

THE EUCHARIST - SACRAMENT OF UNITY OR SYMBOL OF DIVISION?

On the night before he died, Jesus met with his disciples for the last time and celebrated a meal with them. During that meal, he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and said, "Take it: this is my body." Then, he took a cup of wine, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me" (Mark 14:22-24; Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

In this action, Jesus established a means of achieving intimate and personal union with him in his own death and resurrection. He gave himself to us as food and drink, his own body and blood, his very own Person. Or did he? Did he mean what he said, that this bread and wine are truly his body and blood, his own Person, or was he speaking only symbolically?

While almost all Christians celebrate this ritual, variously called the Last Supper, the Breaking of Bread, Holy Communion, Mass, or the Lord's Table, much controversy has arisen over the last centuries, especially since the Reformation, about what it all means. Are we to use bread and wine, as Jesus did, or will a cracker and grape juice suffice? Should the bread be leavened? Should it be a loaf or flat, like pita? Or should it be unleavened? Or, does it really matter? Does the bread remain bread or does it become his real body? Does the wine remain wine or does it become his real blood?

These are questions that have divided Christians for much too long! If Jesus intended the Eucharist to be a source of unity with him and with one another, why has it become a symbol of disunity among those who profess to be his followers? Is this not a scandal to the unbeliever, or even to the simple believer who desires an intimate relationship with the risen Lord? If the bread and wine truly *is* the real body and blood, the Person of Jesus, are not those who profess to be their spiritual leaders short-changing them out of something that is essential to their spiritual growth and relationship with their Lord? If so, by what right and authority do they do this? It is time to take another, deeper look at what Jesus had in mind when he gave us this command: "Do this in remembrance of me." What did he mean by *this*?

The Eucharist In The History Of The Church

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, c. 112 *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, 6

They (the Donatists) abstain from the Eucharist and prayers because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins, whom the Father in his goodness raised up.

Irenaeus, *Against Heretics*, 18, 5 & 6

How will they allow that the bread over which thanksgiving has been said is the body of their Lord, and that the chalice is the chalice of his blood, if they say that he is not the Son of the creator of the world, that is to say, his Word through whom the tree bears fruit, and the fountains flow, and the earth yields first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear? For, as the bread of the earth, receiving the invocation of God, is no longer common bread but Eucharist, consisting of two things, an earthly and a heavenly, so also

our bodies, partaking of the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of eternal resurrection.

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, 248-258, *Epistle on the Eucharist* 43, 14

If Christ Jesus our Lord and God is himself the high priest of God the Father and first offered himself as a sacrifice to the Father, and commanded that this be done in remembrance of himself, then assuredly the priest acts truly in Christ's place when he imitates what Christ did, and he offers then a true and complete sacrifice to God the Father if he offers as he sees Christ himself has offered.

Terminology: The Beginning Of Controversy

The doctrine of the Eucharist was not a subject of controversy in the first centuries, so, therefore, the need for a precise formulation did not arise. The tendency to advance from the *assertion* of the real presence of Christ's flesh and blood to a precise theory of the *mode* of this presence in the elements was more marked in the East than in the West.

Peter Lombard, the most influential theologian of the twelfth century, maintained the "substantial" presence of Christ's body under the accidents of the elements. The term "transubstantiation" seems to have been adopted in the twelfth century. But, it is impossible to say when it came to have a technical meaning, that is, to convey more than the assertion that the elements after consecration are "really" the body and the blood. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council decreed that "the body and the blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the species of bread and wine; the bread being transubstantiated into the body and the wine into the blood by the power of God."

In its technical sense, transubstantiation denotes a doctrine that is based on the Aristotelian philosophy as taught by the schoolmen, or Scholastics as they were called. According to this philosophy, a physical object consists of "accidents", the properties that are observed or perceived by the senses, and an underlying "substance", in which the accidents inhere, and which gives to the object its essential nature. According to the doctrine of transubstantiation, the accidents of bread and wine remain after consecration but their substance is changed into that of the body and blood of Christ.

In 1539, King Henry VIII, later the first head of the Church of England, affirmed this same doctrine in the Six Articles: "The most blessed Sacrament of the altar, by the strength and efficacy of Christ's mighty word (it being spoken by the priest), is present really, under the form of bread and wine, the natural body and blood of our savior Jesus Christ, conceived of the virgin Mary; and that, after the consecration, there remains no substance of bread or wine, nor any other substance, but the substance of Christ, God and man. It is to be believed, and not doubted of, that in the flesh, under the form of bread, is the very blood; and with the blood, under the form of wine, is the very flesh; each separately as though they were both together.

On this point, then, and at this time, Christians of both East and West were in agreement. In October, 1551, the Council of Trent reaffirmed the Lateran Council decree: "Since

Christ our Redeemer said that that which he offered under the appearance of bread and wine was truly his body, it has, therefore, always been held in the Church of God, and this holy Synod now declares anew, that through the consecration of the bread and wine there comes about a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ the Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This conversion is, by the Holy Catholic Church, conveniently and properly called transubstantiation. In the venerable sacrament of the Eucharist, then, the whole Christ is contained under each species and in each separate part of each species" (Session XIII).

--Compiled by Patrick J. Hession

The Institution Of The Eucharist By The Historical Jesus

The Church celebrates the Eucharist by virtue of the authority and the commission expressly given to it by Jesus. The institution of the supper by the historical Jesus is decisive for all eucharistic practice and dogma. The institution of the Church's supper by the historical Jesus appears today to be of particular importance. The following provides an in-depth exploration of the meaning underlying this important doctrine and practice.

Our earliest witness, Paul, expressly traces his account of the institution back to a received tradition, one that ultimately derived from Jesus: "For, I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For, as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

This claim is strengthened by characteristics that are typical of Jesus' manner of speech (For, I tell you, I will not eat it [again] until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God; For, I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:16, 18); "Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25). In the Aramaic turns of speech within *all* the accounts, their Semitic origin is recognizable, and their date and form can be traced to the forties.

A further pointer to the historical Jesus is the fact that both of the existing strands of the tradition, that of Paul-Luke, and that of Mark-Matthew, differ according to the *formulation* and the *theology* but agree in their understanding of the *essential meaning* of the supper. The difference of the formulations can be traced to the transmitters of the tradition; the agreement as to the supper's meaning, however, must be traced to Jesus as the source of the tradition.

Finally, it is precisely the presence of the supper in the life of Jesus, and the light thrown on it by Jesus' life as a whole, that disclose the true character of the sacrament and that make consistent explanation possible.

Jesus' Life And Purpose

Jesus accomplished the decisive purpose of his life, his task as Messiah, in carrying out the mission of the Servant of God of Deutero-Isaiah, who as God's majestic envoy proclaims and inaugurates a new phase of salvation, and who as martyr takes upon himself expiatory sufferings for the sins of many. As his life went on, Jesus thought frequently of his death and spoke often of it to his disciples. It was for Jesus not something that merely happened to him; it was a conscious and willed deed to which he assented as a necessity in the history of salvation, and on which he freely decided: "There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50).

His total readiness for the death, which was the mission of the Servant of the Lord, is also expressed in the teaching of the ransom ("For, the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45), and the prophecies of the passion ("Then, he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." "For, he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' " "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then, they will mock him, and spit on him, and flog him, and kill him; and, after three days, he will rise again.' " Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33 & 34). These are, at their core, genuine prophecies of Jesus but, in their New Testament form, represent interpretative elaborations of the early Church based on its knowledge of the actual course of the passion.

Jesus maintained his obedient "yes" to vicarious expiation through all outward and inward afflictions, even in the dread of death, torments, and abandonment by God. His death is the total dedication and the deepest fulfillment of his being.

Besides his death, Jesus also foretold his resurrection. In Jesus' prophecies of resurrection, we hear the victorious certainty that his death, which he took upon himself purely out of desire for atonement and in eager obedience to the will of the Father, would find recognition before God. Here, the one who offers functions himself also as the gift in his own person and accomplished the sacrificial dedication by the real shedding of his blood.

Jesus must have been sure that God would accept his sacrifice, his body, and hence that God would fill it with new life. Thus, the death of Jesus brings with it the resurrection as an inner consequence, as an essential part of it, regardless of the difference in time between the two events. For the fourth evangelist, then, the lifting up of Jesus on the cross already means his being lifted up in glory ("Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life"; "So, Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the

Father instructed me”; “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw everyone to myself. He said this, indicating the kind of death he would die” (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32 & 33).

In this readiness for death, and in the certain conviction that the sacrifice of his life would be accepted by God and lead to a new order of salvation, Jesus celebrated his last supper and established it as his testament. He summed up in it a visible and even edible blessing, and bequeathed them as a sacrament. Hence, the supper must not only be explained in the light of the entire life of Jesus, it *is* this entirety in symbolic compression.

Its meaning is already partly indicated by its character as a farewell meal (“He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer' ” (Luke 22:15). The last celebration of Jesus, according to the synoptics, is the paschal, or Passover, meal, while according to John 18:28 it takes place before the official paschal date. At any rate, its date is near to that of the Pasch, is influenced by it (the explanation of the foods and the sequence of bread-meal-cup), and is permeated by the spiritual atmosphere of the Jewish feast as a cultic memorial of the saving deed of Yahweh. The New Testament, however, nowhere interprets the Eucharist in the light of the Passover. Rather, a key for the understanding of the supper is given in the biblical idea of the prophetic sign or prophetic action.

The Eucharist As Prophetic Action

This phenomenon is meant not merely as a truth in symbolic dress or the pictorial orientation toward some coming event. It is already the initial realization of a divine decree. An event ordained by God is not merely registered and told of in words; it is brought about and initially realized. The action does not merely represent it symbolically; it anticipates and crystallizes its reality. The prophetic sign is the efficacious sign of a divine action. Jesus situates his supper within the framework of this specific sphere of a divine causality: a) he announces in words the salvific sacrifice of his death; b) he represents it symbolically and makes it present by distributing the food and drink as his body and blood, whereby c) he makes of these elements his Person bodily offered up.

a) All of the accounts situate the action in the perspective of his death by indicating the time (night of the offering) and by the adjectival phrase at the end of the words over the bread, which is indispensable for the understanding of the action: “given for the many”. In a clear allusion to Isaiah 53:12 (“Therefore, I will give him his portion among the great, and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty because he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; and he shall take away the sins of many and win pardon for their offenses”), Jesus' death appears here as the martyr's sacrifice of his person, who is the Suffering Servant of God.

The same notion is conjured up by the second expression: “This cup of the new covenant in my blood.” The predicate “the new covenant” takes up the title from Isaiah 42:6 (I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed

you and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations.“) and Isaiah 49:8 (“Thus says the Lord: In a time of favor I have answered you, on the day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages.“), characterizing Jesus as the founder of a covenant. He fulfills this task, however, ”in his blood“, i.e. by shedding his blood. The biblical term ”blood“ has the connotation of ”shed“, as the addition ”shed for the many“ in Mark 14:24 indicates, that is, instead of and for the sake of the whole of mankind. This, too, is dependent on Isaiah 53:10 & 11 (“If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he will see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the Lord shall be accomplished through him. Because of his affliction, he will see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering, my servant will justify many, and he will bear their guilt.“ Thus, in all of the accounts, the death of Jesus is the determinant factor in the Last Supper.

b) The sacrificial death thus announced in words by Jesus was also the object of a symbolic action. He actualized the offering of his person to the Father for people by consecrating bread and wine as his own Person and by giving them to be eaten by people. His taking and lifting up of the elements, their blessing and consecration as the body and blood of Jesus, means their transfer to God and displays Jesus' dedication to the Father. When Jesus then gives the food and drink as his body and blood, and gives it to be eaten and drunk by people, he portrays visibly the martyr's death, which is the dedication of his inmost life for people, but also its recovery in the resurrection. Moreover, not only the proffering, but the proffering as food and drink reveal how his death, indeed his whole human existence, is for people, in their stead and for their sake.

Just as it is the nature of food and drink to be wholly and entirely for people, and just as they give up their own being to belong to people and to become part of people, thereby building up their life, so, too, Jesus is there for people (by the very fact of his incarnation) and belongs to people. So, too, he gives up his life so that they may live to God.

Finally, however, the proffered elements of the meal are not merely an outward means of representing his sacrificial offering on the cross. They are identical with the one and the same sacrificial gift of the cross, this man Jesus. Hence, the inner identity of both actions and the actual presence of the bloody offering of himself on the cross is established and finally assured in the unbloody offering of himself in the meal.

c) For, by the divine power of his determinative words, Jesus changes the bread and wine into his own sacrificed Person. The term “body” means in the mouth of Jesus, as a rendering of the Semitic expression behind it, not only a part of a person, as though his body were distinguished from his blood or soul, but the whole person in his bodily existence. Likewise, the “blood” for the Semites represents the life-substance (“Only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the meat” Deuteronomy 12:23. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement...For the life of every creature--its blood is its life” Leviticus 17:11, 14a), and stands for the living being with blood coursing through its veins, especially when it suffers a violent death (“And the Lord said [to Cain], 'What have you done?

Listen: your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!" Genesis 4:10; "[Judas] said: "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.'" Matthew 27:4; "Then, the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' " Matthew 27:25; "You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us" Acts 5:28). It indicates, then, the person in the act of shedding his blood.

The adjectival addition to the words over the bread and the cup ("which is given for you", Luke 22:19; "which is poured out for many", Mark 14:24), as also the early apostolic description of the cup as "the new covenant", defines the person of Jesus more precisely as the savior who is the Servant of God. The essential identity of the consecrated elements with the Person of Jesus is indicated in the sentence structure of the blessing, which differs from purely metaphorical statements. In the words of consecration, we have, in contrast to metaphors, a subject ("this") that is of itself colorless and indeterminate but that is defined by a very concrete predicate ("my body"... "my blood"). The real presence of Jesus can be better explained from the character of the supper as a prophetic sign in which action and word bring about through divine power what they represent. It is supported by the act of distribution that underlines the nature ascribed to the gifts, and also by the fact that they are partaken of. Exegetically, this is ultimately assured by the normative interpretation of the supper in the New Testament in terms of the real presence, especially in Paul and John. Hence, the bodily Person of Jesus is present in the supper, not, however, in the static manner of being of a thing but as the Servant of God who, in his sacrificial death, brings about the salvation of us all and, more precisely, as the sacrificial offering of the Servant who delivers himself up on the cross. The real presence of the Person is there to actualize the presence of the sacrificial deed and is united with this in an organic whole. The Eucharist becomes, then, the abiding presence in the meal of the sacrificially constituted salvific event "Jesus", in whom person and work form an inseparable unity.

The inaugurative command "do this in remembrance of me" gives the Church the power to do what Jesus did. By this command, the re-enactments must be formally similar to the initial supper celebrated by Jesus. It gives these re-enactments the divinely- effective power of Jesus' supper and emphasizes and assures their identity of substance with the first supper and with each other. For, it characterizes them as the *anamnesis* of Jesus. *Anamnesis*, in the biblical sense, means not only the subjective representation of something in the consciousness and as an act of the remembering mind. It is also the objective effectiveness and presence of one reality in another, especially in the effectiveness and presence of the salvific actions of God in the liturgical worship. Even in the Old Testament, the liturgy is the privileged medium in which the covenant attains actuality.

The Eucharist In Paul And John

Besides the narratives of the institution, the New Testament itself explains Jesus' acts in a way that is fundamental and normative for all exegesis and dogmatic theology. Paul affirms the bodily real presence of Jesus when he teaches that the bread which is broken and the cup which is blessed is a sharing in the body and blood of Jesus ("The cup of

blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ" 1 Corinthians 10:16), when he concludes to the unity of all Christians as one single body (of Christ) from their partaking of the one bread ("Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." 10:17), and when he points to the unworthy reception of the body of Jesus as explanation of certain judgments of God ("Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For, all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason, many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. If we judged ourselves, we would not be condemned along with the world." 1 Corinthians 11:27-31). Insofar as he places the Lord's Supper in relation to Jewish and heathen sacrificial meals (1 Corinthians 10:18-22), he presents it as a sacrificial action. A sacrificial meal presupposes and brings with it the killing of the victim.

John does not give an account of the institution, but he gives a detailed proclamation of the Eucharist in the great promissory discourse of 6:26-63), which is conceived throughout in the perspective of a sacrament. Its theme is the true bread of heaven. The spiritual reality of this bread--its heavenly origin and its power to mediate life--is there in the historical man Jesus (John 6:26-51b), but the physical reality, as food in the literal sense, is there in his "flesh", which is intended for the life of the world and which One must really eat ("chew"), just as one must also drink his blood as real drink ("I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' So, Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for, my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so, whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and then died. But, the one who eats this bread will live forever' " John 6:51-58).

Such partaking, however, presupposes the sacrifice. The surprising term "flesh", even in connection with "blood", is not a sacrificial element distinct from the blood but the whole concrete man Jesus, as John 1:14, "and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us", and the personal pronoun ("whoever eats me") in 6:57 show.

In the Eucharist, the descent of Jesus from the heavenly world, his incarnation for the purpose of the sacrificial offering, remain present (6:57ff). But, the ascension of Jesus is also effective there ("Then, what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" 6:62), since the ascension alone makes the sending of the Spirit possible ("Whoever believes in me, as scripture says, 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.' He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive." John 7:38 & 39; see also John 16:7) and hence, also, our sacramental meal ("It

is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” John 6:63). The element that really mediates life there is not the flesh as such but the accompanying Spirit, by which the Godhead in Jesus is meant (“The first man, Adam, became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit...The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.” 1 Corinthians 15:45 & 47). For John, too, the Eucharist remains the presence, in the liturgical meal, of the economy of salvation which is “Jesus”.

Conclusion

To conclude, then, the essentials of the Lord's Supper were unalterably prescribed for the Church by Jesus, the consecration of the bread and wine (unleavened bread, if it was the Passover meal) to be his body and blood and their distribution to be eaten and drunk. This decisive core, however, was given a liturgical framework that underwent a development in both the East and the West.

After the words of consecration, the same words that Jesus used, whatever makes bread to be bread is no longer there but is now the body and blood of the Person Jesus; and whatever makes wine to be wine is no longer there but is now the body and blood of the Person Jesus.

It is the real body and blood of the Person Jesus that is eaten and drunk, separately or together, so that the person who eats and/or drinks is *truly* united with the Person of Jesus, not just *symbolically*. This is what Jesus intended when he instituted this sacrament, and this is what the believer must understand and accept. Anything less diminishes the meaning and intent of the one who gave himself in this sacrament for our salvation.

--Josef Andreas Jungmann, edited by Patrick J. Hession