Τρώγω: A Eucharistic Motif in the Gospel of John

by Gerald E. Nora

In John’s Gospel, Jesus uses the verb τρώγω in two speeches. In the Bread of Life Discourse, he uses it four times to describe the eating of his own flesh (6:51-58), and at the Last Supper, he uses it to paraphrase Psalm 41 as a prophecy of Judas’ betrayal (13:8). Since the King James translation, or earlier, English Bible translators consistently translate τρώγω in these passages as meaning simply “to eat,” synonymous with the Greek verb εσθιω, which appears elsewhere in Jesus’ speech. Modern interpreters have noted that the verb is frequently associated with animal activity and is more accurately translated as “to chew, gnaw or munch.” They disagree among each other, however, whether this distinction has special meaning when interpreting John’s Gospel. Those who believe the distinction matters argue that the verb graphically supports the Lord’s teaching about the real consumption of his flesh. This paper agrees with those interpreters but submits that the verb has greater sacramental implications than those advanced by the sacrament’s champions. Correctly understood, the two pericopes express how the “Word-become-Flesh” is also still “the Word” and how the Word manifests its power in both Judas and the other disciples.

In this paper, “the Evangelist” and “John” refer to the final author, redactor, community, or series of writers who produced the received Gospel of John. This is a literary analysis which limits its historic inquiry to what the received text would have meant to its original audience and what this understanding might add to our modern interpretation. “Word” as a capitalized term means the “Word” of God as expressed in John’s Gospel. This paper works from the theological axiom that the “Word” of God is infinite, and from the axiom’s corollaries: that the infinite Word of God contains all and more than is accessible to human thought, and that inspired human words can only partially express truths from the Word. This is especially useful for interpreting the Gospel of John, which is distinguished throughout by its poetic and persuasive coherence but also by its sometimes redundant, shifting, contralogical, or contradictory statements.

1 Chicago Theological Union student Gerald E. Nora is a Catholic Archdiocese deacon assigned to St. Mary of Vernon Parish in Indian Creek. His ongoing ministries include work with juvenile detainees, the homeless, and the hospitalized. He and his wife Patricia raised four children and enjoy a growing family that now includes six grandchildren. Deacon Nora was an Illinois trial lawyer for 32 years and is now majoring in New Testament studies for his MA degree in Theology.

2 When discussing the verb as such, this paper uses the first person active singular form “τρώγω,” that is used for dictionary entries. When discussing its use within the Gospel of John, I quote it as the present participle which appears there, “τρώγων.”


This paper also assumes that the Evangelist intended the finished Gospel text to serve as a persuasive, affirming document of faith, not a reverential archive of independent memorials. Therefore, the paper assumes that the Evangelist only used materials that would have been accessible, persuasive, and meaningful for his original audience, although he also creatively combined these materials in a design that would inspire, provoke, and surprise that audience. Rather than analyze the historic provenance and relative antiquity of different pericopes and the redactions that amplified or restricted them, this exegesis concentrates on how the final text informed the faith of its believers.

When interpreting the Gospel of John, it is important to accommodate several cultural differences between his original audience and ourselves. First, many people in that time were illiterate, and regularly employed professional writers and readers, even for letter-writing. Additionally, the run-on writing style of the day presented readers with interpretive difficulties we have since overcome with punctuation, spacing, and other innovations. Hebrew writing lacked vowels, all reading involved another’s handwriting, and words were not evenly spaced. Reading was laborious, and even private reading would require the reader to sound out the text. In the late fourth century CE, St. Augustine cited St. Ambrose’s ability to read without moving his lips as a remarkable feature of his holiness and intellect. So whether pronounced in communal reading or encountered in private study, the Evangelist’s Gospel reached its audience through a moving mouth. For ancient believers, metaphorical equations of words and food (Jer 15:16; “When I read your words I devoured them”) and of wisdom and food (Prv 24:14; “Wisdom is like honey”) were especially powerful because speaking and reading the metaphors enacted their common motions. It is also useful to remember that, even if John’s first audience shared our Western preference that our table companions chew with their mouths closed, it is doubtful that the eating activity associated with animals was a quiet affair. These considerations invite one to envision how the ancient audience could more easily approach reading, scripture, speaking, and eating as overlapping manifestations of a shared communal activity.

**Τρώγω in the Bread of Life Discourse**

Τρώγω appears at the end of the Bread of Life Discourse, in John 6:51-58. I believe the best translation of this passage is the following text, which follows Raymond E. Brown’s translation, with three exceptions I will discuss next.

51 I myself am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I shall give is my own flesh for the life of the world.

52 At this the Jews started to quarrel among themselves, saying, “How can he give us [his] flesh to eat?”

53 Therefore Jesus told them, “Let me firmly assure you, unless you have eaten the flesh of the Son of Man and have drunk his blood, you have no life in you.

54 The one who is chewing [τρωγων] on my flesh and drinking my blood has eternal life. And I shall raise him up on the last day.

55 For my flesh is real food and my blood, real drink.

56 The one who is chewing [τρωγων] on my flesh and drinking my blood remains in me and I in him.

57 Just as the Father who has life sent me and I have life because of the Father, so the one who is chewing [τρωγών] on me will have life because of me.

58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike those ancestors who ate and yet died, the one who is chewing [τρωγών] on this bread will live forever.标志性

Brown notes that τρώγων should be distinguished from εσθιω (“to eat”) and that it had a “crude connotation” like “gnaw, munch.” But he compromises in his translation, using a different word from “eats,” but one that is a virtual synonym: “feeds.” In my first departure from Brown, I use the verb “chew” as the word that is closest to both the Greek verb’s meaning and to our own common usage. In a second departure, I translate the verbs for eating, drinking, and chewing to match the verb tense or mood of the original Greek. In verse 53, the verbs are active, subjunctive, aorist, second person plural: “have eaten” and “have drunk.” In the following verses, the verbs are in the first person present participle: “is chewing” and “is drinking.” In a less significant departure from Brown’s translation, I use “one” instead of “man,” to translate more precisely John’s ὁ.

Virtually all modern commentators recognize that this pericope concerns the sacramental reception of the Lord’s body and begins with an institutional formula that was probably taken from accounts of the Last Supper. As Brown notes, before Jesus’ call to eat his flesh and drink his blood obtained a positive meaning at the Last Supper, this passage could only have been understood as overthrowing Noahic and Levitical prescriptions against cannibalism. John Dominic Crossan discerns that the entire pericope, not just the institutional announcement, is an apparent Eucharistic formula, and he summarizes the case that this pericope is transposed from an account of the Last Supper institution:

The language of 6:49-58 is explicable only in terms of Eucharistic formulae known from outside this chapter but it is even more startling than the similar formulaic repetitions in 1 Cor 11:27-29...This furnishes four main points: it is formulaic eucharistic language; it is extremely more realistic than is usual elsewhere for such formulae; it is addressed to the murmuring and debating Crowds/Jews; [but] it is not reacted to by them but by the Disciples among whom it has caused a division (6:60-66).标志性

Our inquiry first depends upon whether the “extremely more realistic” verb τρώγων had special significance for the Evangelist and his original audience. Commentators such as C.K. Barrett believe there is no significant meaning when the Evangelist moves from Jesus speaking of the one who eats his flesh to the one who chews his flesh. Brown, on the other hand, offers two points to support the verb’s significance. First, John’s Jesus is escalating his rhetoric with the cruder verb, thereby emphasizing the “realism” (or literalness) of the Eucharist. Second, the verb’s sacramental significance is evidenced by the Evangelist’s exclusive use of it here and in one other Eucharistic context, Jesus’ quotation of Psalm 41 at the Last Supper.

Brown’s argument is strengthened by two other features of the pericope’s verb. First is the Evangelist’s emphasis in Chapter 6, with Jesus repeating the term four times. This repeated emphasis is unusual in John and is comparable with the Prologue’s repetition of the word λόγος. It can also be contrasted with the Evangelist’s apparent preference to mix verbs, such as Peter’s φιλω and the Lord’s αγαπας/φιλεις in Chapter Twenty-One. More sig-

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nificantly, the Evangelist has switched his verb tense, from the aorist “eaten” to the present participle “is chewing.” John O’Rourke suggests that this emphasizes the pericope’s sacramental character because it describes something that will be repeated in time.\(^\text{12}\) If this pericope made sense to the Evangelist’s original audience (however surprising its context in the Bread of Life Discourse might have seemed), it would have made sense only as something Jesus would have been saying while the disciples actually were eating the sacrament. (Clearly, no one is chewing anything, never mind the Lord’s flesh, as Jesus gives the Bread of Life Discourse instead of feeding the crowd which came for food!) It would have been familiar to the Evangelist’s audience as part of the Last Supper and, quite possibly, as part of the liturgical memorial they celebrated.

It is likely the Evangelist intended τρῳγω to have a special emotive or connotative force, but this begs the question what specific meaning the term had when brought into the Discourse on Living Bread and into Jesus’ Last Supper quotation of Psalm 41:10 in Chapter Thirteen. The answer lies in three examinations: first, a closer consideration of the verb, then its context within the earlier Discourse on the Bread of Life (6:35-50), and finally, its context within the larger framework (6:25-34, 59-71) of Chapter Six.

We should note that besides crudely emphasizing the realism of eating, τρῳγω is limited to one part of eating. Besides the previously noted meanings (gnaw, chew, crunch, munch) consider the synonyms we find in a thesaurus: chomp, masticate, chew the cud, gnash, and ruminant. All these meanings concentrate on the movement of the jaws. Consider then how much of the eating process Jesus omits: tasting, swallowing, chymifying, digesting, passing, even assimilating. Besides the crudeness Brown notes in the verb’s connotations, we should remember the verb’s denotation: it focuses exclusively on the action of the eater’s jaws.

Brown characterizes the 6:51-58 pericope as the “sacramental” discourse on the bread of life to distinguish it from the earlier “sapiential” discourse. He charts the remarkable parallels between the two, and along with his assertion that the pericope has been taken from the original Last Supper tradition, he theorizes that it has also been recast to resemble the “sapiential” discourse in 6:35-50.\(^\text{13}\) One could also suggest that the sapiential material was recast to resemble the sacramental, but the important question now is how both sets of material successfully worked together.

Taken alone, the Gospel’s plain text suggests two remarkably similar but incompatible, even competing discourses. Both parts begin with virtually the same words, as Jesus announces that he is the “bread of life” who abolishes hunger and thirst (v. 35) and the “living bread” who provides eternal life (v. 51). The Jews interrupt both parts with objections, in the first part wondering how Jesus, their neighbor, could claim an origin in heaven (v. 41-42), and in the second part asking how “this man” could give them his flesh to eat (v. 52). The first objection meets with the promise that the one who eats the “bread from heaven” will “never die” (v. 50), and the second that the one who takes “this bread will live forever” (v. 58). But where the bread of eternal life in the first, “sapiential” discourse is defined as belief in Jesus, the “sacramental” discourse defines the bread of eternal life as the literally consumed, real flesh and blood of Jesus. In the first part, the Evangelist quotes Jesus as saying, “Let me firmly assure you, the believer possesses eternal life” (v. 47), and four verses later as saying, “Let me firmly assure you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”

The Gospel of John is not an anthology of traditional sayings and stories the Evangelist has scrapbooked together, but a carefully composed, coherent text that inspired and sustained his audience. These two parallel parts, then, could only have worked if the audience understood them as consistent and meaning the same thing. The Evangelist may have initially surprised the audience with this composition, but the composition would proceed

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to make sense if the audience recognized the truth in each of its parts and resolved them as containing the same truth or, perhaps, different but compatible aspects of the same truth.

How can the sapiential bread of life, belief in the words and actions of Jesus, be the same as the sacramental bread of life, the very flesh of Jesus? The answer has already been given in the Gospel’s Prologue: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14). The Word also became the “Lamb of God” (1:29) who, as such, would be sacrificed at Passover and consumed.

The Evangelist has composed the Bread of Life Discourse to reinforce the union of these two realities. Crossan’s exhaustive study of John 6 examines the many literary motifs and parallel structures running through the Chapter and framing the Discourse. The Chapter’s opening narrative moves between traveling and feeding. Jesus moves with the Disciples across the Sea of Galilee to a mountain where he teaches and feeds the crowd with loaves and fish. They re-cross the Sea, the Disciples by boat and Jesus walking, to be met by the crowds, who desire more bread, thereby instigating the Bread of Life Discourse. After a much more detailed analysis, Crossan finds that the Chapter is “characterized by layers of text whose successive levels dominate and absorb the previous ones. In view of the text’s dominant motif of eating, it seems necessary to characterize this process as consumption.”

But Crossan is struck by another feature of the Chapter: the discourse elements depend upon scripture, the scripture motif blends into the discursive elements of Jesus’ spoken words, and the Chapter anticipates and mirrors our own experience of reading these words as sacred scripture. At the end of the Chapter, Peter accepts Jesus’ teaching on his flesh because “You have the words of eternal life” (v. 68). We now read these words as scripture. This recursive phenomenon leads Crossan to ask,

Is it of any significance that we read John 6 as *script* rather than see and hear ‘it’ happen as event? When John 1:14 says that ‘the Word became flesh’ and John 6:63 adds that ‘the flesh is of no avail,’ should we conclude that the Word of God became flesh and voice in order to finally become script: ‘the Word became script’? There, presumably, is the hermeneutical heart: is the Word of God oral or scribal or both, and, if both, are there differences and hierarchies to be maintained within that answer?

Here Crossan has two insights that help this analysis. First, he has identified a second motif that runs throughout Chapter Six, framing as well as informing the Bread of Life Discourse: the motif of speech/writing/word/wisdom, the sapiential element explicitly stressed in the first part of the Discourse. This corroborates our thesis that the sapiential and sacramental elements of the Discourse enjoy a united identity. Second, his recognition of the recursive and overlapping aspects of Chapter Six’s “word” motifs come close to providing the entire analysis in this paper. Crossan, however, does not include the “sacramental” element in his hermeneutical question even though he has specified “consumption” and feeding as the Chapter’s dominant motif! Crossan’s mistake, I believe, is to take Jesus’ statement that “the flesh is of no avail” (v. 62) by itself and not as part of Jesus’ paradox that his flesh is also food that gives eternal life. This is the Gospel’s central paradox, that Christ’s glory is being raised upon the Cross, and that our life depends upon the consumption of his slaughtered flesh.

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14 Crossan, “It is Written,” 16.
15 Crossan, “It is Written,” 17.
16 Crossan’s analysis, in my opinion, shows how John’s Gospel easily leads into a gnostic frame of mind. Not only is the flesh not availing, but the Gospel’s content, scripture citations, discourses, and the reader’s acts of reading/proclaiming lead one towards equating the Word with wisdom words. The “word” supremacy over the corporal elements of food, flesh, and bread is reinforced simply by encountering those elements as words. How might this tendency have been unanticipated by the Evangelist and avoided by his first community? Perhaps if these words were primarily experienced during a Eucharistic meal. This possibility is raised by Raymond Brown and discussed at the end of this paper.
Once we recognize that the Evangelist presents the sapiential and sacramental bread as one and the same thing, we are challenged to move beyond the dialectical thinking (word/sacrament; symbolic bread/real flesh; belief/communion) which has characterized Western thought and informed theological disputes since the Reformation. This “equation” is more than the identification of two phenomena having equal value, or two parts of one whole; rather, it is two expressions of one reality: word made flesh. As a Catholic believer, I am reminded that the Word-made-flesh is still the eternal Word (i.e., “wisdom,” sapiential bread). I am consoled, as other Christians might be challenged, that the equation also means that the flesh is still dwelling with us, inasmuch as the true believers are still “chewing” it. Just as “bread” unites both discourses in the consumption motif, τρώγων (“chewing”) unites the ongoing consumption of the Lord with the moving lips that are reading the scripture and quoting the moving lips of the Lord. It is not to say that one goes with the other; rather, the one is the other.

This is Chapter Six’s lesson, and it also provides the answer to a question that comes later, in the Last Supper: how does one both believe and consume the flesh and blood of Jesus?

Τρώγω and the Last Supper

A literal reading of John’s extensive Last Supper narrative seems to answer only the first part of the question “how is one to believe in Jesus?” Jesus’ teachings after the foot-washing (13:12-16), on love (13:34-35), and in the Last Discourse (14:1-17, 26) provide comprehensive instructions on how to believe and follow Jesus as “the way, the truth and the life” (14:6). The substance of the sapiential bread of life is served at the Last Supper. This amplifies the apparent absence of the sacramental bread of life, leading to an easy conclusion that there is no sacramental Eucharist depicted in John’s Last Supper.

The sacramental Eucharist, however, is richly depicted in John’s Last Supper. The depiction is explicitly introduced with the τρωγω motif introduced in Chapter Six, and John’s ongoing Eucharist is discerned if one comprehends the lesson of Chapter Six’s “chewing” motif: the flesh is word as well as the word being flesh.

A crude term tolled four times in Chapter Six, τρώγω reappears as a single chime in Chapter Thirteen—but discordantly, as Jesus paraphrases the Psalmist’s complaint about the past betrayal of a friend who “ate my bread” (Ps 41:10) into a prophecy about one who is now “chewing my bread.”

Blessed are you if you do it [serve others as I have served you]. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it. I am not speaking of all of you. I know those whom I have chosen. But so that the scripture might be fulfilled, ‘the one who is chewing my bread has raised his heel against me. From now on I am telling you before it happens so that when it happens you may believe that I AM (13:17-19).

Jesus again sounds a loud note with τρώγων, and this time he is speaking about someone who is currently eating bread in his presence. Becoming more troubled, Jesus reiterates that he is about to be betrayed, and at this, the disciples “[look] at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant” (13:22). Clearly, all are eating bread in this part of the Last Supper, not just the betrayer. Otherwise, the disciples would not look at each other at a loss. John’s original audience would understand that the Last Supper narrative is beginning sometime after the institutional consecration, which has already been quoted in Chapter Six. Bread has been blessed and broken and is now being consumed.

At Peter’s prompting, the beloved disciple queries Jesus on the betrayer’s identity, and it is clear that the partaking of bread continues. “Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it. So he dipped the morsel and handed it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot. After he took the morsel, Satan entered
him. So Jesus said to him, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly.’ ...So he took the morsel and left at once. And it was night” (13:26-27, 29).

If a Bible translation fails to communicate clearly Jesus’ speech about the one who “is chewing my bread,” the reader may not realize that any bread has been consumed at the Last Supper. If one interprets “the morsel” as the only evidence of bread, one may reach the more difficult conclusion that the only bread at the Last Supper was served to Judas. For those who correctly read John’s Last Supper account, there is still the challenging aspect that Jesus has given bread to Judas as well as the other Disciples, and the Eucharist has apparently enabled Satan to enter Judas and accomplish the betrayal. However we resolve the elements of choice and destiny, John is clearly portraying the Eucharist as spiritually all-powerful within and even against a person who does not have faith in Jesus. Eternal life is not necessarily a matter of eternal happiness.

Even if we recognize that all the Disciples receive the sacramental bread, we still might misunderstand John as limiting the bread’s sacramental effects to Judas. Here it is critical to maintain the insight gained when “chewing on” Chapter Six. The Word has become flesh, and the flesh is also the Word. The Last Supper begins after the bread has been broken, and most of it is taken with Jesus’ teachings in Chapter 13 and the several speeches and final prayer that fill Chapters 14-17. At the beginning of the Supper scene, the Disciples actively speak with Jesus. Peter resists foot washing; Peter and the beloved disciple investigate the betrayal prophecy; Peter protests his loyalty; Thomas asks about “the way;” Phillip wants to see the Father; another disciple questions Jesus on the end times. Like men digesting a large meal, the Disciples then grow quiet, listening to the largest part of the Last Discourse (14:22-16:28) before finally confessing their understanding (16:29-30).

Taken as a whole, Jesus’ Last Discourse is a compelling and coherent expression of one who is “the way, the truth, and the life.” It is made of parts which seem to contradict each other and which would work best as independent speeches. Jesus even resembles some of our less-gifted politicians or lawyers as he makes several concluding remarks that do not conclude. The composite effect is best described by Raymond Brown:

[Unlike earlier discourses in John’s Gospel] the Last Discourse partakes of the glory of ‘the hour’ and surpasses in nobility and majesty even the most solemn discourses of the ministry. The latter were often directed to hostile audiences...But in the Last Discourse Jesus speaks to his own [13:1] for whom he is willing to lay down his life, so intense is his love [15:13]. The Jesus who speaks here transcends time and space; he is a Jesus who is already on his way to the Father, and his concern is that he shall not abandon those who believe in him but must remain in the world [14:18; 17:11]. Although he speaks at the Last Supper, he is really speaking from heaven; although those who hear him are his disciples, his words are directed to Christians of all times...

It has been wisely said that the Last Discourse is best understood when it is the subject of prayerful meditation.

17 The NABR finesses the issue and avoids any inference that there is bread at John’s Last Supper in its note for 13:26 that suggests that the “morsel” is probably “the bitter herb dipped in the dish.” This mistakenly treats John’s Last Supper as a Passover celebration. John is not depicting a Passover dinner but a supper held “before the Passover” (13:1). John reiterates this point by specifying that Jesus’ crucifixion occurs on the Day of Preparation for Passover (19:31). In John’s Gospel, Passover that year occurred on the Sabbath Christians commemorate as Holy Saturday.

18 This incident recalls Jesus’ prior suggestions that eternal life is in some way both a matter of predestination and choice. In Chapter 12 Jesus quotes Isaiah to explain that some are prevented from believing him, yet the Evangelist immediately goes on to explain that some Pharisees have been motivated to make unbelief their choice (12:37-40). At the end of the sacramental discourse, Jesus asks the Disciples if they too will now reject him, and Peter answers that they choose to remain his followers. Jesus undermines Peter’s reassurance by expressing the paradox that challenges Jesus’ choices. “Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you twelve? Yet is not one of you a devil?’” (6:70)

19 In order, John 13:6-9, 23-25, 37; 14:5, 8, 22.

The Disciples who are chewing the sacramental bread are also digesting the words of the One who is the eternal Word. In the Last Discourse, the Evangelist communicates what one might imagine would necessarily happen should humans enter into eternal wisdom and have it translated into human words. The experience is both dreamlike and realistic. The words make sense and pull one to transcendent truths. Multiple speeches, prophesies and farewells slow down time while also betraying a sense of the urgency of a man composing a last testament while facing imminent arrest and death. Various overlapping, occasionally inconsistent homilies reflect the reported experiences of people facing catastrophe, whose “whole life flashes before their eyes.” Death is imminent but held in suspense. Truth is expressed, but in fragments that communicate a gestalt of larger truths. The speech’s overwhelming content is leavened by Jesus’ promise that the Disciples will later recall all he is saying and that there is much else that they cannot now understand. Too vast to be easily “digested”, the text expands. Too much to be swallowed at once, it is “chewed on.”

Raymond Brown describes how John’s Last Discourse may reflect the Christian Eucharist celebrated by the Evangelist’s community:

There can be no doubt that the chapters that form the Last Discourse were not always united... The Christian Eucharist, which recalled the Last Supper, provided an opportunity for preaching and teaching; and the use of this occasion to gather together traditional sayings of Jesus may have had its effect on the narrative of the Supper itself.21

I believe John’s original audience enjoyed a way of thinking we have largely lost. They saw no dichotomy between the sapiential and the sacramental breads of life. They understood that the Word and the flesh had become one. Entering the Eucharist, they believed this union also enabled them to transcend the normal limits of time and space. They knew that they were enjoying eternal life now, that they were eating the crucified flesh of the risen Lord, and that enjoying the sacramental bread was contiguous with listening to his words. Very simply, they were in love, and their meals with the Lord were not rushed. His food and his words were matters for rumination, for chewing.

Modern Christians easily miss this comprehensive comfort with the Eucharist and the holistic message John gives his first readers and listeners. The “chewing” of sacramental and sapiential life, as it is depicted in John’s Gospel, seems to require a similar cooperation for those who would “hear” or read these words. Besides implementing the “prayerful meditation” that Raymond Brown urges (and which surely informed his work) on an individual basis, we might better obtain the eternal life John’s Gospel tells us we can enjoy right now, if we undertake our meditations communally with table fellowship and extended readings of the scripture. Monastic meal traditions and the liturgy of Matins might best resemble the living community which first heard John’s Gospel.

I believe Bible scholarship can also be advanced by a further reflection on the Greek word τρωγω as a metaphor for reading and hearing scripture. “Chewing” is not swallowing, never mind digesting. It is related to the idea of “rumination,” which is also a comfortable synonym for study, review, or meditation. In his Gospel, John first uses “chewing” to unite two ideas—the sacramental and sapiential matters of eternal life—that cannot be logically or rationally united. Then he uses it to introduce the sacramental Eucharist that is dramatized with the frequently contralogical and multiple parts of the Last Discourse. Our biblical scholarship is perhaps too constrained by modern rationality, causing us to pause over matters such as which parts of the Last Discourse are the oldest, or whether an ecclesial redactor inserted the sacramental discourse into the sapiential. This causes us to miss

the Evangelist’s bigger achievement. Can Bible scholarship enter the realm of appreciation that Raymond Brown enters with “prayerful meditation”? How do we study the meta-rational aspects of the scripture?

Brown’s “prayerful meditation” actualizes the Church’s methodology of combining the scientific level of historical-critical analysis with the theological level that is informed by the analogy of faith and the Church’s living tradition.22 Each of these realms, however, grows from a tradition of philosophic rationalism that is older than Christianity. Each realm is challenged to achieve a deeper understanding of scripture’s parabolic and meta-rational content.

David Gelernter, computer scientist, artist, polymath, and former Hebrew scholar, is now attempting to model the full realm of human thought for his work on artificial intelligence. In a recent article, he describes the larger realm of human thought and how it explains many contradictory and contralogical features of the Hebrew scriptures:

Human thought is dynamic, not static; it moves along a cognitive spectrum, from so-called high-focus, alert, logical thought to the low-focus, contralogical thought of drowsiness and dreaming. Over the course of a day, we descend the spectrum (like shimmying down a rope) from top to bottom. Low-focus thought is—loosely speaking—free associative. Free association is a nonlogical rule for constructing thought sequences.23

Gelernter finds mid- and low-range thinking processes in matters such as contradictory psalm tricolas and dream-like stories like Jacob’s night wrestling with the angel. Certainly such features are found throughout John’s Gospel. The constructs Gelernter uses for modeling the full realm of human thought for artificial intelligence might offer us means of better understanding the grand realm of John’s Word-made-flesh.

Conclusion

By accurately translating one word, τρωγω, we resolve the apparent polarities in John’s Bread of Life Discourse between Word and Sacrament, we recover the Last Supper’s sacramental Eucharist, and we are challenged to reconsider how we may better enjoy the bread of eternal life. The Evangelist uses τρωγω to unite the sacramental and sapiential in Chapter Six’s Bread of Life Discourse. In Chapter 13, the word signifies that the Eucharist has already been instituted, and it impliedly continues throughout the extended Last Discourse. Word and Sacrament are united as Word-made-flesh.