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The Use of the Church Fathers in the  
 Formula of Concord . . . . . J.A.O. Preus 97

Clergy Mental Health and the Doctrine of  
 Justification . . . . . Robert Preus 113

Luther's Last Battles . . . . . Mark U. Edwards 125

The Doctrine of Man:  
 Christian Anthropology . . . . . Eugene F. Klug 141

Luther the Seelsorger . . . . . George Kraus 153

Wittenburg and Canterbury . . . . . John Stephenson 165

The Grace of God as the  
 Foundation for Ethics . . . . . Jeffery Gibbs 185

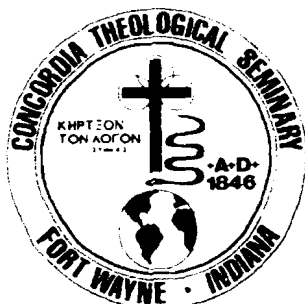
Implications of Recent Exegetical  
 Studies for the Doctrine of the Lord's Supper:  
 A Survey of the Literature . . . . . John T. Pless 203

Propitiation in the Language and . . . . . Douglas Judisch 221  
 Typology of the Old Testament

Theological Observer . . . . . 245

Book Reviews . . . . . 251

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# Implications of Recent Exegetical Studies for the Doctrine of the Lord's Supper: A Survey of the Literature

John T. Pless

Confessional Lutheran theology rightly insists that the doctrine of the Lord's Supper must be firmly grounded on the scriptural texts. It is the word of God that discloses the meaning of the sacrament. The question raised for contemporary Lutheranism focuses our attention on this central issue: "What do the Scriptures actually tell us about the Lord's Supper?" This question calls attention to the fact that theology cannot be divided into neat categories of exegetical studies, dogmatics, historical studies, and practical theology which are unrelated to each other. In fact, when we look at the doctrine of the Lord's Supper we see the complexity of the inter-relatedness of the various theological disciplines. A proper exegetical understanding of the Lord's Supper will have profound and far-reaching effects on dogmatic formulations, liturgical practice, ecumenical encounters and pastoral care.

It is beyond the scope of this study to demonstrate all of the connections of contemporary exegetical studies with dogmatic, ecumenical, liturgical or practical applications with regard to the Lord's Supper. Rather this paper will attempt to provide a "road map" to recent exegetical scholarship in the area of the Lord's Supper, pointing out where certain "detours" have been made into doctrinal theology, ecumenics and **liturgics**.

Critical scholarship of the nineteenth century developed two divergent views as to the meaning of the Lord's Supper. One view emphasized that the Lord's Supper as an act of Jesus intended to be a symbolic action declaring his coming death (A. Juelicher). The second view identified the central meaning of the Lord's Supper with the reception of bread and wine in the act of communion. Proponents of this theory (David Strauss, Bruno Bauer, and Ernst Renan) maintained that "the action of Jesus at the Last Supper can contain no symbolic representation,

of his passion, because he cannot have foreseen his death.“  
The Words of Institution recorded in the Synoptic Gospels and in I Corinthians were regarded as aetiological legends which grew out of the actual practice of the **eucharist** in the early church or else the Lord's Supper was regarded as simply one of the many fellowship meals that Jesus had with his disciples which was given a special character in the memory of the early Christian community.

Early in the twentieth century the names of Wilhelm Heitmueller and Hans Lietzmann stand out as especially significant. Heitmueller, following some nineteenth century scholars, regarded the accounts of the Lord's Supper as "aetiological cult-legends." These accounts according to Heitmueller are heavily colored by the way the Lord's Supper was being celebrated at the time the accounts were written. Since table fellowship took on spiritual dimensions in the ancient world, Heitmueller argues that the early church recognized in his holy meal a special communion between Jesus, who assumed the role of a Jewish house-father, and his disciples.

In 1926 Hans Lietzmann of Berlin published his massive work, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, in which he attempts to arrive at an understanding of the actual, historical meaning of the original Lord's Supper by starting with the liturgies of the fourth and fifth centuries and working his way back to the New Testament texts. Reu says of Lietzmann's work that it was "a rare example of historical insight and erudition."<sup>2</sup> Lietzmann's investigation of the early **eucharistic** liturgies led him to conclude that all of the liturgical forms in the early centuries of Christian history could be traced back to two primal forms: the Hippolytus-Roman form and the Egyptian form.<sup>3</sup> Lietzmann writes:

Our starting points are on the one hand the extant texts of **Hippolytus** or, alternatively, its Greek reconstruction; and on the other hand the oldest form of the Egyptian liturgy, as it may be derived from Egyptian sources- and in single cases probably also from the Gallican: Sarapion's **anaphora** being the most important. From here we must attempt to arrive at the days of the apostles by a comparison of these types with one another and with other witnesses of ancient times.<sup>4</sup>

Next Lietzmann moves on to answer the question, "What were the sources for these two forms of liturgies?" After careful review of the textual evidence, Lietzmann concludes that the

concepts present in the Hippolytan liturgy are derived from Pauline Christianity.<sup>5</sup> The Egyptian liturgy, on the other hand, is traced back to its oldest form in the Anaphora of Sarapion. Lietzmann argues that this form of liturgy was based on a Jewish prototype, perhaps first used in Jerusalem? The Anaphora of Sarapion combines biblical and philosophical language in a single form—it was a rather *ecclectic* liturgy:

It is highly probable therefore that the Sarapion Liturgy does not represent one uniform liturgical type, but is rather the outcome of a gradual mingling of different elements. Above *all*, the narrative of the institution, on account of its subordinate importance, appears as a foreign element; and the way in which it is broken into parts and overlaid with reflections is consistent with *this*.<sup>7</sup>

Lietzmann is unwilling finally to ascribe the celebration of the Lord's Supper to a common source. The Hippolytan form had its origin in Paul. The Egyptian form was derived from the *joyous agape* suppers of the primitive church, which were in turn quite similar to the Jewish Sabbath meal (*chaburah*).<sup>8</sup> Lietzmann goes on to argue that the Last Supper was not a *passover* meal but a *chaburah*.<sup>9</sup>

Undoubtedly, the most significant work on the Lord's Supper in our century is Joachim Jeremias' *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*. Jeremias considers the objections raised against finding the *passover* meal as the context for the Last Supper. After presenting detailed exegetical information to counter each of the objections, Jeremias concludes:

. . .it should be noted that the report of the synoptic gospels that the Last Supper was a *passover* meal **is at variance with the rite of the Early Church**. The Early Church did not celebrate the Lord's Supper according to the *passover* ritual, nor yet only once a year, but daily or on each Lord's Day. The reminiscences of the *passover* can therefore not have come from the liturgical practice; 'for the liturgy gave no occasion for them'... the synoptic gospels nevertheless describe the Last Supper as a *passover* meal and do not allow this to be lost in the tradition, . . . to be removed by the influence of the ritual **practice**.<sup>10</sup>

Yet the significance of Jeremias' work is far greater than his giving greater historical credence to the scriptural texts than many of the scholars who preceded him. The ultimate result of Jeremias' research was to establish a view of the Lord's Supper as 'parabolic action.' This view was destined to create

far-reaching results in the world of biblical scholarship as well as in liturgical practice and ecumenical discussion. This action is identified by Jeremias as *anamnesis*. Jeremias interprets this *anamnesis*-this remembrance-as follows:

**Keep** joining yourselves together as the redeemed community by the table rite, that in this way God may be daily implored to bring about the consummation of the parousia. <sup>11</sup>

With this definition Jeremias provided a platform upon which scholars from many traditions would build a new understanding of the Lord's Supper as man's action before God.

While not accepting all of Jeremias' conclusions, two notable exegetes, Oscar **Cullmann** and Eduard Schweizer must be seen as very much influenced by Jeremias. Schweizer maintained that within the **New** Testament church there were two views of the **eucharist** in existence:

To oversimplify, if the question had been posed concerning the nature of the elements (which it had not), then the Palestinian would have given a 'Reformed' answer, 'the bread signifies the body,' and the Hellenist, a 'Lutheran' answer, 'the bread is the body'."

It comes as no surprise, therefore, to learn that Schweizer was a member of the commission of Reformed and Lutheran theologians who drafted the **Arnoldshain** Theses in 1958, paving the way for **intercommunion** between these two bodies in Germany. **How**, then, does Schweizer view the presence of Christ in the sacrament? True to his Calvinistic heritage, Schweizer writes:

. . .**the** real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper is exactly the same as his presence in the word-nothing more, nothing less. **It** is an event, not an object; an encounter, not a phenomenon of nature; it is Christ's encounter with his church, not the distribution of a substance. <sup>13</sup>

Oscar Cullmann, the well-known New Testament exegete from Basel argues like Lietzmann that there were indeed two sources for the Lord's Supper. Originally the Lord's Supper was seen in light of Easter, not the Last Supper, **Cullmann** maintains. Only with Paul is the Lord's Supper connected with the night Prior to our Lord's death. Note Cullmann's **description** of these early **eucharistic** celebrations:

It may be taken as agreed that the oldest celebration of the Lord's Supper took place in the setting of an actual meal, in which the drinking of wine was not absolutely necessary

as we find in Acts, which speaks only of 'breaking of bread' and of nothing else...It is an essential characteristic of this meal that as Acts 2:46 has it, 'exuberant joy' prevailed amongst them. This was not aroused primarily by the remembrance of the Last Supper, but is explained in the first instance by the remembrance of those other occasions where Jesus, immediately after his resurrection, appeared to the disciples, while they were having a meal.<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly, Cullmann maintains that the central reality of the early eucharist was not the body and blood of the Crucified Christ but a joyful communion with the Risen Lord:

... the joy manifested by the early Christians during the breaking of the bread has its source, not in the fact that the assembled disciples eat the body and drink the blood of their crucified Master, but in the consciousness they have of eating with the Risen Christ, really present in their midst, as He was on Easter Day?

As we shall see, Cullmann's words which sound terribly similar to Schleiermacher,<sup>16</sup> strike a responsive chord in a number of ecclesiastical statements on the Lord's Supper as well as in certain liturgical forms.

Cullmann attempts to ground the Lord's Supper in the early church's "experience" of the Risen Christ. Yet the question of the relationship of Jesus to the Supper remains unanswered in Cullmann's research. Willi Marxsen of Muenster attempts to clarify, if not answer, this question. However his answer leaves us with skepticism in regard to the actual origin of the Lord's Supper:

It is extremely difficult to refer the contents of the Pauline formula back to Jesus; and in the face of all that we can ascertain about the preaching and activity of Jesus, it is still less likely to assume institution of a cult by Jesus. Thus the supposition that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the eve of his death poses so many difficulties that the careful historian must put more than just a question mark here.<sup>17</sup>

Not all New Testament exegetes are as skeptical as Marxsen. A refreshingly positive approach is taken by Aberdeen's I. Howard Marshall. The significance of Marshall's *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, published in 1980, lies not in the theological conclusions at which he arrives-his conclusions are firmly rooted in the Reformed tradition. Rather the importance of the book is that it is an attempt on the part of a conservative

Reformed theologian to deal with the historical data surrounding the Lord's Supper and to come to terms with the theological meaning for contemporary Christians. Marshall states his purpose early in the volume:

Broadly speaking, we want to ask a historical question, What actually happened at the Lord's Supper?-and a theological question, What was the significance of what happened? <sup>18</sup>

In a very systematic fashion Marshall goes about the task of answering those two questions. Marshall sets forth two methodologies currently used for dealing with the literary **and** historical data. One begins with the evidence in the New Testament and then proceeds to the early church and her liturgies (Jeremias). The contrasting approach begins with the early church and attempts to work its way back to the Last Supper (Lietzmann). Marshall opts for the first approach, maintaining that the "original accounts of the Lord's Supper were historical rather than liturgical creations." <sup>19</sup> According to Marshall one must use the New Testament texts themselves and not speculative theories concerning pagan cultic meals or Jewish meal practices to construct a doctrine of the Supper. After a review and critique of the scholarship of such notables as Bultmann, Bornkamm, Dellinger, Goppelt, Jeremias, Lietzmann, Marxsen, Pesch, Schurmann, and E. Schweizer, Marshall argues:

Our conclusion, then, is that Jesus had a Passover meal earlier than the official Jewish date and that he was able to do so as a result of calendar differences among the **Jews**.<sup>20</sup>

***Last Supper and Lord's Supper*** is more than a historical study; it is a theological interpretation. At this point the "Reformed bias" of the author is quite evident:

In fairness it should be observed that the cup contained wine which represented blood rather than the blood itself?

In short, we may be confident that Jesus spoke of the bread as representing his body; that he likened the **cup** to his blood of the covenant or to the new covenant in his blood; and that he spoke of giving himself or pouring out his blood for many. <sup>22</sup>

The word 'is', which would have been absent from the original saying in Hebrew or Aramaic, can mean 'signify' as **well** as 'be identified with,' and there can be no doubt whatever that at the Last Supper the word was used **with**

the former meaning. The saying was uttered by Jesus while he was bodily present with the disciples, and they could see **that** his body and the bread were two separate things. One might compare how a person showing a photograph of himself to a group of friends could say, as he points to it, 'This is **me**'.<sup>23</sup>

. . .it must be plainly stated that Paul's remarks require nothing more than a stress on the symbolism of bread and wine and **do** not in any way require an identification of the bread and wine as the body and blood of **Jesus**.<sup>24</sup>

Placing great emphasis on the symbolic character of **the** Lord's Supper, Marshall develops a "visible word" theology of the Sacrament; that is, the Sacrament is basically a visual aid to faith.

Thus far, all the exegetes we have treated have been representatives of one of the Protestant traditions. A very significant impact on both Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars was made by the Roman Catholic theologian, Odo Casel. Casel devoted his career to the investigation of the connection between the concept of "mystery" and **the** Christian sacraments. Casel's work was to provide a scholarly foundation for the liturgical movement in Roman Catholicism which subsequently would influence the practices of other church bodies as well? According to Casel "mystery" (*mysterion*) is:

. . .the Greek designation for the ancient Hellenic and later Hellenistic secret cults which are unlike the cults of the polis; They give to the worshipers of a god, who have been specially initiated and thereby joined to the god, a closer and more personal union with him; this union reaches beyond death and promises a happy existence in the next world.<sup>26</sup>

Casel argues that the "pagan mysteries" served as a means whereby God prepared the world for "the true mysteries" (i.e., the sacraments). The pagan mysteries provided a "ritual shape" for the sacraments, but Christ provided the "content," **Casel** maintains. Casel's methodology won general approval in Roman Catholic circles, and with increased ecumenical activity not a few Protestants consider themselves disciples of **Casel**.<sup>27</sup>

Now we must turn to the implications that the scholarly investigations of the last one hundred years have had for the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. We formulate our findings in terms of three theses:

(1) The use of the historical-critical method as the normative



methodology for understanding the biblical texts regarding the Lord's Supper is unable to provide a consistent answer to the question, "What is the Lord's Supper?"

- (2) The input of contemporary exegetical studies to ecumenical discussions has not led to a clear understanding of the institution and meaning of the Lord's Supper.
- (3) Contemporary exegetical studies tend toward a spiritualization of the Lord's Supper by connecting the primary content of the Supper with *anamnesis*, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, or eschatology, rather than the Words of Institution.

It cannot be denied that one of the forces at work within American Lutheranism in the 1960's which contributed to the desire for a revised liturgy and new hymnal was the historical-critical approach to the Holy Scriptures. In 1967, David Granskou, then a professor of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, wrote:

The liturgy which we have does present the Bible, but it is presented in the only way that the pre-critical age of exegesis could present it.<sup>28</sup>

The new liturgy must conform to the canons of the historical-critical method, argued Granskou (the italicization has been added):

Liturgies written in a pre-critical age made far different assumptions about the primary historical data, which was supposed to be a direct report of the life and thought of Jesus and the apostles, by the apostles. The Christians who wrote these liturgies were men of good faith who used the Bible as they understood it. However, if we are to be as biblical as they, *we must use the Bible and biblical words according to our understanding, not theirs.*<sup>29</sup>

Granskou leaves open the door for much mischief in his call for an understanding of the "Bible and biblical words" and subsequently the liturgy "according to our understanding."

One of the ironies of the historical-critical method is that it makes a claim to shed light on the actual meaning of the text when in fact it often further obscures the clear intention of the text. Harvey Guthrie contends:

What critical, historical research has uncovered and the way the results have been used in liturgical revision in the Church have opened up wonderful possibilities. Not only have those discoveries and their application in liturgical revision made it possible for contemporary Christians once

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again to worship in the atmosphere and structures of the *eucharistia* cult of early Christianity. Not only have those discoveries and their application in liturgical revision made it possible for contemporary Christians to reappropriate the truly traditional ethos of their liturgy which was obscured by ‘modernizing’ accretions in medieval and Reformation times. Those discoveries and their application in liturgical revision have also reintroduced *today*, *eucharistia*, as a possible basis for faith and theology which cuts right across medieval and Reformation alternatives.<sup>30</sup>

What do we know of the Lord’s Supper in the life of the New Testament Church? Whose picture are we to accept as authentic—that of Lietzmann, Cullmann, Jeremias, Kaesemann? Practitioners of the historical-critical method are unable to come to agreement in providing an answer to our question, “What is the Lord’s Supper?” It is sheer romanticism to believe that this methodology will allow us to re-pristiniate the practice of the early church.

The ecumenical movement has capitalized on the divergence of opinion as to the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. According to a number of ecumenical statements it is really unnecessary and even dangerous to attempt to define the exact meaning of the Lord’s Supper on the basis of the New Testament text since each writer was really an individual theologian with a particular “theology.” Pluralism within the New Testament canon, therefore, gives validity to a whole range of different “theologies” of the Sacrament within Christendom today.

Yngve Brilioth gives classic expression to this point of view in his *Eucharistic Faith and Practice: Evangelical and Catholic* where he contends that there are at least five “dimensions” to the Lord’s Supper (thanksgiving, communion, commemoration, eucharistic sacrifice, and mystery) in the New Testament and in the history of Christianity. Brilioth writes:

We have tried to show that in the eucharist there are both a manifoldness of diverse aspects and a central unity; just as the jewel shows endless changes of light and color as it is regarded from different angles. But the light which it refracts is one and the same; the holy Presence, the Mystery. It is true to say that the other aspects of the eucharist are only different ways to approach to it; and the various forms of liturgy and systems of doctrine which we have surveyed have helped to show the richness of its variety in constantly changing forms. But it is also true that

since the early centuries no part of Christendom has succeeded in expressing all the aspects together, in their harmony and completeness. Is it over-bold to look forward in hope to a future day when a fuller unity of Christendom shall again reveal the great Christian Sacrament in the wholeness of its many-sided **glory**?<sup>31</sup>

Since 1930 when Bishop Brilioth penned those words a number of ecumenical statements have more or less adopted Brilioth's proposals as a point of departure for interdenominational dialogue. For example, in the third thesis of the Arnoldshain Theses,<sup>32</sup> one can discern Brilioth's dimensions of the Lord's Supper (the headings are mine):

### ***Thanksgiving***

The Lord's Supper is an act of worship by the congregation assembled in Jesus name.

### ***Communion***

In the Lord's Supper we commemorate the death of Christ, through which God has reconciled the world to himself once and for all.

### ***Eucharistic Sacrifice***

Accompanied by prayer, thanksgiving, and praise, bread and wine are taken, the Lord's words of institution are pronounced, and the bread and wine are distributed to the congregation to be eaten and drunk.

### ***Mystery***

In the Lord's Supper...we confess the presence of the risen Lord in our midst and joyfully await his return, as those called into glory in the final **consummation**.<sup>33</sup>

The influence of Brilioth is even more clearly present in a 1978 document produced by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission (established by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian **Unity** and the Lutheran World Federation) entitled ***The Eucharist***. Once again, note the influence of Brilioth's categories:

### ***Thanksgiving***

Their very nature links proclamation and thanksgiving closely together. Accordingly, the Eucharist is the great

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thanksgiving to the Father for everything which He accomplished in creation, redemption and sanctification, for everything which He accomplishes now in the Church and in the world in spite of the sins of men, for everything that He will accomplish in bringing his kingdom to fulfillment. Thus the **eucharist** is the benediction (**berakah**) by which the Church expresses its thankfulness to God for all his benefits.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Communion***

Since Christian faith is essentially something shared with all fellow believers, the Eucharist is primarily an affair of the community and, in and through this, of individuals. Like the 'new covenant', the 'blood of the covenant' given in the Eucharist (Matthew **26:28**; Mark **14:24**; Luke **22:20**; I Corinthians **11:25**) is granted to the new people of God and thus to its **members**.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Eucharistic Sacrifice***

Our two traditions agree in understanding the Eucharist as a sacrifice of praise. This is neither the simple verbal praise of God, nor is it a supplement or a complement which people from their own power add to the offering of praise and thanksgiving which Christ has made to the Father. The eucharistic sacrifice of praise has only become possible through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross; therefore this remains the main content of the Church's sacrifice of **praise**.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Mystery***

The Lord's Supper is a mystery of faith in the fullest sense of the word. It belongs to the all-encompassing and incomprehensible mystery of salvation and it participates in its character as mystery."

In both the Arnoldshain Theses and ***The Eucharist we see*** what might be called an expansion and interpretation of the New Testament eucharistic texts. Both of these documents tend to be **eclectic** in their use of contemporary exegetical scholarship. Thus we are left with a "mosaic" portrayal of items certain exegetes and theologians have highlighted as being of importance in understanding the biblical doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The terminology used (i.e., thanksgiving, **com-**

munion, commemoration, eucharistic sacrifice, mystery, etc.) consist of terms which are defined in different ways by different scholars. We are given no unanimous answer to the Catechism's question, "What is the Lord's Supper?" There is, however, an overall trend in contemporary exegetical studies toward a "spiritualization" of the Lord's Supper. This is apparent in at least three areas: (1) the Lord's Supper as action of the church; (2) the Lord's Supper and the Holy Spirit; (3) the eucharist and eschatology.

In the New Testament accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper it is the Lord who is acting to bless through his giving of his body and blood. The direction of the action is from God to man. It is God who gives and man who receives. For this reason, Luther omitted the so-called "eucharistic canon" from the Mass, leaving the Words of Institution standing alone as the clear testament of our Lord to his people. Without going into the rather complex and at times heated debate over the place of the Prayer of Great Thanksgiving,<sup>38</sup> it must be stated that beginning with Jeremias'<sup>39</sup> interpretation of *anamnesis* as the believer's calling upon God to remember, this "gift-character" of the Lord's Supper has been clouded.

In a 1982 statement by the World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, we read not of Christ's giving but of the church's "recalling" and "beseeching":

Representation and anticipation are expressed in thanksgiving and intercession. The church, gratefully recalling God's mighty acts of redemption, beseeches God to give the benefits of these acts to every human being.<sup>40</sup>

Liturgically this idea is given expression in the Prayer of Great Thanksgiving in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*: "Therefore, gracious Father, with this bread and cup we remember the life our Lord offered for us" (p. 67).

A second trend which seems to be the result of the labors of certain exegetical scholars is the grounding of the Lord's Supper in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.<sup>41</sup> In light of the fact that many exegetes who employ the historical-critical method find it difficult to connect the Lord's Supper with "the night in which he was betrayed,"<sup>42</sup> an emphasis on the role of the Spirit in the sacrament becomes a rather convenient way of sustaining the practice of the Supper in the church. Those involved in ecumenical discussions have found that relating the Lord's Supper to the work of the Holy Spirit allows them to maintain "in some sense" the presence of Christ in the Sacrament and at the

same time avoid the historically controversial questions of “how” Christ is present in the Supper.<sup>43</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* goes so far as to assert that the eucharist is to be understood as an “invocation of the Spirit”:

The Holy Spirit is the immeasurable strength of love which makes it possible and continues to make it **effective**...Being assured by Jesus’ promise in the Words of Institution that it will be answered, the Church prays to the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit in order that the eucharist event may be a reality; the real presence of the crucified and risen Christ giving his life for all **humanity**.<sup>44</sup>

This “spiritualization” of the Lord’s Supper is really only a “re-modeled” form of Zwingli’s theology. Oscar **Cullmann** seems to be the architect for this way of thinking **about** the Lord’s Supper,<sup>45</sup> as he confuses the Lord’s Supper with the post-resurrection meals of our Lord. This confusion has left its mark in contemporary liturgies as well. Note “the Invitation” from “The Holy Eucharist III” of the Lutheran **Church-Missouri Synod’s** *Worship Supplement* (p. 65):

Luke the Evangelist wrote of our risen Lord that when he was at table with the disciples at **Emmaus**, he took bread and blessed, it and broke it and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him. This is Christ’s table. Our Savior invites those who trust in him to share the feast which he has prepared. Let us open our hearts to one another as Christ opened his heart to us, and God will be glorified. The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

The same misunderstanding is responsible for the wording of this prayer from *The Lutheran Book of Worship* (p. 47):

O Jesus, our great high priest, be present with **us as you** were present with your disciples and make yourself known to us in breaking of the bread.

Finally, mention must be made of the trend which views the eucharist **eschatologically**.<sup>46</sup> According to those who champion this perspective “the bread and cup of the eucharist are to be interpreted **eschatologically**.”<sup>47</sup> That is, the eucharist is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. Geoffrey Wainwright states:

Having the form of a meal, the eucharist belongs to that universally known realm of spoken and acted imagery which describes and embodies the relation between God and men in terms of eating and drinking; within the biblical tradition, the eucharist is ranged, and in a **pre-emi-**

ment place, among those signs which announce before men, and inaugurate among them, the reality which is included in the eternal purpose of God and which is true for **men**; it is the sign of the kingdom of God in so far as the kingdom is conceived (and it is perhaps the dominant conception) as a feast for the **citizens**.<sup>48</sup>

While it cannot be denied that the Lord's Supper does have a relationship to eschatology (cf. **Matthew 26:29** and **Mark 14:25**), it must be maintained that the Lord's Supper is not primarily eschatological but rather **historical**.<sup>49</sup> Eschatological interpretations of the Supper run the risk of cutting the Lord's Supper loose from its historical meanings and transforming it **into** the object of endless speculation, if not fantasy.

We have limited ourselves to a consideration of exegetical influences in regard to the contemporary statement of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Other influences such as Dom Gregory Dix's historical-liturgical research culminating in his proposal that the **eucharistic** liturgy must have "the four-fold shape" of taking, blessing, breaking, and sharing have not been included. Neither have we discussed the debate over the translation of *diatheekē* (testament or covenant)-a debate which seems to be inspired, at least in part, by Barth and certain of the so-called biblical theologians. Instead we have attempted to give an overview of the exegetical scene as it is today, dominated by critical scholarship. In contrast to the attempts of historical-critical scholars to reach behind, beneath, or above and beyond the texts of the words of institution in the synoptic gospels and I Corinthians, confessional Lutheran **exegetes**<sup>50</sup> must continue to insist that the words of our **Lord be taken as they stand** without "under-interpretation" or "over-interpretation."

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Yngve Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice: Evangelical and Catholic*, trans. by A. G. Hebert (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge), p. 3.
2. Michael Reu, *Two Treatises on the Means of Grace* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1952), p. 54.
3. See page 55ff. in Reu for a concise summary' of Lietzmann's research in this matter.

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4. Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, trans. by Dorteia H. G. Reeve (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), p. 142.
  5. Ibid., pp. 147-148.
  6. Ibid., p. 154.
  7. Ibid., p. 160.
  8. Ibid., pp. 170-171.
  9. Ibid., p. 173.
  10. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. by Norman Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 62.
  11. Ibid., p. 255.
  12. Eduard Schweizer, *The Lord's Supper according to the New Testament*, trans. by James M. Davis (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 34.
  13. Ibid., pp. 37-38.
  14. Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, trans. by A. Steward Todd and James B. Torrance (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 15.
  15. Oscar Cullmann, *Essays on the Lord's Supper*, trans. by J. G. Davies (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1958), p. 16.
  16. M. Reu writes: "Schleiermacher in his *Glaubenslehre*, chapter 139, section 3, had already thrown out the question whether the Lord's Supper as we celebrate it today is, in its principal features, really the same as the farewell supper which the Lord had with His disciples and whether one can really say that Christ gave the command that the supper should be repeated." (*Two Treatises on the Means of Grace*, pp. 40-41.)
  17. Willi Marxsen, "The Lord's Supper as a Christological Problem" in *The Beginning of Christology*, trans. by Lorenz Nieting (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 104. In another essay Marxsen comments: "Whether Jesus on the eve of his death expressly instituted the Lord's Supper cannot be adequately discussed in this context. From an historical point of view it is most improbable. But this does not mean that the Lord's Supper does not go back to Jesus at all. The meals of Jesus after all are remembered." Willi Marxsen, "The Lord's Supper: Concepts and Developments," in *Jesus in His Times*, ed. by Hans J. Schlutz, trans. by Brian Watchorn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 112.
  18. I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980). p. 17.
  19. Ibid., p. 35.
  20. Ibid., p. 75. Reu, following Strack, Billerbeck and Lichtenstein makes a similar point: "Here he [Lichtenstein] shows that the difference between John and the Synoptics can be explained from the stubborn fight between the Sadducees and Pharisees over the dating of Pentecost, based upon a different exegesis of Leviticus 23: 11.. . Jesus would have held the meal on the day when the Sadducees observed it. Both reports



- would be correct: the Synoptics followed the numbering of the days of the month maintained by the Pharisees, while John would follow the numbering of the Sadducees.” (*Two Treatises on the Means of Grace*, p. 70.)
21. Marshall, p. 47.
  22. Ibid., p. 51.
  23. Ibid., pp. 85-86.
  24. Ibid., p. 114.
  25. For a history of the liturgical movement within the Roman Catholic Church and the role of Odo Casel and his formulation of *Mysterientheologie* see Ernest Koenker, *The Liturgical Renaissance in the Roman Catholic Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), pp. 104-124.
  26. Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship and Other Writings*, ed. by B. Neunheuser (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1962), p. 98.
  27. The results of Casel’s work can be discerned in many of the popular as well as advanced works on liturgy and sacraments in use today. For example, see Leonel L. Mitchell, *The Meaning of Ritual* (New York: The Paulist Press, 1977) as a Roman Catholic example. For a Protestant example see James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980).
  28. David Granskou, “Historical Critical Exegesis and the Renewal of Liturgy,” *The Lutheran Quarterly*, XIX (February 1967), p. 85.
  29. Ibid., p. 80.
  30. Harvey Guthrie, Jr., *Theology as Thanksgiving: From Israel’s Psalms to the Church’s Eucharist* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), pp. 213-214.
  31. Brilioth, p. 288.
  32. Skibbe, p. 35. On the relationship between the higher critical method and the Arnoldshain Theses, Skibbe writes: “The significance of this new biblical study for the Arnoldshain Theses is twofold. It tells us something about the theological orientation of the men who wrote the Theses. Of more than twenty theologians who made up the commission, at least nine must be called leading New Testament scholars: Guenther Bornkamm, Oscar Cullmann, Joachim Jeremias, Ernst Kaesemann, Heinrich Schlier, Julius Schniewind, Eduard Schweizer, Ethelbert Stauffer, and Georg Kuhn. None of these men are committed primarily to the traditional dogmatic interpretations of the New Testament” (pp.78-79).
  33. Skibbe, p. 91.
  34. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission, *The Eucharist* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1980), p. 11.

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35. Ibid., pp. 12-13.
  36. Ibid., p. 13.
  37. Ibid., p. 4.
  38. The literature surrounding the pros and cons of including the *verba* within a prayer is extensive. See R.M. Hals, "The Concept of Sacrifice as a Background for the Eucharist," *The Lutheran Quarterly*, 26 (May 1974), pp. 174 -188, and Gordon Lathrop, "The Prayers of Jesus and the Great Prayer of the Church," *The Lutheran Quarterly*, 26 (May 1974), pp. 158-173, as examples of those scholars who support the practice of such a prayer. Representatives of the opposing position would be Gottfried Krodel, "The Great Thanksgiving of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship: It is the Christian's Supper and Not the Lord's Supper," *The Cresset: Occasional Papers* No. I (Valparaiso, Indiana: Valparaiso University Press, 1976), and Carl Wisloff, *The Gift of Communion*, trans. by Joseph Shaw (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964). For a positive evaluation of Luther's liturgical work by an Anglican see Bryan Spinks, *Luther's Criteria and His Reform of the Canon of the Mass* (Brancote Notts: Grove Books, 1982).
  39. Jeremias, pp. 234ff.
  40. Commission on Faith and Order, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva: The World Council of churches, 1982), p. 11.
  41. See Henry P. Hamann, "The Lord's Supper and the Holy Spirit," *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 16 (December, 1982), pp. 150-151.
  42. Marxsen, *The Beginnings of Christology*, p. 104.
  43. Skibbe writes, "The Agreed Statement (Church of South India) has now shifted the emphasis from the unanswerable questions to a new consideration of Christ's person. In doing this, it follows the lead taken by some 19th century theologians and Karl Barth. It stands closer to the understanding of the Lord's Supper found in the Gospel of John than to that expressed in the *Synoptics*. This shift is of greatest importance for the modern discussion of the Lord's Supper and for the development of the ecumenical movement" (p. 35). It should be noted, however, that this "shift" leads to a spiritualistic understanding of the Lord's Supper since John 6 is a discourse not about the Lord's Supper but about faith!
  44. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, p. 13.
  45. Oscar Cullman, *Ear/y Christian Worship*, pp. 14-24. Reformed theologians show their indebtedness to Cullmann on this point. See Ralph Martin, *The Worship of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 145-170.
  46. See Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 7-17, for an overall view of the eschatological background of the New Testament according to some

contemporary scholars.

47. Gordon Lathrop, "The Prayers of Jesus and the Great Prayer of the Church," p. 168.
48. Wainwright, p. 58.
49. Regin Preter correctly maintains the "eschatological" dimension of the sacrament within the context of life in the world. See Regin Preter, "Worship and Creation," *Studia Liturgica, II* (June, 1963), pp. 82-95.
50. In addition to the fine study by Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), see Werner Elert, *The Lord's Supper Today*, trans. by Martin Bertram and Rudolph F. Norden (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973) for examples of careful study of the words of institution by Lutheran theologians.

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