

Manuscript Essay on Celebrating the Lord's Supper Weekly (1733–34)¹

In May 1733 John and Charles Wesley were introduced by John Clayton to Thomas Deacon. At the time Deacon was preparing a non-juror guide for public and private devotions that drew upon the Apostolical Constitutions and other ancient liturgies to supplement the *Book of Common Prayer*. When it was published in May 1734, Deacon's guide included an appendix containing excerpts from various writers defending some of the ancient practices he had added. Among these writers was John Wesley, from whom Deacon excerpted a portion of an essay on the practice of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays (the "stationary fasts").²

Among Charles Wesley's surviving manuscripts is an essay titled (in a secondary hand) "On a Weekly Sacrament" and described as "unfinished."³ This essay was almost certainly prepared by CW during the same time as JW's essay, and with the similar encouragement of Thomas Deacon.⁴ Given its unfinished nature, CW likely never submitted the essay to Deacon for inclusion in his publication; leading Deacon to insert on this topic an extract from an earlier published piece by Henry Dodwell.⁵

The manuscript is held at the Methodist Archive and Research Centre (DDCW 9/14). A transcription of the essay was first published by John Coates Bowmer in 1951.⁶ The transcription which follows was prepared independently (correcting Bowmer in scattered places), focussing on the final text after CW's revisions, and indicating the page transitions (in **red** font) of the original manuscript.

¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: Sept. 27, 2024.

²[Thomas Deacon,] *A Complete Collection of Devotions, both Public and Private: Taken from the Apostolical Constitutions, the Ancient Liturgies, and the Common Prayer Book of the Church of England ...; to which is added an Appendix* (London: for the author, 1734). See pp. 72–74 of the Appendix: "Mr. Wesley's Essay upon the Stationary Fasts"; cf. JW, *Works*, 14:645–50.

³The cover also contains the inscription: "Tho[mas]. C. Marriott / March 2, 1849."

⁴The extended Greek quotations and scholarly argumentation of the essay rule out it being a sermon; cf. Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 277–86.

⁵See Deacon, *Collection*, Appendix, pp. 69–72; extracting Henry Dodwell, *Occasional Communion Fundamentally Destructive of the Discipline of the Primitive Catholic Church* (London: S. Keble and R. Smith, 1705), 11–18.

⁶Bowmer, *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (London: Dacre Press, 1951), 225–32.

Acts 20:7
And upon the first Day of the Week

[p. 1]

Ἐν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων συνηγμένων τῶν μαθητῶν τοῦ κλάσαι ἄρτον ὁ Παῦλος διελέγετο αὐτοῖς.¹

Κατὰ μίαν σαββάτων ἕκαστος ὑμῶν παρ' ἑαυτῷ τιθέτω, θησαυρίζων ὃ τι ἂν εὐοδῶται.²

Just. Mar., Apol. I, c. 87: Καὶ τῆ τοῦ ἡλίου λεγομένη ἡμέρα πάντων κατὰ πόλεις ἢ ἀγρούς μενόντων ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συνέλευσις [γίνεται, καὶ τὰ ἀπομνημονεύματα³] τῶν προφητῶν ἀναινώσκειται μέγρις ἐγγωρεῖ. Εἶτα παυσάμενου τοῦ ἀναγινώσκοντος ὁ προεστὼς διὰ λόγου τὴν νοθεσίαν καὶ πρόκλησιν τῆς τῶν κάλων τούτων μιμήσεως ποιεῖται. Ἔπειτα ἀνισάμεθα κοινῇ πάντες καὶ εὐχαῶς πέμπομεν. Καὶ ὡς προέφημεν παυσάμενων ἡμῶν τῆς εὐχῆς ἄρτος προσφέρεται καὶ οἶνος καὶ ὕδωρ. Καὶ ὁ προεστὼς εὐχαῶς ὁμοίως καὶ εὐχαριστίας, ὅση δύναμις αὐτῷ, ἀναπέμπει καὶ ὁ λαὸς ἐπευφημεῖ, λέγων το ἀμήν καὶ ἡ διάδοσις καὶ ἡ μεταλήψις, ἀπὸ τῶν εὐχαριστηθῆτων ἐκάστῳ γίνεται καὶ τοῖς οὐ παροῦσιν διὰ τῶν διακόνων πέμπεται.⁴

Const. Apos. I. L[ib]. 7, c. 30: τὴν ἀναστάσιμον τοῦ κυριοῦ ἡμέραν, τὴν κυριακὴν φάμεν, συνέρχεσθε ἀδιαλείπτως, εὐχαριστοῦντες. τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐξομολογούμενοι ἐφ' οἷς εὐηργέτησεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεὸς διὰ Χριστοῦ.⁵

Const. Apos. I. [Lib.] 7, c. 36: ὡς κυριακὴ παρακαλεῖται, σοι δέσποτα, τὴν ὑπὲρ πάντων εὐχαριστίαν προφέρειν.⁶

[1.] It is the Church of England's observation that there was never anything by the wit of man so well devised, or so surely established, which in continuance of time hath not been

¹Acts 20:7 (Textus Receptus). "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them" (AV).

²1 Cor. 16:2 (Textus Receptus). "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (AV).

³These four word were omitted by CW—surely by accident, as they are included in the translation.

⁴CW was likely citing from Justin Martyr, *Tou Agiou Ioustinou Apologia Prote yper Christianon*, Longus & Grabe, eds. (Oxford: Sheldonian Theatre, 1700), 131; where this is listed as Chap. 87. In later English translations it typically appears as Chap. 67. For CW's apparent personal translation, see section I.B.1 below.

⁵CW would have known the Greek text of the Apostolic Constitutions from William Whiston, *Primitive Christianity Revived, Vol. II. The Apostolical Constitutions, in Greek and English* (London: the author, 1711). The English translation in section I.B.3.i below is apparently CW's own (differing from that in Whiston).

⁶Ibid.; see CW's personal translation in section I.B.3.ii below.

corrupted.⁷ Now this observation is capable of being carried a great deal further, for it may be as truly remarked that the catholic tradition of Christ's church, nay and the very oracles of God themselves, have escaped no better in this particular than have the devices and innovations of men. The former of these have been scandalously misrepresented or industriously [p. 2] concealed, and the latter explained by the private glosses and unauthorised judgements of particular men, till at length the interpretation hath been a stranger to the text, and borne no manner of relation to the words which it was designed to explain. By these means those many unhappy revolutions of the Christian church were effected which have at length brought her down from her primitive original purity and concord to that lamentable state both of corruption and division wherein we at present find her.

[2.] When Christians began to depart from the pure word of God, the ground and pillar of the faith, and to deviate from that unerring rule of interpreting it, the tradition of the holy catholic Church, and to set up human reason and private opinion as the test and standard of the truth; from that time, I say, may we fairly date the beginning of innovation, the rise of error, and the introducing of corruption. That this is fact may be shown in a multitude of instances. But I choose to confine myself to that notable one of the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist. We know while the church stuck to Scripture, as interpreted by apostolical tradition as her rule of faith, while the Lord's Supper was understood in an orthodox sense and looked upon as the unbloody sacrifice of the representative body and blood of Christ, the oblation thereof made a constant part of the public service of the Church. But in process of time, when the speculative reasonings of the school-men and the tyrannical impositions of the popes of Rome had made a change in this ancient Christian doctrine and [p. 3] raised their monster of transubstan[tia]tion upon the ruins of the primitive doctrine of the Christian sacrifice, the constant participation thereof began to decline, and was by degrees dwindled down to that scandalous infrequency which every good Christian must see and lament.

[3.] And though at the Reformation Calvin and Luther and their adherents did agree in condemning the popish transubstantiation, yet did they likewise accord in rejecting the primitive doctrine. And because they either wanted [i.e., lacked] learning enough to examine the ancient records of the church, or modesty enough to submit to their determination, they went through their reformation merely upon the strength of their own judgement. And then no wonder that it was clouded with so many substantial errors and obvious defects. In this particular case of the Eucharist, I cannot for my own part esteem the doctrines of either Luther or Calvin one jot less heretical than I do that of the Church of Rome. In several things they coincide with them, particularly in the doctrine of the non-necessity of constant communion, which I believe was and is to this day universally held by them and the whole herd of their followers, whether in England or beyond the seas. We know how the case stands in our neighbouring kingdom of Scotland, where the Communion is hardly ever pretended to be administered above once or twice a year. [p. 4] Indeed the Presbyterians in England are somewhat more moderate, but still their practice shows they are tainted with the old leaven.

[4.] And would God the infection had not reached even the household of faith. But alas it is but too evident that the Church of England is blameable for infrequency of communion, as well as her Presbyterian neighbours. Many churches and chapels in the kingdom never have this holy feast celebrated in them except three stated times in the year. And some others who are not

⁷BCP, Preface, "Concerning the Service of the Church."

so scandalously negligent do still fall vastly short of their duty, contenting themselves with administering the Eucharist every month perhaps, or it may not be so often. But my brethren, from the beginning it was not so, and if we examine the Scriptures and the practice of the catholic church in this point we shall find ourselves obliged to say with the apostle, “We have no such custom, neither the churches of God.”⁸

[5.] And to prove this the more effectually, I shall first show from Scripture as well as the tradition of the church that the Holy Communion ought necessarily to be administered every Lord’s Day at the least. Secondly I shall prove that we are indispensably held to the same duty by the plain positive injunctions of our own Church. And thirdly I shall conclude with a practical application of what is said in the foregoing heads. [p. 5]

[I.] First, etc. [i.e., I shall first show from Scripture as well as the tradition of the church that the Holy Communion ought necessarily to be administered every Lord’s Day at the least].

[A.1.] A plain text of Scripture we have in proof of this point in that which I have chosen for the introduction to this discourse “On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread.”⁹ Now on this text I shall make but these two observations. First that the phrase, “breaking of bread” does in Scripture and Christian antiquity always signify celebrating the Eucharist, which is a principle so universally allowed among the learned that the judicious Dr. Hammond, without troubling himself or his reader with a defence of his explication, thus paraphrases the text, “On the Lord’s Day, or Sunday, the Christians being met together to receive the sacrament, Paul spoke to them at large.”¹⁰ Second I would observe that the breaking of bread, or celebrating the Eucharist, is by the text expressly declared to be the end and design of the Christians meeting together. The text does not tell us that being sacrament Sunday the Christians came together, but that on the first day of the week they came together to break bread. Which amounts to as much as if he it had said that on every first day of the week they came together for that purpose. And it is very remarkable that though the Christians at Troas happened that week to be blessed with the presence of St. Paul amongst them, and knew doubtless that he would preach [p. 6] to them on the Lord’s Day, yet the sermon is not mentioned as any part of their motive for coming to church. But on the contrary, the apostle is represented as knowing that on every Lord’s Day all the Christians, both in town and country, came together to celebrate the Eucharist, and therefore as taking that public opportunity solemnly to preach to them.¹¹

[2.] Secondly, St. Paul in his 1 Corinthians 16:2 gives this command, “upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him.”¹² The original Greek will make this text stronger to our purpose than the English translation has done, for the

⁸1 Cor. 11:16.

⁹Acts 20:7.

¹⁰CW cited “Hammond, 4th edn., 415.” I.e., Henry Hammond, *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon all the Books of the New Testament ...*, fourth edition corrected (London: R. Royston, 1675), 415.

¹¹In his comments here and the next two paragraphs CW anachronistically attributes to the earliest church structures and practices that became common later.

¹²CW placed “[1]” here; indicating this is the first of the Greek texts listed at the top of the document (after the title text of Acts 20:7).

meaning of the words evidently seems to be this: “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you set apart something—offering it to the treasury according to the prosperity wherewith God hath blessed him.” Now upon this text we may observe that instead of “laying by him,” the Greek says “let every one set apart something”—that is to say, dedicate or consecrate it to Almighty God, as appears by the words immediately following, “offering to the treasury.” To understand which we must remember that in every church there was a public treasury into which the offerings [p. 7] of the people were put and there kept for the relief of the poor saints that were in want, as well as for the support of the clergy and the repairs and decent ornaments of the church. So that it is plain, here is an offertory prescribed in the text on every Lord’s Day. And anyone who understands at all the constitution of the primitive church, will easily see the absurdity of supposing a weekly offertory without a weekly communion.

[3.] But indeed, why should I spend the time in citing texts to prove that the Eucharist was celebrated every Lord’s Day. For I may safely challenge any person to produce one text of Scripture where the meeting of Christians is mentioned, after the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, where the oblation of the Eucharist is not directly specified as a solemn part of their public service. Indeed, whoever continued steadfast in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship must likewise continue in breaking of bread. For of them it is recorded (Acts 2:46) that they continued daily with one accord in the temple and breaking of bread—not “from house to house,” as it is corruptly translated, but *κατ’ οἶκον* as the Greek expresses it; that [p. 8] is to say, in one of those upper rooms which were consecrated and made into Christian churches.

[4.] But though they did celebrate the Eucharist every day, yet they looked upon the Lord’s Day as a time when they were more particularly obliged to administer it, as from the two forecited positive texts may abundantly appear. Indeed if we consider the name of the Lord’s Day, we shall scarcely be able to assign a better reason for its being called so than because it was constantly celebrated with the Lord’s Supper, which was in those early days of Christianity looked upon as the necessary distinguishing service of that day’s solemnity, the omission of which was accounted the greatest neglect of the holy festival that could be imagined or supposed.

[B.] Thus far then I think we may take for granted that we have evident Scripture on our side for the necessity of celebrating the Eucharist every Lord’s Day. That we have Christian antiquity to support us in the same doctrine, I believe none of the opponents of this practice will be so hardy as to deny. However, for their better satisfaction I shall quote a few passages, all of them of the best antiquity and greatest authority.

[1.] St. Justin the Martyr is the first testimony which I [p. 9] shall mention who in his apology for the Christians offered to the Senate of Rome gives this remarkable description of the Lord’s Day service:¹³

On the day called Sunday, all that live either in town or country meet together in one place and the works of the evangelists or the writings of the prophets are read as long as is thought proper. After the reader has done, the bishop makes a sermon by way of admonition and exhortation to the imitation of such good works. Afterward we all rise up with one consent, and pour out our supplications, and as I have before observed, when we

¹³CW placed a “[2]” at the front of this line, indicating the second of the Greek texts listed at the top of the document (after the title text of Acts 20:7).

have finished our prayers, bread and wine and water is brought and the bishop sends up prayers and thanksgivings to God with all his might and the people join in them by saying Amen, and a distribution of these consecrated elements is made to every one *present* and sent by the deacons to those that are absent.¹⁴

So far this glorious saint and blessed martyr. And of this noble testimony we may observe that, first, Justin lived very near the age of the apostles; that he flourished not above forty years after the death of St. John the Evangelist and was, as he himself informs us, personally acquainted with many of his disciples, who were alive then and a considerable time after St. Justin's death. So that he must be allowed to be a credible evidence of this matter of fact, that the apostolical churches, the principal of which he had personally been present in, did constantly [p. 10] celebrate the Eucharist every Lord's Day. His apology likewise, being writ to the Senate of Rome not in his own name only but in the name of the whole body of Christians of his time, cannot but be allowed to speak the sense of them all; and therefore is a notable proof that the whole Christian world did at that time universally agree in this practice.

[2.] Secondly, Pliny the Younger likewise, though a heathen writer, may be admitted as a strong testimony of this matter of fact. He lived before St. Justin's time, and was contemporary with St. John the beloved apostle. In an account which he gives his master, the Emperor Trajan, of the manners and behaviour of the Christians, he tells him among other things that they were wont upon a stated day to meet together before it was light and to bind themselves by a sacrament not to do any ill thing.¹⁵ Now what day can this stated day be except the first day of the week, mentioned both by St. Luke and St. Justin; or what sacrament can we suppose the primitive Christians bound themselves by, but by the sacrament of the Eucharist. Besides, the time "before it was light," irrefragably proves that it must be the Eucharist, it being usual in those times of persecution to meet together before day for the celebration of the holy mystery that so the Christians might be concealed [p. 11] both from the cruelty and irreverence of their enemies. Which practice is fully proved by Tertullian, who flourished about the year 192 after Christ, who expressly testifies that the holy Eucharist was commanded by our Lord to be celebrated in all Christian assemblies, even in those which were held before day.¹⁶

[3.] The Apostolic Constitutions do likewise give evidence to this matter which (though I look *not* upon them as the genuine work of the apostles) I cannot but esteem as most valuable records of Christian antiquity.

[i.] In the 30th chapter of the seventh book of these Constitutions we have this direction:¹⁷ "Upon the day of our Lord's resurrection, the Lord's Day as we call it, see that ye

¹⁴While this was Chap. 87 of Book I of Justin's *Apologia* in Greek texts of CW's time, it is Chap. 67 in more recent English translations.

¹⁵CW cited: "Pliny, *Epis.* L. 10, l. 93." It is actually Pliny the Younger, *Epistles*, Book 10, Letter 96. Pliny uses the word "*sacramento*," but likely in a broader sense like an oath; see *Loeb Classical Library*, 59:288–89.

¹⁶CW cited: "Tert. *de Corona mil.* c. iii." That is Tertullian, *De Corona Militis (The Chaplet)*, ch. 3.

¹⁷CW placed here "[3]"; referring to the third Greek text (after the title text) given at the beginning of the document. The translation that follows in apparently CW's own, differing from

constantly meet together and offer the Eucharist to God, giving praise for all the good works which God hath done for you through Christ.” And that we may be sure this passage is designed as an injunction of the weekly oblation of the Christian sacrifice, it is closed with a quotation of the famous passage in the prophet Malachi 1:11¹⁸ which all learned commentators, both ancient and modern, have universally understood as a prediction of the Christian sacrifice of the Eucharist.

[ii.] These same Constitutions do likewise give further testimony of this practice in the 36th chapter of the same book, where in a prayer of thanksgiving appointed for the Sabbath, [p. 12] there is a declaration made of the superior excellency of the Lord’s Day above the Sabbath, on account of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and the completion of our redemption thereby, which the church ever esteemed to be a mercy far surpassing even that of the creation. On this account, as the prayer testifieth, “we are commanded to rejoice together, and solemnly to assemble for the celebration of this festival, and we are likewise commanded to offer the Eucharist for all to thee, O Lord, on the Lord’s Day.”¹⁹

[iii.] Now I would ask these two questions. First, whether these Constitutions are not ancient enough to determine whether the church thought herself obliged to offer the Eucharist on the Lord’s Day or no. Secondly, whether a declaration that they did think themselves so obliged would have been made part of a solemn prayer, if in truth there had been no such obligation. Now that the Constitutions are early enough to determine the matter of fact the learned are in general pretty well agreed, who hardly any of them venture to degrade them below St. Epiphanius’s days, who flourished about the year 368 and himself expressly quotes the Apostolic Constitutions. And as to the latter question, anyone that at all considers the great piety and zeal of the primitive Church will not be at a loss for an answer to the question whether the Christians of those days would have suffered a notorious falsity to have been so positively asserted in the body of a solemn prayer. [p. 13] So that I cannot but look upon this evidence as the strongest that can possibly be imagined, both for the truth of the fact that the primitive Christians did celebrate the Eucharist every Lord’s Day and likewise for the truth of the doctrine that they looked upon themselves as indispensably obliged to do so.

[C.] The sum of the matter is this. We have the testimony of St. Luke in several passages of his Acts of the Apostle[s], of St. Paul in his first Epistle to Corinth, of Tertullian, St. Justin the Martyr, the Apostolic Constitutions, and lastly of the Roman Pliny to prove that the holy Eucharist is to be celebrated every Lord’s Day at the least. More authorities might have been added, both from the ancient fathers and from the oracles of God, but these I think are abundantly sufficient to demonstrate what I undertook—namely, that both Scripture and tradition do give plain evidence for the necessity of making at least a weekly oblation of the Christian sacrifice, and of honouring every Lord’s Day with a solemn public celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

that in Whiston.

¹⁸“... In every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.”

¹⁹CW placed a “[4]” at the end of this quotation, indicating the fourth of the Greek texts listed at the top of the document (after the title text of Acts 20:7). The translation is again his own.

[The surviving manuscript does not include the other two sections that CW announced he would address: “Secondly I shall prove that we are indispensably held to the same duty by the plain positive injunctions of our own Church. And thirdly I shall conclude with a practical application of what is said in the foregoing heads.”]

Source: holograph; Methodist Archive and Research Centre, DDCW 9/14.