

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

ance, and I think that if they were subjected to close scrutiny by an expert in Semitic idiom more skilled than myself, they would easily be accounted for as the result of Dr. Vogels' having worked on a totally false principle.

Moreover, I cannot help a few regrets that his principle is *not* a sound one. Were it true, those of us who have acquired some ease in reading Latin, Greek, Hebrew and half a dozen modern languages would be able to write these also with fluency and grace, and I should now offer a version of this article to the editors of several European magazines instead of confining myself to the EXPOSITOR.

Yet it is no concern to me personally whether the Old Syriac be, or be not, earlier than the Diatessaron. I am chiefly interested in the question as to whether its peculiar and suggestive readings, wherein it differs from early Greek codices, though often agreeing with the so-called Western text, are primitive and true.

AGNES SMITH LEWIS.

ST. PAUL AND THE MYSTERY-RELIGIONS.

VIII. SACRAMENTAL MEALS.

THE evidence regarding Sacramental Meals in the Mystery-Religions is both meagre and difficult to interpret. Conclusions have been drawn from one or two extant mystic formulae which go beyond the data. Thus, e.g., the Eleusinian fragment preserved by Clement of Alexandria: ¹ "I fasted, I drank the *κυκεών*," has been explained of a sacrament in which the initiated drank of the same cup as the goddess in her sorrow. This is indeed an attractive hypothesis, but it can be nothing more. A similar explanation has been given of the formula handed down by Firmicus Maternus ² and (with variations) by Clement ³: "I have

¹ Ed. Stählin, I. p. 16, 18. ² Ed. Ziegler, p. 43, 11. ³ I. p. 13, 10.

eaten out of the *τύμπανον*, I have drunk out of the *κύμβαλον*, I have become an initiate of Attis." It is quite possible that these ritual actions may have been the symbols of new life, but there is no hint of how they became sacramental. Attempts have been made to find a sacramental significance in the Dionysiac-Orphic cults, but even Dieterich admits that our knowledge of the facts is altogether inadequate.¹ Accordingly, in the search for parallels to Christian usage, various scholars, notably Dieterich and Heitmüller, have collected evidence from the most primitive phases of religion to illustrate the idea of communion with the god through feeding upon him. To establish, however, the validity of their position it would be necessary to show, first, that this idea survived in the Hellenistic environment of early Christianity, and, second, that it forms an element in Paul's conception of the Lord's Supper. Now it seems to us impossible to demonstrate its presence in the Mystery-ritual itself.² But the case may be different when we turn to the sacrificial meals of Paganism, meals which had their counterpart in the practice of mystery-brotherhoods. Perhaps the chief aim of the latter was, as Cumont suggests,³ the maintenance of communion between the "brethren," but this would rest on the basis of their common fellowship with their deity.

Yet the question still remains: How was that fellowship supposed to be established? And it is not easy to answer with certainty. It is possible, but by no means proved, that, in a primitive stage of society, the partakers of the sacrificial animal believed they were thereby partaking of the very life of their deity, either as embodied in the victim or somehow associated with it. But at least as prob-

¹ *Eine Mithrasliturgie*², p. 105.

² So also Schweitzer, *Geschichte d. Paulin. Forschung*, p. 154.

³ *Les Religions Orientales*, p. 54.

able an explanation is the notion that the god himself is present and shares with his worshippers in the sacrificial meal. Striking exemplifications of the latter conception are given by Lietzmann in an *excursus* on 1 Corinthians x. 21 : e.g., *Pap. Oxyr.* I. 110 : "Chairemon invites you to dinner at the table of the Lord Serapis in the Serapæum, to-morrow, i.e., the 15th, etc." The "table of the god" (τράπεζα τοῦ θεοῦ) is a phrase which occurs in inscriptions and presupposes the presence of the deity as host at the sacrificial meal. And the Roman religious *epulum* is an example of the same idea. It is impossible, therefore, to bring forward any convincing evidence from Hellenistic religion contemporary with Paul in support of the conception of eating the god. Heitmüller, indeed, declares that in the earliest days of Christianity "this belief and usage had a revival and a new lease of life,"¹ but does not produce a shred of relevant proof to establish his statement. Prof. Percy Gardner, who frankly recognises the foregoing facts,² finds the closest parallel to the Christian celebration in Pagan "feasts of communion with departed heroes and ancestors."³ Whether this analogy be valid or not, it at least avoids the absurdity of attributing to Paul the notion of "eating" a Divine Being.

While emphasising the sparseness of the evidence, we have admitted the possibility that, in the Mystery-Religions, certain ritual acts of eating and drinking were believed to impart new life or immortality. And we have taken for granted that in sacrificial meals some kind of communion with the deity was supposed to be established, although

¹ *Die Religion in Geschichte u. Gegenwart* (ed. Schiele), Bd. I., Sp. 45. In *Taufe u. Abendmahl bei Paulus*, pp. 48, 49, he actually postulates for the Christian view of the Lord's Supper a notion so crude as to have been transcended in contemporary heathen and Jewish thought.

² *The Religious Experience of St. Paul*, p. 121.

³ *Ibid.* p. 113.

the method of its establishment eludes investigation. There can be little doubt, moreover, that in the commemoration-feasts referred to above a ritual fellowship with the departed ancestor or hero was a main element in the celebration. We must now attempt to examine the relationship which is alleged to exist between ideas such as these and Paul's conception of the Lord's Supper.

Let us note, first of all, some characteristic statements of the Apostle's position made by investigators obsessed by the phenomena of Comparative Religion, statements so often dogmatically reiterated that writers who receive them at second-hand repeat them as beyond challenge. Dieterich asserts as unquestionable that, according to Paul's view, "Christ is eaten and drunk by the faithful and is thereby in them." The process is actual (*faktisch*).¹ Heitmüller holds that, for Paul, "simple participation in the Lord's Supper produces communion with and in the body and blood of Christ."² According to Schweitzer, Paul has "the most prosaic conception imaginable of the *opus operatum*" in the sacrament.³ Weinel declares it to be obvious from 1 Corinthians x. 1-4 that "in the sacrament the important thing is not the *believing* participation, but the *participation* in the supernatural."⁴ In Professor Lake's judgment, the passage just mentioned implies that "in the Eucharist Christians received the 'Spirit' in the form of food and drink."⁵ Reitzenstein interprets the Pauline conception of the Lord's Supper from a magical text in which the blood of Osiris is represented as a love-potion, laying a spell on the soul of him who drinks it.⁶ How far are such opinions borne out by the data of the Epistles ?

¹ *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, p. 106.

² *Taufe u. Abendmahl bei Paulus*, p. 34.

⁴ *Biblische Theol. d. N. T.*, p. 327.

⁵ *Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 213.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁶ *H.M.R.*, p. 51.

Our inquiry is a limited one. It is beyond our scope to enter into the controversy which has arisen regarding the institution and original significance of the Lord's Supper. It may be necessary at one or two points to refer to phases of the discussion. But in the main we must confine ourselves to the question: What did the Lord's Supper mean for Paul? Most scholars admit that Paul found the celebration already existing in the Church.¹ Scientific exegesis rightly rejects the interpretation of *παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου* (1 Cor. xi. 23) as a special revelation.² And great caution must be exercised in attributing this feature or that in the institution to the creative activity of Paul. Many modern investigators claim a totally unwarranted knowledge of the mind of Jesus when they assume that the sacramental in any shape or form contradicts His entire standpoint. We grant that if the sacramental is synonymous with the magical it must have been foreign to His thought. But, as we pointed out in our last article, there is a sacramentalism which is ethical to the core, having its foundations laid in a genuine religious faith. It is no excrescence of primitive superstition, but corresponds to a permanent demand of the human consciousness, the demand that the visible and tangible should be a seal to faith of that which is unseen and eternal.

The Pauline material is contained in three sections of 1 Corinthians: (1) x. 1-5; (2) x. 14-22; (3) xi. 17-34. Section (1) is far less important than the others, as being no more than an illustration used in passing by the Apostle. Sections (2) and (3) supply real evidence of his position. It is wholly illegitimate to assign a superior authority, as Heitmüller does, to section (2), for the determination of Paul's actual conception. As a matter of fact, an unpre-

¹ See, e.g., Holtzmann, *N.T. Theologie*², II. p. 208.

² See the excellent note of J. Weiss *ad loc.*

judiced interpretation of the two passages reveals, as we shall see, no discrepancy between them. Heitmüller, however, asserts that in chapter xi. we find "a more individual, theological explanation of the Lord's Supper," while in chapter x. there is presented "the unchanging fundamental idea of the celebration and its effect."¹ But this distinction is a mere assertion which there is not a syllable in the Epistles to justify. Indeed, if we were obliged to choose between the two passages for an authoritative statement, Paul's own language would be decisive in favour of chapter xi. For, on his definite testimony, the Apostle simply repeats in xi. 23 ff. the instructions which he had given his Corinthian converts regarding the Lord's Supper when they entered the Christian Church (ὁ καὶ παρέδωκε ὑμῖν). He never suggests that this is a new communication or a discussion of "doubtful points," as Lake represents it.² He deliberately recalls to their minds the familiar ordinance, to make them realise how flagrantly they have abused it.

It is unnecessary to spend much time on chapter x. 1-5. It forms part of Paul's admonition to those who claim the possession of *γνώσις*, against wounding the consciences of their "weak" brethren in the matter of eating sacrificial meat. For the latter this meat still carries with it "the consciousness of the idol" (ch. viii. 7), and so involves them in a perilous association. But the "strong" have gone further, and even partaken of meals in heathen temples (viii. 10). Paul deals fully with this practice in x. 14-22, which we shall discuss immediately. Meanwhile he prepares them for his later warning by a more general caution based on the experiences of the Israelites as narrated in the Old Testament. Here he reminds them that the chosen people, in spite of the extraordinary tokens of God's favour manifested to them, fell into idolatry, impurity, and rebel-

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 30. So also Lake, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

² *Loc. cit.*

lion against God. They also must be on their guard. It is thoroughly natural that in connexion with the sacrificial meals of Paganism the Apostle's mind should move forward to the cognate celebration in the Christian Church, more especially as he will immediately demonstrate the incompatibility of partaking in both. And so he hints at the Lord's Supper and Baptism as experiences typical of God's gracious dealings under the new dispensation, in order to warn his readers that the enjoyment of high privileges, as in the case of Israel, does not necessarily ensure acceptance with God. "Our fathers," he says, "were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual (*πνευματικόν*) food, and all drank the same spiritual drink: for they drank of the spiritual rock that accompanied them: now that rock was Christ." What light do these sentences shed on Paul's conception of the Lord's Supper?

The nature of the reference to Baptism clearly shows that here we have to do with a somewhat daring analogy, and warns us against reading into the language more than it contains. On the surface Paul follows the exegetical method common to the Rabbis with Philo. And it is possible that he actually derived the idea of the never-failing spring of water from Jewish Haggada.¹ But his description of the Divinely-provided manna and the miraculous supply of water as "spiritual" has no suggestion in it that he regarded either as supernatural in quality, or as the medium of a spiritual "substance." Nor is there a hint that he associated with them any extraordinary effect. Perhaps the best comment on the epithet *πνευματικός* is to be found in Deuteronomy viii. 3: "He humbled thee and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that

¹ See Lietzmann, *ad loc.*

he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only but by everything that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord" [i.e., the creative word of God by which He can call into being new means of preserving life]. So that when Paul speaks of "the same spiritual food" and "the same spiritual drink" it is not, as Heinrici (*ad loc.*) well puts it, because the manna and water in the desert are identical realities with the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, but because both give the pledge of the same Divine grace. They are evidences of the redeeming purpose of God in history. It is from that standpoint also that he can identify the rock with Christ. For he regards the Divine working in the old and the new dispensation as an indissoluble unity.

In the second crucial passage, x. 14-21, the Apostle passes beyond vague hints and deliberately charges with idolatry those "strong" Christians who do not shrink from participating in sacrificial meals. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion with the blood of Christ? The bread (loaf) which we break, is it not a communion with the body of Christ? For as there is one bread, so we the many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Look at Israel according to the flesh: do not those who eat the sacrifices enter into communion with the altar? What then do I say? That sacrificial meat is anything or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice 'they sacrifice to demons and not to God.'¹ Now I would not have you in communion with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons: you cannot share in 'the table of the Lord'² and in that of demons."

"Sharing in the table of the Lord" is shown in the opening sentences of the paragraph to mean partaking of

¹ Deut. xxxii. 17 (LXX).

² Malachi i. 12 (LXX).

the cup and the bread. And this participation is described as a communion with the body and blood of Christ. Now this last conception cannot be explained in the isolation of its present context. But its meaning becomes clear from the interpretation of it which Paul has expressly given in chapter xi. There he deliberately states its significance: "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you represent (*καταγγέλλετε*) the Lord's death till he come" (xi. 26). That is to say, the bread and wine represent not the flesh and blood of Christ as such, but His human person as slain on the Cross. Therefore communion with the body and blood of Christ means communion with the Lord as crucified and all that that involves. Hence we never find the Apostle speaking of "eating the flesh" or "drinking the blood" of Christ. He is careful to associate the solemn actions only with the bread and the cup. Accordingly it is obvious that the Lord's Supper sets forth visibly for Paul and his fellow-Christians the supreme spiritual experience which he has described in Galatians ii. 20: "I have been crucified with Christ." And as the Apostle can never dissociate the Crucifixion from the Resurrection, the appropriation of the benefits of the death of Christ which is quickened by the sacred celebration will carry with it a like appropriation of the resources of the risen Lord: "No longer do I live, but Christ liveth in me: and that which I now live in the flesh I live by faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." A passage like this from Galatians reminds us that Paul's thought must not be interpreted atomistically, but in the light of his entire Christian experience.

There is nothing in the paragraph under examination to conflict with the explanation which we have seen to be necessitated by the Apostle's instruction on the Lord's Supper in chapter xi. 23 ff. Indeed, the comparisons which are em-

ployed are sufficient in themselves to put us on our guard against supposing that Paul's notion here is, to quote Weinel, that "the communion with the Lord into which one enters at the table of the Lord is sensible—hypersensible of a real kind," that "the conception is not of a mere spiritual reception of Christ, but somehow of His glorified corporeality."¹ It is impossible to associate with the eating of the sacrifices in Israel (ver. 18) the notion of partaking of the Deity. Such an idea is wholly foreign to Jewish thought. Nor is it otherwise in the case of the demons whom Paul regards as the real forces existing behind Pagan idols. His language is not obscure. The communion with the demons against which he warns he describes as "drinking the cup of demons," "partaking of the table of demons." These phrases, when viewed in the light of the examples cited from papyri at the beginning of this article, suggest that Paul regards the demons as hosts at the sacrificial meals, and communion with them is pictured by the relation of the guests to their hosts.² It is quite irrelevant to quote as decisive for Paul's meaning³ the well-known passage from Porphyrius (*De philos. ex orac. haur.*, p. 147, ed. Wolf) in which he relates of demons that "while we are at food they approach and settle on our bodies . . . and delight especially in blood, etc.," as if this made probable for Paul the notion that they were conveyed into the bodies of the worshippers by means of the sacrificial meat. The Apostle takes for granted that the presence of any one at a sacrificial meal is necessarily a more or less distinct recognition of the super-human Person in whose honour the festival is held. And these superhuman powers he calls *δαίμόνια*, using the term to describe the objects of Pagan worship, after the

¹ *Biblische Theologie d. N.T.*, p. 325.

² See also J. Tambornino, *De antiquorum daemonismo*, pp. 36, 95.

³ So Lietzmann, J. Weiss, and others.

model of Deuteronomy xxxii. 17, which is evidently before his mind. But Porphyrius has the diametrically opposite conception of *δαιμόνια* as beings who interfere with the worship of the gods, and who have to be driven away in order that the god may grant his presence. Very instructive for the view we have suggested of communion with the demons is a passage in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* (II. 71) which says that every one who worships "those whom the Pagans call gods, or tastes meat sacrificed to them" becomes "a guest of demons," and "has fellowship with that demon whose aspect he has fashioned in his mind whether from fear or love."¹ We are justified, therefore, on the basis of an examination of the facts, in asserting that 1 Corinthians x. 14 ff. affords no evidence for the notion that Paul believes in the magical communication of the glorified body of Christ to the worshipper through the medium of the bread and wine.

The most ample material for estimating Paul's conception of the Lord's Supper is presented by 1 Corinthians xi. 23 ff. We have already indicated that it is an authoritative pronouncement on the subject. And it has been necessary at an earlier point to call attention to the Apostle's statement of the fundamental significance of the celebration in verse 26. Paul deduces this significance from the words and actions of Jesus, as these have come down to him through the tradition of the Church. Now, apart from the injunction to repeat the celebration as a memorial, there is no essential difference between Paul and the Synoptics. Indeed, so radical a scholar as Eichhorn goes the length of admitting that no one who compares the four reports of the Lord's Supper can doubt that all four writers speak of the selfsame thing in the very same sense.² With reference to the cup,

¹ So also J. Réville, *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 1907, 56, p. 159.

² *Das Abendmahl im N.T.*, p. 8.

Mark, Matthew, and Luke (except the so-called "Western" text), report Jesus as saying: "This is my blood of the covenant [Luke: the new covenant in my blood] shed for many [Luke: for you]." It is therefore wholly arbitrary to challenge the allusion to the covenant as an addition made by Paul. And the saying obviously represents the approaching death of Jesus as the sacrifice which inaugurates the new covenant. The words which accompany the giving of the cup make perfectly clear the meaning of those which are spoken at the distribution of the bread, even in the brief form which is found in Matthew and Mark: "this is my body." The extended version in Paul and the non-Western texts of Luke is true to Jesus' thought: "this is my body which is for you [Luke: which is given for you]." ¹ The ritual action, therefore, symbolises the death of Jesus as a medium of blessing for His followers. And that part of it which consists in eating the broken bread and drinking the wine emphasises the necessity of appropriating the salvation promised. But there is no evidence of anything realistic or magical about the benefit received. Heitmüller, indeed, finds traces of such a conception in xi. 27: "Whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord," taking these words in close connexion with verse 30: "On this account many among you are frail and sick and a number have fallen asleep." He compares a belief of the Syrians that the eating of sardines, which were sacred to Atargatis, produced ulcers and wasting disease.² But the parallel is in no sense valid. The unworthy partaking of the bread and wine is regarded by Paul as sacrilege against the crucified Christ. His idea seems exactly equivalent to that of

¹ See an excellent paragraph by Jülicher in *Abhandlungen C. von Weizsäcker gewidmet*, p. 242.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 50, 51.

Hebrews vi. 6 : " crucifying for themselves afresh the Son of God and putting him to open shame." The effect which he discerns in the sickness and death of members of the Christian community he does not trace to the partaking of the bread and wine, but distinctly names it a *κρίμα*, a judgment sent by God for the ultimate discipline of those who have been guilty.

It is interesting to note that in this important passage Paul is exclusively concerned with the participation of believers in the benefits of the sacrifice of Christ. The same thing applies to chapter x. 14 ff. But as we indicated, in discussing that section, it is impossible for him to think of Christ crucified apart from Christ risen (cf. Rom. iv. 25). And perhaps the significant words, " till he come," are directly intended to remind them that He whose death of love they commemorate, is " with them always until the end of the age." But for the Apostle, communion with Christ does not depend upon any sacred rite. Its essential condition is a whole-hearted faith. This he makes as plain as words can express it in such passages as Galatians ii. 20 and Philippians iii. 9. And so we are brought back to the position which we attempted to establish in our last article, where we endeavoured to show that faith is for Paul the indispensable postulate of all that is of spiritual worth in the experience of Baptism. It is not otherwise with the Lord's Supper. This was no feast of initiation. Those who partook of it had already professed to surrender themselves to Christ as their Saviour and Lord. They had received and welcomed the good news of salvation through His self-sacrificing death. The bread and the wine were to them symbols of all that that death involved. And when they received them with discernment, they were making acknowledgment of the dying love of the Redeemer. But, as in Baptism, there was something more for Paul and his converts in this sacred meal than

an impressive symbolism. The "acted parable" was amazingly fitted to rouse and invigorate their faith. Thus, by faith, they were carried past the symbols into what Holtzmann has fitly called "the sphere of the reconciling grace which rests upon the death of Christ."¹ There they were able to realise with new vividness the actual operation of the Divine love working on their behalf. The symbols became a sacrament, a convincing pledge of the mercy of God in Christ the crucified.

We have dwelt only on those aspects of the Lord's Supper which have been alleged to show a kinship with the sacred meals of Paganism. We have not referred to the curious theory of Schweitzer that in Paul's view the sacraments "produce resurrection."² Nor have we discussed the hypothesis that the Christian feast was modelled on those Pagan celebrations which commemorated a dead hero or ancestor, because in these latter there was nothing to correspond to Paul's central idea of communion with Christ as crucified. But we believe enough has been said to justify the statement of Von Dobschütz that "the unique sacramental conception of the Early Church, which lacks analogy in the history of religion because it belongs essentially to the Christian religion, has its origin in nothing else than Christian faith and Christian experience."³

H. A. A. KENNEDY.

¹ *N.T. Theologie*², II. p. 201.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 169.

³ *Studien u. Kritiken*, 1905, I. p. 39.