THE EUCHARIST AS SACRIFICE

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Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

Martin Luther was surely wrong to say that there is no basis in the New Testament for the Eucharist (the Lord’s Supper, communion) as a sacrifice. Here are evidences to the contrary.

1. The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) emphasize that the meal is a *Passover* meal. By emphasizing his passion in the context of the Passover meal, Jesus identifies himself with the Passover lamb—a sacrifice.
2. That the bread and wine lie separate on the table foreshadows the impending violent separation of Jesus’ body and blood. (This separation on the table is found in all four narratives of the institution of the Eucharist: Matt 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, 1 Cor 11.)
3. “. . . he *broke* it” (the bread) anticipates the breaking of his body (Matt 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:24). (Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.)
4. “This is *my body*” and “*my blood*” is sacrificial language (Matt 26:26, 28; Mark 14:22, 24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:24-25).
5. “This is my body, which is *given*” and “this is my blood . . . which is *poured out*” is sacrificial language (Matt 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:19-20).
6. “This is my body, which is given *for you*” and “this is my blood . . . which is poured out *for many*” is sacrificial language (Matt 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:24). Matt 26:28 even adds, “poured out for many *for the forgiveness of sins* . . .”
7. The saying, “This cup . . . is the *new covenant* in my *blood*” (Luke 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25), recalls the blood that sealed the first covenant, at Sinai.
   1. Exod 24:5-8, “He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the Lord. 6Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. 7Then 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.” 8Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, “See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.””
   2. See Jer 31:31-34, “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. 33But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.”
8. The references to “new covenant” and “blood” indicate that Jesus was alluding to Isaiah’s “Servant of Yahweh,” a sacrificial figure. (The “Servant of Yahweh” or “Servant of the Lord” shows up in four passages in Isaiah: 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12.)
   1. Isa 42:6, “I am the Lord . . . I have given you [the Servant] as a *covenant* to the people . . .”
   2. Isa 49:8, “I have kept you and given you as a *covenant* to the people . . .”
   3. Isa 53:12, “he [the Servant] *poured out* himself to *death*, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he *bore the* *sin* *of many*, and made *intercession for the transgressors*.”
   4. Compare Matt 26:28, “this is my *blood* of the *covenant*, which is *poured out* for *many* for the forgiveness of *sins*.”
   5. In his Eucharistic words, Jesus “lets it be known that His approaching death is going to replace the sacrifices of the old covenant and free men [from] sin. For such a work God had need of the Servant.” (Benoit 125)

Hence, the Eucharist is a sacrifice.