

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION IN SAINT PAUL

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The First Letter to the Corinthians is the earliest document that describes a Christian Eucharistic celebration. Being written most probably in the spring of AD 55, it reports the liturgical order of Eucharistic celebration that Paul the Apostle wanted to convey as model for the community of believers in Corinth.

I Cor 11:20-26

When you meet together, **it is not the Lord's supper that you eat.** For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you,

that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed

took bread,

and when he **had given thanks,**

he broke it, and said "This is my body which is for you. **Do this in remembrance of me.**"

In the same way **also the cup,**

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 death of the Lord until he comes.

Commentary:

a) In regard to the text

- It is evident from this introductory paragraph that "**The Lord's Supper**", as Paul calls it, was consummated in the Christian community of Corinth **in the context of a social dinner**, reminiscent of the Passover meal. However, Paul is dissatisfied and upset by the uncharitable behavior of the well-to-do Corinthians in front of the needy among them, thus indicating his directive to eliminate the social supper from their gathering.
- On the night Jesus was betrayed, Paul certainly was not an eye witness to the Lord's Supper; nevertheless, he asserts that he delivers here the **liturgical pattern that originates from the Lord himself**. We should therefore understand that, according to the Apostolic tradition, the Eucharistic celebration must be performed in reiteration of the order that has been established by the Lord himself, being transmitted faithfully from generation to generation.

b) In regard to the structure:

The following is the liturgical structure of that pattern:

- The Lord took bread.
He pronounced a prayer of Thanksgiving.
He broke the bread.
And said: This is my body which is for you.
- Do this in remembrance of me.

After supper:

- He also (took) the cup.

- Similarly (i.e. He pronounced another prayer of Thanksgiving);
- Saying: this cup is the new covenant in my blood.
- *Do this...in remembrance of me.*

Therefore:

- 1) There is specifically a “thanksgiving” for the bread, and similarly another “thanksgiving” for the cup.
- 2) A supper takes place between the two rituals, i.e. between the ritual over the bread and the ritual over the cup.
- 3) An order is given to do the “remembrance” of the Lord, in regard to the bread and in regard to the cup.

The two accounts of the Gospel of Luke 22: 7-2 and 24 :29-31

<p><u>Luke 22:7-20</u></p> <p>Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the passover for us, that we may eat it." They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?" He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house which he enters, and tell the householder, `The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I am to eat the passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished; there make ready." And they went, and found it as he had told them; and they prepared the passover. And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."</p>	<p>And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."</p> <p><i>And likewise the cup after supper</i>, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."</p> <p>-----</p> <p><u>Luke 24:29-31 (at Emmaus)</u></p> <p>but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.</p> <p>And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight.</p>
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Commentary in regard to the structure:

<p><u>The ceremonial structure of Luke 22: 7-20:</u></p> <p>A preliminary cup of the fruit of the vine with a thanksgiving.</p> <p>Jesus took the bread.</p> <p>He uttered a thanksgiving.</p> <p>He broke the bread.</p> <p>He gave it, saying: this is my body.</p>	<p><u>The structure at the table of Emmaus:</u></p> <p>He took the bread.</p> <p>He blessed.</p> <p>He broke it.</p> <p>And gave it to them.</p>
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<p><i>Do this in remembrance.</i> <u>Supper is consumed.</u> He took the cup. He pronounced a thanksgiving. He gave it, saying: This is ...for the new covenant in my blood.</p>	<p>And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight.</p>
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Common features between Luke's Ch. 22 and Paul's I Cor:

- 1) The supper interrupts the two rituals over the bread and the cup.
- 2) A prayer of thanksgiving is uttered over each one of the elements.
- 3) The ritual as a whole is performed in remembrance of the Lord.
- 4) The Lord's words "this is my body" & "this is my blood" are uttered concomitantly with the giving of the Body and Blood in communion.

Particularities of the supper in the Emmaus passage:

- 1) It is a summarized version of the ritual, expressed in terms that acquired specific meaning in the community.
- 2) Instead of the thanksgiving over the bread, a "blessing" is uttered.
- 3) The social supper is marginalized, not being mentioned at all.

The Lord's Supper in Mark and Matthew

<p>Mark 14:22-26</p> <p>And as they were eating, he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.</p>	<p>Matthew 26:26-29</p> <p>Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.</p>
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Common features regarding the texts of Matthew and Mark:

- 1) Those segments **lacking a theological meaning disappear** from the structure of Matthew and Mark: a) the supper does not interrupt the two rituals; they follow each other in sequence. b) The additional cup of wine is not mentioned specifically.
- 2) **The prayer** uttered over the bread **is specified** as a "blessing"; the one uttered over the cup is described as a "thanksgiving".
- 3) **The Lord's words** (This is my body/ my blood) are both pronounced as concomitant with the act of giving of the consecrated elements to the disciples **for communion**, i.e. after the prayer over the bread and wine and the fraction.

Liturgical Observations:

- 1) We have to look at all the scriptural accounts regarding the Lord's Supper not as divergent traditions, but as a **common liturgical wealth and reference** for all Eucharistic liturgies.
- 2) A process of **liturgical purification** is clearly detectable within the different scriptural accounts, preserving the sacrificial core of the ritual, as desired by the Lord, and eliminating all the unrelated elements.
- 3) **The sacrificial core is:** The Lord took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it, uttering the lordly words. He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it, saying the lordly words. In reiterating this ritual, according to his command, we will be doing his memorial.
- 4) Because they were unrelated to the core of the liturgical act, **some elements disappeared** from the Eucharistic ceremonial since the Apostolic era; they are those elements expressive of the old **Passover** or of a **social banquet**.
- 5) This process of liturgical purification resulted in having both rituals—over the bread and over the cup—**following each other in sequence in Matthew and Mark**; nevertheless they still maintain, in all the scriptural accounts, their individuality. It will be the Anaphoras of particular liturgical traditions that will join both rituals in one Eucharistic prayer of offering and consecration.

Theological Observations:

- 1) The Lord's Supper on the night he was betrayed was performed **in the prospect** of the Lamb of God to be offered in Golgotha and rise in eternal glory. The Supper at Emmaus, and all Eucharistic celebrations that follow in all churches, reiterate, in a sacramental way, and make present, that same living sacrifice **as being historically fulfilled** once for all.
- 2) While the Passover had two basic moments and sections: **one in the Temple**, where lambs were slaughtered and offered on the altar, **the other in a family banquet** where that same lamb was cooked and consumed; the Christian Qurbana has, as well, two moments: one in the new temple of Golgotha, which is the body of the Son of God/Son of Man, the other in the church where the memorial of that sacrifice is celebrated and made present.
- 3) This first part of the Qurbana celebration reiterates the ritual of the Lord in the last Supper: he took bread and blessed, he took the cup and gave thanks--**both done in commemoration of the offered body and of the shed blood in Golgotha**. This fundamental act of worship corresponds to the offering of the lambs in the Temple, abrogating the sacrifice of animals, and elevating the meaning of human offering to the peak of spirituality.
- 4) The second part of Christian Qurbana—Breaking and Communion—correspond to the consuming of the Lamb in the family gathering.

The sanctification of the bread and wine upon our altars, must be perfected before the liturgical act of breaking; otherwise the broken bread would not be the Body of the Lord. Indeed, all Christian liturgies consider the consecration fulfilled before the Fraction of the Host. Therefore, it is sound to think that the liturgies imitate the example of the Lord in the Last Supper, so that when he broke the bread it was the sanctified bread that he broke and distributed, and that his holy words which accompanied the communion expressed that divine reality and the substance of the sacrament.

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