

The Evangelical Fall from the Means of Grace

R. Scott Clark

The prayers had been offered, the promises read, and the psalm sung. Two princes stepped forward to receive Communion, but the deacon refused to give them the cup. The superintendent of the city's pastors ordered a second minister present to take the cup from the deacon and give it to the nobles, and a struggle for the cup ensued. Outraged by the deacon's insubordination, the superintendent excommunicated him on the spot. This nasty business occurred in 1559 in Heidelberg, Germany. The minister was the Lutheran theologian Tilemann Hesshus (1527-1588), and the deacon was a Zwinglian named Klebitz.¹

As ugly and sub-Christian as it was, the story of the Communion combatants of 1559 reminds us of a time when men took seriously the means of grace, and it presents us with a sharp contrast to our own times. Few evangelical Christians or churches in our time are so devoted to the Supper as to be willing to argue about its proper use, let alone physically struggle for the cup. Why? It is because we have become practically anti-supernatural and simultaneously super-spiritual in our theology, so that we are, on the one hand, bored with God's ordinary means of grace (the sacraments) and on the other hand have stopped believing that God can and does use those means to accomplish His purposes. That is to say, we are guilty of a sort of unbelief.

We have replaced the sacraments with spiritual exercises of our own making. A survey of virtually any evangelical bookstore finds dozens of books on spirituality, self-denial, church growth, and recovery from various addictions. Some of these contain useful advice; so did some of the medieval handbooks of spiritual direction. But few of them contain the Gospel, and almost none of them make any reference to the use of the Lord's Supper as a means to Christian growth.² Even Reformed churches that confess the Supper to be one of the two divinely instituted means of grace (*media gratiae*) normally serve the Supper only quarterly.

This essay is something of a continuation of a nineteenth-century debate in Reformed theology. The various revival movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tended to push the Lord's Supper to margins of Reformed piety. For various other reasons some nineteenth-century Reformed theologians became suspicious of what they regarded as Calvin's overly mystical view of the Supper. In turn, the German Reformed theologian J. W. Nevin criticized the influence of revivalism and realism on Reformed theology and defended Calvin's views.³

THE HISTORY OF THE FALL FROM THE MEANS OF GRACE

Who should participate in the Lord's Supper and how they should do it were two of the most hotly contested questions of the sixteenth-century Reformation. For both Luther and Calvin, the Supper was of critical importance as a means of grace, as a testimony to Christ's finished work,

and as a seal of His work for us. Furthermore, it was a means by which our union and fellowship with the risen Christ and with one another was strengthened and renewed. As much as the Lutherans and Reformed disagreed about the relations of Christ's humanity to His deity and thus the nature of His presence in the Supper they agreed on one very important truth—in the Supper the living, Triune God meets His people and nourishes them. The question was not *whether*, but *how*.

The most immediate reason for our fall from the Protestant idea of the Supper as a means of grace is that we have become practical modernists. Modernism (or the Enlightenment) was a profoundly anti-Christian theology and worldview. Building upon the conclusions of the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and others began to remove the overtly supernatural elements from Christian theology in order to make it acceptable to the cultured despisers of religion.⁴ The task and trajectory of modernist theology has been to find a way to do theology without actually believing (in the same way as Luther and Calvin) what it actually taught. (By *modernism* and *modernity* I mean to encompass the various Enlightenment movements of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. By *rationalism* I mean the use of human reason and sense experience as the fulcrum by which all authorities, including Scripture, the creeds, and confessions, are levered.)

Those theologians who accepted the basic rationalist belief of modernity (man is the measure of all things) worked to find ways to express their modernism in Christian terms. Where the Reformation theologians were convinced of God's present activity in history, modernist theologians were convinced of His present inactivity and hiddenness from us.

The modernist theology provoked a crisis and a reaction. Since we could no longer be certain of God's existence and care for us by the old-fashioned Protestant ways (preaching of the Word and the use of the sacraments), we abandoned them for more direct and immediate means of knowing and experiencing God. This flight to the immediate encounter with God is pietism or mysticism. Pietism is not to be confused with piety. The latter is that grateful devotion to God, His Word, and His people that is at the heart of Christianity. Pietism believes that what is truly important about Christianity is one's personal experience of Jesus; it is a retreat into the subjective experience of God apart from any concrete, historical factuality. Though pietism is usually said to have begun with Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), its roots were much deeper in the history of Christianity. World flight and the interior turn were the stuff of early medieval asceticism. Withdrawal from the world was a major theme among both Greek and Latin writers in the early church. Augustine (354-430), Tertullian (ca. 160-225), Jerome (ca. 342-420) in the West, as well as Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215) and Origen (ca. 185–ca. 254) in the Greek-speaking church, saw world flight as a means to spiritual improvement.

The *via mystica* (the mystical way) was one of the most prominent theological influences in the later Middle Ages. Mystical theology preceded and succeeded the twelfth-century development of the technical academic theology known as scholasticism. The synthesis by Pseudo-Dionysius (ca. 500) of neo-Platonism with Christianity produced an important example of early Christian mysticism. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Hugh and Richard of St. Victor Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), and the *Theologia Germanica* (ca. fourteenth century) are some of the outstanding examples of medieval mysticism leading up to the Reformation. In the sixteenth century mystical

pietism found expression in much of the preaching of the Anabaptist radicals and in the theology of the Silesian (German) Lutheran Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), who taught a theology of direct experience of, and even absorption into, the divine.

Thus when Spener began to organize a pietist reaction to what he perceived to be cold Lutheran orthodoxy, he was only gathering up threads of a movement that had long been active in the church. In fact, Spener's more radical counterpart George Fox (1624-1691) was even more consistent than Spener.⁵ Fox was the father of Quakerism or the Society of Friends. He quite logically followed his concern about one's experience of the "inner Christ" by abandoning the visible church and her sacraments.

In fact, pietism and modernism were family, and those close relations are evident in the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). He received his earliest Christian training from Moravian pietists. As he reduced Christian theology to the experience of dependence upon God (*Gefühl*), he declared that he was now a mature Moravian, and so he was.

Despite its internal differences, the modern evangelical movement is united in its quest for a higher and purer direct experience of the Christ of faith. It is not, however engaged in a more profound search for a more biblical understanding of God's communion with His people through the signs and seals of the covenant.

REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION TO THE MEANS OF GRACE

American evangelicalism is a pietist, experiential religion that is too busy with cell-group meetings to be troubled with the Lord's Supper. At the same time, we have functionally excommunicated ourselves and, to borrow Calvin's language, robbed ourselves of Christ's benefits.⁶ The remedy for the pietist transformation of sixteenth-century Protestant evangelical religion into a religion of private, personal experience is to repent of our unbelief that God does not or cannot use created means to strengthen or edify us as His people. Here is one of the central differences between the religion of the Protestants and pietist-mysticism: Protestantism believes in the use of divinely ordained means. It also seeks to recapture those divinely ordered gospel instruments.

THE INSTITUTION OF THE SUPPER

The Scriptures teach that God establishes the Lord's Supper as the means by which He testifies to us and strengthens us in our salvation in Christ by sealing to His people Christ's twofold benefits—justification and sanctification.⁷ According to the Synoptic Gospels, our Lord instituted the Supper in the midst of the celebration of the Feast of Passover.⁸ The Passover was part of a pattern of important communal feasts (including the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles) in which the covenant assembly met to offer worship and in which God drew near to His people.⁹ The Passover narrative is found in Exodus 12:1-36, the Feast of Weeks in Exodus 34:22 and Numbers 28:26-31, and the Feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23:34. The Scriptures make it clear that these covenant assemblies were eschatological events with the holy ones of heaven in attendance. (See also Ps. 68:7, 17; Heb. 2:2.) Paul assumes this in 1 Corinthians 11:10: "because of the angels." God's people sat at His feet, as it were, to hear the Word and to enjoy

sacramental fellowship with Him. Certainly the structure of the liturgical calendar, filled with major and minor feasts, expressed that repeated desire of the Lord to commune with His people.

The Passover pictured this as a time of fulfillment. The very act of painting the doorposts with the blood of a lamb was symbolic of the necessity of the propitiation of God's holy wrath and the expiation of our sins. The Passover was an eschatological feast as they ate the roast lamb by whose blood they had been redeemed. Already in the Old Covenant believers were tasting the powers of the age to come through these sacramental elements. I am alluding here to Hebrews 6:4-5. Hebrews 11:13 adds that Old Covenant believers died not having received the fulfillment of the promises, but they anticipated the day of fulfillment in Christ. Jesus teaches the same thing in John 8:56. The Passover was also an act of covenant renewal as God's people ate the Gospel and were called again to a life of holiness in the Feast of Unleavened bread.¹⁰

It is against the Old Covenant background of circumcision as the sign of initiation into the covenant community and the feasts as covenant renewal that Calvin and Reformed theology with him distinguished between baptism as the sign and seal of entrance into the visible assembly and the Supper as the sign of confirmation.

Jesus is the paschal lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). It was against this backdrop that the disciples understood the words of institution: "This is My body . . . this cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:19-20). They were familiar with a world that may be nearly lost to us, a world of bloody rituals and sworn oaths to God and neighbor, in which God Himself came to Abraham and swore an oath to "be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:7). So seriously does the God of the covenant take His promise that He swore an oath against His own life; He sealed this pledge first in the sign of the fire-pot going between the slaughtered animals (Gen. 15:17) and later with the bloody sign of circumcision (Gen. 17:10).¹¹

All the bloody signs of the Passover feast were fulfilled in the body and blood of Jesus. The day of types and shadows was gone; the reality had arrived. This was Jesus' teaching against the backdrop of the feasts of Passover and Tabernacles. Though in John 6 Jesus contrasted Himself with the manna, declaring Himself to be the true bread from heaven (John 6:31-35), the broader context (see v. 4) involved the Passover. This explains why He said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (v. 53). His vocabulary was drawn from the Passover feast. Had he intended only to refer to the manna, he would not have included the reference to His blood.

In the history of exegesis it has been nearly impossible for Christians not to link this passage to the Supper, if only figuratively and indirectly. Thus, for Calvin the institution of the Supper was Christ's *sigillum* or "seal" of this sermon.¹² Our spiritual union with Christ, which Jesus called eating His flesh and drinking His blood, leads the Christian naturally to think of the communal, formal, sacramental expression of that ongoing, daily eating of Christ that Calvin called our "mystical union" with Christ (*unio mystica*).¹³

Jesus' words in John 6:54, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood," are quite shocking to us super-spiritual evangelicals. But such sacramental use of the ordinary is the character of redemptive history. The Lord's Supper, like the Old Covenant feasts that preceded it, involved

the sacred use of ordinary things because grace does not replace creation—it renews it. The man born blind was not given entirely new eyes; his old, blind eyes were opened. Note also that Jesus used saliva, clay, and water to accomplish His miracle (John 9.1-7).

Our piety is quite different from Jesus' in other ways as well. We have come to think of the Christian life primarily as a private affair between God and us in our prayer closet. Jesus conducted His ministry and instituted the Supper in a corporate setting, at a feast; and the New Covenant feast was intended to be a communal act of worship as well, not a private spiritual exercise. (See Acts 2:42-46; 20:7-11; 1 Cor 5:7-8; 10-11.) It is beyond question that there are strong individual elements to the Christian faith—one must himself apprehend and appropriate the Gospel. The Bible, however, “deals with man, not only as a solitary unit in his relation to God, but also as a member of a spiritual society, gathered together in the name of Jesus.”¹⁴ And God has ordained signs and seals of that society that we neglect to our great peril.

THE REFORMATION OF THE SUPPER

After 250 years of revivalism and Pietism, it is about time for us evangelicals to renew our appreciation of Calvin's theology of the Supper. His exposition of the Supper is in his theological handbook for future pastors, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559). The heading of the fourth book is: “On the external means or aids by which God invites into Christ's society and retains us in it.”¹⁵ Unlike much popular evangelical piety of our time, Calvin did not juxtapose the use of means in the Christian life with direct, unmediated access to God. In Calvin's day, as in ours, “many” were persuaded out of “pride or loathing or envy” that they could grow spiritually by “privately reading and meditating” on Scripture and thus did not need the ordained means of grace.¹⁶

More than once the church has needed a call back to the biblical means of grace. As we need to be called away from our disregard and shallow understanding of the Supper and called back to a full-orbed theology of the Supper, so too the sixteenth-century church needed a reformation and restoration of the Supper. From 1995-1971 surveyed the theological opinions of about 200 undergraduate and graduate students at Wheaton College, which I take to be a representative cross section of American evangelicalism. Almost uniformly at the outset of their basic theology course they confessed that they had been taught that the Supper is one's declaration of faith in Christ. Most had never been taught a connection between the Supper and the Gospel. Even Zwingli, who has sometimes been criticized for teaching that the Supper was a mere memorial of Christ's death, taught that Christ strengthens us through the Supper.

The spiritual, theological, and moral corruption of the late medieval church was evident in its abuse of the Lord's Supper. The Supper had stopped being a gospel feast of covenant renewal and had become partly legal obligation and partly magic.¹⁷ The doctrine of transubstantiation as promulgated by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) taught that at consecration, the substance of the eucharistic bread and wine, or that which makes them what they are, is replaced by Christ's substance—hence transubstantiation. This dogma was reiterated at the Council of Trent (1551) (*sessio XIII*, cap. IV). That the eucharistic elements continue to look, feel, and taste like bread and wine was said to be accidental—i.e., not a mistake but a nonessential property. Though the consecration of the host was not normally intended as magic, it certainly appeared to most

medieval parishioners to be a kind of magic performed by the priest. Hence the archaic expression *hocus pocus* (to trick someone) derives from the Latin expression, “*hoc est*” (this is), from the Latin (Vulgate) text of Luke 22:19, used in the celebration of the Mass. Like baptism, the Mass became one of seven means by which some thought one could receive within himself divine righteousness.¹⁸ It was this infusion of righteousness (*iustitia infusa*) that was said to create within the Christian a habitus or disposition toward obedience leading to eventual justification.¹⁹

Thus there is more at stake here than just spiritual growth. For Luther and Calvin, the reformation of the church was first of all a recovery of the gospel message itself: Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, lived and died to justify helpless sinners, not to enable them to cooperate with God toward sanctification and eventual, final justification. I fear that our devotion to private exercises is, partly at least, a sort of idolatry in which we worship the “Christ of faith,” i.e., a savior of our own making. In short, it may be that we are disinterested in the Lord’s Supper because we are disinterested in the Lord Himself and His free gift of righteousness.

For Protestants, the sacraments are not about what one has or has not done; rather, they testify and seal to us what Christ has done for us and in our place. The Supper as instituted by Christ speaks to us of our union with Him, effected by the Spirit and the Word. What could be more intimate than “Take and eat; this is my body” (Matt. 26:26)? The purpose of the Supper is not to save us, but to help us grow in grace, to confirm our faith, and to seal to us Christ’s imputed righteousness. We must first, however, embrace that righteousness by faith alone.

It may be that we have rebelled from God’s weak and beggarly things in favor of super-spirituality because we overestimate our own well-being. For Calvin, the very fact that God gave us the Supper testified to our weakness. For those who have eaten Christ by faith, it should be the natural desire to want to feast on Him in the Supper with His people.

This exaltation of the ordinary (after all, even after consecration, the elements remain only bread and wine) at God’s command explains why Calvin was quite vociferous against those whom he called “fanatics” (*fanatici*), those who refuse to use God’s ordinary methods. It is non-Christian pride, not Christian humility, to despise divinely ordained means of Christian growth in grace.

It not that Calvin thought that we should love the sacraments in themselves.²⁰ Rather, the sacrament of the Supper is valuable because it is an “appendix” to the preaching of God’s Word that confirms and seals (*obsignet*) it to the elect.²¹ Though we ought to believe the Word by itself, and it is certainly true as it stands, nevertheless the sacraments are God’s kind “gifts” (*dotes*) to strengthen our trust in the Word. The Christ of the Supper is the same Christ offered to us in the gospel word. Since it was not meant to be a mute witness by itself, the Supper therefore can be effective only in the context of gospel preaching.

At the heart of Calvin’s view is that the Eucharist is a supper, and even more intimately, a family meal.²² Scripture calls it a supper because it was given to nourish us and feed us.²³ He called it a “spiritual feast” (*spirituale epulum*), a “high mystery,” and “this mystical blessing” (*mystica haec benedictio*) of which Satan hopes to deprive us.²⁴

How does the Supper feed us? In several ways. First, as a visible representation of the Gospel it symbolizes for us the “invisible nourishment” we receive from Christ’s flesh and blood.²⁵ Just as it is Christ who is preached to us in the Gospel, so it is Christ we eat in the Supper. Not that the elements are transformed; no, they remain bread and wine.²⁶ Christ, however, uses the elements to share Himself with us by the power of His deity. He is the “only food of our soul.”²⁷

We are fed by the Supper as Christ uses it to strengthen His spiritual union with us. Just as water pours from a spring, so “Christ’s flesh is like a rich and inexhaustible fountain.”²⁸ Though we confess that, with respect to Christ’s humanity, he “ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God,” nevertheless God the Spirit overcomes the spatiotemporal distance between us and the risen Christ and unites us to Him.²⁹ For this reason, one does not need to think of Christ as being physically present in the elements of the table. His flesh is present by the “secret operation of the Spirit” drawing us up to Himself, not bringing Christ down to us.³⁰ It is not necessary “to drag Him from heaven” for us to enjoy Him.³¹

We eat because God has entered into a covenant with us to be our God, and He has given signs and seals to this covenant union. Thus when He calls us to the Lord’s Table, “as often as He pours out His sacred blood as our drink,” it is for the “confirmation of our faith” in which “He renews or continues the covenant once ratified in His blood.”³² So the Supper does not initiate faith in us; that is the function of the Spirit working through the preached Gospel. As we “constantly” eat this bread (by trusting in Christ’s imputed righteousness), so in the Supper “we are made to feel the power of the bread.”³³ There is more to union with Christ than “mere knowledge” (*simplex cognitio*). Christ meant to teach something more “sublime” in John 6:53. Just as it is not “seeing” (*aspectus*) the bread, but “eating” (*esus*) it that feeds the body, it is not the mere intellectual apprehension of Christ that is saving faith, but “the soul must partake of Christ truly and deeply,” entering into His promises.³⁴

The prime benefit of this mystical Supper with earthy elements is that by it the Holy Spirit works assurance of our faith. Christ is the object of our faith. His promises are the sure foundation of our confidence. As we eat it, Christ again says to us, “You are Mine.”³⁵ As we hear the promises set before us weekly in the preaching of the Gospel, so we also see them in the Supper. In this way “pious souls” can derive “great confidence and delight from the sacrament.”³⁶

Calvin spoke thus because he believed that in the Supper Christians have real fellowship with Christ, who is truly present with them. Christ has not abandoned us. In the Supper we receive the “true body and the blood of Christ.”³⁷

HOW SHALL WE THEN COMMUNE?

Calvin has three words of advice for us: simply, solemnly, and serially. One of the great faults of the medieval church was that it forgot how to preach. Contemporaneous accounts of late medieval preaching make it clear that most priests could not or did not preach. When they did, the sermons were often guilty of the most dreadful moralizing as to make them worse than no sermon at all. In their place a popular piety of pageants, passion plays, and feasts arose.

The descriptions might well be contemporary accounts of modern evangelical church life. We are increasingly known for our big buildings, fast-selling recordings, and our tacky dramatic productions more than we are known for our gracious, warm, and winning gospel preaching. To us as much as to his contemporaries Calvin says:

I ask all who are in the least affected by a zeal for piety whether they do not clearly see both how much more brightly God's glory shines here, and how much richer sweetness of spiritual consolation comes to believers, than in these lifeless and theatrical trifles.³⁸

In place of trifles, the Supper should be administered "at least weekly."³⁹ Services should begin with public prayers, followed by the sermon, which itself should be followed by the Supper.⁴⁰

The proper administration of the Supper requires that when the elements have been placed on the Table, the minister should recite the promises attached to the Supper by Christ. He should also excommunicate (*excommunicaret*) those who by the Lord's "interdict" are prohibited from the Table.⁴¹ (See 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.) In the Reformed tradition, this practice of warning unbelievers away from the Table is known as "fencing the table." After the warning, the minister should give thanks and pray God's blessing on the Supper, followed by a Psalm or an appropriate reading afterward, with the minister breaking the bread, of which "the faithful" (*fideles*) should partake in an orderly manner.⁴²

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the idea of coming to the Table weekly is troubling, but why? The most common argument against weekly celebration of the Supper is that it might become routine. Doubtless this is a danger, but by this rationale all churches should hold only monthly worship services so that the sermons and singing will be truly meaningful. The absurdity of the argument is obvious. The possibility of abuse is no excuse for not making use of the divinely instituted means of grace.

Perhaps there is a more fundamental reason we are reluctant to observe the Supper more regularly. One fears that the simple gospel message of Christ offered for and to sinners is not really on the evangelical *agenda*—or *credenda* for that matter. (*Agenda* is Latin for "things to do," and *credenda* is Latin for "things to believe.") It might be that regular observance of the Supper would require a transformation of most evangelical worship services. It is difficult to imagine how a solemnly joyful service of the Supper would fit into some "seeker sensitive" services.

Weekly Communion would also affect the preaching by tending to orient the service around Christ's finished work and away from the constant diet of "how to" messages. The juxtaposition of "Ten Steps to a Happy Marriage" followed by a Communion service is too jarring to contemplate. Simply considering a weekly Communion a hypothetical possibility in our time seems to present radical challenges to evangelical piety.

NOTES

1. J. I. Good, *The Origin of the Reformed Church in Germany* (Reading, PA: 1887), PP. 144-145.
2. In this regard, A. E. McGrath's call to recover a genuinely Protestant piety is an antidote. See *Spirituality in an Age of Change: Rediscovering the Spirituality of the Reformers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 165-173. See also M. S. Horton, *Putting Amazing Back into Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), pp. 215-236.
3. See R. L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Richmond, VA: 1878; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), pp. 810-812; C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, repr. 1982), pp. 646-647; J. W. Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (Philadelphia: 1867).
4. See B. A. Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). Harold O. J. Brown shows the connections between pietism, mysticism, and romanticism. See "Romanticism and the Bible," in *Challenges to Inerrancy: A Theological Response*, eds. G. Lewis and B. Demarest (Chicago: Moody, 1984), pp. 49-66.
5. The continuing influence of Quaker spirituality upon evangelicalism can be seen in the immense popularity of the books of R. J. Foster. For example, see *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, rev. edition, 1988).
6. Ioannis Calvini, *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, in *Opera Selecta*, ed. P. Barth and W. Niesel, 5 vols., 3rd edition (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1962-1974), 4.18.1,6. For the English text see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles, ed. J. T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).
7. The doctrine of the twofold benefit (*duplex beneficium*) is an important part of Reformed theology. It is found in Calvin. See *Institutio*, 3.11.1. It was the organizing principle of the Heidelberg theologian Caspar Olevian (1536-1587), who used it frequently. See, for example, *De substantia foederis gratuiti inter Deum et electos* (Geneva: 1585), 1.1.2; 2.69. On the relations between seals and the covenant theology of Scripture, see S. S. Smalley, s.v., "Seal, sealing," *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, repr. 1975).
8. Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-23. Passover was the first feast of the new year, celebrating God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. For a contemporary critical account see B. A. Bokser, s.v., "Passover," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992). For an evangelical account, see M. R. Wilson, s.v., "Passover," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979-1988).
9. See E. P. Clowney, *The Doctrine of the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995).
10. *Institutio*, 4.16.30.
11. See Jeremiah 34:17-20; K. A. Kitchen, *The Ancient Orient and the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1966); M. C. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972); *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963); *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968); George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: 1955).

12. Ioannis Calvini, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. XL/1: *In Evangelium secundum Johannem commentarius pars prior*, ed. H. Field (Geneva: 1997), pp. 216-217. The English text is in John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, eds. D. W. Torrance *et al.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 169ff. In his interpretation of John 6:53-54 Calvin was working with two parts of the fourfold medieval hermeneutical matrix, the *quadriga*. According to the *sensus literalis et historicus* Jesus' discourse was not properly about the Supper. Yet according to Calvin the passage does touch on the Supper, but only figuratively. Though he said "*figuretur*" he could just as well have used the traditional category *sensus allegoricus*, i.e., the doctrinal sense of the passage.
13. *Institutio*, 3.11.10. See also D. E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 4-101.
14. James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: 1848), p. 2.
15. "*De externis mediis ye! adminiculis, quibus Deus in Christi societatem nos invitat, et in ea retinet.*"
16. *Institutio*, 4.1.5.
17. See *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: 1971), s.v., "hocus pocus.
18. The seven sacraments were: baptism, Eucharist, confession, penance, marriage, extreme unction, and holy orders. Of course no one was eligible for all seven. For Calvin's critique of the medieval sacramental system, see *Institutio*, 4.19.
19. *Canones et decreta sacrosancti oecumenici concilii Tridentini* (Leipzig: 1890), VI, cap. X. The English text is in *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroeder (Rockford, IL: repr. 1978); *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Collegeville, MD: 1994).
20. See *Institutio*, 4.17.5, 9.
21. *Ibid.*, 4.14.3.
22. *Ibid.*, 4.17.1.
23. Thus Reformed scholastic theologian Peter van Mastricht (1630-1706) distinguished between baptism as the "*sacramentum regenerationis*" and the Supper as the "*sacramentum nutritionis*." See *Theoretica-practica Theologia*, Vol. 2, new edition (Utrecht: repr. 1699), pp. 828-845.
24. "*Tanti mysterii*" (*Institutio*, 4.17.1).
25. "*Invisibile alimentum*" (*Institutio*, 4.17.1).
26. Calvin resolutely rejected the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation. See *Institutio*, 4.17.13-7, 39. Christ did not say that the bread would become His body at consecration, but that it already was His body. Calvin regarded the words of institution as a metonym, or a figure of speech (*ibid.*, 4.17.21). The bread "is" Christ in the same way that circumcision "is" the covenant, etc. See also *ibid.*, 4.18.
27. *Institutio*, 4.17.1.
28. *Ibid.*, 4.17.9.
29. *Ibid.*, 4.17.10, 18.
30. *Ibid.*, 4.17.31. Hence he rejected the Lutheran doctrine of the "everywhereness" (*ubiquity*) of Christ's humanity (*Institutio*, 4.17.30). Consequently he also rejected the Lutheran doctrine of the *manducatio infidelium*, i.e., that unbelievers eat Christ's flesh in the Supper. See *Institutio*, 4.17.33-4.
31. *Institutio*, 4.17.31.
32. *Ibid.*, 4.17.1.

33. *Ibid.*, 4.17.5.
34. *Ibid.*, 4.17.5.
35. Hence the language of Heidelberg Catechism (1563) Q/A.1: “That I with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful saviour Jesus Christ.” See P. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. 3, 6th edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, repr. 1983), pp. 307-308.
36. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. H. Beveridge, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, repr. 1979).
37. *Belgic Confession*, art. 35 in Schaff, *Creeds*, Vol. 3, p. 429.
38. *Institutes* (Battles edition), 4.17.43.
39. *Institutio*, 4.17.43.
40. Calvin’s “Form of Church Prayers” has been recently reprinted in T. L. Johnston, ed., *Leading in Worship* (Oak Ridge, TN: 1996). See also, Bard Thompson, ed., *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, repr. 1980), pp. 185-210.
41. See Calvin, *Institutio*, 4.17.40.
42. *Institutio*, 4.17.43. The reason for the *fractio panis* or the breaking of the bread was twofold. First, to illustrate Christ’s body broken for us, but also as a demonstration that despite all the benefits conferred in the Supper, the elements remain bread and wine.

Author

R. Scott Clark (B.A., Nebraska; M.Div., Westminster Theological Seminary in California; D.Phil., candidate, University of Oxford) is academic dean and assistant professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary in California. He is a minister in the Reformed Church in the United States, in which he served as a pastor for several years. He is co-editor of *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* and is a contributor to several periodicals.

This article is taken from *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, John H. Armstrong, General Editor ([Crossway Books](http://www.crosswaybooks.org): Wheaton, Ill. ©, 1998). Used by permission of Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, www.crosswaybooks.org. This material is not to be electronically transferred. Download for personal use only.