

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 66:1

January 2002

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Eucharistic Overtones Created by Sacrificial Concepts in the Epistle to the Hebrews

Daniel J. Brege

The Book of Concord declares: "The Old Testament had pictures or shadows of what was to come; thus this depicted Christ and the whole worship of the New Testament." Exegetes are then directed: "Therefore, as we discern the shadow in the Old Testament, so in the New we should look for what it represents. . . ." ¹ In the epistle to the Hebrews, eucharistic overtones are found especially in the Old Testament "shadows" of the peace and sin offerings, since Christ as priest and sacrifice is particularly represented in Hebrews by these sacrifices. ²

"In the peace-offering the sacrificial meal was the point of main importance." ³ Both priests and laity ate of the peace offering. ⁴ Such eating was usually accompanied with celebration and joy. ⁵ Thus peace offerings have been recognized to be the most natural sacrifices used to explain the Lord's Supper. Andrew Jukes states succinctly, "The Peace-offering remains our food until the resurrection." ⁶

¹Theodore G. Tappert, translator and editor, in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn, *The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 257, Apology, article 24.

²There are likely many other references to the eucharist in the epistle to the Hebrews, but the peace and sin offerings seem to shine with the most intense light.

³Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 99.

⁴See, for example, Leviticus 7:11-34.

⁵F. C. N. Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice* (London: S.P.C.K., 1956), 93: "That it [peace offering] remained the most joyful of the sacrifices is beyond doubt, if only from the constant expression of this in Deuteronomy: and it is probable that, not only the actual phrase 'sacrifices of thanksgiving' but all outbursts of rejoicing and thankfulness in Psalms that have anything to do with the Temple should be referred to it."

⁶Andrew Jukes, *The Law of the Offerings in Leviticus I-VII, Considered as the Appointed Figure of the Various Aspects of the Offering of the Body of Jesus Christ* (London: James Nisbet, 1883), 109. John E. Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Rivingtons, 1882), 41-42, says that the Lord's Supper "is, in fact, the continuance of the ceremonial of the Mosaic peace-offering." In 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 Paul clearly connects the Lord's Supper to the Jewish (and pagan) peace offering.

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The covenant sacrifice was one "type" of peace offering.⁷ Covenants (or "testaments") were often sealed with blood and ratified by a meal drawn from a peace offering.⁸ A primary example of this is recorded in Exodus 24. Verse 5 explains that after Moses built an altar, he and the elders "offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord." Of these peace offerings, verse 11 naturally relates that "they beheld God, and *they ate and drank*."⁹ Verse 8 relates how Moses "took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'"

Hebrews 9:20 changes Moses' words to, "*This is the blood of the covenant.*" Many, noting this change, have correctly observed that when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, He used exactly these words, "*This is the blood of the covenant.*"¹⁰ Lane, who appears to approach the Lord's Supper from a reformed viewpoint, recognizes the common understanding: "It is widely held that the substitution [of "This" for "Behold"] shows that the quotation [in Hebrews 9:20] has been brought into conformity with the eucharistic words of Christ, perhaps under the influence of a local liturgical tradition."¹¹

⁷William L. Lane, *Hebrews, A Call to Commitment* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), 139: "Covenant ratification necessarily involves a peace offering to signify the acceptance of the covenant by the participants [. . .] The fellowship meal, which was the characteristic feature of the peace offering, displayed the peaceful relationship of the participants." See also Robert Daly, *Christian Sacrifice* (Washington, District of Columbia: The Catholic University of America Press, 1978), 89-93.

⁸Roland De Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifices* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964), 38: "The 'selamim' [peace offering] might then be called a covenant sacrifice. In support of this one might point to the part played by the meal (Gen. xvi.30, xxxi.54; Joshua ix.14) and by the blood (Exod. xxiv.8) in sealing of covenants."

⁹Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York: Scribner, 1966), 235: "Concerning Exodus 24:11 ['the elders ate and drank']: In these last words the thought is of a covenant meal: the fact that God grants to the envoys the fellowship of his table is the pledge of the covenant."

¹⁰See also Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 236. Also James Swetnam, "'The Greater and More Perfect Tent': A Contribution to the Discussion of Hebrews 9,11," *Biblica* 47 (1966): 98: "This at once evokes the scene of the institution of the Eucharist by Christ at the Last Supper; the change in wording of Ex. 24,8 to conform to the Eucharistic formula can then hardly be a matter of chance."

¹¹William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, volume 47b (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 245. Lane, however, does not believe this conclusion is necessarily the right one.

As the covenant was inaugurated by the sprinkling of blood, so the sprinkling of sacrificial blood continued as the sign of the priestly mediation of the old covenant.¹² Hebrews 9:1 describes such priestly mediation of the "first covenant": "Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary." Priestly "divine worship" primarily prescribed the sacred sprinkling (or other application) of blood and the eating of the sacred meals. Leviticus 7:14b, 15 gives an example of such sprinkling and eating of a peace offering: ". . . It shall belong to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the peace offerings. Now as for the flesh of the sacrifice of his thanksgiving peace offerings, it shall be eaten on the day of his offering . . ." As peace offerings were eaten by both the laity and the priests, the "old covenant" was continuously mediated.

Christ then comes as the "great high priest." Hebrews 8:6 describes the divine worship led by Christ: "But now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent *ministry* [than the Levitical priests], by as much as He is also the *mediator* of a better covenant . . ." Not only does this verse reflect Christ's priestly work as "mediator," wherein He replaces the Aaronic priesthood, but the word used here for "ministry" (λειτουργεῖν) was a technical worship-word among the Jews.¹³ Jesus is now the priestly liturgist (minister) in the New Testament era, and His sacramental gifts are distributed by His "liturgizing" the "better covenant." The "better covenant" is a eucharistic term, identifying with the only place where Christ declared the "new covenant" in His blood to be found.

¹²Brooke Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 288: "It follows from the general idea of the Jewish sacrifices that they were ruled by the conception of the Covenant." Daly (*Christian Sacrifice*, 90, 93) concludes that "selamim," the word for peace offering, should really be understood as "covenant-sacrifice."

¹³Hermann Strathmann, "λειτουργεῖω," in volume IV, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), 220: "Apart from the two pagan [biblical] instances, . . . the [LXX] reference is always to the worship of Yahweh performed by the priests and Levites either in the tabernacle or in the temple." Field (*The Apostolic Liturgy*, 211-224) claims that the early church (for example, Clement) uses the word "liturgus" to describe the work of the Pastor, whereas "Priest" is applied to all believers. All participate in the liturgy, but one who leads it is the "liturgus."

As Christ now performs the liturgy, He takes the concepts of the old covenant, keeps the continuity recognizable, yet incorporates radical changes into the rites. Christ could not take new wine and put it into old wineskins. For instance, the blood of the old covenant, which was never to be eaten, was mediated by sprinkling, daubing, or pouring.¹⁴ Christ now directs us to the blood of the new covenant, but it is mediated by drinking. John Field is convinced that the references to blood-sprinkling in Hebrews are really references to the blood of the eucharist that we now drink: "The thought conveyed by the sprinkling no doubt is that the reception of the Eucharistic cup is a spiritual sprinkling of the heart with the Blood of Christ to fit it for the worship of God, just as the old ritual sprinklings removed the various kinds of legal defilement."¹⁵

The writer of Hebrews ultimately unites in Christ the liturgical concepts of priestly mediation, covenant, and sprinkled blood: "[You have come] to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood . . ." (Hebrews 12:24). Not only is it likely that such sprinkled blood refers to the eucharistic drinking, but the covenantal reference in this verse would again stir the minds of Christians to recall Christ's Supper.

Lending support to this eucharistic argument is the context of Hebrews 12:24. The preceding verses describe the Christian approach to God:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect (Hebrews 12:22,23).

¹⁴Usually such blood was applied upon the sacred altars in the tabernacle. When Moses inaugurated the covenant, and also on special occasions such as the ordination of the priests, blood would be sprinkled or daubed upon a human being.

¹⁵Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 380. Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 237: "His [Christ's] blood itself, the very Life of the sacrifice, too holy in the old days ever to be received, and never imparted to any offerer, priest, or layman, more closely than by an external sprinkling, is given to every Christian worshipper to drink," 245: "They [Christians] will realise their corporate unity alike with all the children of God and with their Father; and still more the blood, which is the Life of mankind, and will be theirs, not in a mere outward sprinkling, but in themselves by the act of drinking."

Ancient Christian liturgies explicitly link these verses to Holy Communion. The Liturgy of Saint James, which perhaps precedes the completion of the New Testament documents, connects Hebrews 12:22, 23 to the celebration of the eucharist.¹⁶ Shortly before the consecration of the bread and wine, certain ancient liturgies had a common introduction called, "The Prayer of the Veil." This "Prayer of the Veil" in the Liturgy of Saint James prefaces Holy Communion with these words: "It is very meet . . . to give thanks unto Thee . . . whom the heavens are hymning, . . . *the heavenly Jerusalem, the general assembly and church of the firstborn written in heaven, spirits of righteous men and prophets, souls of martyrs and Apostles, angels and archangels.* . . ."¹⁷

Clearly, the Liturgy of Saint James uses the same wording as Hebrews 12:22, 23 to introduce the Holy Eucharist. Thus the verse that follows these verses (12:24), which speaks of our approach to "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood," was no doubt understood in the early church eucharistically.

Summarizing this portion, the priestly work of Jesus as administrator of the covenant peace offering is clearly a concept prevalent in Hebrews. Christ is observed to be performing this priestly work toward us as He inaugurates His covenant meal, sheds His blood to seal the covenant, then mediates the covenant in His blood and flesh by His peace offering meal, the Holy Eucharist. As Christ's priestly work relative to the sin offering is presented, the peace offering concepts will again surface because the two offerings are blended together in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Hebrews 10:18 speaks of Christ by using the Jewish technical term for sin offering: "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin [literally, "sin offering"]." Other passages in Hebrews also describe Christ as sin offering.¹⁸ Christians realize this to be the central tenet of Christ's death, that He is the sin/guilt offering.

¹⁶Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*. Throughout his book, Field argues that the Liturgy of Saint James preceded the New Testament documents. In his preface, iii, Field states that his secondary purpose is to "examine the important subject of alleged quotations from the Greek Liturgy of S. James in the New Testament."

¹⁷Field, *The Ancient Liturgy*, 376. Italics show the connection to Hebrews 12:22, 23.

¹⁸Hebrews 10:18 uses the technical terminology for sin offering, *περι ἁμαρτίας*. See also 9:26; 10:12.

Unlike the Old Testament sin offerings, which had to be repeated, Christ's sacrifice is final, never needing repetition.¹⁹

Part of the rubric for the "common" sin offering that relates it to the Lord's Supper is, as with the peace offering, that it was eaten. In such offerings, brought by the laity, it was the obligation of the Priest to eat the flesh, and by this eating he was pronouncing an "absolution" on the offerer.²⁰

Such eating by the priests was their privilege alone. The laity were never to eat of the sin offering. As Christians have been given the priestly privilege of eating Christ's sin offering as they consume the eucharist, the "Priesthood of Believers" surfaces as a doctrine in the book of Hebrews.²¹

Isaiah 53, with its peculiar use of the word "many," is perceived by some to have a direct link to the Lord's Supper.²² Isaiah 53:10 is a prediction of Christ as guilt offering (sin offering in the LXX). The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews makes the connection with Isaiah 53 by stating in Hebrews 9:28 that Christ "was offered to bear the sins of many."²³ This verse of Hebrews has nearly identical wording with the Septuagint

¹⁹S. C. Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, second edition (London: Methuen, 1953), 55: "Note some significant limitations in the scope and purpose of the Jewish Sacrifices. First, that none of those Sacrifices had any grace-giving power. . . . No Sacrifice looked forward to the future, far less contained any promise of grace to meet future temptations. In this respect they stand in strong contrast with the Christian Sacrifice."

²⁰W. W. Washburn, *The Import of Sacrifice in the Ancient Jewish Service* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1883), 74-75: "The expression, 'to bear the iniquity of the congregation,' clearly indicates that the priests here filled a mediatorial office; they took the sins of the people, to bear them away by the divinely appointed method [of eating the sin offering]." See also Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 236.

²¹Swetnam ("The Greater and More Perfect Tent," 103) summarizes this priestly inference: "The whole passage [Hebrews 10:19 and following] uses Old Testament terminology to imply that the Christians are priests . . . The Christian is priestly through baptism and should draw near to the worship of the Christian economy, the Eucharist. . . . Those who are urged to 'draw near' in 10, 19-25 are considered to be priestly: the Christian priesthood of all Christians is the fulfillment of the Old Testament priesthood of the Levites." See also Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 322-323.

²²Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, 217: "The phrase ['for many' in the Eucharist] seems to be an allusion to Isa 53,10-12." On 222: ". . . the words of institution themselves carry unmistakable references to [Isaiah 53]."

²³To the Hebrew mind the word "many" usually meant "all." Joachim Jeremias, "πολλοί," in volume VI, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 536-545.

translation of Isaiah 53:12. Isaiah therein predicts of Christ, "He Himself bore the sin of many." If, as Jeremias maintains, "without Isaiah 53 the eucharist words remain incomprehensible," then it is very possible that the clear reference to Isaiah 53:12 in Hebrews 9:28 is really another esoteric reference to the Lord's Supper.²⁴ Thus Hebrews 9:28 presents a unification of Christ, the sin offering and the Lord's Supper.

The writer of Hebrews conveys in several places the Jewish belief that the earthly tabernacle had its heavenly counterpart.²⁵ In Hebrews 8:5 the priests are said to "serve a copy of the heavenly things."²⁶ Hebrews 9:24 explains that "Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." Christ has entered the heavenly tabernacle, the heavenly Holy of Holies.²⁷

Within the earthly tabernacle, God was understood to have been enthroned in the Holy of Holies, between the two gold Cherubim. Thus the psalmist prays in Psalm 80:1, "Oh give ear, Shepherd of Israel [. . .] Thou who art enthroned between the Cherubim, shine forth!" Even as in the earthly tabernacle, so too in the heavenly tabernacle, yet outside the time and space of this creation, God is enthroned in the Holy of Holies, surrounded by myriads of angels. It is into this Holy of Holies that the greatest high priest, Jesus, has entered and is now seated at the Father's right hand.

God set the stage for us to grasp Jesus' entry into the heavenly Holy of Holies when He instituted the Day of Atonement to be celebrated in the earthly tabernacle of the Jews. Uniquely on this great day the high priest was obligated to enter the Holy of Holies, the sacred place behind the veil, where God Himself was enthroned among men. At specified times in the holy liturgy of that day, the high priest had to perform several washings or "baptisms."²⁸ He had to sacrifice a sin offering for himself

²⁴Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), 291.

²⁵James L. Kugel, *The Bible as It Was* (London: Belknap Press, 1997), 420.

²⁶One may also see Hebrews 9:11, 23.

²⁷Swetnam, "The Greater and More Perfect Tent," 104. Swetnam presents some of the theories concerning the "more perfect tent," but he concludes that there is ample evidence "in favor of the Eucharistic body of Christ as being the 'greater and more perfect tent' not made with hands."

²⁸George Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972), 128: "On the Day of Atonement, the high priest bathed

and then he could enter the Holy of Holies for the first time under a cloud of incense. The high priest then, after sacrificing a sin offering for the nation, entered the Holy of Holies a second time, sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice upon the Mercy Seat. The high priest was approaching the throne of God. Three main marks of this atonement sin offering were that the blood was placed/sprinkled in the holy places, the animal flesh was totally burned outside the camp, and no one was to eat this sacrificial flesh.²⁹

With the writer to the Hebrews repeatedly returning to the priestly actions surrounding the Day of Atonement, many exegetes have concluded that a discussion of the Day of Atonement is the author's main purpose.³⁰ Hebrews 1:3b likely introduces Christ's entrance into the Holy of Holies: "When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."³¹ Observe here the atoning "purification of sins," and likewise observe Christ enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high, understood to be the heavenly Holy of Holies. It is clear in other such references that Christ, unlike the Old Testament high priests, entered the Holy of Holies to reside there, not merely to present the sacrificial blood and then immediately exit. Thus Christ is seated at God's right hand in the Holy of Holies. After Hebrews 4:15 identifies Christ as the "high priest," then verse 16 elaborates by inviting: "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need." The invitation here to "receive mercy" reminds us that Christ is united with His Father on the Mercy Seat, God's throne. The invitation, "Let us draw near," will be elaborated shortly.

Concerning Christ's entrance into the Holy of Holies, it is more sharply clarified in chapter nine. Verse 24 declares that "Christ did not enter a holy place [here meaning "Holy of Holies"] made with hands, a mere

five times and washed his hands and feet ten times (Yoma 3:3)."

²⁹For a succinct summary of the Day of Atonement see Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 279-280.

³⁰Hicks, *Fullness of Sacrifice*, 236: "[The author of Hebrews] has been stressing the analogy of our Lord's sacrifice with one special aspect of Jewish sacrifice, namely, the sin offering, and in particular the great sin-offering of the Day of Atonement."

³¹Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 10-21, 258-260, 209: "We learnt subsequently (Heb. 1:3) that in taking this place at the right hand of God Christ entered as a Forerunner 'within the veil' of heaven to be the New Priest . . ."

copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." Christ only needed to enact His "Day of Atonement" once, unlike the Jewish high priests who yearly had to enter the earthly tabernacle on the Day of Atonement. Thus verses 25 and 26 inform the reader that Christ did not need to "offer Himself often, as the [Jewish] high priest . . . but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." When Christ finally exits the Holy of Holies, it will be time for Judgment Day, as clearly presented in the two verses that follow.³² And when in verse 28 Christ is said to appear the second time "without reference to sin," this is because, exiting the Holy of Holies, He has completed His Day of Atonement liturgy, and the people of God are ready to enter His glory, forever free from sin. The eschatological nature of the eucharist grasps this fact.

Return to the invitation, "Let us draw near." The word for "draw near" is commonly used in worship, especially for the priests who drew near to present and participate in the sacrifices.³³ Chapter 10 of Hebrews begins by explaining that the Old Testament sacrifices, particularly on the yearly Day of Atonement, were "only a shadow of the good things to come." Such sacrifices could not "make perfect those who draw near," nevertheless Christ's one sacrifice can indeed perfect those who draw near. Now again one finds another of Christ's radical changes as all Christians, not merely high priests, are invited to draw near and enter the Holy of Holies! Hebrews 10:19-22:

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the [most] holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The initial verse of this text conveys the startling revelation that we as Christians can "have confidence to enter the [most] holy place." The final verse in the above quote encourages Christians, "Let us draw near with

³²Hebrews 9:27, 28. See Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 280.

³³Jon Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 91-149. Scholer spends an entire chapter demonstrating the technical nature of this word.

full assurance of faith." Such "drawing near" to the Holy of Holies was formerly a right only reserved for the Jewish high priest. We, as God's baptized priesthood, are now invited to "draw near" behind the veil into the heavenly Holy of Holies! "In Didache 10,6 the word ['draw near'] signifies reception of the Eucharist."³⁴ Field concludes, "The 'drawing nigh to God' is the same as that 'coming unto' God which we have already seen to be intimately connected in the Apostle's mind with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist."³⁵

The two means named in verses 19 and 20 enabling our entrance into the Holy of Holies are the blood and flesh of Christ. Just the proximity of these two words likely caused early Christians to think of the Lord's Supper. Between Christ's blood and flesh are the words, "by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us." The word "new" originally meant "newly sacrificed." It is true that at the time of Christ it usually meant simply "new," yet some philologists are convinced the more ancient connotation of "newly slain" was still understood, and in this context in Hebrews such understanding would have been appropriate.³⁶ Christ's flesh has been "newly slain," and the resultant blood and flesh are His means of entrance into the Holy of Holies. When adding "living way" to "newly slain," one perceives then the foundational doctrines of Christ's death and resurrection.

This "newly slain and living way" has been "inaugurated" for us by Christ. The author of Hebrews has already used the word "inaugurate" to describe God's institution of the former covenant through Moses.³⁷ Such inauguration, as we have seen, involved the sprinkling of blood and the peace offering meal. The Septuagint used "inaugurate" to describe the sacred dedication of the Jewish altar and temple.³⁸ Delitzsch explains that this word, used here in Hebrews, "is the term for dedicating or setting apart for future use."³⁹ It is thus logical that the word

³⁴Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, footnote on 375. Daly here connects Hebrews 4:16; 7:25; 10:1; 10:19-22; 12:18, 22-24.

³⁵Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 192. Field believes the Apostle Paul is the author of Hebrews.

³⁶Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 297.

³⁷Hebrews 9:18 and following.

³⁸Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 319.

³⁹Franz Delitzsch, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, translated by Thomas Kingsbury (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1978), 170.

“inaugurate” is being utilized here in Hebrews to explain Christ’s institution of the Lord’s Supper, a sacred thing enjoined for future use.

Many are convinced the author of Hebrews had the sacraments in mind when he penned Hebrews 10:19 and following. Albert Vanhoye speaks as one representing this viewpoint:

... the author [of Hebrews] alludes to the Sacraments which lead to faith’s fullness: baptism (10:22) and the eucharistic “blood” and “flesh” of Christ (10:19-20) . . . [These] Christian sacraments are closely linked with the personal offering of Christ. It is from it alone that they draw all their worth. They make the offering present and active in the existence of the believers so that this existence is transformed.⁴⁰

Those who participated in the church’s ancient liturgies understood that in Holy Communion, God’s people are truly entering behind the heavenly veil into the Holy of Holies, as described in Hebrews 10:19-20. Field states that “the liturgy of S. James, from which S. Paul makes a quotation in Hebrews x. 19,20, may be traced in every [ancient] liturgy.” Field explains that this liturgical portion was originally positioned “at the Great Entrance, when the priest passes with the sacramental elements into the sanctuary.”⁴¹ Now, as expressed in this ancient liturgy, God’s people may enter behind the veil “by virtue of the Flesh which Christ assumed in His Incarnation and which is sacramentally given to us in the Holy Eucharist.”⁴²

The following are excerpts from the Prayer of the Veil as found in ancient liturgies, showing the imprint of the more ancient Liturgy of Saint James. Portions are italicized to show the unmistakable parallels to Hebrews 10:19, 20:

We give thanks to Thee, O Lord our God, that Thou hast given *us boldness for the entrance of Thy holy place*, which [entrance] Thou hast newly dedicated for us [to be] *a new and living way through the veil of the*

⁴⁰Albert Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, translated by James Swetnam (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 72. One may also see Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 310: “The exhortations in 10:22-25 appear to rest on a pattern of worship influenced by the peace offering.”

⁴¹Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 478.

⁴²Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 478.

Flesh of Christ. Therefore being counted worthy to come into the place where Thy glory dwelleth, and to *be within the Veil*, and to *behold the holy of holies*, we fall down before Thy goodness.⁴³

To the table of Thy most sweet feast, good Lord Jesus Christ, . . . with *confidence [boldness] in Thy mercy* and goodness, I draw near in fear and trembling . . . Take from me then, most merciful Father, all my iniquities and sins, that being cleansed in mind and body, I may be counted worthy fitly to *taste the holy of holies*. [The holy of holies is tasted!]⁴⁴

Verse 22 gives us the encouragement to “draw near in full assurance of faith.” This is the first necessity for drawing near to God through the eucharist, *full assurance of faith*. The verse then continues to explain that we may draw near, “having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” Such washing parallels the priestly prerequisite for the Day of Atonement.

Concerning this washing-prerequisite Westcott concludes: “The two phrases [here in Hebrews 10:22] appear to contain allusions to the Christian sacraments. That to the Eucharist is veiled: that to Baptism is unquestionable.”⁴⁵ Thus faith and our washing with pure water, which is obviously Holy Baptism, are prerequisites set forth here in Hebrews for our priestly approach to the eucharist.

Additionally, these verses are incorporated in the ancient communion liturgies. For example, note the exact parallels to Hebrews 10:22 in this Syriac remnant of the Prayer of the Veil: “Grant, O Lord God, that *with our hearts sprinkled and cleansed from all evil conscience* and unclean thoughts, we may be counted *worthy to enter into the holy of holies* on high, may stand before thy holy altar chastely and purely” [emphasis added].⁴⁶ Thus once again the ancient liturgy brings one to the conclusion that Hebrews 10:19-22 were written with the Lord’s Supper in mind.

Compounding this clear liturgical reference in Hebrews 10:19-22, the encouragement of “not forsaking the assembling together” in verse 25

⁴³Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 438.

⁴⁴Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 498, from a Western remnant. On 480, 486, and 493, Field identifies other liturgical remnants bearing the Hebrews 10:19-20 imprint.

⁴⁵Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 323.

⁴⁶Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 481.

would no doubt have been taken as an encouragement to receive the eucharist. Early Christians assembled together especially to celebrate the eucharist.⁴⁷

Moving to verse 29 one finds another likely eucharistic reference: "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant. . . ?" The blood of the covenant clearly refers to the Lord's Supper wherein Christ used identical wording to refer to the contents of the chalice.⁴⁸ To regard such blood of the covenant as "unclean"⁴⁹ is explained in verse 26: "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins ['sin offering']." If, as seems likely, this is a reference to participation in the blood of the covenant as found in the Lord's Supper, then it doctrinally parallels Saint Paul's warnings in 1 Corinthians 11:27. The Lord's Supper is truly for sinners, as was the Old Testament sacrificial system. However God's covenantal grace never implies license to sin.⁵⁰

In his final chapter, the author of the epistle returns to Day of Atonement concepts. Before specifically speaking of the Day of Atonement, he first warns his Jewish readers, "It is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited."⁵¹ If one only treats sacred eating as

⁴⁷Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 166: "If (as is of course true) in Heb. x. 19-25 the prime reason for the 'assembling of ourselves together' is the Breaking of Bread, we have in that passage also the same interchange of Earth and Heaven and the same interweaving of Communion and Sacrifice as in Heb. xiii. 10ff."

⁴⁸Hebrews 9:20 and here in 10:29 are the only places beyond the eucharistic institution where "blood of the covenant" is found in the New Testament. The eucharistic connection with Hebrews 9:20 has been demonstrated. Hebrews 13:20 is a close parallel.

⁴⁹Literally, "common" [κοινόν].

⁵⁰Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 292, shows the parallel here with Old Testament warnings concerning intentional sinning. Leviticus 4:1-2, 13, 22, 27; 5:14-15 LXX refer to the forgivable nature of "unintentional" sins. Numbers 15:22-31 reflects what is also here in Hebrews where "a deliberate and calculated violation of the commandments placed the offender beyond forgiveness."

⁵¹Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 415, 416: "Here we have an obvious reference to the Holy Communion. The unprofitable 'meats,' clearly meaning those of the old covenant, are distinguished from the 'grace' of the Lord Jesus Christ which is the appointed means of 'establishing the heart' of Christians [. . .] Our Christian 'meats,'

a law, a regulation for godly living, then his heart is not strengthened by grace. Though the Old Testament rituals required faith, they were especially understood as laws, regulations for the flesh (9:10). It thus is apparent that such legalistic Old Testament meals were likely in the mind of the author here in Hebrews 13:9 where he encourages his readers not to be strengthened by foods, "through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited." The people "who were thus occupied" were no doubt the Jews who were legalistically occupied with sacrificial and kosher foods. To re-introduce such teachings into Christianity would truly be the "varied and strange teachings" referred to in the first half of Hebrews 13:9.

Such "food" here in Hebrews 13:9 is obviously parallel to the Jewish "food and drink and washings" mentioned in Hebrews 9:10, which will be explained shortly. Such sacred eating is so important (when united with faith), that immediately after warning his readers not to be "occupied" by such foods, the author to the Hebrews continues with a description of the most sacred Christian eating. He states, "We have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat."⁵²

This "altar," as will be shown, is the Christianized Day of Atonement altar. In the Jewish tabernacle there was no such Day of Atonement altar for the Jews, because such sacrifices were burned outside the camp, and they were not to be eaten by anyone. Many have specifically identified this altar here in Hebrews with the cross of Jesus.⁵³ It is apparent that the author of Hebrews here uses "altar" to create a mental picture of sacrifice, of worship and of God's presence.⁵⁴ "We have an altar" therefore means that we Christians have a sacrament drawn from a sacrifice, and we thus have the means of worship and we are guaranteed God's presence.⁵⁵ It all relates to the cross of Christ.

he [the author of Hebrews] would say, are the very means by which the grace of God establishes the heart."

⁵²Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 538: Though Lane himself is doubtful of the eucharistic nature of this verse, he summarizes some of the strong scholarly opinion supporting it.

⁵³Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 438.

⁵⁴Deuteronomy 12:5-7 identifies what God associated with His tabernacle altar.

⁵⁵Though it is debated, it seems clear enough that Ignatius already around A. D. 100 spoke of the Lord's Supper in relation to an altar: "Let no one be led astray: except a man be within the altar, he is deprived of the Bread of God." To the Ephesians, verse quoted from Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 416.

"Those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat" from the Christian altar. Such who "serve the tabernacle" are no doubt the Jewish priestly order. There are two fundamental reasons why they have no right to eat of the Christian altar. First, if they do not hold to Christian tenets then they do not belong at the same "altar" as Christians. Joining in a sacrificial feast presupposes oneness of belief.⁵⁶ The second reason why those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat from the Christian altar is found in the radically new nature of Christianity's sacred meal. Our Christian observance of Holy Communion is the antitype of all Jewish sacrificial meals, and then, as something radically new, it is even a meal drawn from the Day of Atonement sin offering. This is expanded upon in Hebrews 13:11: "For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp." This is unquestionably describing the loftiest type of sin offering finding its greatest application on the Day of Atonement. The next verse further describes Jesus as that "universal" sin offering: "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate." Jesus' death is able to "sanctify the people," and thus it is a sin offering. His death upon the cross, occurring "outside the gate" of Jerusalem, is also here identified as the antitype of that greatest Jewish sin offering. Jesus, who is repeatedly shown to be the great high priest, has brought His sacrificial blood behind the veil into the Most Holy Place, into the very presence of God in the heavenly tabernacle. If the Jewish priests desire to eat of Christ's sin offering, they must remove themselves from the Old Testament regulations, for under those regulations no one could eat of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement and only their high priest could enter behind the veil. This then is the final radical change inaugurated by our Savior, that all of God's people may go behind the veil, eating of the most sacred sacrifice. Westcott, commenting on this Hebrews 13:10 and following, summarizes this thought wonderfully:

The superiority which the Christian enjoyed over the Jew became most conspicuous when the highest point in each order was reached. The great sacrifice for sin on the Day of Atonement was wholly consumed [by fire]. Though they "who served the tabernacle" "were partakers with the altar," even those who were most privileged had

⁵⁶See 1 Corinthians 10:17; Romans 16:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 5:11; and 1 John 10, 11 where such closed Communion is understood.

no right to eat of this offering. But Christ who is our sacrifice for sins, the perfect antitype of that symbol, is our food also [. . .] The Christian enjoys in substance that which the Jew did not enjoy even in shadow [. . .] We Christians *have* an altar, from which we draw the material for our feast. In respect of this, our privilege is greater than that of priest or high-priest under the Levitical system. Our great sin-offering, consumed in one sense outside the gate, is given to us as our food. The Christian therefore who can partake of Christ, offered for sins, is admitted to a privilege unknown under the old Covenant.⁵⁷

The Christian "altar" is "outside the camp."⁵⁸ It is thus outside of the Jewish tabernacle and regulations. Hence, when we approach our holy meal, it is not in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerazim. Rather, in Spirit and in truth, we approach Christ's sacrifice at the "heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22).

Elaborating the thought of eating of Christ's sacrifice, the author of Hebrews next subtly, but clearly to the Jewish reader, reiterates the fact that Christ's sacrifice is a peace offering: "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to ["confess"] His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:15,16, emphasis added). The italicized words are definitely actions specifically connected to the peace offering, but in addition, all of these were themselves common terms for the peace offering. F. C. N. Hicks succinctly states the observation of many a scholar: "The 'sacrifice of praise' was the peace-offering."⁵⁹ Confession was also at times a term used for the peace offering.⁶⁰ Lane conveys the fact that the *fruit of lips* "came

⁵⁷Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 439.

⁵⁸"Outside the camp" is a far more pregnant thought than many realize. Not only was the concept associated with the Day of Atonement, it was associated with the sacrifice of the most unique sin offering, the Red Heifer. In addition, it was associated with the place to which the unclean were banned, as well as the place where a blasphemer was put to death. Probably the most interesting, relative to Christ, is the fact that when the children of Israel rejected God, He had Moses erect a "tent" [tabernacle?] "outside the camp" (Exodus 33:7-10)! Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 541-546.

⁵⁹Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 294: "The 'sacrifice of praise' was the peace-offering." Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 443, says that the sacrifice of praise "occurs in Lev. vii.12...of the highest form of peace-offering."

⁶⁰Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 92: "And accordingly, this word Confession, like the

to be associated with thank [peace] offerings and thank offering songs."⁶¹ *Sharing* was a technical term especially among pagans, describing the peace offering meal wherein the worshipper "shared" the same meal his god was eating.⁶² The word was then soon adopted by Christianity to label the genuine communion meal, the Lord's Supper. Tibor Horbath, realizing the eucharistic use of this word, says that here in Hebrews 13:16, "The 'koinonia' might mean not only sharing goods with others, but also the gathering where Eucharistic celebrations were held."⁶³ Even the word *continually* "connotes simply and succinctly that the whole continuous liturgy of the old covenant is fulfilled in the continual praise offering of Christians."⁶⁴ Standing alone, sacrifice of praise, fruit of lips, giving thanks [confession] or sharing [koinonia] would not give a certain witness to the concept of peace offering, but standing together they give powerful reference to the peace offering. In addition to the terms used for the peace offering, the Greek word for "sacrifice" used in these verses "appears to have been understood in the early Church of the prayers and thanksgivings connected with the Eucharist."⁶⁵

Recall then that one of the main concepts behind the peace offering was the communion meal. Thus the writer to the Hebrews is obviously, in a manifold way, drawing the Jewish Christian reader (or hearer) to think of worshipful feasting in the Lord's Supper.

Some might object to the thought that the author of Hebrews is mixing the sin offering on the Day of Atonement with the peace offering. It is important to realize that often the different sacrifices were considered a

word Eucharist or Thanksgiving, was one of the terms in the Jewish Church for the Peace-offering, or, as it was frequently called, the Sacrifice of Praise." On 268 Field connects the two sacraments under "confession": "And the 'fulfillment' of the Baptismal 'Faith' is obviously the Eucharistic 'Confession.'"

⁶¹Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 550. One may also see Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 420.

⁶²Friedrich Hauck, "κοινωνός," in volume III, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

⁶³Tibor Horbath, *The Sacrificial Interpretation of Jesus' Achievement in the New Testament* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1979), 71.

⁶⁴Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 550. Also on 449-450, Lane explains that διὰ πάντος was used regularly for the daily burnt offering. "It occurs fourteen times in Num 28:10-29 LXX in reference to the daily sacrifices." Thus the burnt offering enters the sacrificial picture along with the sin offering and peace offering here in Hebrews 13:10 and following.

⁶⁵Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 443.

unit, and each sacrifice was treated as a "stage" in the sacrificial process.⁶⁶ The final stage of sacrifice was the peace offering.⁶⁷ Having presented the radical sacramental eating of the Atonement sin offering, the author of Hebrews encourages such eating by describing Christian worship also in terms of the final stage of sacrifice, the peace offering. "The third stage in the Sacrifice, once more for Christ and for us, . . . is the stage of the Communion-meal."⁶⁸

Thus Christ, at the right hand of the majesty in the Most Holy Place, mediates His holy meal. It is a meal from His Day of Atonement liturgy, a meal whereby we even now enter behind the veil and participate in the divine worship of the heavenly tabernacle.

Finally, consider the eucharistic connotations behind the use of "gifts and sacrifices" in the epistle to the Hebrews. The terms "gifts and sacrifices" are used more than once in Hebrews to describe the λειτουργεῖν of the priests.⁶⁹ For example, the priestly ministration of "gifts and sacrifices" is spoken of in Hebrews 5:1 as "gifts and sacrifices for sins."

Some wrongly conclude that the Old Testament "gifts and sacrifices" indicates that which was slain and burned on the altar. As one investigates the Old Testament use of the word "gifts," it becomes apparent that it is usually used in the Old Testament for those offerings to be eaten by the priests.⁷⁰ The author of Hebrews apparently agrees

⁶⁶Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 311: "In practice they [types of sacrifice] were offered together: and if, under the exigencies of language the word sacrifice could be applied to each, it is still true that each contained several of the essential acts of the whole procedure. There is no warrant for applying the word 'sacrifice' to the death of the victim alone, or to the use of the blood, or to the offering; but if there were, it would be equally applicable to the act of eating with which the complete sacrificial action ended."

⁶⁷Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 251: "And, without doubt, it [the New Testament] leaves us with the Eucharist in so many words described as constituting, for us, at least the last of the six stages in the Sacrifice [which Hicks calls, "the meal"]."

⁶⁸Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 341.

⁶⁹See footnote 12.

⁷⁰The word δῶρον is the translation of either Minchah or Qorban. See Alfred Cave, *The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice and Atonement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1890), 510-520. The Minchah was usually the grain offering, and was almost always eaten of by the priests. Qorban was used for any type of offering, but of all the offerings only the burnt offering did not involve eating by humans.

with this conclusion, for in Hebrews 9:9, 10 he informs us that "gifts and sacrifices are offered [by the priests] which cannot make the worshipper perfect in conscience, since *they relate only to food and drink and various washings* [baptisms]." Then, in the Jewish system, he says that these were "regulations for the body [flesh] imposed until a time of *reformation*" [emphasis added]. After Numbers 18:8-9 presents such "gifts and sacrifices," verse 10 gives the priests the sacramental instruction that "in the most holy place shall you eat them. Every male shall eat them, you and your sons: they shall be holy to you."⁷¹

Hebrew "gifts and sacrifices" were general concepts related to ritual offerings. However, the author to the Hebrews specifically relates the "gifts and sacrifices" to "food and drink and various washings." To the Old Testament Jew it would have seemed strange that the author of Hebrews 9:10 would summarize "gifts and sacrifices" by speaking of "food and drink and various washings."⁷² To the Hebrew Christians, however, such a summary is custom-made to create the thought of the Christian sacraments, which include precisely food and drink and washings.⁷³ Thus, once again, it seems apparent that the author of Hebrews, by using "food and drink and washings" to describe the priestly "gifts and sacrifices," is directing his readers to their sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism.⁷⁴

This sacramental focus becomes even clearer when the word "reformation" is properly understood. Such priestly rites utilizing "food and drink and various washings" in the Jewish system were to exist, the

⁷¹The Greek word for "gifts" (δῶρον) is the same in Hebrews 9:9-10 and Numbers 18:9 (LXX). The words for "sacrifice" are slightly different (θυσίαι, θυσιασμάτων), though obviously from the same root. The sin offering of the Red Heifer in Numbers 19 is also referred to here in Hebrews 9, thus giving the distinct impression that Numbers 18 and 19 were in mind. *The Septuagint Version, Greek and English* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, seventh printing 1975), 200.

⁷²Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 254: "The mention of 'drinks' has caused difficulty, for the Law gave no universal directions in this respect . . ."

⁷³Concerning such "washings," the author of Hebrews uses this word, βαπτισμῶν, to describe Christian baptism in 6:2.

⁷⁴Field, *The Apostolic Liturgy*, 234: "So again we may see the same contrast implied between the 'meats and drinks and diverse baptisms' of the old covenant (v. 10) and the 'good things' which belong to the Priesthood of Christ (v. 11) [. . .] Nothing, therefore, seems to be wanting to place the present allusion to the Holy Eucharist beyond doubt."

text declares, until a "time of *reformation*." The word used here for "reformation" does not mean cancellation. The use of food and drink and baptisms was not to be cancelled, but reformed. Concerning this word for "reformation" Lane says, "The use of the word in the papyri and in the hellenistic Greek indicates that it expresses the notions of correction, reconstruction, improvement, or amendment."⁷⁵ Thus the "food and drink and various washings," which stood primarily as legal regulations for the Jewish Old Testament liturgy, would be reconstructed, improved and amended. Christ now liturgizes as high priest, ministering gifts and sacrifices under the reconstructed and improved sacraments of the New Testament. God did not dispose of food and drink and baptisms, He reformed their use.

We now have "food and drink and washings," which are not legal requirements for the flesh, but means by which the conscience is cleansed. Hebrews 9:9-10 informs us that the Old Testament sacrifices could not "make the worshiper perfect in conscience." This is so because such food and drink and washings were "regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation." Simply stated, the Old Testament food and drink and washings were legal requirements based upon the sacrifice of animals and grain. Such food, drink, and washings would indeed salve the conscience of the Old Testament believer, but they could not perfect the conscience.⁷⁶ Thus Hebrews 10:1 continues: "For the Law, since it was only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near." Such perfection of the conscience cannot happen from the "shadow" but only through the reality of the cross, which empowers the sacraments.

All Old Testament sacrifices, and the meals and baptisms related to such sacrifices, were grounded in Christ's cross, even when the Jews did not fully realize it.⁷⁷ Now, in the Christian era, Christ's crucifixion finds

⁷⁵Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 217.

⁷⁶See Hebrews 9:9, 14; 10:2, 22; 13:18 for references to a purged, perfect conscience in Christ.

⁷⁷John Leighton, *The Jewish Altar: An Inquiry into the Spirit and Intent of the Expiatory Offerings of the Mosaic Ritual* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1886), 27: "Nay, if Israel saw Christ at all in their service, they must, because of its many details, have seen nearly everything about Him; and we should find them again and again saying so. But their silence is conclusive of the fact that they saw him not."

its direct application in the food and drink and washings of the sacraments. Such sacraments are derived not from animal sacrifices but directly from Christ's self-sacrifice.

Unlike the Old Testament priests, Christ, the great high priest, never needs to perform another sacrifice. But this then means that the sacraments are His sole priestly liturgy through which we are invited in this era to enter behind the veil. Now in this temporal eon, we have a high priest at God's right hand in the most holy place. Every time there is a baptism, it is His liturgy, His service to the people. Every time the Lord's Supper is celebrated and His people partake of the body and blood given and shed on the cross, it is His liturgy, His service to the people. His Divine Liturgy, like that of the Old Testament, flows from sacrifice, only now the sacrifice is "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10).