Baptism, Eucharist, and "The Logic of Participation"

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As we approach the question of whether or not unbaptized persons should receive communion in the Episcopal Church our conversations in our task force have clustered around several foci. The first is the question of whether such a practice is appropriate from the perspective of the New Testament documents. This raises formal questions of the meaning of both the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. The other foci are more contextual and practical, viz. evangelism, hospitality, and pastoral care. Other tangents of thought have led us into discussions of the history and tradition of the church. Having discovered the complexity of the issue it is appropriate that our look at the subject has been broad and multi-faceted.

What has not been adequately focused upon, I would suggest, is a look at the soteriological aspect of the relationship between baptism and eucharist.[1] In fact, this perspective, I would be so bold to assert, is the central issue that must be addressed if we are to get to the heart of the question on the appropriateness of inviting those not baptized to receive communion. This soteriological perspective is briefly touched upon in James Farwell's essay on the subject as he speaks of what he calls "the logic of participation"[2] and "both-and soteriology" defined as "the radical gift of grace and the radical call to discipleship, inextricably connected."[3] Nevertheless, Farwell's discussion is cursory at best, focusing upon the Christian's appropriation of the salvific work of Christ, rather than upon this work itself in the death and resurrection of Jesus and its expression liturgically in baptism and eucharist.

In this essay I would like to focus upon this soteriological perspective and suggest that New Testament teaching on the atonement is ritually expressed in the progression from font to table. This sacramental embodiment of the soteriological work of Christ mediates our own participation both corporately and individually in this saving action. To change this traditional progression will suggest, if not require, a different soteriology. Having placed the canonical process from font to table within this soteriological framework I will consider a number of New Testament texts from within this theological context. Finally, I will offer some brief closing reflections of the issue of Open Communion without Baptism.

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[1] Richard Fabian does address the soteriological in his essay "Holy Food for Holy People." However, his soteriology, while making reference to biblical antecedents, is actually quite idiosyncratic. He begins with reference to the Hebrew concept of the sin offering, *chattath*, wherein the offering of a life to God in sacrifice is returned to as a gift from God. This gift is the double gift of the flesh of the animal eaten by the worshiper, and because "God gave the sacrificed animal's life to sinners, who had lost their connection with the God of all life, and so might expect to die." Jesus death, then, is the new *chattath*, and we are doubly fed by the elements of the eucharist and receive Jesus life in the Spirit of Jesus released in his death.

It would seem that Fabian collapses soteriology into the restrictive category of *chattath*, and that reception of communion is not the sacrament and expression of salvation, but is salvation itself.

[2] James Farwell "Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus: On the Practice of 'Open Communion'" *Anglican Theological Review* p.222

[3] Farwell, p. 225

Soteriological Perspectives

While it is beyond the scope of this essay to offer a full discussion of Christian soteriology as it has been discussed throughout the history of the church, we can give a broad outline of the New Testament perspectives concerning salvation. Such an outline underlies the rich conversation over the years on the specific ways Christ's death and resurrection effect our salvation. In exploring this biblical soteriology, Lesslie Newbigin encourages us to avoid any reductionism that merely addresses the postmortem state of the individual soul, "the question we have to ask is not 'What will happen to this person's soul after death?' but 'What is the end which gives meaning to this person's story as a part of God's whole story?'"[4] This puts New Testament soteriology in an eschatological context:

> Salvation in this sense is the completion of God's whole work in creation redemption, the summing up of all things with Christ as head (Eph. 1:10), the reconciling of all things in heaven and earth through the blood of the cross (Col. 1:20), the subjecting of all hostile power under the feet (1 Cor. 15:24-28). The other uses of the verb (we have been saved, we are being saved) must be understood in light of the end to which they look. The question of salvation is wrongly posed if it is posed in respect of the human soul abstracted from God's history of salvation, abstracted therefore from therefore from the question, "How do we understand the human story?" Being saved has to do with the part we are playing now in God's story and therefore with the question whether understood the story rightly.[5]

Thus when we speak of salvation we are also speaking of the Kingdom of God, which includes the inclusion of all peoples regardless of national origin, class, or gender which is prefigured in the community of the Church (cf. Gal. 3:27-28). From this perspective it would seem that offering communion to all regardless of their baptismal status would affirm rather than deny this cardinal point of Christian eschatology, as the open table better prefigures the messianic banquet. Such an argument would also help recover the eschatological significance of the eucharist, an important referent in sacramental theology too often obscured in church history.[6]

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[4] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids) p. 178.
[5] Newbigin, p. 178-179.
[6] For the recovery of eschatology in Eucharistic theology see Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*. It should be mentioned that in the book Wainwright recommends a modified form of Open Communion. For him, the table should be open if in the enactment of the Eucharistic liturgy and the proclamation of the gospel a non-baptized person is compelled to receive Christ and desires to enter the eschatological community. This should be followed quickly by baptism, and if baptism is refused, then the individual would be barred from the table. One who so refused would need to be reminded that the eucharist they received is no longer a blessing but a judgment.

But to make this jump is to separate the soteriological from eschatology. That the Kingdom entails the universal inclusion of peoples into the renewed covenant people must not be denied. Yet the simple affirmation of this truth in liturgical action without also enacting the means by which this inclusion is accomplished results in a loss of the central affirmation of the redemptive work of Christ. The radical inclusivity of Jesus is not a simple affirmation and invitation, but is one that draws people to the crucifixion: "when I am lifted up I will draw all people to myself" (Jn. 12:32). Inclusion must refer not only to the end, participation in the messianic banquet, but also to the process by which all peoples are included. As baptism and eucharist are the ritual actions that express inclusion they must also embody the specific paradigmatic narrative through which we are gathered by Christ: the saving death and resurrection of Jesus.

At this juncture, however, we must take a closer look at this soteriological narrative. Such a narrative begins with Old Testament antecedents in the works of the literary prophets. As we read these documents we begin to see emerge the outlines of a story of judgment upon the covenant people followed by the renewal and restoration of the ruined people of God. The story begins, however, not with judgment, but with the covenant forgetfulness of the LORD's people who in their comfort are faithless in their worship, oppressive toward the poor and the sojourner, promiscuous in their relationships, and enter into unrighteous alliances with pagan empires and nations. They are "in comfort in Zion." This covenant unfaithfulness is judged by the LORD through such events as foreign invasion or even a plague of locusts. In the midst of the crisis God does intervene, raising up a remnant and restoring the fortunes of Zion.[7]

This basic narrative outline of unfaithfulness/crisis/restoration is developed in different ways by different prophetic authors. Eventually there emerges a common expectation of the promised restoration of the people. Among the marks of this redemption will be the rebuilding of the Temple and the renewed presence of the glory of the LORD dwelling therein. There will also be the defeat of the enemies who oppressed them. Yet the nations will also see the glory of God streaming from Zion and will be joined now with the covenant people. This will mark the Day of the LORD and the beginning of God's kingdom. And leading them in this restoration and victory will be God's promised Messiah. It is this eschatological hope that interprets the meaning of the Exile.[8]

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[7]We should also note that this biblical antecedent to the salvation narrative of the passion and resurrection of Jesus has its own antecedent in the Exodus story. The Egyptians live in comfort as they oppress their Hebrew slaves. God intervenes in judgment upon Egypt both in the plagues and in the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Redemption is not in this case of a remnant of the former oppressors, but in the liberation of the Hebrew slaves and their establishment of covenant with God at Sinai. The significance of recalling this "antecedent of the antecedent" is significant in a double way. In light of the Exodus story the plight of the covenant people of the time of the Prophets is an ironic one, as they have forgotten their own history and identity and have opted for the role of the Egyptians. It is also significant in that Jesus, as we shall see, in enacting the prophetic narrative of judgment and restoration in his death and resurrection also enacts a new Exodus.

[8] For this basic outline of Old Testament soteriology and Jesus' appropriation of it I am indebted to the work of N.T. Wright. A popular treatment of his reconstruction of Hebrew soteriology can be found in his second lecture from the series "Evil and the Justice of God" www.westminter-abbey.org /event/lecture/archives/030224_justice_lecture.htm.

Deutero-Isaiah develops the unfaithfulness/crisis/restoration motif in a new direction in the image of the Servant of the LORD (Isaiah 40-55). N.T. Wright comments,

> [The Servant] is clearly Israel, or perhaps we should say Israel-in-person, sharing the vocation of Israel and now sharing the fate of Israel, exiled, crushed, and killed; and yet he also stands over against Israel, so that Israel itself looks on in horror at his fate, and even the remnant within Israel is described as 'those who hear the Servant's voice'. Somehow Isaiah has so redefined the broader problem of evil, of the injustice of the world and the justice of the one creator God, that we now see it, not as a philosopher's puzzle requiring explanation, but as the tragedy of all creation requiring a fresh act from the sovereign creator God, focused on the tragedy of Israel requiring a fresh act from the sovereign covenant God. And, to our amazement and (if we know what we are about) horror, we discover that this fresh act comes into sharp focus in the suffering and death of the Servant. Sharing the fate of Israel in exile, the exile which we know from Genesis 3 onwards is closely aligned with death itself, he bears the sin of the many. He embodies the covenant faithfulness, the restorative justice, of the sovereign God, and with his stripes 'we' - presumably, the 'we' of the remnant, looking on in wonder and fear –'we' are healed.[9]

When we turn to the Gospels the picture that we see emerge is that Jesus fulfills these strands of the prophetic message in his life, death, and resurrection. The various complementary images found in the prophets are enacted by Jesus. Again, let us consider the insights of N.T. Wright:

> In particular, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are declaring, each in their very different ways, that all this was simultaneously Jesus' own intention, in a vocation whose roots went deep into the Old Testament and into his personality, formed in prayer and study from boyhood and confirmed dramatically at his baptism, and the intention of God himself, the God who had long promised that he would return to Jerusalem to rule, to judge, to heal and to save, and who now came to the city with all of that in mind, telling stories about the king who had promised to come back and warning of the consequences of not being ready. He was the hen who longed to gather the chickens under his protective wings. He was the green tree, the only one with life within him, while all around were branches dead and dry, ready for

[9] Wright, lecture 2. p. 7

> burning. He had realized, in that kind of vocation at which one can only stand amazed and awed, that the *peirasmos*, the great 'time of testing' of which prophets and oracles had spoken, was about to burst upon the world like a great tidal wave, and that he had to take its full force upon himself so that everyone else could be spared. 'Watch and pray,' he said to his followers in the garden, 'so that you may not enter the *peirasmos*'; if all he meant was the general advice that after a good meal with rich wines one should say one's prayers lest one be tempted to commit some everyday sin, the scene is reduced to bathos, almost to farce. No: the great, dark, horrible force of evil was bearing down upon him, and Jesus had realized, had long realized, that as Israel's representative it was his task and his alone to do what, according to the same scriptures, Israel's God had said that he and he alone could do. He knelt there, a mile or so from the Gehenna he had predicted as the city's smoldering fate, believing that he had to go ahead, to stand in the breach, to take that fate upon himself. There is no way around this extraordinary, breathtaking combination of theological, personal, cosmic themes. The only way of doing justice to what the gospels are trying to tell us is to grasp the picture in its entirety and swallow it whole.[10]

In other words, in Christ the narrative arc of unfaithfulness/crisis/restoration seen in both the prophetic literature and the Exodus story before it are given their complete iteration. As Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom in both word and action (including, we must add, his table fellowship with outcasts) the unfaithfulness of all, from Pharisee to disciple, is revealed. In his betrayal and death the crisis of human history is brought to its climax and is visited upon the crucified Servant Messiah. In the resurrection God vindicates Jesus, the people of the New Covenant are constituted from many peoples through the sending of the Spirit, and the messianic kingdom is inaugurated.[11]

Yet in the resurrection this soteriological narrative is not merely fulfilled and thus abandoned. In fact, this narrative is made paradigmatic for our inclusion into the inaugurated Kingdom of God. While we cannot bear the crisis of history as did Jesus, we do share in this story as we die to self and rise to new life with him. Hence the New Testament is replete with the language of cross-bearing and suffering with Christ. This

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[10] Wright, lecture 3, "Evil and the Crucified God" p. 4, www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Evil_Justice3.htm.

[11] It may be noted that I have not discussed the theologies of atonement as they develop through the years, beginning with the New Testament documents themselves. These I take in varying degrees to be faithful tropes on the soteriological narrative I have spelled out here. A discussion of the historical theories as they relate to the narrative arc of salvation can be found in Wright, lecture 3, p. 5. Also see James Wm. McClendon in the second volume of his Systematic Theology, *Doctrine* (1994, Abingdon Press, Nashville) pp. 197-327.

narrative is Farwell's "logic of participation" which indeed is both free gift of grace as it has been accomplished for us and the call to cross-bearing discipleship at the same time.

There is no inclusion in the eschatological people of the New Covenant without passing through this narrative arc. Indeed, the soteriological end of restoration, whether the first restoration of Abrahamic Covenant in the Exodus or the establishment of the New Covenant in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (which is the fulfillment and recapitulation of the old covenantal forms), is a covenantal reality constructed through the narrative arc we have suggested here.[12]

The soteriological narrative is mediated to individuals in a variety of ways, including the proclamation of the Gospel, the testimony and witness of Christian people, and interior spiritual experience.[13] Unifying the variety of means of proclamation and experience is the sacramental expression of the narrative arc with the progression from proclamation, to baptism, to communion. Whether evangelism, catechesis, or even the embodied proclamation of covenant faithfulness of the church in mission, proclamation reveals the unfaithfulness of our lives and the graciousness of God in Christ. Baptism, then, corresponds to the time of crisis or judgment. This sense of baptism as crisis that leads to redemption and restoration is clearly biblical and traditional. We see the biblical reference most powerfully in Paul's description of baptism as being buried with Christ in his death (Romans 6:1-6). The eucharist exists within this progression as an expression of the restoration of the covenant in the eschatological fellowship of the church. Retaining this progression gives an objective and ecclesial expression to the varied and multifaceted individual narratives of faith. Our stories, though many, when told through this one saving narrative become one harmonious symphony of the Gospel. Indeed, what may be at stake in dispensing with the canonical narrative progression of baptism and eucharist is the unity of the church as those drawn into the one saving narrative of Christ as opposed to a voluntary association of individualist religious experiences joined by discrete ritual acts all interpreted in different ways through the lens of those individual experiences.

Scriptural Perspectives

Does this understanding of the narrative arc of unfaithfulness/crisis/restoration reflected in the inter-relation of baptism and eucharist help us to read the pertinent texts used to support either the font to table or table to font progression? I would suggest that

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[12] We can even go further to suggest that the original Abrahamic Covenant is constructed by the same narrative arc with the sin after the Flood and the construction of the Tower of Babel as unfaithfulness and the destruction of the Tower as crisis and judgment. Further, the call to Abram to leave Haran can be construed as participation in the crisis for both himself and his family. It is a gracious call, but one that is nevertheless costly. A similar perspective can be observed in the establishment of the Noahic Covenant. Here the contours of the narrative arc should be so apparent as not to require reiteration.

[13] On this see Gordon Smith, *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion and Authentic Transformation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) pp. 107-133. Smith reviews the subject of conversion as it is portrayed in a number of New Testament documents. While there are obvious differences of emphasis, Smith discerns a converging portrait of transformation. These elements are belief in Jesus Christ, repentance, trust in Christ Jesus, transfer of allegiance, baptism, reception of the Holy Spirit, and incorporation into congregational life (which would include admission to communion). It is interesting to notice how Smith's synthesis of New Testament conversion is reflected liturgically in the 1979 rite of Baptism.

it does give us a helpful perspective. The difficulty, however, is the sheer magnitude of material that needs to be considered in dealing with the issue of offering communion to those not baptized. Our views are all too often confined to either giving priority to the stories of Jesus' table fellowship with sinners and tax collectors in the Gospels or Paul's correspondence to the Corinthian church on Eucharistic practice and discipline with a debate over which side has hermeneutical rights to the Last Supper.[14] Often missed are other texts that would help elucidate the subject. Here I have primarily in mind the post-resurrection meals of Jesus, especially in the Lukan material. How do they relate to the question at hand? But also a full discussion would consider the function of meals in the parables of Jesus and the vision of the eschatological marriage feast of the Lamb in the book of Revelation. Unfortunately, in such a brief treatment we cannot do justice to the material. We can, however, take a look at a few texts from the soteriological perspective discussed above, beginning with a brief consideration of the Last Supper.

N.T. Wright in his book *The Challenge of Jesus* discusses the Last Supper in light of Jesus' actions critiquing and re-appropriating first century Jewish symbols of national identity and messianic expectation. Specifically, Wright argues, along with others, that the Last Supper was a symbolic action that completes the action of judgment in the cleansing of the Temple. The Temple had meant "to be the sacrificial meeting of the covenant God and his people, the sign of forgiveness and hope, as God dwelling in their midst as the God of covenant renewal, covenant steadfastness, covenant love."[15] Instead, the Temple had become the focal point of violent messianic expectation, Jewish exceptionalism that eschewed the call to be a "light to the nations," and rigid moralism that inhibited the mercies of God. The cleansing of the Temple is an obvious act of judgment upon the covenant unfaithfulness of the people.

In contrast, the Last Supper is a countersign of restoration. What the Temple meant to symbolize was now to be fulfilled in Jesus. Around him a new covenant people would be gathered. This required nothing less than a new exodus out of the ruins of symbols such as the Temple misappropriated and emptied of their power. The countersign of the Supper pointed to covenant renewed not through violence and exclusion from the saving work of God, but through the non-violent sacrifice of Messiah

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[14] The most simplistic argument that I have encountered in informal discussions (not in this task force, I hasten to add) with those who support a revision of the current practice is that the Bible does not spell out that you have to be baptized to receive communion, therefore it cannot be forbidden. I have two problems with this line of reasoning. First, it seems to rely upon a sort of "proof-texting" and has more in common with scoring a point in a debate than making a well reasoned argument. Second, there may indeed be a text where our canonical progression from font to table does appear. I have in mind Hebrews 6:4-6: "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt." The first participial phrase "have once been enlightened" may be a reference to baptism. The other phrases beginning with "have tasted the heavenly gift," perhaps a reference to eucharist, are then subsequent to "enlightenment." These latter phrases are iterative in the life of the Christian, while the enlightenment is an unrepeatable act as signified by the use of *hapax,* "once." Thus "enlightenment" has chronological priority in this sequence. (See F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1964) p. 120.) Even if this is the case, it is hardly conclusive for those who advocate the canonical position. Nevertheless, we may have the first specific reference to the canonical practice, predating the *Didache*.

[15] Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999) p. 84.

on the cross and pouring forth of mercy. Further, "those who shared the meal with him were the people of the renewed covenant, the people who received 'the forgiveness of sins,' that is, the end of exile. Grouped around him, they constitute the true eschatological Israel."[16]

Viewed in this way, the Last Supper does function within the narrative arc of unfaithfulness/crisis/restoration, with the cleansing of the Temple functioning as the crisis or judgment and the Supper the restoration. Admission to the Supper is not indiscriminate, but was limited to the Twelve. This limitation could simply be a reflection of the biblical concept of election. However, election, beginning with Abraham, is election into covenant. The Twelve are chosen as a sign of the eschatological covenant people as they have participated in Jesus' reenactment and reconstitution of the covenant narrative, the action at the Temple being the latest enactment of the narrative.

Yet the Supper also functions proleptically. There is one final reiteration of the soteriological narrative, the death and resurrection of the Messiah. The Supper points to the final crisis of Jesus dying for the sins of the world as the elements offered are his body broken and his blood poured out. But it also points beyond to the resurrection as the eucharist itself becomes the sacred covenant meal with the risen Lord. This connection is explicit in the Lukan material as the meal at Emmaus is obviously Eucharistic.

This leads us to a neglected strand in the discussion of how open the communion table is meant to be, the post-resurrection meals of Jesus, especially in the material in Luke-Acts. In the final chapter of Luke's gospel we have two meal stories, one, the meal at Emmaus, we have already identified as Eucharistic in content. The other, the meal of broiled fish in Jerusalem (Luke 24:42-43), seems less sacramental and more as a means of pointing out that the resurrected body of Jesus is not merely spirit, but has an aspect of physicality. In both passages, however, eating with the Lord is not at an open table, but one reserved for those whom Jesus has chosen to reveal himself.[17]

In Acts we have two instances[18] where this closed meal fellowship with the resurrected Christ is a sign of being a part of the new apostolic community. The most

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[16] Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, p. 85.

[17] Richard Fabian does refer to the post-resurrection meals in his essay "First the Table, Then the Font," a paper prepared for the Association of Anglican Musicians in 2002. In that essay he writes "So it can hardly surprise us that most New Testament resurrection stories are mealtime scenes. When Jesus' disciples met again to eat together after his crucifixion, their experience convinced them that he was not dead – that instead God had poured out his life like gasoline, setting the world ablaze." Obviously Fabian would not accept the inferences I draw from the resurrection meal stories because our concepts of resurrection diverge so dramatically. The presence of Jesus is relegated to the subjective "experience" of the disciples, and if the fellowship was closed it was not because of Christ's choice but the disciples themselves. Frankly, this points to one of the cardinal difficulties in discussing the literature on "Open Communion," it is not certain to me that all the participants in the debate hold a common understanding of basic Christian vocabulary. I suspect my disagreements with Fr. Fabian would begin long before the question of who should receive communion was ever raised.

[18] The first reference is can be found in Acts 1:4, usually translated "While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father." The word translated "staying", *synalizomenos*, literally means "to take salt with" and is an idiom for either eating together or meeting together. See Zerwick and Grosvenor *A Grammatical Analysis of the New Testament, Vol.1* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974) p. 349. Here, as in both the last chapter of Luke and in Acts 10 apostolicity is tied to post-resurrection table fellowship with Jesus.

significant comes in Peter's discourse at the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10. In rehearsing the narrative of Jesus Peter speaks of the resurrection: "but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:40-41). Here inclusion in the meal with the Lord is, as suggested with the Last Supper, a matter of election as apostolic witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. And, as above, this election should be viewed in terms of their participation in the covenantal narrative arc.

At the heart of the biblical argument for offering communion to everyone irrespective of baptismal status is the open table fellowship of Jesus during his ministry, especially with tax-collectors and sinners. Unlike the restrictive table fellowships of groups such as the Pharisees, Jesus used his table fellowship as a sign of the Kingdom that his ministry had inaugurated. As N.T. Wright explains, "he celebrates the kingdom with all the wrong people, incurring anger and hostility from those who knew in their bones that God's kingdom was about holiness and detachment from evil, never suspecting that evil people could be, and were being, redeemed and rescued."[19] Thus the shock of the Pharisees after the call of Levi (Matthew), "why does you teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matt. 9:11). Such kingdom hospitality is also claimed in the story of the call of Zacchaeus when Jesus invites himself to dine with the chief tax collector (Lk 19:1-10). Zacchaeus does repent and offer to make restitution, but not prior to the invitation. The open call to all irrespective of worthiness or baptismal status is thus being true to this kingdom-sign of Jesus.

While there can be no denying that the table fellowship of Jesus was both at variance with the practice of other groups such as the Pharisees, and that such meals were signs of the kingdom as radically re-envisioned and embodied in Christ, it is not clear how such meals should be understood. Frankly, it would seem that the proponents for offering communion to the unbaptized are making much of what is a paucity of textual material. While there are a number of texts referring to Jesus engaging in meals, they often appear in differing contexts with different theological import. Only a small handful of passages refer to Jesus dining with outcasts and sinners. Central to these are the three synoptic versions of the call of Levi (Mt.9:9-13, Mk. 2:13-17, Lk. 5:27-32) and the call to Zacchaeus (only in Luke). Other meal or eating stories appear in context where the worthiness of the diners is not an issue, such as the feeding of the multitudes, arguably the most explicitly Eucharistic antecedents to the Last Supper. In the feeding of the multitudes the emphasis falls upon the abundance of Christ's provision and, in the synoptic tradition, upon the apostolic command "you give them something to eat." Why so few texts should be given hermeneutical priority in overriding at least nineteen hundred years of the church's Eucharistic practice and discipline has not been made clear.

Yet even if we were to give such weight to passages such as those that highlight the inclusion of sinners and outcasts it would be a misstep to understand such pericopes outside of the covenantal context of discussed above in terms of the narrative arc of salvation. Jesus' meal-sign of the kingdom is a countersign that judges the meal fellowship of groups such as the Pharisees. For such groups, God would fulfill his messianic promises when a pure and faithful remnant of Israel was gathered. This new Israel then would follow messiah into rebellion against the gentile oppressors. The

[19] Wright, Lecture 3.

narrative arc is presupposed by these groups, however the unfaithfulness and judgment phases of the narrative refer to their own moral cleansing of the unworthy. Restoration would then refer to the messiah coming to gather and lead the pure remnant.

Jesus does not so much reject this concept as re-envision it. In Jesus the reconstituted Israel has two referents. First, he is the true remnant of Israel. But he does not express his status as Israel over and against others (*pace* the Pharisees and the Essenes), but in solidarity and mercy toward those who would receive the forgiveness and transforming power of God. This, in part, is the meaning of Jesus' own baptism. Only then in a second and derivative sense does Jesus gather the remnant of sinners, who are the remnant by grace. Yet this remnant is not gathered except from those who have already been formed in the covenantal narrative, the Jews, anticipated in the Exodus and now recapitulated in the unfolding story of Jesus. And the completion of the narrative arc would not be over and against the unworthy, but in a death and resurrection for sinners. In short, they had the narrative context rehearsed in the stories and covenantal practices of first century Judaism by which they could interpret and receive the sign-bearing nature of Jesus meal fellowship.

These meal stories function similarly to the healing stories in the Gospels. (And it is interesting to note that in each of the synoptics the story of the meal after the calling of Levi follows the story of the healing of the paralytic.) Wright comments on these healing stories can be applied to the meal stories as well,

> The rigid – ruthless, one might say – application of certain purity laws meant a restrictive, exclusive community. Jesus' approach was the opposite. His healings were the sign of a radical and healing inclusivism – not simply including everyone in a modern laissez-faire, anything goes fashion, but dealing with the problems at the root so as to bring to birth a truly renewed, restored community whose new life would symbolize and embody the kingdom of which Jesus was speaking.[20]

So we see with the table fellowship, not inclusion in a laissez-faire fashion, but through a new embodiment of the covenant realities held in common by most first century Jews. The conclusions drawn from these passages cannot warrant non-covenantal inclusion in the eucharist today.

Were we to examine the wide variety of scripture references that have relevance we would see similar narrative contours as those spelled out above. The prodigal undergoes the crisis that sends him into the welcoming arms of his father prior to feasting on the fatted calf. Those who worship at the throne of God in what Gregory Dix showed us[21] is a setting reflecting early Christian Eucharistic worship are those "who have come out of the great ordeal," and have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14).

And of course, we have not begun to explore the rich textures of Paul's admonitions regarding the eucharist in his first letter to the Corinthian Church. Here the unfaithfulness judged is the inability to discern the "body", which is contingent upon the

[20] Wright, The Challenge of Jesus, p. 68-69.
[21] Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), p. 32.

reception of the Spirit and being grafted into the ecclesial body through baptism. Thus participation in the eucharist presupposes a prior covenant formation and inclusion. And like Israel of the era of the prophets, unfaithfulness is forgetfulness of the narrative of the Exodus, here expressed as a type of sequential baptism and eucharist:

> I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. (I Cor 10:1-5)

While one cannot point to a specific text commanding baptism prior to the reception of communion, the "logic of participation" is interwoven into the very fabric of the scriptures. The practice of opening communion to those not baptized cannot find solid warrant in the Bible.

Concluding Reflections

As our data gathering has shown, the practice of what is now widely called "Open Communion" is a common practice in much of the Episcopal Church. Certainly the motivation behind much of the changing practice is a well intentioned attempt to be hospitable to visitors and an honest desire for church growth. Nevertheless, I fear that the unexamined assumptions underlying the practice will lead to a number of unintended consequences. Among those consequences will be the emergence of an alien soteriology. Salvation is reduced to affirmation. And soteriology so rendered will be emptied of its transformative power. David Yeago's indictment of contemporary preaching on the atonement speaks to our putative liturgical practice now emerging in our congregations:

> The gospel thus preached is invariably a gospel of affirmation, not transformation. It reassures us but does not make anything happen. The cross of Jesus is proclaimed as the token of our assurance that God is with us "no matter what," a divine presence that enables us to cope with things as they are but does not change anything and therefore in the end reconciles us to things as they are. We have no plausible exegesis of Paul's audacious pronouncement: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" We tend rather to say: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new interpretation: everything remains the same, but we feel quite differently about it."[22]

[22] David Yeago, "Crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate" in Christopher Seitz, ed. *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism*,(Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001) p. 90

The sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist are together the proclamation of the transforming Gospel of Jesus Christ. But the transforming work is not simply that we are accepted and drawn into a new communal meal. It is that we are joined with Jesus Christ through participation in the saving narrative of his death and resurrection. Not to be formed by this narrative, sequentially recognized through the ages in the procession from font to table, is to empty the eucharist of its power. What is left is a communal meal affirming all narratives that each person brings to the table, irrespective of their faithfulness to the gospel. As such, "Open Communion" may well be not the revision of the sacramental practice of the church, but its deconstruction. This new sacramental practice may be heading in the direction of becoming the sacrament of postmodernism; the meta-narrative overthrown by discrete individual narratives. And when we arrive at that point, what we do around the altar of God each week, no matter how "meaningful" or "affirming" it might be, can no longer rightly claim to be the Supper of the Lord.