

THE EUCHARIST: FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

It is my purpose in this short study to suggest some evidence that the New Testament presents the Eucharist as *viaticum*, a source of strength for the Christian as he journeys along the way.

A guide-post in this direction is the gospel presentation of Christian life as a journey, a new Exodus. Geographically, the synoptic atmosphere is one of movement toward Jerusalem. This is accompanied by a doctrinal presentation of the way. For example, Luke's 'journey section' (9:51-18:14) also contains specific teaching on the Christian way. In Mark there are three specific predictions of Jesus that he must suffer, die and rise again (Mk. 8:31; 9:30; 10:33f.). Each of these is followed by an instruction on discipleship: the Christian must *follow* Jesus on his journey. Since a wayfarer needs provisions for his journey, we would naturally examine whether the Eucharist is presented under this aspect.

The idea of 'bread for the journey' is a familiar one in the Bible. For example, when Joseph in Egypt sent for his father Jacob, he provided his brothers with ten mules laden with provisions as 'bread for the journey' (Gen. 45:23). In the gospels we read that the apostles themselves were considerably embarrassed on one occasion because they had forgotten to make that usual preparation for a journey (Mk. 8:14-21). In his missionary instructions Jesus told his disciples to have such trust in God's providence that they would omit this customary, prudent provision and take along no bread for the journey (Mk. 6:8; Lk. 9:3).

In the New Testament Eucharistic catechesis is especially related to the miracle of the manna in the desert. Jesus began his teaching on the Eucharist in Jn. 6 by referring to the manna their fathers had eaten in the desert. The manna was given to Israel by God to provide food for their journey to the promised land. In addition, the Last Supper itself is described in terms of a Passover meal. The unleavened bread in the ritual recalled the fact that the meal was originally taken in haste; the bread was baked before it had time to leaven, in preparation for a difficult journey. Since both the Passover and manna were food for the journey, this would lead us to look for some specific indications of this characteristic in the Eucharist.

The motive of Jesus' miracle in the second multiplication of the loaves (Mk. 8:1-10) is his compassion for the crowds: he was unwilling to send them away lest they faint on the journey. For some had

come from afar off. Once they had eaten and regained strength for the journey, he dismissed them. The account as a whole bears marks of usage in Eucharistic catechesis.¹ If this is so, the evangelist may also be thinking of the Eucharist as food for the journey : Jesus provides a miraculous bread, so that the Christian may not faint on the way. The account opens with reference to Jesus' unwillingness to *send them away*. It likewise closes with the words : ' And he sent them away ' ² (v. 9). If we admit an adaption of the story for Eucharistic catechesis, a theme of this teaching may be that the Eucharistic bread provides the hungry and the weak with the nourishment and strength necessary to journey along the way. Some ancient commentators ³ have also understood it in this sense.

Another reference to the Eucharist as food for the journey may underlie Mk. 8:14-21. The disciples were journeying across the lake and had forgotten to bring the usual bread for the journey. They had only *one bread* in the boat. Jesus scolded them for their lack of faith, saying, ' Why do you keep saying that you have no bread ? ' (8:17). He then recalled the miraculous multiplication of the loaves so the disciples could realise that he himself was the source of that superabundant bread. The story may also have been used in Eucharistic catechesis ; it closely follows the second multiplication and closes the ' food section ' of Mark (6:30-8:21). If this is so, the teaching would be that the disciples need not fear the lack of bread on the journey, for Jesus himself is the source of lasting bread.

The understanding of the ' one bread ' as symbolic of the Eucharist is not a new one.⁴ However I believe there is some basis to suggest that the evangelist himself had this in mind. The mention of just one small loaf among a large group of men is an unusual one. Matthew's account relates that they had no bread at all (16:5-8). It may be recalled that St Paul uses the same words of the Eucharist : ' Because there is *one bread*, we the many are one body ' (1 Cor. 10:17). In Mark, then,

¹ It has been pointed out that the whole account, especially the words, ' Then taking the loaves, he gave thanks, broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute ' (Mk. 8:6) have been influenced by liturgical usage. For a discussion of this, cf. V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (MacMillan, London, 1955) pp. 324-5 ; 357-60.

² The original meaning of the dismissal seems to have been Jesus' effort to halt an incipient popular messianic uprising. cf. Montefiore, ' Revolt in the Desert,' *NTS* VIII (1962), pp. 135-41. However, as we have pointed out, the original story has been adapted for Eucharistic teaching.

³ e.g. St Thomas, *Deficiunt in via qui verbo Dei non reficiuntur* (*Comm. in Matt.* 15:32). St Ambrose compares it to the miraculous bread given to Elias lest he faint on the way (3 Kg. 19:8). He adds, *Si tu manus non extendas tuas ut accipias tibi escas, deficies in via* (*Exp. Ev. Sec. Lucam Lib. VI ; PL xv, 1401*).

⁴ The Venerable Bede writes in his commentary on Mark, *Unus vero panis quem secum habebant in navi, mystice ipsum panem vitae Dominum videlicet Salvatorem designat* (*In Marci Ev. Expos. Lib. II ; PL xcii, p. 210*).

the *one bread* could be Christ himself who is sufficient nourishment for the Christian journey along the way.

Finally, Paul himself seems to have thought of the Eucharist as the sustaining food for the new Exodus. He writes, 'all were baptised in Moses, in the cloud and in the sea. And all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them and the rock was Christ' (1 Cor. 10:2-4). This prepares for the specific mention he makes of the Eucharist a few verses further on (1 Cor. 10:14-22). So if Paul is thinking of the Eucharist in connection with the journey to the promised land, which is a type (10, 11) of the Church, it would be likely that he thought of the Eucharist as food for the journey of the new Exodus. 'The true nourishment and the true spiritual drink, the body and blood of Christ, are now given to God's new people who are marching towards the true Promised Land.'¹

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PAUL AND TRADITION IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

The recent decades have made known to us much of the process that governed the formation of our gospels and we have been able to see something of the life and belief of the primitive Church at work in transmitting the gospel material. But whereas the gospels give us the final form, as it were, of transmitted material on the life and teaching of Christ, throughout the whole of the New Testament we can discern various fugitive fragments of material in transmission: a tradition was being established. In the last two decades in particular a fair number of both Catholic and non-Catholic scholars have been investigating these elements of primitive Christian tradition.² They have asked questions about the use of such elements in the early Church, questions about the importance of such traditional material for the individual New Testament writers, questions about their place in

¹ F. Amiot, *The Key Concepts of St Paul* (Herder, Freiburg: Nelson, Edinburgh, 1962), p. 203

² I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness here to A. M. Hunter, *Paul and his predecessors*, SCM 1961; Klaus Wegenast, *Das Verständnis der Tradition von Paulus und in den Deuteropaulinen*, 1962.