

5-1-1970

The Qumran Meal and the Last Supper

John E. Groh

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Groh, John E. (1970) "The Qumran Meal and the Last Supper," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 41, Article 28.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol41/iss1/28>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

The Qumran Meal and the Last Supper

JOHN E. GROH

I. THE QUMRAN MEAL — SACRED?

The presence of "communal meals" among the Covenanters of Qumran has given birth to the question of the relationship of these meals to the Christian Eucharist as instituted by Jesus Christ. Kuhn notes that "the Qumran texts, as well as Josephus, agree that this order had, as its peculiar features, the constantly repeated baths of immersion and the daily communal meal of the community."¹ Josephus describes the meals of the Essenes (presently considered to be the mother group of the Qumran Covenanters) as follows:

They labor with great diligence till the fifth hour. After which they assemble themselves together again into one place, and when they have clothed themselves in white veils, they then bathe their bodies in cold water. After this purification is over, they every one meet together in an apartment of their own; into which it is not permitted to any of another sect to enter; while they go, after a pure manner, into the dining room, as into a certain holy temple, and quietly set themselves down; upon which the baker lays them loaves in order; the cook also brings a

¹ Karl G. Kuhn, "The Lord's Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran," in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. Krister Stendahl (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), pp. 65—66.

The author is completing his studies at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. He has served as pastor of Savior Divine Lutheran Church, Palos Hills, Ill.

single plate of one sort of food, and sets it before them; but a priest says grace before meat, and it is unlawful for any one to taste of the food before grace be said. The same priest, when he hath dined, says grace after meat, and when they begin, and when they end, they praise God, as he that bestows their food upon them; after which they lay aside their (white) garments, and betake themselves to their labors again till the evening; then they return home to supper, after the same manner, and if there be strangers there, they sit down with them.²

It is significant to note that the Essenes took off their clothes after the meal "as if" they were holy clothes (*Bell. II. viii*).³ Josephus' presentation demonstrates some differences from the Qumran writings. This is primarily due to the literary style of Josephus as he attempted to present the Essenes to his Roman readers.⁴

It can be argued that Josephus' description of the Essene meal is a description of the common meal of the group but not of any specifically "sacred" meal. Philo does not speak of "holy meals" among the Essenes but of a common table (*Quod omnis probus liber sit* 75; *Apology of the Jews* in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* VIII. 11). The fact that the Essene meals were ritually pure to the highest degree does

² Josephus, *Bell. II. viii. 5*. 129—32.

³ J. van der Ploeg, "The Meals of the Essenes," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 2 (1957), 167.

⁴ Kuhn, p. 66.

not make them "sacred" per se.⁵ Rowley says:

They are sacred meals in the sense that the members are conscious that they belong to a religious order, and they are eaten with a solemnity and a quiet which is appropriate to the presence of the God whose blessing is invoked.⁶

It is safe to conclude, then, that the meals described in Qumran literature cannot be ruled either sacred or profane without thoroughly investigating their features. To such consideration we now turn in order to ascertain what relationship, if any, the meals described in IQS and IQSa (*Rule of Discipline*) have to the Lord's Supper.

J. van der Ploeg has cautioned that holy meals are generally the exception, not the rule, in a clan, tribe, or family, lest the distinction between profane and sacred meals disappear.⁷ While this caution may be the result of 20th-century secularism, it deserves attention. In any event, the communal meal described in IQS vi. 4—6 appears at first glance to be a "profane" meal. More precisely, this passage seems to describe the ordinary Jewish blessing that accompanies any meal. Sutcliffe argues that the clause "where there are ten men" implies that there might be times when there would be fewer than ten.⁸ His argument leads him to conclude that the rubric of IQS applies to all the meals of the community and that nothing therein suggests the sacred character of the daily meals.⁹

⁵ Ploeg, p. 171.

⁶ H. H. Rowley, "The Qumran Sect and Christian Origins," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 44 (1961—62), 144.

⁷ Ploeg, p. 166.

⁸ Edmund F. Sutcliffe, "Sacred Meals at Qumran," *Heythrop Journal*, 1 (1960), 53.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Priest argues, on the other hand, that it is generally recognized that the meal described in IQS represents a recurrent ceremony in the life of the community.¹⁰ Black draws attention to the fact that a distinction is made in this passage between the members of the Council who participate in the meal, presided over by the priest, and the *rabbim*, the many. He asserts:

We do not, therefore, have any "ordinary meal" described in IQS, but a special cult-meal in which only sectarians of the highest rank, the Council, are permitted to participate; these were, no doubt, the "full members" of the sect.¹¹

Other scholars have interpreted this instruction as a rubric for an eschatological banquet (amplified in IQSa). Stauffer says that,

the Manual of Discipline (IQS) is a prospective design for the apocalyptic banquet that will occur at the end of the ages. Mark 6:34 ff. is, on the contrary, a retrospective report about the apocalyptic banquet which occurred at Passovvertime in the year 31 at Lake Gennesaret.¹²

In opposition, Hook argues that the meal of IQS has no eschatological character and is simply the direction for a meal of ten or more.¹³

¹⁰ John F. Priest, "The Messiah and Meal in IQSa," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 82 (1963), 95.

¹¹ Matthew Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1961), p. 104.

¹² Ethelbert Stauffer, "Zum apokalyptischen Festmahl in Mc 6:34 ff.," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 46 (1955), 266—67.

¹³ S. H. Hook, "Symbolism in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Studia Evangelica* (papers presented to the International Congress on "The Four Gos-

It is especially in the description of the meal of IQSa ii. 18—21 that the interpretations demonstrate an even greater diversity. A reconstruction of the text gives the following translation:

Let no man (put forth) his hand to the first of the bread (and the wine) before the priest, (because he) will bless the first of the bread and the wine and (then he will put forth) his hand before them. And af(ter him) the Messiah of Israel (will put forth) his hands to the bread.¹⁴

Those who interpret the meal as an eschatological banquet disagree as to its explicit nature. Priest holds that the meal in IQSa refers to a future meal to be eaten *first* when the Messiah appears, and then repeated. This, he argues, is denoted by the rubric in ii. 11 f. As such, this meal is not a customary communal meal within the community.¹⁵ Frank Cross, on the other hand, views this description as an explanation of the common meal of the Essenes, set forth in IQSa as a "liturgical anticipation of the Messianic banquet."¹⁶ Black concurs, adding that "the Qumran sectarians were awaiting the coming of the Messiah of Israel."¹⁷ Hook asserts that in addition to an eschatological setting, the character of the meal is symbolic.¹⁸

But there are others who are not prepared to view the proscribed meal as eschatological or "Messianic." Smith draws particular attention to the maimed and lame

who are referred to in the context, and argues that the order of the assembly described in IQSa is almost certainly a picture of a typical rabbinical court. "That a court session is meant seems almost certain." Laymen present are to be taught, through living examples, a peculiarly priestly aspect of the law, the law of blemishes. Within such a context, the "anointed of Israel" is the leader of the fighting force just as the "anointed priest" is the leader of the liturgical force.¹⁹ He does not see the assembly as eschatological nor the anointed ones as "messiahs."²⁰ The role of the "messiah of Israel" is of such an insignificant nature that the question arises whether or not the meal is concerned with an "eschatological banquet." Burrows maintains that the present meals have nothing to do with the "future Messiah."²¹ For it is evident that the messiah of Israel is not the chief participant; the role belongs to the priest, who has not yet been called a "messiah" in IQSa.²² Rowley refuses to call either of the figures "messiahs"; they are "anointed ones."²³

II. THE QUMRAN MEAL AND THE TEMPLE

The assertion has been made and substantiated that the Qumran meals in some way demonstrate an affinity to the practice

pels in 1957"), ed. Kurt Aland and F. L. Cross, Vol. 73 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1959), 604.

¹⁴ Priest, p. 99 n.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁶ Frank Moore Cross Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, rev. ed. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1961), p. 90.

¹⁷ Black, pp. 103, 105.

¹⁸ Hook, p. 604.

¹⁹ Morton Smith, "God's Begetting the Messiah in IQSa," *New Testament Studies*, 5 (1958 to 59), 222—23.

²⁰ Ibid., 224; see also Matthew Black, "The Gospels and the Scrolls," *Studia Evangelica*, ed. Kurt Aland and F. L. Cross, Vol. 73 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1959), 570.

²¹ Millar Burrows, *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking, 1958), p. 370.

²² Priest, pp. 98n—99n.

²³ Rowley, p. 146.

of priests as they partook of sacrificial meals in the temple. In reference to the garments worn by the Essenes in the cultic meal (as described by Josephus), Gärtner suggests that they are reminiscent of the temple priests' linen garment, which was used only in the service and was put on or taken off with ablutions.²⁴ The Hebrew word *reshit* (portion) is a technical term for sacrificial terminology in the Old Testament. The fact that the Essene Covenanters retained this sacrificial terminology for their cultic meal (IQS vi. 18) demonstrates that the meal originally derived from the priestly meal of the Jerusalem temple.²⁵ The common meals "probably followed the custom of the priests at the temple, who every evening—after a bath—took part in a meal with their portions of the sacrifice."²⁶ It may be possible that the community's sacral meal was understood "as being an anticipation of the perfect ritual of the heavenly temple,"²⁷ although perhaps Platonism has already entered this interpretation. While Black holds that the Qumran meal was derived from the practices of the temple,²⁸ he finds the ultimate origin of the Qumran meal in the prophecy of Ezekiel. From Ezekiel Qumran had taken its priestly organization and its conception of the Messiah. Could it not also have taken the altar, the "table

of community'?"²⁹ Black argues that in Ezekiel 44:3-4 the Messiah-Prince enters the ideal temple of the future by a special gate and partakes of a festal meal ("he shall . . . eat bread before the Lord"). "The Messianic Banquet at Qumran may well be a description of the fulfillment of this prophecy."³⁰ While Black argues that the absence of any "anointed priest" in the Ezekiel prophecy is because his presence is assumed, it is doubtful that this explanation from silence can account for such an absence.

The relation of the Qumran meal to the temple cultus is, at best, tenuous with such evidence. Nevertheless there is, within the description of the meals in IQS and IQSa, sufficient information provided to strengthen the essential cultic nature of meals. Little attention so far has been given to the "wine" and "bread," which make up the meal, and to the fact that the "elements" are of a "firstfruit" nature. It appears, in fact, that the whole debate over the "sacredness" of the meal hinges on the elements involved and the actual eating of the elements.

Since the essential act of a meal is the eating of the food, a meal can only be called sacred when the eating is a sacred act. This normally is the case when the food is sacred or when a sacred meaning is attached to it.³¹

It appears that the wine used in the meal did indeed have a cultic character. The word used for wine in the meal is *tiros*, whereas the ordinary Hebrew word for wine is *yayin*.³² The word *tiros* is a

²⁴ Bertil Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), p. 12.

²⁵ Kuhn, p. 260, n. 22.

²⁶ Karl H. Schelkle, *Die Gemeinde von Qumran und die Kirche des Neuen Testaments* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1960), p. 85; see also Burrows, p. 367.

²⁷ Gärtner, pp. 11—12.

²⁸ Black, *Scrolls*, p. 108.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³¹ Ploeg, p. 165.

³² Sutcliffe, p. 56.

cultic word preferred to the mundane expression *yayin*.³³ The fact that *tirosh* is used, together with the reference to the firstfruit nature of the bread and wine, has led Vermes to this observation:

Mention of the first-fruits of bread and wine (IQS) seems to indicate that the Meal was originally a Pentecostal supper reserved to Priests and Levites (Ex. 23:16; Deut. 16:11; 18:4) where the first-fruits were holy offerings set aside for the clergy.³⁴

The feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, was that time when the firstfruits were eaten by the temple priests. The word *tirosh* is used repeatedly in the Old Testament to refer to wine as a particular product of agriculture (Gen. 27:28; Deut. 7:13; 11:14; 18:4) and as a gift of the goodness of God. Most certainly, then, the use of this particular Hebrew word for the drink of the meal should alert us to some particular priestly significance in the meal. Preliminary study would tend to indicate that in some way the meal was associated with the priests' participation in the Feast of Weeks. This suggestion is, in part, substantiated by the newly released Aramaic fragments from Cave 2, which contain a description of a sacred meal. The text is fragmentary, but Black asserts that it shows the priests partaking of showbread. While he believes this text to be a description of the future participation of Zadokite priests in the "ideal Temple," he does allow that it may well reflect an annual custom of the sect³⁵ and, we will

³³ Kuhn, p. 260, n. 13.

³⁴ G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965), p. 32.

³⁵ Black, *Scrolls*, pp. 110—11.

add, a custom connected with the annual Feast of Weeks, as will be demonstrated shortly.

III. THE PASSOVER AND COVENANT RENEWAL

A more precise definition of the Feast of Weeks is necessary if we would make the relationship vital between the Qumran meal and the Feast of Weeks. J. C. Rylaarsdam ably summarizes the events of the Feast of Weeks:

Beginning with the offering of the sheaf at the beginning of the harvest (Lev. 23:11, Deut. 16:9), it was permissible to bake unleavened bread from the grain of the new crop (cf. Josh. 5:11); but until the Feast of Weeks, fifty days later, concluding the harvest, the use of the new crop for leavened baking was prohibited. This prohibition came to an end with the special cereal offering of two leavened loaves of bread at Weeks, consumed by the priests (Lev. 23:17).³⁶

Again:

Its offering by the priest was a communal rite in behalf of all the people, which opened the harvest season. Part of it (the sheaf of grain) was put on the altar; the priest consumed the remainder. A male lamb was offered as a burnt offering (Lev. 23:12). The ceremony of the sheaf was integrally a part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.³⁷

In Leviticus 23:12-14, the waving of the sheaf of grain fifty days before the Feast

³⁶ J. C. Rylaarsdam, "Unleavened Bread," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), IV, 734.

³⁷ J. C. Rylaarsdam, "Weeks, Feast of," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), IV, 828.

of Weeks is described. In verse 13 the stipulation is made that a drink offering of wine must accompany the cereal offering at this time. It is probable that the Qumran group combined the two events and celebrated the Feast of Weeks concurrently with the waving of the sheaf, taking its priestly prerogative.

An even more startling possibility is that the Qumran group, in its meal, was celebrating the Passover feast. In 2 Chronicles 30:13 and 35:17 the celebration of the Passover in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah coincided with the Feast of Unleavened Bread or Feast of Weeks, as it had for years in the nation of Israel. In addition to the tenuous connection between the Qumran meal and the Passover via the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23), the number of men in attendance at the Qumran meal gives indication that the Passover is under consideration. Kuhn argues that the fact that ten men are to be present (as in every Jewish service) points to the cultic character of the meal,³⁸ but he fails to mention that it was a specific requirement to have a minimum number present specifically for the Passover feast. In New Testament times, the minimum number permitted for a group at the celebration of the Passover was ten (Pes. 7.13 ff.), although often the companies were much larger.³⁹ In this regard it is significant that Exodus 12:4, although it does not mention the number ten specifically, suggests that a man must join with "his neighbor" in order to consume the entire lamb. The number required for the meal

in both IQS and IQSa is at least ten. This suggests implicitly that we are here dealing with a Passover meal.

A further indication of the Passover character of the meal described in IQSa is the mention of the convocation of lay and priestly elements or, if the "messiah of Israel" is taken Messianically, of the royal and priestly elements. The description of the Feast of Weeks (united with the Passover) in Leviticus 23:15-21 stipulates that "you shall hold a holy convocation." A more exact parallel to the Qumran description of the ranking of the royal and priestly participants is to be found in 2 Chronicles 34:29 ff., where Josiah gathers together all Israel for the covenant renewal ceremony and the subsequent Passover of chapter 35. Kraus contends that the Passover was celebrated at a central shrine of Israel already in the days of the judges and further maintains that the rites of Unleavened Bread entered the Passover observance even before that time.⁴⁰ If this is the case, the Qumran concern for a communal observance of the Passover in IQSa is not without good precedent. In addition, the arrangement of the lay group within this communal gathering in IQSa is closely paralleled by 2 Chronicles 35:4, 12. The interaction between Hezekiah, the royal figure, and the priests in the celebration of Passover—Unleavened Bread in 2 Chronicles 30:22 ff. is very significant.

A very essential part of any Passover gathering, according to Exodus 12, is the answering of questions that arise while the meal is in progress. This is true in the rabbinic sources as well. It is very possible that the description of the meal given in

³⁸ Kuhn, p. 70.

³⁹ J. C. Rylaarsdam, "Passover," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), III, 664.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 668.

IQS provides the basis for such question-answer periods within the Qumran meal: "And they shall all sit before him according to their rank and shall be asked their counsel in all things that order" (Vermes). The "counsel" given may be answers provided by the Council members who were participants in the meal described in the next sentence.

A final aspect of the Qumran community that may demonstrate that the meal was in essence a combination of the Feast of Weeks and the Passover is a statement describing the doom of those who follow the evil spirit. Describing the future judgment of those who walk according to the spirit of darkness, the *Rule* states: "And the visitation of all who walk in this spirit shall be a multitude of plagues by the hand of all the destroying angels" (IQS iv). It must be remembered that the Passover, as celebrated in Israel, was not merely the celebration of an event that had occurred years before in Egypt, but also an event that assured the participants of God's continuing deliverance from any of the plagues of the day. Correlatively, those who followed the spirit of darkness were said to be susceptible to the plague of the angels, referring, evidently, to the plague upon the firstborn.

Kuhn and Gärtner assert that the meals of Qumran were intended to replace the custom of the temple priests eating the flesh of sacrificial animals. For their meals, then, the Covenanters did not have meat offered for sacrifices.⁴¹ But if such is the case, then the recently discovered bones buried inside the compound present difficulties. In a trench near the monas-

⁴¹ Gärtner, p. 13; see also Kuhn, p. 260, n. 15.

tery walls, diggers found some fifty jars or pots containing the bones of joints of meat that had been boiled or roasted, and picked clean. Allegro observes that the animals involved were sheep and goats.⁴² Sutcliffe argues that the bones come from a funeral-cleansing rite, which necessitated the burning of animals (except for bones) according to Numbers 19:5. He further suggests that perhaps the bones came from Passover celebrations where the bones could not be burned, in spite of Deuteronomy 16:1-8.⁴³ Ploeg does not concern himself with the presence of bones but seems content to draw attention to the fact that the bones are buried in jars; that fact, he feels, necessitates an explanation. He attempts to explain the phenomenon by reference to the stringent concern for ritual purity within the community.⁴⁴

The presence of the bones does not necessarily imply that there was sacrifice at Khirbet Qumran, but neither does their presence imply that the bones cannot have resulted from a common meal. Father Roland de Vaux argues that the bones "are certainly the remains of meals" and that the care with which they were disposed of "reveals a religious intention."⁴⁵ Cross agrees in saying that "certainly the bones are the remains of the sacral feasts of the community."⁴⁶ Allegro comments:

They could, however, be the remains of an annual sacred meal, and one thinks at once of the Passover, which is not without its messianic connexions in later Juda-

⁴² John Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2d ed. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1964), p. 131.

⁴³ Sutcliffe, p. 58.

⁴⁴ Ploeg, p. 173.

⁴⁵ Sutcliffe, p. 57.

⁴⁶ Cross, pp. 69-70.

ism. However, it must be admitted that so far we have recovered no definite evidence linking the Messianic Banquet with the Passover.⁴⁷

Burrows remarks that there were not enough bones unearthed to represent all the daily meals of the community for any length of time. He suggests that an annual observance of some kind is indicated, perhaps, as Milik suggests, the annual renewal of the covenant.⁴⁸

It is precisely at this point that our hypothesis, which equates the sacred meal of Qumran with the covenant-renewing Passover, provides the necessary link. The presence of the firstfruit references, the parallels with 2 Chronicles 30 and 35, the temple origin of the meal—all these factors are verified archaeologically by the find of the bones, primarily sheep bones. The Qumran feast-meal appears to have been a modified Passover at the time of covenant renewal. The Messianic implications were of far less importance than the other aspects of the meal within its Passover and Sheaves Weeks context.

The important place of the meal in the life of the novice alerts us to its ultimate importance within the entire group. Some scholars are prepared to dismiss the novice's relations to the meal as mere prescriptions of ritual purity. Sutcliffe, when he examines the prescription in IQS vi. 20 that the second year novice cannot touch the drink of the members, suggests that this rubric does not imply the sacred character of the meal but refers to an extreme ritual-concern within the community. The novice could have no part in the preparation or handling of the drink; this does

not prohibit him from drinking what is set before him.⁴⁹ Nötscher parallels this "cleanliness" with the prescription that a man must be clean for a private profane meal in 1 Samuel 20:26.⁵⁰ But much more seems to have been involved. Entrance to the "purity" was granted after a year's novitiate, but one could not touch the "drink of the many" until after the second year (IQS vi. 20; vii. 20). Either the drink (*tirosh*) is ascribed a special meaning so as to require a longer preparation, or the verb meaning "drink" has received the more general meaning of "feast, banquet," so that an especially solemn form of meal is designated.⁵¹ The latter appears to have been the case. For even Josephus notices that before the novice touches the common food, he swears before them fearful oaths (*Bell.* II. viii. 7). It appears, then, that the feast had a purely sacral character, and only after a 2-year novitiate were new members permitted to participate.⁵²

In all probability, the meal towards which the novice worked was the same Passover meal that served simultaneously as the renewal of the covenant for full members. The recitation of the *magnalia* of God in the third column of the *Damascus Document*; the existential reply, "Amen, Amen," on the part of those who

⁴⁹ Sutcliffe, pp. 53—54.

⁵⁰ Friedrich Nötscher, "Sakrale Mahlzeiten vor Qumran," *Vom Alten zum Neuen Testament* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlag, 1962), p. 111 (previously published in *Festschrift für Hubert Junker* [Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 1961], pp. 145 to 174).

⁵¹ Helmer Ringgren, *The Faith of Qumran* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 219.

⁵² Oscar Cullmann, "The Significance of the Qumran Texts for Research into the Beginnings of Christianity," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 74 (1955), 215.

⁴⁷ Allegro, p. 131.

⁴⁸ Burrows, p. 366.

entered the Covenant in column one of the *Manual* (as a reaffirmation of the contemporary deliverance of God in His Passover); and the curse of the plagues of destroying angels on those who did not enter the Covenant in column four of the *Manual*—all these factors seem to indicate that the renewal ceremony that accompanied the induction of new members was intimately associated with the Passover meal. The fact that the examination of all the members occurred on a *yearly* basis lends further credence to this relation. The fact that a man is excluded from the pure meal for a period of one year and is required to do *penance* for a full year if he spoke in anger against one of the priests, but merely do *penance* for six months (with no corresponding reference to exclusion from the meal for six months) if he did so unwittingly (*Manual* vii), indicates clearly that the meal in question was the annually celebrated Passover feast. The same exclusion applies later in the column as a penalty for slandering. Since the Qumran calendar year was centered around seven feasts, there can be little doubt that one of the feasts served as the *tertium a quo*, and that the Passover, celebrated during the first month, was that feast from which and to which penalties would be imposed.

The fact that the Qumran calendar was closely related to the calendar of *Jubilees* (see below) enables us to utilize the latter in an attempt to shed light on the Qumran group. The Feast of Weeks in *Jubilees* is a harvest observance (*Jubilees* 22:1); in addition, *Jubilees* makes this feast a covenant-renewal ceremony for the covenant of Noah founded on that day (*Jubilees*

6:1-21).⁵³ This fact is of importance because, as we have seen, a covenant-renewal ceremony was connected with the Passover in Qumran, just as a covenant-induction ceremony was present for the novices. The relationship between the Passover and the Feast of Weeks and waving of sheaves has been discussed above. The initiate's willingness, in the "Hymn of the Initiate" at the conclusion of IQS, to bless the Lord "before I lift my hands to eat of the pleasant fruits of the earth" can be taken to refer to this day of covenant-induction when the Feast of Firstfruits was combined with the Passover.

A final parallel between the covenant-renewal Passover of Qumran and the Passover of the Old Testament is the exclusion of certain undesirables in both. In IQSa ii there is a discussion of those who are to be excluded from the "assembly of God," which culminates in the feast of new bread and wine. No one who is blemished, paralyzed, lame, blind, deaf, or dumb is allowed. In Exodus 12:43-49 (a postexilic "P" document), sojourners, hired servants, and uncircumcised are ruled out of the Passover. The relation between these two passages indicates a certain common core.

IV. THE QUMRAN MEAL — SACRAMENTAL?

Ringgren carefully distinguishes between a "sacred" and a "sacramental" meal, and suggests that the meal of Qumran is a sacred but not a sacramental meal.⁵⁴ It is perhaps dangerous to apply the term *sacramental* to the Qumran meal in view of the Latin heritage of this term. Bur-

⁵³ Rylaarsdam, "Weeks, Feast of," pp. 827 to 828.

⁵⁴ Ringgren, p. 245.

rows cautions: "One is left with a strong suspicion that the whole idea of anything sacramental in the meals of Qumran is the result of reading Christian conceptions into the text."⁵⁵ Kuhn counters by arguing that the communal meal of Qumran, in place of the sacrificial cultus of the temple, had assumed a new meaning, "mediating salvation from God."⁵⁶ He goes beyond Hook, who is content to say that the Qumran community attached some symbolic and sacramental intention to the bread and wine,⁵⁷ and states:

It is obvious from the central position of the cult meal of the Essenes that they must have attributed to it a deep religious significance, perhaps even a sacramental one. We do know from the Qumran texts that the bath of immersion, which was, beside the cult meal, a cult act peculiar to the sect, did have actual sacramental significance for the community, mediating the divine forgiveness of sins.⁵⁸

Now while it may be wise to avoid the term *sacramental* when referring to the meal at Qumran in the light of the Christian connotations of this word, it appears that the priestly element of the community would tend to associate with the meal some of the characteristics that in the Christian era were called sacramental. While the priests would not find in the Passover meal such divine gifts as the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life through the elements, they would find the recurring deliverance of the Passover God as He came yearly into their lives with His strength and power. The term *sacramental*

is wholly inadequate to delineate such connotations and should be avoided. But this procedure should not blind us to the fact that the meal as celebrated was much more than a jovial communal gathering. The Passover concerned itself with the *magnalia* of God as they entered the lives of the participants. In this way the term *sacramental* could be used to describe such a meal if it were taken to refer to the way in which God invaded the lives of men with His saving power.

V. OTHER JEWISH MEALS

Before we can compare the Qumran meal with the Christian Eucharist, it is necessary to make a brief acquaintance with other Jewish meals current at the time. The first such meal is the ordinary Jewish meal eaten daily in the home. Nötscher holds that such a daily Jewish meal, blessed by the father of the house, is described in IQS vi. 4—6:

According to the Mishnah and the Talmud it is the head of the household, who, as host, speaks the blessing over the bread before he breaks it and distributes it to his table companions: "Blessed be the Lord, our God, King of the world, who allows bread to come forth from the earth." Nothing other than this is signified when, according to Josephus, *Bell. jud.* II. 8. 5 (paragraph 132), the priest speaks the blessing at the communal meal times of the Essenes and when the instruction in the great Rule of Qumran (IQS vi. 4—6) reads: "When they prepare the table for eating or for drinking new wine, the priest should first stretch out his hand to bless the first bread and the first new wine."⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Burrows, p. 369.

⁵⁶ Kuhn, p. 68.

⁵⁷ Hook, p. 605.

⁵⁸ Kuhn, p. 77.

⁵⁹ Nötscher, p. 110.

Nötscher equates the blessing of IQSa ii. 17—22 with the blessing before the meal mentioned in 1 Samuel 9:13 because both use the Hebrew word *bārek*.⁶⁰ While it appears that his facile equation of the meal of Qumran with the ordinary Jewish meal is a bit overdrawn, he does point up the fact that blessing before and after meals is a part of the daily Jewish meal.

Billerbeck offers a modification of the daily meal in his description of the Jewish banquet. At such a banquet the presiding host took the bread before him and pronounced a formula of blessing; after the first cup of wine, each person could pronounce a blessing for himself, while the host may have pronounced the first blessing over the wine.⁶¹ This procedure seems somewhat closer to the Qumran meal but does not allow for the ranking of guests or for the emphasis on the firstfruit nature or for the attachment to the Passover described above.

Sacred meals with bread and wine are not confined to Qumran. Black notes there is a description of such a rite in the *Testament of Twelve Patriarchs* (Levi 8, 5) and in the Jewish apochryphon *Joseph and Asenath*. Such evidence points to the prevalence of this type of meal in other Jewish religious groups. The Pharisees had such religious meals in the Pharisaic guilds or *Haburoth*.⁶² This information allows us to put the Qumran meal within the context of Judaism and sectarian Judaism, but it does not account for the specifically

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶¹ Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Berlin: Beck, 1928), IV, 621.

⁶² Black, "The Gospels and the Scrolls," p. 570.

Qumran elements of the meal described above.

Ringgren finds the background of the Qumran meal in the Jewish (Pharisaic) custom of gathering on Friday afternoon, before the Sabbath, for meals; these meals ended at dusk with a goblet of wine and "the consecration of the (Sabbath) day." This custom was later transferred to the synagog, and the blessing of the bread and wine became a part of the rites of Sabbath eve.⁶³ The difficulty with this proposal is that Qumran seems to have been at direct odds with the Pharisees; it is dubious that such a borrowing of meal customs would have been possible. In addition, the Qumran meal appears to have been a yearly feast rather than a weekly one; it also involved the use of meat. Finally, the Qumran calendar was far different from the Pharisaic, and there would have been a conflict in Sabbath dates.

VI. PARALLELS BETWEEN THE LAST SUPPER AND THE QUMRAN MEAL

Jeremias argues for the Passover character of the Last Supper on the basis of four factors: (1) the event occurred at night; (2) Jesus and His disciples drank *wine*; (3) red wine was utilized; (4) Jesus related His interpretative words to the elements of the meal.⁶⁴ Kuhn contends that the Passover meal is not the direct and immediate precursor of the Lord's Supper as it is described in the New Testament gospels. He suggests instead that the Qumran meal served as the immediate precursor. While he allows that Jesus' reference to the future banquet in Luke 22:15-

⁶³ Ringgren, p. 219.

⁶⁴ Kuhn, pp. 82—83.

18 is given in a Passover context and clearly presupposes a Passover meal, the same is not true for the blessing of the cup and the bread.⁶⁵ Kuhn suggests that the only point of comparison between the Passover and the words of institution is the formal structure of both; both include interpretative statements, although these statements in their interpretative character differ in meaning.⁶⁶ Kuhn proceeds to argue that "while the most original tradition (the Marcan form) contains no specific indication of a Passover setting, it has several features which are unexplainable by such a setting, and these very features correspond to the structure of the Essene cult meal."⁶⁷ But nevertheless he will not take the chance of equating the two meals. He is satisfied to suggest that the *description* of the Last Supper as we have it is given in Qumran form:

Our comparative study of the Essene meal and the Last Supper has no direct bearing on what the last meal actually was, historically speaking. It only gives information about how this meal is described in the formula of institution. This formula, in its most original form, describes the Last Supper not as a Passover meal but as a communal meal, the forms of which correspond to those of the cult meal of the Essenes.⁶⁸

In addition to the arguments given above, which demonstrate that the Qumran meal is connected with the Passover observance (and is thus related to the Last Supper insofar as both utilize the Passover as a basis, thereby vindicating Jeremias'

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 83.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

argument regarding the Paschal character of the Last Supper), we must concern ourselves with the dating of the Last Supper insofar as such dating relates to the Qumran meal. The Qumran calendar was the calendar of *Jubilees*. It was a calendar of 364 days, 52 weeks. Wednesday was the critical day and the day of greatest importance. Feast days fell on the same day each year.⁶⁹ The fact that John seems to describe the Last Supper as occurring a couple days prior to the Passover of the synoptics has led some scholars to attempt a conflation of the two traditions, utilizing the Qumran sectarian calendar as the connecting link. Two books have dealt specifically with the subject. Annie Jaubert's *La Date de la Cene* (1957) draws special attention to the Johannine reference to the Passover "of the Jews." Eugen Ruckstuhl's *Die Chronologie des Letzten Mables und des Leidens Jesu*⁷⁰ (Cologne, 1963) demonstrates conclusively that the Johannine meal was celebrated according to the calendar of the book of *Jubilees*, that is, the calendar of Qumran. It appears, then, that the Johannine meal presupposes the celebration of the Passover and demonstrates that the Passover is the immediate backdrop for the Last Supper. Insofar as both the Last Supper and the meal of Qumran have this common denominator between them, they can be said to be related in their common dependence on the Passover.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Karl G. Kuhn, "Qumran," *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3d ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1961), V, 746.

⁷⁰ This work is reviewed and summarized extensively by K. Romaniuk, *Revue de Qumran*, 4 (1963-64), 576-82.

⁷¹ Patrick W. Skehan, "The Date of the Last Supper," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 20 (1958),

The Last Supper and the Qumran meal are related in more specific ways through their common dependence on the Passover. Kuhn argues that the presence of twelve disciples and Jesus (before Judas left) agrees with the number required for a sacred meal in Qumran,⁷² but he fails to mention that a minimum of ten was required for the celebration of the Passover as well (see above). The Passover was concerned with covenant renewal from its earliest days; at least the gathering together of many in one particular place would seem to indicate this. Similarly, both the Qumran meal and the Last Supper were concerned with the covenant, although in different ways. The Qumran community referred to themselves as those who had entered into the new covenant (CD viii. 15; ix. 28; viii. 37); this recalls the Lord's reference at the Last Supper to the new covenant, although we need not derive one from the other since both proceed from Jeremiah 31:31.⁷³ In fact, the Christian covenant differed radically from the Qumran covenant:

The Christian covenant was in reality new and brought with it the abrogation of the levitical, but not the moral, precepts of the Old Law. The Covenant of the brotherhood was not a new one but a renewal of the obligation to observe the old and indeed its strictest interpretation.⁷⁴

Other parallels between the Qumran meal and the Last Supper are not as readily

explained through mutual dependence on the Passover. The presence of the phrase *hyper pollōn*, "on behalf of the many," in Mark 14:24 is not without its many parallels in the Qumran writings, although none seems to appear specifically in the context of the meals. It is perhaps not coincidental, in the light of the extreme emphasis on rank at the Qumran banquet, that in Luke 22:24-30 and John 13:12-16 teaching that repudiates the desire for rank among the disciples is placed in the discourses of the Last Supper.⁷⁵ Wilson and Cross see in Luke 22:24-26 a specific polemic against the proscriptions of IQSa i. 25—ii. 11.⁷⁶ Kuhn argues that in view of IQS vi. 10 (speech at the common meal was to be done according to turn), John 13:24 takes on a new light. Not Peter but John asks the Lord who the traitor is, for Peter cannot take it on himself to speak.⁷⁷ Perhaps also some would dare to draw a parallel between the footwashing of John 13 and the preparatory baths of Qumran that preceded the meal, although this appears to be a rather common Jewish custom apart from the sectarian practice.

Another parallel between the Qumran meal and the Last Supper concerns the blessing procedure. According to Billerbeck (IV, 621, 628), the ordinary Jewish blessing is before and after the meal, not before the bread and then again before the wine as in IQSa ii. 17—22⁷⁸ and in the Last Supper as recorded in Mark 14.

192—99, asks (197) whether Jesus and His disciples had access to a paschal lamb under the sectarian calendar, since none would be available at the temple.

⁷² Kuhn, *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, p. 260, n. 23.

⁷³ Rowley, p. 152.

⁷⁴ Sutcliffe, p. 120.

⁷⁵ Cross, p. 236.

⁷⁶ Herbert Braun, "Qumran und das NT: Ein Bericht über 10 Jahre Forschung (1950—1959)," *Theologische Rundschau*, 28 (1962), 189.

⁷⁷ Kuhn, *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, p. 69.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 260, n. 16.

Kuhn discounts the fact that Josephus does not mention the interim blessing on the wine but only refers to the blessings before and after the meal. He suggests that Josephus was not acquainted with the specific rubrics that are mentioned in IQSa to the exclusion of the general Jewish blessings before and after the meal.⁷⁹

If it is granted, with Cross, that the communal meal of the Essenes is to be understood as a liturgical anticipation of a coming Messianic banquet, then in regard to this element there is a partial parallel with the Last Supper: "The anticipation of the banquet of the Kingdom is a strong element also in the New Testament accounts of the Lord's Supper and in the later Eucharistic practices of the Palestinian church."⁸⁰ However, it is to be doubted if there was such a Messianic-eschatological emphasis in the Qumran meal.

Black asserts that the *Hymns of Thanksgiving* were, in all probability, used after the meal at Qumran. Especially the recognition of the past deliverances by God and a yearning for future deliverance are to be found within the hymns.⁸¹ Vermes provides additional information regarding the use of the hymns:

Philo's account of the banquet celebrated by the contemplative Essenes, or Therapeutae, on the Feast of Pentecost may indicate the use to which the Hymns were put. He reports that when the President of the meeting had ended his commentary on the Scriptures, he rose and chanted a hymn, either one of his own making or an old one, and after him each of his

brethren did likewise (*The Contemplative Life*, 80). Similarly, it is probable that the psalms of this Scroll were recited by the Guardian and the newly initiated members at the Feast of the Renewal of the Covenant. . . . Indeed, the relative poverty of principal themes may be due to the fact that all this poetry was intended for a special occasion and its inspirational scope thereby limited.⁸²

As a parallel practice in the Last Supper, it is reported that they sang a "hymn" after the supper (Matthew 26:30). It appears that this was the customary procedure after the celebration of the Passover.

A final parallel between the two meals is to be found in the elements common to both. We do not here refer to the reckless suggestion of A. Powell Davies that the "bread represented the Messiahs of Aaron and of Israel" and "the wine was blood."⁸³ Nor are we suggesting that Dupont-Sommer is correct in asserting that "here then are priests who . . . have become principally ministers of the Communion, the most important liturgical act of the sect."⁸⁴ Rather, we are referring to the presence of both bread and wine in both of the meals, Qumran and the Last Supper. The presence of both bread and wine can best be accounted for by recognizing the essential Passover feast that served as a backdrop for each of the meals. It can be assumed that a roasted lamb was present at the Last Supper, and from the archaeological evidence of the bones dug

⁸² Vermes, pp. 148—49.

⁸³ A. Powell Davies, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: New American Library, 1956), p. 100.

⁸⁴ A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, A Preliminary Survey* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), p. 90.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁸⁰ Cross, p. 234.

⁸¹ Black, *Scrolls*, p. 112.

within the Qumran compound we can speculate that such lambs were present at the Qumran meal as well.

VII. DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

There are distinguishable differences between the meal of Qumran and the Last Supper. The differences are far more important than the similarities. In the first place, against the strict rubrics of the Qumran group that a priest was in complete charge of the meal, it is to be noticed that Jesus was not a priest and yet presided at the Last Supper meal.⁸⁵ In addition, there seems to have been no differentiation in the Last Supper between priestly and lay-royal factions as is the case in IQSa. Related to this distinction is the important fact that there seems to have been no subsequent individual blessings of the elements on the part of the participating disciples as prescribed in IQSa.

Another important distinction must be made in regard to the elements. While it cannot be demonstrated conclusively that the bread and wine used at the Last Supper were unleavened bread and new wine, such as would be found at the Feast of Weeks-Sheaves, the fact that the bread and wine were eaten together with the Passover lamb seems to indicate that they were of a firstfruit character. Nevertheless, the important difference is that the firstfruit character of the bread and wine is nowhere mentioned in the accounts of the Last Supper, while in both IQS and IQSa the emphasis is laid on the fact that the bread and wine are "firstfruit." It is possible that the entrance of novices into the

Qumran covenant resulted in the emphasis on the firstfruit character of the bread and wine consumed during the initiatory Passover meal.

Nowhere do the gospel accounts of the Last Supper specifically mention wine when the blessing of the cup is considered, although a reference to the "fruit of the vine" is recorded in Jesus' reference to the future eschatological banquet. In all three accounts and in the Pauline account of 1 Corinthians the "cup" is blessed by the Lord and then distributed. The symbol of the cup, found so often on Jewish graves of the Graeco-Roman period, which, together with the symbol of the vine and grapes, is a symbolic synonym for wine, is found in the Qumran scrolls only with one of its Old Testament meanings, namely as a symbol for the wrath of Yahweh (IQ *Pesher Habakkuk* xi. 14—15).⁸⁶ In the Qumran meal descriptions, the word *tiros* is used as a cultic name for the more common *yayin*, wine. Nowhere is "cup" used in this sense, as it is in the Last Supper.

The most important distinction between the Qumran meal and the Last Supper is that the Lord of heaven and earth was present at the Last Supper and there instituted a supper of His body and blood that was to endure until He would eat again with all His children in the future Messianic banquet. The Lord Jesus answered the questions that were ordinarily asked at the Passover meal with a new interpretation of the Passover meal, a new covenant. It was His body and His blood that the disciples would eat and drink in the bread and wine. "Nothing in the Qumran documents suggests any approach to the im-

⁸⁵ Kurt Schubert, *The Dead Sea Community* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), p. 150.

⁸⁶ Hook, p. 606.

mense 'leap of being', to use Professor Voegelin's expressive phrase, which the transformation of these symbols displays in the earliest Christian eucharist."⁸⁷ Neither in the Qumran texts do we find any trace of the redemptive significance of a historical person. "Thus the person of Christ and his redemptive significance, i. e., the christology, is the decisively new fact of Christianity."⁸⁸

There is much more than a mere reference to the historical significance of a redemptive personality at the Last Supper. There is the explicit concern with the very body and blood of the Christ who was present to institute the meal: "The essential characteristic is . . . the presence of His body in bread and His blood in wine; and this is not found at Qumran — unless we begin to suppose, with Powell Davies, that the Essenes identified the 'Messiahs' with the bread and wine!"⁸⁹ But even more than the mere equation of bread-body and wine-blood is the case at the Last Supper. The death of that body and the draining of that blood are at issue:

The Christian Last Supper has, however, another sense that has no parallels in Qumran and that cannot be derived from Qumran. It is a memorial meal of the death of Jesus and a showing forth of His saving death (1 Cor. 11:26). By virtue of Jesus' bequest this meal is therefore something new.⁹⁰

The character of the Last Supper is derived from its association with the imminent

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 605.

⁸⁸ Kuhn, *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, p. 78.

⁸⁹ Jean Carmignac, *Christ and the Teacher of Righteousness* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1962), p. 95.

⁹⁰ Schelkle, p. 86.

death of Jesus. We have no knowledge of any such commemorative character of the meals of the sect. "Nowhere in Josephus or the scrolls is the Teacher of Righteousness mentioned in connection with the meals."⁹¹ At the Last Supper, then, the original elements are "the formulas which transform the Old Passover into the feast of the New Covenant (which) memorialize the sacrifice of the body and blood of the victim, the pledge of the covenant."⁹²

VIII. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

We began this study with the presupposition that nothing is to be feared if a relationship is established between the Qumran meal and the Last Supper. We have determined that a definite relationship does exist between the two via the common Passover feast. The concluding comments, stated in thetical form, will attempt to digest the results of this study and demonstrate the future course that a study of the Qumran-Eucharist relationship might take.

1. This study has demonstrated that God works through the historical situation and through the common means. The Last Supper was not a novelty but a creation of Christ that utilized the Passover as its essential backdrop. The fact that the Qumran meal was some sort of Passover meal demonstrates that the Last Supper would be within the comprehension of those who at one time or another had either participated in or been acquainted with the meal as it was celebrated at Qumran.

2. The intimate connection between the Passover and the Last Supper can be il-

⁹¹ Rowley, p. 143.

⁹² Cross, p. 236.

luminated with the help of the information the Qumran meal provides. The emphasis on the firstfruit character of the bread and wine used in the Passover is to be derived from the Qumran accounts. The fact that initially the Passover entitled the gathering together of all of the tribes for its celebration is strongly confirmed and clarified by IQSa.

3. The Passover character of the meal described in the Gospel of John becomes clearly evident in light of the Qumran sectarian calendar. This fact enables scholars to make a conflation between the Johannean and synoptic accounts of the Last Supper with greater ease.

4. The amphyctionic background of the covenant renewal that accompanied the Passover at Qumran enables us to apprehend with greater clarity Jesus' reference to the new covenant. The solidarity of the group involved is magnified. The fact that covenant "renewal," as connected to the Passover, was actually the esoteric experience of the power of the covenant God permits us to appreciate with deeper insight Jesus' reference to the new covenant,

as well as His promise that His own body and His own blood were given to each participant.

5. The eschatological banquet is seen in a proper perspective. The Messianic banquet is subsumed under the emphasis on present participation in the Passover-covenant experience. If our analysis of IQSa has been accurate, there is no concern here with "eschatological banquet." The Passover as such does not have this as a concern. As a result, Jesus' attachment of the banquet theme to the Last Supper is more easily understood in its proper perspective.

6. The essential features of the Last Supper stand out with even more clarity than ever before. Jesus Christ is seen as the decisive element of the Lord's Supper. He presides. His body and blood are given. He offers Himself in anticipation of His suffering and death for the sins of many. He is Lord and Master—even of the meal that He chooses as a vehicle for His grace. The many parallels with the Qumran meal are overshadowed by His presence, His Word, His grace.

Chicago, Ill.