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JOHN 6 AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

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

by
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May, 1999

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Introduction

During the trench warfare of World War I, the contested ground between the two armies came to be known as "no man's land". Buried mines, coils of barbed wire, mortar, artillery and machine gunfire made "no man's land" a place where no one dared to set foot. On the field of Church history there have arisen from time to time certain places where theologians feared to tread. Nevertheless someone always stepped into these "kill zones", either knowingly or unknowingly, and the ensuing battles often changed the theological landscape for centuries. Theologians are always reluctant to take a stand against anything which has a longstanding tradition in the church. This is not without good reason. Often those who go against the wisdom of the fathers of the church fall into error. Others find themselves at odds with ecclesiastical leaders. Casualties have been spiritual (Tertullian became a Montanist) or temporal (John Hus was burned at the stake) and sometimes both (Muentzer became an enthusiast and was beheaded). Luther stepped into such a "no man's land" when he opposed indulgences and papal infallibility and yet, to the surprise of the world, lived long enough to die of natural causes. This thesis ventures to reopen an old argument on ground which has been a "no man's land" for Lutherans for nearly 500 years. There is a tradition within Lutheranism of interpreting John 6:51-59 as having no reference whatsoever to the Eucharist. This tradition within Lutheranism can rightly claim the support of Luther who said, "it [the sixth chapter of John] does not refer to the sacrament in a single syllable".¹ Naturally, no

¹ *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) AE 36:19, WA 6:497., St. Louis XIX,4., PE II.178.

confessional Lutheran wants to find himself in disagreement with Luther. We would always rather defend his views when they are maligned. But Luther corrected his own views many times and begs us to treat the fathers in this way:

Even if all the fathers would agree with our interpretation, how could we arrive at the point where for the sake of the fathers we would abandon God's word and depend on them? Follow the example of St. Augustine himself! One ought to read his books, even as he read the books of others; for he did not believe what someone said simply because he said it, no matter how respected he might be, but only if the author proved his case from Holy Scripture. Let us gladly do the dear fathers the honor of interpreting, to the best of our ability, their writings which they have left for us, so that they remain in harmony with Holy Scripture. However, where their writings do not agree with God's word, there it is much better that we say they have erred than that for their sake we should abandon God's word.²

As surely as we do well to consider Martin Luther a father of the Reformation, we would do well to heed his advice here. The first chapter of this thesis seeks to examine the text without regard to Reformation polemics. The second chapter seeks to present the history of the eucharistic interpretation in the early church. The third chapter examines Luther's view. The fourth chapter examines the Lutheran confessions and Law/Gospel distinction. The fifth chapter presents Lutheran catechesis which has referred to the text in explanation of the benefit of the Supper and Luther's preaching on the benefit of the Supper.

² *The Marburg Colloquy, The Report of Osiander*. (October, 1529) AE 38:69, WA 30 III:144.

CHAPTER I

EXEGESIS OF JOHN 6:51-59

Historical Background and Immediate Context of the Text

The Gospel of John focuses upon the σημεῖα of Jesus with the overall purpose "that you may believe...and that by believing you may have life in His name." John places the σημεῖον of the feeding of the multitude within the context and setting of the Passover, the feast of the Jews (John 6:4). This is not mentioned in the Synoptic accounts and at first glance seems to be a mere historical note. However, in keeping with John's style of writing, such as his reference when Judas left the supper chamber to betray Jesus that "it was night" (John 13:30), he draws attention to the Passover in order to give the interpretive setting for the sign. He sees Jesus as the Passover Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). In John's writings, Jesus is the antitype of the Passover sacrifices; the "true Lamb" so to speak. According to John, Jesus died on the Passover at the hour specified by the Law for the slaughtering of the Passover lamb (John 18:28; 19:14, 31).

This assumption is confirmed by 19:33, 36. The fact that Jesus' legs were not broken (19:32f.) is seen by John as the fulfillment of the Scripture that says, "not one of his bones will be broken" (19:36)...What John has in mind is the regulation concerning the Passover lamb in Exod 12:46 (Num 9:12) where it is commanded, "Do not break any of the bones." By this he does not intend to say that the slain body of Jesus was granted divine protection in accordance with

the promise, but that Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed (1 Cor 5:7).¹

The feeding of the 5,000 is a σημεῖον (6:14), and as such, it is presented in a different manner than in the synoptic accounts. John chooses words which will convey the meaning of the sign to his readers. Only John places the feeding of the 5,000 on a mountain (6:3), and only John connects the σημεῖον to the kingship of Christ (6:15). These two seemingly unrelated facts link John's feeding account with the eucharistic prayer of the Didache IX.4: "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and gathered together became one, so let Your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom." When Jesus directs the disciples to make the people sit down for the σημεῖον, He uses ἀναπεσεῖν, but the synoptics use κατα-, ἀνα- κλίνω. ἀναπεσεῖν is the same word Luke used in describing the institution of the Supper (Luke 22:14). The synoptics unanimously record the prayer in these exact identical words: "taking the five loaves and the two fish, having looked up to heaven εὐλόγησεν. . ." But John records that Jesus took the loaves and instead of the unanimous εὐλόγησεν of the synoptics, we find εὐχαριστήσας, (used in the institution narrative, 1 Cor. 11:24, Luke 22:19).² In the synoptics Jesus gives the bread and fish to the disciples so that

¹ Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament In the New*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1982) p. 190.

² εὐχαριστία and εὐχαριστέω were used to speak of the Lord's Supper in the Didache IX.1, 5; 10.1, 7; and by Ignatius of Antioch: Smyr. 7.1, 8.1, Eph. 13.1, Phld. 4; Justin Martyr: Dial. 41.1, 3; 70.4; 117.1.; I Apol. 65.3, 5; 66.1; Ireneaus: Adv. Haer. IV.18.4-5, IV.31.4, V.2.1-3.

they may set them before the people. John emphasizes the direct initiative and action of Jesus here, by reporting that Jesus Himself distributed them to the people. This does not contradict, of course, that Jesus did this through His disciples, it only stresses that Jesus is acting as Lord and Giver in this σημεῖον. John uses ἀνακειμένοις (6:11), which the synoptics do not use. This root is also used in the Supper institution narratives (Matt. 26:20, Mark 14:18). "In the NT it occurs only in the Gospels in the sense "to recline at table,"... Reclining at the passover was meant to signify that after the Exodus the Israelites were free men and not slaves. It was thus regarded as essential."³ John uses this word again in his account of the last supper (13:23, 28) to refer to the disciples who were reclining with Jesus at the Passover meal. The synoptics use the word ἐχορτάσθησαν to describe the feeding, but John uses ἐνεπλήσθησαν.⁴ The synoptics use ἄρω to describe the taking up of the leftover pieces, but in John the gathering is described by συνήγαγον.⁵ This word appears in the Old Testament account of gathering the manna (Ex. 16:16.). The noun of this same root, σύναξις, served as the name of the first part of the

³ Buechsel, κἄμα, TDNT III.654-655. For regulations requiring reclining at the Passover celebrations, see Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, (London: SCM Press, 1986) p. 49.

⁴ This same root is used to describe the enjoyment of the Eucharist in the Didache X.1 .

⁵ This root is also used three times in the Eucharistic prayers of the Didache IX.4 and X.5; also in John. 11:52 where the usage is the same as in the Didache (The Church is gathered into one in the same manner as the bread on the mountain was gathered into 12 baskets. In Rev. 12:1; 21:12, 14 the number twelve is used in symbolic reference to the Church).

Christian eucharistic gathering.⁶ In John 11:52, this root is used to speak of the purpose of Jesus' death "to gather into one the scattered children of God." The synoptics do not mention any purpose for taking up the leftover pieces, but John states explicitly that Jesus directs His disciples to gather them "so that nothing may perish" (ἀπολλύμι, 6:12; this word is employed again in 6:27 to speak of common perishable food, in 6:39 to speak of that which the Father gives to the Son, the elect, as also in 10:28, 17:12, 18:9). John uses both συνάγω and ἀπολλύμι to speak of people as well as the fragments of barley bread. The synoptics report that the fragments were taken up to fill twelve baskets, but they are not specific as to whether these were fragments of fish or of bread, except Mark 6:43, which specifically reports that the remaining fragments were of both bread and fish. John alone reports that the baskets were filled with the fragments of the bread. He even states again that these fragments are from "five barley loaves," but the two fish he does not mention as being among the remains. His emphasis is upon the bread and its super-abundance, by which he fills this σημεῖον with its message.

In John alone it is the disciples, not the people at large, who gather up. The difference, long recognized, can now be explained. In the Synoptics, the action is merely a characteristic part of the successful feast, on a level with eating and being filled. In John, it is the very sign shown to the people. It must be done by the disciples.⁷

⁶ Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-II*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966) p. 234. See also Acts 20:7-8, and 1 Cor. 11:17 which may provide the beginning of the use of this term in reference to the Supper.

It is also to be noted that ἐσθίω which is used in the synoptics to describe the eating of the crowd is replaced by βιβρώσκω, which is related to βρῶσις, "the food which remains to eternal life" in 6:27 and the "true food" in 6:55. Rudolf Schnackenburg makes the connection with John 6:27:

John gives prominence to Jesus' instruction to his disciples to gather up the pieces left over. What in the synoptics simply confirms the miracle (Mk 6:43 parr; cf. Mk 8:8 par) becomes in John a considered action, "so that nothing is lost." This Johannine addition acquires a theological meaning if we compare 6:27: "do not labour for the food that passes away." The bread which strengthens the body passes away (ἀπολλυμένος), but it points symbolically to a food which endures. In the evangelist's mind the idea that nothing should be lost (μή τι ἀπόληται) probably...indicates the symbolic character of the bread offered by Jesus. The point is not these scraps of bread but an imperishable bread of which the bread of the wonderful feeding is an image.⁸

C. K. Barrett sees this passage as referring symbolically to the gathering of the Church that it may not perish, and of the will of Christ to preserve them all from destruction (17:12), and He does this by means of the Eucharist.⁹ The Didache IX.4 uses the gathering of the fragments as a symbol of the gathering of the Church. Barrett's observation gains more weight by the comparison of John 6:12 to 6:39, where that which Jesus does not

⁷ David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, (London: University of London, The Athlone Press, 1956) p. 43.

⁸ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Transl. by Cecily Hastings, Francis McDonagh, David Smith, and Richard Foley, S.J. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990) p. 17-18. (German Title: *Das Johannesevangelium*, Part II, [Verlag Herder KG, 1971].)

⁹ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According To Saint John*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, second ed., 1978) p. 277.

wish to be lost is the Church. The Father has given it to Him and He loses nothing from it; in fact, He raises it up on the last day. Therefore this gathering leads to the resurrection, just as in the eucharistic prayer of Didache IX.4 and X.5. The twelve baskets, carried by the Twelve Apostles, each gathering in for Christ, has also been proposed as signifying the gathering of the Church.¹⁰ One more *possible* eucharistic reference may be mentioned, namely, that in the early Church *barley* bread was used for the Eucharist.¹¹

When the people saw the σημεῖον which He performed they said, "This truly is the prophet who is to come into the world!" (John6:14). The center of the Passover celebration was the Paschal lamb, whose blood was considered by Christ's contemporaries not only a symbol of salvation from slavery and the avenging angel, but a symbolic renewal of the Covenant blood sprinkled on the people by Moses (Ex.24).¹²

Furthermore, in light of the feeding σημεῖον it is important to note the thoughts that must have led the Jews to the conclusion that this is the Prophet of whom Moses had spoken. Apocalyptic literature at the beginning of the Christian era had associated manna with the delights of the Messianic Age. An example from the Baruch Syriac Apocalypse II 29:8-30:2:

¹⁰ Brown, p. 248.

¹¹ J. McHugh, *Verbum Domini* 39 (1961), 222-39.

¹² Vernon Ruland, "Sign and Sacrament", *Interpretation* 18 (Oct., 1964) p. 454.

And it shall come to pass at that self-same time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come to the consummation of time. And it shall come to pass after these things, when the time of the advent of the Messiah is fulfilled, that He shall return in glory. Then all who have fallen asleep in hope of Him shall rise again. [Ruland comments:] Although the Baruch document dates from the second half of the first century A.D., it particularizes apocalyptic hopes that had been active among devout Jews for many generations: paradise in all its rabbinic idealization, the banquet of manna, the resurrection of the body.¹³

The Jews probably concluded that this was the prophet which Moses spoke of because Jesus provided food in the wilderness just as God had done through Moses (Deut. 18:15).

At the outset, Jesus is depicted as the New Moses who "went up the mountain, and was sitting there with his disciples" (v. 3). This action can be compared to that of Moses ascending Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:3) with the elders to participate in a sacred banquet (Ex. 24:9-11). The crowd wandering in this desert place without food recalls the Israelites who were also without food in the the desert. Jesus feeds the crowd as did Moses. The murmuring crowd mentioned in verses 41-42, 62 recalls the Israelites who murmured in the desert (Ex. 15-16).¹⁴

"According to the Sybilline Oracles (VII: 148-149), manna is to be the food of the members of the messianic kingdom."¹⁵ However, the Messianic expectations of these Jews were also mixed with

¹³ Ibid., p. 455.

¹⁴ Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the Primitive Church*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965) p. 98-99.

¹⁵ Andre Feuillet, *Johannine Studies*, (Staten Island, New York: Alba House, 1965) p. 59.

nationalistic kingdom ideas (6:15). They also seemed to be more interested in the "free lunch" aspect of the Messianic signs than the eschatological/soteriological purpose which Jesus had in mind (6:26).

But the miraculous food which the Jews ate was intended to point them to a greater food of which Jesus now speaks. He tells them to stop working for τὴν βρωσιν τὴν ἀπολλυμένην (the common food which men eat for temporal sustenance) but rather to concern themselves with τὴν βρωσιν τὴν μένουσαν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, ἣν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὑμῖν δώσει (6:27). δώσει is future tense; He had not given this food yet.

In regard to Jesus being "sealed" by the Father in 6:27, which relates to our passage : "In His sovereign action God has appointed the Son of Man to be the food of eternal life for men, and He has confirmed this with His seal." "Wills and testamentary dispositions were sealed both by the testator and also by the witnesses."¹⁶ (In this case Christ's Father served as His witness as in 8:16-18.) In Graeco-Roman society documents and legal contracts were "sealed" with wax and then a signet ring with the person's identity engraved on it would be pressed into the warm wax, leaving that person's "seal" which was equivalent to what we would call a "signature" today. The significance of this is that it was a common practice for men to "seal" their covenants which they made with other men. The καινὴ διαθήκη of God with man is sealed in Jesus; and as John's readers know very well, the καινὴ

¹⁶ Fitzer, σφραγις, TDNT VII.949, 941.

διαθήκη is specifically "sealed" in Jesus' blood in the words of institution of the Lord's Supper, which they hear in the Communion Liturgy every Sunday. (According to Justin Martyr, I Apol. 67.7, the Eucharist was celebrated every Sunday.)¹⁷

The Jews, still thinking of the meal which Jesus had given them the day before, try to coax another free lunch out of Jesus (6:30-31) by reminding him (similar to Ps. 78:24 and 105:40): "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."¹⁸ Jesus picks up on this Exodus event and does what Peder Borgen identifies as a midrashic homily on the manna which was given to Israel in the wilderness.¹⁹ The feeding of the multitude in the wilderness no doubt reminded them of the manna which was given to Israel in the wilderness, or at least, it should have, since the feeding was a σημεῖον intended for them. The manna in the wilderness was intended "to cause you to know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man shall live by all which proceeds out of the mouth of Yahweh" (Deut. 8:3). Thus, even the first manna given to Israel was a kind of "sign" intended to teach them to trust the word of God for their eternal nourishment as they do for temporal nourishment. Jesus is the Logos who has proceeded out of the mouth of His Father and become flesh. The bread which the

¹⁷ H. Boone Porter Jr., "The Eucharistic Piety of Justin Martyr", *Anglican Theological Review* 39 (Jan., 1957) p. 31.

¹⁸ For a detailed treatment of the origin of this saying see Bruce G. Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture: The Interrelationship of Form and Function in the Explicit Old Testament Citations in the Gospel of John*, (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992) pp. 33-46.

¹⁹ Peder Borgen, *Bread From Heaven*, (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1965).

Father gave to the Israelites (6:32) was a πνευματικὸν βρῶμη (1 Corinthians 10:3), as Paul reminds the Corinthians, it was one of the "types" (τύποι, 10:6; τυπικῶς, 10:11) of the Supper, but as Jesus says, it was not τὸν ἄρτον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τὸν ἀληθινόν (6:32). In 1 Corinthians 10 the antitype of the manna is the eucharistic bread (the body of Christ). In John the antitype of the manna is "the true Bread" (Jesus). Therefore, manna is not only a "type" of the word of God (teaching) but also of the Word of God (the Teacher).

The spiritual food, of which the manna is a type, gives eternal life (vv. 27, 40, 47). But what is this spiritual food? It is, first of all, the word which Jesus preaches (vv. 35-47), the word of God extolled as *the* true nourishment in the Old Testament. In this respect the discourse of Jesus echoes the teaching of the Book of Deuteronomy, namely, that manna is a sign of the superior food of the word of God. . . . Going beyond this, however, Jesus introduces a new theme. The manna is not only a type of the word of God, but of the Incarnate Word of God in His eucharistic presence (vv. 54-59).²⁰

²⁰ Kilmartin, p. 13. D. Mollat expresses in agreement with Kilmartin and Borgen the additional insight: "On this second day, it is the Exodus all over again. Like the generation in the desert, the Galilean crowd, not recognizing the divine sign, have thoughts and desires only for material things: 'Jesus answered them and said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, ye seek me, not because ye have seen signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled".' (6:26). He calls on them to think of the bread that cannot perish. Already reserved with regard to this new Moses, the crowd then asks for the manna. Like its forefathers, it wants 'bread from heaven': after material favours, miracles. Jesus does not steal away. He takes up the exegesis of the Exodus. The true bread from heaven is not the bread that fell from the sky at the time of Moses and their fathers. The manna was only a figure, like the brazen serpent (John 3:13) and the cloud (John 8:12). The true bread from heaven is 'that which cometh down from heaven and giveth life to the world' (6:33)." D. Mollat, "The Sixth Chapter of Saint John", published in J. Delorme, *The Eucharist in the New Testament*, (Baltimore and Dublin: Helicon Press, 1964) p. 148.

This interpretation which holds that the manna is a two-fold type: 1) of the faith-eating of the Word and, 2) of the oral eating of the incarnate Word, is strengthened by this fact: The eating of the manna in the wilderness was an actual, oral eating. The feeding of the 5,000 was an actual, oral eating. Therefore, the contrast of comparison is not material eating to immaterial eating (It is not Plato who speaks here, but the Incarnate Word), but rather common oral eating which gives temporal life is contrasted to spiritual oral eating which gives eternal life. Otherwise, the stress upon the incarnation would be totally unnecessary here, since even Moses was a faith-eater and there was faith-eating before the incarnation. But the stress on the incarnation makes no sense if the eating is not oral.

Jesus goes on to tell them that the Father is presently giving or continues to give (δίδωσιν) to them the True Bread from heaven (6:32). He is giving it right now, but not in a way that is palatable to them, because in order to receive this Bread one must receive faith. Jesus is about to try to give them this faith as a gift in the words of 6:35: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." "Thirst" is equally appropriate to the type of the wilderness feeding, since the Israelites also drank from the Rock which followed them, the pre-incarnate Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). These words carry with them the Holy Spirit and the gift of the faith, yet they are rejected by the Jews (6:36). 6:37-39 concerns the doctrine of eternal election. There is no salvation except through faith in

Christ, yet in the case of those who do believe, Jesus says, "I Myself will raise him up on the last day." (6:40)

The Jews realize full well that Jesus is claiming to be from heaven but they do not believe it because they know his mother and father; they know where he comes from (or at least they think they do, 6:41-42). Jesus refers to eternal election again and tries to give them the gift of faith once again (6:43-48). He even warns them that their fathers who ate the manna in the wilderness died (because they hardened their hearts and refused to believe, Heb.3:8,12,19). Jesus does not want them to be lost and so He tries to give them the gift of faith again in 6:50 so that they might not die. Faith would have them believe that this Jesus, whose mother and father they know, came down out of heaven and is the True Bread of God who has been sealed by the Father as the One who would give them the food which "remains," "endures" to/for eternal life.

The metaphorical language which Jesus employed in speaking of faith to the Jews was similar to that in Wisdom literature and in the Prophets (Prov. 9:5, Is. 55:1-2). The sapiential eating way of speaking is not unknown to them-- that much they understand; it is Jesus' identification of Himself as the Bread which they find hard to swallow. "Manna was interpreted in the wisdom tradition of Israel in terms of word and instruction; that Torah is bread."²¹ The Jews could not equate Jesus with the Torah because they did not believe; nor could they eat

²¹ C. K. Barrett, p. 293.

sapientially the One who is "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24, 30).
 "God feeds men by his word; Jesus is his word."²²

The Significance and Meaning of the Text

Beginning with 6:51 Jesus introduces a new term: Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς. "Living Bread" is a term which John has not used before. Up until this time Jesus has claimed to be the "Bread of Life" of which the Jews are to "eat" sapientially, by believing in Him; but here Jesus is "Living Bread." "In Jn 6.51 the expression ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν, "I am the living bread" may be understood in some languages as bread which has some living objects in it, namely, bread which is being eaten by worms or weevils." (Louw & Nida 23.88) The point of this gross lexical extract is that the "Living Bread" can mean "bread which is alive" or "bread which has something (or in this case, someone) living within it. Jesus also changes the tense of καταβαίνω to aorist, which is probably a complexive (constative) aorist referring to Christ's completed incarnation."²³

A more drastic change takes place in 6:51b: καὶ...δὲ is a conjunction of addition which is used to introduce something which is related to the subject under discussion, and yet

²² Barret, p. 293.

²³ F. Blass & A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (University of Chicago Press, 1961) paragraph 332.

something which has not been said before. Acts 3:24 καὶ πάντες δὲ "and also all," Acts 22:28 "but also."²⁴

Bauer translates "and also, but also."²⁵

"καὶ ὁ ἄρτος δὲ: καὶ intimates the connection of thought to be expressed with what precedes; δὲ, that it is not a mere repetition, but here takes a new turn. J. G. B. Winer says, "δὲ is frequently used, where only something new, other and different from what precedes, but not entirely opposite, is added."²⁶

The position of δὲ is unusual but by no means wrong; it introduces a fresh thought. This of course is apparent on other than grammatical grounds. The first two clauses in the verse repeat what has already been said. The person of Jesus received by faith is the means by which eternal life is given and sustained. Further exegesis of the basic term bread identifies it with the flesh of Jesus. This identification recalls that of Mark 14:22 (Matt. 26:26; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24), where Jesus says of the loaf used at the last supper τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου, and it is inevitable that the reader should think of the Christian supper as the context in which Jesus gives himself to the believer as his life. This impression is confirmed by the following verses, especially in v. 53, and few dispute that the eucharist is alluded to in this part of the discourse.²⁷

Barret's assertion that the reader would inevitably think of the Lord's Supper is true; John expects his readers to make the

²⁴ F. Blass & A. Debrunner, paragraph 447.9.

²⁵ W. Bauer, W. Arndt, F. Gingrich & F. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (University of Chicago Press, 1958) p. 171.4b.

²⁶ J. G. B. Winer, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms*, (1822) p. 393. See also E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1980) p. 343.

²⁷ Barrett, p. 297.

connection, even though the disciples and the other hearers in the synagogue did not understand all of what Jesus said.

This particle combination is well attested in classical Greek usage:

Denniston's *The Greek Particles* : "This is a natural enough combination, the former particle denoting that something is added, the latter that what is added is distinct from what precedes. In Homer the particles are always juxtaposed, in later Greek always separated by an intervening word or words." [such as in our verse John 6:51, καὶ ὁ ἄρτος δὲ] p. 199

Thayer's Greek Lexicon: "It marks something added to what has already been said, or that of which something already said holds good; accordingly it takes on the nature of an adverb, *also*." p. 316

This usage also passes on into the New Testament:

Robinson's *Greek and English Lexicon of the NT* : "Copulative and emphatic, *also, too*; implying increase, addition, something more; e.g. always so in the connection δὲ καί or καὶ...δὲ, *and also, i.e. and in addition, and likewise*."

Green's *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek NT* : "καὶ...δὲ, together imply *yea. . . moreover*, assuming what has been said, and passing on to something more."

All occurrences of John's usage of the καὶ...δὲ conjunction are in the following verses:

John 8:16 καὶ ἐὰν κρίνω δὲ ἐγώ, ἡ κρίσις ἡ ἐμὴ ἀληθινή ἐστιν, ὅτι μόνος οὐκ εἰμί, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πέμψας με πατήρ.

ἐὰν κρίνω (if I judge) is added here and in the next verse,

John 8:17 καὶ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ δὲ τῷ ὑμετέρῳ γέγραπται ὅτι δύο ἀνθρώπων ἡ μαρτυρία ἀληθής ἐστιν.

ἐν τῷ νόμῳ (in the law) is added also. Both serve as additional proof that Jesus' testimony is legally valid.

John 15:27 καὶ ὑμεῖς δὲ μαρτυρεῖτε, ὅτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐστε.

ὑμεῖς is added to the witnessing of the Holy Spirit.

1 John 1:3 ὁ ἑώρακάμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' ἡμῶν. καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is added to fellowship with ἡμῶν.

3 John 12 Δημητρίῳ μεμαρτύρηται ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας· καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν, καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἡ μαρτυρία ἡμῶν ἀληθὴς ἐστίν.

ἡμεῖς is added to the testimony of the other Christians and that of the truth.

In every case, John's usage of καὶ...δὲ is completely consistent. He always uses καὶ...δὲ to add something new to the topic being discussed. He never leaves the topic behind when he uses καὶ...δὲ, but always carries it into the clause and adds something new to the topic which has not been said before. John 15:26-27 is a clear demonstration of John's usage of καὶ...δὲ: καὶ ὑμεῖς δὲ, it is not only the Spirit who bears witness, but also the disciples. Bearing witness is the topic which is common to both verses, but in addition to what has already been said, a new thing is introduced -- ὑμεῖς, not only the Spirit, but also the disciples shall bear witness (related to the witnessing of the Spirit and yet an

addition of something which has not been said before in
t h e p r e v i o u s v e r s e s) .

That is the function of καὶ...δὲ, to add something new to what is already being discussed. As further proof that John uses καὶ...δὲ in just that way, 1 John 1.3: "whom we have seen and heard, we also proclaim to you, in order that you also may have fellowship with us, and not only that, but also our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." "Fellowship" is the topic, "with the Father and with His Son" is the additional thing which still has to do with that same fellowship.

The point of all this is: In 6:51b Jesus is still speaking of sapiential eating, the eating which is faith—but, in addition to sapiential eating He is also adding something to this faith eating. What is being added to this faith-eating? According to John's consistent usage of καὶ...δὲ, whatever is being added, it has to be related to the faith-eating and cannot leave the faith-eating behind. The same bread which He urged the Jews to eat sapientially He now identifies as His flesh which He will give for the life of the world. He goes on to add that this bread/flesh will be for eating and accompanied by blood for drinking in order that those who eat and drink them will have eternal life in themselves. So this flesh-eating and blood-drinking for eternal life cannot be separated from the faith-eating which yields eternal life. Both the faith-eating and the flesh/blood-eating give eternal life and yet they cannot be identical, because the flesh/blood-eating is an addition to the faith-eating. It must include the faith-eating because John always uses καὶ...δὲ to add something to what

precedes. (Always! There is no instance of καὶ...δὲ where something new is not added to what precedes.) Jesus is not only the Word (teaching) to be eaten by faith, He is also the Word made flesh (The Teacher Himself) to be eaten in actuality. Oulton recognizes that Jesus' giving of His flesh for the life of the world must also be His giving of His flesh to eat so that those who eat it have life.

In 51b, a change of doctrine begins. For Jesus speaks now, not of himself as the heavenly bread...but as the bread which he is, himself, to give them in the future (δώσω, v.51). This gift is described as his flesh and blood, which he will give for the life of the world, and which when appropriated by the believer will be the source and the guarantee of eternal life...The δώσω of this verse is paralleled in the δώσω of 4:14 of the promise by Jesus of the water of life, which, especially when compared with 7:37-39, clearly indicates the gift of the Holy Spirit; and 6:51 “the bread which I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world” does not simply refer to the offering of himself on the cross, for he goes on to speak of the believers' eating of his flesh and blood.²⁸

Sasse sums it up in his customarily insightful and well-aimed manner:

So here two lines of thought about the bread of life stand next to each other that at first glance seem to contradict each other, and yet for the evangelist they form a contrapuntal pair. Both are true for him. Christ is the Bread of heaven, and the flesh of Christ is the bread of heaven. There is an eating of Christ as the true Bread of heaven that happens in faith. And there is an eating of the flesh and a drinking of the blood of Christ that occurs in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Both of these truths belong together in

²⁸ J. E. L. Oulton, *Holy Communion and Holy Spirit*, (London: SPCK, 1954) p. 89.

such a way that one cannot reduce one of them to the other.²⁹

Barret echoes this same line of thought:

"The fact that eucharistic and non-eucharistic statements stand in parallel shows that John is not concerned to argue for the uniqueness of the eucharist as a means of grace."³⁰

To sum up what other exegetes have recognized in this connection: Xavier Leon-Dufour is correct in saying that John 6 deals not successively with faith and the Eucharist, but simultaneously with both.³¹ James Voelz refers to these two underlying references as "double entendre" and demonstrates that this is commonly used in John.³² Now that the significance of the καὶ...δὲ combination has been demonstrated we may consider the remainder of 6:51 and what follows.

ὃν ἐγὼ δώσω The masculine singular relative pronoun ὃν correlates to the masculine singular ὁ ἄρτος. ἡ σάρξ is feminine. What Jesus promises to give is bread. This bread will be given for the believer to eat. But this bread which He will give to men is

²⁹ Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, Transl. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985) p. 78-79. Echoing this thought in answer to the objections of post-Reformation scholars, see John Suggit, *The Sign of Life: Studies in the Fourth Gospel and the Liturgy of the Church* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 1993) p. 76-77.

³⁰ Barrett, p. 297.

³¹ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, (Paulist Press, 1987) p. 266-267.

³² James W. Voelz, "The Discourse of the Bread of Life in John 6: Is It Eucharistic?", *Concordia Journal* 15 (Jan., 1989) p. 35.

equated with His flesh which He will give for the life of the world. The future tense of δώσω takes us back to 6:27 and tells us more about the "food which remains for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you; for this One God the Father has sealed." This food had not yet been given at the time when Jesus said this to the crowd. According to 6:29 "the work" is believing in the One whom God sent. Therefore, ἐργάσεσθε in 6:27 means to "believe in Him whom God sent for the food which remains to/for eternal life." There is a distinction between the "Bread of God" who gives life to them now (6:33) and "the food which remains to eternal life" which He will give to them in the future. Although there is a distinction between the present bread and the future food, they are the same, in that they both consist of the same person, Jesus. But their modes of reception differ in that the present bread is received by faith-eating alone; the future food will be received by faith-eating and actual eating. Jesus tells them to trust Him to provide the food which remains to eternal life.

Joachim Jeremias sees John6:51c as parallel to 1 Cor. 11:24b (p.107-108); and σαρξ as the semitic equivalent of σωμα.³³ C. H. Dodd also sees 6:51b as "an expanded transcription of the words of institution."³⁴ In regard to these views of Jeremias and Dodd: although the content of 6:51 and the words of institution bear some similarities, it is certainly not intended to be a retelling of

³³ Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, (London: SCM Press, 1986) p. 198.

³⁴ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1953) p. 338.

the words of institution, but rather 6:51-58 is a further explanation of what the manna in the wilderness typifies and what is "signed" by the feeding of the 5,000. It proleptically expounds the benefit of the Supper to believers. 6:51 is certainly not merely a promise of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The reason why the passage speaks not of Jesus' ψυχή (=life), which would be specifically Johannine, (10:15,17; 15:13; 13:37-38; 1 Jn 3:16) but of his σῶμα, is that it also refers to the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood in the Lord's Supper, which is grounded in His atoning death. Another proof of this point is given by the pattern of the way Jesus speaks of His self-giving:

The word "give" (δίδωμι) in the verse 51b does not refer to the offering which Christ makes of Himself to the Father but to the bestowal of Himself on men. In other places in the Fourth Gospel we find statements which refer to the self-giving of Jesus to the Father for the salvation of men. In none of these cases is the offering of Jesus expressed by δίδωμι. This word is used by John to indicate the bestowal of the redemptive gifts on men. However, implicitly Jesus refers to His redemptive mediation. His flesh has redemptive value because it is offered as an acceptable sacrifice to the Father.³⁵

While Edward Kilmartin's point is well taken and demonstrates that Jesus is speaking not of His sacrificial giving of Himself into death alone, but also of His giving of this bread to men, we acknowledge that this sacramental giving to men is grounded upon His substitutionary death. It is also acknowledged that John does use δίδωμι to speak of the Father's giving of His Son for the world, but it is correct that Jesus Himself does not use δίδωμι to

³⁵ Kilmartin, p. 122-123.

speak of His giving of Himself to the Father. In any case, it is clear from the masculine pronoun *ὃν* that Jesus will give His flesh as bread for men to eat.

ὕπερ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς is somewhat similar to John 3:16,17: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever believes in Him might not perish but have everlasting life*. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that *the world might be saved through him*". The world being saved through Him by means of believing in Him speaks primarily of the subjective justification of the sinner. Objective justification is, of course, contained wherever subjective justification is spoken of, since it forms the foundation of the individual reception of the benefit of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice and His substitutionary obedience. Again, what Jesus promises to give to men is "bread" to be eaten and not just His flesh which He will give as sacrifice to His Father. *ὕπερ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς* is objective genitive, which means "for the world's living" (to make the world live) and not "in place of the world's life," subjective genitive.

ὕπερ is used in the same way that it is used in 1 Cor.11:24, Luke 22:19&20 and Mark 14:24. It is not *merely* sacrificial/substitutionary, but also sacramental in that *ὕπερ* denotes that it is for our benefit also as a means of grace. In 6:33 Jesus "is giving" (pres. act. part.) life to the world. This giving is a "means of grace" giving-- to men, not to the Father-- but it is based upon His sacrificial/substitutionary giving of Himself to His Father. To pit the flesh and blood of Christ sacrificed for us

against the flesh and blood of Christ given for us in the Supper is to fail to recognize that the forgiveness of sins is not only accomplished (objective justification) by Christ's flesh and blood, but also delivered (subjective justification) by Christ's flesh and blood.

In regard to the choice of the word σάρξ instead of σῶμα in 6:51, it is not proper for modern-day exegetes to confine the Apostle John to Pauline usage; furthermore, even Paul used σάρξ and σῶμα interchangeably occasionally when speaking of the human body of Christ (Rom. 7:4 & 8:3). σάρξ instead of σῶμα clearly agrees with the Lord's Supper usage of Ignatius: Romans 7.3; Philadelphians 4; Smyrneans 7.1; Trallians 8.1; and also Justin Martyr: I Apol. 66,1. (See the section on Ignatius in the Catena of Early Church Witnesses).

In 6:52 a fierce dispute breaks out among the Jews (it continues to this day in Christendom concerning the doctrine of the real presence). "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" is analogous to "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (Nicodemus had no idea what Jesus was talking about--neither do these Jews.) The Samaritan woman was also confused by Jesus' words. She seemed to think He was offering her the equivalent of indoor plumbing (John4:15). It is important to note that throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus makes statements which even His chosen twelve cannot understand until after the resurrection (such as in John 2:19-22). Let there be no mistake about the cause of division in this verse.

Some have thought that the Jews are equivalently asking: How can this man be the universal mediator? This interpretation is unacceptable, for if it were so then the Jews should have fixed on the final remark made by Christ: "... and the bread that I will give is My flesh for the life of the world." But the Jews combine the totality of the statements made by Jesus and stress the concept of *eating*. Their question is unequivocal and continues on the sacramental plane: What does this man mean by saying that He can give us His flesh to eat?³⁶

Kilmartin's point is well taken. The Jews are not disputing whether or not this man is the prophet of whom Moses spoke. They are not arguing about whether or not He is the Messiah. They are not questioning the significance of His work. His promise to give His flesh to eat has occasioned their dispute. His "flesh for the life of the world" they do not question, but eating His flesh has caused a rift among them.

In 6:53 the expression "Son of Man" takes us back to 6:27 where "Son of Man" is first used in this chapter; where Jesus speaks of "the food which remains for eternal life." The flesh and blood of "the Son of Man" is "the food which remains for eternal life." The food which carries Christ's living flesh is none other than the "Living Bread." It is the "Living Bread" because the risen flesh and blood of the Son of Man is alive and "remains" forever. In 6:27, Jesus says, "which the Son of Man will give to you," He has not given this food yet. The reason why Jesus says "have life *in yourselves* " and not just "have life" (6:40, 47) is because those

³⁶ Kilmartin, p. 124.

who believe and eat his flesh and drink his blood have the living flesh and living blood within themselves. It is not "in your stomachs"; that would be a gross misunderstanding. Rather, Christ here means: "life in your whole person(s)." The Living Bread imparts the living Christ within the bread to the believer. The believer shall be raised up on the last day because Christ lives in him (=ζήσει δι' ἐμέ, 6:57). Resurrection is through Christ--He is the "life-making Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45) and the enfleshed Word who is Spirit and Life (6:63). "For just as the Father raises the dead and makes alive, so also the Son makes alive whom He wishes," (5:21). Believers have life in themselves because Christ remains in them and they in Christ (6:56). This is the Life of Christ and it is through His Life that they "shall be raised up on the last day" (6:39, 40, 54). Apart from the enfleshed Word, the life-making Spirit: Christ, there is no life and no resurrection. Since "this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11-12) it is by union with Christ through faith that this Life is communicated to us. This is the Life who is our life (Col. 3:4), who will raise us up on the last day.

C. H. Cosgrove draws a distinction between "the ostensible audience" (the Jews in the Synagogue in Capernaum) and "the implied audience" in 6:53.

It is as if Jesus leaves the crowd of unbelieving Jews behind and addresses persons who already acknowledge his claims but resist their implications, persons who believe but are not prepared to "eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood."³⁷

Cosgrove identifies “the implied audience” of this statement (6:53) as “secret believers” who believe in Jesus but refuse to identify themselves with the Johannine Community.³⁸ Seen in this light the words of Jesus in 6:53 are quite to the point, and represent part of the Johannine response to the notion that the Life Jesus gives can be had apart from the Church; that is, apart from public identification with the Johannine community by participating in the Lord’s Supper. Clearly, for the Apostle John, one could neither hold “dual membership” in both the synagogue and the Church of Jesus, nor have eternal life as a “secret believer” without confessing Christ publicly.

In 6:54 a new word is introduced: τρώγων. If we allow the Apostle John to show us how he uses this word we shall have no problems understanding why he uses it. Problems arise only when we *assume* that his usage of this word has no significance. The only other place in the Bible where John uses τρώγω is in John 13:18 at the last supper--the very place and time of the institution of the Lord's Supper (according to the Synoptics).³⁹ John quotes Ps. 41:10 in this verse but he alters it. The Septaugint has ἐσθίων in this verse, but John refuses to use the same word to speak of Judas which he had previously used to

³⁷ C. H. Cosgrove, “The Place Where Jesus Is: Allusions to Baptism and to the Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel,” *NTStud* 35 (4, 1989): 528.

³⁸ Cosgrove qualifies the ‘secret believer’ as one who acknowledges the claims of Jesus but shrinks from identifying with the Johannine community for fear of expulsion from the synagogue. He gives convincing proof from the Gospel of John itself that there were many such ‘secret believers’ but that “for the Evangelist secret faith is not genuine faith.” Cosgrove, p. 530.

³⁹ Matt. 26:17-20, Mark 14:12-17, Luke 22:7-14.

speak of the faith-eating. The eating of Judas is certainly not metaphorical for believing in Christ. There is no figurative use of τρώγω in Scripture (unless one claims that it is in John 6 and that would only be begging the question to prove one's presupposition). "To eat solid food" (Louw & Nida 23.3). "To gnaw, nibble, munch, eat (audibly). . . John uses it, in order to offset any Docetic tendencies to "spiritualize" the concept so that nothing physical remains in it, in what many hold to be the language of the Lord's Supper." (BAG 829). The classical usage of the word is somewhat startling:

to gnaw, craunch, chew raw vegetables or fruits (as nuts, almonds, etc.), of mules (Homer Od. 6:90), animals feeding, of men--blackberries (Barn. Ep.7,8) [Thayer's *Lexicon*, p. 631]

to gnaw, crack, chew, pr. fruits, nuts, raw beans, etc. which require cracking with the teeth [Robinson's *Greek and English Lexicon of the NT*, p. 733]

The substitution of τρώγω for ἐσθίω throws light on the intention of the section by giving firm evidence that what is added to the faith-eating by the καὶ...δὲ is the actual eating of Christ's flesh and blood:

From 6:51c "to eat" no longer has [only], as in 6:51b, the metaphorical sense of appropriating the self-proffering of Jesus in the word by faith, 6:35. It now means receiving His self-proffering in the eucharist by physical eating. In 6:51, 53 the presentation of the gift unmistakably adopts eucharistic language and the eating is characterised as really corporeal by ἀληθῶς (-ης). John 6:54 is formulated as a parallel of 6:47, not to replace faith by sacramental eating, but to bind the two together. 6:56b also presupposes a faith relation, cf. John 15:4...The necessity of the eucharist to salvation is in some sense stated by John 6:53 as is that of

baptism by John 3:5, is thus the necessity of the uncurtailed incarnation of the Word."⁴⁰

It is to be noted that in later Greek τρώγω became a synonym for ἐσθίω; however, this in no way proves that John could not be using the word here with the older, longer-standing meaning. In support of the theory that τρώγω is a mere synonym for ἐσθίω, some commentators have asserted that John never uses ἐσθίω in the present tense (implying that he would have to use τρώγων for the present participle in 6:54 since he did not know or was not in the habit of using the present form of ἐσθίω).⁴¹ This theory falls apart when we compare Rev. 11:5, where John uses the present active indicative form of ἐσθίω with the prefix κατα, demonstrating that John does know and use the present form, but chooses to use τρώγω instead. Mark (12:40) and Luke (20:47) also use the present participle of ἐσθίω, so it cannot be maintained that John could not have used it. Theodore Zahn also concurs that it is "extremely unlikely" that τρώγειν is being used here, or anywhere else in the Bible, without certain distinction from ἐσθίειν; therefore he refers to this eating as a "*eigentlich kauen*" and "*eines wirklichen Essens*."⁴² Nor can we afford to assume that John was ignorant of the Septuagint usage of κατατρώγειν (Prov. 24:22e and Ez. 23:34 Aqu.

⁴⁰ Goppelt, τρώγω, TDNT VIII.237.

⁴¹ Barrett, p. 299 and also D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Company, 1991) p. 284.

⁴² Theodor Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Johannes, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Nachf. (Georg Bohme), 1908) p. 346-347, footnote 58.

Symm. Theod.) which means "devour" or "pulverize" (BD 101). Why change roots from one sentence to the next, if not to change the emphasis? Why indicate an addition (καὶ...δέ) if nothing is really being added? Interpretations which presuppose that there can be no sacramental reference in John 6 will not be able to answer these questions; thus, in an effort to maintain that the emphasis of the sermon does not change, the literal meaning of these words will have to be abandoned for a figurative meaning.

If one is not willing to admit a reference to the Lord's Supper, it is impossible to find any other way of accounting for the introduction of "drinking blood." Blood-drinking is not the language of sapiential eating which the O.T. uses as figurative of faith! In the O.T. "eating blood" is never used as a metaphor for faith. The assertion that "eating flesh and drinking blood" refers to faith and faith alone has no precedent in Scripture. Therefore, the assertion that John 6:53-58 cannot in any way refer to the Lord's Supper has no Scriptural evidence on which to stand. To say that this passage refers exclusively to sapiential eating is to do violence to the text.

According to Raymond Brown:

There are two impressive indications that the Eucharist is in mind. The first indication is the stress on eating (feeding on) Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood. This cannot possibly be a metaphor for accepting his revelation. "To eat someone's flesh" appears in the Bible as a metaphor for hostile action (Ps. 27.2, Zech.11.9). . . The drinking of blood was looked on as an horrendous thing forbidden by God's law (Gen.9.4; Lev.3.17; Deut.12.23; Acts 15.20). Its transferred, symbolical meaning was that of brutal slaughter (Jer.46.10). In Ezekiel's vision of apocalyptic carnage (39.17), he invites

the scavenging birds to come to the feast: "You shall eat flesh and drink blood." Thus, if Jesus' words are to have a favorable meaning, they must refer to the Eucharist."⁴³

Rudolf Bultmann attributes the passage to some unnamed "redactor"; despite this hypothesis, he interprets the words as they stand and ties them into Ignatius' understanding of the Supper:

(6:51b-6:58b) These verses refer without any doubt to the sacramental meal of the Eucharist, where the flesh and blood of the "Son of Man" are consumed, with the result that this food gives "eternal life," in the sense that the participants in the meal can be assured of the future resurrection. Thus the Lord's Supper is here seen as the *φάρμακον ἀθανασίας* or *της ζωης*. (Ign. Eph. 20.2)⁴⁴

Bultmann implies that "the redactor" drew upon Ignatius when making this sacramental addition; but since there is no historical record of a "redactor" (not to imply that the early Church would have ever allowed such a redaction) it is more likely that this statement of Ignatius is based upon John's theology of the Supper. The evidence given by Lietzmann supports this, by showing that Ignatius quoted this term from the Antiochene Liturgy:

The formula that the broken bread is a *φάρμακον ἀθανασίας*, *ἀντίδοτες τοῦ μὴ ἀποθανεῖν, ἀλλὰ ζῆν ἐν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ διὰ παντός* must be regarded as a citation from the Antiochene Liturgy rather than as a theologoumenon of Ignatius. [Lietzmann footnotes this statement:] Ign. ad. Eph. XX.2. In the anaphora of Sarapion the eucharist is termed *φάρμακον ζωης*.

⁴³ Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-II*, p. 284.

⁴⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary*, Transl. by George R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971) p. 219.

This term occurs also in Gaul; and in the liturgy of a Berlin Papyrus (still unpublished) we read that the eucharist may serve as εἰς φάρμακον ἀθανασίας, ἀντίδοτον ζωῆς ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ ἅπαντα ἀποθανεῖν, ἀλλὰ ζῆν ἐν σοὶ διὰ τοῦ ἡγαπημένου σου παιδός. This has been regarded as a citation from Ignatius; but since when have the liturgies cited Fathers of the Church?⁴⁵

Hans Lietzmann is suggesting that this terminology is actually older than Ignatius and is based upon the liturgy of the early Church and not coined by Ignatius himself, but rather the language of the eucharistic liturgy of the earliest Christians. It is certainly not, as Sasse points out, a product of the Hellenistic mind, "It is a product of the unhellenistic eschatology of the Bible and Jesus himself."⁴⁶ In fact the Liturgy of "Ur-Sarapion and Didache are strongly influenced by the Fourth Gospel," Lietzmann maintains.⁴⁷

Schnackenburg brings out John's polemical purpose in quoting Jesus' words in 6:53:

Probably the Evangelist is attacking a gnostic or docetic group within his community which rejected the reception of the Eucharist. Ignatius of Antioch's remark about his docetic opponents: "They keep away from the Eucharist and prayers because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh and blood of our Redeemer Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins." (Smyrn.7.1) Anyone who (like the gnostic Docetists) rejects the reception of the flesh and blood of

⁴⁵ Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper: A Study in the History of the Liturgy*, translated by D. H. G. Reeve (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), p. 210 (German title: *Messe und Herrenmahl* [Bonn: Marcus und Weber, 1926].)

⁴⁶ Sasse, p. 148, footnote 127.

⁴⁷ Lietzmann, p. 420.

Jesus denies His incarnation (σάρξ) and his bloody death on the cross (αἷμα).⁴⁸

In 6:54, ". . . and I will raise him up on the last day" is a further point against the incipient-gnostic opponents of John, who denied the resurrection.⁴⁹

In 6:55 Jesus speaks of His flesh and blood as food and drink in actuality. ἀληθής: "real, genuine. . . of the body and blood of Jesus J 6:55" (BAG 36).

"ἀληθής always says emphatically that something is what it professes to be, and as it professes to be." "It is actual food," "corresponding to reality."⁵⁰ Note that the word ἀληθής, or even the variant ἀληθῶς is not to be confused with ἀληθινός, which would render a symbolic meaning. ἀληθής can mean "true" in contrast with "false"; however, it can also have the meaning "genuine, real, valid" in contrast to "invalid" or "not genuine" or "not real" as in John 8:17. Here it refers to food and drink which is real/actual in that it can really be eaten. ἀληθινός would certainly not render this meaning, but if this food could not actually be eaten, it could not be ἀληθής. Karl Friedrich Kahnis comments on this distinction:

Ἀληθής and ἀληθινός are to be distinguished in this way: the first word excludes the untrue and unreal, the later word is

⁴⁸ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 61.

⁴⁹ On John's opponents, see the Catena of Early Church Witnesses on the use of σάρξ by Ignatius.

⁵⁰ Hermann Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of N. T. Greek*, Transl. by William Urwick, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, reprint, 1954) p. 84, 87.

not appropriate to its idea. The extent of ἀληθής is the reality, the extent of ἀληθινός is the idea. With ἀληθής the concept is appropriate to the thing, with ἀληθινός the thing is appropriate to the concept. ἀληθινός can stand as ἀληθής (thus John 19:35 the μαρτυρία ἀληθινή, 5:32, 8:13, 17 ἀληθής), but ἀληθής never stands as ἀληθινός. Now it means in our passage: "My body is actual food, My blood is actual drink," thus only this meaning can be given, that body and blood of Christ are not figurative [*uneigentlich*] but rather actual, literal food and drink. Against this stands ἀληθινός, as in v. 32 ἀληθινός ἄρτος, thus this food is appropriate to its idea, therefore a spiritual, figurative manner is possible.⁵¹

The word βρώσις takes us back to the βρώσις of 6:27. This is the food which remains to eternal life. Jesus had told the crowd that they should trust the One whom God sent for this food which He would give to them. This is the only "work of God": that they believe in Him and "work" (trust Jesus) for the imperishable food which He will give them.

John 6:56 is a statement which applies only to believers in Jesus. By the very definition of the word μένω, no one can "remain in Him" who is not already "in Him." Throughout John's writings "to remain in Jesus" means "to have faith-union with Him." ἐν ἐμοὶ μένει καὶ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ draws us back to 6:27 to "the food which remains for eternal life." When the believer eats "the Living Bread" which is the living flesh and blood of the Lord, that body and blood remain in him and he remains in the Lord. As Jesus stressed in the earlier part of this discourse (6:26-50) faith is the foundation for eternal life and 6:51-58 is inseparably linked to that faith. No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born

⁵¹ Karl Friedrich Aug. Kahnis, *Die Lehre vom Abendmahle*, (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1851) p. 119.

again (John 3:3). Likewise, no one can bear fruit unless he remains in Christ (John 15:1-10). The λόγος who became σὰρξ does not "remain" in those who do not believe the One whom the Father sent (John 5:38). This phrase of John (μένειν ἐν) is "a stronger form of the Pauline ἐν Χριστῷ (II.451)"⁵² John 6:56 is John's way of saying what Paul says in 1 Cor. 10:16. "John's Gospel does not have κοινωνία, κοινωνέω or κοινωνός. Instead it uses verbal phrases like μένειν ἐν, εἶναι ἐν e.g., 14:20,23; 15:4ff; 17:21."⁵³ This reciprocal indwelling means that we have been taken up into the flesh and blood of Christ. We remain in His body and He remains in us. The importance of this is pointed out in 6:57.

Vs. 57 is a most forceful expression of the tremendous claim that Jesus gives *man a share in God's own life* . . . And so it is that, while the Synoptic Gospels record the institution of the Eucharist, it is John who explains what the Eucharist does for the Christian. Just as the Eucharist itself echoes the theme of the covenant ("blood of the covenant"- Mark 14:24), so also the mutual indwelling of God (and Jesus) and the Christian may be a reflection of the covenant theme, Jer. 24:7 and 31:33 take the covenant promise, "you will be my people and I shall be your God," and give it the intimacy of God's working in man's heart.⁵⁴

John uses this same covenantal language to describe the resurrected bride of Christ in the new heaven and new earth: "Behold the σκηνὴ of God is with men. He will σκηνώσει with them and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be with

⁵² Hauck, μένω, TDNT IV.576.

⁵³ Hauck, κοινωνός, TDNT III.808, ftn. 69.

⁵⁴ Brown, p. 292-293.

them" (Rev. 21:3). This picture of the resurrected people of God is founded upon the covenant sealed in the blood of the Word who became flesh and ἐσκήνωσεν among us (John 1:14). This root word is found also in the eucharistic prayer of the Didache, along with συνάγω, ἐμπίμπλημι and other Johannine words and thoughts.

καὶ ὁ τρώγων με: the personal pronoun με indicates that eating the flesh and blood is equivalent to eating the whole Christ-- not the dead flesh of Christ drained of its blood (a separated flesh and blood), but the unified, living flesh and blood, the whole living Christ according to his human and divine natures in one person. The same observation is true concerning ὁ τρώγων τοῦτον τὸν ἄρτον, "this bread" which the believer will eat, is none other than Christ Himself, the living Bread, who is actually eaten in a supernatural, hidden manner in the Supper. To object that only Christ's body and blood and not the living Christ Himself is eaten in the Supper, is to present the Supper as the eating of a dead Christ, or one who is not altogether a human person. The metaphorical eating (the faith-eating) and the actual eating (in the Supper) in no way contradict or rule each other out. They are not mutually exclusive, but rather, they belong together. The actual eating of the living Christ presents no contradiction with the preceding verses which deal with faith-eating alone of the True Bread or the Bread of Life, since following the καὶ...δὲ conjunction which indicates a new addition, Jesus explicitly says: "The Bread which I will give is My flesh."

ζήσει δι' ἐμέ He shall live because Christ's living flesh and blood remain in him. That is why Jesus says "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life ("God has given us eternal life, and this life is in [ἐν] His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." 1 John 5:11-12) and I will raise him up on the last day." (6:54) Those who remain in Christ through faith have passed from the (sphere of) death into the Life (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14), which is Christ Himself, because wherever Christ is present, the sphere of life reigns. This life is given and received at first primarily through the "birth of water and the Spirit" (3:5; cf. 1:12-13), but it requires the constant connection with the true Vine to remain fruitful (15:5), who maintains and strengthens eternal life in believers through His Supper (cf. 6:56-57). That is why Christ says "life in yourselves" (6:53)—because this "Living Bread" is "the food which remains for eternal life"(6:27). What is spoken of as Christ in the believer is also spoken of as the believer in Christ: John 15:1-11. Paul also speaks of the resurrection of believers in this way ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται (1 Cor 15:22) with Christ Himself being the life-making Spirit, πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν (1 Cor 15:45).⁵⁵ Werner Elert, commenting on the last verses in the Bread of Life sermon, notes the eschatological significance:

⁵⁵ That Paul speaks of the resurrection of believers only is indicated in the context: 1 Cor. 15:20, 23. Christ is in no way the "firstfruit" of the resurrection of unbelievers.

The double aspect in which life appears elsewhere in John is found here too. It is in the present and at the same time in the future. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood *has* eternal life" (verse 54)--that is the present. "He *abides* in Me and I in him" (verse 56)--that is the present outlook. "He who eats this bread *will live* forever" (verse 58)--that is the future consummation. The present "having" of life through the reception of Christ's body and blood assures the resurrection, for He says: "I will raise him up at the last day" (verse 54). Ignatius' oft quoted formula regarding Holy Communion, "The medicine of immortality and the antidote which prevents us from dying" (Ephesians 20:2) is only a linguistic modification of the Johannine conception.⁵⁶

This helps explain John 6:63: "The Spirit is the One who makes alive, the flesh profits nothing." The flesh of Jesus Christ is the spiritual flesh of the God-Man; and, if we let John speak, "God is a spirit, and it is necessary for the ones who worship Him to worship in spirit and truth." (4:24) So "that which is born of the flesh" cannot help itself in any way; but, "that which is born of the Spirit" has been made alive by the Spirit. The flesh of Jesus is not "born of the flesh" (Jesus, conceived of the Holy Spirit, Matt.1:20; born of God, 1 John 5:18) and is of great benefit. In fact, it is only in the flesh of Jesus where the life-making Spirit dwells that we have access to eternal Life. Resurrection to eternal life comes only through union with the flesh and blood of the Man, Jesus of Nazareth (1 Cor. 15:21, Rom. 6:5). Apart from this life-making flesh there is no life and no salvation. Everyone outside of this flesh remains in the sphere of death. We are enabled to see

⁵⁶ Werner Elert, *The Lord's Supper Today*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973) p. 31. (Excerpted and translated with permission from the original German: *Der Christliche Glaube*, [Furche-Verlag, Hamburg, 1956])

the answer to the Jews' question of unbelief: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" by the explanation which Jesus gives to His disciples in the form of another question--"What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending where He was before?" By recalling these words John shows (to believers) that Christ really can accomplish this:

He points to the Ascension and concomitant Glorification whereby Christ became "life-giving Spirit" as providing an answer (perhaps a double answer) to the difficulty. He means that the One who even in His earthly life could walk on the sea, and after His Resurrection could appear and disappear at will, pass through closed doors, and ascend into heaven, all the time retaining His body with the nailholes in it--such an One could do even this. He could, both because by all these things He proved Himself to be a supernatural Divine Being to whom all things are possible; and also because His body was--especially after the Resurrection and Ascension--very different from our earthly bodies, for which this would be indeed impossible. The things about which Jesus had been talking in the discourse which gave offence--namely His body and blood--were not flesh and blood as we know them in this life, or in death. They were His flesh and blood as they shall be after He is risen, ascended, and glorified. They shall have become a spiritual body at the time He will give them. And only as such could they profit unto eternal life.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Felix L. Cirlot, *The Early Eucharist*, (London: SPCK, 1939) p. 127.

Translation and Text Notes of John 6:51-59

(51) ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν⁵⁸ ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ⁵⁹ καταβάς⁶⁰.
 ἐάν τις φάγη⁶¹ ἐκ τούτου τοῦ ἄρτου ζήσῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα· καὶ ὁ
 ἄρτος δὲ⁶² ὃν⁶³ ἐγὼ⁶⁴ δώσω ἢ σὰρξ μου ἐστὶν ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ
 κόσμου⁶⁵ ζωῆς. (52) Ἐμάχοντο⁶⁶ οὖν πρὸς ἀλλήλους οἱ
 Ἰουδαῖοι λέγοντες, Πῶς δύναται οὗτος ἡμῖν δοῦναι⁶⁷ τὴν σάρκα
 [αὐτοῦ] φαγεῖν⁶⁸; (53) εἶπεν οὖν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν
 λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ φάγητε τὴν⁶⁹ σάρκα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
 καὶ πίητε αὐτοῦ τὸ αἶμα, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς. (54) ὁ
 τρώγων⁷⁰ μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίνων⁷¹ μου τὸ αἶμα ἔχει⁷² ζωὴν

⁵⁸ Attributive Adjectival pres. part.; Present denotes a continuous state of being alive.

⁵⁹ Genitive of source.

⁶⁰ Attributive Adjectival aor. part.; "the having come down from heaven bread".

⁶¹ A proleptic Aor. Subj. (#257 Zerwick), also referred to as a "futuristic aorist" (BD 333); see also Burton #50, see also John. 15:8.

⁶² See the analysis of καὶ . . . δὲ under "The Significance of Structure".

⁶³ Masculine sing. rel. pron. corresponding to masc. ὁ ἄρτος not to fem. ἡ σὰρξ.

⁶⁴ Emphatic ἐγώ.

⁶⁵ Objective genitive.

⁶⁶ Inceptive Imperfect.

⁶⁷ Aor. Infinitive epexegetical to main verb.

⁶⁸ Aor. Infinitive complementary to "flesh".

⁶⁹ "A class. author would have used the gen. more often where the acc. is found in the NT; thus John 6:53,54,56,57 with τρώγειν, which in the NT as in class. never takes the gen., but which would not have been used here by a classical author (emphasis added)." (BD 169.2).

αἰώνιον, καὶ γὰρ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ· (55) ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ μου ἀληθὴς ἐστὶν βρώσις, καὶ τὸ αἷμά μου ἀληθὴς⁷³ ἐστὶν πόσις. (56) ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίνων μου τὸ αἷμα ἐν⁷⁴ ἐμοὶ μένει καὶ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ⁷⁵. (57) καθὼς ἀπέστειλέν με ὁ ζῶν πατήρ καὶ γὰρ ζῶ διὰ* τὸν πατέρα, καὶ ὁ τρώγων με καὶ κεῖνος⁷⁶ ζήσει δι' ἐμέ. (58) οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς, οὐ καθὼς ἔφαγον οἱ πατέρες⁷⁷ καὶ ἀπέθανον· ὁ τρώγων τοῦτον

⁷⁰ Attributive substantive pres. part., General Present Part.: "The Present Participle is also used without reference to time or progress, simply defining its subject as belonging to a certain class, i.e. the class of those who do the action denoted by the verb. The participle in this case becomes a simple adjective or noun, timeless and indefinite (emphasis added)." (Burton #123); see p. 20-21. for lexical analysis of τρώγω.

⁷¹ Attributive substantive pres. part., General Present Part. as in the previous footnote.

⁷² Pres. Indic. act. Progressive or continuous sense: "to continue to have."

⁷³ "Superficially the adjective ἀληθής appears to be inappropriate, and therefore several witnesses substitute the adverb ἀληθῶς. On the whole, the external evidence supporting ἀληθής is of preponderant weight." (Bruce Metzger's *Textual Commentary on the Greek N. T.*)

⁷⁴ Dative of sphere; not merely association.

⁷⁵ "After αὐτῷ codex Bezae adds what appears to be a homiletic expansion, καθὼς ἐν ἐμοὶ ὁ πατήρ καὶ γὰρ ἐν τῷ πατρί. ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ λάβητε τὸ σῶμα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὡς τὸν ἄρτον τῆς ζωῆς, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν αὐτῷ ('As the Father is in me, I also am in the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you do not receive the body of the Son of man as the bread of life, you have no life in him'; the sentence 'if you...in him' is also read by (a, ff2)" (Metzger's *Textual Commentary*)

* with accus. normally means "on account of", but here means "through"; points to the source of life.

⁷⁶ καὶ κεῖνος = καὶ ἐκεῖνος "he also" (Zerwick).

* διὰ with accus. normally means "on account of"; points to the source of life. "In a local sense 'through'. (BD 222) "This διὰ + Acc. can only mean 'through' here, as in Rom 8:20; Rev 12:11; 13:14. . . The best solution is perhaps to regard the accusative construction in the case of a person as implying the personal activity." (Schnackenburg, 2, 455).

τὸν ἄρτον ζήσει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. (59) Ταῦτα εἶπεν ἐν συναγωγῇ⁷⁸ διδάσκων⁷⁹ ἐν Καφαρναούμ.

(51) I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread he shall live forever--and in addition to that--the bread which I Myself will give is My flesh for the life of the world. (52) Then the Jews began to dispute among themselves saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat!?" (53) So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. (54) He who chews My flesh and drinks My blood continues to have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (55) For My flesh is true/real food, and My blood is true/real drink. (56) He who chews My flesh and drinks My blood continues to remain in Me and I in him. (57) Just as the living Father sent Me and I live through the Father, so he who chews Me, he also shall live through Me. (58) This is the bread which came down from heaven, not like (the manna) the fathers ate and they died; he who chews this bread shall live forever.

⁷⁷ "the manna"; several variant texts supply what is implicit in the context.

⁷⁸ Variant D has σαββατω which is the time when one would expect to hear a sermon on such a text as the manna in the wilderness. The article has been omitted from this prepositional phrase just as in John 18:20; "a strong tendency to omit the article in prepositional phrases...because in Semitic usage the substantive would be in the construct and so without the article." (Zerwick #182)

⁷⁹ Predicative Circumstantial: Temporal; pres. act. part.

(59) He spoke these (words) while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Objections to Eucharistic Reference Answered

Those who contend that John 6 does not refer to the Lord's Supper might offer these objections:

I. The Lord's Supper had not been instituted at the time when Jesus spoke these words; therefore, no one could have understood what Jesus was talking about, if indeed He spoke of the Lord's Supper.

Response: This line of reasoning would lead one to say that the O.T. prophets could not have spoken of Christ's resurrection because He had not been born yet. The fact that no one was able to understand is not a legitimate objection. Jesus said many things during His ministry which neither the Jews nor His own disciples were able to understand. If anyone claims "God does not propose the incomprehensible."—we shall disagree on the basis of Scripture (John 2:19-22, 3:4, 4:14-15, 6:52, 8:27, 10:6, 12:34, 13:7, 28, 36-38, 14:5, 8, 26, 16:12-13, 16-18, 20:9).

Furthermore, the inability to understand did not keep Peter and the others of the Twelve from believing in this "hard saying." The understanding would come later (as it often does with us) as Jesus said in John 14:25-26.

II. σάρξ is used instead of the regular term σῶμα, for referring to the Lord's Supper.

Response: σάρξ and σῶμα are synonymous here. John used σάρξ instead of σῶμα deliberately in order to emphasize the true humanity of Jesus in opposition to his incipient-gnostic

opponents.⁸⁰ John's use of the word "flesh" is the natural corollary to John 1:14, "The Word became flesh." John's opponents, such as Cerinthus, denied the permanent incarnation of the Logos. The later Gnostics taught that Christ's "body" was not a real body of flesh and blood but an apparition which "seemed" (Docetism) to be flesh and blood. John carries on a relentless warfare against these false teachings in almost everything he writes (John 1:14, 19:34, 20:25-28; 1 John 1:1, 4:2, 5:6; 2 John 7). Furthermore, we cannot confine John (or Jesus) to Pauline usage.

III. John 6 cannot refer to the Lord's Supper because of vs. 53-54: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Not every person who eats and drinks Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper has eternal life, some eat and drink unworthily, and thus, to their judgment (1 Cor. 11:29).

Response: 6:53 is not an absolutely unconditional statement. For example: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5) This statement is exactly analogous to 6:53. Both statements appear to be absolutely unconditional (when ripped away from their context), and yet, they are not. A person can enter the kingdom of God without being baptized. Baptism is necessary, but not absolutely necessary. There is more than one

⁸⁰ See pages 49-54.

way to be born again (1 Pet. 1:23, 25). Likewise, the Lord's Supper is necessary, but not absolutely necessary. There is more than one way to remain in fellowship with Christ. Rejection of Baptism or the Lord's Supper is evidence of unbelief. Only unbelief damns; however, faith cannot coexist with the conscious rejection of Christ's Word. 6:54 is analogous to Gal. 3:27: "For as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Neither statement is absolutely unconditional. Note also the present continuative sense of ἔχει in 6:54, "He who chews My flesh and drinks My blood continues to have eternal life." John 6:56 makes it clear that these statements concerning those who do eat His flesh and drink His blood are addressed to believers only--since one can "remain" in Christ only if he is already a believer. The statements concerning those who do not eat His flesh and drink His blood are addressed to unbelievers as statements of pure law. Those who refuse to "trust in the One whom God sent for the food which remains to eternal life" are those who "have no life in themselves." They have not listened and learned from the Father (6:45); likewise, they are those who are not able to hear Jesus' words (John 6:60, 8:43). For this reason a fight breaks out between the "do's" and the "do not's"; those who do not ask the question of unbelief: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Those who do make the confession of faith in the One God sent to provide the food which remains: "You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." As Jesus said, "there are some of you who do not believe," there also are those who do. The sermon in the

synagogue in Capernaum divided the crowd into two groups: believers and unbelievers. John 6:53 is not addressed to those who possess life; it is pure law for unbelievers. John 6:54 is addressed to those who already possess life; it is pure Gospel for believers.

IV. If John were speaking of the Lord's Supper in 6:51-58, he would be making the Lord's Supper an *opus operatum* which makes any participant immortal.

Response: Those who raise this objection seem to ignore the whole preceding part of this discourse (6:26-51), in which Jesus speaks of the gift of faith no less than six times. Faith is presupposed for "those who do." This objection fails to recognize who is being addressed in these statements. 6:56 makes it clear that only those who are already in Christ (believers = those who do) eat Christ's flesh and blood.

In v. 64, in the context of a repeated emphasis on the necessity of faith, an allusion is made to Judas Iscariot . . . Judas appears here as an example to illustrate that faith is indispensable in the Eucharist and that in this sense, too, the "flesh" alone profiteth nothing, because in this passage the necessity for God-given faith is brought to the fore.⁸¹

John's readers knew that Judas had been at the Last Supper with Jesus. Likewise, they knew that it would have been better for Judas to have never been born. John places great emphasis on Judas' lack of faith (6:64,70-71; 12:4-6; 13:2,10,11,21-30; 17:12; 18:1-5).

⁸¹ Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, (SCM Press, 1953) Wyndham Hall Press reprint, p. 101.

Not only does John 6 not teach a Lord's Supper which is salvific *ex opere operato* , it teaches the exact opposite—a Lord's Supper which presupposes and includes faith! The καὶ...δὲ construction links the faith-eating with the flesh and blood eating of the Supper so that the two may not be pulled apart and played against each other. What God has joined together, let no man separate!

V. This passage deals not with the mystery of the sacrament but the mystery of Christology.⁸²

Response: It is true that there is a great emphasis on Christology (Who Jesus is as Savior) in these verses. But as Menken admits, “belief in Jesus and participation in the Eucharist are not mutually exclusive.”⁸³

As the καὶ...δὲ conjunction in 6:51 shows, literal eating and metaphorical eating can neither be separated from one another in this passage, nor played against one another. Menken also admits that the sacrament of the Eucharist implies a Christological statement.⁸⁴ The Christology of the theological heirs of Calvin and/or Zwingli is not adequate to permit any “realistic” view of the Eucharist; therefore, in keeping with this Christology, any realistic eating in this passage must be discounted. Likewise,

⁸² This view is asserted by the following: Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997) p. 237. Maarten J. J. Menken, “John 6,51c-58: Eucharist or Christology?” *Biblica* 74 (1,'93):1-26. Anderson, P. N., *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, (Tuebingen: Mohr, 1996).

⁸³ Menken, p. 6.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

since it would vitiate both their Christology and their view of the Eucharist, Scholars of the Reformed persuasion are unprepared to admit any direct reference to the Eucharist in this passage. These reasons are not exegetical, but historical and confessional in nature. Therefore, the adherents of this view give no recognition to the fact that the Jesus who is the Bread of Life (flesh and blood) is the very same Jesus (flesh and blood) who is actually present in the Eucharist.

Objections to the View that John 6 Does Not Refer to the Lord's Supper

I. If John 6:53-58 is not a reference to the sacramental eating of Christ's flesh and drinking of His blood, then what is the additional thing which καὶ...δὲ introduces to the faith-eating which has not been said before? John consistently uses this conjunction to introduce a new subject; what then is the new subject if it is not the eating of flesh and drinking of blood in the Lord's Supper? It cannot be denied that the topic of the earlier part of the sermon is the faith-eating of the Bread of Life. What is related to the faith-eating and yet an addition to it if not the actual flesh and blood-eating of the Supper? The vicarious sacrifice Jesus mentions in 6:51b is the necessary foundation for both the life which Jesus gives through the faith-eating in the present and through the sacramental flesh/blood-eating in the future; it is the foundation for the present Bread and the future Food, the Bread of Life and the Living Bread. How do those who want to deny any reference to real sacramental eating answer this question?

II. There is no place in Scripture where "blood-drinking" is used as a mere figure of "faith." Such a usage would be totally unprecedented and cannot be supported by Scripture. How do those who deny any reference to the Supper explain "drink My blood" without simply denying the clear literal meaning of the words?

III. Disciples would not be offended by a mere figurative expression for faith. It is the literal talk of eating flesh and drinking blood which is revolting to them here. Eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ is the *skandalon* which causes many disciples to fall away here (6:60-66). Werner Elert illustrates this for us:

The answer to the question: Do these words of Christ relate to Holy Communion? is dependent on the other question: What constituted the *skandalon* for the disciples here? Christ's claim to be the Bread of life cannot by itself have been an offense to them. To be sure, the Jews were offended by such and similar claims (John 5:18; 7:20; 8:12, 52; 10:20, 31), but not so the disciples. However, here they too recoil. From what? Because Christ was vulgarizing the beautiful figurative speech of the bread of life, which may be appropriated by faith, by speaking of His flesh and blood? Did He perhaps offend them when He attached so much importance to the "flesh"? The evangelist John can surely not have thought of the offense in that way, because according to his doctrine the entire mystery of Christ's mission consists in the fact that the Word became "flesh" (John 1:14; cf. 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). Also the generalizing interpretation of the words, "the flesh is of no avail," founders on this Johannine doctrine. No, the offence stemmed from the fact that Jesus had spoken of the eating of His flesh (τρώγειν, verses 54,56.) and the drinking of His blood, which excluded any figurative understanding.⁸⁵

IV. In John 3 Jesus speaks of Baptism without using the words "baptize" or "baptism" by saying, "born of water and Spirit." The mirror-like parallelism between John 3 and John 6 would suggest that Jesus is using a similar expression to speak of the Lord's Supper in John 6. The Πῶς δύναται. . . Ἄμην ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μή. . . of John 3:4-5 is mirrored by the Πῶς δύναται. . . Ἄμην ἀμὴν λέγω υμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ. . . of John 6:52-53. The lack of comprehension of Nicodemus concerning Baptism is mirrored by the the lack of comprehension of the Jews. Even the response of Christ to the incredulous questioning of Nicodemus is strikingly similar to that which He gave to the Jews in John 6:61-62: "Does this cause you to stumble? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?" John 3:12: "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" Surely the marked similarities between Christ's speech on Baptism and his speech on the bread of life are not without meaning. Even without being alerted to these similarities, we should notice that the text of John 6 itself indicates another kind of eating in addition to the faith-eating. Immediately before the crucial conjunction in 6:51, Christ says, "If anyone eats (φάγη) of this bread he shall live forever." But after the conjunction He says (6:58), "He who eats (τρώγων) this bread shall live forever." In order to emphasize the addition of a new kind of eating to the faith-eating, John uses this new word which he has not used before. Note that he does not stop using the old word (φαγεῖν), that is, he does not leave faith behind

⁸⁵ Elert, p. 29.

when he begins to speak of this new kind of eating--the two kinds of eating happen together. In John 3 faith and Baptism are so intertwined with each other that the rejection of Baptism is really an act of unbelief. Likewise in John 6 the faith-eating of the Bread of Life and the actual eating of His flesh and blood belong together in such a way that the rejection of the oral eating of the Supper is an act of unbelief. The variant text of codex Bezae (quoted in the translation section in the footnote on 6:56) may not be original text of this verse, but it does reflect the true, early Western understanding of the bond between faith and the Lord's Supper.

Summary

John 6 has been called "a faith chapter" and rightly so, for it speaks primarily of the possession of eternal life through faith-union with Christ whose atoning work will not leave us hungry or thirsty (6:35, 40). In addition to this (καὶ...δέ), our passage also speaks of eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood, which happens in oral, supernatural actuality in the Supper along with the faith-eating in our hearts whenever we "receive the body of the Son of Man as the bread of life." The result of the oral eating added to the faith-eating is the objective (*extra nos*) certainty that we have life in Him and that He remains in us and we know that He really will raise us up on the last day.

CHAPTER II

A CATENA OF EUCHARISTIC REFERENCES TO JOHN 6 IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Introduction

The question investigated in this chapter is: Which of the early fathers of the Church interpreted John 6 (especially the Bread of Life sermon) eucharistically? The objective is not to prove that there was complete agreement among the fathers on a eucharistic interpretation of the Bread of Life sermon, but simply to show that such an interpretation did exist in the early church. This history of interpretation may have some bearing on how we interpret the Bread of Life sermon and may be somewhat surprising, since Luther and most Lutheran exegetes since the time of the Reformation have interpreted this passage as having no reference to the Eucharist.⁸⁶ Lutherans are generally somewhat apprehensive about planting in fields which Luther did not plough (and rightly so), but the objective is to show that it was not this way from the beginning; a eucharistic interpretation of the Bread of Life discourse is not a post-Reformation novelty.

Evidence from the Early Church

The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, commonly referred to as the Didache, contains words which can be found among New

⁸⁶ With the notable exceptions of Wilhelm Löhe, August F. C. Vilmar, E. W. Hengstenberg, K. Fr. Göschel, Theodor Zahn, Werner Elert, Hermann Sasse, James W. Voelz.

Testament writers only in John and has certain other similarities with John.⁸⁷ Didache IX.2 provides a prayer for the cup of the Eucharist: "First, concerning the Cup: 'We give thanks to You, our Father for the holy Vine of David Your servant, which You have made known to us through Your servant Jesus.' "⁸⁸ In John 15:1 Jesus says, "I am the true Vine." This verse is probably the basis for the term "Vine of David" in the Didache. Rev. 5:5 calls Christ "the Root of David" which employs the Old Testament imagery which might also be the source of this phrase in the Didache. But the similarities with Johannine phrases become overwhelming in the next two verses, IX.3: "And concerning the broken bread: 'We give You thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You have made known to us through Jesus. . .'" The word κλάσματος appears in John 6:12 in the plural to refer to the broken pieces of barley bread which the disciples gathered for Jesus so that nothing would be lost.

The word *klasmata* also appears in the Synoptic accounts. Its use in the Didache suggests that it was a common term

⁸⁷ In reference to the eucharistic prayers in chapters IX and X: "The antiquity of the prayers is clear from the fact that they are heavily influenced by the Jewish tradition. Note, too, the title *pais* ("child" or "servant") as applied to Jesus in all these prayers; it is a very early Christological title that soon disappeared from the Church's tradition. According to H. J. Gibbins, "The Problem of the Liturgical Section of the Didache," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 36 (1935), 383-86, "the prayers date from as early as 30-70 A.D. and come from Jerusalem." The preceding quote is from Willy Rordorf, *The Eucharist of the Early Christians*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1978), p. 19. (French Title: *L' Eucharistie des Premiers Chre'tiens* [Beauchesne et ses Fils, 1976].)

⁸⁸ Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1912) p. 322. All references from the Didache are from Lake's Greek text.

for the Eucharistic hosts in the early Church. The cognate noun, *klasis*, appears in "the breaking of the bread," a designation of the Eucharistic meal, and the verb *klao* appears in the accounts of the institution.⁸⁹

"Life" is certainly a major theme in John, τῆς ζωῆς of John 1:4 being identical to the Didache; also similar is John 3:15-16, 36 and 4:36 where the reaper συνάγει καρπὸν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον. John 17:3 and 26 bear similarity to the phrase "which You have made known to us through Jesus" which occurs in IX.2, 3 and X.2 and in an abbreviated form in X.3. "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and gathered (συναχθέν) together became one, so let Your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom," Didache IX.4 . Only John connects this feeding to the kingship of Jesus. This correlates to the broken bread which Didache IX.4 speaks of being scattered on the mountains and then gathered. Only John's account of the feeding of the 5,000 locates the event on a mountain, John 6:3. The phrase "Gather (συναγάγετε) the fragments. . . so that nothing (singular) may be lost" in John 6:12 refers not so much to the gathering of the pieces (not "so that they may not be lost") but to the meaning of the σημεῖον: the gathering of the Church (hence the singular τι). Certainly this prayer was written with John 11:52 as its inspiration, if not its vocabulary: "he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather (συναγάγη) together into one the scattered children of God," (John 11:51b-52). "Broken bread," "scattered on

⁸⁹ Raymond Brown, *New Testament Essays* , (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965) p. 83, fn. 16.

the mountains," "gathered together into one," kingship and "kingdom": the similarities are too many, too identical and too compacted to allow any doubt of the connection between the gathering of the bread and the Church in the Gospel of John and in the Didache. After the admonition that no one be permitted to eat (φαγέτω) or drink (πίετω) the Eucharist but those baptized into the Name, chapter X begins with Μετὰ δὲ τὸ ἐμπλησθῆναι οὕτως εὐχαριστήσατε. ἐμπίπλημι is found not in the synoptic accounts of the feeding of the 5,000, but only in John's account. Didache X.2 continues: "We give thanks to You, Πάτερ ἅγιε, for Your holy name, which κατεσκήνωσας in our hearts and for the knowledge and faith and ἀθανασίας, which you have made known to us through Jesus. . . ." John 17:11 has the synonymous parallel: Πάτερ ἅγιε, τήρησον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου. John 17:26 tells how this knowledge, faith and this Name has been made known to the Church through Jesus, καὶ γὰρ ἐν αὐτοῖς, being equivalent to the holy Name tabernacled in the hearts of the saints. κατεσκήνωσας comes from the root σκηνώ, the noun being the tent of God's presence in Ex. 33:9 and Num. 12:5. John uses this Old Testament word to speak of God's saving presence with His people in the person of His Son, "The Word became flesh and ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, and we beheld His glory (John 1:14)." This incarnate Word dwelling in us comes to final eschatological consummation with those who will stand before the throne, serving God "day and night within His temple, and He who sits upon the throne σκηνώσει ἐπὶ αὐτοὺς" (Rev. 7:15). Even now, God's σκηνή is the Church, "τὴν σκηνὴν αὐτοῦ, those who dwell in heaven" (Rev.13:6). "But it does not yet appear what we

shall be" (1 John 3:2), it will not be revealed until Christ appears and then it will be apparent that "The σκηνὴ of God is with men and σκηνώσει μετ' αὐτῶν, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them" (Rev. 21:3). Neither John nor the Didache fail to tie together Christ's incarnational presence and His eucharistic presence to His eschatological presence in the final consummation.⁹⁰ This eucharistic prayer says that along with this faith and knowledge comes immortality, not the immortality of an immaterial soul of Hellenistic philosophy but the eternal life which comes through knowing the only true God (John 17:3), the immortality of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:42, 53-54). It is only through communion with Christ that one may share in His immortality, since He is "ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν" (1 Tim. 6:16). Ignatius, quoting the Antiochene Communion liturgy, echoes the meaning of the Didache, by calling the Supper the φάρμακον ἀθανασίας (Eph. 20.2).⁹¹

Didache X.3: Σὺ, δέσποτα παντοκράτορ, ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα ἕνεκεν τοῦ ὀνόματός σου... In Rev. 6:10, the martyrs call God δέσποτα, and παντοκράτορ is used nine times in Revelation. The latter word does not appear in the synoptics at all. Didache X.3 goes on to say that God has given common food and drink for men for enjoyment

⁹⁰ Please note that the Didache contains a popourri of Scriptural quotes and expressions. The point being made in this section is that there are many words and phrases in this eucharistic prayer which originate from no other part of Scripture except John's writings. The writer(s) of the Didache use the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6 as a eucharistic sign in this prayer.

⁹¹ See the exegesis section, p. 24-25 and the following section on Ignatius of Antioch.

that they might give thanks, "but to us You have granted spiritual food and drink and life eternal through Your Servant." Spiritual food and drink appear most distinctly in 1 Cor. 10:3-4, but even more in keeping with the Didache is the eternal life which results from eating and drinking the Spirit-filled food and drink in John 6:54-55: "He who chews My flesh and drinks My blood continues to have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food and My blood is true drink." Not only is the spiritual food and drink mentioned, but also the immortality of the resurrection is directly connected to it. Reinhold Seeberg, commenting on the Didache IX and X, asserts: "It is, therefore, the Johannine conception of the Lord's Supper which is presented here as well as in Ignatius."⁹² In a similar vein Ignatius also draws contrast between common food and the spiritual food of the Eucharist in Rom. 7.3. Didache X.5: "Remember, Lord, Your Church to deliver her from all evil [cf. John 17:15, 1 John 5:18] and to bring her to consummation in Your love [1 John 4:18] and gather her from the four winds [Rev. 6:13, Matt. 24:31], the sanctified [John 17:17, 19; Eph. 5:26], into Your kingdom." Here the thought goes back to Didache IX.4 and its reference to John 6:11-13 and the gathering of the children of Israel (the Church) in John 11:52. There are other allusions and similarities to John's writings and thought in these eucharistic prayers, but let these suffice to show that the Didache refers to the feeding miracle in John 6 as a σημεῖον of the Eucharist and of the gathering of the Church. The

⁹² Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1952) p. 74.

Didache's eucharistic prayers are the earliest known eucharistic prayers and very likely were contemporaneous with the Apostle John.⁹³ They are indicative of the early Church's view of the feeding of the 5,000 during the life-time of John.

The use of σάρξ by Ignatius sheds light upon John's use of σάρξ. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110) in his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 7:1 says,

Εὐχαριστίας καί προσευχῆς ἀπέχονται, διὰ τὸ μὴ ὁμολογεῖν τὴν εὐχαριστίαν σάρκα εἶναι τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν παθοῦσαν, ἣν τῇ χρηστότητι ὁ πατὴρ ἤγειρεν. οἱ οὖν ἀντιλέγοντες τῇ δωρεᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ συζητοῦντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν· συνέφερεν δὲ αὐτοῖς ἀγαπᾶν, ἵνα καὶ ἀναστῶσιν. ⁹⁴

They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, the flesh that suffered for our sins, and that the Father in his goodness raised up again. Therefore those who reject the gift of God die amid their disputes. But it is profitable for them to practice agape, so that they also may rise again.

The debate over whether or not the reference of Ignatius to the Eucharist as the σάρξ of Christ is dependent on the Gospel of John leaves one with many different opinions. On one hand Richardson cautiously states:

⁹³ These prayers are dated as early as 30-70 A. D.; see footnote 73.

⁹⁴ Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 258. All references from Ignatius are translated from the Greek text of Lake unless otherwise specified. ἀγαπᾶν should be understood in the sense of receiving the Supper, as Seeberg translates: "It were profitable for them to commune (ἀγαπᾶν=ἀγάπην ποιεῖν, Smyr. 8.2. Apparently in the same sense we find ἀγάπη ἄφθαρτος, Rom. 3, cf. Zahn. p. 348.), in order that they might rise again." See Reinhold Seeberg above.

When one recognizes the free and independent way in which Ignatius makes use of Pauline language and phrases, it does not seem impossible that he has here Johannine passages in mind. However, the question of his indebtedness to John has not been indubitably established, nor on the other hand is there sufficient justification for denying it altogether. Perhaps the evidence at our command is not sufficient to enable us to give a final and conclusive judgment.⁹⁵

Nevertheless Richardson admits:

Actually the only ideas that can be considered unique to Ignatius and John are those connected with the Eucharist. Like John, Ignatius expressly connects the resurrection and eternal life with the rite (Eph. 20.2; Smyr. 7.1, cf. John 6.54). In Smyr. 7.1, ἀγαπᾶν is probably used with a double meaning, denoting participation in the Eucharist as well as φιλαδελφία. Both ideas are connected in John with eternal life and the resurrection (John 6.54, 1 John 3.14). The same background of the docetic heretics, who refused to attend the Eucharist, because they denied that Christ came in the flesh and hence abjured the connection of the elements with His flesh and blood, may be reflected in John (6.51b-56) and Ignatius (Smyr. 7.1).⁹⁶

Paul makes no direct connection between the Supper and resurrection to eternal life. Ignatius uses the word σάρξ instead of σῶμα to speak of the Supper in opposition to his docetic opponents, who taught that the Christ descended upon the man Jesus at His Baptism and departed before He suffered and died (a refusal to confess that he bears flesh μὴ ὁμολογῶν αὐτὸν σαρκοφόρον; Smyr. 5:2).

⁹⁵ Cyril Charles Richardson, *The Christianity of Ignatius of Antioch*, (New York: Colombia University Press, 1935) p. 75.

⁹⁶ Richardson, p. 71.

In the view of the docetists, Christ is by nature divine and therefore could not sully himself by contact with flesh; any bodily life he might have could only be an outward appearance, an illusion. Since he was not born of a woman and did not have a real body, he could not die on the cross or rise from the dead. Having thus done away with the scandal of a God taking flesh, that is, with the scandal of the incarnation, the docetists logically proceeded to empty the Eucharist of its meaning: Christ did not take flesh, and therefore his flesh could not be present in the Eucharist.⁹⁷

The Docetism described by Raymond Johanny above may not be identical in every respect to the incipient-Docetism which John and/or Ignatius battled. Irenaeus reports that John wrote his proclamation of the Gospel for the express purpose of destroying the error of Cerinthus. This fits perfectly into what John himself wrote in his letters concerning what his opponents deny; and in his account of the Gospel he says, "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:31):

John, the disciple of the Lord, proclaimed this faith and wished by the proclamation of the gospel to destroy the error which had been planted among men by Cerinthus. . . The disciple of the Lord wished to cut off all such ideas and to establish the rule of truth in the Church, that there is one God Almighty who made all things by his Word, both visible and invisible, and also to indicate that through the same Word through whom God made this world order he also

⁹⁷ Raymond Johanny, "Ignatius of Antioch" in *The Eucharist of the Early Christians*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1978), p. 56-57. (French Title: *L' Eucharistie des Premiers Chre'tiens* [Beauchesne et ses Fils, 1976] .)

bestowed salvation on the men who belong to this order. (Ireneaus, *Against Heresies* III. xi.1)⁹⁸

Some idea of the teaching which John opposed may also be gained from Ireneaus and provide the reason why John speaks of the Word becoming flesh and why he also goes to great lengths to speak of the blood of Jesus and His human suffering:

A certain Cerinthus also in Asia taught that the world was not made by the first God, but by a certain Virtue far separated and removed from the Principality which is above all things, a Virtue which knows not the God over all. He added that Jesus was not born of a virgin but was the son of Joseph and Mary, like other men, but superior to all others in justice, prudence and wisdom. And that after his baptism Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove, from that Principality which is above all things; and that then he revealed the Unknown Father and performed deeds of virtue, but that in the end Christ flew back, leaving Jesus, and Jesus suffered and rose again, but Christ remained impassible, being by nature spiritual. (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I. xxvi. 1, 2) ⁹⁹

Given this information about the teaching of Cerinthus, it is easy to see why John emphasized that Jesus is still the Christ, the Son of God and this same Christ is the One who suffered and died on the cross. John is flatly contradicting Cerinthus, who taught that the Christ abandoned Jesus before his suffering and death. To the point is the analysis of H. M. Gwatkin, who speaks of this early

⁹⁸ Cyril Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers, Library of Christian Classics Vol. 1* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963) p. 378.

⁹⁹ Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, (New York & London: Oxford University Press, 1960) p. 52.

form of incipient Docetism of men such as Cerinthus who was associated with both the Ebionites and Gnosticism.

The stumbling-block of that age was not so much the Lord's divinity as his crucifixion. Because he suffered, said the Jew, he was not divine. Because he was divine, replied the Gnostic, he did not suffer. Thus the Judaizers and the Gnostics had a common interest in explaining away his sufferings, for they were agreed that divinity and suffering are inconsistent with each other. So they introduced a higher power as the real Christ. The Ebionites made the Spirit of the Lord (in the Jewish sense) light on a common man. The Gnostics clothed a heavenly power with the appearance of manhood, so that those sufferings were only in appearance. In either case, it is denied that the Redeemer suffered at all. (H. M. Gwatkin, *Early Church History to AD 313*, Vol. I, p. 11) ¹⁰⁰

In another letter of Ignatius, *Romans* 7:3:

I take no pleasure in corruptible food or in the delights of this life. I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David, and for drink I desire his blood, which is agape incorruptible ("an immortal love feast"). ¹⁰¹

It is helpful here to note that Ignatius' use of the term "love" is not merely moral but also Eucharistic, as in *Smyr.* 8:2 where he clearly uses the words ἀγάπην ποεῖν to designate the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Ignatius requires a bishop to be present to baptize or to ἀγάπην ποεῖν. This usage is similar to that in *Jude* 12 where the word is sometimes translated "love feasts" as in the Revised Standard Version. There is certainly a similarity between

¹⁰⁰ J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius*, (Cambridge: SPCK University Press, 1987) p. 15.

¹⁰¹ Cyril Richardson gives this translation of ἀγάπη ἁφθαρτος in *Early Christian Fathers*, LCC Vol. 1, p. 105.

"the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus" and the bread which Jesus says is His flesh (John 6:51). Likewise a certain similarity between the ἀγάπη ἄφθαρτος and the βρώσιν τὴν μένουσαν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον of John 6:27. For Ignatius the Supper and love are inseparable.

The agape that Christ had for the Church is particularly expressed in the gift of His passion. His blood is "the incorruptible agape" (ἀγάπη ἄφθαρτος Rom. 7.3), which the believer receives in the Eucharist. Agape and Eucharistic rite are closely related. By faith in the reality of the life and death and resurrection of Christ, and by participation in the Eucharist, the believer receives this gift of the divine agape (Tral. 8.1), which works itself out in the relations of the Christian to the community. For these two aspects of agape are inseparable-- participation in the divine favour and the practical brotherly love (φιλαδελφία) of the believer in his attitude to his fellow Christians. The heretic who fails to attend the Eucharist has thereby shown that he lacks agape, because his pride and unbrotherly conduct (cf. φησίδω Tral. 7.1) have separated him from the community, and he has abandoned the rite wherein he can be constantly renewed in faith and agape (Tral. 7.1). This close connection of agape with the Eucharistic rite is brought out in Smyr. 7.1, where there is perhaps a play upon the verb ἀγαπᾶν. Only those who partake of the Eucharist and who have "brotherly love" can hope for the resurrection.¹⁰²

Johanny maintains:

The Johannine inspiration of these texts is evident. In the sixth chapter of his Gospel, St. John expresses the idea of eternal life by means of symbols drawn from the eucharistic liturgy: bread of God, bread of life, flesh of Christ, blood of Christ. Ignatius in turn endeavors to express the incorruptible love which is eternal life, by means of similar

¹⁰² Richardson, *The Christianity of Ignatius*, p. 20.

language. He does so in a eucharistic perspective or with a eucharistic outlook.¹⁰³

Another point of view is expressed by Maurer who sees no dependency of Ignatius upon John in the form of an exact quote but thinks that an allusion (*Anspielung*) to John is unmistakable; especially with τροφή φθοράς in *Ignatius to the Romans* 7:3 and βρώσις ἀπολλυμένη of John 6:27.¹⁰⁴ Still another viewpoint is put forward by Rudolf Schnackenburg, who points out that whether or not Ignatius is directly dependent upon John, his theology of the incarnation is similar to John's.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, his opponents are also those who deny the permanent incarnation of Christ. It is clear that Ignatius uses σάρξ instead of σῶμα in reference to the Supper in order to combat his incipient- Docetic opponents who used the word σῶμα in a way that denied the present reality of Christ's human flesh. Given John's warnings against those who deny that Jesus has and still is "come in the flesh," calling them "false prophets" and "deceivers," it is probable that John recounts Christ's sayings concerning His own flesh for the very same purpose.

The polemic against docetism in John and Ignatius may account to some extent for the fact that the σῶμα (Χριστοῦ) of Paul (Rom. 7.4; 1 Cor. 11.24, 27, etc.) becomes σάρξ in these authors. The docetics, indeed, might have found it easy to spiritualize the term σῶμα, when applied to Christ; cf., for

¹⁰³ Johanny, *idem.*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁴ Christian Maurer, *Ignatius von Antiochien und das Johannesevangelium*, (Zurich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1949), p. 38.

¹⁰⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John, Volume 2*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), p. 453.

instance, Hipp. Ref. 6.30; Iren. Adv. haer. I.7; and II Clem. 14.2,3. . . Finally, we may add, that even the gods, in the popular account given by Plato (Phaedr. 246 D), are supposed to have ψυχή and σῶμα. The latter is clearly no actual σάρξ.¹⁰⁶ (emphasis added)

It is clear from the perfect tense in 1 John 4:2 and present tense in 2 John 7 that John's opponents denied the permanent incarnation of Jesus Christ (even if they admitted that the heavenly Christ had rested upon the earthly Jesus during his ministry for a time before his suffering and death). Therefore they also denied, according to Ignatius, that the Eucharist is the flesh of Jesus Christ. Hence John's and Ignatius's emphasis upon the flesh of Jesus Christ and His suffering and the real shedding of His blood. In Paul's time it may have caused no misunderstanding to refer to the Supper as the body and blood of Christ; but by the time John wrote his letters and Gospel account, using the word σῶμα to speak of Christ would have played right into the heretics' hands. It might be analogous to a respected theologian today using the word "gay" to describe the joyfulness of Jesus' disciples while some who had been within his congregation were currently teaching that Jesus and His disciples were actually homosexuals! It would give the wrong impression. Neither John nor Ignatius made this kind of mistake. They speak of the Word who became flesh, suffered, died and rose again. John records the words of Jesus Himself to bolster the fact that the One who came down from heaven is the same One who gave His flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51), and the same Son of Man who gives the food

¹⁰⁶ Richardson, *The Christianity of Ignatius*, p. 100, note 96.

which remains to eternal life (6:27) which is the flesh and blood of that same Son of Man which He gives to eat and drink (6:53-58).

Hermann Sasse elaborates on John's polemical concern:

It has a deep significance that we hear of the first great apostasy from Christ at the end of that great chapter of John which begins with the miracles of the feeding of the 5,000 and of Jesus walking on the water, and which then continues with the great discourse on the bread of life and the mystery of Christ's body and blood. Not only the Jews of Capernaum were offended. "Many...of his disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?...From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." (John 6:60, 66). When John wrote his Gospel, the theme of which was "The Word was made flesh," a great apostasy had already begun which led many Christians in such countries as Syria and Egypt—into the gnostic sects that denied both the Incarnation and the Real Presence. "They do not believe that the Eucharist is the flesh of Saviour Jesus Christ," says Ignatius. From John, as from Ignatius, it becomes evident that, as the doctrines on the Incarnation and on the Real Presence belong together, the denial of one must needs lead to the denial of the other. When Jesus asked the Twelve, "Will ye also go away?" (John 6:67), Peter answered with the confession which at the same time is a reaffirmation of his belief in the Incarnation and of his acceptance of the "hard saying" of Jesus concerning the eating of his body and drinking of his blood: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁰⁷

John 6 can only be understood in the light of the incipient-Docetic controversy that took place in the time of John and afterwards with Ignatius. Our only sources for gathering this historical context are the writings of those involved in the controversy, such

¹⁰⁷ Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body*, (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977) p. 292-293.

as John, Ignatius and later, Irenaeus. Any interpretation separated from this historical context is doomed to be guided by hypothetical historical speculation or the philosophical/theological presuppositions of the interpreter. Furthermore:

It must be added that this argument from the history of the Docetic controversy not only excludes pure symbolism, but also any of the less definite forms of realism such as would make the sacrament merely to bestow grace, or mediate the benefits of the Passion, or of the Christian religion in general, or of mystical union with a purely spiritual Christ but without conveying the real body and blood of Christ. It is just precisely the actual body and blood of Christ which raise the difficulty. If the Eucharist had not been claimed definitely to be these, it would have given the Docetics no greater difficulty than Baptism. It was because it was so claimed that their premises made it impossible for them to accept it.¹⁰⁸

Lastly, the most famous statement of Ignatius on the Supper, Ephesians 20, begins with his desire to write a second letter in which, "I will show you the plan of salvation concerning the new man, Jesus Christ, in His faith and in His love (ἀγάπη), in His suffering and resurrection." Ignatius goes on to say:

Come together every one of you in common and all in grace from His Name, in one faith and in Jesus Christ, who descended according to flesh from David, Son of man and Son of God, so that you might obey the bishop and the presbytery with an undistracted mind, breaking one bread, which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote so that we do not die, but live in Jesus Christ forever. [Eph. 20.2]

The Eucharist is an antidote capable of counteracting the deadly poison of sin and uniting us to Christ forever. Heresy is referred

¹⁰⁸ Felix L. Cirlot, *The Early Eucharist*, (London: SPCK, 1939) p. 128.

to as "strange food" and its teachers serve a cup which is θανάσιμον φάρμακον mixed with honeyed wine (Tral. 6.2). This "deadly medicine" is in contrast to the φάρμακον ἀθανασίας of the Eucharist. Seeberg boldly states that the view of Eph. 20.2 is based upon John 6:54-58.¹⁰⁹ Even Cyril Richardson, who is cautious not to equate similarity in terminology with certainty of source, admits: "Yet their weight [that of allusions to John] is cumulative, and there is a close relation between the views of John and Ignatius on the Eucharist (cf. John 6:54 with Eph. 20:2 and Smyr. 7:1)."¹¹⁰

Justin Martyr also uses σὰρξ and σῶμα in reference to the Supper in *Apology* 66 (150 AD) where Justin says that this eucharistic food is the σαρξ - αἷμα of Christ but then quotes the institution narrative using σῶμα - αἷμα.

This food we call Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true, and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and for rebirth and who lives as Christ handed down to us. For we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink; but as Jesus Christ our Saviour being incarnate by God's word took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus. For the apostles in the memoirs composed by them which are called Gospels, thus handed down what was commanded them: that Jesus, taking bread and having given thanks, said, "Do this for my memorial, this is my

¹⁰⁹ Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, p. 68.

¹¹⁰ Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, LCC Vol. I, p. 79.

body"; and likewise taking the cup and giving thanks he said, "This is my blood"; and gave it to them alone. ¹¹¹

Schnackenburg comments:

This text must be based on Johannine theology: Justin recognizes the connection between the incarnation of the Logos, Jesus' offering of his flesh and the flesh and blood of Jesus made available in the Eucharist. Nevertheless the testimony of Ignatius and Justin is not evidence of a primitive eucharistic formula with σάρξ - αἷμα, but only a theology of the Incarnation similar to John's, perhaps dependent on his. ¹¹²

Justin's use of "flesh" in this passage corroborates the view that no careful Christian theologian would use the word σῶμα to speak of the Supper at this time without qualifying it and defining it as the true flesh of Jesus. The fact that Justin quotes the words of institution and uses the word σῶμα points out that the σῶμα of the Supper is the true σάρξ of Jesus, despite what the Docetist may say about the σῶμα being a non-material body.

Origen (185-254) in his *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (on Matt. 26.26-28) says:

It is also written in the Gospel according to John: "Moses did not give you bread, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven" (John 6:32). And Jesus always taking bread from the Father for those who keep the festival along with Him, gives thanks, breaks it, and gives it to His disciples according as each of them is capable of receiving, and He gives it to them saying, TAKE AND EAT, and He shows, when He feeds them with this bread, that it is His body, since He

¹¹¹ Ibid., *Early Christian Fathers*, LCC Vol. I, p. 286.

¹¹² Schnackenburg, p. 453.

Himself is the word which is needful for us, both now, and when it will have been completed in the kingdom of God.¹¹³

Cyprian (200-258) says in his work on the Lord's Prayer, Ch. 18:

"I am the bread of life which came down from heaven. If any man eat of my bread he shall live forever. Moreover, the bread that I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world" (John 6:51, 2). Since then He says that, if anyone eats of His bread, he lives forever, as it is manifest that they live who attain to His body and receive the Eucharist by right of communion, so on the other hand we must fear and pray lest anyone, while he is cut off and separated from the body of Christ, remain apart from salvation, as He Himself threatens, saying: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you" (John 6:54). And so we petition that our bread, that is Christ, be given us daily, so that we, who abide and live in Christ, may not withdraw from His sanctification and body.¹¹⁴

There can be no doubt where Cyprian stands on his interpretation of this section of the Bread of Life passage, he sees it as specifically eucharistic.

Athanasius (c. 296-373) who became Bishop of Alexandria in 328, commenting on John 6:61-63, in his *Epistola Ad Serapionem IV.19* says:

Here he has employed two terms about himself, flesh and spirit; and he has distinguished spirit from flesh so that they might believe not only in so much of him as was apparent to sight but also in what was invisible, and thus might learn that what he was saying was not fleshly but spiritual. For how many would his body suffice for food, so

¹¹³ Daniel J. Sheerin, *The Eucharist: Message of the Fathers of the Church*, vol.7 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1986) p. 190.

¹¹⁴ John R. Willis, *The Teachings of the Church Fathers*, (N. p. : Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 444-445.

as to become the nourishment of the whole world? The reason for his mention of the ascension into heaven of the Son of man was in order to draw them away from the material notion; that thenceforth they might learn that the flesh he spoke of was heavenly food from above and spiritual nourishment given from him. For he says, "What I have spoken to you is spirit and life," which is as much as to say, "What is displayed and given for the world's salvation is the flesh which I wear: but this flesh and its blood will be given to you by me spiritually as nourishment, so that this may be bestowed spiritually on each, and may become for individuals a safeguard to ensure resurrection to eternal life." "115

Johannes Quasten, commenting on this portion of Athanasius' letter states:

Some scholars have quoted it [Ep. ad Serapionem IV.19] in order to prove that Athanasius regarded the Eucharist as a symbol of the body and blood of our Lord, not as His real body and blood. But the passage taken as a whole in its context does not justify such an interpretation. Athanasius introduces Jesus promising the Apostles to give them His body and blood as a spiritual food (πνευματικῶς). Using this expression Athanasius intends to refute the misunderstanding of the inhabitants of Capharnaum who thought of the flesh of Christ in its natural state. The body and the blood of the Lord will be given to the Apostles in a spiritual way (πνευματικῶς δοθήσεται τροφή), as a token of the resurrection to eternal life. Thus there is no idea of a symbolical interpretation in the sense of Zwingli.¹¹⁶

Hilary of Poitiers (300-367), *On the Trinity-Book VIII.14-16* says:

For as to what we say concerning the reality of Christ's nature within us, unless we have been taught by Him, our words are foolish and impious. For He says Himself, *My*

¹¹⁵ Henry Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956) p. 299.

¹¹⁶ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. III, (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, Spectrum Publishers, 1960) p. 79.

flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in him. (John 6:55-56) As to the verity of the flesh and blood there is no room left for doubt. . . And these when eaten and drunk, bring it to pass that both we are in Christ and Christ is in us. . . Now how it is that we are in Him through the sacrament of the flesh and blood bestowed upon us, He Himself testifies, saying, *And the world will no longer see Me, but ye shall see Me; because I live ye shall live also; because I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you...* Again, how natural this unity is in us He has Himself testified on the wise, *He who eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in him. (John 6:56).* . . Now He had already taught before the sacrament of this perfect unity, saying, *As the living Father sent Me, and I live through the Father, so he that eateth My flesh shall himself also live through Me. (John 6:57)*¹¹⁷

Hilary's view is clearly sacramental. (see Book X.18 also)

Basil (330-379) writes in *Letters*, No. 93:

It is good 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 has eternal life" (John 6:55). 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.¹¹⁸

John Chrysostom (c 349-407) *Homily on the Gospel of John* No.46

(on John 6:41-69), says:

Now if someone should inquire, "Why did He also bring up the matter of the mysteries?," we should say this in reply to him: It was just the right time for such words, for the obscurity of what is said always compels the attention of the listener, and makes him listen more carefully. . . And so,

¹¹⁷ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) vol.IX p. 141-142.

¹¹⁸ Willis, p. 445. See also Sheerin, p. 304-305.

they actually derived no profit from his words at that time, but we have enjoyed the benefit of the very realities. Therefore, we must learn the wonder of the mysteries, what they are, and why they were given, and what is their benefit. "We are one body," scripture says, "and members made from His flesh and from His bones (Ep 5:30)"--let the initiated attend to these words carefully. . . He has made it possible for those who desire, not merely to look upon Him, but even to touch Him and to eat Him and to fix their teeth in His flesh, and to be commingled with Him, and to satisfy all their longing. Let us, then, come back from that table like lions breathing fire, thus becoming terrifying to the devil, and remaining mindful of our Head and of the love which He has shown us.¹¹⁹

"Golden-mouth" is clear on John 6: It is eucharistic, realistic, and beneficial.

Cyril of Jerusalem (318-386) in his *Catechetical Lectures*, Lect. XXII.4 (On the Mysteries IV.), On the Body and Blood of Christ, says: "Christ on a certain occasion discoursing with the Jews said, *Except ye eat My flesh and drink My blood, ye have no life in you* (John 6:53)."¹²⁰

Ambrose in *The Sacraments* (390 or 391), IV, Ch.5.24-25 says:

What is greater, manna from heaven or the body of Christ? Surely the body of Christ, who is the Author of heaven. Then, he who ate the manna died; he who has eaten this body will effect for himself remission of sins and "shall not die forever." (John 6:49, 58). . . Therefore, when you ask, the priest says to you: "the body of Christ," and you say: "Amen," that is, "truly." What the tongue confesses let the affection hold. That you may know, moreover: "This is a sacrament whose figure went on before."

And Ambrose also says in *The Sacraments*, VI, Ch.1.1-4:

¹¹⁹ Sheerin, p. 203, 204, 205.

¹²⁰ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII, p.151.

Just as our Lord Jesus Christ is the true Son of God, not as man through grace, but as the Son of God from the substance of the Father, thus He is true flesh, as He himself said, which we receive and is His true drink. (John 6:55) But perchance you say what the disciples of Christ also said at that time when they heard Him say: "Unless one eat my flesh and drink my blood, he will not abide in me and will not have eternal life" (John 6:54-61)--perchance you say: "How true [flesh]? Certainly I see a likeness, I do not see true blood." First of all, I told you about the words of Christ which operate so as to be able to change and transform the established orders of nature. Then, when His disciples did not tolerate the words of Christ, but hearing that He gave His flesh to eat and gave His blood to drink, went back, and yet Peter alone said: "Thou hast words of eternal life, and whither shall I go back from you?" (John 6:69)--lest, then, more might say that they go, as if it were a kind of horror of the blood, but as if the grace of redemption did abide, thus indeed in likeness you receive the sacraments, but obtain the grace and virtue of true nature. "I am the living bread," He says, "which came down from heaven." (John 4:61) But flesh did not come down from heaven, that is, He took on flesh on earth from a virgin. How, then, did bread come down from heaven and living bread? Because our same Lord Jesus Christ is a sharer of both divinity and body, and you who receive the flesh participate in that nourishment of His divine substance.

Ambrose also says, in *The Mysteries*, Ch. 8.47:

It has been proven that the sacraments of the Church are more ancient; now realize that they are more powerful. In very fact it is a marvelous thing that God rained manna on the fathers, and they were fed by daily nourishment from heaven. Therefore, it is said: "Man has eaten the bread of angels." But yet all those who ate that bread died in the desert, but this food which you receive, this "living bread, which came down from heaven," furnishes the substance of eternal life, and whoever eats this bread "shall not die forever"; for it is the body of Christ. (John 6:49-58) ¹²¹

Gregory of Nyssa in *Against Eunomius*, (382-383) Book XI says:

But we, having learnt from the holy voice of Christ that “except a man be born again of water and of the spirit he shall not enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3,6),” and that “He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, shall live forever (John 6:51, 54),” are persuaded that the mystery of godliness is ratified by the confession of the Divine Names--the names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and that our salvation is confirmed by participation in the sacramental customs and tokens.¹²²

Gregory connects John 3 to John 6 and yet does not separate either passage from the faith which they presuppose, “ratified by the confession of the Divine Names.”

Theophilus of Alexandria (d 412) in his *Sermon on the Mystical Supper* says:

“I am the bread of life (John 6:35, 48) who have come down from heaven (John 6:51), and grant life to men. Receive me as leaven into your mass (1 Cor. 5:6), that you may partake of the indestructible life that is in me. I am the true vine (John 15.1), drink my joy, the wine I have mixed for you....But as those who ate the manna in the wilderness are dead, not thus do I present my body to you, for he who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:59).¹²³

Cyril of Alexandria (d 444) in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 4.2, (on John 6:51 and 53), says:

Then let those who, because of their folly have never accepted faith in Christ, listen to this: UNLESS YOU EAT THE FLESH OF THE SON OF MAN, AND DRINK HIS BLOOD, YOU DO NOT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE IN YOU. For completely without a

¹²¹ Roy J. Defferari, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 44, (The Catholic University of America Press, 1987) p. 305-306, 319-320, 22-23.

¹²² *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V, p. 238.

¹²³ Sheerin, p. 151-152.

share, indeed, without a taste in the life in holiness and blessedness do they remain who have not received Jesus through the mystic blessing. For He is Life by nature, according as He was begotten by the Living Father (John 6.57).¹²⁴

And in his *Homily on the Gospel of Luke*, No. 142, Cyril quotes John 6:51 and 53-57 and says: "When, therefore, we eat the holy flesh of Christ, the Saviour of us all, and drink His precious blood, we have life in us, being made, as it were, one with Him, and abiding in Him, and possessing Him also in us."¹²⁵

In Letter 17 Cyril says:

Proclaiming the death according to the flesh of the only begotten Son of God, that is, of Jesus Christ, and confessing his Resurrection from the dead and his Ascension into heaven, we celebrate the unbloody sacrifice in the churches, and we thus approach the spiritual blessings and are made holy, becoming partakers of the holy flesh and of the precious blood of Christ the Savior of us all. . . Wherefore even if he may say to us, "Amen, I say to you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood," we shall not conclude that his flesh is of some one as of a man who is one of us, (for how will the flesh of a man be life-giving according to its own nature?), but as being truly the very flesh of the Son who was both made man and named man for us.¹²⁶

In Letter 55 Cyril says:

Thus, death was conquered, which dared to assault the body of life, and thus corruption even in us is nullified and the strength of death itself is weakened, and accordingly Christ said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 228.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 233.

¹²⁶ Defferari, vol. 76, p.86-87.

the Son of man, and drink his blood, you do not have life in you.” Therefore the holy body and blood of Christ are life-giving.¹²⁷

And in Letter 101:

Even the body of the Son of God, which he took from human nature, we hold to be life-giving, because it was mingled with the living God according to the word of our Lord which he spoke in the Gospel, “Unless you eat my body and drink my blood, you do not have eternal life.” (John 6:53) For if, as those blasphemers say, our Lord's body is not beneficial because it was taken from human nature, then according to their expression neither is the living mystery which is the outward sign of his body able to be of any aid to those who receive it.¹²⁸

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) also interprets this passage sacramentally in *Ennaratio on Psalm 98*:

Now, at the time when the Lord bequeathed this, when He spoke of His flesh, and said: “Unless a man eat of my flesh, he will not have eternal life in him” (cf John 6:54), certain of His disciples, almost seventy, were scandalized, and said: “This is a hard saying, who can understand it?” . . . They were the ones who were hard, not the saying. Indeed, if they were not hard, if they were gentle, they would say to themselves: “He is not saying this without a good reason; there must be some sacrament hidden here.” . . . “I have given you a sacrament. Understood spiritually, it will give you life. Although it must be celebrated visibly, yet it should be understood invisibly.”¹²⁹

Augustine also says in *On the Merits and Remission of Sins*, 1.34:

In addition, what are they maintaining who call the sacrament of the Lord's Table “Life,” except the statements:

¹²⁷ Ibid., vol. 77, p. 33.

¹²⁸ Ibid., vol. 77, p. 162-163.

¹²⁹ Sheerin, p. 184-185.

“I am the living bread who have come down from heaven” (John 6:51), and “The bread which I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world” (John 6:51), and “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you will not have life in you” (John 6:53)?¹³⁰

These quotations are given, not to present a comprehensive view of Augustine's view of John 6, but rather to balance the view of Augustine given by modern commentators who quote only Augustine's comments concerning the faith-eating in John 6 and leave out Augustine's references to the sacrament in regard to this chapter.¹³¹ Perhaps this modern tradition of "selective Augustine" began in the time of Zwingli and Luther who were both fond of quoting "believe and you have eaten" with the authority of Augustine¹³², but failed to mention any of his sacramental references to John 6. To paraphrase Hermann Olshausen's observations: Luther followed the same interpretation of our passage as Augustine, with the exception that this great Church father correctly did not rule out so completely and wholly any connection with the Supper as Luther did. In the interpretation of this difficult passage Augustine appears to have directly struck upon the true middle way (*Mittelweg*).¹³³ If Olshausen's analysis

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 274.

¹³¹ Most blatant in this regard is Leon Morris in his *The Gospel According To John*, (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1971) p. 360, ftn. 76 and p. 377, ftn. 122. In his revised 1995 Edition, p. 319, ftn. 82 and p. 334, ftn. 128.

¹³² The famous words, “believe and you have eaten (crede et manducasti)” (MPL 35, 1904) occur in the explanation of John 6:27-29 and have no direct bearing on the Eucharist. It is to be noted that these words of Augustine do not refer to John 6:51-58.

of Augustine is not completely on the mark, then it is surely true that Augustine speaks out of both sides of his mouth on this passage. In his treatise *Concerning Christian Doctrine* III.24, he emphatically states that John 6:53 "is a figure, ordering that there is to be communion in the passion of the Saviour, and that there is to be sweet and useful remembrance that for us His flesh was crucified and wounded." In the other corner of his mouth he confesses:

With faithful heart and mouth we admit that the Man Christ Jesus, the Mediator between God and men, gives us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink, although it seems more horrible to eat human flesh than to kill it, and to drink human blood than to shed it; and in all Holy Scripture, whenever anything is figuratively said or done, in any matters contained in the sacred pages, it is to be explained in accordance with the rule of sound faith, and we are to listen not with scorn but with wisdom. [*Against an Opponent of the Law and the Prophets* II.35]¹³⁴

Ephraem the Syrian (ca 306-373) in his *Memra for the Fifth Day of Great Week* (Holy Thursday), says:

(Speaking of the Lord's Supper) Receive of it , eat of it, all of you, and eat in it the Holy Spirit, for it is truly my body, and he who eats it will live forever (John 6:51). This is the heavenly bread which has come down from on high onto the earth (John 6:50). This is the bread the Israelites ate in the wilderness and did not esteem. The manna which they gathered, which came down to them, was a figure of this spiritual bread which you have now received. Take and eat

¹³³ Hermann Olshausen, *Biblischer Commentar über Sämmtliche Schriften des Neuen Testaments* . (Königsberg: August Wilhelm Unßer, 1838), p. 174.

¹³⁴ Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of The Holy Eucharist* , (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909) Vol. I p. 65.

of it, all of you. In this bread you are eating my body. It is the true source of forgiveness.¹³⁵

Gaudentius of Brescia (fl 406) in his *Tractate Two on Exodus*, says:

From the time when the true Lamb of God came, the Lord Jesus, whose shadow that lamb was, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29), and said: "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you" (John 6:54), from that time on the Jews in vain practice carnally that which, unless they do it spiritually with us, they are not able to have life in them. "For the law is spiritual" (Rm. 7:14), as the Apostle says, and "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7). . . Therefore, in this truth wherein we live, One has died for all, and in the mystery of the bread and wine in every church this same One as sacrificed restores, as believed vivifies, and as consecrated sanctifies the consecrators. This is the flesh of the Lamb, this His blood. For the Bread who came down from heaven says: "The bread which I will give you is my flesh for the life of the world" (John 6:51-52). Rightly, also, is His blood manifested in the appearance of wine, for when He Himself says in the Gospel "I am the true vine" (John 15:1), He makes it quite clear that all wine offered in the figure of His Passion is His blood.¹³⁶

Leo the Great in Sermon 78.3 (September 453) says:

For since the Lord says "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you will not have life in you" (John 6:54), you ought so to be partakers of the holy table as to have no doubt whatever concerning the truth of Christ's body and blood. For that is received in the mouth which is believed by faith, and it is in vain for them to answer "Amen" who dispute that which is received.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Sheerin, p. 139-140.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 87-88.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 281-282.

John of Damascus (c 675-c 749) in his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Ch. XIII, says:

The bread and the wine are not merely figures of the body and blood of Christ (God forbid!) but the deified body of the Lord itself: for the Lord has said, "This is My Body," not, this is a figure of My body: and "My blood," not, a figure of My blood. And on a previous occasion He had said to the Jews, *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, you have no life in you. For My flesh is meat indeed and My blood is drink indeed. And again, He that eateth Me, shall live forever.* (John 6:51-55)¹³⁸

Summary

While I do not pretend that this is a complete compilation of all the Church Fathers who interpret the Bread of Life discourse eucharistically, it does provide ample evidence to support the claim that a eucharistic understanding of the passage has been taught throughout the period of the early church. The doctoral dissertation of Valentin Schmitt concurs with this assessment of the early Church treatment of John 6:

The exegesis, which the flourishing period of patristic literature and the Alexandrian school in particular gives, which suits the explanation of the catholic exegetes, who apply v. 51b . to the Eucharist, offers no support to an explanation of a purely figurative food.¹³⁹

Far from being an innovation of the Reformation period, the eucharistic interpretation of John 6:51-59 is overwhelmingly preferred in early church exegesis over any such interpretation

¹³⁸ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IX, p. 83.

¹³⁹ Valentin Schmitt, *Die Verheissung Der Eucharistie (Joh. VI) Bei Den Vatern*, Inaugural -Dissertation zur Erlangung Der Doktorwürde (Würzburg: Andreas Göbel, Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1900) p. 121.

which excludes eucharistic reference. As Lutherans loyal to the Word of God, it might behoove us to re-examine the passage on an exegetical basis (all history of interpretation aside) and see if what the early church witnesses have said is true on the basis of the text itself. But we should also re-examine what Luther said about the passage in light of his own historical situation to see what his reasoning was for the situation he addressed. And then, perhaps the Bread of Life sermon will no longer be forbidden ground for Lutherans who would see it eucharistically, but rather, it will become holy ground and add new appreciation for Holy Scripture and for the Holy Supper of our Lord.

CHAPTER III

LUTHER'S VIEW OF JOHN 6 IN REGARD TO THE LORD'S SUPPER

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine Luther's view of John 6 in regard to the Lord's Supper. We hope to demonstrate Luther's reasons for the position he held on this chapter and compare them with the text of John apart from the polemical considerations which Luther had with respect to the Romanists and the Sacramentarians (Zwingli, Bucer, Oecolampadius and others).

Examination of Luther's View of John 6 and the Supper

As early as 1517 Luther speaks of John 6 with reference to the Sacrament, in his *Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (1517-1518) commenting on Hebrews 9:2, "The table and the shew bread,"

Or, it may mean that the table is Christ himself, who is our altar, our sacrifice and our bread as John says in the words "I am the living bread," etc. (John 6:51). He it is whom we receive in the sacrament, and feed on in this life. This is the meaning of the passage in the twenty-third Psalm where it says: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies who trouble me" (Ps. 23:5). This verse may perhaps give the reason why the table was placed on the north side and the candlestick on the south side, because in the Scriptures "north" signifies enemies and oppressors, as Jeremiah says, "From the north shall all evil spread out" (Jer. 1:14). For truly no consolation can be found nor victory won in any temptation whatsoever, unless we draw near to the

sacrament and partake of "the table prepared for us against those who trouble us." ¹⁴⁰

This quotation does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that Luther held a sacramental interpretation of John 6 in 1517. In this same series of lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews Luther speaks of a "spiritual eating and drinking" in John 6. Commenting on Hebrews 9:14:

That means through faith in his blood, and to be precise, faith in the blood that was shed for us, as Christ himself distinctly says in John 6: "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him." This "eating" and "drinking" Christ means in a spiritual sense, and that means "to believe," just as Augustine expressly expounds the passage, "To what purpose preparest thou thy belly and thy teeth? Believe and thou hast already eaten." (Augustine, in *Joan. Ev. Tract.*, XXV, 12; Migne, 35.1602.) Therefore the words "his," "his own," "mine" and the like are to be most carefully noted. Because not all flesh nor all blood cleanses and feeds. Only Christ's blood does that, and that blood was shed for the remission of sins. It follows, therefore, that both those who only meditate on the Passion of Christ and by such activity suffer with him, and also those who arrive at something other than faith, think fruitlessly and as heathen. For who even among the heathen would not sympathize with Christ in his sufferings? But his passion ought to be pondered with such devotion that faith is increased. To put it plainly, the more often it is meditated on the more fully is it believed that the blood of Christ is shed for a man's own sins. For this is what that expression "spiritual eating and drinking" means. Expressing it in plain words it means to be joined to and incorporated in Christ in a faith of this kind, as it is expressed above.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ James Atkinson, *Luther: Early Theological Works*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962) p. 159-160.

¹⁴¹ Atkinson, p. 172-173.

The heavy influence of Augustine on Luther's interpretation can readily be seen by the fact that Luther often quotes Augustine when speaking of the "spiritual eating and drinking" in reference to John 6. Luther defines it as a faith which believes that the blood of Christ is shed for a man's own sins. Luther expressly states his opinion on this chapter's relationship to the Lord's Supper in *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), while speaking of Augustinus Alveld¹⁴², a Franciscan who had written a treatise against Luther concerning the sacrament in both kinds:

He treats John 6 with incredible wisdom, where Christ speaks of the bread of heaven and the bread of life, which is He Himself. The most learned fellow not only refers these words to the Sacrament of the Altar, but because Christ says: "I am the living bread" [John 6:51] and not "I am the living cup," he actually concludes that we have in this passage the institution of the sacrament in only one kind for the laity. But here follow the words: "For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" [John 6:55] and, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood" [John 6:53]. When it dawned upon the good friar that these words speak undeniably for both kinds and against one kind---presto! how happily and learnedly he slips out of the quandary by asserting that in these words Christ means to say only that whoever receives the sacrament in one kind receives therein both flesh and blood...[Luther speaking sarcastically as pupil of Alveld] But learn this too: In John 6 Christ is speaking of the Sacrament of the Altar, although he himself teaches us that he is speaking of faith in the incarnate Word, for he says: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" [John 6:29]. But we'll have to give him credit: this Leipzig professor of the Bible can prove

¹⁴² For background on Alveld see AE 36.12-13, notes 7, 11, 12; and PE II.167-168.

anything he pleases from any passage of Scripture he pleases.¹⁴³

Luther's reasoning is thus: Since the text speaks of believing as slaking one's hunger and thirst then the eating and drinking must be faith itself and sacramental eating and drinking are excluded. For Luther it is an either/or proposition--the eating and drinking is either John's way of saying "believing" or it is the literal eating and drinking which takes place in the sacrament. Now since the text plainly speaks of believing, he therefore concludes that it cannot be sacramental. But he gives additional reasons why he considers John 6 as not referring to the sacrament:

In the first place the sixth chapter of John must be entirely excluded from this discussion, since it does not refer to the sacrament in a single syllable. Not only because the sacrament was not yet instituted, but even more because the passage itself and the sentences following plainly show, as I have already stated, that Christ is speaking of faith in the incarnate Word. For he says: "My words are spirit and life" [John 6:63], which shows that he was speaking of a spiritual eating, by which he who eats has life; whereas the Jews understood him to mean a bodily eating and therefore disputed with him. But no eating can give life except that which is by faith, for that is truly a spiritual and living eating. As Augustine also says: "Why do you make ready your teeth and your stomach? Believe and you have eaten." For the sacramental eating does not give life, since many eat unworthily. Hence Christ cannot be understood in this passage to be speaking about the sacrament... Otherwise, if in this passage Christ were enjoining a sacramental eating, when he says: "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood,

¹⁴³ AE 36:15-16=St. Louis XIX, 4. References to Luther's writings from the various editions of his work are abbreviated as follows: Weimar=WA, Saint Louis=St. Louis, Philadelphia Edition=PE, American Edition of Luther's Works=AE.

you have no life in you" [John 6:53], he would be condemning all infants, all the sick, and all those absent or in any way hindered from the sacramental eating, however strong their faith might be. Thus Augustine, in his *Contra Julianum*, Book II¹⁴⁴, proves from Innocent that even infants eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ without the sacrament; that is, they partake of them through the faith of the church. For this reason I have written elsewhere that the Bohemians cannot properly rely on this passage in support of the sacrament in both kinds.¹⁴⁵

The first of Luther's objections to a sacramental reference in John 6, "because the sacrament was not yet instituted," is the weakest. In the Gospel according to John, Christ did indeed speak of many things before their time had come. He spoke of the gift of the Holy Spirit before His death/glorification, resurrection, Ascension and before Pentecost (John 4:10-14 & 7:37-39). He spoke of baptism and the salvation of the world before His mandate to baptize "all the nations" (John 3 & Matt. 28:19). The real objection behind the "not yet instituted" argument is this-- if Christ were referring to the sacrament, no one would have been able to understand what he was really saying-- therefore Christ could not have been referring to the sacrament! This reasoning ignores the fact that it was not unusual for Christ to say things which could not be understood. In fact Christ often deliberately spoke in such a way that He could not be understood except by faith (Matt. 13:10-15, Mark 4:10-12, Luke. 8:9-10). This is especially evident in John; Nicodemus did not understand how a

¹⁴⁴ *Contra Julianum* II, cap. 36. Migne 44, 699-700.

¹⁴⁵ AE 36:19-20, WA 6:497f., St. Louis XIX,4f.

man could be born again (John 3:1-12), the woman at the well thought that Jesus was offering to bring running water to her house (John 4:15). The crowd did not understand how Christ could foretell of His death and yet still be the Christ who is to remain forever (John 12:34). The whole Gospel is filled with sayings of Christ which men (even the disciples) could not understand and which refer to things "not yet instituted." The understanding came as a gift to the disciples after the resurrection (John 2:18-22).

The writing to which Luther refers concerning the reliance of the Bohemians upon John 6 as proof for communion in both kinds is *D. M. Luthers Erklärung etlicher Artikel in seinem Sermon vom hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen wahren Leichnams Christi*. (*D. M. Luther's Explanation of Several Articles in his Sermon on the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy True Body of Christ*) written after mid-January, 1520. In paragraph 8 of this *Explanation* Luther says:

Then that the Bohemians support themselves upon the passage Joh. 6,53: "Unless you eat the flesh and drink the Blood of the Child of Man, then you have no life in yourselves," concludes nothing. For the Lord speaks not of the Sacrament in that place, but rather of believing in God and the Child of Man, that is, Christ. (translated from St. Louis XIX, 455; WA 6, 80)

This brings us to Luther's second objection to a sacramental reference in John 6: Christ is speaking of the eating and drinking which is faith ("spiritual eating and drinking"); therefore he cannot be referring to the sacramental eating and drinking. If we were to assume (with Luther) that the one literal meaning of the

passage can refer to only one thing we would agree with Luther. But the one literal meaning can have more than one reference in John's way of speaking. This is proven in John 3:3 where ἀνωθεν is used. The word can mean "from above" or "anew, again." If it is an either/or proposition such as Luther imposes upon John 6, then man is either born again-- and not from above, or he is born from above-- and not again. But in John 3:3 baptism bestows a birth which is both from God and a second, new birth. John's usage "is purposely ambiguous and means both *born from above* and *born again* J 3:3, 7" [BAGD Greek-English Lexicon p. 77]. So if we let John speak in his own way and we understand him in his way it is possible for Christ to be speaking of both the eating and drinking which is faith in Christ and the sacramental eating and drinking which belongs with that faith. Luther claims (as previously quoted on p. 71) that Christ cannot be speaking of the sacrament because "He says, 'My words are spirit and life', which shows that he was speaking of a spiritual eating." Spirit, life and the words of Christ all belong with the sacrament. Faith does not just float around, it clings to the very things of which Christ speaks: the eating of Christ's flesh and the drinking of His blood, so that the sacramental eating is a reception through faith of the Spirit and life of Christ in His own flesh and blood. It is a totally spiritual reality brought about by the words of Christ to be received by those who "worship in Spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Luther certainly did not mean to imply that "spirit" means "immaterial," or that "spirit" is the opposite of sacramental!

But Luther's best argument against a reference to the Supper is that of the possibility of unworthy reception of the sacrament and so he emphasizes that "spiritual eating" can take place without the Lord's supper in his *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520):

And as there is greater power in the word than in the sign, so there is greater power in the testament than in the sacrament; for a man can have and use the word or testament apart from the sign or sacrament. "Believe," says Augustine, "and you have eaten." but what does one believe, other than the word of the one who promises? Therefore I can hold mass everyday, indeed, every hour, for I can set the words of Christ before me and with them feed and strengthen my faith as often as I choose. This is a truly spiritual eating and drinking...Let the others tabulate the various benefits of hearing mass; you just apply your mind to this, that you may say and believe with the prophet that God has here prepared a table before you in the presence of your enemies, at which your faith may feed and grow fat. But your faith is fed only with the word of divine promise, for "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Hence, in the mass you must pay closest heed above all to the word of promise, as to a most lavish banquet--your utterly green pastures and sacred still waters, in order that you might esteem this word above everything else, trust in it supremely, and cling to it most firmly, even through death and all sins.¹⁴⁶

In his sermon on John 6:55-58, *Am Tage des heiligen Wahrleihnams Christi (Frohnleihnams Christi)* of 1523 Luther contrasts two interpretations of the passage and argues against the Bohemian's usage of the passage to support communion in

¹⁴⁶ AE 36:44-45.

both kinds. In support of his interpretation he brings up again the argument of unworthy eating.

This Gospel has two interpretations. One of them given by Christ Himself; the other by the Pope, or rather the Devil. The first, which Christ Himself gives. . . since the Lord says: "My flesh is the true food, and My blood is the true drink. He who eats of My flesh and drinks of My blood remains in Me and I in him." That is a strong promise, that he who eats this food, must remain in Christ and live eternally. The other interpretation which the Pope has given to Him, is that he has applied it to the sacrament of the Altar, which interpretation one must nevertheless use with shame. And then we would understand this Gospel [to speak] of the bread of the Altar as our papists have done and this feast thereby instituted, then we give the Bohemians a sword in the hand, that they might cut through our heads. For they conclude strongly against us on the basis of this Gospel and whole chapter, that we should eat, drink and use both kinds, against the ordinance and institution of the Pope. For as [this] rings with the text of this Gospel: "Truly, truly, I say to you, If you do not eat of the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink of His blood, then you have no life in yourselves." What will they say to this? I would gladly hear our papists, bishops and their rabble, [but] what would they raise with this? For we do not wish to deny that this Gospel be understood according to their interpretation of the sacrament of the altar, since we celebrate this feast in the whole world; neither do we want to scold the Bohemian heretics that they receive the sacrament in both kinds. Let everyone judge this for himself. I mean, that is, what this has run up against! Thus a man should strike himself on the heel. So it goes when one would make a different [forced] interpretation of the Scripture. Therefore, although here it clearly stands: "He who eats of this bread, that one will live in eternity," so the text constrains that it must be understood of a different eating. It must be a different food, which the Lord gives, than the sacrament of the altar which the Pope interprets it to be. For one can use the sacraments to great harm. One can never stop up the mouth of Saint Paul where he says in 1 Cor. 11:27, "Whoever eats of this bread unworthily or drinks of the cup of the Lord, is guilty

of the body and blood of the Lord"; and soon thereafter, v. 29-30: "Whoever eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself, therewith that he does not discern the body of the Lord. Therefore there are also many sick and unhealthy among you, and a good part sleep." Which words all apply there, that one can receive the sacrament unworthily; but the food of which the Lord speaks here, one can never receive unworthily. Therefore this Gospel does not permit itself to be interpreted of the bread of the altar. For it has much too clear a promise in itself. Therefore one should let it remain in its true simple interpretation and not apply it to the present feast as the Pope has done, as he does also with all the other histories. Just look at the present day histories thus you will find an abomination therein. For behind them are the most beautiful and lovely histories and sayings which should satisfy a reasonable and simple conscience, which they have applied all of these to the feast, despite the fact that not a letter applies to it. One gives the guilt to Thomas Aquinas, he has done it. This I do not know; but it is almost his same spirit and writing. So they have taken our text out of the mouth and painted him with a different color, so that no one should be able to grasp the right interpretation. (translated from St. Louis XI, 2248-2250; WA 12, 582.)

Luther fails to recognize that John could be speaking of both "spiritual eating and drinking" (faith) and sacramental eating and drinking at the same time. It is important to notice that Luther cannot appeal to John for his argument of unworthy eating, but must import Paul's handling of a particular case in Corinth into John's text in order to buttress his argument. Just as John does not speak of baptismal rebirth apart from faith (John 3:1-18), he does not speak of eating and drinking Christ's flesh and blood apart from faith (the "spiritual eating and drinking"). The conjunction καὶ...δε; in John 6:51 denotes that a new thing is being added (eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood)

without leaving behind the eating and drinking which is faith. With John it is not an "either/or" proposition—it is a "not only/but also" or a "both/and" proposition.¹⁴⁷ The καὶ...δὲ links the "spiritual" eating and drinking with the sacramental, which is every bit as much a "Spiritual" activity as faith itself because it is done in faith. True, we "can never stop up the mouth of Paul," but neither can we put the words of Paul into John's mouth. John speaks in his own words and for John faith is presupposed for the eating of Christ's flesh and drinking of His blood. If it is true that John is building upon the foundation laid in the first part of the bread of life discourse (6:22-50), then faith is included in the eating and drinking of Christ's flesh and blood and the appeal to unworthy eating is not a valid objection to a sacramental reference. Certainly John 6:56 shows that Jesus is addressing believers only, since no one can "remain in Christ" unless that person is already "in Christ," that is, already a believer. Jesus leaves no room for any *ex opere operatum* understanding of this verse. Therefore there is no room for the *manducatio indignorum* objection to a Lord's Supper reference. In his Pentecost Wednesday sermon on John 6:44-51 (1528) Luther covers much of the same ground as in the *Babylonian Captivity*:

I now remind you that these words are not to be misconstrued and made to refer to the Sacrament of the Altar; whoever so interprets them does violence to this

¹⁴⁷ Winer's Grammar of N. T. Greek: "καὶ...δὲ , in one and the same clause signifies et. . .vero, atque etiam, and also." Also see BAGD p. 171, 4. b. John uses καὶ... δὲ to add something new in John 15:27, 8:17; 1 John 1:3 and 3 John 12.

Gospel text. There is not a letter in it that refers to the Lord's Supper. Why should Christ here have in mind that Sacrament when it was not yet instituted? The whole chapter from which this Gospel is taken speaks of nothing but the spiritual food, namely, faith. When the people followed the Lord merely hoping again to eat and drink, as the Lord himself charges them with doing, he took the figure from the temporal food they sought, and speaks throughout the entire chapter of a spiritual food. He says: "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life." Thereby he shows that he feeds them with the object of inducing them to believe on him, and that as they partook of the temporal food, so should they also partake of the spiritual. . . The whole New Testament treats of this spiritual supper, and especially does John here. The Sacrament of the Altar is a testament and confirmation of this true supper, with which we should strengthen our faith and be assured that this body and this blood, which we receive in the Sacrament, has rescued us from sin and death, the devil, hell and all misery.¹⁴⁸

Luther once again appeals to John 6:63, "the words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life," as proof that Christ cannot be referring to the sacrament. In what way do these words prove Luther's point? The Lord's Supper is truly Spirit and life and it is given to us also by the words of Christ. Not that the words which Christ spoke in John 6 are the institution of the Supper, they are not; but in what way do the words "Spirit and life" rule out any reference to the Supper where Christ's spiritual flesh and blood give us eternal life? Luther acknowledges that Christ's flesh is a spiritual, life-giving flesh, in his treatise, *That These Words of*

¹⁴⁸ St. Louis XI, 1143-1145. Also found in John Nicholas Lenker, *Sermons of Martin Luther, Vol. III*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983) p. 402-403.

Christ, "This is My Body" Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics
(1527):

His flesh is not of flesh, or fleshly, but spiritual; therefore it cannot be consumed, digested, and transformed, for it is imperishable as is all that is of the Spirit, and a food of an entirely different kind from perishable food. . . Whether Christ's flesh is eaten physically or spiritually, then, it is the same body, the same spiritual flesh, the same imperishable food which in the Supper is eaten physically with the mouth and spiritually with the heart, according to Christ's institution, or eaten spiritually with the heart alone through the Word, as he teaches in John 6 [:63] (St. Louis Ed. has 6:35 as the verse which Luther has in mind). For the fact that it is eaten physically with the mouth in the Supper does not prevent it at all from becoming flesh or a fleshly food. On the contrary, whether it enters the mouth or the heart, it is the same body; just as when he walked on earth, he remained the same Christ, whether he came into the hands of the faithful or of the wicked.¹⁴⁹

The mention of John 6:35 in the St. Louis edition (WA 23, 204 has only the chapter number) is actually the strongest indication that faith is intended by "eat and drink" throughout the entire chapter. John is speaking of believing throughout this chapter by the words "eat and drink." But if one assumes that John must speak as Paul and can only be referring to one kind of eating and drinking throughout the whole chapter, a mistake is made in overlooking the additional kind of eating and drinking which is indicated by the καὶ...δὲ conjunction in 6:51 and in failing to hear John as the book of "signs." So the fact that John is speaking of faith as "eating and drinking" throughout this chapter

¹⁴⁹ St. Louis XX, 844-845, paragraphs 205-206. Also AE 37:100.

in no way rules out John's use of the same words to speak of the sacramental eating and drinking as well. As a result, a sacramental reference in John 6:53-58. would speak only of believing reception of the sacrament, hence Luther's *maducatio indignorum* argument would not apply here because faith could not be separated from the sacramental eating and drinking of Christ's flesh and blood in John 6.

Luther's efforts to avoid any direct sacramental reference are complicated by his use of the church fathers against Zwingli and Oecolampadius as testimony that the early church held that the true body and blood of Christ are present in the Supper:

We should also like to hear St. Hilary, who is another of the ancient doctors and an excellent interpreter of Scripture. He writes against the Arians in book 8, On the Trinity: "If the Word has truly become flesh, and we truly receive the Word which became flesh in the Lord's food, how are we to believe that he does not dwell in us by his nature, he who, when he became man, has assumed the nature of our flesh, nevermore to lay it aside, and has mingled the nature of his flesh with his eternal nature in the sacrament of the flesh, of which we become partakers in common?" Here, indeed, Hilary says that in the food of the Lord, i.e. in the sacrament, we truly take the Word who became flesh, or as we might say more directly, the enfleshed Word; and for that reason Christ remains in us naturally, or with his nature and substance, not only spiritually as the fanatics dream. . . Shortly thereafter he says, "If we wish to say how Christ is truly and naturally in us, let us learn not to speak so of him, lest we speak like fools and godless men. For Christ says, "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" [John 6:55-56]. No doubt remains that it is the true body and blood, because both through the Lord's own acknowledgment and through our faith it is truly flesh and

truly blood, which as they are received and drunk by us, bring it about that we are in Christ and Christ in us.”¹⁵⁰

In the passage Luther quotes, Hilary interprets John 6 to refer to the sacrament. Hilary of Poitiers (300-367), *On the Trinity-Book VIII.14&16* says,

For as to what we say concerning the reality of Christ's nature within us, unless we have been taught by Him, our words are foolish and impious. For He says Himself, *My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in him. (John 6:55-56)* As to the verity of the flesh and blood there is no room left for doubt. . . And these when eaten and drunk, bring it to pass that both we are in Christ and Christ is in us. . . Again, how natural this unity is in us He has Himself testified on the wise, *He who eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in him. (John 6:56)*. . . Now He had already taught before the sacrament of this perfect unity, saying, *As the living Father sent Me, and I live through the Father, so he that eateth My flesh shall himself also live through Me. (John 6:57)*¹⁵¹

This might appear to be inconsistent of Luther to cite a eucharistic interpretation of John 6 in support of the real presence of Christ's true body and blood in the sacrament, since Luther claims this chapter does not refer to the Supper even in one syllable. So Luther is using what he confesses to be a misinterpretation of Scripture to show that the church (at the time of Hilary) confessed that Christ's body and blood are truly present in the Supper. This is not at all inconsistent with the way Luther used the Fathers. He used what was in agreement with Scripture

¹⁵⁰ AE37:120-121.

¹⁵¹ Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.IX p.141-142.

as supporting evidence and disregarded the rest. Luther did not agree with Hilary that John 6 refers to the Supper, but used Hilary to prove to Zwingli that the Church has always confessed the doctrine of the real presence. Luther does indicate a distinction between the benefit of spiritual eating and the benefit of sacramental eating:

Therefore he wills to be “in us by nature,” says Hilary, in both our soul and body, according to the word in John 6 [:56], “He who eats me abides in me and I in him.” If we eat him spiritually through the Word, he abides in us spiritually in our soul; 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.¹⁵²

Luther considers John 6 to speak only of food for the soul:

“To eat” means to eat with the soul, so that I accept the flesh, apprehend it, and retain it. (p. 129); But this does not signify a physical eating with the mouth; it is an eating such as the soul engages in, an eating and drinking which feeds and nourishes the soul. Therefore nothing else should be placed before the soul for its food than this body, which is referred to here as “My body.” (p. 133); The soul merely receives the gift, namely, body and blood. . . Therefore a Christian says: “I know of no work which will justify me; but my life and righteousness consist in this alone, that Christ has flesh and blood which are the food and life of my soul.” (p. 136)¹⁵³

The word ψυχή is not even mentioned in John 6; nor is καρδιά. But Luther does not intend any spirit/flesh or soul/body dichotomization. What is good for the soul is certainly good for the body. Luther makes the food for the soul or the "spiritual

¹⁵² AE37:132.

¹⁵³ Page references are to AE 23=St. Louis VII, 1538f. Also in WA 33.

eating" of Christ the primary benefit from which all bodily benefit flows.

Irenaeus and the ancient fathers pointed out the benefit that our body is fed with the body of Christ, in order that our faith and hope may abide and that our body also may live eternally from the same eternal food of the body of Christ which it eats physically. This is a bodily benefit, nevertheless an extraordinarily great one, and it follows from the spiritual benefit.¹⁵⁴

This statement is clarified by another statement of Luther in the *Large Catechism* (1529):

We must never regard the Sacrament as something injurious from which we had better flee, but as a pure, wholesome, comforting remedy imparting salvation and comfort, which will cure you and give you life both in soul and body. For where the soul has recovered, the body also has benefited." (LC V, 68; Triglotta p. 768)

According to Luther, the benefit of the "spiritual eating" and of the bodily eating are the same, since the body receives all of the benefit given to the soul. In this way Luther refuses to allow body and soul to be separated even though he makes a distinction between the two. Paul Althaus contends that Luther spoke of a particular saving effect of the sacramental eating when it is accompanied by the spiritual eating:

The unique significance of the real presence of the body of Christ filled with the Spirit was too great to permit an answer to this question simply in terms that the body and the blood are the guarantee, and especially, the vehicle of forgiveness. For this reason, Luther attempts to demonstrate that there is a particular saving effect of such bodily eating of the body of Christ. "So, when we eat Christ's

¹⁵⁴ St. Louis XX,762. and AE 37:132.

flesh physically and spiritually, the food is so powerful that it transforms us into itself and out of fleshly, sinful, mortal men, makes spiritual, holy, living men. This we are already, although in a hidden manner in faith and hope; the fact is not yet manifest, but we shall experience it on the Last Day."

¹⁵⁵ But Luther had very frequently attributed this same transformation of the flesh into spirit to the spoken word of preaching which brings Christ into us. For this reason, Luther first describes a unique saving effect to the sacrament by taking up the thought of Irenaeus and the other Greek fathers that the body and blood of Christ are a food which makes the body immortal. Christ gives us his own body as a food "so that with such a pledge he may assure and promise us that our body too shall live forever; for here on earth it partakes of an everlasting and living food." If these words seem to say that the bodily eating of Christ's body was a guarantee to the soul that the body would be raised, other passages leave no doubt at all that Luther thought of a physical effect resulting in resurrection and not only an assurance of it. "The soul sees and clearly understands that the body will live eternally because it has partaken of an eternal food which will not leave it to decay in the grave and turn to dust." ¹⁵⁶ With this, the real presence received a peculiar effect corresponding to its peculiar significance. Since this is given only to faith, one cannot characterize the thought as magical.¹⁵⁷

Despite the emphasis that Luther places upon the "spiritual eating" and the bodily benefit which flows from it, he speaks also of a bodily benefit which is derived from the substance of Christ's body whenever it is received in faith; a benefit which corresponds to the nature of Christ's body.

¹⁵⁵ WA 23, 205; AE 37, 101.

¹⁵⁶ WA 23, 155, 191, 205, 253.; AE 37, 71, 93f., 100, 130.

¹⁵⁷ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1966) p. 401-402.

In the fifth book, chapter 5, he [Irenaeus] says, “The cup, which is a created thing, he acknowledges as his own body, by which he gives increase to our bodies.” Observe, again, that the body of Christ in the cup strengthens our bodies. . . Again, shortly thereafter he says, “Now when the mixed cup and the manufactured bread receive the Word of God, they become the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, through which things the nature of our body grows and subsists.”. . . the sacrament is not a sign of the absent body of Christ but is the body of Christ himself, as that by which not only is our body physically fed but also the nature and substance [wesen] of our body is nourished, strengthened, and sustained unto eternal life and becomes a member of the body of Christ.¹⁵⁸

Again, Luther speaks of a corresponding benefit of the body in the Supper when received in faith:

If it is in the bread and is physically eaten with faith, it strengthens the soul by virtue of the fact that it believes it is Christ's body which the mouth eats, and so faith clings to the body which is in the bread. Now that which lifts, bears, and binds faith is not useless but salutary. Similarly, the mouth, the throat, the body, which eats Christ's body, will also have its benefit in that it will live forever and arise on the Last Day to eternal salvation. This is the secret power and benefit which flows from the body of Christ in the Supper into our body, for it must be useful, and cannot be present in vain. Therefore it must bestow life and salvation upon our bodies, as is its nature.¹⁵⁹

It is not convincing to argue that Luther only intends to say that the great bodily benefit of the resurrection flows out of the strengthening of faith which is fostered by the bodily eating as in the above quoted statement from the *Large Catechism*. One wishes that Luther had written more on the relationship between

¹⁵⁸ AE 37:119, also in St. Louis XX, 762-893.

¹⁵⁹ AE 37:134.

the identical benefit produced in us by both the spiritual and the sacramental eating and drinking. But perhaps Luther was wise by not venturing to say any more and avoided speculation in things which our Lord has not spoken about. Luther defends his explanation of John 6 and sheds some light on his seemingly inconsistent use of the Fathers¹⁶⁰ in *D. Martin Luthers Sendbrief wider etliche Rottengeister an Markgraf Albrecht zu Brandenburg, Herzog in Preußen*. of April 1532:

It is true that in John 6 Christ does not speak of the Supper, handles also nothing with his hands, administers neither bread there nor wine to his disciples, as he does in the Supper, but rather he preaches a free sermon to both the disciples and the unbelievers at Capernaum on the faith in him, which faith is in my opinion, that he is truly man, has flesh and blood and he has given both of them for us; which he calls essentially a spiritual eating of his body and spiritual drinking of his blood. And he calls himself a spiritual bread, that gives the world life. Such eating and drinking can happen outside of Baptism and the Sacrament, only in faith and through the preached Word of the Gospel, and also no godless person can eat, as little as a godless person can believe and at the same time remain godless. For he speaks there [John 6:51]: "He who eats this bread has life." And later on [v.53]: "If you will not eat of the flesh and drink of the blood of the Son of Man, then you will have no life in yourselves." Therefore one must be only a believer to eat in John 6; for you should have life, says Christ.

In summary it is said: "He who believes in Christ, he shall be holy." But in the Supper, both can eat, worthy and unworthy, as St. Paul clearly declares, 1 Cor. 11:27-29: "He who eats the bread of the Lord unworthily, and drinks the cup unworthily, he eats and drinks judgment to himself."

¹⁶⁰ Gerhard Krodel accuses Luther of inconsistency in his interpretation of John 6 when he quotes Irenaeus and Hilary in AE 37: 100, 118-124. *Interpretation*, 37 (1983): 283-288.

Therefore they cannot all eat the life, as they must eat in John 6. For this reason there is a great distinction between John 6 and the Lord's Supper. For one is a spiritual eating without the bodily eating; but in the Supper is a spiritual eating, however only the believers, and at the same time a bodily eating to both the believers and unbelievers in common. Just as to believe and to hear the Gospel is a spiritual baptism, since we are spiritually baptized through the Spirit and the fire, only the believing are receptive (*empfänglich*); but the bodily baptism is common to both the believing and unbelieving and still nevertheless a true Baptism in both of them, except that for the unbelieving person, it is of no benefit, but rather condemning. Just as the name of God in some other mandate of God is the true name of God but still harmful to those who misuse it, and beneficial to those who invoke it in true faith.

And although some quote the text of John 6 to confirm the Sacrament and insist on the word *dabo*, since he says: "My flesh which I will give," and think it should be a promise of the Sacrament, that he afterwards instituted, it still does not follow; for he means by *dabo* or a promise, that he would surrender his body into death for us and pour out his blood for our sins. Furthermore, one can force nothing from this, for the aforementioned reason, since no godless person can spiritually eat Christ's flesh or drink his blood, that is, to believe; as he can very well do in the Supper and without any faith orally receive the body and blood of Christ.

Yet we do not condemn the fathers and teachers for using and quoting John 6 in regard to the Supper because they often quote many passages unevenly; for their view is still right and good, that they thereby attest to the fact that it is truly the flesh and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Therefore they are held to be good, even though, for instance, the passages are misapplied, because they nevertheless declare their meaning forcefully and clearly. But to hold the article of faith one certainly has to have the true simple sense of the passages, which is not necessary where one simply preaches or admonishes. (translated from St. Louis Ed. XX, 1678-1687; also found in WA 30 III, 547.)

The last paragraph of this letter explains why Luther had no qualms about using the Fathers' eucharistic interpretations of John

6 even though he disagreed with their application of the passage. They were good and useful to Luther insofar as they testified to the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper (*contra* Zwingli and Oecolampadius). Luther's major argument against a sacramental reference in John--the unworthy eating of the Supper of which Paul speaks--is struck down by the καὶ...δὲ conjunction¹⁶¹ which will not allow faith to be left behind when the real eating (τρώγων)¹⁶² and drinking of Christ's flesh and blood are added to the "spiritual eating." This is why this eating and drinking in John 6 always gives life: it always goes with faith and is never apart from the faith mentioned in John 6:35.

If Luther is to be accused of any inconsistency, it is not in his use of the fathers' eucharistic interpretations of this passage, but rather in Luther's own treatment of John 6:53, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves." In his *Babylonian Captivity* Luther stated that if Christ is enjoining a sacramental eating here "he would be condemning all infants, all the sick, and all those absent or in any way hindered from the sacramental eating, however strong their faith might be."¹⁶³ This interpretation is inconsistent with the way Luther interprets the mirror image of this statement concerning Baptism, John 3:5, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the

¹⁶¹ pages 11-16.

¹⁶² pages 21-23.

¹⁶³ AE 36:20=PE II.178-179, St. Louis IX, 4-129.

Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Here Luther does not say, "If Christ is speaking of Baptism he would be condemning all people who are in any way hindered from being baptized, however strong their faith might be." Luther says:

Here Christ is speaking of Baptism; and also, It matters not that you cannot understand how you are renewed. Just say: "I will believe it. I do not know either whence the wind comes; and still I know that it exists, for I can hear and feel it. Thus I will also believe God when He says that Baptism initiates a new birth, even though I cannot understand how it can renew me, keep and preserve me for eternal life. I will simply hear the Word, accept the water of Baptism, and believe."¹⁶⁴

But the two statements are parallel to each other. Luther treats John 3:5 as though the exception to this statement were obvious. But with John 6:53 he allows no exception whatsoever. It is true that there are no exceptions to these statements, but they must be understood according to John's way of speaking. Christ is not saying, "Whoever is not baptized cannot enter the kingdom of God." He is saying "Whoever rejects the baptism that I give cannot enter the kingdom of God." In John 3 faith and Baptism are linked together so tightly that the rejection of Baptism is really unbelief. Likewise in John 6 the "spiritual eating" (faith) of the Bread of Life and the eating of His flesh and blood belong together since the function of the conjunction in 6:51 is to link them together so that they are not to be separated. Luther does not address the conjunction in 6:51, nor does he acknowledge that it means anything more than a simple "and."

¹⁶⁴ AE 22:283, 295.

However, he does give some indications as to why he may not have known about the special purpose for which John employs this conjunction. While commenting on 6:62 Luther says:

This text is a bit obscure. I have not yet consulted our philologists regarding it. Nevertheless, I shall give you my opinion; if I hit the mark, good and well. It seems to me that these words, "If you were to see the Son of Man ascending, etc." have a twofold meaning. This is couched in the language of John, and we will get the sense and meaning, even if we fail to get the grammar. The Latin version of this text is declarative, not interrogative.¹⁶⁵ [*Der Latinus hat nicht:: Si videritis ascendentem filium hominis, ubi prius erat, das es nicht sei gefragt.*"] WA 33, 251.

Luther admits that he does not have a full grasp of the grammar and so he refers to the Latin text.¹⁶⁶ This indicates to us that Luther may not have known about the function of the crucial καὶ...δὲ conjunction in John 6:51. We find no mention of it in any of Luther's writings on John 6. If it is true that Luther did not know about the addition indicated by this conjunction, then it is not surprising that he would interpret the chapter to speak of faith alone, since that is the original theme of the chapter. But when we consider the way this conjunction links faith with eating

¹⁶⁵ WA 33:251=St. Louis VII, 219f.=AE 23:160. The editor of the American Edition footnotes: "The meaning of this statement is obscure. The Latin translation of this verse reads: *Si ergo videritis Filium hominis ascendentem ubi erat prius?* " Was Luther working with a poor copy of the Latin text?

¹⁶⁶ Dr. Franz Posset maintains that Luther translated chiefly from the Latin almost without the Greek text in his academic work: "All the Bible references are in Latin...the Greek was considered only occasionally, mostly stimulated by Erasmus's annotations." *Luther's Catholic Christology*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1988) p. 67.

Christ's flesh and drinking his blood, and the very physical language used (τρώγων)¹⁶⁷, we see no reason to deny that this passage refers to the Lord's Supper on account of the unworthy eating which Paul refers to in his letter to Corinth. Certainly the eating of Christ's flesh and drinking of His blood, when done in faith, cannot be unworthy eating, and that is the only eating of flesh and blood of which John is speaking. John is simply not addressing the problem of unworthy eating as Paul was in his first letter to Corinth.

To interpret John correctly, we must first listen to John's way of speaking; secondarily, we may interpret John by what Paul says, realizing that Paul and John may express the same truths with different vocabularies and expressions, or they may use the same words with different emphases attached to them. In John 3 Jesus speaks of Baptism without using the words "baptize" or "baptism" by saying, "born of water and Spirit." The undeniable parallelism between John 3 and John 6 would suggest that Jesus is using a similar expression to speak of the Lord's Supper in John 6. The Πῶς δύναται... Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μὴν... of John 3:4-5 is mirrored by the Πῶς δύναται... Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ... of John 6:52-53. The lack of comprehension

¹⁶⁷ "Gnaw, nibble, munch, eat (audibly). . . John uses it, in order to offset any Docetic tendencies to 'spiritualize' the concept so that nothing physical remains in it, in what many hold to be the language of the Lord's Supper." BAGD p. 829. "From 6:51c 'to eat' no longer has, as in 6:51b, the metaphorical sense of appropriating the self-proffering of Jesus in the word by faith, 6:35. It now means receiving His self-proffering in the Eucharist by physical eating. In 6:51, 53 the presentation of the gift unmistakably adopts eucharistic language and the eating is characterized as really corporeal by ἀληθῶς(-ης)." TDNT VIII. 236-237.

of Nicodemus concerning Baptism is mirrored by the lack of comprehension of the Jews. Even the response of Christ to the incredulous questioning of Nicodemus is strikingly similar to that which He gave to the Jews in John 6:61-62: "Does this cause you to stumble [in your faith]? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?" John 3:12: "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" Surely the marked similarities between Christ's speech on Baptism and his speech on the bread of life are not without meaning. Even without being alerted to these similarities, we should notice that the text of John 6 itself indicates another kind of eating in addition to the "spiritual eating." Immediately before the crucial conjunction in 6:51, Christ says, "If anyone eats (φάγη) of this bread he shall live forever." But after the conjunction He says (6:58), "He who eats (τρώγων) this bread shall live forever." In order to add a new kind of eating to the eating of faith, John uses this new word which he has not used before. Note that he does not stop using the old word (φαγεῖν), that is, he does not leave faith behind when he begins to speak of this new kind of eating--the two kinds of eating happen together.

Summary

We have found that although Luther's exegesis of the central theme of the chapter is correct, the eating and drinking which is faith (what Luther refers to as "spiritual eating"), he has gone too far in his polemics against his Roman and Swiss opponents by

asserting that there is not any reference to the Supper "in a single syllable."¹⁶⁸ In short, there is more to be mined from this text than what Luther has dug out of it. Or, to put it in words more Johannine, Luther has bitten off less than he could have chewed in regard to this chapter. And so even today the Lutheran church has yet to digest all that Jesus has spoken in John Six.

Chronological Bibliography of Luther's References to John 6

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|--------------------------|--|
| 1517
241; | Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews (AE 29, 107-241;
WA 57 III, 97-238) |
| 1520, Jan. | <i>D. M. Luthers Erklärung etlicher Artikel in seinem Sermon vom hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen wahren Leichnams Christi.</i> (WA 6, 78-83; SL XIX, 452-459) |
| 1520
SL | The Babylonian Captivity of the Church (AE 36, 3-126;
XIX, 4-129) |
| 1523
12, | <i>Am Tage des heiligen Wahrlechnams Christi.</i> (WA 12, 582f.; SL XI, 2248-2250) |
| 1525
Images | Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of
and Sacraments (AE 40, 202-203) |
| 1525
Before
132f.) | Sermon on 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 10:1-5, Third Sunday
Lent (Lenker Edition VII, 93-105; WA 17 II,
132f.) |
| 1525
Meaning | Bondage of the Will, Genesis 6:3 and the Biblical
of Flesh (AE 33, 214-215; WA18, 733-736) |
| 1526 | Letter to Schwenkfeld (AE 49, 148-150) |

¹⁶⁸ AE 36:19=PE II:178, also St. Louis XIX, 4-129.

- 1527 That These Words, "This is My Body," Still Stand Firm
Against the Fanatics (AE 37)
- 1528 Sermon on John 6:44-51, Pentecost Wednesday
(Lenker Edition III, 395-404; SL XI, 1143-1145)
- 1528 Confession Concerning Christ's Supper (AE 37, 360)
- 1528, July Letter to Nicholas Gerbel (Against Bucer) (AE 49, 199-
202)
- 1529 Marburg Colloquy (AE 38, 15-89)
- 1531 Sermons on the Gospel of John (AE 23, WA 33)
- 1532, April ***D. Martin Luthers Sendbrief wider etliche
Rottengeister an Margraf Albrecht zu Brandenburg,
Herzog in Preußen.*** (WA30 III, 547f.; SL XX, 1678-
1687)
- 1544 Brief Confession of D. Martin Luther on the Holy
Sacrament (AE 38, 299-300)

CHAPTER IV

DOCTRINAL THEOLOGY

Confessing the Doctrine of this Sermon

The Formula of Concord uses John 6:48-58 to prove that the divine nature of Christ communicates its attributes to the human nature in such a way that the human nature becomes capable of achieving things beyond the natural properties of human nature:

“The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin,” 1 John 1:7. This does not refer only to the merit that was once achieved on the cross. John is saying in this passage that in the work or matter of our justification not only the divine nature in Christ but also his blood (by mode of efficacy), that is, actually, cleanses us from all sins. Thus in John 6:48-58 the flesh of Christ is a quickening food (*lebendigmachende Speise*); as also the Council of Ephesus concluded from this [statement of John] that the flesh of Christ has power to quicken (to make alive); and as many other glorious testimonies of the ancient orthodox Church concerning this article are cited elsewhere. FC SD VIII.59; Triglotta p. 1034-1035

His flesh is truly a quickening food and His blood a truly quickening drink; as the two hundred Fathers of the Council of Ephesus have testified, *carnem Christi esse vivificam seu vivificatricem*, that is, that the flesh of Christ is an enlivening flesh. FC SD VIII.76; Triglotta p. 1042-1043

The Formula is referring in these two places to Canon XI of the Council of Ephesus, which states:

Whosoever shall not confess that the flesh of the Lord giveth life and that it pertains to the Word of God the Father as his very own, but shall pretend that it belongs to another person who is united to him [i.e., the Word] only according to honour, and who has served as a dwelling for the divinity; and shall not rather confess, as we say, that that flesh giveth

life because it is that of the Word who giveth life to all: let him be anathema.

In the following notes of the Council, Cyril of Alexandria explains and proves this assertion:

We perform in the churches the holy, life-giving, and unbloody sacrifice; the body, as also the precious blood, which is exhibited we believe not to be that of a common man and of any one like unto us, but receiving it rather as his own body and as the blood of the Word which gives all things life. For common flesh cannot give life. And this our Saviour himself testified when he said: "The flesh profiteth nothing, it is the Spirit that giveth life." [John 6:63] For since the flesh became the very own of the Word, therefore we understand that it is life-giving, as the Saviour himself said: "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me shall live by me." [John 6:57] Since therefore Nestorius and those who think with him rashly dissolve the power of this mystery; therefore it was convenient that this anathematism should be put forth.¹⁶⁹

Cyril is clearly speaking of eating Christ in John 6:57; he is just as clearly speaking of eating Christ in the Lord's Supper, which he calls the "unbloody sacrifice," "his own body" and "the blood of the Word." Surely the confessors do not quote Cyril (from the Council notes) without knowing that he applies John 6 directly to the Supper. Nor is their usage of the Council of Ephesus incorrect, since the article on the person of Christ sprang out of controversy over the presence of Christ's human nature (flesh and blood) in the Supper. These statements in the article on the Supper (SD VIII) are inextricably bound to the statements in the article on the Person of Christ (SD VII). Ultimately, throughout this whole

¹⁶⁹ Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol. 14, The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, transl. Henry R. Percival, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1900) p. 217.

Christological article, the confessors are striving to defend the doctrine of the Holy Supper¹⁷⁰, as they readily assert:

The entire person of Christ is present, to which both natures belong, the divine and human; not only according to His divinity, but also according to, and with, His assumed human nature, according to which He is our Brother, and we are flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone. Even as He has instituted His Holy Supper for the certain assurance and confirmation of this, that also according to that nature according to which He has flesh and blood He will be with us, and dwell, work and be efficacious in us. FC SD VIII.78-79; Triglotta p. 1042-1045

Undeniably, the confessors assert a Christological connection between the flesh and blood of Christ in John 6 and the flesh and blood of Christ in the Supper. More than that, they make no disclaimer of Cyril's use of John 6 in reference to the Supper; nor do the confessors ever put forward Luther's repeated assertion that John 6 does not deal with the Supper. The confessors also touch upon an interpretation of John 6 in the article on the Supper:

Therefore, there is now a twofold eating of the flesh of Christ, one *spiritual*, of which Christ treats primarily in John 6, which happens in no other way than with the Spirit and faith in the preaching and meditation of the Gospel as well as in the Lord's Supper and in itself is useful and salutary and is necessary at all times for salvation to all Christians; without which spiritual enjoyment also the sacramental or oral eating in the Supper is not only unsalutary, but also harmful and liable to condemn. But such spiritual eating is nothing other than *faith*. . . The other eating of the body of

¹⁷⁰ This is not to say that the article on the Person of Christ does not also defend the doctrine of Holy Baptism, which teaches that Christ is present with the baptized not only according to His divine nature, but also His human nature, albeit in a hidden and supernatural manner.

Christ is *oral* or *sacramental*. FC SD VII.61-63; Triglotta p. 994-995

The confessors explicitly state that Christ speaks of spiritual eating primarily (*vornehmlich*) in John 6. However; it is to be noted, that they do not state that Christ speaks only, or exclusively of spiritual eating in John 6; although one might think that this would be an excellent place to do so, if they had so wished. But, they make no such assertion. We should not permit this fallacious argument: "The confessors say that Christ speaks of spiritual eating in John 6; therefore, Christ does not speak of oral eating in John 6." That conclusion does not necessarily follow, since the Formula does not state that Christ does not speak of oral eating also in John 6. Hermann Sasse correctly observes:

The Formula of Concord, following Luther and the exegetical tradition of the early Lutheran Church, does not quote John 6 as a proof-text for the Sacrament, but for the spiritual eating ("of which Christ treats especially John 6:54," *Sol. Decl. VII, 61*; Trigl. 995) that occurs inside and outside the Sacrament. It is not, however, a dogma of the Lutheran church that no other connection between John 6 and the Lord's Supper may be assumed. The Reformers follow an exegetical tradition established in the Western church by Augustine in his *Tractatus in Johannis evang.* 26, 11-20 (MPL 35, 1611 ff). Augustine has it from Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl. III, 12*, whose source is his great teacher Origen. In contradistinction to the neo-Platonic spiritualism of Origen and Augustine, the Eastern church has retained the realism of Ignatius and the Orthodox Fathers. The influence of Augustine on Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin in this regard is equally strong. Later Lutherans have admitted that there is a connection between John 6 and Sacrament of the Altar (such as J. G. Scheibel, *Das Abendmahl des Herrn* (1823); and Theodor Zahn).¹⁷¹ (emphasis added)

The word *vornehmlich*, indicates that John 6 is not the only passage where Christ speaks of spiritual eating, but they have used the word *vornehmlich*, to indicate that John 6 is the passage where Christ speaks most clearly of spiritual eating. Secondly, the confessors assert, Christ speaks of spiritual eating also when He adds the spiritual eating to the oral eating of the words of institution.

Eat and drink. For in view of the circumstances this command evidently cannot be understood otherwise than of oral eating and drinking, however, not in a gross, carnal, Capernaïtic, but in a supernatural, incomprehensible way; to which afterwards the other command adds still another and spiritual eating, when the Lord Christ says further: *This do in remembrance of Me*, where He calls for *faith* (which is the spiritual partaking of Christ's body [Latin]).

FC SD VII.64-65; Triglotta p. 994-995

In the language of the confessors, any description of the exercise of faith may be called "spiritual eating." It does not necessarily have to be connected to the actual eating of the Supper, nor does it even have to be an expression involving eating. "The whole New Testament treats of this spiritual supper and especially does John here [in John 6]."¹⁷² The Formula's reference to "remembrance of Me" as a "spiritual partaking of Christ's body"

¹⁷¹ Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Adelaide, S.A.: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977) p. 143-144. To Sasse's list of Lutherans who have observed the connection between John 6 and the Supper, we also add: E. W. Hengstenberg, Wilhelm Löhe, A. F. C. Vilmar, K. Fr. Göschel, Werner Elert, Peter Brunner, Joachim Jeremias, Oscar Cullman, Heinrich Bornkamm, James W. Voelz, Theodor Zahn and others.

¹⁷² Martin Luther (St. Louis Ed. XI:1143), as quoted by Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953) Vol. III, p. 331.

does not mean to say anything more than this: remembrance entails faith. True, the term "spiritual eating" goes well with the actual eating which takes place in the Supper, but the confessors, especially Luther, used the term apart from the Supper to denote faith in general. We prefer the term "faith-eating" and our usage is more specific, since we never use the term to speak of faith when not expressed by a food/eating metaphor. The reason why faith-eating is to be preferred over "spiritual eating" is twofold: 1) the reception of the Lord's Supper is every bit as much "spiritual," since it is the actual eating of God's thoroughly Spirit-filled flesh and blood. 2) faith is always "spiritual" in that it is caused by the Holy Spirit, but it is not always an eating, either metaphorical or sacramental; therefore, it is confusing to refer to every description of the exercise of faith as "spiritual eating." Hermann Sasse comments on the doctrinal formulation of this chapter:

This part [the early part, beginning with John 6:33] of the discourse has been properly taken as the scriptural foundation of the doctrine of the *manducatio spiritualis*, the spiritual eating of Christ in faith. But it does violence to the text if one now reads this meaning into the verses from 51b on.¹⁷³

In John 6 Jesus adds the oral eating to the faith-eating. In the words of institution, according to the Formula, He adds the faith-eating to the oral eating. In John 6, Jesus is speaking to a mixed crowd: believers and unbelievers. Faith is the first and primary

¹⁷³ Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament (1941)" (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985) p. 78.

topic of His sermon. At the institution of the Supper, Jesus is speaking to the chosen twelve who confessed faith in Him.¹⁷⁴ The oral eating is the primary topic of the words of institution; in addition, Jesus makes it clear that His body and blood are to be eaten in His remembrance, that is, with Christ as faith's object. The eating is actual, sacramental, oral reception of the glorified, supernatural, illocal body and blood. The remembrance is faith in that same incarnate living Christ whose flesh and blood are received into the mouth. Christ tailors His words to benefit His hearers—to create faith in the unbeliever, to strengthen faith in the believer, and to break down the resistance of those who object. In John 6 the words of Jesus are carefully addressed to His mixed audience of believers and unbelievers. Certain statements are aimed directly at those who do not believe. Certain statements apply only to His followers who believe in Him. Other statements are more generally given to all. To interpret all of the statements in the Bread of Life Sermon as though there were no distinction among the hearers is to fail to rightly divide the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel in the Bread of Life Sermon

¹⁷⁴ This is not to say that all of the twelve were believers, Judas was not a believer; the distinction being made here is that the twelve had been instructed in faith and confessed faith, whereas the crowd in John. 6 included those who had not been instructed and had not confessed faith. So, naturally, Christ spoke of faith first and of oral eating second.

The words of Jesus divide His hearers into two distinct groups: believers and unbelievers. Matt. 13:11-12 illustrates this indisputably; there are "the haves and the have-nots." Likewise, in John 6 there are "the dos and the don'ts." In the first part of the sermon Jesus says that there are those who do not believe (6:36); nevertheless, He repeatedly promises that those who do believe have eternal life (6:35, 40, 47). These are "the do's and the don'ts." In the second part of the sermon, following the καὶ...δὲ conjunction, Jesus speaks of those who eat His flesh and drink His blood and those who don't. The corollary with John 3 is clear. The Pharisees who rejected the preaching of John the Baptizer also rejected his baptism (Luke 7:29-30). Likewise, those who do not eat Christ by faith also reject eating His flesh and blood. Jesus preaches law to those who refuse His gifts. The statements "unless a man. . ." in John 3:5 and "unless you. . ." in John 6:53 are tailor-made law for those who are rejecting Jesus' gifts. The refusal to eat Jesus' flesh and blood is the result of the rejection of Jesus. Since they rejected Him as the Bread of Life, they also reject Him as the Living Bread. Not only did they fail to recognize the meaning of His sign (6:26), Jesus Himself is rejected, both His preaching and His gift of flesh to eat and blood to drink. In short, rejection of Jesus is rejection of both Gift and Giver, rejection of God's Word and rejection of His Sacraments go hand in hand. So the corollary is clear: those who reject the Baptizer reject his Baptism; those who reject Jesus reject His Supper. It is clear that for these people in Capernaum, the refusal to eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood is evidence of their unbelief. Jesus knows exactly

who these people are, John 6:64: " 'There are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe. . ." Jesus said this referring to those who rejected His words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. They had rejected Him from the beginning. Those who believe have no trouble accepting the words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, even though they do not understand how Jesus will accomplish what He has promised (6:68-69). They do not ask as the unbelievers do, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" They do not even view it as "a hard word" (6:60). Gifts of the Gospel are not seen as conditions or requirements by those who receive them. They are seen as unreasonable demands by those who reject them.

The linking of the faith-eating (6:26-51) with the oral eating (6:51-59) in no way leads to the conclusion that only believers partake of the Lord's body and blood in the Supper. This linking in no way overthrows the *manducatio indignorum*, nor does it impinge upon it. The matter of *manducatio indignorum* simply lies outside the scope of this sermon. Jesus is simply not addressing the abuses of the Corinthian congregation in this synagogue in Capernaum. He is speaking proleptically of the Supper and He links faith to it in such a way that the oral eating cannot be considered a magical act which renders one immortal *ex opere operato*.

God has more than one vehicle which delivers the remission of sins or justification (*media communicationis remissionis peccatorum sive iustificationis ex parte Dei*). Any one of these

means delivers the whole Christ and the possession of eternal life. One does not have to partake of all of these means in order to have the full gift of eternal life. The believer's attitude toward these means is "the more the merrier!" However, the unbeliever who despises God, despises His instruments as well. The unbeliever is never neutral toward God and his means of eternal life, he is never irreligious. The unbeliever is by nature an idolator; with false gods come false means of life or "psuedo-sacraments." An idolator can never accept a true means of life; it is against his religion. He views it as a wicked deception: "How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" (6:42). Those who reject the true God accordingly reject His vehicles of delivery: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (6:52). The rejection of any of these means is to remain in death. He who rejects Baptism "cannot enter the kingdom" (3:5), "is condemned already" (3:18), "the wrath of God remains upon him" (3:36). To reject the Supper is to "have no life in yourselves" (6:53). To refuse the testimony of Scripture is to lock oneself out of life (5:39-40); the writings of Moses are the means which were rejected (5:44-47). Here it is important to remember that despising the means is the result of unbelief. For this reason Lutheran dogmaticians have classified Baptism and the Lord's Supper as "secondary fundamental doctrines."

The Sacraments offer nothing new; they only seal and confirm the same grace and same absolution which the Gospel announces, gives, and confers. In this sense the Sacraments are not absolutely necessary; and for this

reason we call the doctrines of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion secondary fundamental doctrines.¹⁷⁵

In keeping with the often quoted dictum: *Contemptus sacramenti damnat, non privatio*,¹⁷⁶ Lutherans have maintained that saving faith cannot coexist with the incorrigible rejection of these secondary fundamental doctrines. Hollaz is quite right in saying of the secondary fundamental articles as such: "A simple want of acquaintance with them does not prevent salvation, but the pertinacious denial of, and hostility to, them overturns the foundation of faith." (Doctr. Theol., p.98 f.)¹⁷⁷

There is a sharp and clear distinction which must be observed between those who err in regard to Baptism and/or the Lord's Supper as a result of ignorance and those who err in regard to Baptism and/or the Lord's Supper as a result of unbelief. For example: It is possible for a Christian to hold a false view of the Lord's Supper, but only if he does not realize that his view is false; that is, a believer can be inconsistent and make mistakes in doctrine which do not immediately overthrow the foundation of his faith. This false belief will play havoc with the person's faith and militate against his trust in Christ and his certainty of salvation whenever he begins to compare the false with the true. But once the error has been discovered and pointed out by

¹⁷⁵ J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955) p. 53.

¹⁷⁶ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics Volume III* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953) p. 393.

¹⁷⁷ Mueller, p. 54.

Scripture, there is no longer any room for "felicitous inconsistency." The believer is then confronted with a choice between correction by that Word or rejection of that Word. Once ignorance of the error has been removed, the person is faced with the ultimatum: "Choose this day whom you will serve." He will either knowingly remain with the doctrine and god of his own making or he will be corrected and thankfully respond: "You have the words of eternal life." How long this may take or when it occurs is known only to God. Those who err because of weakness or ignorance and those who err because of unbelief are known only to God. It is not for us to decide who errs out of ignorance or inconsistency and who errs out of unbelief. Our task is simply to rebuke and correct all error whenever it appears within the Church.

CHAPTER V

THE BENEFIT OF THE SUPPER IN LIGHT OF JOHN 6 IN LUTHERAN CATECHESIS AND PREACHING

The "Bodily Benefit" of the Lord's Supper

Luther's Small Catechism calls the benefit of the Supper: "forgiveness of sins, life and salvation."¹⁷⁸ He explains this by saying, "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there also is life and salvation." It is clear that it is not the act of eating and drinking which gives such benefit, but rather the Word which is with (*neben* : close by, besides) the bodily eating and drinking. The forgiveness of sins is to be equated with Justification of the sinner before God: "The forgiveness of sins or justification before God (*die Rechtfertigung vor Gott*), for thus says the Lord: Take, eat this is My body, which is given for you, in your stead, for your good." ¹⁷⁹ Now Justification or forgiveness of sins means life and salvation. K. Euler explains it in this way:

Life, namely spiritual life, the life of Christ, which has been born a new man in us in holy Baptism, is supported and strengthened thereby, to fear God, to love, and to fulfill his commands. . .[Euler then quotes John 6:53-58 as proof for the "life" which is supported and strengthened by the Supper]. And Salvation: The joyous consciousness and the certain hope

¹⁷⁸ SC VI.6.

¹⁷⁹ K. Euler, *Handbuch zum kleinen Katechismus Luthers für Lehrer in Schule und Kirche* . (Gießen: n.p., 1861), p. 632-633.

of the resurrection to eternal life in the blessed fellowship of God... Therefore it is given for daily pasture and feeding, that you might recover and strengthen the faith, that you might not fall back in such battle, but rather always become stronger and stronger. For the new life shall thus be done, that it constantly increases and continues; but on the other hand, it must suffer much. For such an angry enemy is the devil. ¹⁸⁰

Thus the Supper supports and strengthens the "life" of the new man (the life of Christ in us) against the attacks (Anfechtung) of the devil and the world. Otto Zuck elaborates on the "life" which is nourished by the Supper:

[Under the heading of "On the Blessing of the Holy Supper"] "So as often as we eat this meal, God seals and guarantees to us the remission of our sins for the sake of Jesus Christ, who as the Lamb of God has taken away the sins of the world. But where the source of all ill is done away with, there also the matter of the consequence of sin is brought up. What then, has God's granting the forgiveness of your sins attained? Life and Salvation. How does the Lord say it in John 6:53? Unless you eat -- in yourselves. So what works in the Supper? The Life. Now those who do not eat the Holy Meal also live; here a different life must be intended. Of which life does this place not speak? Of the bodily life. Which life is meant here? Spiritual life. What do we call the Spiritual Life? The divine life. By what is the earthly life preserved? By earthly food. By what the Spiritual life? By the Holy Supper. But he who carries a divine life, stands in intimate communion with God. And this communion God will transform, one day after the bodily death, into an eternal one. What will he then someday give to those who on earth were joined with Him through a divine life? Eternal Life.

Bible texts: 1 Cor. 10:16, 2 Cor. 5:19, John 6:53. ¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 633.

¹⁸¹ Otto Zuck, *Katechesen über die fünf Hauptstücke des kleinen Katechismus Dr. Martin Luther's*. (Bernburg, Verlag von J. Bacmeister, 1883), p. 205-206.

The day of resurrection is the time when the communion which we have with God is transformed into an eternal one. The communion which we have through the Supper during our temporal life is a foretaste of the consummated communion we will share with God on the day of resurrection. So the Supper is inextricably bound up with resurrection from the dead and eternal life. But it is not a medicine of immortality in the Greek philosophical sense nor a matter of keeping this body from death and decay. It is neither medieval magic nor futuristic organic chemistry. It is the work of the life-making Spirit of God. Ernst Keyl adds:

55. But is the Sacrament also a life-making food for our mortal body?

Without any doubt. For Irenaeus and the early fathers have shown the benefit, that our body is fed with the body of Christ, so that our faith and hope might stand, that our body should also live eternally by the same eternal food of the body of Christ, which he eats bodily; which is a bodily benefit; but nevertheless comes out of the great mass and follows from the spiritual. For Christ will indeed also make our bodies eternally living, holy and glorious, which is a very great thing, for that He gives us His body to eat for a short time on earth. Therefore He will be in us naturally [essentially] (says Hilary), both in the soul and the body according to the Word, John 6:56, "He who eats Me, remains in Me and I in him." One eats Him spiritually through the Word, so He remains spiritually in us in the soul. One eats Him bodily, so He remains bodily in him; as one eats Him, so He remains in us and we in Him. For He is neither digested nor transformed, but rather we alone are continuously transformed, the soul in righteousness, the body in immortality. Thus have the fathers spoken.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Ernst G. W. Keyl, *Katechismusauslegung aus Dr. Luthers Schriften und Symbolischen Büchern, IV Band* . (herausgegeben von der ev.=luth.

In his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Martin Chemnitz is more specific in regard to the early fathers' teaching of the Supper as a food of resurrection:

Because in the Eucharist we receive that body of Christ which has been given for us, and the blood of the New Testament which has been shed for the remission of sins, who will deny that believers there receive the whole treasury of the benefits of Christ? For they receive that through which sins are remitted, by which death is abolished, by which life is communicated to us, by which Christ unites us to Himself as members, so that He is in us and we are in Him. Hilary says beautifully: "When these things have been taken and drunk, they bring about both that Christ is in us and that we are in Him." Cyril says: "When in the mystical benediction we eat the flesh of Christ in faith, we have from it life in ourselves, being joined to that flesh of Christ which has been made life, so that not only does the soul ascend through the Holy Spirit into a blessed life, but also this earthly body is restored by this food to immortality, to be resurrected on the last day."

Therefore we receive in the Eucharist the most certain and most excellent pledge of our reconciliation with God, of the forgiveness of sins, of immortality and future glorification. . . For in His Supper He gives us as food that body which He gave into death for us, in order that from it, as solid, divine, and life-giving food we may live, be nourished, grow, be comforted, and so transformed into Him that we can never be separated from Him, as Augustine affectionately says, speaking for Christ: "You will not transform Me into you, but you will be transformed into Me." . . . Beautiful is the statement of Ignatius, which is found in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where he calls the Eucharist *pharmakon athanasias, antidoton tou mee apothaneiv, alla zeen en theoo dia Ieesou Christou, katharteerion alexikakon*, that is, "a medicine of immortality, an antidote, that we may not die but live in God through Jesus Christ, a cleansing remedy through warding off and driving out evils." 183

Synode von Missouri Ohio u. a. St., Druck von Aug. Wiebusch u. Sohn., 1868), p. 42.

Chemnitz points out that the Christians of the Augsburg Confession emphasize the forgiveness of sins in the Supper not to detract from the other benefits of the Supper, but rather to emphasize that in forgiveness, we have all of Christ's benefits; forgiveness not only for venial sins but for all sins, life not only in the future but eternal life right now; salvation leading not to purgatory but the resurrection of our bodies in the consummated kingdom of God.

I wanted to restate these things briefly from the saying of the fathers in order that I might show the reader that the point of controversy concerning which the papalists are here contending with us is not that they think and speak more highly concerning the purpose, fruit, power, and efficacy which come from receiving the Eucharist, or that we speak of the forgiveness of sins in such a way that we deny and detract from the other effects of the Eucharist. I added our confession to the statements of the ancients, which are taken from and built up from the Word of God, in order that it might become plainly evident before the whole church that we take away nothing whatsoever from the honor, power, and efficacy of the Eucharist.¹⁸⁴

Where Luther said, "Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation," he could just as truly have said, "Where there is forgiveness of sins, there also is redemption through His blood and no longer any need for a sin-offering." (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 10:18). Luther is simply explaining what the forgiveness of sins is-- it goes hand in hand with justification and is consummated in resurrection to eternal life. But if one insists upon direct

¹⁸³ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent, Part II*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), p. 233-234.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

scriptural proof that "life and salvation" come to us through the Lord's Supper in particular, teachers of the Catechism have provided direct proof in their harmonizations of Luther's Catechism with Scripture in their explanations and question & answer sections of their teaching handbooks.

K. F. L. Arndt's Teacher's Handbook states:

As the bodily bread is for earthly nourishment and wine serve to strengthen the body, so is the communication of the body and blood of Christ a heavenly food and a drink of eternal life. So says Christ Himself of His flesh and blood: "This is the bread which has come down from heaven etc. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life... My flesh is true food and My blood is true drink," John 6:50 . Even though at the time when He spoke, the Supper was not yet instituted , He nevertheless looks toward the mystery here which is presented to us in the Sacrament. He calls it a food and a drink, because we shall acquire it to take and eat. It shall be a food of heavenly nourishment through which eternal life is supported and preserved. This can and should now indeed go on through the spiritual use at all times, but in the Sacrament with the custom in which Christ has ordained visible signs, through sacramental use.¹⁸⁵

In F. W. Schüße's *Outline and Teaching of Luther's Small Catechism* :

Thus the Supper has opened to all worthy communicants always anew the gate of heaven, and makes them just as glad and certain of their salvation in Christ. So it should be. For as our Lord Christ Himself says of His Supper: "I am the living bread having come down from heaven. He who eats of this bread will live in eternity. And the bread, which I will give, is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Later He

¹⁸⁵ Karl F. L. Arndt, *Handbuch für Lehrer beim Unterricht nach Luthers kleinen Katechismus* . (Neustrelitz, 1853), p. 386-387.

says: "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood, has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." See there, how the Holy Supper is a meal full of boundless blessing for all who eat it in faith.¹⁸⁶

H. U. Sverdrup's *Explanation* :

How do believers obtain life and salvation in the Sacrament of the Altar? This Sacrament brings believers into spiritual union with their Lord and Saviour, who imparts Himself to them, and thereby preserves and strengthens them in faith, hope and love unto eternal life.

John 6:56. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.¹⁸⁷

Why is the reception of the body and blood of Christ of such certain benefit? Because the Word of God, from which the sacrament derives its benefit and efficaciousness, cannot be separated from the body of Christ. Christ is the enfleshed Word of God. Luther defends this against the fanatics:

But if again I reply, "I will not let anyone separate the body of Christ from the Word," they would hiss and hoot at me. Well, suppose it is as they dream, that Christ's body is alone in the bread and no Word of God is there with it--though this is not possible; let us see what they gain. Why, they will run out of the rain and fall into the water! For if Christ's body is present without the outward Word of God, it cannot be present there without the inner, eternal Word which is God himself, John 1. For this "Word became flesh" and is in the flesh.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Friedrich W. Schüße, *Entwürf und Katechesen über Dr. M. Luthers kleinen Katechismus* vol. 3. (Leipzig, Verlag von B. G. Teubner, 1899), p. 387.

¹⁸⁷ H. U. Sverdrup, *Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism*. Translated from the Norwegian by Prof. E. G. Lund, D.D., (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1900), p. 115.

¹⁸⁸ Luther, *That These Words, 'This is My Body'...* (1527) AE 37, 133 (see Footnote 137 on p. 70 for abbreviations of Luther's Works).

Luther does not allow any spirit/flesh or soul/body dichotomization of man. What is good for the soul is certainly good for the body. Luther makes the food for the soul or the "spiritual eating" of Christ the primary benefit from which all bodily benefit flows.

Irenaeus and the ancient fathers pointed out the benefit that our body is fed with the body of Christ, in order that our faith and hope may abide and that our body also may live eternally from the same eternal food of the body of Christ which it eats physically. This is a bodily benefit, nevertheless an extraordinarily great one, and it follows from the spiritual benefit.¹⁸⁹

This statement is clarified by another statement of Luther in the *Large Catechism* (1529):

We must never regard the Sacrament as something injurious from which we had better flee, but as a pure, wholesome, comforting remedy imparting salvation and comfort, which will cure you and give you life both in soul and body. For where the soul has recovered, the body also has benefited. LC V:68; Triglotta p. 768

According to Luther, the benefit of the "spiritual eating" (faith) and of the bodily eating have the same effect, since the body receives all of the benefit given to the soul. In this way Luther refuses to allow body and soul to be separated even though he makes a distinction between the two. So even though Luther calls the Supper "food for the soul" (LC V:23), the benefit extends to the body as well, and he does not fail to remind us that the devil is hoping to destroy our body and soul (LC V:84). Robert Kolb calls

¹⁸⁹ Luther, *That These Words, 'This is My Body'...* (1527) AE37:132.

this benefit of the Supper "shalom" (wholeness and health for the whole person when our "life" is consummated).¹⁹⁰ But Luther also insists that where the body of Christ is present, there also is the life-making Word/Spirit of God. He calls Christ's flesh "a real spiritual flesh, a divine flesh imbued with the Holy Spirit, in which nothing but spirit is found, a flesh full of grace; for it gives life to the world."¹⁹¹ And again, in his *Ten Sermons on the Catechism* (1528), "The need is that sin, devil, and death are always present. The benefit is that we receive forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit."¹⁹² The result is evident:

Christ's body can never be without fruits and without effect, doing and profiting nothing. But as large as the treasure is in itself, it still has to be contained in the Word and given to us, otherwise we could never know of it or look for it. LC V:30; Triglotta p. 758

But Paul Althaus contends that Luther spoke of a particular saving effect of the sacramental eating when it is accompanied by the spiritual eating:

The unique significance of the real presence of the body of Christ filled with the Spirit was too great to permit an answer to this question simply in terms that the body and the blood are the guarantee, and especially, the vehicle of forgiveness. For this reason, Luther attempts to demonstrate that there is a particular saving effect of such bodily eating of the body of Christ. "So, when we eat Christ's flesh physically and spiritually, the food is so powerful that it transforms us into itself and out of fleshly, sinful, mortal men, makes spiritual,

¹⁹⁰ Robert Kolb, *Dying and Rising*. (unpublished, 1990), p. 97.

¹⁹¹ *Sermons on the Gospel of John* (1531) AE 23, 166.

¹⁹² Luther, *Ten Sermons on the Catechism* (1528), AE 51, 192.

holy, living men. This we are already, although in a hidden manner in faith and hope; the fact is not yet manifest, but we shall experience it on the Last Day.”¹⁹³ But Luther had very frequently attributed this same transformation of the flesh into spirit to the spoken word of preaching which brings Christ into us. For this reason, Luther first describes a unique saving effect to the sacrament by taking up the thought of Irenaeus and the other Greek fathers that the body and blood of Christ are a food which makes the body immortal. Christ gives us his own body as a food “so that with such a pledge he may assure and promise us that our body too shall live forever; for here on earth it partakes of an everlasting and living food.” If these words seem to say that the bodily eating of Christ's body was a guarantee to the soul that the body would be raised, other passages leave no doubt at all that Luther thought of a physical effect resulting in resurrection and not only an assurance of it. “The soul sees and clearly understands that the body will live eternally because it has partaken of an eternal food which will not leave it to decay in the grave and turn to dust.”¹⁹⁴ With this, the real presence received a peculiar effect corresponding to its peculiar significance. Since this is given only to faith, one cannot characterize the thought as magical.¹⁹⁵

Luther places great emphasis upon the "spiritual eating" and the bodily benefit which flows from it, but he speaks also of a bodily benefit which is derived from the substance of Christ's body whenever it is received in faith; a benefit which corresponds to the nature of Christ's body.

In the fifth book, chapter 5, he [Irenaeus] says, “The cup, which is a created thing, he acknowledges as his own body, by which he gives increase to our bodies.” Observe, again, that the body of Christ in the cup strengthens our bodies. . . Again, shortly

¹⁹³ WA 23, 205; LW 37, 101.

¹⁹⁴ WA 23, 155, 191, 205, 253.; LW 37, 71, 93, 100, 130.

¹⁹⁵ Paul Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 401-402.

thereafter he says, “Now when the mixed cup and the manufactured bread receive the Word of God, they become the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, through which things the nature of our body grows and subsists.”. . .the sacrament is not a sign of the absent body of Christ but is the body of Christ himself, as that by which not only is our body physically fed but also the nature and substance [wesen] of our body is nourished, strengthened, and sustained unto eternal life and becomes a member of the body of Christ.¹⁹⁶ (emphasis added)

Again, Luther speaks of a corresponding benefit of the body in the Supper when received in faith:

If it is in the bread and is physically eaten with faith, it strengthens the soul by virtue of the fact that it believes it is Christ's body which the mouth eats, and so faith clings to the body which is in the bread. Now that which lifts, bears, and binds faith is not useless but salutary. Similarly, the mouth, the throat, the body, which eats Christ's body, will also have its benefit in that it will live forever and arise on the Last Day to eternal salvation. This is the secret power and benefit which flows from the body of Christ in the Supper into our body, for it must be useful, and cannot be present in vain. Therefore it must bestow life and salvation upon our bodies, as is its nature.¹⁹⁷

And also:

Therefore he wills to be “in us by nature,” says Hilary, in both our soul and body, according to the word in John 6 [:56], “He who eats me abides in me and I in him.” If we eat him spiritually through the Word, he abides in us spiritually in our soul; 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.¹⁹⁸ (emphasis added)

¹⁹⁶ Luther, *That These Words, 'This is My Body'...* (1527) AE37:119.

¹⁹⁷ Luther, *That these Words, 'This is My Body'...* (1527) AE37:134.

It may be that Luther only intends to say that the great bodily benefit of the resurrection flows out of the strengthening of faith which is fostered by the bodily eating as in the above quoted statement from the *Large Catechism*. One might wish that Luther had written more on the relationship between the identical benefit produced in us by both the spiritual and the sacramental eating and drinking. But perhaps Luther was wise by not venturing to say any more and avoided speculation in things which the Lord has not spoken (*Deus absconditus*). Luther does not deal with the question of how this takes place, because that question is not answered by Scripture. He simply asserts what Scripture teaches concerning the benefit of the Supper:

Those who are sensible of their weakness, desire to be rid of it and long for help, should regard and use it only as a precious antidote against the poison which they have in them. For here in the Sacrament you are to receive from the lips of Christ forgiveness of sin, which contains and brings with it the grace of God and the Spirit with all his gifts, protection, shelter, and power against death and the devil and all misfortune." LC V:69; Triglotta p. 769

This statement is similar to "medicine of immortality, an antidote that you might not die but live forever in Jesus" from the letter of Ignatius to the Ephesians 2:20. The Solid Declaration also speaks of Christ's flesh as a *vivificus cibus* :

Thus in John 6:48-58 the flesh of Christ is a quickening food (*lebendigmachende Speise*); as also the Council of Ephesus concluded from this [statement of the evangelist and apostle]

¹⁹⁸ Luther, *That these Words, 'This is My Body'...* (1527) AE37:132.

that the flesh of Christ has power to quicken (to make alive); and as many other glorious testimonies of the ancient orthodox Church concerning this article are cited elsewhere. FC SD VIII.59; Triglotta p. 1034-1035

His flesh is truly a quickening food and His blood a truly quickening drink; as the two hundred Fathers of the Council of Ephesus have testified, *carnem Christi esse vivificam seu vivificatricem*, that is, that the flesh of Christ is a enlivening flesh. FC SD VIII.76; Triglotta p. 1042-1043

So, we come to the question: If the benefit of the bodily eating is exactly the same as that of the "spiritual eating" of faith, what is the point of so much emphasis on the bodily benefit of the Supper? Hermann Sasse gives us an insight here:

Here we are confronted with the famous question whether, according to Luther, the Sacrament of the Altar--the same would apply to the Sacrament of Baptism--can have, and has, effects on the human body. It is quite clear that, in the passage just quoted from the *Large Catechism*, everything depends on the forgiveness of sins. This forgiveness leads to a strengthening of the inner life: it gives the Holy Spirit, who brings life eternal. However, since forgiveness and Spirit are inherent in the body and blood of Christ, and since the bodily and the spiritual eating in the reception of the Sacrament by the believer are one action, the whole man is influenced by the body of Christ. . . It is not accidental that John 6 appears here as the scriptural proof. There is a connection between the Sacrament and the Last Things. Baptism looks to the resurrection of the body, and so does the Sacrament of the Altar. That the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are anticipations of the future, of our resurrection and the complete union with Christ, is the doctrine of the New Testament.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body*, (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), p. 148-150. Sasse cites Rom 6:3 and John 6:54. in his footnote.

Bread and wine are the tangible means through which Christ gives us the gifts of the new covenant--his body and blood. This tells us something which we might not be so readily aware of when we receive forgiveness through absolution.

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.²⁰⁰

Implications in Preaching

What is the practical implication of this special "bodily comfort" which believers have through the Supper? In a funeral sermon included in Veit Dietrich's *Haus-Postille* Luther is reported to have said:

The body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine, through the power of the Word, are placed in our mouth, so that, as the holy fathers also said in this connection, our mortal bodies here on earth might be nourished unto everlasting life through an immortal food. And so there has arisen among Christians the custom of protecting those who are sick with this living and eternal food so that they may grasp with all the greater certainty the hope of eternal life.²⁰¹

It is a special comfort to those whose loved ones have died to know that their departed Christian friends and relatives have received the imperishable body and blood of Christ. Luther goes on to say to them:

²⁰⁰ Ibid., *This is My Body*, p. 313.

²⁰¹ Luther, *Saemmtliche Schriften*, Xllla, 1327, 14. [= St. Louis or Walch II Ed.]

Since you know that your good friend deported himself as a Christian in this regard, not despising the eternal food so rich in grace, sought it, and partook of it, you should now be satisfied that as far as he is concerned, he will not remain in death. As St. Paul says, Christ will bring him with Himself on the Last Day and give him to you again just as her son was restored to the widow (the sermon was based on Luke 7:11-16). And so the holy sacraments direct us to such a hope so that we may be certain and have no doubts at all.²⁰²

As a special comfort to ourselves, we too can say, as we depart from the Lord's Table, "My flesh will dwell in hope, because you will not abandon my life to Hades, nor did you allow Your Holy One to see decay. You have made known to me the ways of life; You shall fill me with joy with Your presence." (adapted from Acts 2:26b-28)

CONCLUSION

As with any complex issue, especially this one, one might be reluctant to write anything called a "conclusion"; knowing full well that if this thesis is well received, it may well be the beginning and not the conclusion of the matter. To be more precise, it is my hope and it is my purpose in writing, that the issue of whether or not John 6 is to be interpreted as having reference to the Lord's Supper will be discussed openly in our church. It has been observed that whenever the question arises in informal theological discussion, often the question is quashed by a short quote from Luther. If the argument goes further, a knowledgeable student of Luther may even put forth his argument about unworthy eating. The argument seldom goes

²⁰² Luther, *Saemmtliche Schriften*, XIIIa, 1327, 16.

farther than this. Confessional Lutherans are reluctant to say "Luther was wrong" in the company of fellow Lutherans.²⁰³ My goal is to reopen the argument and carry it beyond this snag-point. Many Lutheran students and pastors have told me that when they preach on John 6, they make eucharistic references, but they are not sure if those references really belong with the text. Others have said they wanted to draw direct eucharistic references from this text, but did not dare to do so for fear of being criticized for contradicting Luther, or because of an honest fear of not being fully prepared to defend their position. This is why I spoke of the Bread of Life sermon as a "no man's land" for Lutherans in the general introduction. The evidence which has been presented should go a long way in exploding some of the land mines in this "no man's land." The exegesis must stand on its own without reference to the history of interpretation. Nevertheless, it is reassuring that the early church exegesis is in overwhelming agreement with the eucharistic interpretation. Luther's admission that he did not understand the grammar of John 6:62 and his habitual use of the Latin text leads us to the conclusion that he probably had no knowledge of the function of the crucial *καί...δέ* conjunction in John 6:51. We cannot speculate whether this knowledge would have changed Luther's interpretation, but certainly no interpretation can be any better than the text on which it is based. The Vulgate does not reflect an

²⁰³ Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the statement: "Luther was wrong" is immediately followed by a statement which cannot be supported by Scripture, is it not?

accurate translation of this conjunction. Even though the Lutheran Confessions do not take up Luther's view of John 6, none of the catechetical books which refer to John 6 under "benefits of the Supper" have ever been translated into English (even those written especially for the LC-MS). Should we refrain from using John 6:51-58 in our teaching and preaching of the Lord's Supper? If the findings of this thesis are correct, we should teach that John 6:51-58 speaks of the benefits of believing reception of the Lord's Supper. If not, then I would hope that someone might show me from the Scriptures, in a gentle and brotherly fashion, the true interpretation. "Thy will be done."

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