

Jesus, Not Just His Blessings:

A Pentecostal Theology of Encounter with Christ at His Table

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Social media opens a window on some of the less conventional aspects of Pentecostal and Charismatic practice. These may be aspects which many theologians will rush to condemn and many pastors wash their hands of; however, they sometimes give us a glimpse of the folk-theology which operates in much wider ways than careful theologians might wish to see. And at the same time, they display some gaps in our teaching and discipleship. One such example is that of the grape-juice videos: social media videos of people buying large quantities of grape juice to use for a private version of the Lord's Supper followed by pouring out the grape juice around the boundaries of the person's property to place it, and those who dwell in it, under the protection of the blood of Jesus.¹ There is no biblical precedent for this practice, which is far from Protestant orthodoxy. The *Azusa Street Articles of Religion* (drawing ultimately from the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* of the Church of England) explicitly state that "the Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about; but that we should duly use them."² That due usage of the Supper is to eat and drink in faith, not to pour it out. In fact, it was such practices which this article was originally aimed against. As Bishop Browne put it in his *Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles*, the point here is that we should have "a reverent esteem and diligent use" of the sacraments, but not "a superstitious veneration of the mere instruments."³

An unbiblical use of the Supper, not instituted by the Lord, such as pouring it out to encircle in the protection of the blood of Jesus, is just such a "superstitious veneration of the mere instruments." And yet, at the same time, it expresses some genuine biblical truths (albeit in

¹ I am deliberately not citing an example of such videos, as they have often been posted by people going through incredibly difficult circumstances in which they are desperate for the Lord's intervention, yet then been widely mocked by others with large social media followings. I do not want to contribute in any way to such mockery. The fruit of the Spirit is kindness.

² *Articles of Religion of the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission*, Art. 16, in William J. Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission* (Los Angeles: Apostolic Faith Mission, 1915), 24.

³ Edward Harold Browne, *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles: Historical and Doctrinal*, 14th edition (London: Longmans Green, 1894), 598.

an unbiblical form). Although it is a superstitious practice rather than a Scriptural use of the sacrament, it does express confidence in the power of Christ's shed blood and the intuition that the Lord is actually doing something when we celebrate the sacrament of the Supper. What we see here is a folk theology grasping hold of some genuine truths, but without sufficient teaching to help bring them together into a coherent (and biblical) whole.

A PROPHETIC ACT OF POWER?

A slightly more developed version of this theology is seen in the teaching of Beni Johnson, who sees Communion as “a powerful tool of intercession.”⁴ Johnson teaches that “we can tap into the transformative power of Communion ... by taking it into our communities,” and gives examples of pouring the Communion elements on the ground as a way to pray for the land.⁵ This location-specific approach to the power of the sacrament means that Johnson advocates taking Communion in the offices of a company to bring business growth, or in a place reputed for satanic and occult worship as a means of bringing divine influence.⁶ The concept of the Supper as a means of intercession also leads her to encourage taking Communion *for other people* in their times of sickness.⁷ Johnson clearly does not share the concerns of the Protestant Reformers expressed in the *Azusa Street Articles* about the due use of the Sacrament being limited to that instituted by Christ. While it might not be recognised in the Charismatic and Pentecostal circles influenced by Johnson, these teachings have strong parallels in the Catholic

⁴ Beni Johnson, *The Power of Communion: Accessing Miracles Through the Body and Blood of Jesus* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2019), 110.

⁵ Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 111.

⁶ Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 20–21, 118.

⁷ Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 85.

concepts of the Sacrifice of the Mass and Mass Intentions (albeit stripped of a theology of the real presence, which is what ultimately gives these Roman Catholic teachings their coherence).

Johnson's contention is that Communion is "a prophetic act ... to align ourselves with Heaven and bring Heaven's reality to earth."⁸ Notice the emphasis here on Communion as an *act*. Her eucharistic theology is actually of a Zwinglian memorialist type. "When we take Communion," Johnson writes, "we are reminding ourselves of His sacrifice and the personal, unprecedented ways this New Covenant affects every area of our lives."⁹ Therefore, her concept of "the power of Communion" is not connected to the presence of Christ in the Supper. Rather, Communion is a "tool," a "prophetic act," and a "powerful weapon."¹⁰ The focus is on us, and what we do in celebrating Communion; it is "a powerful tool at our disposal."¹¹ Therefore this might involve "taking Communion three times per day."¹² In Johnson's view this frequency of (private) Communion is significant because, "in completing the prophetic act, we are releasing something into the atmosphere that helps the answer to our prayer to break through."¹³ This includes reminding "the devil of his failure."¹⁴ Johnson's husband, Bill, writes that Communion is "a military tool of battle" which believers can use "that defeats and overcomes the assaults that the enemy brings against us."¹⁵

A major aspect of Johnson's view of the power of Communion is concerned with healing. Some writers with similar views of the Supper encourage "those who have a sickness or disease" to "receive Communion every day," and to "do it in the same manner that you would when a

⁸ Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 18–19.

⁹ Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 40.

¹⁰ Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 17.

¹¹ Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 62.

¹² Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 19.

¹³ Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 17–18.

¹⁴ Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 45.

¹⁵ Bill Johnson, "Developing the Habit." In Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 159.

doctor prescribes medicine.”¹⁶ Others recommend taking it three times a day like vitamins, or each time one is supposed to take medication, or even as many times throughout the day as one is “attacked” by symptoms.

Taking Communion multiple times a day to combat illness or celebrating the Supper for a private intention leads to the encouragement to celebrate the sacrament privately, rather than only together with the church. Johnson, in fact, goes so far as to say that “if we are only experiencing Communion within the four walls of the church, we are missing out on a gift from Jesus.”¹⁷ Early Pentecostals, however, saw the Supper as a significant means by which Christ unites his church together and thus saw the need for the Supper to be celebrated as a corporate feast. A.S. Copley (who articulated the Finished-Work position before William Durham) insisted that “there is no individual partaking of the body and blood of the slain Lamb. The whole Church as one man acknowledges one all-sufficient sacrifice for all, and all together as one man eat and drink the memorial, thus together feeding on Christ.”¹⁸

Johnson sets out a concept of the Supper as a prophetic act which brings heaven’s reality to earth and releases something into the atmosphere which aids in achieving a breakthrough for our prayers. It is a weapon for spiritual warfare and a powerful tool for healing. Yet, at the root of this, Communion is seen as *an act* which we perform and to which God responds. The initiative is firmly on our side; this is a human act to draw down divine blessing. Although Johnson tries to avoid it (she caveats that she does not “mean to imply that Communion is some sort of golden ticket. Our relationship with God is not transactional, it is relational”¹⁹) it is hard

¹⁶ Perry Stone, *The Meal that Heals: Enjoying Intimate Daily Communion with God* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2008), 145.

¹⁷ Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 110.

¹⁸ A.S. Copley, *The Divine Order of the Sons of God: Lessons in 1 Corinthians* (San Diego: Grace Assembly, n.d.), p.33.

¹⁹ Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 62.

to escape the idea that there is something almost mechanical or magical in this scheme: our act releases breakthrough and brings down heaven's reality. Christ himself appears to have been displaced from the centre of the Supper.

And that, I would argue, is the key problem with this understanding of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Table is seen as a Table of Blessing, and yet the Lord Jesus, in whom all blessing is found (Ephesians 1:3) is absent from the Table. Christ and his broken body and shed blood do have a significant place in Johnson's thought, but as the mechanism for the blessings found at the Table, rather than as the one in whom we are blessed.²⁰ What is sought at the Table are the gifts, rather than the Giver.

One possible (and common) reaction to this would be to downplay the availability of blessing and healing at the Supper. However, that is not the only option, and certainly not the one the earliest Pentecostals would have taken.

HEALING AT THE TABLE

One of the remarkable things about the earliest Pentecostals is that, across countries, languages, cultures and even the Finished-Work versus Wesleyan-Holiness divide, there was a strong shared belief in healing in the Lord's Supper. In Azusa Street, Pentecostals believed that the Supper "brings healing to our bodies if we discern the Lord's body by faith."²¹ When the Apostolic Faith Mission in Portland, Oregon set out its doctrinal commitments in one of the earliest Pentecostal statements of faith in 1911, these included, word for word, what was taught

²⁰ This can be seen in the declaration of her Communion liturgy, Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 170. A faulty Christology may have some influence on this. Johnson maintains, for example, that "everything that Jesus did here on earth was an example for us to model in our daily lives." Johnson, *Power of Communion*, 168–169. This may be reflective of her husband's particular kenotic teaching, which I have engaged elsewhere. See Jonathan Black, *40 Questions About Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2024), 65–68.

²¹ William J. Seymour, "The Ordinances Taught by Our Lord," *The Apostolic Faith* 1.10 (September 1907), 2.

at Azusa Street, that the Lord's Supper "brings healing to our bodies if we discern the Lord's body."²² The even earlier 1910 statement of faith of the Hong Kong Pentecostal Mission states a similar belief, that those who discern Christ's body in eating and drinking of the Supper will "become healthy and strong."²³

In the United Kingdom, the first confession of faith of the Apostolic Church in 1913 spoke of how "some are weak, some infirm, and some sleep (having died), because they have eaten judgment unto themselves."²⁴ A year or two later, the doctrine of the British Apostolic Faith Church (which although it shared a name with the Portland group, was entirely unrelated) proclaimed that "any who eat or drink unworthily, drink damnation unto themselves. But if we discern the Lord's Body, there is healing for any who are weakly or sick."²⁵

And this wasn't just a teaching confined to doctrinal statements. Pentecostal preaching and testimonies were full of it too. In Britain, Pentecostals were writing of this connection between healing and the need to "discern the Lord's body in the sacrament" in 1908.²⁶ In Canada, Pentecostals were teaching healing "at the Lord's Table" in 1909; "we should always see in the broken bread the body of our Lord Jesus broken for our healing and bodily health, as well as for salvation from eternal death."²⁷ Jonathan Paul taught similarly in Germany.²⁸ In the United States, F.F. Bosworth preached in 1914 that, "when Jesus said: 'This is my body,' He did not refer to His mystical body, the Church, but to His own physical body broken for our healing. Discerning His body will bring deliverance from our diseases as appropriating the blood will

²² "Doctrines," *The Apostolic Faith (Portland)*, No. 17 (1911), 2.

²³ Mok Lai Chi, "The Liturgy of the Mission," *Pentecostal Truths* 3.2 (February 1910), 2. Translated by Connie Au.

²⁴ *Athrawiaethau Sylfeinol yr Eglwys Apostolaidd* (1913), Art. 7.

²⁵ "The Doctrine of the Apostolic Faith Church," *Showers of Blessing* No. 14 (1914 or early 1915), 6.

²⁶ C.H. Hook, "A Message from Camberwell," *Confidence* 1.7 (October 1908), 11.

²⁷ "Divine Healing," *The Promise* No. 14 (October 1909), p.7. Reproduced in *Canadian Pentecostal Reader*, edited by Martin W. Mittelstadt and Caleb Howard Courtney (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2021), 53–54.

²⁸ Jonathan Paul, "Discerning the Lord's Body," *Confidence* (August 1911), 185–186.

cleanse us from our sins.”²⁹ Foursquare preachers called the Lord’s Supper “the Healing Ordinance.”³⁰ Willard Pope preached at the Foursquare Convention from this need to discern the Lord’s body, that “Paul absolutely puts his finger on the bread in the communion and declares there is in it that which will affect our physical welfare, depending on our proper understanding of it.”³¹

Pentecostal teaching in the United Kingdom continued on the same lines. In Elim, Henry Proctor taught that “discerning the Lord’s body will bring deliverance from disease,” and so, in the Breaking of Bread, we are to “appropriate the Divine life for the body as well as the soul and spirit.”³² Frank Hodges, leader of the Apostolic Church in the English Midlands, taught that one of the means of healing the Lord has given to his church is “by touching Christ, or Christ touching them” in the Breaking of Bread, where “faith appropriates of health to spirit, soul and body.”³³ Likewise, French Pentecostal publications taught this healing at the Table.³⁴

So, in the United States, Britain, Canada, Hong Kong, Germany and France, early Pentecostals appear united in their teaching that there is provision for healing in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. But this is not the full extent of their teaching on the Supper; their unity goes further. And their unity in teaching healing at the table can only be properly understood in the context of their wider Eucharist teaching.

²⁹ F.F. Bosworth, “Discerning the Lord’s Body,” *Latter Rain Evangel* (June 1914), 3; cf. E.N. Bell, “Questions and Answers,” *Christian Evangel* (14th June, 1919), 5; E.N. Bell, *Questions and Answers* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1923), 50.

³⁰ John Goben, “The Healing Ordinance,” *The Bridal Call Foursquare* (May 1929), 12–14, 29–30.

³¹ Willard H. Pope, “By Faith Are Ye healed,” *The Bridal Call Foursquare* (February 1928), 26.

³² Henry Proctor, “Discerning the Lord’s Body,” *Elim Evangel* 5.3 (March 1924), 62–63.

³³ Frank Hodges, *Divine Healing* (Penygroes: Apostolic Church, n.d.), 19–20.

³⁴ D. Price, “La Rédemption s’étend-elle à la Guérison des corps,” *Viens et Vois* (December 1933), 189; G. Obert, “Le Repas du Seigneur,” *Viens et Vois* (November 1962), 16.

A VERY BRIEF SURVEY OF EARLY PENTECOSTAL THINKING ON THE LORD'S SUPPER

So what was the Eucharistic teaching of the earliest Pentecostals? How did they understand the Lord's Supper? During the revival at Azusa Street, William Seymour taught that "the Lord's Supper is to us a memorial of the death of our Lord and also points us to His coming to catch us away in the glorious liberty of the children of God." Thus, it points us back to Christ's cross and forward to His return. Yet, it also has a present-tense aspect with regards to sanctification and healing. Now, "as we partake of this ordinance, it brings healing to our bodies if we discern the Lord's body by faith." In it, we also find "sanctification through the Blood. Our souls are built up, for we eat His flesh and drink His Blood."³⁵ Seymour neither falls into the trap of rationalism on one side nor superstition on the other. The Supper is not reduced to an empty symbol, for in it "we eat His flesh and drink His Blood." Nor is it reduced to something mechanistic or magical. While he has a high view of healing through the sacrament, this healing is available because the Healer himself is present. It is not through faith in "the healing power of Communion," nor the reduction of the sacrament to a ritual by prescribing it three times a day that healing is to be found; rather it is through faith in Jesus whose body we are to rightly discern in the Supper.

In Asia too, early Pentecostals held to a similar understanding. In 1910, Pastor Mok Lai Chi set out the faith of the Hong Kong Pentecostal Mission. "The Eucharist," he writes, was instituted by Christ, not only "so that by doing it we will remember his death until his return," but also for our health and strength, both spiritual and physical. "If we follow God's words faithfully and discern his body," in drinking the cup and eating the bread we "receive his body

³⁵ William J. Seymour, "The Ordinances Taught by Our Lord," *The Apostolic Faith* 1.10 (September 1907), 2.

which was sacrificed for us.” Therefore, both our bodies and souls will “become healthy and strong.”³⁶ There is healing and sanctification at the table, because Christ himself is there to feed us with his body and blood.

William Durham, the key pioneer of the Finished-Work Pentecostal message, likewise connected the Lord’s Supper with our ongoing growth in grace. The Supper “symbolizes ... our partaking of Christ,” because in it “we commune of the body and blood of the Lord.”³⁷ The two sacraments sum up the gospel, for “the Gospel is briefly summed up in these few words: the believer in Christ, and Christ in the believer.”³⁸ When we eat and drink of the Supper, we partake “of that which by living faith becomes unto us His Body and Blood.”³⁹

In the United Kingdom, the first confession of faith of the Apostolic Church explicitly stated that, in the Breaking of Bread, “in remembrance of His death for us, we partake substantially of His Body and Blood, to be sustenance for the spiritual life, through faith.”⁴⁰ D.P. Williams, the drafter of this confession, elsewhere explained that, in the Supper, “there is a mystical union of eating his flesh and drinking of his blood. It is that which we can and should, by faith, experience, and by that communion be made partakers of the living Christ.”⁴¹ In eating and drinking in the Breaking of Bread, “we drink his blood; we eat his flesh,” with sanctifying effect.⁴²

This brief survey has taken in three continents, three languages (English, Cantonese, and Welsh), and both the Wesleyan-Holiness and Finished-Work branches of Pentecostalism. Yet

³⁶ Mok Lai Chi, “The Liturgy of the Mission,” *Pentecostal Truths* 3.2 (February 1910), 2. Translated by Connie Au.

³⁷ William Durham, “How the Work is Progressing,” *Pentecostal Testimony* 1.5 (July 1910), 15.

³⁸ Durham, “How the Work is Progressing,” 15.

³⁹ William Durham, “The Los Angeles Convention,” *Pentecostal Testimony* 2.1 (January 1912), 13.

⁴⁰ *Athrawiaethau Sylfeinol*, Art. 7.

⁴¹ D.P. Williams, “The Path to Maturity in the Spiritual Life VIII,” *Herald of Grace* 6.3 (March 1946), 68.

⁴² D.P. Williams, “The Three Spheres of Activity in the Governance of God,” *Riches of Grace* 11.1 (September 1935), 205.

across the intercontinental diversity, we see a common approach to the Lord's Supper. The reason that blessings such as healing can be found at the Lord's Table is because Christ is there, and as we eat and drink of the Supper in faith, we are eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

SYMBOLS AND REALITY

But how could early Pentecostals both speak of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, while also using words like “symbol” and “memorial”? William Durham, for example, as we've just seen, writes of communion with Christ's body and blood, and even of the bread and wine *becoming* Christ's body and blood, while at the same time saying that the Supper “symbolizes ... our partaking of Christ.”⁴³ Immediately this shows us that early Pentecostals did not necessarily find the concepts of Christ's presence in his body and blood in the Supper and symbols contradictory. For these early Pentecostals, while symbols were indeed involved, the Supper was not an *empty* symbol.

To help us understand their non-empty symbols, it's helpful to look at what else they called a *symbol*. And as we do that, we find that this language is very often used, not for objects that merely remind us of something, but for things through which God works and makes his presence known. Some of the earliest examples of symbols from Pentecostal writings and sermons include Elijah's mantle, with which both he and Elisha struck the river and the Lord divided it to let them cross over on dry ground (2 Kings 2:8–14), the ark of the covenant in the middle of the river by which the Lord held back the waters so the children of Israel could cross on dry ground (Joshua 3:14–17), the rod in Moses' hand, through which the Lord had worked to display his mighty power, and the rushing wind and tongues of fiery of the Day of Pentecost,

⁴³ Durham, “How the Work is Progressing,” 15.

which accompanied the very presence of the outpoured Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2–3).⁴⁴ None of these was an empty symbol. In each case, the symbol was something through which God worked to make his presence, his power, and his glory known. Thus, what we see in early Pentecostal thought is a concept of symbols which are not empty, but rather through which the Lord acts and conveys his power and presence.

CHANNELS OF BLESSING AND THE SUPPER BAPTISED IN THE SPIRIT

And yet, each of these symbols is different from the Supper. As William Durham noted: We recognize only two ordinances in the Gospel—the Lord’s Supper and baptism ... We are buried by baptism into His death. We commune of the body and blood of the Lord ... We do not believe anointing with oil or laying on of hands, or foot-washing to be ordinances, but we recognize them to be Scriptural, and believe in giving them their proper places.⁴⁵

The two gospel sacraments are distinctly different from anything else, even from biblical means through which the Lord works to heal and bless, such as the laying on of hands and anointing with oil. Thus, although Elijah’s mantle or the ark of the covenant might help us to understand how God can act through symbols, this is not an exact equivalent of the Supper. After all, it was only *after* God’s working through them that the rod and the mantle could be called symbols. The Lord’s working through the bread and wine of the Supper is continually repeated based upon his word of promise; thus it is an *ordinary* means of his grace. God’s work through

⁴⁴ Edith Hill Booker, “The Abuse of Power,” *Latter Rain Evangel* (February 1910), 17; A.P. Collins, “Jesus Standing in the River of God’s Judgments,” *Latter Rain Evangel* (June 1913), 14; J.W. Brooks, “What is that in thine hand?”, *Latter Rain Evangel* (March 1912), 20; Elizabeth Sisson, “God’s Spirit as Atmosphere,” *Latter Rain Evangel* (July 1915), 10; Herman L. Harvey, “The Speaking in Tongues,” *Pentecostal Evangel* (25th June, 1921), 1.

⁴⁵ Durham, “How the Work is Progressing,” 15.

the rod or the mantle, however, was neither promised nor continually repeated; these were *extraordinary* means.

Unlike God's surprising work via the mantle or the rod, his work in the Supper is to be expected each and every time we come to the table. That is not to say that the *effects* of his work in the Supper will always be the same; but his primary work in the Supper — that of fulfilling the promise of Christ's presence — should be expected every time we "do this" in remembrance of him. And yet, this should not be thought of as automatic. It is not the performance of a ritual which guarantees or brings about the presence of Christ. Where, then, is this promise rooted?

D.P. Williams gives us an answer which is both explicitly Pentecostal, and yet fully in line with historic Christian understanding: it is "through the agency of the Holy Spirit and the blessing of Christ."⁴⁶ The blessing of Christ is proclaimed in his words of institution for the Supper. Yet, just as at creation, the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit is at work in and alongside the words the Lord speaks. Just as at the moment of the incarnation, the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit accompanies and makes a way for the entrance of the Word. And just as in regeneration, the Holy Spirit brings us to Christ and Christ to us. At the Breaking of Bread, the Spirit is poured out through the blessing of Christ that this bread and wine might be filled with the Saviour, so that "we eat His flesh and drink His blood."⁴⁷

In a sense, then, we might speak of the Supper being baptised in the Spirit to be filled with the Saviour. But is it appropriate to use such language of a thing rather than a person? It is believers whom Jesus promised to baptise in the Spirit in Scripture, not bread and wine. I would argue that we have good reasons to apply this language analogically to a Pentecostal understanding of the Lord's Supper. I have argued elsewhere that the Pentecostal doctrine of the

⁴⁶ D.P. Williams, "The Lord's Table." *Riches of Grace* 3.7 (May 1928), 276.

⁴⁷ Seymour, "Ordinances Taught by Our Lord," p.2; cf. Williams, "Three Spheres," 205.

baptism in the Holy Spirit “both negates the Zwinglian *non capax* and provides a way for the real presence of the incarnate Christ (i.e. the Christ who has a body and blood) to be manifest on earth.”⁴⁸ Thus, it makes way for the *possibility* of Christ’s presence. Now, however, I want to look at this from another perspective to see how the baptism in the Holy Spirit can help us see the way in which Christ can be present in the Supper.

Many early Pentecostals used the language of being *channels* for God to work through by the Holy Spirit, particularly in connection with prophecy and the baptism in the Spirit.⁴⁹ D.P. Williams gave particular attention to the nature of *channels*, arguing that “the essence of the gift is manifested through the channel’s personality and life, although the gift in its impartation is pure, and separated from the channel.”⁵⁰ So, the gift itself is pure and is distinct from the channel. Yet, the gift is expressed through the nature of the channel. In the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is the gift and those who are baptised in the Spirit are the channels. The gift of the Spirit is distinct from the person who is baptised in the Spirit, and yet is expressed through the personality and life of that person. The Spirit is present, not just some effects produced by the Spirit; and yet the presence of the Spirit is only seen in and through the nature of the person who is baptised in the Spirit.

This concept of *channels* can be helpfully applied in thinking through the Pentecostal approach to Eucharistic theology. The gift in the Supper is Christ (in his body and blood). The channels for this gift are the bread and wine of the Supper. The presence of Christ is distinct

⁴⁸ Jonathan Black, “On the possibility of presence: Overcoming mere memorialism in British Pentecostal Eucharistic Theology,” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 40.2 (2020), 128.

⁴⁹ “From Azusa Mission,” *The Apostolic Faith* 1.12 (January 1908), 1; Tom Anderson, “Letter from Winnipeg, Manitoba,” *The Apostolic Faith* 1.12 (January 1908), 4.; “Invocation,” *Latter Rain Evangel* 1.1 (October 1908), 7; Gilbert E. Farr, “Jesus the Way, the Truth and the Life,” *Latter Rain Evangel* 1.2 (November 1908), 19; Thomas Jeffreys, “Conference at Mulheim-on-Rohr,” *Confidence* 2.8 (August 1909), 189; Alexander Boddy, “Prophetic Messages and their Trustworthiness,” *Confidence* 2.2 (February 1909), 42.

⁵⁰ D.P. Williams, *The Prophetic Ministry in the Church* (Penygroes: Apostolic Church, 1931), 35.

from the bread and wine, and yet it is only seen in and through the nature of the bread and wine. The bread and wine, blessed with Christ's words and overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, become the channels of the presence of the body and blood of Christ.

This application of the concept of *channels* used by early Pentecostals in explanations of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and prophecy to the Breaking of Bread opens up the possibility of a Pentecostal understanding of the Supper which avoids transubstantiation (a view which appears to have been universally rejected by early Pentecostals, often very strongly), while at the same time rooting the blessings found at the Lord's Table in Christ's real presence. The bread and wine continue to play an important role as *channels* in the eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood. Yet, it is Christ's body and blood which they convey: this is neither *virtualism* nor *receptionism*. Furthermore, Christ's body and blood are *conveyed* by the channels, not *contained* by them. This means that it is neither a local nor physical presence (alleviating concerns often voiced by Pentecostals in misunderstandings of transubstantiation), and that this presence is always continually dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit. It is an understanding of Christ's presence in the Supper which is real, objective, substantial, spiritual, and sacramental, but it is not physical or local. The bread and wine remain bread and wine, yet through this bread and wine, the Lord miraculously feeds us with his body and blood.

This means that, by the Spirit's overshadowing of the bread and wine, we truly encounter Christ in eating and drinking at his Table.⁵¹ Therefore, every spiritual blessing is available in the Supper, because — and only because — Christ, in whom every spiritual blessing is found, meets us and feeds us there. There is healing at the Table because we encounter Christ the Healer there.

⁵¹ Cf. Chris E.W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2012), 289–293; Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar*, revised edition (n.p., 2015), 179–180.

Yet, this also means that the Supper is not our *prophetic act* nor is it a *powerful tool at our disposal*. It is not we who are acting in the Supper, but rather the Lord by the Spirit who acts. The initiative is on Christ's side, not ours. The Breaking of Bread is a gracious means to draw near to Jesus; it is at his disposal, not ours. Such a theology of the Supper has room for all the good intuitions behind the folk-theology expressed by Johnson, without the weaknesses which draw it towards a quasi-magical mechanism.

CONCLUSION

The pendulum swings in two directions. A fear of superstition can push us quickly into a rationalism which minimises the place of the Lord's Supper and sees it as no more than an empty symbol or object lesson to jog our memories. Yet, in such environments, the intuition that something more is happening when we come to the Table (or when read the biblical accounts of the Supper), particularly when coupled with a lack of teaching about the sacrament, can thrust people back in the opposite direction. I never cease to be amazed by how many people I talk to from Pentecostal churches with a minimalistic approach to the Eucharist, who tell me they take Communion daily by themselves at home. The folk-theology we encounter on social media thrives in our churches under the surface. The solution to this is not, however, a Zwinglian overreaction. Rather it calls us to deeper catechesis (and mystagogy).

There is a hunger for the Lord's blessings at his Table. But without adequate understanding, the pull is towards superstition and quasi-magical approaches. However, the analogy of the baptism of the Holy Spirit enables us to see the bread and wine of the Supper as channels (by the Spirit) which convey the presence of Christ in his body and blood, so that we encounter the Lord's blessing at the Table, because we encounter the Lord himself there. We do

not need to give in to superstition, or to reduce the Table to a mere object lesson to avoid it. Instead, we can receive Christ's blessings in the Breaking of Bread because in it we encounter the one in whom all blessing is found as we eat of the Supper baptised in the Spirit and filled with the Saviour.

DRAFT