

A TABLE OF ACTION: UNDERSTANDING THE LORD'S SUPPER THROUGH THE
LENS OF SPEECH ACT THEORY

A Paper

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by

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In October of 2007, business giant IBM ran a series of television commercials entitled "Stop Talking, Start Doing." The series of four commercials focused on the absurdity of "business-speak" substituted for actual work. For example, in the commercials employees lament the thought of sitting through another corporate meeting, so they devise a game of "buzz word bingo" to pass the time. These commercials demonstrate, in a popular way, the disparity between speech and action in our culture. Words and actions have subversively drifted apart.

Unfortunately, the church has accepted the speech/action disparity. Either churches focus on pragmatic actions without thoughtful speech, or they focus on precise speech void of action.¹ Perhaps this disparity is best displayed at the Lord's Table. While Restoration Movement churches pride themselves on their precision of observing the Lord's Table weekly, some have said we "observe the Lord's Table weakly" in light of our frequency.² The Table has become a place where beliefs and piety are only internal and personal experiences – a place where mental ascent and detached remembrance replace fellowship and communal thanksgiving. Is it possible for this current icon of speech/action disparity to be mended together again? This paper will demonstrate how J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory of language and meaning provides an acceptable bridge

¹ In Restoration Movement churches, this duality comes from the merging of a frontier/revivalist tradition with a Scottish Commonsense Realism tradition.

² "Observe the Lord's Table weekly, not weakly" has become somewhat of a rallying cry in the Restoration Movement over the last decade as churches wrestle with the frequency of the Lord's Supper against church growth models.

for helping congregants in Stone-Campbell Movement churches recognize the Lord's Supper as a moment for unity in word and deed recognized through fellowship with Christ and one another in a spirit of thanksgiving. Care will be taken to demonstrate how Speech-Act theory provides an alternative explanation of the Supper that fits more tightly with Scripture and Church history.

AN OVERVIEW OF SPEECH ACT THEORY

Speech Act Theory is rooted in a series of lectures given by philosopher J. L. Austin on the campus of Harvard University in 1955.³ Austin begins his model by calling into question the theory that statements merely describe "some state of affair" or deal with the reporting of facts.⁴ He labels these kinds of verifiably true/false statements as "constatives."⁵ For Austin, philosophy has incorrectly cast the majority of experience in this constative (true or false) role, a situation which does not accurately describe the way humans actually live and speak.⁶ As an alternative, Austin offers a different paradigm based on what he calls the "performative" instead of the true/false constative.⁷ The performative lens views language as something that is *done* instead of something that only describes (truly or falsely) what *is*.⁸ Austin summarizes the performative as "to say

³ Raman Selden, ed., *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. George Alexander Kennedy, 9 vols., The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vol. 8 (Cambridge University Press, 1989-1999), 347.

⁴ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2d ed., The William James Lectures; 1955 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸ In the beginning, Austin lets the constative and the performative exist side by side. But later on he recasts the constative as a specific kind of performative.

something is to *do* something."⁹ The performative is divided into three basic acts: the *illocutionary* act, the *locutionary* act, and the *perlocutionary* act. Austin (as well as many other commentators on his work) uses the example of speaking/making a promise to illustrate the three acts of the performative, we will do likewise for our exploration of Speech-Act Theory.

When someone makes a promise, they begin with what Austin calls an *illocutionary* force. The illocutionary force is the *will or intent to carry out* an intended action. For example, if someone sent an email that read "I'll meet you at 8:00 PM," Austin would say that the illocutionary force is the *willingness or intent* to meet. The emailer begins with the intent to meet at 8:00 PM and then renders that intention into text. Austin would also say that the emailer could have the intention of not showing up at all and writes the email to carry out different actions (perhaps meeting on a different day other than today) by using the same words.¹⁰ The same written (or spoken) phrase can have more than one possible illocution because the author's (or speaker's) intent is the focus of the illocution, not the rendered text itself.¹¹

The rendered text itself is classified as the *locution*. The locutionary act is the writing or speaking of illocutionary intent. Nicholas Walterstorff says "...my act of inscribing those words *counts* as my act of making that promise."¹² The speaking or writing act codifies the speaker's or writer's intent in a medium that is assessable by

⁹ Austin, 12.

¹⁰ This example begins to show signs of weakness on this point. Selden illustrates it better on p. 349 by talking about the different intents of the phrase "the house is on fire." It could be formed out of an illocutionary intent to warn or an illocutionary intent to mourn.

¹¹ Selden, ed., 349.

¹² Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Not Presence, but Action: Calvin on the Sacraments," *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought* 16 (March 1994): 18.

others. Intention (illocution) is demonstrated through the locutionary act of speech or written word. Illocutions reside only in the mind of the author until they are rendered into some kind of vehicle that can travel from one person to another. In the example of the promise email, the emailed words serve to assure the recipient that an illocution to appear at 8:00 PM was made in the mind of the sender.

The effect on the hearer/reader of the illocution rendered in locution is what Austin calls *perlocution*. He describes it this way:

"Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them...."¹³

In the emailed promise example, the recipient's *removal of worry* in regard to meeting is the perlocutionary act. These perlocutionary acts are effects caused by illocutionary acts rendered and confirmed by locutionary acts. In the example, the recipient feels relieved (perlocution) because the sender promised (illocution) to show up at 8:00 PM. The email itself (locution) both renders and confirms the promise (illocution) and provides the cause for the "consequential effect" of feeling relieved (perlocution).

When a constative statement does not match reality, we label it false. As said before, Austin prefers to view reality through the lens of the performative; so when illocutions, locutions, and perlocutions do not match with reality and "go as expected," he describes them as being "infelicitous" or "unhappy" as opposed to false.¹⁴ He divides

¹³ Austin, 101.

¹⁴ Ibid., 14. In fairness, these are not Austin's favorite terms to use, but he used them because they convey the lack of integrity (infelicitous) and poor affective consequences (unhappy) when performatives do not function as they should.

these infelicities into two categories: "misfires" and "abuses."¹⁵ The "misfires" category contains acts where sincere illocutions do not get rendered effectively into legitimate locutions. For example, a person has the intent to marry someone (illocution), but they answer "OK" (locution) when the socially expected answer is "I do." Their illocution, however sincere, misfires because they did not render it into the conventionally acceptable locution for the context. Conversely, the "abuses" category contains acts where conventionally acceptable locutions are rendered from insincere or deceptive illocutions. In the wedding analogy, the participant would say "I do" (locution) with no intent (illocution) to be married. The performative, in both cases, did not "go as expected" and both cases fail and produce, in Austin's terms, unhappiness.

Many scholars have expanded, critiqued, and praised Austin's Speech Act Theory, therefore an expansion or critique on that theory here is beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁶ We will assume that the theory is sound enough to stand and begin our application of Speech Act Theory to the Lord's Supper. But, before we apply Speech Act Theory to the Lord's Table, is it even possible or helpful to take a philosophy of language and apply it to a multimedia event like the Table? In answer to that question, I rely on Wolterstorff to bridge the gap. Wolterstorff says:

The prying apart of illocutionary actions from locutionary actions is a crucial part of the model. Once we have that distinction in hand, then immediately we notice that the same sorts of actions that are illocutionary actions – and in many cases not just the *same sorts* of actions but the *very same* actions – can be performed not only by

¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶ See the following for expansions and critiques: Sandy Petrey, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1990), John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1970), Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998), Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1973).

uttering or inscribing words, and not only by doing such other things with words as pointing to them or signing them, but can be done without using words at all, using instead pictures, semaphore signals, gestures, and so forth. (Of course, in these latter cases they wouldn't, strictly speaking, be *illocutionary* actions, since they wouldn't be performed by illocutionary actions; nonetheless they would belong to the same ontological category.)¹⁷

Wolterstorff goes on to say that just like uttered words and gestures belong to the same ontological category, Word and Sacrament are similarly paired by content – namely "the promise of our redemption in Jesus Christ."¹⁸ If Word and Sacrament are both of similar ontology, and Speech Act Theory "works" as a way to understand the Word more fully, then Speech Act Theory is a reasonable method to use for exploring the Lord's Supper.

THE LORD'S SUPPER THROUGH THE LENS OF SPEECH ACT THEORY

Instead of starting with illocutions in the Lord's Supper, we will begin with locutions. Locutions, from Speech Act Theory, are utterances or inscriptions that help render illocutions into shareable or receivable form. The first and most prominent locutions at the Table are *the bread and cup*. These physical entities render illocutionary acts. They are not "merely show-and-tell lessons" which only point us to true/false constative historical facts (although they do); they are "inscriptions" – made with physically created things – which communicate deep illocutionary intent.¹⁹ The bread and cup have an intentional and attentive author who is in the process of illocutionarily acting through these locutions.

¹⁷ Wolterstorff: 19.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Leonard J. Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 11.

For performatives to "work" in Speech Act Theory, they need to be felicitous. In order for locutions to be felicitous, they need to avoid the infelicities of "misfires." Likewise, the bread and cup need to avoid misfires as well. In the example of the marriage ceremony above, the misfired locution of "OK" replaced "I do." While the illocution stayed intact, the locution failed because it was not rendered as conventionally acceptable in the context. Are there conventionally acceptable norms for the locutionary use of physical symbols in general and the bread and cup in specific at the Lord's Table? In other words, are there ways in which we render physical symbols in general and the bread and cup specifically that would cause them to be infelicitous (not consistent with the author's illocutions)?²⁰ To fully answer these questions we need to discern the illocutionary act(s) at the Table, but before we do, let us look at two more locutionary acts.

While the bread and cup are certainly the most prominent "inscriptions" at the Lord's Table, they are unique "inscriptions" in that they must not only be viewed with the eye (like a text) but acted upon by eating and drinking. The second locution at the Lord's Table is the very acts of *both eating and drinking*. The bread and cup are not "read" until they are consumed. Some might place the acts of eating and drinking as a part of the perlocutionary act – as a part of the "consequential effects" of the bread and cup being offered. However, I would suggest that while we may visually appreciate from afar the letters and spatial order of a sentence in a language we do not know, we have not read that sentence until we have taken the pronunciations, syntax, and grammar into our own minds as orderly events fixed in conventions we know. Likewise, the bread and cup are

²⁰ This question is addressed in the last section.

not fully "read" until they are consumed. The bread and cup are made to be eaten and drank just as words are made to be understood in the mind of the reader. There is value in the physical symbols themselves, but they are incomplete as texts until they are consumed.

The last locution at the Table is not as difficult to align with Speech Act Theory as the first two because it is *speech itself*. The liturgical speech that surrounds the Table is as much a part of the Table as the locutions of bread/cup and eating/drinking. Jesus demonstrates this for us at the Last Supper when he uses speech to accompany the bread and cup. Most, if not all, communion liturgies throughout history as well as today contain some form of speech at the Table.²¹ Since spoken utterances (and inscriptions) are commonly accepted in Speech Act Theory as locutions we will also accept them here. Let us now move on to illocutionary acts at the Lord's Table and we will later return to felicitous conventions for locutions.²²

As said before, single locutions can have several different but valid illocutions behind them. The Lord's Supper is no different. While there are several (perhaps many) illocutions to be explored in the Table, we will focus on four main illocutions that garner support from Scripture and church history. First, we begin with the illocutionary force of *desired fellowship*. God's intent at the Table is to fellowship with His people. The illocutionary force is evidenced by the Table's historical background as a meal event. Before Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at the Last Supper, there was a long Jewish

²¹ Ronald Claud Dudley Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, 3rd, rev. and enl. ed. (Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990).

²² These are taken up in the last section.

tradition of sacred fellowship at common meals. Gavin explains the importance of fellowship at those meal like this:

Whenever possible, emphasis was laid upon the corporate as well as the religious character of the social life organized in the common meal. Ber VI. and VII. prescribe many details bearing on these principles: for example, two groups, who may be having a meal under the same roof, are to say grace together if it is feasible (VII. 5); ... These Fellowships or *haburoth* were presumably extremely common in the religious-social life of the Jew in the early years of Christianity. It was entirely in accord with the spirit of Judaism so to hallow social intercourse, or, to put it the other way about, to deem social intercourse sacred.²³

In addition to the Jewish precedent for fellowship at the Table, the Apostle Paul through Scripture encourages the church in Corinth twice about the illocution to fellowship at the Table. The first encouragement appears in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 when he calls the bread and cup a "sharing" in the body and blood of Christ. Paul writes, "since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread."²⁴

Augustine affirms this "fellowshipping bread" analogy in his famous "be what you see, receive what you are" sermon where he expands the bread analogy all the way from kernel of wheat to finished loaf of bread, broken and shared.²⁵

Second, the Lord's Supper contains the illocution of *the desire to sustain*.

Alexander Schmemmann begins his "study guide" on liturgical worldview with the idea that God sustains us through sacred interaction.²⁶ He starts by painting the picture of God

²³ Frank Stanton Burns Gavin, *The Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments* (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1969), 67-68.

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:17, NIV.

²⁵ Augustine and others, *The Works of Saint Augustine : A Translation for the 21st Century* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: New City Press, 1990), 300-301.

For an expanded and retold version of this sermon, see the "Video Meditation - Bread" in the project appendix.

²⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd rev. and expanded ed of *Sacraments and Orthodoxy*. ed. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 11.

creating a garden and man then eating the good things that God made as an act of life-giving sustenance. He calls eating a sacred interaction with creation, one which God blesses and uses throughout the Biblical story.²⁷ The gospel of John recounts Jesus talking about himself as this sustaining "Bread of Life" who offers himself "for the life of the world."²⁸ While discussion remains spirited in regards to the sacramental character of this text, one cannot help but think the early church heard (and perhaps John intended them to hear) the "desire to sustain" at the Lord's Supper on at least a secondary level. After giving several reasons against a sacramental understanding of John 6, Gerald Borchert writes "on a secondary level, however, John may expect his readers to read Jesus' words in light of the church's observance of the Lord's Supper, though not necessarily in a sacramental sense."²⁹ Many Eucharistic prayers throughout the history of the church also acknowledge this nourishing aspect of the Table.³⁰

Thirdly, the Table contains the illocutionary act of *God's intent to remind the church of His story of redemption*. This is probably the most widely recognized illocution because it is the most plainly stated in the Biblical texts. Both Luke and Paul tell us that Jesus asked the disciples to "do this in remembrance of me."³¹ But the question arises – what are we to remember while we do this? The context of the Last Supper provides clarity. The Last Supper was a Jewish meal (see illocutionary

²⁷ For an expanded and retold version of this concept, see the "Video Meditation - Hungry" in the project appendix.

²⁸ John 6:51, NIV.

²⁹ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, New American Commentary V. 25a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 217. I use this quote here to demonstrate that many of those who see John 6 on a primary level as not connected to the Lord's Supper, most are willing to connect the two on a secondary level.

³⁰ Jasper and Cuming. pp. 15, 40, 82, etc.

³¹ Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24, NIV.

fellowship above), but it was also the Jewish Feast Day of Passover. The Passover festival celebrated God's mighty acts in Israel's Exodus from Egypt. The themes of deliverance and rescue were "sitting on the table" both by way of the bread and the lamb. The unleavened bread reminded them of the expediency with which God rescued them, the lamb reminded them of God's care in sparing their firstborn by another's sacrifice. Jesus asks his disciples (and the church by extension) to add his own and final atoning sacrifice to the saving works that God has done throughout history. Again, Eucharistic prayers from all points in church history echo this theme of remembering God's saving acts through Biblical history as culminated in the death and resurrection of Jesus.³²

The last illocution at the table is the act of *God's desire to fully restore creation at Christ's return*. This illocution is best found in Paul's admonition to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" as well as Jesus' promise to the disciples "for I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."³³ While the "when" of Jesus' promise could be dependent on one's interpretation of when "the kingdom of God comes," Paul's admonition seems to be clearly about the return of Christ. John also points to a feast in Revelation that echoes this Eucharistic feast.³⁴ Again, the Eucharistic prayers of the historical church demonstrate this longing for the future where God completes his story. Most notable is one of the earliest Eucharistic prayers from the Didache:

May grace come, and this world pass away. Amen.
 Hosanna to the God of David.
 If any be holy, let him come; if any be not, let him repent.
Marana tha. Amen.

³² Jasper and Cuming.

³³ 1 Corinthians 11:26 and Luke 22:18, NIV.

³⁴ Revelation 19:7-9.

Before we leave this section on illocution, it is important to note that God is the person acting in the illocutionary act. God desires for us to fellowship, to be sustained, to remember His redemption story, and to anticipate His future return. The church's role in this Speech Act Theory view of the Table is not to create our own illocutions in our own minds, but to discern God's illocutions by looking at the locutions (the bread, cup, eating, drinking, and words) in their conventional contexts (Scripture and church history). When we do this, we avoid the error of only creating meaning in our minds by attaching true/false labels – what Austin called the constative error. Vanhoozer says:

Their (Wittgenstein, Austin, and Searle) focus on how language is used in specific contexts for particular purposes allows these philosophers to anchor meaning elsewhere than in consciousness. To be exact, language and world come together not in the subject's mind but in inter-subjective interactions.³⁵

When we understand these actions of fellowship, sustenance, remembrance, and hope as God-initiated actions rendered in the bread, cup, eating, drinking, and speech; we can then focus on the *perlocutionary* actions that God intends to bring about through His illocutionary and locutionary acts at the Table.

Perlocutionary acts at the Table are identified both by our affective states and by the potential for us to produce and reproduce speech acts of our own. In the Speech Act Theory example of a promise, the perlocutionary act is the relief of anxiety. The Table does touch this affective area of ourselves, but it also consequentially calls us to respond in ways that spring from and move beyond the affective. The best way to discuss perlocutions at the Table is to trace the path from specific illocutions through to their consequential perlocutions. We will use the four illocutions named above for this discussion.

³⁵ Vanhoozer, 213.

First, the illocutionary act of fellowshiping is rendered, by way of locutions, into the perlocutionary act of *embodied fellowship* with God and with each other.³⁶ In regards to the perlocutionary act of fellowshiping with God, Keil describes the social meal context of the Jewish Passover as a place where "the sacrifice has become a sacrament, the flesh of the offering (the lamb) as a means of grace through which the Lord takes up His redeemed people into the fellowship of His own House...."³⁷ The meal context of the Lord's Supper, born out of these Jewish roots, provides a consequentially ripe environment for fellowship with God. In regards to the perlocutionary act of fellowshiping with each other, Paul's correction in 1 Corinthians 11:17ff goes as far as to say that when you do not fellowship appropriately with each other, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. The early church echoes this practice of Table fellowship as evidenced by Justin Martyr's account of the Lord's Supper in his First Apology:

And when the president has given thanks and *all the people* have assented, those whom we call deacons *give to each one present* a portion of the bread and wine and water over which thanks have been given, and *take them to those not present*....And thereafter we continually *remind one another* of these things. Those who have the means *help all* those in need; and we are always *together*. (emphasis mine)³⁸

Second, the illocutionary act of sustenance is seen perlocutionarily as *being fed*. While Jesus' Bread of Life discourse in John 6 may not be "sacramental" in a primary way, we need not tie the use of John 6 to only a "real presence" illocution and therefore only a "real presence" perlocution. The context and history that Jesus uses in John 6 leads us to the larger Biblical arc of God's desire to feed us with good things. The

³⁶ One alternate name for the Lord's Supper – Holy Communion – derives its name from this perlocution.

³⁷ Quoted on p. 67 of Gavin., originally from *Hanbuch der biblische Archäologie*, I. p. 385

³⁸ Jasper and Cuming, 19.

locutions of eating and drinking adequately render God's illocution to nurture and sustain. When we eat and drink, we realize we are fed. The locutions are so closely tied to the illocution (the desire to nourish expressed in a nourishing bread and cup), that this may be one of the simplest, yet overlooked, perlocutions at the Table. Since God (not man) is the illocutor in this scenario, we can be assured that his intent to sustain us is carried out because of His authority to do so. We must remember that this situation is not a simple transactional process to receive eternal life (as some see John 6 when applied to the Lord's Supper), God already desires to sustain us – it is His invitation and initiation, not ours, that drives this perlocution. We simply receive the nourishment – we neither control it nor negotiate it.

Third, the illocution of God's desire to remind us of His acts in history finds its fulfillment in the perlocution of a church who *sees the world ordered by God's redemptive narrative*. In the broadest sense, this perlocution could be called living with a Christian worldview. God's desire to form or narrate the world through the doing and telling of His mighty acts (illocution) are told at the Table (locution) to re-form the church's view of the world from fallen to redeemed (perlocution). This is the most central cause for thanksgiving at the Table. Every time we sit at the Table, God recalibrates our view of ourselves and the world around us by re-ordering them around His salvation narrative. The spoken recapitulations of God's work at the Lord's Supper are not merely *informational*, they are ultimately *formational*. Speech Act Theory helps us, via the performative, to move beyond an information-only (truth/falsity) approach to an approach that *acts in and on* the life of the hearer.

Lastly, the illocution of longing for the future is seen perlocutionarily as both *hope* and *mission*. When we eat this meal in anticipation of Christ's return (locution), God's desire and authority to see the world fully restored at Christ's return (illocution) is germinated in us as hope (perlocution). Hope is nurtured and grown in the anticipatory setting of the Table. The locutionary elements that bridge our hope and God's desire are 1) the meal context itself with its overtones of the wedding feast of the Lamb as seen in Revelation and 2) the spoken words of assurance that Jesus gives when He says he will "drink this anew." While mission could equally be a result of the other three illocutions mentioned above, it is most explicitly tied to this illocution because of Paul's words "for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you *proclaim* the Lord's death until he comes (emphasis mine)."³⁹ The Eucharistic prayer from the Didache (cited above) demonstrates this as well by its call to mission in saying "if any be holy, come; if any be not, let him repent."

Having looked at the locutions, illocutions, and perlocutions active in the Lord's Supper, let us now revisit the question of whether infelicitous locutions or illocutions can "derail" the intended perlocutions. In Speech Act Theory the illocution/locution felicity or "happiness" can be broken if 1) the illocution is made insincerely with a properly rendered locution (abuse) or 2) the illocution is made sincerely with a poorly rendered locution (misfire).⁴⁰ Since God is the author and actor of the illocutions at the Table, insincere illocutions can be ruled out. If we look briefly at God's speech acts in history, He has not only maintained illocutionary sincerity, He has defined illocutionary

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:26, NIV.

⁴⁰ See the "misfires" and "abuses" discussion above on p. 4-5.

sincerity.⁴¹ With Table illocutions safely sincere, we can now move to locution misfires at the Table. Locutions (unlike illocutions) are actively shared by both the author and the reader, so potential for error increases with this extra handling. The Lord's Supper is almost an extreme version of this author-reader-locution-sharing because the author (God) lets us "rewrite" the locutions of the Table (bread, cup, eating, drinking, and speech) each time we celebrate according to our contexts. God's initial delivery and current reminders of the locutions leave generous room for things like translation of speech, different kinds of bread, various modes of eating, etc. Since we are given the ability to contextualize the locutions, we also have the responsibility to ensure that *felicitous* locutions are the sincere expressions of God's illocutions and means for our perlocutions.⁴²

Because these locutions were, in a sense, made for contextualization and portability by a generous author, whether a locution is felicitous or not may, in part, depend on the context in which the locutions are enacted. For this project, I will provide a few examples of infelicitous locutions in the context of Stone-Campbell Movement churches to demonstrate contextual infelicitous locutions.

⁴¹ Elizebeth Newman elaborates on the Hebrew concept of *dabar* (the Hebrew word for speaking a word). She argues that the very idea of speech comes from God's demonstration of sincerity and felicity in Speech Act Theory. Elizabeth Newman, "Rethinking the Eucharist: Towards a Unity of Word and Deed," *Ecumenical Review* 45 (1993).

⁴² The illocutions and perlocutions I have named above are appropriate for any context and any time.

INFELICITY AT THE TABLE

While there are several infelicitous instances of locutions at the Table in Stone-Campbell Movement churches, I will focus on only three infelicitous locutions. First, the locutions of bread and cup are infelicitous when they are expressed in *individual servings* – bite-sized, precut crackers for the bread and small "shot glasses" for the cup. This seems infelicitous in the sense that Paul (and later Augustine and Campbell) ties the fellowship and unity hoped for in illocution and realized in perlocution to the "sharing" of the one bread and cup. Surely there is room for derivation, but in a culture where individualism is over emphasized, locutions at the Table should unite and not divide.

Second, the current locutions of bread/cup-eating/drinking seem to offer very little in the way of a "meal-like" experience. Because of their size and "sterility," the bread and juice fail to convey that they are, in fact, *something that brings sustenance*. They resemble something from a pharmacy, not a bakery; a medicine cabinet, not a winery. Again, there is room for derivation, but our preference should be for locutions that felicitously render God's illocutions.

Third, and most importantly, the locuted spoken words at the table *fail to communicate* God's story of salvation. Since Stone-Campbell Movement churches rarely use any kind of Prayer of Great Thanksgiving, many congregations are left to the spontaneous musings of someone trying to develop a theme from a sermon or a personal anecdote. The words of institution from the Last Supper are sometimes read, but if this locution is to be felicitous, it must encompass enough of God's saving acts to promote living within a Biblical worldview.

CONCLUSION

Speech Act Theory is a valuable tool to help reform our understanding of the Lord's Supper. When we understand God's illocutive intentions at the Table, take care to provide felicitous locutions, and respond appropriately in our perlocutions; the Lord's Table can be a place where we encounter fellowship, receive nourishment, learn to see the world, and receive hope and mission for the future. Alexander Campbell expressed this kind of felicitous interaction between illocution, locution, and perlocution at the Table when he wrote:

To every disciple he [Jesus] says, "For you my body was wounded; for you my life was taken." In receiving it the disciple says, "Lord, I believe it. My life sprung from thy suffering; my joy from thy sorrows; and my hope of glory everlasting from thy humiliation and abasement even to death." Each disciple, in handing the symbols to his fellow disciple, says, in effect, "You, my brother, once an alien, are now a citizen of heaven; once a stranger, are now brought home to the family of God. You have owned my Lord as your Lord, my people as your people. Under Jesus the Messiah we are one. Mutually embraced in the everlasting arms, I embrace you in mine; thy sorrows shall be my sorrows, and thy joys my joys. Joint debtors to the favor of God and the love of Jesus, we shall jointly suffer with him, that we may jointly reign with him. Let us, then, renew our strength, remember our King, and hold fast our boasted hope unshaken to the end.

‘Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.’

Here he knows no man after the flesh. Ties that spring from eternal love, revealed in blood and addressed to his senses, draw forth all that is within him of complacent affection and feeling to those joint heirs with him of the grace of eternal life. While it represents to him "the bread of life" - all the salvation of the Lord - it is the strength of his faith, the joy of his hope, and the life of his love."⁴³

⁴³ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 274.

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