

Covenant Renewed: The Mass in Scripture According to Pope Benedict XVI

“I am convinced that the ecclesial crisis in which we find ourselves today depends in great part upon the collapse of the liturgy, which at times is actually being conceived of *etsi Deus non daretur*: as though in the liturgy it did not matter any more whether God exists and whether He speaks to us and listens to us.”

–Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, quoted in “Restoring the Liturgy: How We Must Proceed, part 2), *Inside the Vatican*, May 2005, 95.

Ratzinger:

the liturgy was rather like a **fresco**. It had been preserved from damage, but it had been almost completely **overlaid with whitewash** by later generations. In the Missal from which the priest celebrated, the form of the liturgy that had grown from its earliest beginnings was still present, but, as far as the faithful were concerned, it was largely concealed beneath instructions for and forms of private prayer. –Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 7–8.

Ratzinger

There is no doubt that this new missal in many respects brought with it a real improvement and enrichment; but setting it as a new construction over against what had grown historically, forbidding the results of this historical growth, thereby makes the liturgy appear to be no longer a living development but the product of erudite work and juridical authority; this has caused us enormous harm. For then the impression had to emerge that liturgy is something “made”, not something given in advance but something lying within our own power of decision. From this it also follows that we are not to recognize the scholars and the central authority alone as decision makers, but that in the end each and every “community” must provide itself with its own liturgy. When liturgy is self-made, however, then it can no longer give us what its proper gift should be: the encounter with the mystery that is not our own product but rather our origin and the source of our life. –Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 148.

Delegation from Kievan Rus’

Then we came to the edifices where they worship their God...we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men.

Ratzinger

Creation moves toward the Sabbath, to the day on which man and the whole created order participates in God’s rest, in his freedom. Nothing is said directly about worship, still less about the Creator needing the gifts of men. The Sabbath is a vision of freedom. On this day slave and master are equals. The “**hallowing**” of the Sabbath means precisely this: a **rest from all relationships of subordination and a temporary relief from all burden of work**... The Sabbath is the sign of the covenant between God and man; it sums up the inward essence of the covenant. If this is so, then we can now define the intention of the account of creation as follows: creation exists to be a place for the **covenant** that God wants to make with man. The **goal of creation is the covenant**, the love story of God and man.

– Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 26

Samaritan Woman

John 4:19–24 (ESV)

¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Ratzinger

If, then, everything is directed to the covenant, it is important to see that the covenant is a relationship: God’s gift of himself to man, but also man’s response to God. Man’s response to the God who is good to him is love, and loving God means **worshipping** him. If creation is meant to be a space for the covenant, the place where God and man meet one another, then it must be thought of as a space for **worship**. – Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 26.

Marriage: Questions before the Consent

- N. and N., have you come here to enter into Marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?
- Are you prepared, as you follow the path of Marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?
- Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?

Since it is your intention to enter the covenant of Holy Matrimony, join your right hands and declare your consent before God and his Church. – *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*

Roman Catechism / Catechism of the Council of Trent:

The sacraments “are so many sacred links / bonds [sacris vinculis] by which [the faithful] are bound [connectuntur] and united [copulantur] to Christ... Although this name [Holy Communion] is common to all the sacraments, because they [all] unite us to God, and render us partakers of him whose grace we receive, this word *communion* belongs in a more special manner to the Eucharist, which accomplishes this communion itself.” (*Roman Catechism* 1.10.22).

Kinship and Covenant

Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) teaches that a covenant is a means by which persons enter into communion with each other. Indeed, “to ‘ratify a Covenant’ means ‘to enter with others into a bond based on blood or to welcome the other into one’s own covenant fellowship and thus to enter into a communion of mutual rights and obligations.’” –April 9th, 2009—Homily

As Frank Moore Cross makes clear, kinship “was conceived in terms of one blood flowing through the veins of the kinship group” and in the covenant “a real, if non-material form of consanguinity is established. The partners become in some way ‘brothers of the same flesh and the same bones’” (Benedict XVI, Homily).

A covenant, Cross asserts, was a “legal mechanism...by which outsiders, non-kin, might be incorporated into the kinship group” (Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 7). However, more than legal fictions, “such individuals or groups were grafted onto the genealogies and fictive

kinship became kinship of the flesh or blood. In a word, kinship-in-law became kinship-in-flesh” (Cross, 7).

OT liturgies all follow this pattern in making or renewing the Covenant relationship:

In its ancient form, the “classical Old Testament liturgy...includes two aspects: the burnt offering and the reading from the book of the covenant” (Ratzinger, *Dogma & Preaching*, 15–16). Seen in the context of covenant renewal, the “worship of God in Israel...is aimed at man as a covenant partner” (Ratzinger, *Dogma & Preaching*, 16). The covenant itself is “concretized in...worship” (Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 17). In this context, covenant relationship is the larger category into which law and worship are situated. Indeed, “worship, law, and ethics are inseparably interwoven” into the ordering of covenant life together (Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 17).

Exodus 24:1–11

And he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship afar off. ² Moses alone shall come near to the LORD; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.”

³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, “All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do.” ⁴ And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ And he sent young men of the sons of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. ⁶ And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. ⁷ Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” ⁸ And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

⁹ Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, ¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. ¹¹ And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

Covenant and the Kindred of YHWH

Israel is the “People of God” (literally, “the kindred of YHWH”) because of and particularly in relation to its identity as covenant-assembly vis-à-vis God. Therefore, the “People of God” formula “must be understood as legal language, the language of kinship-in-law, or in other words, the language of covenant.”¹ Ratzinger notes that when the Bible speaks of Israel as this covenant-assembly, it identifies it as the *qāhāl*-YHWH or covenantal/liturgical assembly.

Qāhāl as Covenant Assembly

Important to note here is Ratzinger’s recognition of the “*qāhāl*” as “a covenant assembly” (Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 41) and therefore principally a liturgical assembly. It is for

¹ Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 12, 13. “As a result of the divine covenants, Israel became ‘*am Yahweh*, which is usually translated as ‘the people of God,’ but literally means the ‘family of God’ or ‘God’s kindred.’ Yahweh, according to [Frank Moore] Cross, ‘is the god of Israel, the Divine Kinsman, the god of the covenant.’” Scott W. Hahn, *Letter and Spirit: From Written Text to Living Word in the Liturgy* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 48.

the liturgy of covenant making that Israel is gathered together in assembly. For Ratzinger, “Israel is constituted as a people through the covenant” (Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 19). It is in the covenant-making liturgy that Israel’s identity as the People of God (*’am Yahweh*) is rooted. Indeed, in Jewish “liturgical literature, *qāhāl* is the community assembled in worship” (Westermann, *Theological Lexicon*, 1124). For example, “wherever the Chronicler mentions the *qāhāl*, it is in a liturgical setting” (De Vries, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 136). So, in Chronicles, *qāhāl* references Israel “in a more formal or technical sense” as the “complete ‘assembly of Israel’ gathered for worship or for feasts or fasts to worship Yahweh” (Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 129). So the “original purposes of the *qāhāl* were cultic: to remember and renew the covenant made at Sinai” (Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 129). Recall here that the first and exemplary use of *qāhāl* is in the context of the Exodus, the Sinai covenant journey (Hahn, *The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire*, 55).

ἐκκλησία as New Covenant *qāhāl*

The Last Supper scenes in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20) constitute the only place where Jesus uses the word *covenant* (διαθήκη). Significantly, Jesus even uses the words “blood of the covenant” (τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης), which are found in a parallel place in the Scriptures at the sealing of the Sinai covenant where Moses says, “Behold, the blood of the covenant” (Ἴδοὺ τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης—Ex 24:8).² When Israel is gathered together at Sinai to enact the covenant, they are gathered together as the *qāhāl*-YHWH. Israel’s identity as the “people of God” [*’am YHWH*] is therefore bound up with the covenant.

It is no wonder that St. Paul capitalizes on this connection between the covenant-assembly and Jesus’ New Covenant people by identifying the people of the New Covenant as the ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*).³ It seems that the word ἐκκλησία gathered so much distinctive reality to it that for “Latin speakers of the West,” ἐκκλησία could “not be translated,” but had to “be taken over” by transliteration.⁴ Hahn notes that for Ratzinger, “there is deep significance in the fact that the New Testament word for ‘church’ (*ecclesia*) is used in the Septuagint to translate *qāhāl*, the liturgical assembly of the people of God” (Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 129).

² Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, eds., *Septuaginta: SESB Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), Ex 24:8. That Jesus’ words have Exodus 24 in mind is indicated particularly by the meal context. Michael P. Barber explains that “celebrating a *meal* mirrors not only Moses’ words concerning the ‘blood of the covenant’ but also the sacred *feast* that culminates Exodus 24 (see Exod. 24:8–11). Moreover, just as Exodus 24:4 highlights the way God’s covenant is established with the *twelve tribes*, the *twelve apostles* are prominent in Luke’s Last Supper scene (Luke 22:14, 30). Taken individually, each of these parallels are only suggestive of a connection between Jesus’ words and Exodus 24. Taken together, however, these points of contact are too strong and numerous to be written off as mere coincidence.” Michael Patrick Barber, “The New Temple, the New Priesthood, and the New Cult in Luke-Acts,” *Letter & Spirit, Volume 8: Promise and Fulfillment* (2013): 118.

³ “The determining factor for Paul’s usage... was almost certainly the LXX use of the term *ekklēsia* to translate the ‘assembly of YHWH/Israel’ (*qāhāl YHWH/Israel*).” James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 166.

⁴ Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: the New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. Lionel Richard Mortimer Strachan (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 114.