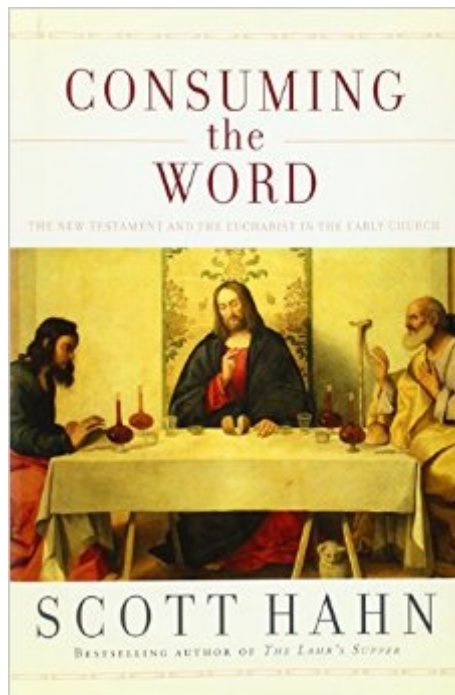


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# Consuming The Word: The New Testament And The Eucharist In The Early Church



## Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *The Lamb's Supper* and *Signs of Life* comes an illuminating work that unlocks the many mysteries of the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist. Long before the New Testament was a document, it was a sacrament. Jesus called the Eucharist by the name Christians subsequently gave to the latter books of the Holy Bible. It was the "New Covenant," the "New Testament," in his blood. Christians later extended the phrase to cover the books produced by the apostles and their companions; but they did so because these were the books that could be read at Mass. This simple and demonstrable historical fact has enormous implications for the way we read the Bible. In *Consuming the Word: The New Testament and the Eucharist in the Early Church*, Dr. Scott Hahn undertakes an examination of some of Christianity's most basic terms to discover what they meant to the sacred authors, the apostolic preachers, and their first hearers. Moreover, at a time when the Church is embarking on a New Evangelization he draws lessons for Christians today to help solidify their understanding of the why it is Catholics do what Catholics do. Anyone acquainted with the rich body of writing that flows so inspiringly from the hand and heart of Dr. Hahn knows that he brings profound personal insight to his demonstrated theological expertise, writes Cardinal Donald Wuerl in the foreword to the book. *Consuming the Word* continues in that illustrious tradition. It brings us a powerful and welcome guide as we take our place in the great and challenging work in sharing the Good News.

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## Customer Reviews

As a convert to Catholicism, Scott Hahn was my security blanket for many years. I knew I could not go wrong reading him, and felt like I could relate to him in many ways. He wrote a mixture of accessible and scholarly works, and I felt a sense of accomplishment when I was able to upgrade to some of his more scholarly works. I would not be where I am today if it weren't for him and his many wonderful works. Consuming the Word is another one of those wonderful works. If you ask a Christian today to tell you what the New Testament is, you will hear various answers like, "The second half of the Bible," or "Twenty-seven books," or "The Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation." All of those answers would be accurate by today's standards but not by the standards of the Early Church. Dr. Hahn points out that, first and foremost, books were a luxury in that time. The Church was around before the official canon of the New Testament was even formed. In fact, depending upon your geographical location, you might have found guidance from some works that aren't even in the canon today, like the Epistle of Barnabas or Clement's Letter to the Corinthians. Hahn then goes on to explain how the term "New Testament" as we know it today is different in meaning from the times of the early Christians. The actual "New Testament," as the Early Church knew it, was the Eucharist. Let that sink in for a moment. It seems so obvious now, but I would have never made that realization without this book. Using and interchanging the terms testament and covenant, Dr. Hahn points out that the Eucharist is at the center of the New Covenant.

What's not to love about a book with a foreword (by a cardinal, no less) that dives into the discussion of New Evangelization in the second paragraph? (Let the dog-earing and highlighting begin!) I'll admit, I was wondering just what the New Evangelization had to do with a book by Scott Hahn about the Bible...and I was feeling a little less-than-ready, if I'm honest. Cardinal Wuerl didn't wait long to lay it out for me: "The New Evangelization calls us to render that voice intelligible to our age. The Word never changes, but the voice must be clear and relevant. The tone must be alive and enthusiastic. Our witness must be heard in the places where our people are." And the book does not disappoint. If you're a scholar-wannabe with a tendency toward snoring, this book is for you. If you find yourself walking around the house trying to finish a book, able to read blazing fast if only those people would quit asking for things from you, this book is for you. If you've ever wondered what the big deal about the Bible is and whether we Catholics really do have any clue at all, this book is for you. One thing I particularly appreciated about Hahn's approach to the topic, the New Testament as more than just a document, is that he did it in a way that I would call very ecumenical and completely Christian. This book isn't just for the Catholic reader, and I don't say that

lightly. In fact, I almost didn't include it, except that I find it very curious and intriguing. I've tried to pass along other Scott Hahn books to non-Catholics and I've never really had success. They're heavy and pretty Catholic. They're not, in my experience, introductory reading.

If you walked into a first-century church and asked to see a copy of the New Testament, you'd get a bunch of confused looks. What do you mean a copy? The Bible didn't yet exist. For the early Christians, "New Testament" was a sacramental phrase. It wasn't a book; it was the Eucharist. In "Consuming the Word: The New Testament and the Eucharist in the Early Church" (Image, 2013), renowned biblical scholar Dr. Scott Hahn explains that for the Biblical writers, the words "testament" and "covenant" were interchangeable. Both the Greek word for "testament" (diatheke) and the Hebrew equivalent (b'rith) are most accurately rendered in English as "covenant." Therefore when Jesus offered a cup of wine to his disciples at the Last Supper, saying "this cup is the new covenant [the kaine diatheke] in my blood" (1 Corinthians 11:25), the Jews would have understood him to say, "this cup is the new testament in my blood." Thus the New Testament was a sacrament at least a generation before it was a document. But why is that important? It reveals the deep connection between the New Testament books and the liturgy. These biblical documents were intended to be proclaimed within the context of the sacrament we call the New Testament. Unlike many Protestants, who focus exclusively on the Scriptures, Catholics dine at two tables according to Pope John Paul II: "one of the Word of God, the other of the Eucharist. The work that we take on ourselves consists in approaching these two tables in order to be filled." Hahn's book offers many fascinating insights on this connection. However, some readers may find "Consuming the Word" uncharacteristically disjointed. The chapters don't flow with the same linear and breezy style of titles like "The Lamb's Supper" or "Hail, Holy Queen".

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