

INTERPRETER

— ∞ —
A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 28 · 2018 · Pages 171-176

Two Notes on the Language Used in the Last Supper Accounts

Robert S. Boylan

Offprint Series

© 2018 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication of the Interpreter Foundation, a non-profit organization located at InterpreterFoundation.org. You can find other articles published in our journal at MormonInterpreter.com. You may subscribe to this journal at MormonInterpreter.com/annual-print-subscription.

TWO NOTES ON THE LANGUAGE USED IN THE LAST SUPPER ACCOUNTS

Robert S. Boylan

Abstract: *The institution of the Lord's Supper is recounted explicitly in four New Testament texts (Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26). Common to all these texts is the phrase “this is my body,” and in the Lukan and Pauline texts, the command to “do this in remembrance of me.” In this paper, I will examine both the grammatical and theological implications of “this is my body” and the concept of “remembrance” in the theology of the Last Supper — with how Latter-day Saints can appropriate such in their weekly observance of this sacred ordinance.*

This brief article addresses two exegetical issues about the language used in the institutional narratives of the Last Supper in the New Testament: “This is my body” and “Remembrance.”

This is My Body

The phrase “this is my body” is the translation of the Greek phrases *τοῦτο ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα μου* (*touto estin to sōma mou*) in Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, and Luke 22:19 — literally, “this is the body of me” — and *τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα* (*touto mou estin to sōma*) in 1 Corinthians 11:24 — literally, “this of me is the body.”

A rather technical argument has been made to support more “substantial” views of the nature of the Eucharist by Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Lutheran authors based on this language against the more “symbolic” understanding of the Supper. The argument is that as the demonstrative “this,” *τοῦτο* (*touto*) is a demonstrative neuter singular; it cannot refer to the term “bread” *ἄρτος* (*artos*), which is masculine, but rather the noun “body” *σῶμα* (*sōma*), which is neuter. As a result of this and the fact that it is coupled with the verb *εἰμι* (*eimi*) “to

be,” Christ, according to some commentators, is teaching that the bread literally *becomes* the body of Jesus, with an alternative translation: “this [new entity] is the body of me,” something at first blush problematic for Latter-day Saint theology, which does not hold to a transformation of the “substance” of the bread and water during the celebration of the Supper.

It is correct that the referent for the demonstrative “this” is “body.” However, it would be problematic to read much into such grammar. In Greek grammar, there is an “interpretive εἰμι,” wherein the verb εἰμι, often in conjunction with τοῦτο (*touto*) or τι (*ti*), has the definition of “meaning” or “[this] means.”

Two notable instances of such can be seen in Matthew 27:46 and Luke 18:36:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is [τοῦτ’ ἔστιν (*tout’ estin*)] to say, My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46)

And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant [εἶη τοῦτο (*eiē touto*)]. (Luke 18:36)

A symbolic meaning of “this is my body” can still be retained, notwithstanding claims to the contrary. Furthermore, taking “is” in a literalistic manner would result in some problems if one were to be consistent in approach to the verb εἰμι. For instance, in Luke 22:20, both “cup” [ποτήριον (*potērion*)] and the demonstrative are singular neuters. However, in theologies that hold to a “substantial” (“bodily”) view of the nature of the Real Presence, it is not the cup but the contents thereof (i.e., the wine) that is transformed into the blood of Christ. Of course, just as “this is my body” is a literary device (the interpretative εἰμι) and should not be taken in a literalistic fashion, neither should “this cup” be interpreted as being the [blood of] the new covenant; in reality, it too, is a literary device (synecdoche), all of which are harmonious with Latter-day Saint theology of the Lord’s Supper.

Of course, a close identification of the consecrated bread and wine/water with the body and blood of Christ is not problematic for LDS theology and scripture; consider the following from the Book of Mormon (which records the very words of Christ Himself):

And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken **bread** and blessed it and given it unto you. And this shall ye do in remembrance of **my body**, which I have shown unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do

always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you ... And now behold, this is the commandment which I give unto you that ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of **my flesh and blood** unworthily, when ye shall minister it; For whoso eateth and drinketh **my flesh and blood** unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul; therefore it ye know that a man is unworthy to eat and drink of **my flesh and blood** ye shall forbid him. Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out from among you, but ye shall minister unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father, in my name; and if it so be that he repenteth and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him, and shall minister unto him of **my flesh and blood**. (3 Nephi 18:6–7, 28–30, emphasis added)

Remembrance

The noun ἀνάμνησις (*anamnēsis*), translated as “remembrance,” is used in two of the institutional narratives of the Lord’s Supper:

And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance (ἀνάμνησις) of me. (Luke 22:19)

And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance (ἀνάμνησις) of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance (ἀνάμνησις) of me. (1 Corinthians 11:24–25)

The term appears five times in the LXX. Four of these five instances are used within the context of a sacrifice, the exception being Wisdom of Solomon 16:6. The NRSV translates the verse as follows:

[T]hey were troubled for a little while as a warning, and received a symbol of deliverance to remind (ἀνάμνησις) them of your law’s command.

The other instances of this term in the LXX are Leviticus 24:7, Numbers 10:10, and Psalms 38:1 (LXX, 37:1) and 70:1 (LXX, 69:1). The NRSV captures the original language texts rather well:

You shall put frankincense with each row, to be a token offering for the bread, as an offering (ἀνάμνησις) by fire to the Lord. (Leviticus 24:7)

Also on your days of rejoicing, at your appointed festivals, and at the beginnings of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over your sacrifices of well-being; they shall serve as a reminder (ἀνάμνησις) on your behalf before the Lord your God: I am the Lord your God. (Numbers 10:10)

A Psalm of David, for the memorial offering (ἀνάμνησις)... (Psalms 38:1)

To the leader. Of David, for the memorial offering (ἀνάμνησις)... (Psalms 70:1).

The term is only used one other passage in the Greek New Testament. Speaking of the iterative Old Covenant sacrifices, the author of Hebrews wrote:

But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance (ἀνάμνησις) again made of sins every year. (Hebrews 10:3)

Unlike the Old Covenant sacrifices, Jesus's sacrifice is a one-time event:

By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. (Hebrews 10:10–14)

Therefore, in light of all these considerations, Jesus's command to "do that in *remembrance* of me," therefore, is a command not simply to "remember" Jesus in a physiological sense *merely* but to remember what Jesus has done for us — that is, His atoning sacrifice, a sacrifice that, unlike those of the Old Covenant, is not iterative but "once for all," using a Greek term that denotes "finality" or "once, and never again" [εφάπαξ (*ephapax*)].

Max Thurian, a Reformed Protestant theologian who, at the end of his life, would convert to Catholicism, noted the following about the meaning of ἀνάμνησις:

Douglas Jones seems disturbed by those writers who accord the word "memorial" a primarily sacrificial meaning. In this I am in agreement with him. The twofold meaning of the word

must be emphasized, in that it can mean both a recalling to men and a recalling to God, in praise and supplication. When it is applied to the Eucharist, the term means first of all the presence of the divine activity on behalf of His people, as a recalling to the believer, and the presence before God of what He has done in the course of the history of salvation, as a recalling in praise and supplication. The term memorial also has a secondary meaning which refers to the sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist. It does not have this as its primary meaning, but when it is used of the Eucharist it shows how and in what sense it can be conceived as a sacrifice, i.e. only in the sense that it is an act of proclamation, a memorial before men and before God, a presence and an actualization of the unique sacrifice of Christ.¹

The earliest Christians seemed to have understood this nuance. As one scholar wrote of the Eucharist during the time of Justin Martyr (AD 100–165):

In Justin's account, the prayer said at the Eucharist is extemporaneous, and this is likely to have been the general rule. From other second- and third-century witnesses, we can possibly glimpse something of the broad pattern such improvised prayers may have taken. In accordance with Jewish traditions of giving thanks at meals, eucharistic prayers seem often to have consisted of at least two aspects: remembrance (Greek, *anamnesis*) and invocation (Greek, *epiclesis*). **Remembrance meant recollecting the saving acts of God in the history of Jesus and perhaps reciting the words of Jesus at the Last Supper as an institutional narrative for the meal.** Invocation meant appealing for the Holy Spirit to come upon the worshipers and to accept their thanksgiving.²

1. Max Thurian, *The Eucharistic Memorial, Part 2: The New Testament*, trans. J. G. Davies (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961), 84 n. 1. The study Thurian is advocating is that of Douglas Jones, "Ἀνάμνησις in the LXX and interpretation of 1 Corinthians XI.25," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 6 (1955), 183–91. For a book-length study of ἀνάμνησις in 1 Corinthians 11:24–25, see Fritz Chenderlin, "Do This as My Memorial:" *The Semantic and Conceptual Background and Value of Anamnesis in 1 Corinthians 11:24–25*. *Analecta Biblica* 99 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982).

2. Ivor Davidson, *The Birth of the Church: From Jesus to Constantine, AD 30–312* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 281, emphasis added.

This parallels the underlying theology of the prayers used by Latter-day Saints to consecrate the bread and water:

... that they may eat in remembrance of the body of [Jesus] ...
(Moroni 4:3)

... to bless and sanctify this wine [or water] to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of [Jesus] which was shed for them ... (Moroni 5:2)

Conclusion

While the terms “this is my body” and “remembrance” at first blush may seem rather simple and straightforward, our study has shown certain nuances that, when read in light of the Greek language, have added meanings — meanings that add to the symbolism and importance of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper both in antiquity and in modern practice. Furthermore, in light of these interpretive issues, it is the hope of the author that readers will have a better appreciation of the underlying theology of the Last Supper accounts in the New Testament, a greater appreciation of one’s own partaking of the ordinance each Sunday, a strong focus on the “sacrificial remembrance” of the once-for-all atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, an appreciation of studying the original language texts of the Bible, and a fuller appreciation of the inexhaustible depths of Scripture.

Robert S. Boylan is a graduate of the Pontifical University of Ireland, Maynooth, and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, with degrees in theology and anthropology, with extensive research in biblical exegesis, history of interpretation, and historical theology. His main areas of focus are the Old World origins of the Book of Mormon and Latter-day Saint theology in light of the historical-critical method of exegesis. He blogs on these and related topics at ScripturalMormonism.blogspot.com. He has also written three books on theological issues: *Not by Scripture Alone: A Latter-day Saint Refutation of Sola Scriptura* (CreateSpace, 2017); *Behold the Mother of My Lord: Towards a Mormon Mariology* (CreateSpace, 2017) and *After the Order of the Son of God: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Latter-day Saint Theology of the Priesthood* (CreateSpace, 2018). He currently lives in Tralee, in the southwest of Ireland, and is pursuing qualifications in accountancy.