



## The Theological Significance of the Eucharist: Exegesis of Mark 14:12-26

Isaac Boaheng (PhD)

Senior Lecturer, Christian Service University College, Research Fellow, University of the Free State,  
South Africa

E-mail: [revisaacboaheng@gmail.com](mailto:revisaacboaheng@gmail.com)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v6i10.1728>

---

### **Abstract**

The Eucharist is one of the two sacraments celebrated in most Protestant churches. Given the circumstances related to its institution (Mark 14:12-26 and its parallels), the Eucharistic meal can be considered as a symbol of the atoning death of Christ on the cross which was prefigured in the Passover lamb (Exod. 12). The Eucharist is not just a Christian ritual but an event that holds profound theological significance. Yet, many people participate in it without adequate knowledge about the relevance of this holy meal. This paper is an attempt to explore selected theological significance of the Eucharist to facilitate a meaningful participation in the Eucharist by modern Christians. It used the historical-critical approach to exegesis to study Mark 14:12-26, exploring the meaning of the text to its original audience and drawing some relevance for the contemporary church. The paper argues that the institution of the Eucharist signifies the atoning sacrifice of his body and blood, the establishment of a new covenant that has the responsibility to proclaim the Christian faith. In addition to its contribution to New Testament scholarship, the paper also contributes to the subject of atonement.

**Keywords:** *Atonement; Jesus; Lord's Supper; Passover lamb*

### **Introduction**

The Eucharist has been a source of reflection, devotion, and theological inquiry for centuries (Erickson 2013). The origin of the Eucharistic meal is deeply rooted in the Old Testament (particularly Ex. 12). Its Old Testament background is located in the context of Israelites' history of oppression and suffering in Egypt. They endured slavery (Ex. 13:3; 20:2; Deut. 5:6), burdened by suppression (Ex. 1:10-11), subjected to harsh working conditions (5:6ff.), and humiliation (Ex.1:13-14). The first Passover celebration, as recounted in Exodus 12, took place on the eve of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt after over four centuries of residence in the land. This tradition later evolved into one of Israel's annual celebrations.

The New Testament accounts for the institution of the Eucharist are located in the context of the Passion story (Erickson 2013). The Eucharist was instituted during the last evening meal that Jesus had with his disciples before his crucifixion (cf. Matt. 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-38; John 13:1-17). Paul establishes a typological relationship between the Passover meal and Christ's death by referring to Christ as the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). Obviously, the Eucharist is not just a Christian ritual but an event that holds profound theological significance. Yet, many individuals participate in it without adequate knowledge about the relevance of this holy meal. The purpose of this work is to explore selected theological ideas and implications of the Eucharist based on an exegetical study of Mark 14:12-26. This paper used a historical-critical exegetical approach to explore what the text reveals about the significance of the Eucharist. It begins with a background study of the text, proceeds with the exegesis of the text, and ends by drawing theological significance for contemporary Christianity.

### **Historical background of Mark 14:12-26**

The gospel of Mark is a very important document in Christianity. Yet, before the period of critical New Testament scholarship, Mark was neglected and considered as an abridged form of Matthew, which was considered as the first gospel account documented (France, 2002; DeSilva, 2018). Mark became a prominent book in Christian scholarship when critical scholars proved beyond doubt that it was written first among the gospels and was used as a source document for the gospels of Matthew and Luke (Ayegboyin, 2015; DeSilva, 2018).

Like the other gospels, Mark does not name its author. However, there are strong reasons for attributing this gospel to John Mark. Many early Church Fathers, including Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, unanimously attributed the authorship of the Gospel of Mark to John Mark (Ayegboyin, 2015). Papias (ca. AD 110) was the first Father to attribute this gospel to John Mark (Grassmick, 1983; Ayegboyin, 2015; DeSilva, 2018). These Church Fathers maintained that John Mark was an eye witness or follower of Jesus (though not a disciple himself) who accompanied Peter and witnessed his preaching, served as Peter's interpreter, and reproduced Peter's sermons accurately, though not chronologically (France, 2002; Ayegboyin, 2015).

Internal evidence supporting John Mark's authorship of the gospel of Mark includes the fact that he came into contact with Peter (Acts 12:12). Also, the author was conversant with the geography of Palestine particularly Jerusalem (Mark 5:1; 6:53; 8:10; 11:1; 13:3), Aramaic which was the common language in first-century Palestine (Mark 5:41; 7:11, 34; 14:36) and Jewish traditions (Mark 1:21; 2:14, 16, 18; 7:2-4). His connection with Peter is attested by "the eyewitness vividness" in the account which suggests they were derived from the memories of "inner circle" apostolic eyewitness like Peter (cf. 1:16-20, 29-31, 35-38; 5:21-24, 35-43; 6:39, 53-54; 14:32-42). Furthermore, the author's use of Peter's word and works (cf. 8:29, 32-33; 9:5-6; 10:28-30; 14:29-31, 66-72) and the striking resemblance between the outline of Mark and Peter's sermon in Acts 10:34-43 favor John Mark's authorship (Grassmick, 1983).

Most scholars believe that Mark was written in Rome for Gentile believers (France, 2002; Gundry, 2012). Testimonies in support of this argument include Jewish customs explained by the author (cf. 7:3-4; 14:12; 15:42); the translation of Aramaic expressions into Greek (cf. 3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 9:43; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22, 24), the use of several Latin terms in preference to their Greek equivalents (cf. 5:9; 6:27; 12:15, 42; 15:16, 39), the use of Roman time system (cf. 6:48; 13:35); the fact that only Mark identifies Simon of Cyrene as Alexander's and Rufus' father (cf. 15:12; Rom. 16:23); the use of only a few Old Testament quotations and the writer's concern for "all the nations" (cf. 5:18-20; 7:24-8:10; 11:117; 13:10; 14:9) (Grassmick, 1983, p.99).

No scholarly consensus has been reached concerning the date of writing of Mark and so different dates have been proposed. Irenaeus, for example, dates Mark after the martyrdom of Peter (ca. AD 64-68) while both Clement and Origen believe that it was written while Peter was alive (Grassmick, 1983; Ayegboyin, 2015). The debate has yielded two major views, an earlier date of AD 40-50 (if it was written before the death of Peter) and a late date of AD 65-70 (if it was written after Peter's life) (Ayegboyin, 2015). The nature of the debate points to the fact that the actual date for the writing of Mark cannot be determined with certainty.

The Gospel of Mark has various purposes, a summary of which is offered below (Carson & Moo, 2008; Gundry, 2012). Mark's main purpose was evangelistic; thus, it was written to preach the gospel of Christ. It was also written for practical purpose in that this gospel gives practical guidance and support for believers based on Jesus's life and ministry. It was also meant to encourage persecuted Christians to stand firm. More so, Mark has apologetic and political purposes. Additionally, Mark was written for the catechetical and liturgical needs of the Church.

Identified sources for the composition of Mark include oral materials (transmitted over a long period after Jesus's ascension), Petrine source (particularly sections which can only be attributed to an "inner-circle" disciple of Christ such as Peter (cf. 1:16-20; 5:21-24; 9:2-8), Markan construction (portions which Mark himself constructed from oral traditions which are usually scanty, for example, 3:13-19; 6:6-13; 6:30-33) and pre-Markan material (Jewish sources which existed before Mark was written) (Ayegboyin, 2015).

### **Literary context and structure of Mark 14:12-26**

The Gospel according to Mark is the shortest of all the gospels because it includes fewer stories than any other gospel. Yet, it gives a fuller account of the same event recorded by any other gospel (Edwards, 2002). Among the gospels, only Mark describes itself as "gospel" (1:1) and this underscores the fact that its main concern is to give an account of Jesus's life, ministry, passion and death. This does not mean that Mark is a biography of Jesus—that is, an organized historical account of Jesus, beginning with his family background, his birth, early childhood, education, marriage, career and so on. Rather, Mark (like the other gospels) is selective based on the needs of his addressees.

Mark shows a preference for Latin words when Greek words are equally available (Wessel, 1984). There is also evidence of huge Aramaic influence on Mark's language, which makes his Greek rough, unrefined, redundant, repetitious and inferior to other New Testament writers (Wessel, 1984; Ayegboyin, 2015). Edwards (2002) describes Mark's style of writing as predominantly forceful, fresh and vigorous. Support for this claim can be adduced from Mark's numerous use of the historical present (that is, the use of the present tense to relate past event [151 times]) and his use of the adverb "immediately" or "straight-away" (41 times), which makes readers think they are reading "an on-the-spot" account (Wessel, 1984; DeSilva, 2018). Other literary features of Mark include direct addresses (cf. 2:10); indirect addresses (cf. 13:37) and rhetorical questions (cf. 4:14). Mark's gospel is chronologically arranged.

Another literary technique used by Mark is intercalation, that is, the insertion of a second, seemingly unrelated story into an ongoing story. Mark 11 has an example of intercalation (A-B-A): the cursing of the fig tree (11:12-14), the cleaning of the temple (11:15-19), and the withered fig tree (11:20-25) in which the withering of the fig tree is usually to be read symbolically as a prediction of the destruction of the temple.

Different scholars divide this Gospel differently depending on their focus. I, however, find the fourfold division of Mark presented by Gruenler (2008) as appropriate for the study: (1) Thematic prologue (1:1-15); (2) Jesus's preaching of the good news in the wilderness and the city (1:16-8:26); (3)

Jesus's invasion of the hostile city of Jerusalem (8:27-15:47) and (4) Unfinished epilogue (16:1-8). According to this division, the text under consideration (that is, 14:12-26) falls within 8:27-15:47 which Gruenler (2008) divides further into Jesus's journey to Jerusalem (8:27-10:52), Jesus's confrontation with Jerusalem (11:1-13:37) and Jerusalem's opposition to Jesus (14:1-15:47).

Therefore, the immediate context for the pericope under study is 14:1-15:7 which deals with the various ways in which the city of Jerusalem showed opposition to Jesus. The section that immediately precedes the text under consideration (14:1-11) deals with the account of an unnamed woman who anointed Jesus as a way of highlighting Jesus's nature as the anointed One and also to prepare him for his burial. In this account, the spiritual insight and generosity of this woman are contrasted with the high priests' (14:1-2) and Judas' spiritual blindness (14:10-11).

Then comes 14:12-26 which divides conveniently into three parts. The first section (14:12-16; cf. Matt. 26:16-19; Luke 22:7-13) deals basically with the preparations for the Passover meal including the time and setting (v. 12); Jesus sending two disciples to Jerusalem to go and secure the venue for the celebration (v. 13-15) and the preparation of the Passover meal itself (v. 16). This is followed by the initial phase of the meal with Jesus's prophecy about his betrayal by Judas (14:17-21; Matt. 26:20-25; Luke 22:21-23; John 13:21-30).

The last part is the institution of the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist (14:22-26; cf. Matt. 26:26-30; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). Mathew's account shows great resemblance with the Markan account and the Lukan and Pauline accounts also have certain agreements. Commonalities among all the four accounts include the taking of bread, the blessing of the bread (or thanksgiving), the breaking of the bread, the saying "This is my body" and the taking of the cup. The command for the continual observance of this Sacrament is absent in Mark and Matthew. Mark believes that his audience is familiar with the details about the traditional blessings, prayers, and traditions related to the festival and so he does not include such details in his account (Beavis, 2011).

Next, one reads of Jesus's prediction of his betrayal by Peter (14:27-31), Jesus's prayer and arrest (14:32-52) both of which move him closer to his death, and then his trials before the high priest (14:53-72), before Pilate (15:1-15) and eventually his crucifixion and death (15:16-15:47).

With the background given above, the study now moves on to read the text closely.

### Close reading of Mark 14:12-26

#### The preparations for the Passover meal (Mark 14:12-16)

12 *Καὶ τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν ἁζύμων, ὅτε τὸ πάσχα ἔθνον, λέγουσιν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ, Ποῦ θέλεις ἀπελθόντες ἐτοιμάσωμεν ἵνα φάγῃς τὸ πάσχα;*

13. *καὶ ἀποστέλλει δύο τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Ὑπάγετε εἰς τὴν πόλιν, καὶ ἀπαντήσῃ ὑμῖν ἄνθρωπος κεράμιον ὕδατος βαστάζων· ἀκολουθήσατε αὐτῷ*

14. *καὶ ὅπου ἐν εἰσέλθῃ εἶπατε τῷ οἰκοδεσπότη ὅτι Ὁ διδάσκαλος λέγει, Ποῦ ἐστὶν τὸ κατάλυμά μου ὅπου τὸ πάσχα μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν μου φάγω;*

15. *καὶ αὐτὸς ὑμῖν δείξει ἀνάγαιον μέγα ἐστρωμένον ἑτοιμον· καὶ ἐκεῖ ἐτοιμάσατε ἡμῖν.*

16. *καὶ ἐξῆλθον οἱ μαθηταὶ καὶ ἦλθον εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ εὔρον καθὼς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἠτοίμασαν τὸ πάσχα.*

This section begins with the temporal clause τῆ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν ἀζύμων (“on the first day the Unleavened Bread”) which ordinarily would mean the 15th day of the month of Nisan (Friday), a day following the celebration of the Passover the previous evening (Wessel, 1984; Stein, 2008). However, the additional description that it was on this day that the Passover lambs were sacrificed means that the writer has the fourteenth day of Nisan (Thursday) in mind here (Wessel, 1984). The word “lambs” (αρνιά) is not actually found explicitly in the Greek text, but translators supply it because the context demands it (see Exod. 12:1-20; Lev. 23:5-8; Num. 28:16-25). Donahue and Harrington (2002) maintain that the imperfect verb ἔθουον (“were sacrificing”) connotes a customary action and should be understood as “when they customarily sacrificed.”

The expression τὸ πάσχα (“the Paschal lamb” or “the Passover lamb”) reminisces Exodus 12, where God instructed each Israelite household to kill an unblemished young male lamb and paint their doorframes with the lamb's blood as protection against the killing of firstborns by the angel of death. From the text one notes that the Last Supper which Jesus partook prior to his arrest, trial and crucifixion, is the Passover meal. Lane (1974) gives a number of reasons to substantiate this position. The first evidence is the return to Jerusalem for the Supper (Mark 14:17; cf. John 12:12, 18, 20; 13:2; 18:1) in accordance with the stipulations in Deuteronomy 16:5–8 that the Passover meal can only be eaten within the walls of Jerusalem. Secondly, the practice of reclining at the table (14:18; cf. John 13:12, 23, 25, 28) satisfies a requirement of the Passover celebration in the first-century Greco-Roman world custom required everyone to recline for the festive and formal meal. More so, Jesus's act of breaking of the bread during the meals and after the serving of a dish (14:18-20, 20)— unlike the normal meal practice of breaking the bread before serving the dish— depicts the Passover meal in which the breaking of the bread was preceded by the eating of bitter herbs. Further, the use of wine was reserved for festivals like Passover rather than ordinary meals where water (instead of wine) was normally drunk. Moreover, the meal was eaten late at night (1 Cor. 11:23; John 13:30), unlike the normal supper which was taken in the late afternoon.

Granted that the Last Supper was a Passover meal, one can validly conclude that the day on which Jesus was arrested, condemned and crucified was Friday, 15th Nisan (reckoned from sundown to sundown). John's (18:28 cf. 19:14, 31, 42) account of the priests' concern to fast track Jesus's crucifixion in order not to be defiled with the effect of being disqualified to eat “the pesach” (suggesting that it was the day following Jesus's crucifixion that the Passover was celebrated) seems to oppose this position. In addressing this challenge, Lane (1974:498) maintains that there were other “paschal sacrifices” referred to as chagigah (lambs, kids, bulls) which were offered throughout the festival week.” Old Testament use of pesach to designate these paschal sacrifices (in Deut. 16:2 and 2 Chron. 35:7) makes it highly probable that “the pesach” of John 18:28 refers not to the paschal lamb (which would have been eaten on 14th Nisan during the Last Supper) but to one of the paschal sacrifices. It is also important to note that the Feast of the Unleavened Bread lasted seven days (Stein, 2008) and according to Josephus (JW 2.1.3; 5.3.1; Ant. 14.2.1; 17.9.3; 18.2.2.; 20.5.3) it began on the fourteenth day of Nisan (see also France, 2002).

Jesus's reference to κεράμιον ὕδατος (“a jar of water”; v.13), according to Edwards (2002, p.420), places “the meeting in the vicinity of the pool of Siloam on Mt. Zion, to which water was diverted by Hezekiah's tunnel from Jerusalem's only water source, the Gihon spring.” Both Stein (2008) and Lane (1974) maintain that in Jewish culture, it was normally women who carried water and therefore a man carrying water was easy to be identified. Keener (2014) challenges this view and argues that wealthy families (as was probably the case here) employed the services of male servants to carry water for them. My opinion is that while one can be certain that the owner of the house was wealthy, (indicated by the description as a “large upper room” instead of a single storey peasant house), there is no certainty as to the location or identity of the owner of the house.



The expression ὅπου ἐὰν εἰσέλθῃ (“wherever he enters”; v.14) is not used in the generic or distributive sense, implying that the man was likely to enter a number of houses and that the disciples should inquire of each householder. Instead, it signifies that the disciples should inquire of the house into which the man enters. After locating the house, the disciples were to find out from the owner of the household about the guest room reserved for Jesus and his disciples. Jesus’s request of κατάλυμά (“a lodging” or “a guest room”; v. 14) is in line with the Jewish requirement that residents of Jerusalem reserve room during this festive period to accommodate pilgrims who came from all over the country to celebrate the Passover. The title Ὁ διδάσκαλος (“The teacher”) underscores that the owner of the house knew Jesus (Edwards, 2002, p.421).

Verse 15 describes the room which was provided for Jesus and his disciples as ἀνάγειον μέγα ἐστρωμένον ἑτοιμον (“a large upper room, furnished and ready”). The verb ἐστρωμένον (“furnished”) refers not primarily to furniture but to what is required for the occasion, such as rugs, a dining table and reclining couches (France, 2002, p.565; Stein 2008, p.647). The possibility exists that the owner of the house had secured the necessary food items as well as the Passover lamb for the celebration and so all that the two disciples needed to do was to prepare the meal itself including roasted lamb, unleavened bread, a bowl of saltwater, a bowl of bitter herbs, fruit sauce, and wine (Taylor 1984:538).

All that Jesus told the disciples were fulfilled exactly (v.16). Both Cranfield (1959) and France (2002) argue that the close correspondence between Jesus’s instructions and their fulfillment suggests a pre-arranged sign than divine foreknowledge. However, one can agree with Beavis (2011, p.211) that “in the context of the Passion Narrative, the incident contributes to the theme of Jesus’s prophetic foreknowledge of the events culminating in his death and resurrection.”

### Jesus’s prophecy about his betrayal (Mark 14:17-21)

17. *Καὶ ὀψίας γενομένης ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα.*

18. *καὶ ἀνακειμένων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσθιόντων ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν, Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν παραδώσει με ὁ ἐσθίων μετ’ ἐμοῦ.*

19. *ἤρξαντο λυπεῖσθαι καὶ λέγειν αὐτῷ εἷς κατὰ εἷς, Μήτι ἐγώ;*

20. *ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Εἷς τῶν δώδεκα, ὁ ἐμβαπτόμενος μετ’ ἐμοῦ εἰς τὸ τρίβλιον.*

21. *ὅτι ὁ μὲν υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὑπάγει καθὼς γέγραπται περὶ αὐτοῦ, οὐαὶ δὲ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐκείνῳ δι’ οὗ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδεται· καλὸν αὐτῷ εἰ οὐκ ἐγεννήθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος.*

Jesus arrives with the Twelve in the evening, marking the beginning of the Passover day (15th Nisan) (Taylor 1984). Stein (2008) argues that τῶν δώδεκα (“the Twelve”) is used here conventionally to refer to the ten disciples who were not sent by Jesus. If Peter and John had joined their colleagues after the Passover preparation, then the disciples would be twelve in number and hence be described rightly as “the Twelve.” There is however no clue from the text to choose one position over the other.

The expression ἀνάκειμαι (“at table”) actually means “to recline” or “to be in a horizontal position.” The Passover meal was originally eaten while standing (Exod. 12:11). However, by Jesus’s time, the Jews had adopted the Greco-Roman culture of reclining on couches during festive and formal meals, “as a sign that the people were no longer slaves, but free men” (Taylor, 1984, p.540).

In the course of the meal, Jesus revealed that one of his Twelve disciples will betray him (v. 18). The noun παραδίδομι (“betray”) literally means “to deliver” or “to hand over”. The word Ἀμὴν (“Truly”

or “Amen”) underscores the trustworthiness of the statement that follows. The explanatory expression *ὁ ἐσθίων μετ’ ἐμοῦ* (“one who is eating with me”) alludes to Psalm 41:9 where the poor righteous sufferer cries that his close friend whom he trusted and who ate bread with him had “lifted his heel” against him (France, 2002, p.566). Keener (2014) cites the example of two ancient warriors who stopped fighting each other simply because one learned that his father had hosted the other warrior’s father for a dinner to illustrate the importance attached to eating a meal together with another person. Against this backdrop, to betray a friend after dining with him/her was (and still is) very treacherous.

It is clear that Mark’s focus is not on Judas and so he neither records Judas’ question separately (Matt. 26:25) nor records the question which led to the identification of Judas as the culprit, and eventually made him leave the group to gather his gang to arrest Jesus at Gethsemane (John 13:23-30). Jesus’s prophecy about his betrayal filled the disciples with sorrow (indicated by the verb *λυπέω*, lit. meaning “to be distressed” or “grief”) and led to an active “soul-searching” by each participant (Edwards, 2002, p.423; Taylor, 1984, p.539). One by one, the disciples (including even Judas; cf. Matt. 26:25) sought to clear themselves using the interrogative *Μήτι ἐγώ* (lit. “It is not I, is it?”), which serves as a protest of loyalty rather than a request for information.

Jesus then narrows the identity of his betrayer to *Εἷς τῶν δώδεκα* (“one of the Twelve”), thereby exonerating the other participants at the meal (v.20). Here, the verb *ἐμβάπτω* signifies the dipping of the bread into a sauce, rather than a complete submersion of it. The noun *τρύβλιον* (“bowl”) refers to the dish placed in the center of the table containing the sauce into which bread was dipped for eating during the Passover meal (Cranfield, 1959, p.424). The expression *ὁ ἐμβαπτόμενος μετ’ ἐμοῦ εἰς τὸ τρύβλιον* (“one who dips bread in the bowl with me”) is a metaphorical way of underscoring the depth of the treachery (Witherington, 2001, p.373; Taylor, 1984, p.541; see v.18).

The progression of dialogue in verses 18-20 suggests that there were other people at the meals apart from Jesus and the Twelve. After prophesying that one of those dining with him will hand him over (v.18); each of them sorrowfully asks, “Surely not I?” (v. 19); Jesus then specifies that it will be “one of the Twelve” (14:20), suggesting that the betrayer is not part of the larger circle of disciples but of “the Twelve.” Certainly, the eating of Passover meal required familial setting including men, women and children (Exod. 12:3-4). Mark however might have omitted these details because it was part of the socio-religious background he shared with his audience.

The particle *ὅτι* (“for”) (at the beginning of v. 21) indicates that the reason for Jesus’s betrayal is about to be supplied. The verb *ὑπάγω* (lit. “go forward” or “goes away”) is used in John (7:35; 8:14; 16:5) to refer to the return of Christ to his Father. In the Markan account, the motif of returning to the Father is not explicit; yet, Mark makes it clear that Jesus is about to end his earthly life. The verb *γέγραπται* (“as it is written”, that is, “as the Scriptures say about him”) highlights that Jesus’s betrayal and suffering are following divine purpose or foreordination (Donahue & Harrington 2002). Edwards (2002, p.424) argues that these words by Jesus highlight “the paradox of the crucifixion and atonement” in that though the betrayal was the height of wickedness, it is a necessity to ensuring that God’s salvific plan is carried out (Acts 3:17–18; 4:27–28). Yet, Jesus states that the betrayer is not exonerated of guilt because he will act freely in betraying him (Jesus). Certainly, God’s sovereignty and human responsibility come to play in such a way that the former neither cancels human freedom nor relieves responsibility for one’s moral choices, hence the *οὐαί* (“woe”) (Cranfield, 1959, p.424).

Jesus’s reference to himself as *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* (“The Son of man”) is important to the present study. In the Old Testament, the title is used to signify “an individual” or humanity in general (Psa. 12:8; 80:17-19), the prophet Ezekiel (Ezk. 2:1; 3:17) or an individual who comes to the Ancient of days to receive everlasting dominion, glory and a kingdom (Dan. 7:13, 14, 26ff.). In Jewish apocalyptic

literature, this title refers to a divine being who would manifest himself at the end of this age as the judge of all humans and complete finally God's salvation for humanity (1 Enoch 47–71 and 4 Ezra 13).

In the gospels, the title “The Son of man” is used exclusively by Jesus himself about 82 times—Matthew (32x); Mark (14x); Luke (26x) and John (10x) (Nel, 2017, p.1). There are five more New Testament references to this title (Acts 7:56; Heb. 2:6; Rev. 1:13–15 [2x] and 14:14). Jesus uses this title eight times in Mark in the context of his own suffering, death, and resurrection (8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:21a, 21b, 41) in a way similar to Daniel's use. In addition, “Son of man” has eschatological connotations (Mark 8:38; 13:26, 34; 14:6). The title also depicts Jesus as a human being who represents all humanity (Nel, 2017). Jesus's preference for this title helps him not only to emphasize his mission as YHWH's suffering servant but also to avoid the political connotations associated with terms like Messiah.

### The institution of the Lord's Supper (Mark 14:22-26)

22. *Καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐλογήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς καὶ εἶπεν, Λάβετε, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου.*

23. *καὶ λαβὼν ποτήριον εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἔπιον ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες.*

24. *καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν.*

25. *ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐκέτι σὺ μὴ πῖω ἐκ τοῦ γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ὅταν αὐτὸ πίνω καινὸν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ.*

This section accounts for the institution of the Lord's Supper, which took place at Jesus's last Passover celebration. The narrative portion of this verse has seven intransitive Greek verbs—*ἐσθίω* (“eat”); *λαμβάνω* (“take” or “grasp”); *εὐλογέω* (“bless”); *κλάω* (“break”); *δίδωμι* (“give”), *εἶπον* (“say”) and *λαμβάνω* (“take” or “grasp”)—all of which underline Jesus's gracious act on behalf of his disciples. These verbs echo the account of Jesus's miraculous feedings of the five thousand (Mark 6:41 [31–44]) and four thousand (Mark 8:6 [1–9]).

According to France (2002), the Passover meal was a symbolic one that needed to be interpreted from generation to generation. Accordingly, the Passover liturgy required the youngest child to ask about the origin and reason for the celebration (Exod. 12:25–27) and the family head or the host (in this case Jesus Christ) to answer him by recounting the biblical account of the deliverance of the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage (see also Deut. 26:5–9) (France, 2002). It was in fulfillment of this liturgical requirement that Jesus (after blessing the bread, and having broken and distributed it to his disciples) made the statement *τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου* (“this is my body”).

There is a debate as to whether this statement is to be read literally or figuratively. The literal interpretation holds that the bread that Jesus gave to his disciples was his actual body and so when the priest blesses the bread it transforms into the actual body of Christ. The literal interpretation is not plausible because it does not even agree with the standard Jewish interpretation of the Passover bread. Keener (2014, p.166–167) asserts that when Jews say “This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate when they came from Egypt” they do not mean that what they are now eating is the same as the one their ancestors ate so many centuries ago but rather that, what they have in their hands today represents what they ancestors ate in Egypt. In addition, the literal interpretation also seems to promote cannibalism. Evans (2001, p.390) maintains that the verb *ἐστιν* is used here in a translational value of “signifies” or “represents,” so that the bread becomes a symbol of Jesus's body rather than the literal body.



I subscribe to the figurative interpretation. The starting point of the journey to making meaning out of the debate is to recognize that the Aramaic language (which Jesus spoke) has no specific verb for the English verb “to be” in this kind of construction and so what Jesus said in Aramaic would be “This, my body” (Donahue & Harrington, 2002). Therefore, the verb *ἐστίν* (“is”) was introduced by the gospel writer(s) who reported what Jesus said in Aramaic in Greek. Edwards (2002, p.425) argues strongly that the verb *ἐστίν* (“is”) should neither be understood as “represents”, “stands for” or “symbolizes” (because such understanding “weakens the relationship between Jesus and the bread to a figurative or symbolic likeness”) nor as literally equating the bread with Jesus’s body (because such understanding cannot be valid in this context when Jesus is still alive). Rather, it should be understood metaphorically as “means” or “conveys” to make Jesus’s statement “This bread *means* or *conveys* my body” (Edwards, 2002, p.425). That is, Jesus was about to leave the disciples, but henceforth the breaking of the bread was to signify his personal presence with them.

Next, Jesus then took the cup and after giving thanks, gave it to the disciples to drink (v. 23). Though the text does not mention “wine”, the cup (*ποτήριον*) must be understood as a metonymy representing its content (in this case, wine). This was the third cup of wine which, like the other cups, is drunk after the family head *εὐχαριστέω* (“returns thanks”). The writer uses the expression *ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς* (“gave it to them”) in both this and the previous verse to highlight Jesus’s act of self-giving. The expression *ἔπιον ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες* “all drank of it” presumably indicates a single cup.

In verse 24 Jesus interprets the cup. The noun *διαθήκης* (“covenant” used only here in Mark) corresponds to the Hebrew *ברית* and refers not to an agreement between co-equals but to (*συνθήκη*) but to God’s covenant with Israel, which Israel may accept or reject but cannot alter (Grassmick, 1983, p.178). Donahue and Harrington (2002) maintain that the oldest manuscripts such as Vaticanus and Sinaiticus do not have the word *καινός* (“new”) qualifying the word “covenant” and therefore, it is likely that its addition here is due to Pauline (1 Cor. 11:25) influences.

Jesus’s last interpretative remarks concerning the blood is that it is poured out *ὑπὲρ πολλῶν* (“in behalf of many” or “for many”), signifying the vicarious nature of his sacrifice for humanity (Grassmick, 1983, p.177). This statement alludes to a pre-Markan tradition in which the death of Christ is always considered as “for” others (Rom. 5:8; 8:32; 1 Cor. 11:24; Gal. 1:4; 2:20). In Mark, it echoes the statement “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45 RSV) and ultimately alludes to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 whose soul is “poured out” for the lives of many (Evans, 2001, p.392–394; France, 2002, p.570). In English the word “many” usually means “not all”; however, in Aramaic and Hebrew “many” can be used in the inclusive sense to mean “all” (Donahue & Harrington, 2002). If the inclusive use is intended here, then Mark is saying that the Christ Event is for the benefit of all humans. If on the other hand, the writer used “many” in the limited sense, then Christ died for those eternally selected to be saved. Deciding which position is valid in this passage lies beyond the scope of this paper.

The expression *τὸ ἐκχυννόμενον* (used only here in Mark) means “the (blood) poured out” which is the shedding of Jesus’s own blood on the cross rather than the pouring of blood from a container. The Old Testament attests to the use of wine as a symbol of blood (see Gen 49:11; Deut. 32:14; Isa 49:26). Since blood symbolizes life (Lev. 17:11) the pouring out of Jesus’s blood metaphorically underlines the expression for his death on the cross (see Isa. 59:7 and Psa. 13:3). Here too Christ’s word must be taken as figurative so that one does not consider the wine in the cup as his actual blood. The expression “blood of the covenant” occurs many times in the ratification of God’s covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai through the sprinkling of blood on the people (cf. Exod. 24:1-8). In this passage, Moses tells Israel the laws he had received from God after which the people responded: “all which the Lord said we will do and we will obey” (LXX Exod. 24:3). Moses then prepares a sacrifice, reads the law of the Lord to the people who after hearing the law reply as before (v. 7). Moses then takes the blood of the prepared sacrifice and

sprinkles it upon the Israelites, saying: “behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord made with you concerning all these words” (LXX Exod. 24:8). In the light of this text, one may consider Mark as identifying Jesus’s blood with the blood of Israel’s covenant to obedience. The text also echoes Zechariah 9:11, where YHWH speaks to the daughter of Zion (or Jerusalem), promising to redeem her captives “the blood of my covenant with you” (RSV).

The Passover ritual never interpreted the cup as blood because of the prohibition of drinking animal blood in the Law (Keener, 2014). Thus, Jesus’s bloodshed on the cross inaugurates the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34) in the same way that the sacrificial blood ratified the Old Covenant at Sinai (Exod. 24:6-8) (Edwards, 2002). The sprinkling of the blood on the people in Exodus 24 corresponds to the drinking of the blood at the Last Supper (Cranfield, 1959). By reinterpreting the bread as his body, Jesus identifies himself with the sacrificial lamb that is eaten at the celebration and his blood with the blood of the sacrificial victim that saved Israel (Evans, 2001). No wonder Paul says “Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7 RSV). Therefore, France (2002, p.570) is right to note that “as God first rescued his people from Egypt and made his covenant with them at Sinai, so now there is a new beginning for the people of God, and it finds its focus not on the ritual of animal sacrifice but through the imminent death of Jesus.”

Verse 25 focuses on the eschatological dimension of the Last Supper highlighted by Jesus’s final solemn prophetic declaration that he will not drink again of the fruit of the vine in this festive manner until the dawn of the Messianic kingdom (14:25; cf. Matt. 8:11–12; 22:1–10; Luke 13:28–29; 22:16; Rev. 2:7; 19:9; see also Isa. 25:6; 1 Enoch 72:14). This assertion echoes the Qumran community’s belief about an eschatological banquet which they will partake together with “an anointed priest and the Messiah of Israel” (1QSa 2; 1QS 2) (Witherington, 2001, p.375). This vow by Jesus signifies that his death will serve as the basis for forming a redeemed community with which he will drink the vine again in God’s kingdom. The expression *γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου* (“fruit of the vine”) is a Semitism for the wine used for the Passover feast (Donahue & Harrington, 2002).

The hymn referred to in verse 26 is probably the last part of the Hallel (Psa. 115-118) which was usually chanted antiphonally to end the Passover meal (Keener 2014; see Lane 1984). Afterward, Jesus and his disciples (without Judas) crossed the Kidron valley (cf. John 18:1) to the western side of the Mount of Olives before arrival in Gethsemane to be arrested and crucified in Jerusalem (Grassmick, 1983).

### **Theological significance**

The above exegetical study points to the following theological significance of the Eucharist. The main theological issues center on the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the act of remembrance and proclamation, the eschatological dimension, and the sense of unity and community within the body of believers.

### **Symbol of God’s grace and sacrifice**

The Eucharist is a symbol of God’s grace extended to humanity (Grudem, 2011). Jesus organized his feast and graciously invited his disciples to join him. Central to the Eucharist is Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross. It serves as a reminder of the core message of Christianity, which is the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. According to Christian belief, Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of humanity (Mark 14:24; cf. Matt. 26:28). This act is viewed as the ultimate expression of God’s love and grace (Rom. 5:8). In partaking of the Eucharist, believers receive the benefits of this atoning sacrifice, experiencing God’s forgiveness and reconciliation. The Eucharist, therefore, is an extension of God’s

grace to all who come to his table, regardless of their worthiness. It underscores God's inclusive and welcoming nature.

As people come to the Lord's Table they must accept his gracious invitation and extend grace to other human beings (Erickson 2013). This means one's vertical relationship with God, through their participation in the Eucharistic meal, should inform their relationship with other human beings and other creatures. The divine grace bestowed on humans should be prompt believers to commit themselves to acts of grace in the society. There is the need to actively participate in the society's efforts to promote justice, to reduce the plight of the poor, to address the needs of the downtrodden and to endure that all are equally catered for in the national agenda.

### **Eschatological and missional significance**

The Eucharist also has an eschatological dimension (Grudem, 2011). Jesus dined with humanity to institute (inaugurate) it. He promised the same banquet in his kingdom which will be established in his return (Mark 14:25). Jesus's statement about not drinking of the fruit of the vine until the Messianic kingdom is realized connects the meal to the anticipation of a future banquet in God's kingdom. This suggests a forward-looking aspect of the Eucharist, with a focus on the consummation of God's kingdom. Therefore, participation in the Eucharist implies sharing the Christian hope of Jesus' return and the establishment of his eternal kingdom. Such hope encourages the Christian to live in accordance with God's will no matter the cost because they know their reward in the Messianic kingdom will far exceed their groaning in the present world (Rom. 5:18).

Related to the eschatological dimension is the missional significance. The Eucharist has a missional purpose in that participation in this meal is a way of proclaiming Christ's death (Grudem, 2011; 1 Cor. 11:26). Christ's atoning death on the cross is the most important reason for the incarnation. He made this clear when he asserted that he came to serve and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28). As believers partake in the Eucharist, they are reminded of their role in fulfilling the Great Commission (Grudem, 2011). This can motivate the church to be more proactive in evangelism and discipleship, particularly in regions where Christianity is not the dominant faith. The Eucharist serves as a call to action, encouraging Christians to share the message of Christ's sacrificial love. It is therefore, unacceptable to participate in the meal without participating in the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20 and parallels).

### **Community Formation**

The Eucharist serves as the basis for forming a redeemed community. The Eucharist is also a symbol of the unity of the body of Christ, the Church. In partaking of the one bread and one cup, believers signify their spiritual unity and fellowship with one another (1 Cor. 10:16-17). All participants are seen as part of the body of Christ. Therefore, by sharing in the bread and the cup, the disciples enter into a covenantal relationship with Jesus and with each other. This communal aspect of the Lord's Supper highlights the unity and fellowship it fosters among believers. The early church emphasized the communal aspect of the Eucharist (Acts 2:42-46). Here, this sacrament served as a unifying force among early Christians. The significance of this unity is further highlighted by the Apostle Paul in his strong admonition to the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 11:23-27. Paul's point is that the Eucharist should not only be a symbolic act but also a means to strengthen the bonds of love, interconnectedness, and brotherhood among the members of the Corinthian church. This unity is not only present in the present but also looks forward to an eschatological unity where all believers will be gathered together in the presence of God. The unity of the church can be enhanced if Christians desist from using their pulpits to advertise their churches and castigate other churches in the name of trying to win members to their churches. There is the need to de-emphasise denominational labels and a reinforcing of local labels like

“Our denomination is the best” or “we are not like other Christians.” This does not mean that we cannot speak against unchristian practices and teaching that characterize some so-called Christian denomination. However, we must do it in such a way that does not give undue attention to our denomination and makes it as the only true Christian church.

In Africa and other parts of the world where communal worldview of is the norm, the communal dimension of the Eucharist offers a strong foundation to deepen and practicalize this worldview. This sense of community and solidarity is expressed in the Zulu saying that “I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours.” O’Donovan (1964, p.4) states that “Africans tend to find their identity and meaning in life through being part of their extended family, clan, and tribe. There is a strong feeling of common participation in life, a common history, and a common destiny.” Therefore, as people partake in the Eucharist they are reminded of their responsibility to contribute to the welfare of the entire society.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, the following facts have been established. The Eucharist signifies hope in the future consummation of God’s kingdom. It calls upon Christians to proclaim Christ's sacrificial love and actively engage in evangelism and discipleship. By participating in the Eucharist, the Great Commission becomes more than a command; it becomes a response to God’s grace, an extension of his love to others. Furthermore, the Eucharist fosters the formation of a redeemed community. The Eucharist can be a powerful tool for reinforcing the sense of community and solidarity among Christians, encouraging them to see themselves as part of a larger family, clan, or tribe. A proper understanding of the Eucharist has the potential of increasing social cohesion, support for one another, and a shared commitment to addressing societal challenges. The Eucharistic meal is rooted in communal sense of life and one’s welfare has to be the burden of the other. Given this understanding, welfare schemes should favor the poor rather than widening the gap between the poor and the rich. It is important that the church teaches its members to appreciate the significance of the Eucharist so that they can partake with meaning and live their lives in the light of its significance. A biblically and theologically sound understanding of the Eucharist will inevitably produce ethical renewal that will inform believers’ relationship with God and with other humans.

### **References**

- Ayegboyin, D. (2015). *The Synoptics: Introductory notes on the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke*. Ibadan: Baptist Press.
- Beavis, M. A. (2011). *Mark*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Carson, D. A. and Moo, D. J. (2008). *An introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd edition. Nottingham: Apollos.
- Cranfield, C. E. B. (1959). *The Gospel According to Saint Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- DeSilva, D. A. (2018). *An Introduction to the New Testament Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation*. 2nd edition. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Donahue, J. R and Harrington, DJ 2002. *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Mark*. Minnesota: Liturgical Press.
- Edwards, J. R. (2002). The Gospel According to Mark. In *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*. Edited by Carson, DA. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Erickson, MJ 2013. *Christian Theology*. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Evans, C. A. (2001). Mark 8:27–16:20. *Word Biblical Commentary* 34b. Edited by Metzger, BM *et. al.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

- France, R. T. (2002). *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Grassmick, J. D. (1983). Mark. In Walwood, JF and Zuck, RB (eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, pp. 95-198. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook.
- Grudem, W. A. (2011). *Systematic Theology: Introduction to Christian Doctrine*. Nottingham: InterVarsity Press.
- Gruenler, R. G. (2008). Mark. *Baker Commentary on the Bible*. Edited by Ewell, WA. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Gundry, R. H. (2012). *A Survey of the New Testament*. 5th ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Keener, C. S. (2014). *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. 2nd edition. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Lane, WL. (1974). Commentary According to the Gospel of Mark. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Edited by Bruce, FF. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- O'Donovan, W. (1964). *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective* second edition. Carlisle: Paternoster.
- Wessel, W. W. (1984). Mark. In Gaebelin, FE (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, pp. 601-796. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Stein, R. H. (2008). *Mark*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Taylor, V. (1984). *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. Hampshire: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Witherington, B. (2001). *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

## Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).