

# COVENANT MEMORIAL

## A Fresh Perspective on Real Presence

### Essay No 1

## Covenantal Real Presence: A constructive proposal

A proposal that is **biblical in grammar (Passover–memorial)**, **patristically compatible (presence as participation)**, **Reformationally intelligible (promise-centred)**, and **Anabaptist-sensitive (discipleship/communal integrity)**.

### Thesis

**Covenantal Real Presence**<sup>1</sup>: In the Eucharist, the risen Christ is really present to his covenant people *as covenant Lord*—present to give what he promises (communion with himself and the benefits of his once-for-all self-offering), through the Spirit, by means of the appointed signs, as they are received in faith within a reconciled, obedient community.

This is “Real Presence” because Christ truly gives himself; it is “covenantal” because presence is **promissory, relational, and enacted**, not mechanically produced or metaphysically localised.

## 1. Biblical foundations: memorial as enacted covenant (*zikkārôn / anamnesis*)

1. **Passover (Exod 12:13–14)** shows memorial as an enacted sign that God “sees” and to which God binds saving action.
2. **Covenant remembrance** is divine action (Gen 9:16; Exod 2:24).
3. **“Do this in remembrance of me”** should be heard within that memorial world: not “think about me,” but “keep covenant with me through this appointed enactment.”
4. **Paul’s realism**: participation (*koinōnia*) in body and blood (1 Cor 10:16–17) and the moral danger of eating “unworthily” (1 Cor 11) only make full sense if something more than mental recollection is occurring.

So, the Eucharist is memorial that *participates* in the once-for-all event without repeating it.

## 2. The nature of presence: personal, covenantal, pneumatic

Covenantal Real Presence specifies three things:

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<sup>1</sup> This view of ‘Covenantal Real Presence’ can be simply understood as the ‘Covenant Presence’ of Christ at his Table, and so throughout.

- **personal:** Christ is present as a living subject who acts, not as a static object to be analysed,
- **covenantal:** Christ is present in the mode of promise—"I am with you," "given for you," "for the forgiveness of sins"—a presence inseparable from his pledged self-giving
- **pneumatic:** the Spirit is the mode of communion; the Spirit does not replace Christ but unites believers to the risen Christ.

This resonates strongly with Calvin's best instincts (real feeding, Spirit-mediated), while avoiding collapsing "spiritual" into "imaginary".

### 3. The signs: neither empty symbols nor automatic mechanisms

In this proposal, bread and wine are:

- **appointed covenant signs** (visible words),
- **effective means** precisely because God has freely bound himself to act through them,
- **not magical** (no *ex opere operato* automatism),
- **not merely illustrative** (they truly mediate communion because Christ promises to meet his people there).

This is close to patristic "two realities" language (earthly and heavenly) without requiring later metaphysical definitions.

### 4. The sacrifice question: "memorial sacrifice" without repetition

Covenantal Real Presence speaks of "sacrifice" in a controlled way:

- the cross is **once-for-all** (no repetition, no re-immolation),
- the Eucharist is **sacrificial memorial** in the sense of *covenantal representation*: the church is brought into living contact with the benefits of the definitive sacrifice and responds with thanksgiving, self-offering, and proclamation,
- the Eucharist is therefore an *access-meal* and a *covenant-renewal meal*, not a second atonement.

This framing integrates naturally with Hebrews' finality and with the biblical memorial pattern.

### 5. Ecclesial conditions: presence given to a people, not to isolated consumers

Here Anabaptist instincts become a strength rather than a liability:

- the Eucharist presupposes the **one body** (1 Cor 10:17),
- reconciliation is not optional decoration but part of the sacrament's truth,
- the church must catechise and shepherd participation because the Supper is church-defining.

This does not make obedience the *cause* of presence, but it does treat obedience as the **covenantal form** of receiving presence truthfully.

## 6. Pastoral and liturgical implications

A church practicing Covenant Real Presence (or simply, Covenant Presence) will tend to:

- celebrate Communion **more frequently** (because it is constitutive, not occasional),
- teach it as **promise + participation**, not “moment of reflection”,
- include intentional space for **reconciliation** (silence, confession, peace, restitution where needed),
- explicitly connect the meal to **mission and embodied discipleship**,
- avoid language that implies repeated sacrifice or bare symbolism.

## 7. How this proposal negotiates the classic poles

- Against **Zwinglian thin memorial**: remembrance is enacted participation; Christ truly gives himself.
- Against **crude localism / mechanistic presence**: presence is covenantal and pneumatic, not spatialised.
- Against **re-sacrifice**: once-for-all finality is safeguarded; “sacrifice” language is memorial/representational.
- Against **PSA reductionism**: the Supper is not mere penalty-rehearsal but communion, proclamation, and covenant renewal—while affirming the gravity of sin and the necessity of the cross. It is the celebration of forensic standing *in the context of renewed covenant participation* in all that the cross has achieved.

### Covenant Memorial

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Occasional emphasis has been added for clarity.