming to and believing in Him. Paradoxically, however, this believing and

coming are not within the power and will of man alone. They are both completely dependent upon God's will and power.<sup>10</sup>

For Stevens, believing on and coming to Jesus are identical, and both of these phrases are equivalent to eating the Bread of life, as both the context (verses 33,50,51) and the figurative use of hunger and thirst indicate.<sup>11</sup> To believe is to have the Son, to receive Him, to come to Him, to enter into the possession of eternal life with Him. Such functions and effects are impossible in any faith "not in its very nature a trustful surrender of the soul to Jesus, a self-renouncing acceptance of His person, and an entrance into life-fellowship with Him."<sup>12</sup>

And so in this opening verse of the discourse Jesus completes the theme that manna is not a food of eternal life. The fathers in the Old Testament who ate it died, but those who eat the Bread of life, Christ Himself, never die. He is not only the Giver: He is the eternal βρωσιν.<sup>13</sup>

#### John 6:37-40

In these verses Jesus recognizes that the unbelief of those who are listening causes a rejection of His offer of Himself as the Bread of life. Fortunately for the entire history of salvation, however, man cannot entirely hinder that work of God in Christ. Jesus obeys completely the will of the Father, even to the point of His death on the cross, and God is determined that man should be saved.<sup>14</sup>

In verse 38 (as in verse 40) coming to Jesus is the necessary condition for understanding what He is. John may also hint at one possible implication of the καταβίβηκα ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. The one

who comes from God possesses uniquely the visio Dei which gives eternal life, and thus the one who sees Jesus has eternal life. This descent of the Bread of life from heaven means, among other things, Christ's mediation of the visio Dei to a world living in darkness, a theme consistent with John's theme of light and darkness.<sup>15</sup>

In this section Christ furthers the claims of the preface. Here He says that He represents in this earthly sphere the mind and will of the Father, and that He is the One who will raise men from the dead on the last day (verses 38,40).<sup>16</sup> Such a reference to the last day stands in close association with the Johannine allusions to the parousia and to the association of both resurrection and judgment with it. In this first part of the discourse the statement that Jesus will raise up at the last day is repeated three times, all in reference to those who are renewed through faith and union in Him (verses 39,40,44; cf. 54).<sup>17</sup>

In this section there is also present the "now" and the "not yet" aspects of eternal life, parallel to that of John 5:24-29. The one whom the Father draws to come to and believe in His Son; the one who eats the flesh and drinks the blood of the Son of man, he remains in the Lord and the Lord in him. He has eternal life already, yet the Lord will raise him up to life at the last day.<sup>18</sup>

In verse 40 John affirms the assurance of the resurrection along with the promise of eternal life. This certainty of the resurrection, as Stevens continues, does not seem especially connected with the concept "eternal," but more with the whole concept of "eternal life," which for John is a spiritual fellowship with Christ.<sup>19</sup>

The listeners encountered real difficulty with the words of Jesus, particularly because of the claims in the statement  $\bar{\epsilon}\gamma\omega\ \bar{\epsilon}\iota\pi\epsilon\ \bar{\sigma}\ \bar{\alpha}\rho\tau\omicron\varsigma\ \dots\ \bar{\epsilon}\kappa\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \sigma\upsilon\beta\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$  (verses 33,35). They could have easily accepted the idea of heavenly bread, as their fathers had accepted the manna from heaven, but these particular words of Jesus seemed to imply that His manner of birth was not like that of ordinary men. He had come down from heaven.<sup>20</sup>

The argument raised against such claims centers in the fact that one whose parents are known cannot very well have come down from heaven. The Jewish listeners knew both Mary and Joseph and thus wondered how Jesus could make such a claim. John may be giving an ironic allusion to the virgin birth at this point. Nowhere in his gospel does he affirm belief in this doctrine, even though it is probable both that he knew and accepted it. If those who now objected so strongly had known the truth about the parentage of Jesus, they would now have to recognize that He had in fact come down from heaven and that His claim was totally justified.<sup>21</sup>

Because they thought they knew His human origins, however, these Jews object to Jesus' description of Himself as being the Source and Giver of all life, in contrast to both Moses and the manna. Only in the beginning of the next section, which follows the reiteration and amplification of this section, will Jesus reveal that the food which He now offers is in fact His flesh.<sup>22</sup>

Reassertion. John 6:42-50

To the objection, Jesus continues to speak of Himself as the

Bread of life, and although this saying has given great offense, He reasserts even more strongly that He is the Bearer of spiritual life. He alone is the Way to the Father, alone the Giver of life (verse 44). Those who really hear God speaking through Him recognize that His message is divine, and thus faith in Him is the one condition of that life which He gives (verses 45,47).<sup>23</sup>

Jesus indicates that He is the one fundamental source of eternal life, and that faith is the one fundamental and essential link between Jesus and man. Thus on a basic level, according to Worden, the one who has faith has eternal life (verse 47), because belief and faith in Jesus means union with Him as the Source of life.<sup>24</sup>

Beginning with verse 42, this section of reassertion makes a number of contrasts. The food now offered stands in sharp contrast to the physical food of earlier verses (26,27) or to the manna provided only for a temporary need in the wilderness (31-33). The Lord's true kingship stands in sharp contrast to the political kingship desired by the multitude when they see in Him a second Deliverer (15). So now the outward knowledge of the Lord stands in sharp contrast with the true knowledge of Him as the One who reveals the will of the Father, a knowledge necessary to faith in Him (verse 36).<sup>25</sup>

In this portion of the first section John also gives one of the three sources of testimony which awaken faith in the hearer. Here he uses Jesus' testimony concerning Himself as evidence to give grounds for the faith of the Christian. Only the Son who comes down from the bosom of the Father can adequately reveal that Father (verse 46) and the revelation which He gives also attests that those who are recep-

tive to divine things believe and come to Christ (verse 45).<sup>26</sup>

Only in reply to the objections to His claims does Christ assert that His relationship with God is absolutely unique. For one thing, He is related to God in such a way that anyone who really knows God is led by that knowledge to receive Him as well. For another, their fellowship is unique.<sup>27</sup>

In this gospel, as alluded to before (verses 37-40), there is an emphasis on the fact that the believer already has eternal life. But although this life is a present possession, it is not complete until the last day, a combination of references to present and future which corresponds substantially with the two-fold representation of the kingdom of God in the synoptics.<sup>28</sup>

In verses 48-50 John clarifies the meaning of Jesus' mission in and to the world. He has come down from heaven to bring God's new covenant with man to completion. To do this, He has come as the Bread of life, whose efficacy proves the superiority of that new covenant when compared and contrasted with the manna of the Old Testament covenant with Moses.<sup>29</sup>

Once again (verse 49) Jesus points out to the crowd that although their fathers had eaten manna in the wilderness, they nevertheless died. For Jesus--even as He refers to the earlier scriptural reference in verse 31--any bread which has actually come down from heaven would not permit a man to die.<sup>30</sup>

According to Barrett, the arguments of verses 32-35 appear once again. The manna, even though it was quite miraculous, no more ended human hunger and death than did ordinary bread. The heavenly bread

about which Jesus now speaks, the Bread of life which He both gives and is, gives eternal life and fulfills every spiritual need on the part of those who eat it.<sup>31</sup>

Bernard treats these closing verses of this section in a similar manner. The manna which had nourished those of Israel who ate it in the desert did not free them from physical death, and was thus like ordinary bread in spite of its divine origin. The Bread of life which Jesus offers does not deal with physical nourishment or death, but with spiritual nourishment, such that the one who keeps on feeding (remains in spiritual touch with Jesus) finds both security from spiritual death and eternal life.<sup>32</sup>

#### Thematic Nature of John 6:35-50

The entire discourse is interesting because of the possible interpretations. Brown's commentary on John 1-12 summarizes the major positions and cites the major authorities espousing them. It is worthwhile, even in a survey such as this and in anticipation of the final section, to list the theories of interpretation:

- (a) The whole of the discourse (35-58) refers to the revelation by and in Jesus or his teaching. . .
- (b) Only this first part has this sapiential theme, but in 51-58 the bread refers to the eucharistic flesh of Jesus. . .
- (c) The whole discourse (35-58) refers to eucharistic bread. . .
- (d) The flesh refers both to revelation and the eucharistic flesh of Jesus.

Commentators differ in their reactions to this thematic problem, and it is noteworthy that most Roman Catholic writers seem to center in the unity of the discourse in the eucharistic theme. Brown, however, himself a Roman Catholic writer, accepts and defends a fifth theory

of interpretation. The first part, for Brown, has the sapiential theme as its major emphasis, with the eucharistic theme present in a lesser degree, while the second part deals with the eucharistic flesh of Jesus. Brown's arguments are convincing and valid.

To demonstrate the sapiential theme in 35-50, Brown notes that the basic reaction required to Jesus' presentation of Himself as the Bread of life is belief (verses 35,36,40,47) or coming to Him (a synonymous term in verses 35,37,44,45). Only once in this entire section is the requirement given that one must eat the bread (verse 50), the emphasis which does occur in the second part of the discourse.

That differences exist in the two sections, Brown continues, is readily demonstrated. Some Jewish circles had long interpreted manna as signifying the divine word or instruction. To a Jewish listener there would have been adequate preparation for understanding the Bread of life or the Bread from heaven as divine revelation given in and by Jesus. But in verses 51-58, the Bread of life is identified by Jesus as His flesh, and thus a eucharistic theme seems apparent.

In further consideration of the sapiential theme, the coming of the Messiah had some associations with the Passover, and thus the yearly Passover meal had certain characteristics which anticipated the messianic banquet. At the final Passover of His life Jesus would institute the eucharist as His own anticipation of that banquet; yet in this chapter of John the banquet for the five thousand was messianic in an unrecognized way. The multiplication of loaves was a sign that Wisdom had come to give bread (wisdom itself) to all who sought it.

In regard to the sacramental theme in verses 35-50, the mention

of the manna in verse 31 would have had immediate eucharistic associations for any early Christian audience. Even Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (10:1-4) had warned his readers about the eucharistic cup and bread by reminding them of the example of their fathers, who had eaten manna in the desert and who had received water from the rock. Thus the early Christian would associate the eucharist with manna, even though strict eating had not yet been required in this part of the discourse.

For Brown, the juxtaposition of hunger and thirst in the opening assertion of Christ would also seem very strange if the discourse dealt only with bread. This is not an impossible situation even if the bread refers only to revelation (Sirach 24:21 LXX, οὐ ἐσθίωντές γε ἔτι πενῶσθεσιν, καὶ οὐ πίνοντές γε ἔτι διψήσθεσιν.), although it would make more sense if one posits already at this point a reference to the eucharistic flesh and blood, eating and drinking.<sup>33</sup>

A Roman Catholic View. Worden

Reference to another Roman Catholic writer may point out the tendency toward a eucharistic interpretation of the entire discourse.

The following quotations are from Worden's article.

The discourse is one whole, and the whole eucharistic, not because of the words in themselves, but because John is writing fully conscious that the only bread of which the church thinks, as soon as bread is mentioned in connection with Jesus, is that bread which Jesus took, and pronouncing the blessing broke.

John is not speaking of two things: first that act of believing in Jesus which might metaphorically be called eating the bread of life; and second, that eating of the flesh and drinking of the blood of Christ which is called the eucharist. He is speaking of the eating of the bread of life which is Jesus,

flesh and blood, an eating which must be an act of faith,  
if he who eats this bread will live forever.<sup>34</sup>

The difference from other commentators may well appear in this final quote, where Worden makes reference to believing in and coming to Jesus.

When John speaks of the eucharist, he is concerned first to insist that we must never lose sight of the truth that salvation is through knowledge, namely that experiential knowledge which John prefers to call faith, an act demanding the conscious submission of the individual to the divine attraction. Jesus is the bread of life; but it is only he who comes to Jesus who shall not hunger, and he who believes in him who shall never thirst.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>George Stevens, The Johannine Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), p. 159.

<sup>2</sup>C. K. Barrett, The Gospel according to St. John (London: S.P.C.K., 1955), p. 241.

<sup>3</sup>Raymond Brown, The Gospel according to John (I-XII), in The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 29, 275.

<sup>4</sup>R. H. Lightfoot, St. John's Gospel. A Commentary (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), p. 167.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>6</sup>Brown, p. 275.

<sup>7</sup>J. H. Bernard, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John, in The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 1, 197.

<sup>8</sup>Brown, p. 269.

<sup>9</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 345.

<sup>10</sup>Barrett, p. 235.

<sup>11</sup>Stevens, p. 227.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>13</sup>Dodd, p. 338.

- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 432f.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 338.
- <sup>16</sup>Stevens, p. 112.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 340.
- <sup>18</sup>Lightfoot, p. 168.
- <sup>19</sup>Stevens, p. 324.
- <sup>20</sup>Bernard, p. 202.
- <sup>21</sup>Barrett, pp. 244f.
- <sup>22</sup>Lightfoot, p. 14.
- <sup>23</sup>Stevens, p. 159.
- <sup>24</sup>F. Worden, "The Holy Eucharist in St. John," Scripture, 15 (October 1963), 101.
- <sup>25</sup>Lightfoot, p. 168.
- <sup>26</sup>Stevens, pp. 235f.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 112.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 313.
- <sup>29</sup>D. M. Stanley, "The Bread of Life," Worship, 32 (September 1958), 486.
- <sup>30</sup>Brown, p. 277.
- <sup>31</sup>Barrett, p. 246.
- <sup>32</sup>Bernard, p. 206.
- <sup>33</sup>Brown, pp. 272ff.
- <sup>34</sup>Worden, 16 (January 1964), 8.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., 15, 101.

## CHAPTER V

### JOHN 6:51-58. THE SECOND PART OF THE DISCOURSE

#### Thematic Material

##### The Position of Raymond Brown

If one uses Brown's exposition of the first part of the discourse to clarify the thematic material, then it is only consistent to take a closer look at his comments on the thematic material in this section of the discourse as well. Brown--as do most of the other commentators--states that this section deals with the eucharist, for two very impressive reasons. The first is the emphasis on eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus. For Brown, this can in no way be a metaphor for accepting His revelation. The second is the formula in verse 51. Since John does not report any words of Jesus over the bread and the cup at the moment of the last supper, it is even possible that in this verse Jesus speaks the Johannine form of the words of institution. In this section, then, the eucharistic theme which was only secondary in verses 35-50 now becomes exclusive. Eternal life now comes from eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus rather than as a result of believing in Him. Now Jesus is the dominant Agent and Source of salvation, rather than the Father who brought men and gave them to Jesus in the earlier section.<sup>1</sup>

Brown even goes so far as to propose that this section may be from the Johannine narrative of the institution of the eucharist. This paper has not concerned itself with any form-critical discussion

of these texts, but many recent commentators do view this section of the discourse as a later addition to elucidate the reference to the eucharist in the previous section. Thus Brown's proposition is an interesting one, and he supports it with the following evidence: (1) This would explain the absence of an account of the institution in Chapter 13, the point where the synoptics would place it; (2) Verse 51 is very similar to an institutional formula; (3) The clear reference to the eucharist in these verses would not create misunderstanding at the last supper.<sup>2</sup>

As Brown states, the original discourse (35-50) stressed the necessity of belief in Jesus. The new discourse (51-58) emphasizes the necessity of eating and drinking the eucharistic flesh and blood. The juxtaposition of the two forms of the Bread of life discourse represents Jesus' two-fold presence to all who believe in word (35-50) and sacrament (51-58).<sup>3</sup>

#### The Position of George Stevens

One commentator who disagrees strongly with any eucharistic stress is George Stevens. He feels that this section of the discourse culminates in the repeated assertion of Christ that He is the living Bread from heaven and that the life-giving bread is His flesh, which He will give for the life of the world. Stevens comments that the seeming reference to the death of Christ is favored by (1) the future action of  $\theta\acute{\omega}\sigma\omega$  in verse 51; (2) the linkage of  $\pi\acute{\iota}\epsilon\tau\epsilon \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma \tau\omicron \zeta\eta\upsilon\alpha$  with death; and (3) by the support of such passages as John 1:29, 3:14, and I John 4:10, yet he considers all of this evidence to

be of dubious validity.<sup>4</sup>

For Stevens the giving of Christ's flesh for man is more likely a symbolic expression for His self-communication to the believer, rather than an assertion in regard to His sacrificial death. This is consistent with the over-all view of Stevens regarding the Bread of life discourse, for one of his major emphases is the mutual indwelling of Christ with the believer.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Traditional Lutheran Position

One interesting discovery of this research was that the traditional Lutheran position denied the eucharistic interpretation of this section of the discourse. The article by W. H. T. Dau, "The Eucharistic Interpretation of John 6," may serve to illustrate this fact, and the interested reader may also note the article by J. T. Mueller listed in the bibliography.

For Dau, the major thought of the entire discourse is that believing in the Son of man as descended from heaven, accepting Him as a gift of God for the hunger of the soul in a perishing world, and placing Him confidently before all else that God has given sinners for salvation is absolutely necessary for receiving eternal life.<sup>6</sup>

The eucharistic view is indefensible because (1) While Christ speaks in a metaphorical manner of eating and drinking His flesh and blood, He did not institute the sacrament until a year later; (2) There is no consideration here--as there is in other eucharistic references--of an unworthy reception; (3) Here such eating and drinking is absolutely necessary for salvation; and (4) No external elements are mentioned.<sup>7</sup>

## Flesh, Life, and Death. John 6:51

If one accepts the eucharistic interpretation of this section (which in no way detracts from the non-eucharistic theology present in these verses), then one must note the major concepts of flesh, life, and death in verse 51.

## Flesh

It is first interesting that in this verse, where Jesus speaks of the bread as His flesh, He emphasizes once again that He has come down from heaven. In John 1:14 the Word became flesh as it entered the world, and it is this same incarnate Word that is now given to man in the form of living bread.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus had spoken of the Bread of life as that which came down from heaven and of Himself as that living Bread, both living and giving life to all who ate it. Now He speaks of this bread as His flesh, and of the feeding in terms of eating and drinking His flesh and blood.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus not only creates in a miraculous way and then gives the food which man needs; He is that food. He gives His flesh and blood for the life of the world. As Barrett points out, John knows that apart from the context of the carrying out of God's will in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the eucharist--the reception of that flesh and blood--is a meaningless ceremony.<sup>10</sup> Until this point the words of Jesus might have seemed only metaphorical or symbolic. The person of Jesus, received by faith, is the means by which the believer receives eternal life. But now Jesus shatters any such views of His

words and asserts strongly that the Bread of life is His flesh.<sup>11</sup>

Dodd says that a Christian reader could not easily miss the eucharistic reference in this verse. The very expressions which John uses, *Ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς . . . καὶ ὁ ἄρτος δὲ ὃν ἔγω δώσω ἡ σὰρξ μου ἔσται ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς*, are an almost expanded transcription of the Pauline words of institution (I Corinthians 11:24).<sup>12</sup> Ruland agrees. These words echo the parallels in both the synoptics and in Paul, and in all of these--including this verse of the discourse--bread, the indicatory formula, and the "for you" with all its redemptive overtones are present.<sup>13</sup>

This verse is really nothing more than the logical consequence of all that Jesus had been saying. He first repeats *Ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς*. But if He is both the Bread and the Giver of that bread, then He gives His own flesh and blood. Curiously enough, Jesus never gets to how this can be, yet He will state in this section the essential meaning of the phrases *φαγεῖν σάρκα* and *πιεῖν αἷμα* in more familiar terms, namely the union with Christ by mutual indwelling.<sup>14</sup> Nor does anyone object here and ask how this can be, although there are objections to come. What Jesus has said is surely enough to lead the attentive listener to seek further clarification.<sup>15</sup>

#### Life

Verse 51 also concerns itself with the concept of life. The Bread of life is primarily that Bread which gives life, as in verse 35. But in this verse the Bread of life becomes the living Bread, which has life in itself. The second meaning is tied in closely with

the first. Since life can only proceed from life, that which gives life must itself be living.<sup>16</sup>

This life has both present and future qualities. One who responds to the word of Christ may enjoy that life in the present, yet the same power and authority which assures the believer during his earthly life will also raise the dead to a life to come. Christ is the Life-giver on both levels, and the primary concern is that life is Christ's gift of self.<sup>17</sup> The power of Christ to give this life is closely related to His own personal dependence on the Father. It is the Father who gives even His Son the power and authority to judge and to give life, and who gives that life itself.<sup>18</sup>

#### Death

This verse finally concerns itself with the concept of death. Christ's momentous statement makes it quite certain that one must not understand verses 32-35 in any sense which would imply that the Bread of life which Jesus gives costs Him nothing. On the contrary, that gift involves His death.<sup>19</sup>

The bread which Jesus now supplies is His flesh given for the life of the world. This seems to be a plain reference to the sacrificial death of Jesus, but one can gain no precision about the manner or significance of that sacrifice at this point.<sup>20</sup>

In verse 32 the listeners had heard that it was the Father who gave the bread from heaven in the sense that the Son came from the Father. Now that Jesus has identified the bread with His flesh, He must give it Himself. Jesus voluntarily gives His life in death (10:18).

Because that death is voluntary, eucharistic participation in His flesh is possible for the one who eats and drinks the flesh and blood.<sup>21</sup>

Reaction. John 6:52

As difficult as the Jewish listeners had found the thought in verse 41 that Jesus was the heavenly Bread for which they had asked, they now encounter an even greater difficulty in the unusual suggestion that Jesus was now to give them His flesh to eat. The difficulty was real even if they could see that the flesh on which they were to feed represented the whole humanity of Jesus. They could not understand how any human being could give his nature to another, even on a spiritual level.<sup>22</sup>

Reassertion. John 6:53-58

Once more Jesus reacts to a question not with explanation, but by reassertion and by the addition of the concept of blood. This gives further emphasis to the death of Jesus and alludes to the eucharist, but John's main thought in the ensuing verses is Jesus' mission from the Father and the mutual indwelling of Christ and the believer.<sup>23</sup>

Stevens is consistent in this section. He notes three interpretations of one's securing spiritual life by eating and drinking the flesh and blood of the Son of man: (1) reference to the Lord's Supper; (2) reference to the propitiatory death of Christ; (3) reference to the flesh and blood understood in an ethical or mystical sense.<sup>24</sup> As he considers these interpretations, he posits the living appropriation of Christ to the heart as the primary meaning. Flesh and blood are

symbols of Christ's self, and to partake of these is to appropriate Him in a spiritual way by union with Him.<sup>25</sup>

While John yields nothing to normal Jewish sensibilities and insists on the reality of the flesh and blood, he nevertheless attributes no magical powers to this reception and nowhere equates this sacrament with pagan mystery. Verses 53-56 promise the gift of life to the one who eats and drinks the flesh and blood of Jesus, but this also follows the necessity of belief stressed in verses 35-50. The two are not contradictory, but teach that the gift of eternal life in Christ comes in a believing reception of the flesh and blood.<sup>26</sup>

Jesus' reassertions are again prompted by the fact that the Jews cannot understand what He is saying. He now affirms that actual participation in, true eating and drinking of, His flesh and blood is essential for the believer to have or to gain eternal life. The believer who receives flesh and blood dwells in Christ and Christ in him, as Christ dwells with the Father and the Father with Him.<sup>27</sup>

#### Verse 53

It is significant that in this verse Jesus calls upon the hearer to eat His flesh and to drink His blood. For Lightfoot, a reference to the rite of the eucharist is inescapable, and the phrases φαγῶν σάρκα and πινῶν αἶμα are more definite than the phrases used in the synoptic gospels and in I Corinthians in reference to the sacrament. This partaking of flesh and blood also becomes, in addition to belief in Him (verse 47), a condition of eternal life and of being raised on the last day. When one so partakes, a reciprocal indwelling is estab-

lished between Christ and the believer, just as Christ lives in the Father and the Father in Him through His fulfillment of the Father's will. So the believer partaking of this incarnate Life now lives forever.<sup>28</sup>

The bread of heaven is now the flesh of Jesus which gives life to the world, life which is not available elsewhere. Two new points also appear in this verse. First, Jesus uses the title  $\delta \text{ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου}$  in reference to Himself. Second, He adds the requirement of drinking His blood to the statement about the flesh of the Son of man, here used in reference to the eucharist.<sup>29</sup>

In point of fact, the answer of Jesus in this verse is even more difficult than before. The drinking of the blood which He now adds to the eating of the flesh would be especially startling to a good Jew, for whom the blood of animals was ritually unclean.<sup>30</sup> The Old Testament associated blood with horrendous things, with brutal slaughter, hostile action, apocalyptic carnage (Genesis 9:4, Zechariah 11:9, Jeremiah 46:10, Ezekiel 39:17). If Jesus' words are then to have any sort of favorable meaning, they must refer to the eucharist.<sup>31</sup>

#### Verse 54

This verse again deals with the two types of eschatology. The one who eats Jesus' flesh has eternal life already (realized eschatology), but Jesus also promises to raise that one on the last day (final eschatology). John had also implied final eschatology in verse 53 by referring to eating the flesh of the Son of man, for the Son of man is also an eschatological figure.<sup>32</sup>

John believes that the believer will enter into eternal life at the resurrection, but even more important for him is the fact that the believer already has and enjoys eternal life. This present reality of life is a consequence of the final reality, and in both cases life comes to the believer only because the word of Christ has power and authority from the Father.<sup>33</sup>

Blanchard draws an interesting conclusion from this verse. The same terminology is used here to describe the one who has eternal life as in verse 47. Believing and eating are both continuous actions, and both seem to refer to the same thing. Both bring about the same result, eternal life. It would seem, then, that believing in Christ and eating His flesh are identical actions.<sup>34</sup>

Stevens is consistent with his non-eucharistic interpretation as he discusses this verse. Since Jesus speaks of a present and continuous eating and drinking; since it is difficult to imagine Him referring to the last supper so far in advance of its establishment; since He uses terms so mystical and so widely different from those actually used at the institution, this cannot refer to the eucharist.<sup>35</sup>

The verb *τρῶγειν* in this verse is also interesting. In secular Greek one used *τρῶγειν* to speak of animals, though from the time of Herodotus to speak also of human eating. It seems likely that with this verb John attempts to stress the realism of the flesh and blood, even in the eucharistic setting.<sup>36</sup> John may also answer both Gnostic and Docetic attacks on the reality of the incarnation. He warns his readers against the dangers of a crude and materialistic interpretation of the eucharist. Against the Gnostics, he emphasizes the reality of

Christ's flesh and blood; against the Docetics, he stresses the need for faith to appropriate both flesh and blood for the soul. The one who now partakes of this true food gains abiding union with Christ.<sup>37</sup>

Verse 55

In this verse Christ's flesh and blood are what food and drink should actually be. They fulfill the ideal, archetypal function of food and drink in giving eternal life to those who partake of them.<sup>38</sup>

Ἀληθείας, ordinarily used to distinguish between heavenly reality and its natural counterpart, or between the New Testament and its Old Testament counterpart, would not be accurate here, for Jesus in no way contrasts His flesh and blood with a natural or Old Testament counterpart. He insists instead on the true value of His flesh and blood as food and drink.<sup>39</sup>

This verse may also be interesting in terms of the crucifixion, when both water and blood come from Christ's side (19:34-35). In Chapter 6 John nowhere defines how Christ could give His flesh and blood to men, though one might suspect from verse 51 the death which was to come. But now the meaning becomes clear. Eternal life in man depends on Christ's offering Himself in death to fulfill God's will.<sup>40</sup>

The βρωσας which occurred in verse 27 also appears in this verse. This is not Christ's βρωσας, but rather that which He gives in His flesh and blood for the life of the world. Christ is able to give life because He came down from heaven to do the will of the Father who had sent Him, and it is the will of that Father that whoever sees and believes in the Son should have eternal life. Because Christ's

own  $\beta\rho\omega\sigma\upsilon$  is to do the will of the Father, He is able to give Himself as the  $\beta\rho\omega\sigma\upsilon$  which remains forever.<sup>41</sup>

#### Verses 56-57

In these verses Christ's flesh and blood are true food and drink to the one who receives because a complete and mutual indwelling between that receiver and Christ comes about through them.<sup>42</sup> If Christ is the Food and Drink of eternal life, then once again He has taken His hearers far beyond normal messianic expectation. One can properly speak of union or mutual indwelling only with God, through which one enjoys eternal life. Thus Christ ascribes to Himself specifically divine functions and prerogatives.<sup>43</sup>

If one compares verses 56 and 54, having eternal life is equal to being in close communion with Jesus, the believer remaining in Christ and Christ in the believer. In the further explication such remaining in Christ becomes a participation in the unique relationship between the Father and the Son.<sup>44</sup>

All of the commentators pick up the theme of mutual indwelling, even those who posit the eucharistic theme in this section. Christ's spiritual food was to do the will of the Sender and to complete His work (John 4:34), but man cannot receive this food unless he shares in the humanity of Christ by faith. This, then, is the  $\beta\rho\omega\sigma\upsilon$  which Christ gives and which lasts forever. Bernard notes that this mystical doctrine of the mutual indwelling of Christ and man is the core of John's Gospel.<sup>45</sup>

As Stevens points out, it is in accordance with God's very nature

as the absolutely living One to give life. He gives this spiritual life to the believer through His Son, who lives because of the Father by reason of that unique and essential relationship which exists between them. The Father is the absolute Source of life; He gives life to the Son; the Son gives life in turn to the believer.<sup>46</sup>

Dodd gives considerable treatment to the theme of the union between the Father, the Son, and the believer. The expression, "I in the Father and the Father in Me," expresses a unity so close and so unique that to see the Son is almost the same as the visio Dei, and the relationship described in this way is brought about by an activity which is that of the Father working through the Son, a relationship which is not static, but a dynamic activity of the Father in the Son. One may describe that relationship, says Dodd, in terms of Christ's obedience to the will and word of the Father or to an imitation of His works, but it is basically more than that. It is rather the sharing of one life, which in this case is eternal or absolute.<sup>47</sup>

Such dependence on the Father, Dodd continues, is of the essence of the sonship of Christ. It is not that the Son possesses anything inherently or independent of the Father, for He depends absolutely on Him.<sup>48</sup> In fact, it is only because of this identity of will and purpose of the Father and the Son that Christ brings to completion the works of that Father. This rather precise and emphatic statement of the role of Christ as the Life-giver follows closely upon the bold statement that eternal life involves, even is, the union with Christ by mutual indwelling.<sup>49</sup> The overall effect of this is that the relationship between Father and Son--as John affirms and displays it as

the final revelation between God and man in the incarnate Word--now comes into being in the believer by knowledge, vision, mutual indwelling, and the sharing of life.<sup>50</sup>

Such life is the essential property of the Father, as Barrett notes, which is then mediated to and through the Son so that the Son may give life as well. Jesus had no independent life or authority or power. Only because He has this unique relationship with the Father can the believer receive life by remaining in a unique relationship with Him.<sup>51</sup>

Bernard notes in verse 57 a transferring of the metaphor used by Jesus. No longer is eating and drinking the flesh and blood primary, but rather the feeding which is seen as personal communion with Him. Just as the Father, the Source of life, sent His Son on earth, and just as Christ's life is completely dependent on the Father, so the one who eats Christ and thus remains in continual communion with Him assimilates that life on a spiritual level--just as he assimilates bread on a physical level--and lives in dependence on Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Verse 57 is, then, a strong expression of Jesus' claim that He gives the one who eats the living bread a share in the very life of God. John does not record the institution of the eucharist as such; instead, he tells his reader what the eucharist does for men. As the eucharist echoes a covenant theme, so mutual indwelling between God and Christ, Christ and the believer may reflect covenant as well.<sup>53</sup>

In summary, Christ is the Bread of life in His entire person, work and spirit. To eat and drink His flesh and blood is to feed on that living Bread which came down from heaven; to live because of Him;

to live deeply rooted in Christ.<sup>54</sup> This life has fulness and richness and involves man's realization of his true destiny in union with both God and Christ. Such a life is by nature imperishable, no longer subject to the dominion of death.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond Brown, The Gospel according to John (I-XII), in The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 29, 284f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>4</sup>George Stevens, The Johannine Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), pp. 159f.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 186 et passim.

<sup>6</sup>W. H. T. Dau, "The Eucharistic Interpretation of John 6," Theological Quarterly, 19 (April 1915), 74.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 80f.

<sup>8</sup>Brown, p. 291.

<sup>9</sup>J. H. Bernard, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John, in The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 1, 208.

<sup>10</sup>C. K. Barrett, The Gospel according to St. John (London: S.P.C.K., 1955), p. 236.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>12</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 338.

<sup>13</sup>V. Ruland, "Sign and Sacrament: John's Bread of Life Discourse," Interpretation, 18 (October 1964), 451.

<sup>14</sup>Dodd, pp. 338f.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 353.

<sup>16</sup>Bernard, p. 198.

<sup>17</sup>Dodd, p. 364.

- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 389.
- <sup>19</sup> R. H. Lightfoot, St. John's Gospel. A Commentary (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), p. 161.
- <sup>20</sup> Barrett, p. 235.
- <sup>21</sup> Brown, p. 291.
- <sup>22</sup> Bernard, pp. 208f.
- <sup>23</sup> Barrett, pp. 235f.
- <sup>24</sup> Stevens, pp. 159ff.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 261.
- <sup>26</sup> Brown, p. 292.
- <sup>27</sup> Lightfoot, p. 14.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 162.
- <sup>29</sup> Barrett, pp. 246f.
- <sup>30</sup> Bernard, p. 209.
- <sup>31</sup> Brown, pp. 284f.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 292.
- <sup>33</sup> Dodd, p. 148.
- <sup>34</sup> M. Blanchard, "A Spiritual Interpretation of John 6;52-9," Indian Journal of Theology, 8 (April-June 1959), 48.
- <sup>35</sup> Stevens, p. 160.
- <sup>36</sup> Brown, p. 283.
- <sup>37</sup> E. Sambayya, "St. John's Discourse on the Bread of Life with Special Reference to Jn. 6;52-9," Indian Journal of Theology, 8 (July-September 1959), 77.
- <sup>38</sup> Barrett, p. 247.
- <sup>39</sup> Brown, p. 283.
- <sup>40</sup> Dodd, p. 438.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 387.

- <sup>42</sup>Barrett, p. 247.
- <sup>43</sup>Dodd, p. 340.
- <sup>44</sup>Brown, p. 292.
- <sup>45</sup>Bernard, p. 192.
- <sup>46</sup>Stevens, p. 60.
- <sup>47</sup>Dodd, p. 194.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 255.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 340.
- <sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 397.
- <sup>51</sup>Barrett, p. 248.
- <sup>52</sup>Bernard, pp. 213f.
- <sup>53</sup>Brown, pp. 292f.
- <sup>54</sup>Stevens, p. 261.
- <sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

## CHAPTER VI

### JOHN 6:60-63. THE AFTERMATH

If there were no response to the words of Jesus in the second section of His discourse on the Bread of life, then one could legitimately stop with no reference to the following verses. There is response, however, for once again Jesus' words cause offense among the listeners. The writer does not propose to dwell on the information regarding the setting in verse 59, for that might well belong to a form-critical discussion of this chapter, but the reaction of the disciples in verse 60 is important.

The particular statement of Jesus which they seem to challenge is the reference to the descent from heaven in verse 58. Jesus had applied that reference to Himself and makes special reference to this in His answer in verse 62, where He once again speaks of Himself as the Son of man. His question concerns their possible reaction if they were one day to see Him ascending back up into heaven. That which is only flesh cannot give them eternal life. Only that which is spirit can do so.<sup>1</sup>

In point of fact, the whole process in Christ's ministry of His return to the Father--including His crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension--was on the one hand the supreme scandal and on the other His vindication as the true Bread of life. At the same time, this process proved that eating and drinking His flesh and blood was neither murderous nor cannibalistic nor magical. Man must face that scandal, and he must make the costly decision of faith before he can

ever eat that bread and drink that blood. He must make that decision before he can receive the gift of eternal life by being united with Christ in death.<sup>2</sup>

There is, to be sure, tremendous difficulty in even believing that the eating of the flesh or the blood can give eternal life. Flesh cannot go beyond its own physical limitations, and yet the Son of man gives life to those who feed on His flesh. Although He had become flesh, His origin from the Father and His essence are of the spiritual realm, and the spirit characteristically gives life. But to this the disciples take exception, and some leave Him.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus had not mentioned spirit in regard to eternal life during the discourse, but His references to and His use of ἀληθείας indicate strongly that the Bread of life belongs to the realm of spirit. In this respect, the main tendency of the entire discourse--with contrast between the true bread (on a spiritual level) and any other food (on a material level)--may be summed up in the words of verse 63: The spirit alone gives life; the flesh is of no use.<sup>4</sup>

The comment on the spirit at this point is germane to the discourse because of the characterization in verse 32 of the bread from heaven as ἀληθείας. This bread belongs to the heavenly and eternal realm, not to the realm of the natural and passing. This heavenly, eternal realm is that of the Spirit of ἀλήθεια.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of John's gospel, the Spirit had, for the moment, descended on and abided in Christ alone (John 1:33). After Christ's return to the Father, however, those who remain in the world, who eat and drink His flesh and blood, and who share in His life and death

will also receive the Spirit and have life because He completed His work.<sup>6</sup>

So in this aftermath of the discourse Christ not only gives the word which is truth; He is that true Word. He not only gives life; He is that Life. In the discourse Christ gives the Bread of life; yet He is that Bread. He now tells His listeners, τὰ ρήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λαλάηκα ὑμῖν πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωὴ ἐστιν. Everything which Christ is, is in His words, and His words are spirit and life.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus can speak the final word of life only because of the decisive action of the death and resurrection of the Bread of life. One can see the incarnate Word fully to be flesh only where He gives both His flesh and blood for the world. For the message of John, there is no contradiction whatsoever between receiving life through the feeding on the flesh and blood of Christ and Christ's words as life. He expresses the complete revelation of life to man in the union of word and deed.<sup>8</sup>

The verses which follow the close of the discourse do cast light on the implication of the earlier words. Here are a final reaction against Christ's words, an ultimate conflict between flesh and spirit as life-giving, and a revelation of Christ's words as both spirit and life.

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<sup>1</sup>J. H. Bernard, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John, in The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 1, 216.

<sup>2</sup>C. K. Barrett, The Gospel according to St. John (London: S.P.C.K., 1955), p. 250.

<sup>3</sup>Bernard, p. 217.

<sup>4</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 341.

<sup>5</sup>Raymond Brown, The Gospel according to John (I-XII), in The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 29, 300.

<sup>6</sup>R. H. Lightfoot, St. John's Gospel. A Commentary (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), p. 163.

<sup>7</sup>Dodd, p. 268.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 342.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

The writer finds it difficult to capsule all that has gone before, yet he will try to note some of the more important themes which appear in John's Bread of life discourse. John seems to have been writing to the Christian community to indicate the significance of the eucharist for the individual believer. So he writes this discourse and places it in a setting prompted by the question of the crowd who had followed Jesus because of their messianic interest in Him.

Christ's response in the preface deals with the inability of the people to understand the very sign for which they were looking. He tells them that faith is the one required work of God and that the Old Testament manna is now replaced by heavenly bread, as Moses is now replaced by a new Giver.

The first section of the discourse deals with both sapiential and eucharistic themes. Christ announces that He is the Bread of life received by faith. His mission is to do the will of His Father, and when the listeners grumble at His words, He reasserts that He is the Bread which comes down from heaven and gives life. The hearers were concerned with physical things; Jesus, with spiritual.

The second section deals with the bread as Christ's flesh, a eucharistic theme. To the response of the Jews, Christ reasserts His claim with the addition of blood, and He deals strongly with the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, the Son and the believer.

The aftermath serves to elucidate and bolster Christ's claims.

A final reaction takes place against His revelation, but He reasserts that the spirit is of ultimate importance in the life-giving process and that His words are spirit and life. This final revelation is so difficult that even some disciples leave Him.

The six commentators who serve as the basis for this research have painted a graphic picture of John's Bread of life discourse, a portion of John's gospel which defies easy analysis and study. They have treated the discourse in whole and in part, yet their task remains. Even though they have stopped long enough to record their findings, their research and that of the writer have just begun.

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