



Sacramentality in the Fourth Gospel: Conflicting Interpretations*

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ABSTRACT

It is remarkable that John's Gospel has no account of the Lord's Supper, nor of Jesus' own baptism. Some interpreters, among them Rudolf Bultmann, have taken this to mean that John is very much opposed to sacraments. Yet, others, such as Oscar Cullmann, try to show that John is the most sacramental gospel of all. The sixth chapter of John, being rich in symbolism, is especially important for this question. Among many conflicting interpretations of John 6, there are good reasons for preferring the approach taken by Sir Edwin Hoskyns. Hoskyns's view is that John 6 is both christological and Eucharistic. Regardless of which interpretation we favour, in light of Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17 it is important to keep on working and praying that they all may be one. Even though Eucharistic unity still eludes us, discussion of sacramental themes in John's Gospel must continue. I try to make a contribution to the ecumenical study of Johannine sacramentality in three areas: (1) sacraments and the glory of the Lord, (2) sacraments and friendship with God, and (3) a sacramental imperative to feed those who suffer from hunger.

KEYWORDS

Christology, Eucharist, gospels, interpretation, sacraments, symbolism

In Christian worship, 'institution narratives' are important as anchoring texts for sacramental practice. These are the words spoken by Jesus in the gospels that explain why a sacrament is remembered and practised 'in just this way'.¹ In his book *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, for example, Joachim Jeremias

* Special thanks go to Dr Loyd Melton, Professor of New Testament at Erskine Theological Seminary, for helpful discussion of Johannine themes.

¹ James White offers a concise description of institution narratives in *Introduction to Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), pp. 222–23. Dom Gregory Dix shows in richer detail how these institution narratives shaped the worship of the early churches. They sought to

discusses four such passages for the celebration of the Eucharist: 1 Corinthians 11:23–25, Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22–24 and Luke 22:19.² The scriptural basis for the sacrament of baptism is likewise very significant for liturgical practice. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus himself is baptized by John, according to Matthew 3:13–17, Mark 1:1–9 and Luke 3:21–23. Jesus also commands his disciples to baptize and teach in Matthew 28:18–20.³

Therefore, it is surprising, even astounding, to find that in the Gospel of John, there is no narrative about the Lord's Supper, and no story that tells us of Jesus' own baptism. How are we to account for these absences? An overview of modern scholarship shows that there are basically four views of John's attitude toward sacraments: (1) John must have had an *anti*-sacramental agenda, according to Bultmann, MacGregor and Dunn. (2) Contra this assertion, there is an approach that *maximizes* the presence of sacraments in John, favoured by Vawter, Worden and Cullmann. (3) A *moderate* approach to identifying sacraments in John is offered in the work of Lindars, C.K. Barrett, C.H. Dodd and R.E. Brown. (4) *Non*-sacramental readings of John (chapter 6 especially) are proposed by F.F. Bruce and Martin Luther.⁴ To these four, I add another: (5) Sir Edwyn Hoskyns offers what may be the best approach to the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, one in which he takes John 6 to be both christological and sacramental.

John's Gospel as Anti-Sacramental: Bultmann, MacGregor and Dunn

Bultmann's anti-sacramental interpretation of the Johannine tradition asserts that the Spirit and the Word are opposed to all forms of sacramentalism. A sacramental church knows in advance exactly when and where the Spirit operates: only at that time and in those places where ecclesiastical authority is present to give legitimacy to a sacrament. Bultmann believes that John rejects this view, because, according to John 3:8, 'The Spirit blows where it will'. Heightening the contrast still further, Bultmann emphasizes that John's teaching focuses on the need to

follow the basic pattern of what Jesus himself had done with the bread and the cup at the Last Supper. He took the bread, blessed, broke and distributed it, and this was followed by his taking of the cup, which he then blessed and shared with his disciples. See *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), pp. 48–50, 156–62.

² Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), pp. 108–14.

³ To point to only three among so great a cloud of witnesses: George Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1962); Arland Hultgren, 'Baptism in the New Testament: Origins, Formulas, and Metaphors', *Word & World* 14 (1994), pp. 6–11; Robert O'Toole, 'Christian Baptism in Luke', *Review for Religious* 39 (1980), pp. 855–66.

⁴ This overview is a slightly modified version of one offered by Kikuo Matsunaga in his essay, 'Is John's Gospel Anti-Sacramental? A New Solution in Light of the Evangelist's Milieu', *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981), pp. 516–24.

receive Jesus as God's Word. He views with suspicion the words concerning Jesus' 'flesh' in John 6:54: 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life'. Instead, Bultmann holds that the words of Jesus in John 6:69 are more likely to be historically authentic: 'It is the Spirit which quickeneth. The flesh profiteth nothing'. Therefore, the Christian's proper worship must be only 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24).⁵ Moreover, says Bultmann, where we find passages in John that seem to encourage the use of sacraments, these must be additions that came much later, from an ecclesiastical redactor at a considerable distance from the earliest stages of the Johannine tradition.⁶

G.H.C. MacGregor also suggests that John is wary of any kind of sacramental theology. MacGregor's treatment of Johannine anti-sacramentalism revolves around four questions:

1. Why does John omit all reference to the Lord's Supper?
2. Why does John replace the Lord's Supper with foot-washing?
3. Why does John associate his 'Bread of Life' teaching with the multitude rather than the intimate circle of disciples?
4. How are we to reconcile John's realistic language concerning 'flesh and blood' with his stress elsewhere on the supremacy of the Spirit?

As to question (1) — *Why no mention of the Lord's Supper?* — MacGregor says that the answer is to be found in John's own theology of the Incarnation. The Synoptic Gospels emphasize the atoning death of Jesus on the cross as the key to redemption, and therefore the Last Supper is closely linked to the cross, but for John it is above all the Incarnation that counts when it comes to salvation. Therefore in John 6, the discourse about 'the bread of life' is entirely dissociated from the Lord's death. (2) *Why the washing of feet instead?* MacGregor believes John favours this active ritual because it is more in keeping with the dynamism of the love command in John 13. This is very different from the Synoptic pattern, in which the elements of bread and wine are received passively by the Twelve.

Question (3) from MacGregor is: *Why the multitude rather than the inner circle?* Answer: This is John's way of showing that faith is no longer a matter of physical or temporal proximity to Jesus of the sort the apostles enjoyed. According to the Johannine tradition, says MacGregor, faith involves receiving Jesus spiritually. (4) *And as for John's realistic images of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus?* MacGregor argues that the Christian movement of the late first century was being criticized by Jewish authorities who denied Jesus' power to save, and

⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), pp. 142, 189–92, 471–72.

⁶ Cullmann is especially critical of this part of Bultmann's argument: '... it will not do to cut out all these passages ...'. See *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953), p. 54.

that John's 'realistic' imagery is a metaphorical way of saying, 'There can be no half-measures. To receive life you must not stop short of embracing Jesus wholeheartedly'. Therefore, for MacGregor, 'body and blood' in the Johannine tradition are always to be interpreted spiritually. If 'body and blood' in no way refer to rigidly defined rituals controlled by hierarchical authorities, neither can their meaning be grasped by those whose insight concerning Jesus stops at the level of outward human appearances. You have to let Jesus get 'inside' your thinking, feeling and acting, just as food gets inside your body.⁷

For his part, J.D.G. Dunn identifies John's opponents as Docetists. In Dunn's view, the Docetists would have been offended by the Christian claim that God had become incarnate in human flesh. In addition, however, other Christian teachers, in their eagerness to refute these Docetists, had begun to overstate the literalistic interpretation of the bread and the wine and their connection to salvation. John's teaching in the sixth chapter, then, has two aims: (1) to continue the effort to refute the Docetists, but also (2) to pull back from the error of well-intentioned Christian teachers who were over-emphasizing the importance of receiving the bread and the wine. John states the matter unequivocally against the Docetists: at the heart of the Christian faith is Jesus, who has come down from heaven in 'flesh and blood'. John hastens to add, however, that life does not come through the elements of the Eucharist – life comes only through the Spirit. To drive this message home further, John reminds us that Judas, the traitor, received the bread from Jesus' very own hand (John 13:26), yet not even this was sufficient to change his heart for the better. True faith is rather a question of inward assent to the Holy Spirit, and it is the Spirit who makes the difference.⁸

The 'Maximizing' View of Sacraments in John's Gospel:

Walter, Worden and Cullmann

According to Bruce Wavter and most others in this group, each of the sacraments in the Catholic tradition can be linked to some justifying foundation in John's

⁷ G.H.C. MacGregor, 'The Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel', *New Testament Studies* 9 (1963), pp. 116–19.

⁸ J.D.G. Dunn, 'John VI – A Eucharistic Discourse?', *New Testament Studies* 17 (1970–71), pp. 328–38, especially p. 327. Matsunaga's approach considers very similar evidence, yet he concludes that John is very sacramental. By Matsunaga's reading, there were those who left John's community, even though they had been baptized by water. John is quiet about the sacraments because they had all shared the rites of baptism and eucharist at some point, but now John is trying to clarify the difference between his community's view of the sacraments and the view of those who left. Mikuo Matsunaga, 'Is John's Gospel Anti-Sacramental? A New Solution in Light of the Evangelist's Milieu', *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981), pp. 516–24.

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Gospel.⁹ Mapping the sacraments in John would look something like this, in their estimation:

Baptism: 'Nicodemus, unless one is born of water and Spirit ...' (John 3:5)

Eucharist: 'I am the vine, you are the branches ...' (John 15)

Marriage: The Wedding at Cana in John 2:1–11

Last Rites/Extreme Unction: Anointing of Jesus at Bethany (John 12)

Penance/Reconciliation: 'Whose sins you shall forgive ...' (John 20:23)

Ordination: 'Feed my sheep ...' in John 21

Thomas Worden is another spokesman for this (mostly) Catholic point of view. He believes that Protestants give too much weight to the Pauline warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27–29: 'Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty ... Let a man examine himself. Paul's warning is important, Worden says, but we shouldn't let it overshadow something that is even more important – frequent participation in the Eucharist. As John sums it up for us in the feeding of the 5,000: Jesus is the bread of God 'which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world' (John 6:34).¹⁰

Placing Cullmann in the midst of these Catholic scholars is bound to look somewhat odd, since his outlook is decidedly Protestant. Nevertheless, in his book, *Worship in the Early Church*, the crux of his argument is that John's Gospel offers the strongest of foundations for a sacramental outlook. In Cullmann's reading of John 6, 'bread' can only be an echo of early Christian Eucharistic practices, just as the 'washing' of John 13 *must* refer to the waters of Baptism.¹¹ Moreover, says Cullmann, John 20:30 tells us that the evangelist's purpose is to tell the story of Jesus through 'signs' of the sort that might figure prominently in worship.¹² A liturgical setting is also implied by John 12:30, where it is said that the voice from heaven came 'for the sake of the crowd that stood by'.¹³ Thomas the Doubter, too, has his role to play in establishing John's attitude toward sacraments when he says 'My Lord and my God!' after *touching* Jesus' side in John 20:27–28.¹⁴ For John, it is above all in worship – where we see, hear, taste and touch the sacraments – that the risen Christ is encountered. Cullmann even says, reversing an oft-heard

⁹ Bruce Wavter, 'The Johannine Sacramentary', *Theological Studies* 17 (1956), pp. 151–66. Useful tables summarizing these claims are provided by Raymond E. Brown and Francis Moloney, though they do not agree with the 'maximizing approach'. See Raymond E. Brown, 'The Johannine Sacramentary' and Francis J. Moloney, 'When Is John Talking about Sacraments?', *Australium Biblical Review* 30 (1982), pp. 10–33.

¹⁰ Thomas Worden, 'The Holy Eucharist in St John', *Scripture* XV(32) (1963), pp. 97–103.

¹¹ Oscar Cullmann, *Worship in the Early Church* (London: SCM Press, 1953), pp. 94 and p. 107.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

objection, that the ones at a relative epistemological disadvantage are those first-century disciples who knew Jesus *only* in the flesh, before the full truth about Jesus became clear to the worshipping church, thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

Moderate Approaches to Finding Sacraments in John's Gospel:

Lindars, Brown and Barrett

Barnabas Lindars implores us to declare a truce between these two camps: 'Word and sacrament belong together in the Christian life'.¹⁶ According to Lindars, Bultmann's version of Johannine theology depends far too much on the individual's personal response to the Word. This leads Bultmann to neglect the love command and the ritual solidarity of the Christian community as they are found in the thirteenth chapter of John.¹⁷ That being said, Lindars does not find sacramental allusions in *every* Johannine story, as Cullmann does.¹⁸ Lindars says instead that practices relating to baptism and the Eucharist are *implied* in John's Gospel.

John has no wish to belittle the importance either of baptism or the Eucharist. They are practices with which his readers are expected to be familiar, so that he can simply take their existence for granted. What does concern him is that those who are brought into fellowship with Christ through baptism should have a true understanding of what is implied by the confession of faith; and that those who meet for the celebration of the Eucharist should fully comprehend the moral obligations implicit in the act of communion with one another and the glorified Christ. *To this end, the preaching of the word in connection with these sacramental acts is indispensable.*¹⁹

This point is important enough to be repeated: sacraments are not to stand by themselves; rather, sacraments are intended to be celebrated in conjunction with the Word.

Raymond E. Brown also favours a 'moderate' interpretation when it comes to numbering the sacraments in John. This makes Brown somewhat unusual among Catholic scholars, many of whom read John in a way that maximizes the number of sacraments. Brown sees in John the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and he does not try to press a claim for any other beyond these two:

Moreover, among the four gospels it is to John most of all that we owe the deep Christian understanding of the purpose of Baptism and the eucharist. It is

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 47–50.

¹⁶ Barnabas Lindars, 'Word and Sacrament in the Fourth Gospel', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29 (1976), pp. 49–63. For 'Word and sacrament belong together . . .', see p. 49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63, my emphasis.

John who tells us that through the baptismal water God begets children unto himself and pours forth upon them His Spirit (3:5, 7:37–39). Thus baptism becomes a source of eternal life (4:13–14) and the eucharist is the necessary food of that life (6:57). Finally, in a dramatic scene (19:34), John shows symbolically that both of these sacraments, baptismal water and eucharistic blood, have the source of their existence and power in the death of Jesus.²⁰

There may be *other* grounds in the Catholic tradition for celebrating the seven sacraments, but only these two have a sure basis in John's Gospel. To argue beyond that, says Brown, would mean that the Church's sacramental practice rules its exegesis, rather than allowing careful exegetical work to guide its sacramental practices.²¹

C.K. Barrett makes an important contribution to this debate on sacraments in John by taking us in an altogether different direction. He calls on us to remember that the word 'sacrament' does not appear at all in the New Testament. After the first century, the Christian community borrowed *sacramentum* from the Roman legal system, where it meant something like 'a vow of loyalty'.²² So this word 'sacrament' fits John's theological meaning in a rather awkward and inexact way. In fact, 'sacrament' seems to have misled some people in the ancient world into thinking that the Christian faith was just one more 'mystery religion' with secret rites that claimed to impart special powers. However, John would have been opposed to that kind of secrecy, and opposed as well to any implication that transmission of *that kind* of power was the purpose of Christian ritual.

'Yet it is true', says Barrett, 'that there is more sacramental teaching in John than in the other gospels'.²³ The key for Barrett is John's use of symbolism in teaching about the sacraments and the question of *which* people in the sixth chapter of John grasp its meaning or fail to grasp it. John 6 tells us of an escalating misunderstanding over this symbolic form of discourse. Jesus says in 6:48, 'I am the Bread of Life'. Already those listening to him must have wondered what this claim could mean. In John 6:57 Jesus says, 'He who eats me shall live because of me'. And 6:58 reads, 'He who eats this bread shall live forever'. John's story tells us that many who were present did not catch on to this symbolism. Their understanding remained at the literal level – they said, 'How can this man give

²⁰ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), p. 214. See also *idem*, *The Gospel According to John*, Anchor Bible 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. cxiv, and Raymond E. Brown, 'The Johannine Sacramentary', in *idem*, *New Testament Essays* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 51–76.

²¹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. cxii–cxiii.

²² C.K. Barrett, 'Sacraments', in *Essays on John* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1982), p. 81. See similar remarks made by D.A. Carson in *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 281–82.

²³ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1962), p. 69.

us his flesh to eat?' They added in 6:60, 'This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?' And this is followed by 6:56, which says, 'From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.'²⁴ They had hoped to make him a king (John 6:15), but he was now telling them that he intended to be the sort of king who would have to be 'chewed up' and torn to pieces. This was definitely not the triumphant inauguration speech his followers had been anticipating. So the point Barrett comes to is this: we can fully accept the claim that the 'bread' in John 6 is sacramental, if Christians are willing to take the Eucharist to be the kind of rite that clearly embraces this vision of Jesus as a *suffering King*.²⁵

So to restate the various views of this more moderate camp:

1. Word and sacrament belong together in John's vision of the Christian life (Lindars, contra Bultmann).
2. John does *show* us, though he does not explicitly *tell* us, of Baptism and Eucharist in John 19:34 and elsewhere (Brown).
3. The word 'sacrament' is not John's word, and the key to chapter 6 is the question of *which group* understands the connection between broken bread and Messianic suffering (Barrett).

Non-Sacramental Readings of John 6: F.F. Bruce and Martin Luther

F.F. Bruce and Martin Luther each argue that John 6 is not chiefly about sacraments, but is instead mainly christological.²⁶ In his commentary on John 6:54, 'eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus', F.F. Bruce holds that Augustine had it right long ago when he said: 'To what end do you prepare your belly and your tooth? Believe, and you have eaten.'²⁷ And again in *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine says Jesus uses these words to give us 'a figure, bidding us communicate in our Lord's passion, and secretly and profitably treasure in our memories the fact that for our sakes he was crucified and pierced'.²⁸ Bruce asks us to remember also the words of John the Baptist in John 1:29, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!' This announcement is a prelude to John 6:51: 'The bread which I will give is my flesh, given for the life of the world'. To *give one's flesh* can only mean death, and Jesus adds that his death will be both voluntary (*I will give*) and vicarious (*for the life of the world*).²⁹ So for Bruce, John 6 is not about sacraments,

but about abiding in Christ (Jesus) and being united to him, and these things are only possible thanks to Jesus' death and resurrection.

Martin Luther's approach to John 6 was hammered out in large measure as a response to the views of Ulrich Zwingli. Zwingli says that when Jesus speaks of 'bread' and 'eating' in John 6, what he *really* means is 'gospel' and 'believing'. Luther, too, is interested in this kind of eating/believing: 'Whenever this pointed and plain message is preached, we must realize that this chapter does not refer to the Sacrament, but to spiritual nourishment and eating'.³⁰

A somewhat closer comparison of their views, however, reveals just where it is that they diverge. Zwingli's reading of John 6 is characterized above all by an abhorrence of idolatry (think of Zwingli's *On True and False Religion*). We profit from Christ's flesh greatly, says Zwingli, but our profit comes by his flesh being *slain*, not by what we crush with our teeth.³¹ Luther does not share Zwingli's fears about the bread and the wine becoming idolatrous, however. Luther's overall perspective on the Eucharist is that Christ is really present – in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine. Nevertheless, for Luther, John 6 is christological and not sacramental. In this chapter, says Luther, the bread of life is appropriated *only* by faith.³² As Luther himself puts it, 'The Holy Scriptures contain one sacrament only, which is the Lord Jesus Christ himself'.³³

Sir Edwyn Hoskyns: John 6 as Eucharistic and Christological

No discussion of sacramental themes in John's Gospel can afford to overlook the insights of the Anglican scholar Edwyn Hoskyns. In Hoskyns's view, John

²⁴ Martin Luther, 'Sermons on the Gospel of John', *Luther's Works*, vol. 23 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 118. See also David Yeago, 'The Bread of Life: Patristic Christology and Evangelical Soteriology in Martin Luther's Sermons on John 6', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 39 (1995), pp. 257–79. John Calvin also ruled out any Eucharistic meaning for John 6. See Eleanor Hanna, 'Biblical Interpretation and Sacramental Practice: John Calvin's Interpretation of John 6:51–58', *Worship* 73 (1999), pp. 211–30.

²⁵ W.P. Stephens, 'Zwingli on John 6:53: "Spiritus est qui vivificat, caro nihil prodest"', in David Curtis Steinmetz, Richard A. Muller, and John Lee Thompson (eds), *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 170–71.

²⁶ Gerhard Krodel, 'John 6:53', *Interpretation* 37 (1983), pp. 283–88.

²⁷ Better known in scholarship on Luther is his insistence in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* that there are 'two sacraments rather than seven'. Luther's formulation, 'one sacrament only', first came to my attention through the work of Markus Barth, *Rediscovering the Lord's Supper* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), pp. 100–101, where it is found near the end of an illuminating chapter entitled 'The Witness of John 6', pp. 77–102. Barth cites two passages from Luther's Works, 57, 1930, pp. 114, 222, and the second from 'Disputation Regarding Infused and Acquired Faith' (Weimar edition of Luther's Works, 6, 1888, pp. 86, 97). This seems also to be what Edward Schilleckeck has in mind in his book *Christ: The Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁶ For this basic outline of scholars who argue for the 'christological' interpretation of John 6, I am indebted to M.J.J. Menken, 'John 6:51c–58: Eucharist or Christology?' *Biblica* 74 (1993), pp. 1–26.

²⁷ Augustine, *Homilies on John* 26.1.

²⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 3.16.

²⁹ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 158–62.

6 is primarily christological in its import, and yet it also clearly presupposes the practice of the Eucharist in the early Church.

Hoskyns asks us to focus first on what John 6 says about Christology, about the experience of a growing understanding of who Jesus is. There are two miracles in the sixth chapter – Jesus feeding the multitude and Jesus walking on the water – and these stories help to reveal Jesus' identity by setting up a contrast between two different types of faith. The crowd's enthusiasm over the miracle of the bread prevents them from grasping Jesus' divine identity and mission: 'I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill' (John 6:26). When Jesus walks on the water, however, the disciples demonstrate the right kind of faith in him by overcoming their fear and receiving him into their boat (John 6:16–21).³⁴ This 'receiving Jesus' leads eventually to Peter's confession in John 6:68–69: 'Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God'. So the disciples dare to receive Jesus *himself* as the one sent from God, whereas the crowd wants mainly to receive something *from* Jesus, something that they imagine is greater than he – something for their belly-hunger or a leader who will rid them of the Romans. Taken as a pair, then, these two stories in John 6 illuminate the nature of faith by contrasting the misguided response of the crowd with the proper response of the disciples.³⁵

This distinction between the faith of the crowd and the faith of the disciples, however, does not preclude a reading of John 6 as *also* Eucharistic. In 6:11 John shows Jesus 'giving thanks' and breaking the bread.³⁶ Hoskyns's further comment on 6:30 is that it emphasizes 'The permanent satisfaction of thirst as well as of hunger ... not in order to round off a literary phrase, but in anticipation of vv. 53–6, and suggests the wine of the Eucharist'.³⁷ The language found in verse 54, 'drinking Jesus' blood' and 'munching' his flesh, likewise points to the Eucharist.³⁸ And beyond the confines of chapter 6, Hoskyns is confident that John assumes a eucharistic setting: 'Thus when the author comes to record the ideal Eucharist in chapters xiii–xvii, he portrays the Lord Himself as purifying His guests, delivering the Eucharistic discourse and offering the prayer of thanksgiving'.³⁹

³⁴ Edwyn Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, ed. Francis Noel Davey (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), p. 291.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 294–95.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 298–99.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

Three Johannine Themes and their Implications for Ecclesiology

For my part, I find Hoskyns's reading of John 6 the most satisfying. Nevertheless, given so many conflicting interpretations, perhaps we should confess that the Christian community is very far from reaching a deep and unifying consensus on the nature, the role, or even the number of sacraments. Yet it is somehow comforting to realize that Jesus' own prayer in John 17 anticipates such difficulties without giving up hope: 'Holy Father, I pray that they all might be one, just as we are one'.⁴⁰ Jesus seems to have known, even as he was saying farewell to his disciples, that unity among his followers would be elusive. Even if this unity 'doth not yet appear', scripture does encourage us to 'Be ready to give an account of the hope that is within you' (1 Pet. 3:15). Under the sign of this hope, then, I would like to explore the implications of Johannine sacramentality in three areas: (1) Sacraments and the Glory of the Lord, (2) Sacraments and Friendship with God, and (3) The Eucharist and Hungry People.

Sacraments and the Glory of the Lord

Against those who argue that John's Gospel is opposed to the sacraments as important expressions of Christian faith and experience, my own conclusion is that the whole narrative of John's Gospel is warmly suffused with a sacramental light. The water being turned into wine at Cana in John 2, the well and the woman's water jar in John 4, the loaves and the fish in John 6 – any of these objects and situations can readily become transparent, revealing to us the transforming power of God.⁴¹ Perhaps many of us have already learned to approach the sacraments in this way, based on the familiar catechetical definition of a sacrament as 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace'.⁴²

In Augustine's *Letter 55* there is another clue concerning the great breadth of the sacramental life. Here Augustine is willing to interpret many actions as sacraments: reading scripture, making the sign of the cross, bowing our heads, participating in catechetical instruction, reciting the Creed, singing a hymn, praying the Lord's prayer.⁴³ The Gospel of John seems to advocate a similarly radical kind of freedom and openness with respect to the experience of

⁴⁰ S. Lewis Johnson, 'Jesus Praying for the Whole Family: An Exposition of John 17:20–26', *Emmanuel Journal* 9 (2000), pp. 73–84.

⁴¹ Paul Trudinger makes this point about the fourth gospel in 'St John: A Subtle Sacramentalist', *Downside Review* 414 (2001), pp. 1–10.

⁴² In the *American Book of Common Prayer* (1979), this definition is found on p. 857.

⁴³ Augustine's *Letter 55* is discussed in an instructive essay by Emmanuel Cutrone, 'Sacraments', in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadiini (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 741–47.

