

THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE EARLY CHURCH: COVENANT EXTENSION OR EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE?

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Abstract

This study seeks to show how the Lord's Supper lost its relational and historical (past-present-future) covenant focus and instead became fixed on the Platonic *now* of mystical contemplation, displacing the eschatological hope of Christ's physical return with the real presence of Christ in the eucharist. This resulted from the Hellenistic interpretation of reality in general and of Christian rituals in particular. The first section explores the nature of God and the Old Testament covenant, followed by the covenant's continuity in the New Testament through the Lord's Supper. The second portion analyzes the *Didache's* Jewish-Christian perspective of the Lord's Supper and contrasts it with the Hellenistic-Christian stance of Justin Martyr and Ignatius of Antioch in order to show that the former held a symbolic (biblical) view of the Lord's Supper, while the latter began to introduce the Greek philosophical view of Christ's real presence in the eucharist.

Keywords: Covenant, Didache, Lord's Supper, mystical, temporality, eucharist, Platonism, presence, over-realized eschatology.

Introduction

On the evening before His death, Christ celebrated the Passover meal in the upper room with His disciples. This occasion was the setting for inaugurating a new covenant and, with it, a new Christian era. Christ, the Passover lamb, offered the bread and cup as emblems of His body and blood, which, after His death, would ratify the covenant. Participation indicated the disciples' acceptance of a covenant that spanned human history—extending back to the Old Testament and stretching forward to the last day. Christ highlighted this eschatological fulfillment by stating, “I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25; cf. Luke 22:18). In Matthew, Christ adds the focus of eschatological unity: “I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new *with you* in my Father's kingdom” (26:29, emphasis mine). Paul later underscored the present union exemplified in the Lord's Supper: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the

body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body: for we all partake of that one bread” (1 Cor 10:16-17).

Yet the very act that was intended to exalt God’s covenant and unite the church in mission and expectation of Christ’s return, soon became one of the most divisive issues within Christianity. In fact, by the time of Paul’s writing of his first letter to the Corinthians, he was already having to rectify the Corinthians’ abuse of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:27-34). Thomas O’Loughlin notes that the heated eucharistic debates of the sixteenth century (between Luther, Calvin and Trent) were “but technical differences within a single intellectual paradigm in comparison with the theological shifts ... that took place unnoticed over centuries.”¹ Within a short time after Jesus’ death, the church began to teach that the elements were the actual body and blood of Christ, and that ritualistic participation in the eucharist offered salvific benefits. Thus, the Lord’s Supper went from a communal activity where everyone was involved, to a religious act performed by ritual experts on our behalf.² This notion drastically altered not only the role of the pastor/priest, but also the church’s understanding of soteriology and eschatology. “Having divided the Lord’s meal from meals, the ‘Christian altar’ from real tables, and made the leader distinct as one enrolled in a Christian *sacerdotium*, one then had either to abandon the practice altogether...or to discover new theologies to justify it.”³

Already during the first two centuries of Christianity the rudiments of these “new theologies” were beginning to form. These theologies entirely lost sight of the covenant’s extension throughout history and its eschatological aim. The teachings of the covenant law were forgotten, and the promise of Christ’s Parousia was equally neglected. Instead, the focus became fixed on the *present moment*. Through the words of institution, an ordained priest made Christ himself present *now* in the bread and wine. Thus, salvation became less centered on a covenant relationship with Christ and His return, and more centered on the believer’s mystical participation in the here and now.

This article explores how the Lord’s Supper lost its historical and relational covenant focus and became fixed on the Platonic *now* of mystical contemplation.⁴

¹Thomas O’Loughlin, *The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings* (London and New York: Bloomsbury; T&T Clark, 2015), 57.

²Ibid., 99.

³Ibid., 101.

⁴In the use of the term *mystical/mysticism*, I am guided by the definition of Pseudo-Dionysius (c. AD 500) who coined the term “mystical theology.” He related it to “symbols and ritual (συμβολικὴν καὶ τελεστικὴν),” that lead us beyond a cognitive relation to God “to a real union with Him in the ‘truly mystic darkness of unknowing.’” According to Pseudo-Dionysius, mystical theology does not persuade us, it acts on us. See “Mysticism, Mystical Theology,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, eds. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1134.

This will be done by exploring the nature of God and the OT covenant, along with its NT continuity in the Lord's Supper. Next, the Judeo-Christian view of the Lord's Supper, as described in the *Didache*, will be contrasted with the eucharistic teachings of two early church fathers—Justin Martyr and Ignatius of Antioch.

*God's Nature:
Analogical Temporality and Relational Love*

Before we can understand the past-present-future covenant extension of the Lord's Supper, we must first understand the Lord of the Supper. There are two basic elements of God's nature that are essential to the foundation of the covenant: 1) God's analogical temporality⁵ and 2) His relational love. As the second Person of the Godhead, Christ was one from all eternity with the Father and Holy Spirit, yet this eternity must not be understood (as has traditionally been done by philosophy) as a static timeless reality. Instead, Scripture presents a God whose very ontological being encompasses the temporal extensions of past, present and future. Fernando Canale's phenomenological study of Exodus 3 reveals that God's proclamation—I AM THAT I AM—reveals His ontic presence in time.⁶ He is the *I AM* of the past, present and future. The Lord declares,

I am the God of your Father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob [*past*]. . . . I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows [*present*]. . . . So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey [*future*] (vs. 6-8).

And yet this future redemption was not for the Israelites only. Canale notes that God defines Himself as the God of the ancestors, “the covenant God”⁷ who reveals His being in connection to mission (“Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you” Gen 3:14). In this way, God's being is so

⁵Canale's term for God's nature as being *analogically temporal* indicates that God essentially acts and engages in time, yet is able to transcend it (such as through omnipresence). See *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2005), 70-74.

⁶Canale deconstructs the traditional philosophical “onto-theo-logical” order of theological reason through his phenomenological analysis of Gen 3. He then reconstructs theological reason as grounded on a “theo-onto-logical” order. See *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 298-382.

⁷*Ibid.*, 342.

intimately linked to mission that there is, so to speak, a “missionary dimension of Being and an ontological dimension of mission.”⁸

Not only does God’s self-revelation express His ontological dimension (as a being who reveals Himself temporally in history through His past-present-future words and acts), it also grounds God’s epistemological dimension, that is, how we are to know and relate to Him. Canale analyzes Exodus 6:2-8, where Moses, discouraged and confused, questions God (because Pharaoh is heaping more work on the Israelites instead of freeing them). God responds: ‘I am the LORD.⁹ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them’ (6:3). Here, the verb “known” (*noda ti*) appears in the *niphal* and represents the reflexive sense where God reveals Himself as the One who both *causes* the cognitive activity and *is* the object to be known cognitively. The rest of the text indicates the way in which God is to be known. The construction is very similar to what we have seen in chapter three: It is presented in the context of the *past* covenant (v. 4), in which God is hearing the Israelites’ *present* cries (v. 5) and promises *future* redemption (v. 6). Here we see that the past covenant is the foundation on which the Israelites raised up their present pleas and the basis on which God heard them and remembered to fulfill His covenant. God ends by once again emphasizing the cognitive dimension to Moses: “then you shall *know* that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the Lord” (Exod 6:7, 8).

Once again, God’s being is expressed temporally as He extends Himself through His words and acts in a past-present-future flow. Furthermore, He asks that in order to know Him we remember what He has said and done so that we might believe His future promises. In other words, the cognitive process works through “extension-tension.” Humans must approach the temporally “extended” subject matter (God’s acts, presence, and promises in history) and gather them in “tension” in order to unite the various parts of God’s revelation in a harmonious whole.¹⁰ This is theological knowledge. What is notable here is that such a cognitive process runs directly counter to all theologies and philosophies that claim that oneness with God must be reached mystically, that is, apart from

⁸Ibid.

⁹This first clause may be seen as a continuation of the parallelism in 3:14 referring to God’s being; the second clause speaks about the knowledge of God. Also, just as the reflexive sense was used in 3:2 in introducing the ontological dimension of God’s being, 6:3b uses *yada* in its *niphal* form is a revelational term referring to the essence of God. In other words, God himself is the one who causes the cognitive activity.

¹⁰Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason*, 378.

cognition. Instead, Scripture reveals that “it is God’s Being in itself in His mystery that is opened up for human knowledge.”¹¹

A second element of the divine nature, one that is closely connected with God’s analogical temporality, is His loving relationality. “God is love” (1 John 4:8-16) is evident in the mystery of the Trinity and in the Trinity’s relationship with the created universe. John Peckham notes that Scripture’s affirmation “God is love” indicates that “all that God *is* and *does* must be understood as congruent with divine love. That is, God’s character is itself love and God is essentially loving. The members of the Trinity have always been involved in a love relationship (cf. John 17:24). Intratrinitarian love is thus essential to God, a product of God’s Trinitarian, relational nature.”¹² Peckham further notes that the love of God is foreconditional¹³ and reciprocal. “The foreconditional-reciprocal model [of God’s love] interprets the canonical evidence to mean that humans are called (invited) by God to be a part of His elect but that humans possess the God-given ability to accept or reject God’s call and, consequently, love relationship with God.”¹⁴

This is where the covenant enters. Simply stated, a covenant¹⁵ is a legally binding agreement between two parties. Yet unlike most legal contracts, the aim of the divine covenant is a dynamic relationship of love.¹⁶ To love another, one must act—and to act, one must have the element of time. Thus, the temporal-historical extension of God’s being and His character of relational love become the foundation for the covenant. Peckham notes, “The reciprocal aspect of the divine-human love relationship is especially evident in the covenant relationship.”¹⁷ God points back to creation (and/or deliverance) as evidence of His love [past], and promises long life and salvation [future] (Deut 4:37-40, 7:7-8,

¹¹Ibid, 373.

¹²John Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 252.

¹³Peckham coins the term *foreconditional* to indicate that God’s love “in relation to the world is unconditional with respect to volition (subjective love), but conditional with respect to the ongoing God-world relationship (objective love).” Ibid., 277.

¹⁴Ibid., 108.

¹⁵The Hebrew word for covenant, *berith*, is derived from a root which means “to cut,” thus a covenant is a “cutting,” of animals into two parts, with the contracting parties passing between them, thus sealing the covenant (Gen 15; Jer 34:18, 19). See M. G. Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

¹⁶See Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 2:311.

¹⁷Ibid., 222.

10:15) in exchange for (or conditional on) being loved and obeyed [present]¹⁸ (Deut 11:1; cf. Exod 20:5-6).¹⁹

Old Testament: The Nature of the Covenant

Beginning with Adam in the Garden of Eden (Hos 6:7) the Old Testament presents several “covenants” such as the ones made with Noah, Abraham, David and Solomon,²⁰ yet Scripture regularly emphasizes that God’s covenant is one, it is *the* “everlasting covenant.”²¹ Gudmundur Olafsson points out that “the Old Testament never speaks of covenants in the plural—only singular, even though it is associated with various individuals, which supports the idea that God only had one covenant which he adapts to the needs of the different individuals and times.”²²

God’s covenant at Sinai is unique among others in the Old Testament because (a) it is grounded in God’s self-revelation as a Being who is temporally present and missionally active in the past-present-future continuum of space and time, and (b) it points to His words and actions as the medium by which humans may know Him. In other words, the Sinai covenant grounds being (ontology) and knowing (epistemology). Furthermore, the covenant at Sinai involves not an individual, but an entire nation. It looks back [*past*] not to creation but to Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian slavery (Exod 20:1) through the blood of the Passover lamb (Exod 12: 11-13). It establishes God’s sanctuary presence among them [*present*] (Exod 25:8, cf. 40:34), and anticipates the [*future*] presence of the incarnate Passover Lamb and humanity’s final deliverance from slavery to sin (John 1:29, 1 Cor 5:7). Finally, the Sinai covenant has a strong missional aim in that the nation was to be

¹⁸It is important to note that the human response does not earn salvation, yet it does gain humans a love relationship with the God who is able to save them.

¹⁹Some scholars have posited a distinction between so-called promissory (unconditional) and obligatory (conditional) covenants, stating that certain covenants, such as the Abrahamic and Davidic, were unconditional. Yet closer study reveals that each covenant includes elements of conditionality and unconditionality, so that they are both promissory *and* obligatory (cf. Gen 18:19, 22:16-18, 26:4-5, 1 Kgs 2:3-4, 8:25, 9:4-9). Ibid. 222, 223. See also Gary Knoppers, “Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the Davidic Covenant: A Parallel?” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116:4 (1996), 670-697 and Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 14, 15.

²⁰For a good exposition of the OT covenants, see Gully, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity*, 2:311–377.

²¹The term “everlasting covenant” appears fifteen times in the Old Testament (Gen 9:16, 17:7, 13, 19, Num 18:19, 2 Sam 23:5, 1 Chron 16:17, Ps 105:10, Isa 24:5, 55:3, 61:8, Jer 32:40, 50:5, Ezek 16:60, 37:26).

²²Gulley, *God as Trinity*, 313.

“a kingdom of priests and holy nation,” indicating that the people of Israel were to be intercessors on behalf of other nations as they lived out holy lives that would draw others to God (Exod 19:6, Deut 4:5-6).²³

Thus, in Exodus we see that, like God's very ontological being revealed in Genesis 3, the *nature* of the covenant is presented as a temporal past-present-future extension of God's presence throughout history that has a love-relational (missional) focus. The *development* of the covenant answers the *how*. How do humans enter into a covenant relation with God? Elsewhere I have explored the development of the sanctuary-covenant structure in Exodus as an interactive seven-step process God reveals to the Israelites through a series of progressive mountaintop communications.²⁴ While all steps serve a function in revealing God's covenant love and achieving covenant oneness, there are three crucial steps that connect directly with the Lord's Supper ratification: 1) Reception of God's *covenant law* (Exod 20); 2) Israel's assent to the terms of the covenant which is ratified by the *blood of the covenant* being sprinkled on the altar and the people (Exod 24:1-8); and 3) *covenant eating* (Exod 24:9-11). The tenor of the covenant development is less like a formal contract, and more like a marriage union.²⁵ Indeed, the final aim of the covenant is to abide in sanctuary union: “Let them build me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Exod 25:8). Thus, while the *nature* of the covenant is temporal extension and relational love, the *development* of the covenant occurs via covenant law, covenant blood, and covenant eating.

²³See also Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), and Daniel C. Juster and Don Finto, *The Irrevocable Calling: Israel's Role as a Light to the Nations* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 2007).

²⁴The seven steps to personal and communal sanctuary-covenant union with God are: 1) an assent to the conditional nature of covenant (Exod 19:3–6); 2) personal introspection (Exod 19:8b–14); 3) heart reception of God's Decalogue (19:20–20:17); 4) acceptance of all God's prophetic teachings (20:21–23:33); 5) consumption of God's word (Christ's body), which is revealed in sacrificial living (Christ's blood) (24:9–11); 6) cooperation with the Holy Spirit for dwelling in sanctuary union with Christ (24:13–32:14); and 7) anticipation Christ's soon return and restoration of our face-to-face communion (40:17–38). Silvia Canale Bacchiocchi, “The Sanctuary-Covenant Structure as Pattern to Oneness with God” (research paper, Andrews University, 2015), 12–30.

²⁵Although the covenant concept of God as bridegroom is extensively treated in the OT prophetic writings, it is first revealed, albeit in latent form, in the Decalogue. See Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 113–117. John Peckham has also explored the various marriage metaphors in Old and New Testaments, noting, “Just as God is depicted as the husband of his people in the Old Testament, Jesus takes on the metaphorical role of the bridegroom, who will wed his bride (the church), for whom he lovingly gave himself up (Matt 9:15; 25:1-10; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35; John 3:29; Eph 5:23-27; 2 Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7; 21:9; cf. James 4:4).” *The Love of God*, 224.

*New Testament: The Lord's Supper
as Extension of the Covenant*

In the New Testament, we note a similar progression of the Old Testament Sinai covenant. On the eve of Christ's death, the synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—describe the covenant as having a past-present-future extension. Christ exclaims, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover²⁶ [*past*] with you before I suffer: for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God [*future*].... This is my body which is given for you: do this in remembrance of me [*present*].... This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.” (Luke 22:15-16, 20, cf. Matt 26:27-29; Mark 14:24-25).

John's apparent silence regarding the institution of the Lord's Supper on the evening before Christ's death has baffled numerous scholars and given rise to a host of theories.²⁷ Yet it is important to note that John has already presented the emblems of the Lord's Supper (covenant blood and covenant eating) in chapter 6: “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him” (6:56, cf. 15:7). Christ's seemingly cannibalistic statement caused many disciples to turn away. To those who remained Christ explained, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. *The words* that I speak to you are spirit and they are life” (6:63, italics mine). Peter likewise affirms: “You have the words of eternal life” (v. 68). Thus, when John presents the Lord's Supper sermon (John 13–17), Christ's focus is precisely on these “words of life,” namely covenant law, and he uses language that highlights the relational-love aspect of God's nature and the covenant, regularly linking our love for God with commandment keeping.²⁸ Thus

²⁶For a study of the various views regarding whether the Lord's Supper looked back to the Passover, see Andreas J. Kostenberger, “Was the Last Supper a Passover Meal?” in *The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ Until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 6–30. See also Matthew Myer Boulton, “Supersession or Subsession? Exodus Typology, the Christian Eucharist and the Jewish Passover Meal,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66:1 (2013): 18-29.

²⁷Daniel Augsburger explores the broad array of interpretations including “Anti-Judaism,” “Anti-Episcopacy,” “Calendrical Disagreements,” “Strong Sacramentalism,” and “Christian Oath of Secrecy.” See “John and the Institution of the Lord's Supper,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 1, no. 1 (1963): 3-24. See also Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 100.

²⁸Christ repeatedly mentions the new command to love one another (15:34, 35; 15:12, 17), and connects love with commandment keeping: “If you love me keep my words/commandments” (14:15, 21, 23); “If you abide in me and my words abide in you ...” (15:7); “Abide in my love. If you keep My commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love (15:9-10); “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (15:14); and praying to His Father: “...they have kept your word ... for I have given to them the words which You have

we see that John also grounds the nature of the Lord's Supper in temporal extension and relational love, with a development that features covenant law, covenant blood, and covenant eating.

Regarding the perspective of Paul, Oleg Kostyuk has explored the temporal extension of the covenant in relation to the Lord's Supper. He notes that Paul's statement, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor 11:26),"

encompasses three dimensions: present, past, and future. Present tense is described in the consuming of the bread and cup themselves. The present consuming of the symbols, in its turn, points to the past, that is the death of the Lord. It also points to the eschatological future that is the coming of the Lord (Parousia)."²⁹

I would also note that the concept of proclamation in this text underscores the missional focus of the Lord's Supper. Thus we see that the evidence of both the New Testament gospels and the writings of Paul supports the covenant structure of the Old Testament, both in its *nature*—temporal extension and relational love, and in its *development*—covenant blood, covenant law, and covenant eating.

Next, we will explore how the Lord's Supper was interpreted outside of Scripture in the first two centuries of Christianity. First we will look at the *Didache*—a Judeo-Christian interpretation—and contrast it with the writings of Justin Martyr and Ignatius of Antioch, as representatives of a more Hellenistic interpretation of the Lord's Supper.

Early Jewish Christianity: The Didache

The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,³⁰ better known as the *Didache*, is an early Christian manual or treatise that was likely circulated among the churches in Syria around the turn of the first century.³¹ This date, however, has undergone extensive studies

given Me: and they have received them" (17:6, 8); "I have given them Your word (17:14); "Sanctify them by your truth, Your word is truth" (17:17).

²⁹Oleg Kostyuk, "From the Lord's Supper to Parousia: Resisting the Tendencies of Over-Realized Eschatology Among Corinthian Believers" (paper presented at the Twelfth Seminary Scholarship Symposium, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 2016), 10.

³⁰Jean Paul Audet has shown that the original title for the *Didache* was *Didachai ton apostolon* (Teachings of the Apostles), a title similar to Luke's second volume (Acts of the Apostles). Yet the title was later expanded to include the twelve apostles in order give the document greater authority. *La Didache: Instruction des Apotres* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1958).

³¹Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 44. See also "Didache," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, eds. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 482.

and scholars have recently begun to date it earlier, which would make it one of the first Christian documents, preceding some NT writings.³²

The composition is generally arranged in three sections³³ covering ethics, practices (baptism and the Lord's Supper), and church order. The section that concerns us, regarding the Lord's Supper, is found in chapters nine and ten:

- 9:1 But as touching the eucharistic thanksgiving give thanks thus.
- 9:2 First, as regards the cup: We give You thanks, O our Father, for the holy vine of Your son David, which You made known to us through Your Son Jesus; Yours is the glory for ever and ever.
- 9:3 Then as regards the broken bread: We give You thanks, O our Father, for the life and knowledge which You made known to us through Your Son Jesus; Yours is the glory for ever and ever.
- 9:4 As this broken bread was scattered on the mountains and being gathered together became one, so may Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom; for Yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

³²Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 25. Aaron Milavec and Eugene LaVerdiere both argue for a mid-first century origin, and they argue for the letter's independence from the Gospels. Notably, a growing number of critics are coming to the conclusion that the *Didache* does not assume any knowledge of NT writings. See LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 135; Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 46-50; Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Faith, Hope, and Life of the Earliest Christian Communities, 50-70 C.E.* (New York: Newman Press, 2003), 695-739; Marcello Del Verme, *Didache and Judaism: Jewish Roots of an Ancient Christian-Jewish Work* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 81-86.

³³Eugene LaVerdiere sees a three-stage process as evolving over a period of 50 years—beginning around AD 50 and ending around AD 100. The first stage (*Didache* 1–6 and 16), covers the way of life and the way of death—along with eschatological exhortations. The OT wisdom literature employed here is indicative of the Jewish character of this early Christian community. LaVerdiere suggests that the community at this time was Christian but that its members were Jewish and still identified with their Jewish roots. Stage two (*Didache* 7–10) developed the requirements on baptism (7), fasting (7:4–8:1), the Lord's Prayer (8:2) and the Eucharist (9–10). LaVerdiere views this stage as one where the community still held to their Jewish heritage, but had begun to separate and distinguish themselves from non-Christian Jews as well as Gentiles. The third and final stage (*Didache* 11–15) offers instructions for leaders in the early Christian Community—apostles, prophets, and teachers. At this stage, LaVerdiere suggests that the community saw itself threatened by not only Jews and Gentiles, but also by other Christians and false teachers. He concludes that in order to protect itself, the *Didache* community ended up withdrawing from all Jews and Christians to the point that the community eventually died off. *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church*, 135-145.

- 9:5 But let no one eat or drink of this eucharistic thanksgiving, except those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said: Do not give what is holy to the dogs.
- 10:1 And after you have eaten enough, give thanks thus:
- 10:2 We give You thanks, Holy Father, for Your holy name, which You have made to dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality, which You have made known to us through Your Son Jesus; Yours is the glory for ever and ever.
- 10:3 Almighty Master, You created all things for Your name's sake, and gave food and drink to men for enjoyment, that they might give You thanks; but gave us spiritual food and drink and eternal life through Your Son.
- 10:4 Before all things we give You thanks that You are powerful; Yours is the glory for ever and ever.
- 10:5 Remember, Lord, Your Church, to deliver it from all evil and to perfect it in Your love; and gather it together from the four winds, sanctified for Your kingdom which You have prepared for it; for Yours is the power and the glory for ever and ever.
- 10:6 May grace come and may this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. If any man is holy, let him come; if any man is not holy, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen.³⁴

When the *Didache* was first published (1883), scholars noted the strong Jewish tenor of the mealtime prayers in chapters 9 and 10.³⁵ Louis Finkelstein explored the connection between *Didache* 9–10 and the *Birkat ha-mazon*, a Jewish mealtime prayer, concluding that they were essentially the same form of prayer.³⁶ Scholars have generally agreed with Finkelstein, although with minor alterations. Similarly, Jonathan Schweibert points out five uniquely Jewish elements in *Didache* 9–10, the first being, once again, the Jewish concept of “thanksgiving” and prayer at mealtime,³⁷ a rarity in Greek meal rituals.³⁸

³⁴J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 232-233.

³⁵See Louis Finkelstein, “The Birkat Ha-Mazon,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 19 (1928/9): 211–62; R. D. Middleton, “The Eucharistic Prayers of the *Didache*,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 36 (1935): 259–67; Martin Dibelius, “Die Mahl-Gebete der *Didache*,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 37 (1938): 32-41.

³⁶The only difference is that the first two of the three units in the Jewish prayer were inverted in the Christian version. See “The Birkat Ha-Mazon,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 19 (1928/9): 211–62. See also Louis Ligier, “The Origins of the Eucharistic Prayer: From the Last Supper to the Eucharist,” *Studia Liturgica* 9 (1973): 177; Mazza, *The Origins of the Eucharistic Prayer* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 18ff; and H. van der Sandt and E. Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 310–29.

³⁷The other four uniquely Jewish elements Schweibert notes are: (2) offering the cup before the bread (an act more common in Jewish communal meals than in Greek meals);

This uniquely Jewish notion of thanksgiving at mealtimes is of interest as it introduces a new term for the Lord's Supper—the *eucharist* (thanksgiving). In Scripture, the terms for Christ's ratification of the covenant are: “the Lord's Supper,”³⁹ “communion,”⁴⁰ “cup of blessing,” and “breaking of bread.”⁴¹ Scripture does use the word *eucharist*, but only as a verb to describe Christ's action of “having given thanks” (*eucharistēsas*),⁴² not as a noun describing the event itself. Thus, in naming the celebration of the Lord's Supper as the thanksgiving/Eucharist, we note the strong Jewish tenor of the work and its Hebraic mindset. Of the four major OT sacrifices (burnt, sin, guilt, and peace), the “peace” or “fellowship” offering was the only one from which the worshipper could eat. Furthermore, Deut 7 points to thanksgiving as the prime motivation for the fellowship offering (vv. 12, 13, 15) wherein the covenant was renewed through the eating of the sacrificial animal (cf. Ps 50:5, 14). In fact, the Passover itself might be seen as a type of this fellowship sacrifice of thanksgiving (Deut 16:1-4), with its motivation—thanksgiving—highlighted in many Psalms (cf. 50:14, 23; 56:13; 107:22; 116:17-19).⁴³

Critical to our study is that the *Didache's* thanksgiving prayer embraces the *nature of the covenant* as temporal extension: thanking God for His *past* revelation of the “vine of David” in the life of Jesus (9:2), for the *present* knowledge received through Jesus (9:3, cf. chapters 1–4), and for the *future* Kingdom that will come after this world passes away (vv. 5, 6). Of particular interest is the final phrase: “May grace come and may this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. If anyone is holy, let him come; if anyone is not, let him repent. Maranatha! Amen” (*Didache* 10:6). The term *maranatha* (“Our Lord, come!”) was used by early

(3) the various doxologies; (4) the petition to be gathered from the four winds or corners of the earth into the kingdom (Deut 30:3-5; Isa 11:12; and Ezek 11:7, 37:21); and (5) the Jewish acclamations of *Didache* 10:6: *Hosanna*, *Amen*, and *Maranatha*. See Schweibert, *Knowledge and the Coming Kingdom*, 115–17.

³⁸Thus, the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo (25 BC–AD 50) said, “(it would be irreverent) ... and equally unlawful to enjoy and partake of any form of food for which thanks had not been offered (*eucharistesantas*) in the proper and rightful manner.” See Jonathan Schweibert, *Knowledge and the Coming Kingdom: The Didache's Meal Ritual and its Place in Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 114. Jean Laporte argues that *eucharistia* was Philo's customary term for meal prayers, see *Eucharistia in Philo* (New York: Mellen, 1983), 53-55.

³⁹1 Cor 11:20. A similar expression is “The Lord's table” (1 Cor 10:21).

⁴⁰1 Cor 10:16.

⁴¹1 Cor 10:16; Acts 2:42.

⁴²Matt 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 19.

⁴³John Mark Hicks, “The Lord's Table: A Covenant Meal,” *Leaven* 3, no. 3 (1995): 5. See also idem, *Come to the Table: Revisioning the Lord's Supper* (Costa Mesa, CA: Leafwood Publishers, 2002).

Palestinian Christians who spoke Aramaic (underscoring the likely Jewish connection) and clearly invokes the Parousia as being still in the future.⁴⁴ Also, the covenant foundation of relational love is seen in the request for the Father to perfect the church “in Your love” (v. 5). The *development of the covenant* is likewise noted: covenant law (9:5),⁴⁵ covenant blood/body (“broken bread” 9:3-4), and covenant eating (9:5–10:1). In short, the *Didache* gives us a glimpse of one of the earliest primitive Christian celebrations of the Lord’s Supper/eucharist that retains the Hebraic covenantal view, and thereby encompasses a very different theology from what soon became the norm.

Over-Realized Eschatology, Presence, and Platonism

During the decades following Christ’s ascension, various views began to surface that greatly altered the covenant view of the Lord’s Supper. In particular, the future focus of the Parousia became greatly compromised. Many new Christians began to believe that Christ’s second coming had already occurred. Thus, they held to an “over-realized” eschatology,⁴⁶ believing that the Parousia had already taken place—only in a mystical way.⁴⁷ Scholars have interpreted Paul’s focus on the bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15) and the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11) as an attempt to correct this over-realized eschatology.⁴⁸ Moreover, in 2 Thessalonians, Paul specifically warns against the deceptive teaching that Christ had already come and that the Parousia had been accomplished mystically: “Now brethren, concerning

⁴⁴Kostyuk, “From the Lord’s Supper to Parousia,” 6-7.

⁴⁵Additionally, *Didache* 1–4 teaches the “way of life” lifestyle, and is the ground of the covenant agreement entered into initially at baptism (7:1-3) and all ensuing eucharistic recommitments.

⁴⁶Realized eschatology refers to belief that while Jesus’s first coming to inaugurate the kingdom of grace in our lives (Heb 1:1) has occurred, the kingdom of glory has not yet come, and will occur only when death is swallowed up (Isa 25:6-10; Rev 21:3-6). Over-realized eschatology, then, refers to a belief that Christ’s coming in glory has already occurred. See the Lord’s Supper in relation to the final death in Isaiah 25:6-10, where God destroys death and rests from the work of redemption.

⁴⁷Proponents of an over-realized eschatology in the Corinthian church include Christopher L. Mearns, “Early Eschatological Development in Paul: The Evidence of 1 Corinthians,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 22 (1984): 19-35; Anthony C. Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology at Corinth,” *New Testament Studies* 24, no. 4 (1978): 510–26; Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 302-304. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, [1st] ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 108; and Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 12.

⁴⁸See Kostyuk, “From the Lord’s Supper to Parousia,” 3.

the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means..." (2:1-4, cf. 1 Thess 4:13-18).

Next, Paul immediately connects this deception with the "mystery of lawlessness" and "the coming [*parousia*] of the lawless one" (2:9). Not only does Paul juxtapose these two parousias—true and false—he also reveals that "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work" (2:7). In this Paul seems to suggest not only that the false parousia will seek to replace Christ's physical and historical second coming with a mystical false appearing, but also that the view of Christ's mystical presence—quite possibly in the Lord's Supper—was already circulating in his day. What could account for this drastic shift in interpretation? How could the grand covenantal scheme of the Old and New Testaments, ratified by Christ's Passover dinner (and implemented by the *Didache* community) have been so easily forgotten?

Hellenistic Christianity

I believe one reason the Lord's Supper lost its covenant extension in early Christianity is due to the Hellenistic culture of the early church. Already centuries before Christ, Alexander the Great (356–323 BC) had expanded his empire from Greece to India and unified the disparate nations under the Greek language and culture. So much so, that even in Palestine the Greek culture was easily assimilated within the broad Jewish community.⁴⁹ The dominant mentality was one of relativism and syncretism, and survival generally meant blending in.⁵⁰ Thus, when Christianity began to spread, most of the new converts sprang from a Hellenistic culture that used a different hermeneutical lens (subconscious presupposition) to interpret reality in general and Christian rituals in particular.⁵¹ For while

⁴⁹ After the Greeks took over Palestine (332 BC), the Jews (particularly the upper class) accepted and even welcomed Greek culture. Many Jewish children were sent to the Greek gymnasiums, where they were educated in philosophy, sports (which they did naked), and dramatic plays. To counter gymnasiums, Jewish synagogues were started, yet these also were permeated with Greek methods and rhetorical devices. So long as the Jews were allowed to maintain their forms of worship—which they generally were at least until the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167 BC)—they remained agreeable to Hellenistic culture. See G. R. Osborne, "[Hellenism](#)," *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* 1:956–957.

⁵⁰ Raul Kerbs, *El Problema De La Identidad Biblica Del Christianismo: Las Presuposiciones Filosoficas de la Teologia Cristiana: Desde Los Presocraticos al Protestantismo* (Entre Rios, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2014), 161–162.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 305–314; Claude Tresmontant notes, "Certain aspects of Platonism and, above all, Neo-Platonism show themselves as the irreconcilable opponents of these [biblical] systems. The fundamental outlook—be it conscious or not—of basic concepts, the

monotheistic belief in a single God was common to both Judaism and Greek philosophy,⁵² their interpretations of the nature of the one God were diametrically opposed. In contrast to the historically extended, relationally loving Hebrew God, the God of Greek philosophy was timeless and impassible—unable to enter history, speak, or love.⁵³ There was no way to reconcile these two Gods. And yet the cacophonous clash of Hebrew and Hellenistic thought, voicing two glaringly different views of reality, was harmoniously reconciled in the syncretism of a certain Hellenistic Jew.⁵⁴ Philo of Alexandria (25 BC–50 AD) was a philosopher whose allegorical method of biblical interpretation allowed him to fuse Hebrew and Greek thought, interpreting the teachings of Moses and Plato as essentially one and the same,⁵⁵ so much so that he became known as the Hebrew Plato.⁵⁶ Philo's influence on early Christianity was so significant that Roger Olson claims that second-century apologists were all “simply standing on Philo's shoulders and building a Hellenistic-Christian superstructure on his Hellenistic-Jewish foundation.”⁵⁷

premises and the problematics of these conflicting philosophies are so thoroughly different that no agreement between them could possibly be worked out. Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?” *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, trans Michael Francis Gibson (New York: Desclee Co., 1959), xix; see also Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (London: W. W. Norton, 1960).

⁵² The polytheism held in paganism was originally debunked by Socrates. After him, Aristotle, Neoplatonism, and Plotinus all posited one impassible, timeless and immutable God (Unmoved Mover/Prime Act, the One), who was supreme in a hierarchy of descending intermediate beings who engaged with creation. So while some still held polytheistic beliefs (Acts 17:16), the philosophy after Aristotle posited only one supreme Being/God, a feature that favored the blending of Greek philosophy with Christianity.

⁵³See Tony Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 6-8.

⁵⁴Kerbs, 305.

⁵⁵“The Septuagint [Greek translation of Hebrew Old Testament around the third century BC] was probably produced, not only to provide a Bible for Greek-speaking Judaism, but also to show that Judaism and Greek thought were not mutually exclusive. The writings of Philo went even further, attempting to couch Jewish theology in Hellenistic thought-forms. G. R. Osborne, “Hellenistic Judaism,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* 1:961.

⁵⁶ N. L. Geisler, “Philo Judaeus,” *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 592.

⁵⁷Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 57. Also, David T. Runia explores the impact of Philo on early Christianity in *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993). It is important to note that Christian apologists, such as Justin Martyr, do not directly mention Philo. It is most likely that the similarities in their philosophies (such as their use of the *Logos*) have more to do with the prevalence of Neoplatonism than with any direct or indirect knowledge of Philo's works.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr (AD 100-165) was the most influential second-century Christian apologist.⁵⁸ Born into a Greek family, he explored various philosophical schools until he settled on Platonism. Later, after a “mysterious old man” led him to Christianity, Justin became a Christian philosopher who stated that Socrates had been a “Christian before Christ” and that Christianity was the fulfillment of Platonism.⁵⁹ It is important to note that Justin identified the *Logos* in John 1:1 with the “cosmic *Logos*” of Neoplatonism and stoicism.⁶⁰ This philosophical *Logos* was an impersonal intermediary divinity (an emanation of God) who permeated and ordered everything in the universe. Justin’s teaching, linking Christianity to philosophy and Christ to the philosophical pantheistic *Logos*, seriously undermined the uniqueness of the historical covenant God and the historical relation of Christ with creation.⁶¹

Justin’s *First Apology* (c. AD 155), written as an appeal to Emperor Pius to treat Christians more justly, describes a eucharistic celebration that took place after the baptism of believers. Justin states that after a prayer and a kiss of peace, the elements (“bread and water and wine mixed with water”) were taken to the “ruler [*proestos*] of the brethren” who offered a prayer and thanksgiving. Then the deacons passed around the elements to everyone who ate “the eucharistized bread and wine and water.”⁶² Justin elaborates on the meaning of “eucharistized” in his second description of the Eucharist (one which described the regular weekly communion):

And this food is called among us Εὐχαριστία [the Eucharist] ... For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh *by transmutation* are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh...⁶³

Here we note that “the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh” nourish the believer through a process of “transmutation.” What exactly does Justin mean in saying the elements undergo a transmutation [*metabolen*]? Jaroslav Pelikan suggests that the transmutation could indicate either a change in the elements after consecration or to the body of the participant being transformed by

⁵⁸Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 59.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 61.

⁶¹Kerbs, *El Problema De La Identidad Biblica Del Christianismo*, 313–16.

⁶²Justin Martyr, *1 Apology*, lxvi.

⁶³Ibid.

the gift of immortality, or to both.⁶⁴ Paul Bradshaw says that Justin is the first Christian writer to put forward what might be called a theory of consecration, describing a change in the bread and cup.⁶⁵ And Paul Jones views Justin's description as "drawing a parallel between the divine *Logos* in the incarnation and the eucharist"; according to Jones, Justin "argued almost exclusively for a realistic interpretation [of the eucharist].⁶⁶ Justin continues his account of the Eucharist:

For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them: that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, "This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body:" and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, "This is My blood:" and gave it to them alone.⁶⁷

Here Justin quotes almost verbatim from the biblical accounts in Mark 14:22-24 and 1 Cor 11:23-25, with one notable exception. While both biblical writers mention the covenant: "this is the blood of the covenant" and "This cup is the new covenant in my blood," respectively, Justin completely omits any mention of the blood referring back to the covenant. Instead, the blood points to itself as being the reality.

Thus, we see how Justin's philosophical presuppositions appear to have affected his interpretation of the Lord's Supper as a timeless participation in Christ's mystical presence. Roger Olson points out that Justin's teachings were so influential that later Christian thinkers simply assumed the truth of his suggestions and used them to build their theologies.⁶⁸

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius of Antioch⁶⁹ was one of the first Christian martyrs. His seven letters, written while he was imprisoned in Rome, contain "the first real theology in

⁶⁴Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 169.

⁶⁵Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 91.

⁶⁶Paul H. Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence: A History of the Doctrine* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 29.

⁶⁷Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* lxvi.

⁶⁸Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 59.

⁶⁹Although the letters of Ignatius have commonly been dated from the middle of the first century to c. 100-110—a date based on Eusebius's placing him during the reign of Emperor Trajan (98–117)—recent research shows several inconsistencies in Eusebius's dating in general and with Ignatius in particular, as Ignatius's letters contain no names of officials holding Roman post or allusions to datable events. We do know that Ignatius wrote to Polycarp (d. 159) and Barnes has shown that Ignatius was familiar with the

Christianity.”⁷⁰ In his letter to the Smyrnaeans, Ignatius underscores that the elements are the real body of Christ, and he denounces those who “absent themselves from the Eucharist and the public prayers, because they will not admit that the Eucharist is the self-same body of our Saviour Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins, and which the Father in His goodness afterwards raised up again.”⁷¹ It would appear that the people or congregation under attack celebrated a Eucharist, but they did not believe that the elements (bread and wine) represented the real body of Christ.⁷² Thus, we note a growing tension between communities like the one that produced the *Didache*, which interpreted the Lord’s Supper historically and eschatologically, and other communities that leaned towards a mystical view of Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist.

Furthermore, Ignatius interpreted the Eucharist sacramentally, terming it the “medicine of immortality.” “[Be] ready now to obey your bishop and clergy with undivided minds and to share in the one common breaking of bread—the *medicine of immortality*, and the sovereign remedy by which we escape death and live in Jesus Christ for evermore.”⁷³ Here we note that the ability to achieve immortality rested in the intercessory hands of the bishop who alone could officiate in the Eucharist: “The sole Eucharist you should consider valid is the one that is celebrated by the bishop himself, or by some person authorized by him. Where the bishop is to be seen, there let all his people be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is present, we have the catholic Church.”⁷⁴ In fact, Ignatius repeatedly stated that the bishop stood in the place of Christ.⁷⁵ As with Justin, we note Ignatius also views the elements the

writings of the gnostic Ptolamaeus, who was still alive in 180 AD. See Timothy D. Barnes, “The Date of Ignatius,” *Expository Times* 120, no. 3 (2008): 119-30. See also Thomas O’Loughlin who supports Barnes conclusions, stating that “the issue of Ignatius is complex for many Christian theologians in that he is often still dated to c. 100–110, whereas he [his writings] should be dated to c. 150–160 at earliest.” *The Eucharist*, 98. Though I am not committed to this date, I believe a later dating is more likely, as Ignatius presents an advanced sacerdotal view that is unparalleled by other first century writers and which would be useful in countering the gnostic heresies that apologists such as Irenaeus (130–202 AD) sought to counter.

⁷⁰Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 46.

⁷¹Ignatius of Antioch, *Ep. Smyr.* 7.

⁷²Schweibert, *Knowledge and the Coming Kingdom*, 240.

⁷³Ignatius of Antioch, *Ep. Eph.* 20 (emphasis supplied).

⁷⁴Ignatius of Antioch, *Ep. Smyr.* 8.

⁷⁵“Follow your bishop, every one of you, as obediently as Jesus Christ followed the Father. Obey your clergy too, as you would the Apostles; give your deacons the same reverence that you would to a command from God. Make sure that no step affecting the church is ever taken by anyone without the bishop’s sanction.” *Ibid.* To the church in Magnesia Ignatius wrote: “In the same way as the Lord was wholly one with the Father,

real body of Christ able to impart salvation, but he goes a step further in claiming that the bishop is an essential intermediary of this saving act. O'Loughlin points out that most early Christian writers, Ignatius foremost among them, found it convenient to "press Christian liturgical forms into the familiar shapes of Greco-Roman religion." In other words, just as sacrifices with officiant priests was an integral part of Hellenistic culture, these church fathers sought to show that Christians could also offer them ceremonies with sacrifices and priests.⁷⁶

In summary, Justin and Ignatius are two representatives of second-century church leaders whose theology of the Lord's Supper supported a strong belief in the sacramental view of the real presence. While some note that there were other early church fathers who held a more symbolic view of the Eucharist,⁷⁷ it is important to remember that the early fathers' interpretation of "symbol" or "form" was vastly different from ours today.

In the ancient world, a symbol had almost the opposite meaning of that which it has in modern culture. A symbol in ancient society is not primarily a pointer that represents something apart from the symbol. In ancient society, a symbol participates in that which it represents, so that it can almost be said to *be* that which it represents.... In antiquity, the symbol is the presence of that which it represents and mediates participation in that reality.⁷⁸

Recall Pseudo-Dionysius' interpretation of mystical theology as using "symbols and ritual" to assist in achieving oneness with God that transcends reason or thought. Thus, we can strongly suggest that the general view of the early church fathers, of whom Justin and Ignatius are prime examples, tended towards a strong view of the Lord's Supper as a mystical union with God.⁷⁹

and never acted independently of Him ... so you yourselves must never act independently of your bishop and clergy." Ignatius of Antioch, *Ep. Smyr.* 7.

⁷⁶O'Loughlin, *The Eucharist*, 98.

⁷⁷Jones refers primarily to the eucharistic teachings of church fathers, Clement and Origen, both of Alexandria. *Christ's Eucharistic Presence*, 30.

⁷⁸William R. Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 80. See also Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 198–99; Colman E. O'Neill, O.P., *Sacramental Realism: A General Theory of the Sacraments* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1983), 98.

⁷⁹"That the Eucharist conveyed to the believer the Body and Blood of Christ was universally accepted from the first [referring to patristic period], and language was very commonly used which referred to the eucharistic elements as themselves the Body and Blood. Even where the elements were spoken of as 'symbols' or 'antitypes' there was no intention of denying the reality of the Presence in the gifts. From the 4th cent., language about the transformation of the elements began to become general. In "Eucharist," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 570.

What about the *Didache*? Interestingly, it continued to circulate in various communities,⁸⁰ with chapters 9–10 taken up in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a compilation composed in AD 380. Although the original text is still recognizable in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, that compilation introduced two major alterations to the original: 1) Jesus now mediates creation and glory ascending to the Father, but He no longer mediates knowledge, and 2) the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus are introduced as the new matrix for the elements.⁸¹ Schweibert argues that this is not an organic development of the *Didache*'s inherent logic and pattern, but a "(probably artificial) 'updating' ... which aims to bring that text into line with an emerging orthodox eucharistic pattern."⁸² The new mystical thrust of the *Apostolic Constitutions* is evident in the new title the copyists gave this section: the "Eucharistia mystica." Mazza notes that there has been a "profound transformation" of the original text which allows the "sacramental realism ... to exert an influence on the eucharistic text."⁸³

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored how the *nature of the covenant* (Old and New Testaments) parallels God's self-revelation in Exodus 3. God's being and covenant are both grounded in 1) a past-present-future historical extension and 2) a relational love that seeks unity. The *development of the covenant*, or methodology, for achieving this oneness was noted as having three primary steps, namely, a) covenant law, b) covenant blood, and c) covenant eating. We saw how the covenant's eschatological focus was compromised in the early church by an over-realized eschatology that held Christ's Parousia had already come, something Paul sought to counteract and warn against. We also noted that the Hebrew *Didache* community continued to keep to the biblical covenant's temporal extension, focusing on Christ's Parousia as still to come (Maranatha). The Greek church fathers, on the other hand, held Platonic presuppositions that influenced their interpretation of the Lord's Supper. As a result, they ignored the covenant's temporal extension and future focus, and instead claimed the elements were the real presence of Christ's body and blood. As such, the teaching of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist appears to be an "over-realized eschatology" similar to the kind Paul warns about. If Christ is already present in the elements, His physical coming has already occurred, and if one can participate in Christ's body

⁸⁰Schweibert traces *Didache* tradition during the pre-Constantinian period as seen in Rome, Asia Minor and Egypt. *Knowledge and the Coming Kingdom*, 183-237.

⁸¹Ibid., 244.

⁸²Ibid., 247.

⁸³Mazza, *The Origins of Eucharistic Prayer*, 61.

as the “medicine of immortality,” then salvation has taken place in the very act of eating and drinking.

While a comprehensive study of the biblical covenant and the Lord's Supper in relation to salvation is beyond the scope of this article, I have sought to advance a basic understanding of the nature and development of the Hebrew covenant in the Lord's Supper, and propose a probable cause for the early church's deviation from the biblical pattern, i.e. the Platonic interpretation of the covenant ritual as conveying the reality in the symbol. Among next steps for research are: exploring the name of God in His progressive (OT-NT) revelation, and delimiting the unique roles of the Trinity in achieving covenant communion, particularly the role of the Holy Spirit in assisting human-divine unity. Furthermore, I believe the connection between Paul's warning against the false Parousia in 2 Thess 2:1-13 and the development of the eucharistic real presence of Christ in the early church warrants further study.