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A Meal in the Background of John 6:51–58?

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The new paradigm presented by the Society of Biblical Literature Meals in the Greco-Roman World Seminar challenges, among other things, the exegesis of John. Both the "eucharistic overtones" of selected passages in the Gospel of John and the assumption of a cultic meal on the level of the community have been called into question. The Bread of Life discourse (John 6:22–59) can be analyzed as a textual phenomenon that makes use of the imagery of eating and drinking but does not refer to a specific meal practice of early Christians. In this article, I argue that the complex metaphorical network in the Bread of Life discourse rests on conceptual imagery that we might refer to as EATING/DRINKING IS ADOPTING TEACHING. The intensification of the concept of adopting teaching into the language of eating the flesh has several parallels in antiquity. Moreover, this vivid imagery in John 6:53–58 is a conscious provocation of the recipients at the level of the narrated world and part of a typical Johannine misunderstanding scene. In the narrative strategy of John 6, these strong metaphors narratively enact the separation of the believing from the unbelieving disciples. The metaphors do not, however, point directly to specific practices of the believers. The argument will focus on the motif of drinking the blood of Jesus in John 6:53–58. An analysis of the ancient reception of this motif shows that it entered the discourse on meals prior to its influence on the ritual semantics itself. This observation suggests that it was the textual reception of the Gospel of John that influenced the development of a ritual and not the ritual that gave rise to the text.

The Johannine Jesus commands his hearers to eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to have eternal life (John 6:51–58). Many Johannine scholars interpret these comments as references or allusions to a sacramental/eucharistic meal practice in early Christianity.[1] In this article, I will argue that there is *no* specific meal

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[1] See, e.g., Charles H. Cosgrove, "The Place Where Jesus Is: Allusions to Baptism and the Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 35 (1989): 522–39; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1962), 246–48; John M. Perry, "The Evolution of the Johannine Eucharist," *NTS* 39 (1993): 22–35;

in the background of John 6:51–58 but rather that the passage refers in more general terms to the universal human practice of eating and drinking. This universal human practice, in turn, can be identified as the source domain of the metaphor on which the imagery of John 6 is based.

My argument is structured in five parts. I will begin with some preliminary remarks on a new paradigm of analysis for the origins and development of the Christian Eucharist that challenges the traditional interpretation of the Gospel of John as having eucharistic allusions or overtones. This will be followed by observations about the network of metaphors in John 6 in the context of which, I argue, verses 51–58 should be interpreted. I will then, in two steps, propose a new way of understanding Jesus's request to drink his blood and eat his flesh. Finally, I will comment on the influence of John 6 on the development of eucharistic meals in later church history.

I. A New Perspective on Early Christian Meals

The new perspective on early Christian meals began with the studies of Matthias Klinghardt and Dennis E. Smith and continued, for example, in the work of the Society of Biblical Literature Meals in the Greco-Roman World Seminar and in the work of Andrew McGowan, Hal Taussig, Clemens Leonard, and others.[2] The

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Carsten Claussen, "The Eucharist in the Gospel of John and in the *Didache*," in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 135–63; Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 5th ed., THKNT 4 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 176–82; Jean Zumstein, *Das Johannesevangelium*, KEK 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 270–75. See also the references in the discussion of this article in section III.

[2] See Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern*, TANZ 13 (Tübingen: Francke, 1996); Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig, eds., *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Matthias Klinghardt and Hal Taussig, eds., *Mahl und religiöse Identität im frühen Christentum / Meals and Religious Identity in Early Christianity*, TANZ 56 (Tübingen: Francke, 2012); Susan Marks and Hal Taussig, eds., *Meals in Early Judaism: Social Formation at the Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Andrew B. McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); McGowan, "Rethinking Agape and Eucharist in Early North African Christianity," *StLi* 34 (2004): 165–76; McGowan, "Rethinking Eucharistic Origins," *Pacifica* 23 (2010): 173–91; Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009); Clemens Leonhard, *The Jewish Pesach and the Origins of the Christian Easter: Open Questions in Current Research*, SJ 35 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006); Clemens Leonhard and Benedikt Eckhardt, "Art. Mahl V (Kultmahl)," *RAC* 23:1012–1105; Soham Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige: Ritualtheoretische Exegese paulinischer Texte*, TANZ 55 (Tübingen: Francke, 2011); R. Alan Streett, *Subversive Meals: An Analysis of the*

basic principle of this approach is the distinction between practice or form on the one hand, and discourse on the other hand, when it comes to meal rituals. The use of ritual theory in this approach has revealed a methodological problem in earlier and even recent studies on the Eucharist.[3] All knowledge about meal rituals is based on texts, but the primary objective of these texts is not to represent or describe the rituals themselves. The cited studies thus reject the theories of meal typologies of early Christian meals proposed by Hans Lietzmann and others who share this methodological flaw.[4] The starting point of this new paradigm is the meal practices common to gentile, Jewish, and Christian meals of the Greco-Roman era, as they are known from both archaeological and textual sources.[5]

The evening meal gathering had a three-part structure: (1) the *deipnon*, the eating of foodstuff in the narrow sense; (2) the libation ceremony; and (3) the subsequent *symposion* that included food, wine, conversation, discussion, entertainment, banquet music, and so on. Those gathered for the meal generally reclined on *triclinia* or the *sigma*. This reconstruction is based on numerous sociohistorical references in ancient sources.[6] The New Testament evidence suggests that early

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Lord's Supper under Roman Domination during the First Century (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 7–51.

[3] For a critical evaluation of the Pauline term *Lord's Supper* (1 Cor 11:20), see Andrew B. McGowan, "The Myth of the 'Lord's Supper': Paul's Eucharistic Meal Terminology and Its Ancient Reception," *CBQ* 77 (2015): 503–21. In my view, McGowan is right to interpret the term as "an occasional rhetorical construction dependent on immediate context" (503).

[4] See, e.g., Hans Lietzmann, *Messe und Herrenmahl: Eine Studie zur Geschichte der Liturgie*, AKG 8 (Bonn: Marcus & Weber, 1926); Ernst Lohmeyer, "Vom urchristlichen Abendmahl," *TRu* 9 (1937): 168–227; Oscar Cullmann, "Die Bedeutung des Abendmahls im Urchristentum (1936)," in Cullmann, *Vorträge und Aufsätze 1925–1962*, ed. Karlfried Frölich (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966), 505–23; Bernd Kollmann, *Ursprung und Gestalten der frühchristlichen Mahlfeier*, GTA 43 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990); Gerd Theissen, "Sakralmahl und sakramentales Geschehen: Abstufungen in der Ritualdynamik des Abendmahls," in *Herrenmahl und Gruppenidentität*, ed. Martin Ebner, QD 221 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2007), 166–86.

[5] Taussig, "Introduction," in Smith and Taussig, *Meals in the Early Christian World*, 1.

[6] It is not possible to list here all of the geographically and chronologically widespread references in literature, inscriptions, and papyri (e.g., invitations) or all of the archaeological evidence from Italy to Jordan. See the discussions of evidence in Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*; Smith and Taussig, *Meals in the Early Christian World*; Klinghardt and Taussig, *Mahl und religiöse Identität im frühen Christentum*; for the Greco-Roman meal in general, see, e.g., Nicholas R. E. Fisher, "Greek Associations, Symposia, and Clubs" and "Roman Associations, Dinner Parties, and Clubs," in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome*, ed. Michael Grant and Rachel Kitzinger (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1988), 1167–97 and 1199–225; Oswyn Murray, ed., *Sympotica: A Symposium on the Symposion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Inge Nielsen and Hanne S. Nielsen, eds., *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World*, ASMA 1 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press; Oxford: Alden Press, 2001); Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Konrad Vössing, Mensa regia: *Das Bankett beim hellenistischen König und beim römischen Kaiser*, Beiträge

Christian meals should be understood along these same lines.[7] Nonetheless, within this cultural framework, the practice of meals shows great diversity and heterogeneity, for example, regarding the food, the décor, and the ritual acts.

Christian meals were substantial evening repasts with staple foods (not exclusively bread and wine). The liturgical forms and prayers were not fixed until the third century CE. There is no evidence that the so-called words of institution (Jesus's words at the Last Supper as narrated by Matt 26:26–28, Mark 14:22–24, Luke 22:19–20, and by Paul in 1 Cor 11:24–26)[8] were part of the meal prayers. The overtly liturgical use of the words of institution is first documented in the eucharistic prayer of the newly ordained bishop in the Apostolic Tradition, which apparently dates to the fourth century.[9]

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zur Altertumskunde 193 (Munich: Saur, 2004); Vössing, ed., *Das römische Bankett im Spiegel der Altertumswissenschaften* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008); for the Jewish meal as part of Greco-Roman meal practice, see esp. the articles in Marks and Taussig, *Meals in Early Judaism*; Leonhard and Eckhardt, "Art. Mahl V (Kultmahl)," 1054–74; Clemens Leonhard, "Brotbrechen als Ritualelement formeller Mähler bei den Rabbinen und in der Alten Kirche," in *"Let the Wise Listen and Add to Their Learning" (Prov. 1:5): Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday*, ed. Constanza Cordoni de Gmeinbauer and Gerhard J. Langer, SJ 90 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 501–19.

[7] For instance, the following elements are typical of the Greco-Roman *deipnon/symposion*: The use of verbs like κατάκειμαι (Mark 2:15; Matt 14:3; Luke 5:29; 7:37; 1 Cor 8:10), ἀνάκειμαι (Mark 6:20; 14:18; 16:14; Matt 9:10; 26:7, 20; Luke 22:27; John 6:11; 12:2; 13:23, 28), συνανάκειμαι (Mark 2:15; 6:22; Matt 9:10; 14:9; Luke 7:49; 14:10, 15), κατακλίνω (Luke 7:36; 9:14–15; 14:18; 24:30), ἀνακλίνω (Mark 6:39; Matt 8:11; 14:9; Luke 7:36 [A W Θ Ψ f^{13} Byz]; 12:37; 13:29), and ἀναπίπτω (Mark 6:40; 8:6; Matt 15:35; Luke 11:37; 14:10; 17:7; 22:14; John 6:10; 13:12) refers to reclining; note also the use of the verb στρωννύω in Mark 14:15 and Luke 22:12—related to στόρνυμι, which is used to describe the preparation of dining couches (see, e.g., Herodotus, *Hist.* 6.139.3; Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 4.138b; 6.239b [= Diodorus of Sinope]); 1 Cor 11–12, Luke 14:7, 22:24–30, and John 13–15 refer to the typical content of sympotic table talk or social conflicts and values connected with meals (see Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 75–97, 153–74, 286–96; for John, see George L. Parsenios, *Departure and Consolation: The Johannine Farewell Discourses in Light of Greco-Roman Literature*, NovTSup 117 [Leiden: Brill, 2005]); singing at the symposium (see Mark 14:26 par.) is typical of Greco-Roman meal practice (cf. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft,* 99–129); note also the typical Greco-Roman meal terminology δεῖπνον (Mark 6:21; 12:39 par.; Luke 14:12, 16, 17, 24; John 12:2, 4) and δειπνέω (Luke 17:8; Rev 3:20); the phrase μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι (1 Cor 11:25; Luke 22:20) separates the *deipnon* (full meal) from the following symposium, whereas the ritual actions of Jesus narrated in 1 Cor 11:25, Luke 22:20, and Mark 14:23–25 par. mark the transition betweeen those two parts (see below).

[8] The term "words of institution" is used here to refer to these words due to the lack of accurate alternatives. However, the term is problematic because it was originally associated with "monocausally-historicizing" (Klinghardt) hypotheses concerning the development of the Eucharist. See Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 2–3.

[9] Cf. Paul Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo, 2010), 50–51. In the beginning of the third century, Tertullian knows of a distribution of eucharistic food in the morning (Tertullian, *Cor.* 3.3; *Or.* 19), but this cannot serve as evidence for a celebration

II. The Anachronism of "Eucharistic" Interpretations of John 6

Consequently, at the time when the Gospel of John was written there is no evidence to suggest that there existed a "cultic" Christian ritual in the sense of the later Eucharist in which bread and wine were consumed and symbolically interpreted as the body and blood of Christ. To presuppose such a ritual requires a circular argument.[10] The crucial point concerning the words of institution is that when the narrated Jesus speaks about the bread and cup, he is not interpreting the so-called elements, bread and wine, but his complete ritual action. Moreover, Jesus's words in the four Gospels show great differences in syntax and meaning and, in my view, have to be understood in the context of the narrated world of the biblical texts. For example, the words over the cup in Mark 14:24 and Matt 26:28 refer to a *proposis* ritual whereas Luke 22:20 clearly refers to a libation ritual.[11] From this it follows

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of the Eucharist in the morning and an independent, noneucharistic *agapē* meal in the evening. On the contrary, Tertullian understands "eucharistic" meals to be common meals in the evening (see *Apol*. 39; *Ux*. 2.4.2; 2.8.8; *Jejun*. 17.2–3). About fifty years later, however, the writings of Cyprian include the earliest proof of a celebration of the Eucharist in the morning that is independent of the *deipnon*/*symposion* in the evening (Cyprian, *Ep.* 63.16). This does not mean that before Cyprian there was no worship in the morning. Morning liturgies, however, were noneucharistic in the beginning. Only when the communities grew too big for celebrating a *symposion*/*convivium* in the evening did the celebration of the Eucharist shift to the morning. The development of the ritual form of the Eucharist that one can observe in the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian in the late second and early third centuries is regionally related to North Africa (Carthage). All in all, we have to assume a complex and inconsistent evolution from the *deipnon*/*symposion* to the eucharistic Mass in the third and fourth centuries. In a short period of time, the community meal became an act "der individuellen Heilsvergewisserung und Heilsaneignung" (Martin Wallraff, "Christliche Liturgie als religiöse Innovation in der Spätantike," in *Liturgie und Ritual in der alten Kirche: Patristische Beiträge zum Studium der gottesdienstlichen Quellen der alten Kirche*, ed. W. Kinzig, U. Volp, and J. Schmidt, Studien der Patristischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft 11 [Leuven: Peeters, 2011], 69–97, here 89). See also Clemens Leonhard, "Morning *salutationes* and the Decline of Sympotic Eucharists in the Third Century," *ZAC* 18 (2014): 420–42.

[10] For a detailed explanation of this view in scholarship, see Jan Heilmann, *Wein und Blut: Das Ende der Eucharistie im Johannesevangelium und dessen Konsequenzen*, BWANT 204 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2014), 9–20.

[11] In the context of a meal, the *libation* is a ritual pouring of liquid which, together with a sung prayer, marks the transition from the *deipnon* to the symposium (see, e.g., Xenophon, *Symp.* 2.1; *Anab.* 6.1.5–6; Plutarch, *Quaest. conv*. 1.1 (*Mor.* 615b); Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 4.149c; P.Lond. 7.2193; IG 2.2:1338). The term *proposis* refers to the well-documented practice of drinking a sip of the still unmixed wine at the beginning of the symposium (see, e.g., Athenaeus, *Deipn*. 15.693c/d [= Theophrastus]), which could be done from one cup to emphasize table fellowship (see, e.g., Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 10.504a [= Menander]; Pollux, *Onom*. 6.31; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll*. 8.12). For further reading on the interpretation of the words of institution, see Matthias Klinghardt, "Bund und Sündenvergebung: Ritual und literarischer Kontext in Mt 26," in *Mahl und religiöse Identität*,

that an early eucharistic ritual in which the participants consumed bread and wine as if they were flesh and blood of Christ cannot be deduced from the words of institution.

These points suggest that the eucharistic interpretation of John 6:51–58 stems from an anachronistic understanding of early Christian eucharistic rituals. The common notion of "eucharistic overtones" in Johannine scholarship has been challenged by the work of the SBL Meals seminar.[12] According to the results of the SBL seminar, this approach seems inadequate for the analysis of, on the one hand, the relationship between John 6:51–58 and the ritual life of early Christianity and, on the other, of the relationship between John 6:51–58 and the *differing* accounts of the words of institution in the Synoptics. The results of the work of the SBL seminar remind us to determine carefully the relationship between text and ritual in each account of the Last Supper. Thus, for heuristic reasons, distinguishing among the following elements is essential for interpreting "meal texts" in the New Testament:

1. Early Christian meals that were actually performed
2. The (literary) discourse on meals that is represented in texts "which follow their own discursive … logic respectively"[13]
3. The narrative enactment of the meal practice of Jesus
4. Textual phenomena that make use of imagery related to eating and drinking but do not refer to a specific practice of meals that were actually performed.

I will return to these differentiations after analyzing John 6:51–58 in the context of the metaphoric network in John 6.

III. The Metaphoric Network in John 6

I leave aside the literary-critical debate about verses 51–58, as recent research has decided in favor of the literary unity of John 6.[14] Instead, I will focus on the

159–90; Klinghardt, "Der vergossene Becher: Ritual und Gemeinschaft im lukanischen Mahlbericht," *Early Christianity* 4 (2012): 33–58; summarized in Heilmann, *Wein und Blut*, 85–104.

[12] For an overview of the issue of "eucharistic overtones" in the exegesis of the Gospel of John, see Heilmann, *Wein und Blut*, 2–8. The SBL seminar also challenges the question of a supposed replacement of "the Eucharist" in John 13. If the words of institution do not prove a "cultic" ritual in which the early Christians consumed bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ, the foot washing should be seen merely as another variant caused by the different narrative concept of the Fourth Gospel. It is a phenomenon that should be compared to other differences between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics, for example, the table talk in Luke 22:24–37 and that in the Johannine Farewell Discourse.

[13] Klinghardt, "Bund," 162 (my translation).

[14] See, e.g., Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, HNT 6 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,

metaphoric network of John 6. Ulrich Busse, Ruben Zimmermann, and Jan G. van der Watt have described the numerous, interrelated metaphors in John 6. They argue that verse 27 introduces the metaphorical level of the Bread of Life discourse and that the center of this network is the "I am" saying in verse 35.[15]

The source domain of the metaphors is formed by the practice of eating rather than by the materiality of food.[16] This view is supported by the use of the lexeme βρῶσις in verse 27. Unlike the lexeme βρῶμα ("food"), βρῶσις refers to the practice of eating, as numerous passages in the New Testament and other ancient sources show.[17] The imagery that forms the basis for the metaphoric network of John 6 is made explicit in verse 51: whoever *eats* of the living bread that came down from heaven will live forever. In other words, in the thought world of the Gospel of John, whoever receives the incarnated word and believes in it will live forever. For heuristic purposes only, this idea may be conceptualized by the following metalinguistic definition: According to the *conceptual metaphor theory* of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, the basic conceptual metaphor EATING/DRINKING IS ADOPTING TEACHING is the conceptual basis on which the complex metaphor network in the Bread of Life discourse is formed. The term "basic conceptual metaphor" refers to cognitive concepts that shape communication and perception. Lakoff and Johnson's basic example ARGUMENT IS WAR, for example, suggests that most descriptions of "fighting with words" are conceptualized with metaphors taken from the

2005), 365; Thyen, "Über die Versuche, die sogenannte 'eucharistische Rede' (Joh 6,51c–58) als redaktionelle Interpolation auszuscheiden," in *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum*, WUNT 214 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 539–47; Johannes Beutler, "Zur Struktur von Johannes 6," in *Studien zu den johanneischen Schriften*, SBAB 25 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1998), 247–62; Beutler, "Joh 6 als christliche 'relecture' des Pascharahmens im Johannesevangelium," in *Damit sie das Leben haben (Joh 10,10): Festschrift für Walter Kirchschläger zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Ruth Scoralick (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2007). For a detailed discussion, see Heilmann, *Wein und Blut*, 155–61.

[15] Ulrich Busse, *Das Johannesevangelium: Bildlichkeit, Diskurs und Ritual*, BETL 162 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 273–402; Ruben Zimmermann, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium: Die Christopoetik des vierten Evangeliums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Joh 10*, WUNT 171 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 407–46; Jan G. van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John*, BibInt 47 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 111–38; van der Watt, "I Am the Bread of Life: Imagery in John 6:32–51," *AcT* 2 (2007): 186–204. See also Jörg Frey, "Das Bild als Wirkungspotenzial: Ein rezeptionsästhetischer Versuch zur Funktion der Brot-Metapher in Johannes 6," in *Bildersprache verstehen: Zur Hermeneutik der Metapher und anderer bildlicher Sprachformen*, ed. Ruben Zimmermann, Übergänge 38 (Munich: Fink, 2000), 331–61, here 344.

[16] For the following discussion, see further Heilmann, *Wein und Blut*, 144–54, 174–200.

[17] See ibid., 145 n. 198, for numerous references, most notably in the LXX: Gen 1:29, 2:9, Job 33:20, Ps 13:14, etc., Wis 4:5, Isa 55:10, Jer 15:13, 19:17, 41:20. In the New Testament, see Matt 6:19–20, Rom 14:17, 1 Cor 8:4, 2 Cor 9:10; see also Josephus, *A.J.* 1.13.2 §230; 1.20.2 §334; Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1118A; Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 2.2 (635c).

source domain "war."[18] Similarly, the conceptual metaphor EATING/DRINKING IS ADOPTING TEACHING describes a concept which shapes communication about the reception of teaching (in oral or written form), one that is widely attested in ancient sources.[19]

Close parallels to the imagery of John 6 can be found especially in the Prophets and in Jewish wisdom tradition.[20] For example, Jeremiah says that "your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart" (Jer 15:16). Even closer to John 6 is the imagery in Isa 55:1–3, 10–11.

> [1]Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. [2]Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. [3]Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.… [10]For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, [11]so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Here one finds the following motifs: coming to the water as someone who is thirsty, eating the word of god that comes down from heaven like bread for sustenance. The book of Sirach explicitly associates eating and drinking with receiving instruction: "She [wisdom] will feed him with the bread of learning, and give him the water of wisdom to drink" (Sir 15:3). Moreover, in chapter 24 one finds the motif that wisdom came down to earth (v. 3), the motif of coming to wisdom (v. 19), and the following personification of wisdom, which is an important pre-text of John 6:35: "Those who eat of me will hunger for more, and those who drink of me will thirst for more" (Sir 24:21). There is also evidence in New Testament, early Christian, early Jewish, and rabbinic sources that drinking metaphorically conceptualizes the receiving of teaching. An impressive example is m. ʾAbot 1:4, where Yose ben

[18] See, e.g., George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[19] See, e.g., Mark 6–8 (cf. Matthias Klinghardt, "Boot und Brot: Zur Komposition von Mk 3,7–8,21," *BTZ* 19 [2002]: 183–202); Col 4:6; Heb 6:4–5; Rev 2:17; Barn. 10.11, 11.11; Ign. *Trall.* 6.1; Gos. Thom. 28 (P.Oxy. 1.14–17); Acts Paul (P.Bodm. 41.3.14–15; P.Hamb. 4.5); Aristophanes, *Nub.* 523; Philo, *Legat.* 2.86; Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.4.5; 2.5.18; 3.1.5; 10.1.4; 10.6.25, etc.; Seneca, *Ep.* 84.5–6; Aelian, *Var. hist.* 13.22; Ovid, *Pont.* 3.4.53–56; Artemidorus Daldianus, *Onir.* 2.45; Macarius, *Apocr.* 2.12.6; Justin, *Dial.* 120.1–2; Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.7.6; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.6.45–46; Gen. Rab. 70.5.

[20] Apart from the sources discussed in the following, see Ezek 2:8–3:11 (cf. the reception of Ezek 2:8–3:3 in Rev 10:9–10), Prov 3:13–20, 9:2–17.

Yoezer says, "May your house be a meeting house for Sages …, and drink their words thirstily."[21]

In classical sources the evidence in Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 347e, is of particular interest. According to Athenaeus's account, Aeschylus called his tragedies the slices of fish or meat of the great Homeric banquets (τεμάχη τῶν Ὁμήρου μεγάλων δείπνων). Also significant is the striking imagery in Aristophanes's comedy *The Acharnians*. Line 484 uses the metaphor of "gulping" Euripides (καταπιὼν Εὐριπίδην). In all of these examples, the language of eating is used metaphorically to refer to adopting teaching, without reference to an actual meal or physical eating. This suggests that the conceptual metaphor EATING/DRINKING IS ADOPTING TEACHING was well known and therefore could also plausibly be seen as the basis of the imagery in John 6:51–58.

IV. Drinking the Blood of Jesus and Eating His Flesh: A Metaphor?

The majority of exegetes hold that verses 51–58 are primarily sacramental rather than metaphorical due to the concrete language of the passage.[22]

[21] Moreover, see 1 Cor 3:1–2; Heb 5:11–14; 1 Pet 2:2–3; 1QH XIII; b. Hag. 3a; m. 'Abot 1:11, 2:8; Justin, *Dial.* 120.2.

[22] For further detail on the following, see Heilmann, *Wein und Blut*, 167–73, 200–240. In contrast, see James D. G. Dunn, "John VI—a Eucharistic Discourse?," *NTS* 17 (1971): 328–38, here 338. My interpretation, however, differs from Dunn's thesis that the imagery of eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood refers to "the believing reception of the Spirit of Christ." Dunn's interpretation constricts the significance of the imagery unnecessarily. See the short evaluation of Dunn's thesis by Silke Petersen, "Jesus zum 'Kauen': Das Johannesevangelium, das Abendmahl und die Mysterienkulte," in *"Eine gewöhnliche und harmlose Speise"? Von der Entwicklungen frühchristlicher Abendmahlstraditionen*, ed. Judith Hartenstein, Silke Petersen, and Angela Standhartinger (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), 113 n. 26. In my view, Jesus's correction in verse 63 (the verse forms the basis of Dunn's argument) refers solely to the materialistic misunderstanding of the unbelieving disciples and does not function as an interpretation of the imagery. The interpretation of the imagery is given by Peter in verse 68 (see below). See also David Gibson, "Eating Is Believing? On Midrash and the Mixing of Metaphors in John 6," *Themelios* 27 (2002): 5–15; John Bowman, "Metaphorically Eating and Drinking the Body and Blood," *AbrN* 22 (1983–1984): 1–6; Robert Kysar, *Voyages with John: Charting the Fourth Gospel* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 200–215.

That the passage must be understood nonmetaphorically is often postulated in biblical exegesis. See, e.g., Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, WUNT 2/78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 111–12; Jesper Tang Nielsen, *Die kognitive Dimension des Kreuzes: Zur Deutung des Todes Jesu im Johannesevangelium*, WUNT 2/263 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 265–66. Although Jane S. Webster emphasizes that "the eucharistic tradition does not necessarily determine the meaning" of John 6:51–58 (*Ingesting Jesus: Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John*, AcBib 6 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature,

Consequently, they understand Jesus's words to be referring to a meal in which bread and wine are identified with Jesus's body and blood because a literal interpretation is also impossible. In their argument, they refer to the semantics of the verb τρώγω ("munch"). This meaning, in their view, precludes a metaphorical meaning of verses 51–58, though why this should be the case is not explained.[23] It is noticeable that in many cases these exegetes postulate that the section makes sense only against the background of "the Eucharist."[24] The following arguments can be made against this view:

1. Semantically, the Greek verb τρώγω does not at all preclude a metaphorical meaning of the passage. Indeed, there are several sources that attest a metaphoric use of the verb, as Hugo Blümner has shown.[25]

2. The historicity of cultic meals with features such as theophagy, *sparagmos,* and *omophagy*, which are sometimes presented as an analogy to the meal in the background of John 6,[26] is highly controversial. According to Benedikt Eckhardt, it is difficult to prove that such rituals took place.[27] The motif of drinking the blood of humans or the accusation of holding Thyestic meals is a common literary topos used for polemical purposes and therefore may not be a description of a specific ritual that was actually performed.[28]

2003], 84), she still assumes a connection between the ingesting imagery and "the eucharistic tradition" (153).

[23] See, e.g., Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, NovTSup 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 89–93; Helge K. Nielsen, "John's Understanding of the Death of Jesus," in *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives; Essays from the Scandinavian Conference on the Fourth Gospel in Aarhus 1997*, ed. Johannes Nissen and Sigfred Pedersen, JSNTSup 182 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 232–54, here 243.

[24] A particularly striking example can be found in the commentary of Christian Dietzfelbinger, who argues against a noneucharistic reading of John 6:51–58: "Christians of the New Testament period could not understand John 6:51ff. as other than referring to the Lord's Supper" (*Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 2 vols., ZBK 4 [Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2001], 170 [my translation]).

[25] See Hugo Blümner, *Studien zur Geschichte der Metapher im Griechischen: Über Gleichniss und Metapher in der attischen Komödie* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1891), 52–53, with reference among others to Aristophanes, *Ran.* 367; *Vesp.* 158, 586, 672. See also the striking examples in Aristophanes, *Nub.* 924; Aristotle, *Metaph.* 3.1001A; and Sotades, *Lyricus* 15.15.

[26] See, e.g., Petersen, "Jesus zum 'Kauen'"; Esther Kobel, *Dining with John: Communal Meals and Identity Formation in the Fourth Gospel and Its Historical and Cultural Context*, BibInt 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 231–36; Kobel, "The Various Tastes of Johannine Bread and Blood: A Multiperspective Reading of John 6," in *Decisive Meals: Table Politics in Biblical Literature*, ed. Nathan MacDonald, Luzia Sutter Rehmann, and Kathy Ehrensperger, LNTS 449 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 88–92.

[27] See Leonhard and Eckhardt, "Art. Mahl V (Kultmahl)," 1012–51.

[28] See further Mark J. Edwards, "Some Early Christian Immoralities," *AncSoc* 23 (1992): 71–82; Andrew B. McGowan, "Eating People: Accusations of Cannibalism against Christians in

3. The close connection between wine and blood in the ancient world is a scholarly chimera based mainly on problematic conclusions derived from rhetorical figures in a few literary sources. The occasional rhetorical play with the color of blood and red wine does not mean that blood and wine were always or even often associated in the ancient world.[29] Further, the lexeme σάρξ ("flesh") in John 6:51–58 does not function as a reference to the *meat* of the cooked Passover, as some scholars assume based on the references to the Passover in the Johannine passion narrative (ch. 19).[30] The more common term for such meat would have been κρέας ("meat") as in LXX Exod 16:3, 8, 12, which rather denoted roasted, edible *meat,* while σάρξ is more often used for the "living" flesh.[31] Jesus's invitation to eat his *flesh* (σάρξ) is even more scandalous because he requests his audience to eat and drink him while he is still alive.[32]

4. As shown in section III, both the imagery of drinking and the intensification of the metaphoric language of adopting teaching in the sense of eating flesh have parallels in the ancient sources (see esp. Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 347e; Aristophanes, *Ach.* 484).

5. There are significant differences between the so-called words of institution and the predications in John 6:51–58.[33] Regardless of whether the demonstrative

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the Second Century," *JECS* 2 (1994): 413–42; Annette Keck, Inka Kording, and Anja Prochaska, eds., *Verschlungene Grenzen: Anthropophagie in Literatur und Kulturwissenschaften*, Literatur und Anthropologie 2 (Tübingen: Narr, 1999); Daniel Fulda and Walter Pape, eds., *Das andere Essen: Kannibalismus als Motiv und Metapher in der Literatur*, Rombach Wissenschaften: Litterae 70 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2001); J. Albert Harrill, "Cannibalistic Language in the Fourth Gospel and Greco-Roman Polemics of Factionalism (John 6:52–66)," *JBL* 127 (2008): 133–58, https://doi.org/10.2307/25610110; Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians: Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 161–81; Heilmann, *Wein und Blut*, 172 n. 320.

[29] See further Heilmann, *Wein und Blut*, 69–75.

[30] See, e.g., Christine Schlund, *"Kein Knochen soll gebrochen werden": Studien zur Bedeutung und Funktion des Pesachfests in den Texten des frühen Judentums und im Johannesevangelium*, WMANT 107 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2005), 139–72.

[31] See the sources cited in LSJ, s.v. "σάρξ."

[32] Although the studies of Kobel and Webster are valuable in other respects, they are both based on this presupposition (Kobel, *Dining with John*, 178–86, 231–37, 251–70; Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*, esp. 34, 76–79, 148–49). It is also misleading to interpret Jesus's request to drink his blood in 6:53–56 as a request to drink his blood shed on the cross in 19:34, contra Joseph A. Grassi, "Eating Jesus' Flesh and Drinking His Blood: The Centrality and Meaning of John 6:51–58," *BTB* 17 (1987): 28–30.

[33] A large majority of scholars suggest that John 6:51–58 contains a reference to the words of institution. See, e.g., Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 4 vols., HThKNT 4 (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1965–1984), 2:91; Perry, "Evolution of the Johannine Eucharist," 22–23; Kobel, "Various Tastes," 85–86. A few scholars argue against this: Craig R. Koester, "John Six and the Lord's Supper," *LQ* 4 (1990): 419–37; Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, PilNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 296–98; Maarten J. J. Menken, "Joh 6,51c–58: Eucharist or Christology?," *Bib* 74 (1993): 1–25; Mira Stare, *Durch ihn Leben: Die Lebensthematik*

pronoun τοῦτο in Matt 26:26–29, Mark 14:22–26, Luke 22:15–20, and 1 Cor 11:23–26 refers to the physical bread or more likely interprets the narrated acts performed by Jesus,[34] the different order of subject and predicative noun is striking (τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου [Mark 14:22 par.] vs. ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος [John 6:51]/ἡ γὰρ σάρξ μου ἀληθής ἐστιν βρῶσις [John 6:55]). As Klinghardt has shown, the subject and predicative noun in the predications of both the words of institution and John 6 are arranged in a fixed order: "the notorious copula 'ἐστι' is not a mathematical equal sign that expresses ontological equivalence."[35] The specification with the adjective ἀληθής in 6:55, which indicates metaphorical language in the Gospel of John,[36] can be explained against the background of the frequent occurrence of the motif of the true testimony in the Gospel of John (3:33; 4:18; 5:31–32; 8:13, 14, 17, 26; 10:41; 19:35; 21:24). There is more evidence, however, for the thesis that the words of institution are not in the background of John 6:51–58.

Exegetes who postulate a literary dependence of John 6:51–58 on the words of institution see in the giving of bread in verse 51e a reference to the *giving* of Jesus's σῶμα. This idea can be countered by the following arguments: The use of the verb δίδωμι in verse 51e develops the earlier use of δίδωμι in John 6 (cf. verse 27 and the citation of Exod 16:15 in verse 31); it does not have to refer to the words of institution. Furthermore, the giving of Jesus's σῶμα occurs only in the longer version of the words of institution in Luke 22:19. Neither 1 Cor 11:24 nor Mark 14:22 nor Matt 26:26 implies that the mention of Jesus's σῶμα is a reference to the giving of Jesus's σῶμα at the cross.[37] If, as numerous scholars agree, the longer version of the Lukan

in Joh 6, NTAbh NS 49 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2004), 206–19; Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 367–70; Meredith J. C. Warren, *My Flesh Is Meat Indeed: A Nonsacramental Reading of John 6:51–58* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 82–84. Frequently, however, scholars do not clearly differentiate between the question of the intertextual relationship between John 6:51–58 and the words of institution, on the one hand, and the question of whether John 6:51–58 refers to a specific meal ritual labeled "the Eucharist," on the other.

[34] See Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 4 vols., EKKNT 7 (Zurich: Benziger, 1999), 3:34–38; Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 4 vols., EKKNT 1 (Zurich: Benziger, 2002), 4:116; Luz, "Das Herrenmahl im Neuen Testament," *BK* 57 (2002): 2–8, here 4–5; Jens Schröter, *Das Abendmahl: Frühchristliche Deutungen und Impulse für die Gegenwart*, SBS 210 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2006), 128–30; Schröter, "Die Funktion der Herrenmahlsüberlieferungen im 1. Korintherbrief: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Rolle der 'Einsetzungsworte' in frühchristlichen Mahltexten," *ZNW* 100 (2009): 78–100, here 93; Klinghardt, "Der vergossene Becher," 56.

[35] Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 439 (my translation).

[36] See Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, "Klartext in Bildern: ἀληθινός κτλ., παροιμία – παρρησιά, σημεῖον als Signalwörter für eine bildhafte Darstellungsform im Johannesevangelium," in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language*, ed. Jörg Frey, Jan G. van der Watt, and Ruben Zimmermann, WUNT 2/200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 70.

[37] The verb δίδωμι in the narrator's voice in Mark 14:22 and parallels is simply a reference to the common gesture of opening the meal.

words of institution is secondary,[38] it is unlikely that John would have been familiar with Luke's distinctive form of the words of institution, which are absent from the shorter version, which was likely closer to the form that would have circulated prior to the time the Fourth Gospel was written.

Thus, the combination of bread and flesh can be explained by positing an allusion in the Bread of Life discourse to LXX Exod 16, where bread and flesh (vv. 3, 8, 12) occur together. As demonstrated decisively by Gary A. Phillips,[39] the bread in John 6:51e is to be read as a metaphor for Jesus's teaching, which he himself embodies. The future tense δώσω (v. 51e) indicates that John 6:51–58 functions as a proleptic reference to Jesus's teaching in the following gospel text, particularly in the Farewell Discourse (chs. 14–17).[40] Here in the Farewell Discourse, Jesus *teaches* the disciples about his death and its implications for them. In this sense, ingesting the flesh and blood of Jesus means "to be willing to share with him in his sufferings and death as a factor of discipleship faithfulness" and is also a "close parallel to Mark 8[:34–35]."[41] In the Gospel of John, however, "death as a factor of discipleship faithfulness" does not mean martyrdom in the usual sense but the *social death* of the disciples who believe in Jesus and will therefore be hated by the world (see 15:18–16:4). In the Fourth Gospel, as others have shown, the death of Jesus can be interpreted as a consequence of his open (παρρησίᾳ) teaching of the *logos* of God (see 7:4, 26; 11:54; 18:19–20).[42] He put his life at risk for his friends by speaking openly to the world (see 15:13).[43]

[38] The shorter version of the Lukan words of institution is the *lectio difficilior* and the *lectio brevior*. There is no conclusive argument for the assumption that a scribe has erased τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον … ἐκχυννόμενον in Luke 22:19–20. See further Martin Rese, "Zur Problematik von Kurz- und Langtext in Luk. xxii. 17 ff.," *NTS* 22 (1975): 15–31; Matthias Klinghardt, *Das älteste Evangelium und die Entstehung der kanonischen Evangelien*, 2 vols., TANZ 60 (Tübingen: Francke, 2015), 1019–28.

[39] Cf. Gary A. Phillips, "This Is a Hard Saying: Who Can be Listener to It? Creating a Reader in John 6," *Semeia* 26 (1983): 23–56, here 37–51. I owe this reference to Adele Reinhartz.

[40] The relative clause ὃν ἐγὼ δώσω ("that I will give") refers to the bread. Thus, Jesus does not say that he will *give his flesh* (contra, e.g., Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*, passim; Warren, *My Flesh Is Meat Indeed*, passim). Some older translations are based on textual variants.

[41] Paul N. Anderson, review of *Ingesting Jesus: Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John*, by Jane S. Webster, *Int* 59 (2005): 432; see also Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 367–70; J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 396, 402.

[42] For further reading, see Michael Labahn, "Die παρρησία des Gottessohnes im Johannesevangelium: Theologische Hermeneutik und philosophisches Selbstverständnis," in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums: Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditionsgeschichtlicher Perspektive*, ed. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle, WUNT 175 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 321–63.

[43] The verb τίθημι in 15:13 should not be understood in the passive sense of "lay down his life," as most of the English translations suggest, but—following ancient conceptions of friendship—in the active sense of a person risking his or life, which could include death. See Jens Schröter, "Sterben für die Freunde: Überlegungen zur Deutung des Todes Jesu im Johannesevangelium," in *Religionsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments: Festschrift für Klaus Berger zum 60.*

V. Evidence for a Metaphorical Interpretation of John 6:51–58 from Its Context and from Its History of Reception

The context of John 6 supports the metaphorical interpretation of verses 51–58. Those who argue in favor of a sacramental interpretation refer to the meal setting at the beginning of the chapter, the feeding of the five thousand (vv. 1–15): the setting of the narrative in proximity to the Passover (v. 4), the absolute use of the verb εὐχαριστέω in verse 11, and the analeptic reference by the narrator to "the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks [ἔφαγον τὸν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσαντος τοῦ κυρίου]" (v. 23). These elements, which have their own text-critical problems,[44] are interpreted as "eucharistic overtones" and are understood to refer to the Synoptic accounts of Jesus's last (Passover) meal with his disciples.[45] At least two arguments, however, speak against this view.

1. The verb εὐχαριστέω refers primarily to the common Jewish practice of thanking (blessing) God for bread prior to eating a meal (see Did. 9:1; 10:1, 7)[46] and should not be interpreted as "eucharistic language" at such an early stage in the history of Christianity. The absolute use of εὐχαριστέω can also be found in Mark 8:6 (cf. also Matt 15:36). To assume the use there as "eucharistic"—that is, referring to a sacramental meal practice in early Christianity—is a circular argument. Moreover, the closest analogy of verse 11 is neither the story of the Last Supper nor the meal at the lake (John 21:13) but "the raising of Lazarus, where thanksgiving

Geburtstag, ed. Axel von Dobbeler, Kurt Erlemann, and Roman Heiligenthal (Tübingen: Francke, 2000), 263–87; Zimmermann, *Christologie der Bilder*, 252, 390–95; Thomas Söding, "Einsatz des Lebens: Ein Motiv johanneischer Soteriologie," in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Gilbert Van Belle, BETL 200 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 363–84. See further Heilmann, *Wein und Blut*, 201–9, 273–78.

[44] Verse 4 is missing in minuscule 1634 and a few other manuscripts; εὐχαριστήσαντος τοῦ κυρίου is missing in the famous Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D 05), in majuscule 092 and a few other majuscules, in some Old Latin manuscripts, and in the Syriac manuscripts—thus a typical Western noninterpolation that can, with good reason, be interpreted as older compared to the "majority text." See, e.g., Michael Wade Martin, "Defending the 'Western Non-interpolations': The Case for an Anti-separationist *Tendenz* in the Longer Alexandrian Readings," *JBL* 124 (2005): 269–94, https://doi.org/10.2307/30041013, with further references; Klinghardt, *Das älteste Evangelium*, passim.

[45] See, e.g., Perry, "Evolution of the Johannine Eucharist," 23–24; Thomas Popp, *Grammatik des Geistes: Literarische Kunst und theologische Konzeption in Johannes 3 und 6,* ABIG 3 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001), 292–93; Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 160–62; more carefully: Barrett, *Gospel according to St John*, 237.

[46] See Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 17th ed., KEK (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 157.

[εὐχαριστέω] works like petitionary prayer.… Here too, 'giving thanks' shows Jesus' dependence on the father, and consequently the five thousand were fed."[47]

2. The Bread of Life discourse in the narrow sense (vv. 25–59) is explicitly marked as a teaching scene in a synagogue (v. 59) and does not take place at a meal or even a paschal[48] meal. Moreover, verses 22–24 clearly demarcate the teaching scene from the feeding of the five thousand both (1) temporally and (2) spatially: (1) The temporal markers in verses 16–17 (ὄψιος ["evening"]; σκοτία)[49] indirectly sets the previous meal scene as a *deipnon* in the late afternoon. In contrast, the temporal marker τῇ ἐπαύριον ("the next day," v. 22) suggests that the reader should imagine an earlier time of day for the teaching scene in the synagogue of Capernaum. (2) The crowd finds Jesus not at "the place where they had eaten the bread [after the Lord had given thanks]" (v. 23) but on the other side of the sea in the synagogue of Capernaum (see vv. 24–25). This means that they searched at the wrong place or for the wrong thing and so misunderstood the real meaning of what had happened to them (see v. 26). Thus, in the context of John 6, the story of the feeding of the five thousand functions as a "prelude" to the misunderstanding of the crowd (later of "the Jews") of the mostly metaphorical statements of Jesus, which is characteristic for the Bread of Life discourse. Evidence for the fact that John 6 deals not with material eating but with teaching would then be found in the connection of chapter 6 to chapter 5: "But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?" (5:47). Furthermore, the story of the feeding of the five thousand is well suited to function as a prelude to the subsequent misunderstandings of Jesus's metaphorically conceptualized teaching, because the bread in Mark 6–8 (in my view, one source text for John 6) already refers metaphorically to the teaching of Jesus, which John had understood correctly.[50]

Moreover, the sequence of typical Johannine misunderstandings in John 6 verifies a metaphorical interpretation of verses 51–58. According to R. Alan Culpepper's systematization of Johannine misunderstandings, the drastic metaphorical language in verses 53–58 is part of a conscious provocation of the recipients at the level of the narrated world and, therefore, part of a typical Johannine misunderstanding scene:

[47] Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 349.

[48] In my view, the notice "the Passover … was near"—in connection with the hint that Jesus does stay away from Jerusalem (7:1)—is to be understood as a variant of the motif of the hour (i.e., the Passover of Jesus's death) that has not yet come. (On the narrative function of the motif of the hour in the Fourth Gospel, see Tobias Nicklas, "Wiederholung und Variation: Das Motiv der 'Stunde' im Johannesevangelium," in *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: Style, Text, Interpretation*, ed. Gilbert Van Belle and Michael Labahn, BETL 223 [Leuven: Peeters, 2009], 295–320); Michaels rightly concludes that the notice "should not be allowed to govern the interpretation of the entire chapter" (*Gospel of John*, 343).

[49] See the motif of the night in John 13:30 in the context of the advanced table talk.

[50] See Klinghardt, "Boot und Brot," 191–200.

> (1) Jesus makes a statement which is ambiguous, metaphorical, or contains a double-entendre [see esp. vv. 53–58]; (2) his dialogue partner responds or protests which shows that he or she has missed the higher meaning of Jesus' words [see v. 60b–c: 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?']; (3) … an explanation is then offered by Jesus … [see v. 62–63: "Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The *words* that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.][51]

Although Culpepper does not include John 6:51–71 in his list of Johannine misunderstandings, the passage does evince the characteristics he delineates.[52]

In my view, the main goal of the narration in John 6 is the constitution of the twelve disciples of Jesus. The drastic imagery is part of the narrative strategy of the chapter: The disciples who leave Jesus (see v. 66) (mis)understand his speech literally because of their lack of faith (see v. 64). Yet the answer of Peter in verse 68 ("You have the words of eternal life [ῥήματα ζωῆς αἰωνίου]") shows clearly that the twelve disciples were able to overcome the cognitive dissonance created by the contradictory statements of Jesus in verses 51–58 versus verse 63. The statement of Jesus in verse 63 and that of Peter in verse 68 offer the readers the hermeneutical key to unlock the metaphorical meaning of the motif of eating and drinking in John 6. It is Jesus's teaching (see διδάσκω in v. 59) that has to be incorporated in order to receive eternal life.

To sum up, the imagery in verses 51–58 describes the believers' need to eat, to drink, and to chew—in other words, to incorporate completely—the incarnated *logos* of God that has become flesh and blood (cf. 1:14; 19:34) to have eternal life.[53] The acceptance (παραλαμβάνω) of the incarnated *logos* is a key motif of the Gospel of John (see 1:11–12): To accept the *logos* by believing in Jesus and his teaching is the precondition for receiving the eternal life that is expressed in the Gospel of John in many variations (see, e.g., 3:14–21; 5:24, 38; 6:35; 8:34–41; 14:6) often embedded in scenes with misunderstandings. John 6:51–58 is simply one of these variants.

Thus, the motif of drinking the blood of Jesus does not reference the actual act of drinking wine. Nothing in the Bread of Life discourse indicates to the reader that the pericope has to be understood against the background of their own meal practice; the entire discourse is a textual phenomenon that makes use of the imagery of eating and drinking but does not refer to a specific meal practice of early Christians.

[51] R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 152.

[52] In contrast, see D. A. Carson, "Understanding Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel," *TynBul* 33 (1982): 59–91, here 91; Tom Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in John: A Study in Tradition and Folklore*, SBLMS 53 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 284–87.

[53] It has often been seen that σάρξ and αἷμα in John 6 could simply refer to the "humanity" of Jesus in the sense of the traditional merism (see Sir 17:30; 28:5; Matt 16:17; 1 Cor 15:50; Gal 1:16; Eph 6:12; Heb 2:14). Cf., e.g., Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*, 84, with further references.

I would also argue that the imagery of John 6:51–58 is not intended to evoke associations of any form of "sacrificial meal," as proposed by Meredith J. C. Warren.[54] Rather, the imagery is self-referential. It is the words of Jesus in the text of the Gospel of John that are to be "eaten," "chewed," and "drunk."[55] The Gospel of John is not a text for a quick, one-time reading; the Fourth Gospel reveals itself only if readers chew and drink the words of Jesus in the text through an intensive and repetitive reading process.[56]

The early reception history of John 6:51–58 supports the interpretation offered here.

> … we partake of the flesh of Christ, that is, of the divine Scriptures [*several lines missing*] of the true Lamb, for the Apostle professes that the lamb of our passover is Christ when he says: For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed; his flesh [σάρκες instead of κρέα in Exod 12:8] and blood, as shown above, are the divine Scriptures, eating [τρώγω] which, we have Christ; the words becoming his bones, the flesh becoming the meaning from the text, … and the blood being faith in the gospel of the new covenant. (Origen, *Pasch.* 1.96–97 [Daly, ACW 54:45])

The wording (σάρκες, τρώγω) in this quotation from Origen's *Peri pascha* refers unambiguously to the imagery in John 6:51–58. Origen here interprets the Johannine passage as referring to the text of the Fourth Gospel itself.

In addition, in the *Apocriticus* of Macarius Magnes, one finds a comment on John 6 made by an unidentified "Greek" perhaps from the third century CE. In his *quaestio* regarding "that saying of the Teacher" (ἐκεῖνο τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦ Διδασκάλου) in John 6:53, the Greek (Ἕλλην) shows a complete lack of understanding of the imagery in John 6.

> That saying of the Teacher is a far-famed one, which says, "Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood, ye have no life in yourselves." Truly this saying is not merely beast-like and absurd, but is more absurd than any absurdity, and more beast-like than any fashion of a beast, that a man should taste human flesh, and drink the blood of members of the same tribe and race, and that by doing this he should have eternal life. For, tell me, if you do this, what excess of savagery do you introduce into life? Rumour does not record—I do not say, this action, but even the mention of this strange and novel deed of impiety. The phantoms of the Furies never revealed this to those who lived in strange ways, nor would the Potidasans have accepted it unless they had been reduced by a savage hunger. Once the

[54] See Warren, *My Flesh Is Meat Indeed*, esp. 187–243. I do agree with Warren, however, that John 6:51–58 is to be understood as "nonsacramental," although the description "nonsacramental" is misleading for the New Testament period in that it evokes an anachronistic ritual concept.

[55] For this pragmatic dimension of the text, see Phillips, "This Is a Hard Saying," 51–53.

[56] Cf. the imagery in Ezek 2:8–3:11 and Rev 10:9–10. Incidentally, this has an interesting point of reference in the practice of subvocalized reading in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Josh 1:8). For more on ancient reading techniques, see A. K. Gavrilov, "Techniques of Reading in Classical Antiquity," *ClQ* 47 (1997): 56–73.

> banquet of Thyestes became such, owing to a sister's grief, and the Thracian Tereus took his fill of such food unwillingly. Harpagus was deceived by Astyages when he feasted on the flesh of his dearest, and it was against their desire that all these underwent such a pollution. But no one living in a state of peace prepared such a table in his life; no one learnt from a teacher any knowledge so foul. If you look up Scythia in the records, and go through the Macrobian Ethiopians, and if you career through the ocean girdle round about, you will find men who eat, live, and devour roots; you will hear of men who eat reptiles and feed on mice, but they refrain altogether from human flesh.… Wherefore it seems to me that neither Mark nor Luke nor even Matthew recorded this, because they regarded the saying as not a comely one, but strange and discordant, and far removed from civilized life. (Macarius, *Apocr.* 3.15.2–4 [Crafer, Translations of Christian Literature])

It is significant that "the Greek" neither makes any reference to the meal practice of early Christians nor draws a parallel to the so-called words of institution. Even more important, however, is the response of the Christian Macarius. He explains to the Greek what the verse is about:

> Now the flesh and blood of Christ, or of Wisdom (for Christ and Wisdom are the same), are the words of the Old and New Testaments spoken with allegorical meaning, which men must devour with care and digest by calling them to mind with the understanding, and win from them not temporal but eternal life.… Thus did the saints one by one, once long ago, and again and again, by eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Wisdom, that is, by receiving in themselves the knowledge and revelation of her, live for aye with a life that will never cease. (Macarius, *Apocr.* 3.23.11–12; Crafer, Translations of Christian Literature)

Like Origen, Macarius interprets the imagery as referring to the biblical text itself and is thereby aware of the connection of the Gospel of John to Jewish sapiential theology.[57]

VI. Redefining the Relationship between John 6 and the Development of Eucharistic Meals

My concluding remarks address the influence of John 6 on the development of eucharistic meals in later church history. The epistles of Ignatius are frequently

[57] For further reading, see Petra von Gemünden, "Weisheitliche Bilderkonstellationen im Johannesevangelium? Einige strukturelle Überlegungen," in *Picturing the New Testament: Studies in Ancient Visual Images*, ed. Annette Weissenrieder, Friederike Wendt, and Petra von Gemünden, WUNT 2/193 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 159–82; Angelika Strotmann, "Die göttliche Weisheit als Nahrungsspenderin, Gastgeberin und sich selbst anbietende Speise: Mit einem Ausblick auf Joh 6," in Hartenstein, Petersen, and Standhartinger, *"Eine gewöhnliche und harmlose Speise*," 131–56.

mentioned as an analogy for a eucharistic understanding of flesh and blood in John 6. But *Eph.* 20.2 does not document a "sacramental realism." Rather, this passage has to be understood in relation to the motif of the unity of the Christian community, which is one of the main themes of the epistles of Ignatius:

> Assemble yourselves together in common, every one of you severally, man by man, in grace, in *one* faith and *one* Jesus Christ, who after the flesh was of David's race, who is Son of Man and Son of God, to the end that ye may obey the bishop and the presbytery without distraction of mind, breaking *one* bread; that [ὅ] is the medicine of immortality and the antidote that we should not die but live forever in Jesus Christ." (*Eph.* 20.2; Lightfoot [slightly modified])[58]

The subordinate clause that is initiated by the neuter pronoun ὅ does not point to the material bread (*masculinum*) but refers to the entire preceding sentence: to break *one* bread harmonious in unity (cf. also Ign. *Eph* 5) that is the medicine of immortality.[59]

The reception by the ancient church of the motif of drinking the blood of Jesus shows that this motif first entered into the *discourse on meals*. Only in a second step did the motif of drinking the blood of Jesus influence and change *the ritual semantics themselves*.[60] (The term "ritual semantics" describes the meaning that is generated within the performance of a ritual through the interaction of the single elements of the ritual.)[61] This observation corresponds with the highly dynamic and complex historical development of Christian meal practice, which Klinghardt, McGowan, and Wallraff, among others, have described.[62] In John 6, one finds the

[58] J. B. Lightfoot, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 parts in 5 vols. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1973), 2.2:87.

[59] See Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 2.2:87.

[60] See Heilmann, *Wein und Blut*, 219–31.

[61] See further Gerald A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible*, BBRSup 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 127–34.

[62] Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 499–522; Andrew B. McGowan, "'Is There a Liturgical Text in This Gospel?': The Institution Narratives and Their Early Interpretive Communities," *JBL* 118 (1999): 73–87, https://doi.org/10.2307/3268225; McGowan, "Rethinking Agape"; McGowan, "Rethinking Eucharistic Origins"; Wallraff, "Von der Eucharistie zum Mysterium: Abendmahlsfrömmigkeit in der Spätantike," in *Patristica et Oecumenica: Festschrift für Wolfgang A. Bienert zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt und Uwe Kühneweg, MThSt 85 (Marburg: Elwert, 2004), 89–104; Wallraff, "Christliche Liturgie." See also Henk J. de Jonge, "The Early History of the Lord's Supper," in *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition: Papers Read at a NOSTER Conference in Soesterberg, January 4–6, 1999,* ed. Jan Willem van Henten and Anton Houtepen, STAR 3 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001), 203–37; Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 97–115, 139–57; Jason König, *Saints and Symposiasts: The Literature of Food and the Symposium in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Culture*, Greek Culture in the Roman World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 123–30; Harald Buchinger, "Early Eucharist in Transition? A Fresh Look at Origen," in *Jewish and Christian Liturgy and Worship: New Insights into Its History and Interaction*, ed. Albert Gerhards

well-known innovative capacity of John that has shaped the language of the early Christians,[63] and the influence of this innovation on the evolution of the Christian Eucharist should not be underestimated. To be more specific, within the dynamic process of the ritual evolution of the Eucharist, the metaphors of eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood became *ritualized* in the truest sense of the word. A question for further discussion concerns whether, in terms of the metalanguage of ritual studies, the later eucharistic ritual might result from a conflation of the imagery of John 6 and of the so-called words of institution.[64] In conclusion, the reception of the text of the Gospel of John influenced the development of ritual, but ritual did not influence the text of John 6.

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and Clemens Leonhard, JCPS 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 207–27; Leonhard and Eckhardt, *RAC* 23:1081–83.

[63] See, e.g., Labahn, "Die παρρησία des Gottessohnes," 363.

[64] For further reading on the application of this concept to the field of early Jewish and Christian rituals, see, e.g., Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "'Not by Bread Alone …': The Ritualization of Food and Table Talk in the Passover 'Seder' and in the Last Supper," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 165–91.