

## Jesus' Table Fellowship, Baptism, and the Eucharist

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*The practice of communion without baptism has become more prevalent within the Episcopal Church. Proponents of this practice use scripture extensively in their argument for a change in the traditional Ordo, which maintains an indissoluble bond between baptism and the eucharist. They claim that the narratives of Jesus' table fellowship support the practice of communion without baptism. In this essay, I will critique the use of scriptural references to Jesus' table fellowship in support of communion without baptism by considering their canonical context. First, I will explain how the canonical context of those scriptural passages actually argues in favor of the traditional Ordo rather than for a change to it. Then, I will provide an example of how canonical context intensifies the radical hospitality called for by proponents of communion without baptism by means of the traditional Ordo rather than a change to it.*

From its beginning, the church has practiced two central rites: baptism and the eucharist. While the external forms of these two rites have changed significantly over the course of history, these rites have nonetheless remained fundamental to the church's identity and practice. Between these two rites is an indissoluble bond through which baptism prepares for the eucharist and the eucharist contextualizes baptism. This indissoluble bond also exists in relation to the church. On the one hand, the church has formed baptism and the eucharist through its ritual practice, theology, and canon law. On the other

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hand, baptism and the eucharist have also formed the church as the center of its life.

The practice of communion without baptism has become more prevalent within the Episcopal Church. A recent study suggests that almost 25 percent of bishops in the Episcopal Church reported that parishes within their diocese permit communion without baptism.<sup>1</sup> While the canons of the Episcopal Church allow only baptized Christians to receive communion and a resolution at the 2006 General Convention affirmed this position, a significant number of Episcopal parishes nevertheless continue this practice.<sup>2</sup>

Proponents of communion without baptism use scripture extensively in their argument for a change in the traditional Ordo, which maintains an indissoluble bond between baptism and the eucharist.<sup>3</sup> They claim that the narratives of Jesus' table fellowship support the practice of communion without baptism. For example, Kathryn Tanner rightfully emphasizes the radical hospitality which Jesus exhibited during his ministry to those persons deemed sinners and religiously impure by the Jewish authorities of that time.<sup>4</sup> She and other proponents of communion without baptism interpret these narratives as a justification that the sacramental grace of the eucharist should be made available to all people and not to baptized Christians only. Just as Christ opened his table to all people, they argue, so also should the church open the eucharistic table to all people.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Report from the Task Force on "Communion Before Baptism" of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California, as cited in Cheryl Peterson, "Font to Table or Table to Font?" *Lutheran Forum* 42.2 (Summer 2008): 46.

<sup>2</sup> "No unbaptized person shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion in this Church." The Canons of the Episcopal Church (Title 1.17.7), [www.episcopalarchives.org/pdf/CnC/CandC\\_2009pp11-60.pdf](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/pdf/CnC/CandC_2009pp11-60.pdf); The Acts of Convention 2006-D084, "Uphold Baptism as a Requirement of Receiving Holy Communion," [www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts\\_resolution.pl?resolution=2006-D084](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2006-D084).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Arthur C. Cochrane, *Eating and Drinking with Jesus* (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Westminster Press, 1974), 78–100; Stephen Edmondson, "Opening the Table: The Body of Christ and God's Prodigal Grace," *Anglican Theological Review* 91.2 (Spring 2009): 214; Richard Fabian, "First the Table, then the Font," The Association of Anglican Musicians, 2002, [www.saintgregorys.org/Resources\\_pdfs/FirsttheTable.pdf](http://www.saintgregorys.org/Resources_pdfs/FirsttheTable.pdf); and Mark W. Stamm, *Let Every Soul Be Jesus' Guest* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2006), 41–62.

<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Tanner, "In Praise of Open Communion: A Rejoinder to James Farwell," *Anglican Theological Review* 86.3 (Summer 2004): 475–477.

<sup>5</sup> Compare Tanner, "In Praise of Open Communion," 475–477; Edmondson, "Opening the Table," 218; Fabian, "First the Table, then the Font"; and Stamm, *Let Every Soul Be Jesus' Guest*, 45.

In this essay, I will critique the use of scriptural references to Jesus' table fellowship in support of communion without baptism by considering their canonical context. First, I will explain how the canonical context of those scriptural passages actually argues in favor of the traditional Ordo rather than for a change to it. Then, I will provide an example of how canonical context intensifies the radical hospitality called for by proponents of communion without baptism by means of the traditional Ordo rather than a change to it.

### *The Canonical Context Explained*

If considered solely as literal narratives of the historical Jesus, then the feeding stories of Jesus might give an account that could support the practice of communion without baptism. However, when considered within a canonical perspective, these narratives actually speak to and within eucharistic communities of baptized believers.<sup>6</sup> Thus instead of advocating communion without baptism, these narratives, when considered within their canonical context, actually re-invigorate the indissoluble bond between baptism and the eucharist, which forms the church.

In order to understand the context of these narratives, I will begin with the canonical shaping of the New Testament. While the Gospel narratives are placed at the beginning of the New Testament, they are not actually its oldest books. Biblical scholars generally agree that the letters written by Paul are the earliest extant Christian writings, with 1 Thessalonians being the first.<sup>7</sup> While Paul does not write about baptism or the eucharist in 1 Thessalonians, he does write about baptism in Galatians, his next letter in our present day canon, written around 55 C.E.<sup>8</sup> In Galatians 3, Paul speaks about the relationship between the Law and faith, attempting to persuade the church at Galatia that faith in Christ will fulfill all the requirements of the Law. Then he concludes: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal. 3:27). Everett Ferguson provides an

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<sup>6</sup> See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1979), 69–106, for an exposition on canonical hermeneutics.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 456.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 468.

important interpretation of Paul's view of the relationship between faith and baptism:

Paul binds faith and baptism together as two aspects of entering into Christ. One now belongs to Christ on the basis of faith in him by being baptized into him. If a distinction is to be made between the relation of faith and baptism to the blessings described, one might say that baptism is the time at which and faith is the reason why.<sup>9</sup>

While Ferguson suggests a temporal connection between baptism and faith, the metaphorical imagery also points out a spatial connection. Paul describes the Galatians as being "baptized *into* Christ." This metaphor indicates a type of spatial entry. At one point, the Galatians were outside of Christ and now they are in Christ. For Paul, both faith and baptism provide that entrance *into* Christ.

A couple of years after writing to the Galatians, Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Corinth in late 56 C.E. to early 57 C.E.<sup>10</sup> In this letter, he treats baptism and eucharist in much greater detail. For example, in I Corinthians 10, Paul gives important instruction to the Corinthian church regarding how they ought to behave during the eucharist. First, he recalls the Exodus narrative in which God through Moses leads the people of Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea and into the wilderness, where God then provides them with manna to eat from the sky and water to drink from a rock. Paul likens the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea to baptism and the eating of manna and the drinking from the rock to the eucharist. The movement through the Red Sea and then the supply of manna and water are similar to being "baptized *into* Christ." Paul sees a progression from baptism to the eucharist. However, what is most interesting is that he does not demonstrate a need to spell this out specifically for the Corinthians. Thus, Eugene LaVerdiere suggests, "From Paul's presentation, we see how baptism and the Eucharist were very closely related in both life and theology."<sup>11</sup> This close relationship is evident

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<sup>9</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 147.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 512.

<sup>11</sup> Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 37.

in that Paul finds it unnecessary to explicitly state it. At this early time in the church, the movement from baptism to the eucharist must have been so ingrained in the ritual consciousness of the early church that it was completely unnecessary to refer to this chronological and spatial movement specifically.

Paul not only relates closely baptism and the eucharist, but he also speaks specifically about their ecclesiological implications: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:16–17). Paul is not speaking of an individual participation in the eucharist, but rather a corporate participation as the church. Thus, for Paul, the eucharist and the church are also closely related.

In 1 Corinthians 11, he continues by chiding the church at Corinth for the divisions that persist in their community right up to and during the celebration of the eucharist (verses 17–22). He tells them that he cannot commend them for this behavior. Instead, he exhorts them with those words he has received from the Lord Jesus and has handed on to them. Then he moves into the famous Words of Institution that are found in nearly every eucharistic prayer. Finally, he speaks of those who partake of the eucharist unworthily. Paul's juxtaposition of division within the church, the Words of Institution, and the exhortation to partake of the eucharist worthily is important. Edward J. Kilmartin contends that for Paul they are inherently connected. To partake of the eucharist unworthily is to fail to see the inherent connection between the eucharist and the church: "Having failed to observe fraternal charity which was demanded of Christians," Kilmartin states, "they also failed to recognize that the Christ they received is not merely the Christ-for-me but the Christ-for-many. . . . Therefore, 'without distinguishing the body' equals *without recognizing the Eucharistic body in its specific claim to fraternal charity*."<sup>12</sup> In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul speaks of a close relationship between baptism and the eucharist; in chapter 11, he speaks of a close relationship between the eucharist and the church. Again, for Paul, this progression of baptism to eucharist to church is very natural. He does not stress

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<sup>12</sup> Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the Primitive Church* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 88.

the order of these events. Rather, his emphasis is upon their theological significance.

Clearly, Paul understands there is a close relationship between baptism, the eucharist, and the church. How does this understanding of baptism relate to the narratives of Jesus' table fellowship found in the Gospels, which were written after Paul's letters to these churches?

One narrative that is shared by all four Gospels is the account of Jesus' baptism. This story precedes all other narratives regarding Jesus' ministry, with the exception of his birth and early childhood. A natural progression from Jesus' baptism into his public ministry is evident. None of the table fellowship narratives occur before these narratives of Jesus' baptism.

However, is Jesus' baptism equivalent to baptism in the church? If baptism is meant for the remission of sins, as described in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, then what does that mean for Jesus, who is said to be without sin (Hebrews 4:15)? Was Jesus' baptism completely different from later Christian baptism, or are there parallels between them? Even though the details of Jesus' baptism differ in the four narratives, two features remain the same: the coming of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove with the voice from heaven declaring him "Son," and the mention of the future baptism in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as Ferguson argues, Jesus' baptism is similar to Christian baptism through adoption as children of God and reception of the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Maxwell Johnson identifies two references from the Hebrew scriptures in the pronouncement from the Father during Jesus' baptism, one from Psalm 2:7, which was meant for the coronation of kings, and the other from Isaiah 42:1, which is the calling of the "Suffering Servant."<sup>14</sup> Johnson concludes that the divine voice at Jesus' baptism is not calling a great and powerful Messiah but rather a "suffering Messiah." He states, "In this way, then, scholars have seen this baptismal event at the Jordan as having 'vocational' significance for Jesus' own life and ministry."<sup>15</sup> Thus, Jesus' baptism is not about purity from sin but rather vocation for ministry. Similarly, later Christian baptism is also primarily about vocation for ministry, not purity

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<sup>13</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 101–103.

<sup>14</sup> Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, revised and expanded edition (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007), 15.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 16.

from sin. Therefore, proponents of communion without baptism are correct in critiquing baptism as solely a purity rite.

Now the proper context for the narratives of Jesus' public ministry is evident. In all four of the Gospels, Jesus' own baptism precedes his public ministry. Furthermore, in Paul's epistles, which precede all four Gospels, Paul assumes that baptism precedes the eucharist. Without this context, misunderstandings can occur regarding the narratives of Jesus' table fellowship.

In many instances, Jesus shared table fellowship with those the religious establishment deemed inappropriate (Matthew 9:11, Mark 2:16, Luke 5:30). Furthermore, all four Gospel narratives give an account of the feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9, and John 6), and two also provide an account of Jesus feeding the four thousand (Matthew 15 and Mark 8). These narratives aptly describe Jesus' generous nature in seeking all who are hungry and all who are lost. Mark Stamm, in his book *Let Every Soul Be Jesus' Guest*, argues that these feeding stories are about the eucharist. He points out the fourfold eucharistic shape found in the feeding stories of Mark 6 and Luke 9, as well as in Paul's shipwreck on Malta in Acts 27.<sup>16</sup> Stamm and others have suggested that these narratives support the practice of communion without baptism,<sup>17</sup> arguing that because Jesus had an open table fellowship so should the church.

However, as already discussed, to use these narratives in this fashion is to forget the context in which they were written. Furthermore, it is also to forget the context in which they were read. Early Christians very likely would have read these narratives in the context of the eucharist, just as contemporary Christians read them in that same context today. For LaVerdiere, these narratives are actually explanations of the role of the eucharist in the church. For example, he suggests that the ten meal narratives found in Luke each show a distinct purpose for the eucharist. The feast with Levi (5:27–39) shows the need for repentance; the breaking of bread at Bethsaida (9:10–17) shows the mission of the church; and so forth.<sup>18</sup> While proponents of communion without baptism are correct that these feeding stories are

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<sup>16</sup> Stamm, *Let Every Soul Be Jesus' Guest*, 45. Note that Stamm does go on to recognize the ecclesial context in which these narratives were written; compare 54–55.

<sup>17</sup> Compare Kathryn Tanner, "In Praise of Open Communion," 476–477 and Edmondson, "Opening the Table," 218.

<sup>18</sup> LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church*, 83–94.

eucharistic in nature, they misunderstand the narrative and canonical context of these stories when they suggest these stories support the practice of communion without baptism. Andrew McGowan aptly observes that “if we accept the form-critical approach that the Gospels were written within the milieu of early Christian communities, then we must also recognize this in the case of Jesus’ meal practices.”<sup>19</sup> Otherwise, the church runs the risk of suggesting that the Gospel narratives’ primary purpose is to provide readers with a literal, historical account of the life of Jesus rather than an understanding of the life of Jesus as seen through the lens of the diverse communities of faith to whom and in whom these narratives were written.

While the narratives of Jesus’ table fellowship may be eucharistic in nature, the Institution Narratives themselves (Matt. 26:26–29, Mark 14:22–25, Luke 22:19–20, and 1 Cor. 11:23–25) are explicitly so. Again, the question of context arises. Much debate exists about the historical situation of the Institution Narratives. Some suggest that the Words of Institution found in most of the earliest eucharistic prayers (though absent from the *Didache*) have their origin in the historical Last Supper itself.<sup>20</sup> Others suggest nearly the opposite—that the Gospel narrative of the Last Supper actually originated in the liturgical practice of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>21</sup> Others believe that no correlation exists either way.<sup>22</sup> Did the historical account of the Last Supper give rise to the rite of the Lord’s Supper? Or did the practice of the Lord’s Supper in the early church influence the development of the narrative of the Last Supper? A definitive answer remains elusive. However, a strong connection did exist between the rite of the Lord’s Supper and the narrative of the Last Supper.

In the canonical shaping of scripture, baptism and the eucharist play a central role in the feeding narratives of Jesus. In the next section, I will consider an example of a narrative that proponents of communion without baptism often cite to support their claim that baptism

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew McGowan, “The Meals of Jesus and the Meals of the Church: Eucharistic Origins and Admission to Communion,” in *Studia Liturgica Diversa: Essays in Honor of Paul F. Bradshaw*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips (Portland, Ore.: Pastoral Press, 2004), 111.

<sup>20</sup> See Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 26–27; and Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the Primitive Church*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (London: SPCK, 2009), 10.



need not precede communion. By looking carefully at the canonical shaping of the narrative of the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:24–30, I will show that this narrative of radical hospitality toward the outcast actually reinforces baptism before communion rather than its alternative.

*The Canonical Context Exemplified*

The story of the Syrophenician woman's attempt to have Jesus heal her daughter takes place in gentile territory, after Jesus has left Galilee and entered Tyre. He enters a house and does not wish anyone to know he is there. Nonetheless, a woman whose daughter has an unclean spirit follows him into the house. She drops to Jesus' feet and begs him to save her daughter. Jesus responds with an answer that proves shocking to the modern-day ear: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 7:27). Just as it is today, calling a person a "dog" was a grave insult.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Jesus appears to be tying this insult to the woman's ethnicity as a gentile. Undaunted, the woman replies, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (7:28). Jesus responds to her faithfulness by healing her daughter of the unclean spirit.

Read out of context, this passage appears to have little to commend it. However, a closer look at the intra-Markan, intercanonical, and historical contexts of this narrative reveals Mark's intention to critique the eucharistic practice of the early church. First, I will consider this narrative within its intra-Markan context.

In his book *The Four Gospels on Sunday*, Gordon Lathrop suggests that the author of Mark uses a series of circles, or chiasms, to provide rhetorical parallelisms for emphasis. These parallelisms walk the reader through a series of narratives through which the author unfolds a larger message for the reader. Thus the author uses the entire sequence of parallelisms to convey a meaning that each narrative independently cannot convey. The center of the sequence represents the author's most important message. In this case, the narrative of the

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<sup>23</sup> Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1991), 61–62.

Syrophoenician woman marks the center of these feeding narratives (Mark 6:6b–13–Mark 8:14–21):

- A Sending of the Twelve without bread—6:6b–13
- B Herod's meal, return of the disciples—6:14–30
- C Feeding of the five thousand—6:31–44
- D Walking on the sea and healing—6:45–56
- E *Controversy with Pharisees on purity*  
 . . . *In the house: all food clean*  
 . . . *In the house at Tyre: crumbs from the table*  
*for all*—7:1–30
- D' Ephphatha—7:31–37
- C' Feeding of the four thousand—8:1–10
- B' The Pharisees seek a sign from heaven—8:11–13
- A' The disciples have no bread: the yeast and the baskets full—8:14–21<sup>24</sup>

Passages A, B, C, and D occur within Jewish territory, while passages D', C', B', and A' occur within gentile territory. As the center of the chiasm, passage E is the hinge for this narrative sequence and thus provides the author's central intention for the chiasm. Passage E begins with Mark 7:1–23, which describes yet another confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. The Pharisees have criticized Jesus because his disciples do not wash properly before eating. Jesus returns the critique by quoting Isaiah 29:13 from the Septuagint: "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines" (Mark 7:6–7). Jesus explains to the crowd that it is not what enters the body that defiles the body but what comes from the heart.

Then, Jesus enters a house (Mark 7:17). Lathrop recognizes a pattern in Mark where Jesus shares a general teaching with the crowd but then gives its interpretation to the disciples, usually in a house. Because the Gospel of Mark itself would have been proclaimed within the liturgy of the house-churches, Lathrop makes a compelling argument that the author of Mark uses houses as a rhetorical device to indicate the church.<sup>25</sup> Accepting this hermeneutical key, the reader can then presume that Mark wishes to get the church's attention with

<sup>24</sup> Gordon W. Lathrop, *The Four Gospels on Sunday: The New Testament and the Reform of Christian Worship* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2012), 77.

<sup>25</sup> Lathrop, *The Four Gospels on Sunday*, 68.

this narrative by means of his reference to the house. From the beginning of this series of feeding stories in 6:6b–13 to this point in the narrative, Jesus has not entered a single house. Now, he enters a house. And now, Mark speaks directly to the church, using Jesus' teaching against the Pharisees' overemphasis upon ritual purification generally to critique the church's overemphasis upon ritual purification in the assembly. Through this symbolic use of "house," the author of Mark wishes to reform the eucharistic practice of the church.

Jesus leaves this house and enters another house. Again, Mark wishes to draw the attention of the church to the following narrative. The Syrophenician woman enters after Jesus and throws herself at his feet. Historically, a woman—and a gentile woman at that—would not enter a strange house and throw herself at the feet of a strange man lest she risk her reputation. However, Lathrop's hermeneutical key regarding Mark's use of houses signifies a deeper message here: Mark is addressing the presence of gentiles within the church. Furthermore, the imagery of bread on the table has strong eucharistic overtones. The author of Mark is telling the apostolic church not only to allow gentiles into the church, but to allow them access to the eucharistic table. Coupled with Christ's declaration of all food as clean in the passage above, this passage declares all persons clean.

Thus, proponents of communion without baptism are right that Jesus' feeding narratives generally and this narrative specifically argue for reform of the eucharistic practices of the church. All persons regardless of gender or ethnic identity should have access to the eucharistic table. However, a closer examination of the Pauline context of this narrative and its relationship to the late first-century text the *Didache* reveals that this critique does not extend to baptism, as that would nullify the very purpose of Mark's gospel—identification with Christ as the crucified-risen One.

Scholars have long debated the influence of Pauline theology on the author of Mark. For a time the question appeared to be settled but recent scholars are once again raising it.<sup>26</sup> Lathrop suggests that the occasion for the writing of Mark may have been the death of Paul in the Neronian persecutions, based on evidence in the *First Letter of Clement*, and that the author of Mark did indeed know the writings

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<sup>26</sup> See Joel Marcus, "Mark—Interpreter of Paul," *New Testament Studies* 46.4 (October 2000): 473–474.

of Paul.<sup>27</sup> They share a common theology of the cross, as emphasized by Joel Marcus: “Both Paul and Mark lay *extraordinary* stress on the death of Jesus.”<sup>28</sup> Marcus provides a number of examples that elucidate this emphasis upon *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross) in Paul and Mark as an unpopular theme in the early church.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Lathrop believes Mark’s intention was to critique the assemblies for their lack of focus upon Christ as the crucified-resurrected One in their midst.<sup>30</sup>

Lathrop’s chiasmic structure for the feeding narratives in Mark 6:6b–8:21 focuses upon this critique. As mentioned above, the hinge in the chiasm is the narrative of the Syrophenician woman. From this point forward, the narratives occur in gentile territory. Therefore, the narrative regarding the feeding of the four thousand becomes more than a mere repetition of the previous narrative of the feeding of the five thousand. Instead, the feeding of the four thousand continues Mark’s critique of eucharistic practice. Located within gentile territory, this narrative focuses upon the inclusion of gentiles in the eucharistic meal. Jesus tells the disciples, “I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat” (Mark 8:2). Charles Bobertz observes that in Mark’s Gospel the words “three days” symbolically echo the period of Jesus’ time in the tomb and his resurrection: “The easiest reading of the narrative on a symbolic level, therefore, is that these Gentiles rightfully belong at the ritual eucharist, and therefore resurrection, because they have entered into the death of Christ (presumably through an implied ritual baptism).”<sup>31</sup> Thus, according to Bobertz’s proposal, this three-day imagery stands in for baptism in this narrative. With the use of this expression, the author of Mark draws the connection between baptism, identification with Christ’s death and burial, and the subsequent eucharistic meal. Therefore, the author of Mark is not attempting to critique baptism before eucharist but rather is drawing attention to baptism, not as a purity rite, but as participation in Christ as the crucified-risen One.

<sup>27</sup> Lathrop, *The Four Gospels on Sunday*, 21–22.

<sup>28</sup> Marcus, “Mark—Interpreter of Paul,” 479.

<sup>29</sup> Marcus, “Mark—Interpreter of Paul,” 481–484.

<sup>30</sup> Lathrop, *The Four Gospels on Sunday*, 72–73.

<sup>31</sup> Charles A. Bobertz, “Ritual Eucharist Within Narrative: A Comparison of *Didache* 9–10 with Mark 6:31–44; 8:1–9,” in *Studia Patristica* 45.7, ed. by Jane Ralls Baun, et al. (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2010), 96.

Another critique of eucharistic practice in this chiasmic structure leads us to the narrative's intercanonical context. In his lecture at the Virginia Theological Seminary on January 24, 2012, Lathrop drew an important connection between Mark's mention of the "yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod" (8:15) and Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians' eucharistic practice in 1 Corinthians 11. Mark's "yeast of the Pharisees" is a rebuke of ritual purity as a prerequisite for eucharistic practice, as pictured in the narrative of the Syro-Phoenician woman. Likewise, his mention of "the yeast of Herod" is a rebuke of the oppression of the rich over the poor. Paul makes a similar rebuke in 1 Corinthians 11, where he admonishes the Corinthian church for its unequal treatment of the rich and the poor (11:21). The eucharist is not the place for such divisions. The table should be open to all regardless of socio-economic status.

However, this openness to all does not circumvent baptism. As proposed above, the narrative of the feeding of the four thousand includes a reference to baptismal identification with the crucified One in their midst. Furthermore, Paul speaks of the flow of baptism to eucharist in 1 Corinthians 10 just before his rebuke of their eucharistic practices, drawing analogies of baptism with the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan and of the eucharist with their subsequent feeding on manna in the wilderness (10:1-5). Paul makes another connection between baptism and the death and burial of Christ in Romans 6:4, and the author of Colossians, influenced by Pauline theology, makes a similar connection in Colossians 2:12. While the eucharistic table is open to all persons regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic status, that openness remains predicated upon identification with Christ as the crucified-risen One through baptism. This identification with Christ is not a privilege or a badge of honor to lord over others. Rather, it is identification with Christ, who in turn identifies with the outcasts.

Bobertz suggests that the entire Gospel of Mark focuses on the inclusion of the gentiles at the eucharistic table. However, Bobertz claims that Mark does not in fact argue for the presence of gentiles based on purification rites, but quite to the contrary: "What characterizes the presentation of the rituals of baptism and eucharist in *Mark* is the strong association of the liminal space of ritual with the death of Christ."<sup>32</sup> Thus, Mark does not view baptism as a purification rite

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<sup>32</sup> Bobertz, "Ritual Eucharist Within Narrative," 95.

but as identification with Christ as the crucified-risen One. Any attempt to eliminate baptism before communion would nullify Mark's intention to justify the inclusion of the gentiles at the eucharistic table *because of* their identification with Christ as the crucified-risen One in baptism.

Mark's baptismal theology as based upon a *theologia crucis* rather than upon purification becomes important in considering the historical context of the Gospel of Mark. The *Didache* is one of the earliest liturgical sources available, possibly written in the late first century and thus contemporaneously with the later books of the New Testament. David Flusser suggests that the author of the *Didache* may actually have used an earlier Jewish source called *The Two Ways* for much of the preliminary material. He believes this earlier material would have been contemporary with the early apostolic church. In fact, the author of the *Didache* may have believed it to have apostolic origins.<sup>33</sup>

In chapter seven, the *Didache* gives a detailed description of the baptismal rite. Then, in chapter nine, it quite forcefully prohibits the communication of the unbaptized: "9.5 Let no one eat or drink of your thanksgiving [meal] save those who have been baptized in the name of the Lord, since the Lord has said concerning this, 'Do not give what is holy to dogs.'"<sup>34</sup> The exact nature of this "thanksgiving [meal]" is unknown. For example, the eucharistic liturgy in the *Didache* does not include the Words of Institution, which are present in most other early eucharistic prayers.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, some scholars have suggested that the meal it describes is not the eucharist but rather an *agape* meal. Other scholars suggest it is just an earlier form of the eucharistic liturgy. Bradshaw takes a middle viewpoint by wondering if the *Didache* suggests a diversity of eucharistic practices at this time.<sup>36</sup> Regardless of the exact nature of this meal, the church or at least some communities within it have developed a more formal norm for the relationship between baptism and this meal, whether it is the eucharist or another type of meal.

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<sup>33</sup> David Flusser, "Paul's Jewish-Christian Opponents in the *Didache*," in *Gilgul: Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions*, ed. S. Shaked, D. Shulman, and G. G. Stroumsa (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 73–74.

<sup>34</sup> "The *Didache*," in *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, ed. E. C. Whitaker (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>35</sup> Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, 26–27.

<sup>36</sup> Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, 32.

The *Didache* emphasizes the necessity of baptism before communion. However, the baptismal theology of the *Didache* focuses upon purification as the sole imagery for baptism. Bobertz and Lathrop argue that Mark wishes to critique an overemphasis upon purification, which also appears in the *Didache's* baptismal theology.<sup>37</sup> The narrative of the Syrophenician woman draws this critique into clarity with its reference to “the dogs.” If the *Didache*, or some precursor to it, was indeed a popular writing during the time of Paul and Mark, perhaps this reference speaks directly to the baptismal theology in *Didache* 9.5. Bobertz makes an insightful connection:

For the *Didache* separateness and holiness lie at the heart of an alternative universe, that is, the separate physical, social, and theological space created by ritual: “do not give what is holy to the dogs.” For *Mark* the death of Christ lies at the heart of ritual space, for some who are the participants, especially the Gentiles, find themselves ritually placed within that death in baptism and table-fellowship: “they have been with me now for three days.”<sup>38</sup>

Mark wishes to reform the current eucharistic practice by declaring that the eucharistic table is open to all people. However, identification with Christ as the crucified-risen One, who also identifies with the outcasts, marks that openness. Baptism is the ritual means by which they identify with Christ, not as an act of exclusive superiority, but rather as an inclusive identification with all those with whom Christ also identifies.

Mark's narrative of the Syrophenician woman provides an important critique of eucharistic practice. The eucharistic table is not reserved only for the wealthy or the ritually pure. It is open to all persons who wish to identify with Christ, the crucified-risen One. However, proponents of communion without baptism misunderstand when they suggest that these feeding narratives do not consider baptism as integral to the eucharist. A close look at the intra-Markan, intercanonical, and historical contexts of this narrative within its chiasmic structure shows that baptism as identification with the crucified-risen

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<sup>37</sup> Bobertz, “Ritual Eucharist Within Narrative,” 95, and Lathrop, *The Four Gospels on Sunday*, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Bobertz, “Ritual Eucharist Within Narrative,” 98–99.

One is indeed inherent within these texts. The church will greatly benefit from a critique of the prevailing image of baptism as a purification rite instead of identification with Christ as the crucified-risen One. Proponents of communion without baptism are correct in offering this critique. The church ought never to see baptism as a barrier to communion or as an initiatory hurdle to overcome. Baptism is about identification with Christ, and the eucharist is about renewed identification with Christ. This expanded imagery of baptism, therefore, reforms the view that the eucharist is meant only for the pure. Instead, the eucharist is communion with Christ as the crucified-risen One, who welcomes the outcasts, and with whom Christians have identified through baptism.

### *Conclusion*

As with most theological issues, scripture speaks with many voices through many communities. Therefore, the modern church should be cautious in approaching scripture for an exact historical account of the practices of the early church. However, the church should be equally cautious in disregarding scripture as an irrelevant source of history. Perhaps the wisest approach would be to recognize that scripture provides the narrative of various communities' struggles with faith while these various communities likewise provide the context for the writing of scripture. Thus, each forms the other and is formed by the other. Proponents of communion without baptism rightly point to the eucharistic character of the narratives of Jesus' table fellowship. However, by not placing them within both their narrative and canonical contexts, they fail to recognize the indissoluble bond between baptism, the eucharist, and the church.



The Eucharist is a Christian rite that is considered a sacrament in most churches, and as an ordinance in others. According to the New Testament, the rite was instituted by Jesus Christ during the Last Supper; giving his disciples bread and wine during a Passover meal, Jesus commanded his followers to "do this in memory of me" while referring to the bread as "my body" and the cup of wine as "the new covenant in my blood". Through the eucharistic celebration Christians remember both Christ's sacrifice. One group instituted the Eucharist at an early stage, and it took a long time before other groups adopted it. The group behind the Gospel of Thomas, and also the group behind the Q Gospel, did not mention any such tradition. What the original groups should have inherited from the real Jesus, apart from his teachings, was the tradition of open table fellowship. The committed followers would have continued that, and later created a ritual in memory of his death. After all, their master was still with them in spirit on these occasions, and they were thinking of him. Surely this could be what is b