

these very reflections of Paul. That becomes fully clear when he numbers also sickness and premature death among the punitive consequences of an unworthy reception (1 Corinthians 11:30). The context forbids to construe this as a general chastisement for any kind of unworthiness. Rather, the punitive physical consequences correspond exactly to the physical eating and drinking and therefore also to the physical reception of the Lord's body and blood. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:16.)

The treatise in the letter to the Hebrews reflects that the Early Church was acquainted with a becoming guilty of Christ's blood also otherwise (Hebrews 10:29; cf. 6:6 and Matthew 27:25). The disputants of the doctrine of the *manducatio indignorum* are as a rule also proponents of the doctrine that Holy Communion is only *verbum visibile*. But even if it were only this, they should ask themselves whether the unbelieving hearing of the Word, which would be comparable to the unworthy reception in Holy Communion, deprives the Word itself of its objective validity. They must surely concede that the Word of God, when it is heard by an unbeliever and thus finds its way into his inner self, still remains the Word of God when spurned, assailed, rejected. But as little as an unbeliever can prevent the Word of God, which he hears with his ears, from penetrating into his inner self and there fulfilling its task (κερικός, Hebrews 4:11), so little can an unworthy communicant prevent his receiving of Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion. In the former instance, he hears the Word to his own condemnation; and in the latter, he eats and drinks Christ's body and blood to his own condemnation. There is no neutral vacuum in either instance.

## JOHN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF HOLY COMMUNION

If the rest of the New Testament contained testimonies regarding Holy Communion at variance with Paul's testimony, we might be confronted by difficult decisions. However, under no circumstances would that warrant a reinterpretation of the Pauline testimony. An occasion for doing this has been offered time and again by Christ's words recorded in John 6:26-59. To be sure, these words have in turn been interpreted most variously. The analysis of the sources, outwardly supported by an uncertainty as to the transmission of the text of verse 51, has frequently contributed to this. Only if we can prove that in John 6 Christ refers to the Sacrament will this yield anything for dogmatic understanding.

Luther, as we know, disputed this relationship. In the sentence "The flesh is of no avail," he found—and surely rightly so—a repudiation of the "Capernaïc" understanding of Christ's words. If Christ's entire discourse tends toward this thought, then the *manducatio spiritualis*, the reception of Christ by faith, appears as the antithesis to the Capernaïc eating. In view of verses 40 and 47ff., this antithesis is very correctly discerned. Luther himself had to stress this because

involved was a defense of his own conception of Holy Communion against the accusation of Capernaïtism. For that reason his weekday sermons emphasized that he, too, was aware of a spiritual reception of Christ in Word and Sacrament. However, apart from this reception of the bread from heaven by faith, the second part of Christ's words (v. 51ff.) speaks so realistically of the eating of Christ's body and the drinking of Christ's blood that the reader of the Gospel of John is inevitably reminded of Paul.

The statement that it is "the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail" (v. 63) has often been construed as an epigrammatic summation of the entire discourse, or at least of a part of it. However, that is impossible, for the discourse itself, at least in its last part, moves in the opposite direction. When Jesus stresses here in ever new terms that the bread which He gives is His own flesh (vv. 51-56), the greatest importance is assigned precisely to His flesh. But the words of verse 63 appear to say just the opposite.

If the section comprising verses 51-59, which we may call the third part, were an interpolation by a later redactor (Bultmann), the contrast between flesh and Spirit would have to correspond to the antitheses governing the first (vv. 26-29) and the second part (vv. 32-50) of Christ's words. In the first part He places the procuration of imperishable food (v. 27), which according to verse 29 is faith, over against the desire for the dispenser of earthly food (v. 26). The words of verse 63 might possibly be fitted in here, that is, if the two were immediately joined. However, the conversation takes a new turn due to the question of the Jews (vv. 30-31). The second part of Christ's words contrasts the bread which God Himself dispenses from heaven (vv. 32-33), the bread which is Christ Himself (v. 35), with the miraculous food of the wilderness. This bread enjoys a double distinction over the manna of the wilderness. First, it really "comes down from heaven" (v. 33); second, it appeases hunger forever (v. 35).

As this double theme is carried out, each of the two distinguishing marks provokes the Jews to contradiction, and each receives greater sharpness as the charges are being refuted. The first objection of the opponents is directed against Jesus' claim that He came down from heaven (v. 42), the second that He calls His own flesh the bread of life, which when eaten fully satisfies one's hunger, for it conveys eternal life (v. 52). The second objection and its repudiation belong to the execution of the double theme exactly as the first one does. Thus verses 51-59, which contain it, cannot be the interpolation of a later redactor. And the antithesis of flesh and Spirit in verse 63 possesses the proper continuity only if it is part of the theme, for it is only with verse 51 that the discussion about the flesh begins. Without this third section there would be no reason for contrasting flesh with Spirit. The first two parts speak only of bread. Verse 63 is intelligible only because this bread is designated as Christ's flesh in the third part and only because the Jews disputed (v. 52) this claim of Christ.

Admittedly the words pertaining to Spirit and flesh were no longer addressed to the great mass of Christ's hearers but only to the narrow circle of His disciples. Christ's discourse induced a crisis. Its "partly very defiant and blunt formulations signify an intentional endurance test for the relationship of Jesus' adherents to their Master."<sup>2</sup> Many forsook Him because they could not bear the "hard saying" (vv. 60, 66). The fact that also the disciples "murmured at it" reveals that they heard Jesus' words with the same unbelief as the Jews did. Therefore the words with which Jesus countered their "murmuring" can only have the purpose of strengthening their faith. And Peter's later profession demonstrates that the words fulfilled their purpose. As always so, here, too, the strengthening of their faith resulted from a promise—from the promise of the exaltation of the Son of Man and from the promise of "the Spirit that gives life" (v. 63).

But now, what is the meaning in this context of the words "The flesh is of no avail"? If this addition is only an epilogue for the disciples, it may have a double meaning for that part of the discourse to which the word "flesh" is joined. It may either intensify or weaken the offense (*skandalon*). It would weaken it if with its help the expression "flesh" were to be made intelligible subsequently in the third part of the discourse, that is, if, in a sense, apology were to be made for it. And thus it is actually understood by many exegetes. But, to be exact, it would then not be a weakening but a refutation. For if the general statement "The flesh is of no avail" is to be a subsequent interpretation of Christ's words, then His flesh cannot be the "food indeed" (v. 55) and cannot impart eternal life (v. 54). Then these sentences would be stripped of the *skandalon* only because they are subsequently carried *ad absurdum*. Consequently, that general statement of the epilogue can only intensify the *skandalon*, as if to say: "Although the flesh is of no avail, the words which I have spoken are Spirit and life." The expression "which I have spoken" (λελάληκα, not λαλώ, as Luther read), of course, refers back to the discourse itself. The disciples, too, cannot and shall not be spared the *skandalon*. But as always so, here, too, their faith shall be strengthened by the words of their Lord (cf. John 16:1) in defiance of the *skandalon*.

The answer to the question "Do these words of Christ relate to Holy Communion?" is dependent on the other question: "What constituted the *skandalon* for the disciples here?" Christ's claim to be the bread of life cannot by itself have been an offense to them. To be sure, the Jews were offended by such and similar claims (John 5:18; 7:20; 8:12, 52; 10:20, 31), but not so the disciples. However, here they, too, recoil. From what? Because Christ was vulgarizing the beautiful figurative speech of the bread of life, which may be appropriated by faith, by speaking of His flesh and blood? Did He perhaps offend them when He attached

2 Gustav Stählin, *Skandalon: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte eines biblischen Begriffs* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1930), 244.

so much importance to the "flesh"? The evangelist John can surely not have thought of the offense in that way, because according to his doctrine the entire mystery of Christ's mission consists in the fact that the Word became "flesh" (John 1:14; cf. 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). Also the generalizing interpretation of the words "The flesh is of no avail" founders on this Johannine doctrine. No, the offense stemmed from the fact that Jesus had spoken of the eating of His flesh (τρώγειν, vv. 54, 56ff.) and the drinking of His blood, which excluded any figurative understanding. And the epilogue retracted nothing of this. It might be inferred precisely from this that the third part of the discourse, in the Johannine presentation, indeed has Holy Communion in mind. The Jews are entirely unable to comprehend this eating and drinking. In the case of the disciples, their human offense as such is joined by the terrifying thought that these words, if they should materialize, would make their Lord a corpse.

The epilogue first gains its full meaning from this perspective. The flesh which was mentioned is not the flesh of a corpse, as the disciples assumed and from which idea they recoiled. They would behold the Lord "ascending" (v. 62). This cannot refer, as John 12:32-33 does, to the ascending on the cross. In view of the allusion to the place whence He came (ὅπου ἦν τὸ πρότερον), it can refer only to His ascending after His death. If verses 62 and 63 are not completely unrelated, the words regarding Spirit and flesh must refer to the exaltation. And this reference is perfectly clear. Without the exaltation, the flesh (of the corpse) is of no avail. But it is "the Spirit that gives life." Aside from this verse, the expression "to give life" (ζωοποιεῖν) occurs in only one other passage in this Gospel, namely, in John 5:21. And here it is used as a parallel to "raising the dead." In John 6:63, the Spirit is said to give life because He again breathes life into the flesh of the corpse, which flesh without Him is of no avail. Thus the Spirit leads the dead to ascend to life. Accordingly the words pertaining to flesh and Spirit do not refer to a manner of eating but to the promised food itself.

Thus the entire discourse contributes to the understanding of the Sacrament. Very probably the Fourth Gospel encounters here the same adversaries as are to be presupposed in John 1:14 and in 1 John 1:1 and as are clearly identified in 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7. In its realism, the strong expression used for eating (τρώγειν) corresponds exactly with Thomas's meeting with the risen Christ (John 20:27) and with the seeing with eyes and the touching with hands that is mentioned in 1 John 1:1. This same realism that is affirmed for the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament is expressed by Paul in the *manducatio oralis* and the *manducatio indignorum*. Perhaps even the words pertaining to the traitor, in which the term τρώγειν occurs (John 13:18), may be construed as a reference to the *manducatio indignorum*. At all events, any thought of a mere commemoration of the dead Christ or any thought of a mere table-fellowship with the exalted Christ is entirely out of the question in John.

We are further reminded of Paul and the Synoptic writers when in John 6:51 we find “for the life of the world” added to the “giving of the flesh.” In the “for” (ὕπερ) there lies, as in Mark 14:24 and in 1 Corinthians 11:24, a reference to the sacrificial death. At the same time, John’s closer designation of purpose implicit in the word *life* leads beyond that. This may perhaps also be inferred—to be sure, as contrast to any thought of punishment—from Paul’s remark about those fallen asleep prematurely (1 Corinthians 11:29–30). And throughout his proclamation the emphasis on “life” or “eternal life” is a variously modified theme. But in the Johannine treatise on Holy Communion, the reception of Christ’s body and blood is directly placed into the purpose of life. In fact, one might almost say that it is subordinated to it. To eat Christ’s flesh and to drink His blood is necessary for the attainment of life, eternal life (6:53 ff.). Eating and drinking are the means, “life” is the goal. The “life” that Holy Communion purposes to give is indispensable. The “living Father” sent the Son, who lives “because of the Father;” therefore he who eats Him will “live because of the Son” (v. 57). With this conception of Holy Communion, one of the chief themes of the Gospel of John reaches its conclusion.

The double aspect in which life appears elsewhere in John is found here too. It is in the present and at the same time in the future. “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood *has* eternal life” (v. 54)—that is the present. “He *abides* in Me and I in him” (v. 56)—that is the present outlook. “He who eats this bread *will live forever*” (v. 58)—that is the future consummation. The present “having” of life through the reception of Christ’s body and blood assures the resurrection, for He says, “I will raise him up at the last day” (v. 54). Ignatius’s oft-quoted formula regarding Holy Communion, “The medicine of immortality and the antidote which prevents us from dying” (Ephesians 20:2), is only a linguistic modification of the Johannine conception. For today’s differentiation between immortality and eternal life, which was necessitated by the reinterpretation of the Enlightenment, is appropriate neither to John nor to Ignatius. Ignatius, too, is aware that there is no resurrection without dying, both for Christ and for us (Trallians 9:2). Thus immortality is not an uninterrupted extension of physical life into the infinite. As his whole letter to the Romans shows, death is a necessary passage to eternal life. Ignatius writes, “To be close to the sword is to be close to God” (Smyrnaeans 4:2).

Immortality is also an integral component of Johannine eschatology (11:25ff.). Also in John’s words on Holy Communion not only eternal life (v. 58) but also the non-dying of him who has eaten Christ’s bread (v. 50) appears as contrast to the necessary dying of the fathers. Thus that formula of Ignatius is sound Johannine doctrine. **The reception of Christ’s body and blood is death’s antidote because it guarantees the resurrection.**

On the basis of the Pauline and Johannine conception, perhaps many a further statement of the New Testament might be construed as a reference to Holy Communion. With regard to 1 Corinthians 5:6ff. and 1 Peter 2:3 this is quite

generally acknowledged. Luther’s translation of δειπνον with “Abendmahl” (literally, “evening meal,” also used to designate the Last Supper, or Holy Communion) has long directed attention to other passages (John 13:4; Revelation 3:20; 19:9; cf. also Luke 14:16). In Revelation 22:17–21, Lohmeyer beholds “the barely disguised final celebration of the Eucharist.” According to him, D. Ploog believes that Hebrews 8–10 also contains a Holy Communion homily.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps new light would be shed on many an additional New Testament statement if it were understood from the viewpoint of Holy Communion—for example, on the “mystery, which is Christ in you” (Colossians 1:27) or on the “partakers of a divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). However, the meaning of the Sacrament itself, as derived from the reports of its institution and their further elaborations by Paul and the Gospel of John, can neither be enriched nor impaired by all of these uncertain allusions.

## THE DOGMATIC CONCEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

The New Testament conception of Holy Communion as presented is binding for dogmatics because such understanding is drawn from the original institution of the Sacrament as well as from its repeated celebration together with the “word of reconciliation.” However, also at this point the history of dogma may not be ignored. The return to the “singleness of heart” with which the Early Church celebrated the Sacrament cannot take place if dogmatics tries, as it were, to secure a place for itself outside the history of dogma. The investigations of the last century prove that the conception of Holy Communion, when kept aloof from the questions and problems of the Church’s confessional writings, became enmeshed in ideologies which were alien to early Christianity. To be sure, dogmatics cannot trace the entire history of the doctrine of Holy Communion. However, we dare not close our eyes to the fact that within the Church and within theology “singleness” was again and again jeopardized and destroyed by “doubleness” (cf. above “Paul’s Contribution to the Understanding of Holy Communion”). A critical line of demarcation must always be drawn against this.

If the Gospel is correctly understood as the word of reconciliation, then the doctrine of Holy Communion must reflect this understanding. Consequently, when the Roman doctrine proceeds from the insight that atonement is effected by sacrifice, and when it accordingly associates the Eucharist with the sacrifice of Christ, we can but concur. But it errs when, proceeding from this basis, it conceives of the Eucharist as a sacrifice which must be repeated by the priest. It is true that at present this idea often recedes into the background. However, it is recorded in the decrees of the Council of Trent. Try as we will, and despite the anathema pronounced at Trent, we can discover no intimation in 1 Corinthians 11:24 and

<sup>1</sup> Ernst Lohmeyer, *Vom Urchristlichen Abendmahl* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1938), 196, 312.