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The Holy Communion in the Early Church

THE REV. F. R. MONTGOMERY HITCHCOCK, D.D.

(The first half of this essay was published in the April-June number of "The Churchman.")

JUSTIN MARTYR.

WE now come to a writer who has been described as a disciple of the apostles (ep. ad Diogn.); "a man not far from the apostles in time or virtue." (Methodius in Phot. cod. 247).

Justin was converted from paganism in A.D. 133 and was martyred at Rome A.D. 163-167. He wrote his first apology between 138 and 150 (Gwatkin). The Dialogue with Trypho was written later. He had been a philosopher, and looked upon many things from a philosopher's standpoint. He gives an account of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Sunday morning service at Rome in his day to the Roman Emperor (Apology I. 63. 65). The following extracts are of great interest and importance (I. 65). "We salute each other with a kiss when the prayers are ended. Then is brought (*prospheretai*) to the president of the brethren a loaf (bread) and a cup of water and (mixed) wine (*Krama*) and he takes it, and offers up praise and glory to the Father of all, through the name of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and makes a lengthened thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) for these favours vouchsafed to them. When he hath ended the prayers and the thanksgiving (*eucharist*) all the people present respond "Amen." When the president has made his thanksgiving and all the people present have responded, the deacons, as we call them, give to everyone present a *portion of the bread and wine and water* for which thanks have been given. (Note that they are still called, after consecration, bread and wine.) They also take away a portion for the absent ones. And this nourishment (*trophe*) is called by us *eucharist*, and it is not lawful for anyone to partake of it but a believer, and one who has been washed with the washing for the forgiveness of

sins and the new birth, and is living according to Christ's commandments. For not as *common* bread and *common* drink do we receive these things, but as through the Word of God our Saviour after His Incarnation took flesh and blood for our salvation, even so also the food for which thanksgiving has been made through the word of prayer that is from Him¹ (or through prayer in His Word), the food from which our blood and flesh are nourished by *digestion* (*metabole* does not refer here to change of elements but to assimilation of food), we have the right to regard as the *flesh and blood of that Jesus* who became incarnate. For the apostles in the memoirs which they made, and which are called gospels, so reported that the order was given to them, that Jesus took bread and gave thanks and said, "This do in remembrance of me, *that is my body*" (*toutesti*, explanatory) and that He likewise took the cup and gave thanks and said, "This is my blood," and gave it only to them. This the evil demons imitated commanding it to be done in the mysteries of Mithras, for that a loaf and a cup of water are set forth with certain formulæ in the initiation ceremonies² you either know or can learn."

THE SUNDAY SERVICE (C. 67).

"And on the so-called day of the Sun a meeting is held of all of us who live in cities or country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. Then, when the reader has ceased, the president (*ho proestos*) (presiding elder)³ gives in a sermon both admonition and exhortation to follow these good things. Then we all rise together and offer prayers and, as I said before, when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought (*prospheretai*) and wine and water, and the president likewise offers prayers and *thanksgivings* (*eucharistiae*) to the best of his ability,⁴ and the people respond with their "Amen."

¹ "Through the prayer of the word which is from Him." The Lord's Prayer. (*di' euches logou tou par' autou*).

² Mithraism or sun worship was popular with soldiers. It had ablutions and a bread and water ritual (see Cumont).

³ This title is in 1 Tim. v. 17, "the elders who preside well" (*proestotes*).

⁴ *Hosè dynamis autò*. This may prove that the prayers were either extempore or memorized. They don't seem to have been read. The liturgy was not yet formulated. They had the Lord's Prayer of course

Then follows the distribution and *partaking*¹ of the things² for which thanks were given (the bread, wine and water) and a portion is sent by the deacons to the absent ones. The well-to-do and the willing give as they intend, and the collection is deposited with the president, who himself succours the orphans and widows and those who are in want through sickness, or any other cause, and strangers and sojourners. In a word, he is the guardian of the needy."

There are several points to be noted in this account of the Church services.

(1) The *Agape* is not mentioned. Its place has evidently been taken by the distribution of food and other things to the needy by the president in their district. (2) There is no fixed order or canon of consecration, if there is any consecration at all. The president offers praise and glory to the Father through the name of the Son and the Holy Ghost, and *gives thanks at length*. At the end of his *thanksgivings* (*eucharistiae*) the people say Amen. The second account states that the president offers prayers and *thanksgivings* (*eucharistiae*) *to the best of his ability*, doubtless extemporizing as in the former case. There was no fixed formula evidently at the time. (3) There is no idea here of *oblation* of any sort. The verb used with the prayers, "*send up*"³ is not in the Greek Bible at all; and has no sacrificial connection in New Testament, being only used of sending people about or back. The bread is *distributed* by others and presented to the president. It could not mean "is offered,"⁴ as the president receives it, and he is not Deity. But he says the prayer and thanksgiving for it. (4) The bread and wine are still bread and wine, after thanksgiving has been made for them, but no longer "*common*" (*Koinos*), that is, they are to be used for no ordinary purpose. He does not call them "Holy" or "Sanctified." One may render the participle *eucharistetheis* of the bread, wine and water "set apart by the thanksgiving." It does not mean "consecrated."⁵ The substance "bread" remains, as Pusey pointed

¹ *metatepsis*, this word is also in Irenaeus for the Communion.

² *ta eucharistethenta* (1) The things for which thanks (eucharist) were given, (2) over which the eucharistic prayer had been said (Pusey). There is no proof that one special eucharistic prayer had been drawn up at the time.

³ *anapempein*.

⁴ *prospheretai*.

⁵ See Irenaeus IV. 18.4. "Bread over which thanks have been made anem in quo gratiae actae sunt).

out. There is no transubstantiation. (5) Some of it is carried away at once by the deacons to the absent members, presumably to be consumed by them at once. There is no "reservation" here. (6) It is more than probable that one of the passages read from "the memoirs of the apostles called gospels" contained the institution of the Lord's Supper, which Justin gives in the Lukan form. The president also possibly referred to it, but this is not stated, in his prayer and thanksgivings. This is the earliest reference to the words of Institution. No doubt they had always been used from the days of St. Paul.

(7) The Three Persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, are mentioned together. Praises are offered to God the Father of all through the Son and the Holy Spirit. Compare the closing words of one of the oldest liturgical relics outside the Scriptures, the Gloria in Excelsis. "Thou only art Holy, thou only art the Lord; thou only O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, are most high in the glory of God the Father."

There is evidently no invocation of the Holy Spirit. He is not blessing and changing the bread and wine with which water is blended, but assisting with the Son in the directing of the "praise and glory"—the true sacrifice—to the Father. (8) The wine is mixed with water. Plain wine is not used. (9) The crux of the passage which refers to the Incarnation is the phrase "by way of change" (*kata metabolēn*). Does this mean that there is a change or conversion of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ? Nothing can be further from the writer's thought, for the water which was used with the wine would also be changed into something. He used *the phrase* of another change altogether, of the change by which the bread and wine as food are converted into our body and blood by the process of digestion (*metabolism*). We have this very phrase of digesting food in Xenophon,¹ where it is used with food (*trophe*) as here: "Our blood and flesh are nourished by digestion" (*kata metabolēn*), or by assimilation. Athenagoras, an imitator of Justin, in his *De Resurrectione* (c. iv) used this word *metabole* of the various actions of *digestion*. So that was Justin's meaning.

¹ Mem. i. 6.6. *trophēn metaballesthai*, possibly also in Ignatius, Mag. X. where "digest the true leaven" seems the best rendering.

The next phrase to settle is, "through the word of God." The phrase in New Testament means (1) written word (O.T. promise), (2) New Testament "Revelation," (3) the Word Incarnate. Now we have a close parallel in 1 Timothy iv. 5, which is much clearer in Greek than in English. "Every creature of God is good, when received with thanksgiving (*eucharistia*); for it is sanctified through the word of God and prayer." Here we have the same phrase as in "Jesus incarnated through the word of God" (*Apol.* I. 65) (*dia logou theou*)¹. In the former passage it is not the Word Incarnate, and so must mean either through the Gospel revelation or the Old Testament promise. In the latter passage some take it to be the logos, but the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures is the agent of the Incarnation (Luke i. 35). Another phrase seemingly parallel is "through a word of prayer that comes from Him,"² or "through a prayer—a word that comes from Him." Otto and Baumgarten-Crusius take it of the Lord's Prayer. Some form of prayer given by Christ was very likely used among the prayers said by the president during the Communion service. It corresponds to the preceding phrase, and so the whole phrase—"the food over which thanksgiving is made through prayer" is parallel to 1 Tim. iv. 5. "Every creature of God is good (for food) when received *with thanksgiving*, for it is sanctified through a word of God and prayer."³ It could not possibly mean *through invocation of the Word*. The words "*from Him*" rule out that and similar renderings. Note the absence of article in the Timothy and Justin passages. As he does not affirm any change in the bread and mixed wine themselves; but alludes to their being changed into our physical system by the process of digestion and assimilation, he could not have believed that they were made actually and literally into the Body of the Lord. What then did he mean by this remark—"As the incarnate Jesus Christ had both flesh and blood, so we were taught that the food, over which thanksgiving is made, is of that same incarnate Jesus both flesh and blood?" Did Justin make every fresh loaf over which thanksgiving is said, identical and co-extensive with, or an addition to

¹ Compare the phrases *dia logou theou sarkopoiethis* and *hagiazetai dia logou theou*.

² *di' euches logou par'autou*.

³ See article *epiklesis* (The Protestant Dictionary) by the present writer.

the flesh and blood—the humanity which Jesus Christ took at His incarnation? The latter alternative would be to read an eighth-century conception (impanation) into the second! In the former case (Harnack), if literal, there is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Incarnation if every consecrated loaf is the same flesh, that is, the humanity assumed by that Incarnation. The Docetics would have easily exposed that subterfuge, if employed. If, however, he meant that every new loaf *represents* the flesh of Christ, he says what Christ said in His institution of the sacrament, which he (Justin) proceeds to give. He made the bread just what Christ made it in His institution, neither more nor less. And he reasons thus: as Christ was flesh and blood and His body consequently required food like ours, so He made this supper represent His flesh and blood to us, to remind us of Himself. He quotes our Lord's words of institution, of which logic forbids a literal interpretation, and refers to the similar use of bread and water in the mysteries of Mithras, in which, of course, there was no change. In those mysteries there was an *Agape* or feast. According to Cumont¹ there is a monument in which Mithras and the Sun are represented, reclining on a couch with a table before them, on which lies the sacred bread marked with the cross, and both are raising the cup in their right hands. It is a reconciliation scene, but there is no notion of a conversion of bread and wine into the body and blood of Mithras. Looking at this passage again and comparing it with Ignatius, Romans vii. "I wish for the Bread of God which is the Flesh of Christ, of the seed of David, and for drink, His blood, which is immortal love," where the spiritual character of the passage is shown by the concluding words, we note that even if Justin distinguishes between the pre-existent personality of the Word, and the humanity He afterwards assumed, the most he does—assuming for argument's sake that he does it—is to treat the bread and wine after the thanksgiving, as His humanity. This in itself would be very far from the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation, which means that the whole Christ, in both the Divinity and humanity, are in every particle of Bread and every drop of Wine, after consecration, and that the same Christ is on ten thousand altars at the same time. Justin,

¹ Cumont, *Monuments, Intr.* p. 175.

however, does not identify the bread and wine with the humanity Christ assumed. "Word of God," without the article, in this crucial passage is not the Logos or Word of John i. 1. It has not the article which Justin generally used with the Word (Apology, I. 33, 56, 67, 95, etc.), because it is distinguished from Jesus Christ. "Jesus Christ our Saviour being made incarnate *through (the) word of God* took flesh and blood." It might here mean the *reason* of God, but cannot refer to the second Person of the Trinity. Neither is Word—also without article—in the following phrase, "through prayer of a word that is from Him," the Word or Logos of John i. 1, for "a word from Him" can only refer to the teaching of the Word Himself. Gore, Gwatkin and others render "word of prayer." There is, consequently, no foundation for the assumption that Justin is here illustrating a supposed union of the Logos and the sacramental bread and wine by the union of the Logos of Christ with His humanity,¹ he is simply giving the reason why the bread and wine after the thanksgiving (through the word of prayer from Him) are no longer "common bread" and "common beverage." They have been set apart for a certain use, and are called, because of that use, by the names of the things they represent.

Justin's views of the Communion are also set out in this later and more mature *Dialogue with Trypho*. In this Dialogue C. 41. *Dial.* (260B) he takes Malachi i. 11. "In every place incense shall be offered unto my name and a pure offering," as prophetic of the Eucharist, chiefly because the Jewish sacrifices are condemned in the same context. He says, "He is speaking here beforehand of those sacrifices that are being offered by us Gentiles in every place, that is the bread of the Eucharist and the cup of the Eucharist." A similar reference is in 344D. to these things, "the eucharist of the bread and cup" in Malachi i. 11. In a previous passage, 259D., he saw in the oblation of fine flour for those cured of leprosy "a type (*typos*) of the bread of the eucharist, which Jesus Christ our Lord enjoined us to *prepare*² in remembrance

¹ Justin used *logos* or word in these senses, reason, word spoken or oracle, the Divine Word, Christ the reason which all humanity shared, Apol. I. 46, the germinant Reason (II. 13). (*logos spermatikos*).

² *poiein*, not "sacrifice" or "offer" but "prepare" here and elsewhere, unless the context has a term for sacrifice. "Do this in remembrance of Me" not sacrifice "this."

of His passion (*eis anamnesin*)¹ that we should give thanks to God for having made the world and all that is in it, for man and also for having delivered us from our evil state." This was the *Minchah* or meal offering of Lev. xiv. 21.

In 297A. of the same Dialogue (c. 70) after quoting Isaiah xxxiii, 16, "Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure," he says: "In this prophecy there is a clear reference to the *bread* which our Saviour Christ enjoined us to *prepare* in remembrance of His having assumed a body (*somato-poesasthai*) on behalf of the believers for whom He suffered, and to the cup which He enjoined us to prepare with thanksgiving in remembrance of His blood." In this passage the bread and wine are used in remembrance of His Body and Blood. Justin altered the Lord's phrase, "*Do this in remembrance of Me*" (Luke xxii. 19, 1 Cor. xi. 24) into "in remembrance of my having assumed a body and of my blood." Accordingly, they cannot be His Body and Blood, being only reminders, types of His Body and Blood. In 345 D. 117, in answer to Trypho that God rejected the *sacrifices* of the dwellers in Jerusalem and only accepted the prayers of the Jews of the *Diaspora*, and that He called their prayers "*sacrifices*" (*thusiai*), Justin replied, "*prayers and thanksgivings made by worthy people are the only sacrifices (thusiai) perfect² and pleasing to God.* I myself assert. These are the only things Christians have been taught to *do*³ (celebrate) even at the *commemoration (anamnesis)* of this food both dry and liquid, in which they also remember the passion." And in 346 (118) he says, "At His coming again do not think that Isaiah or the other prophets say that *sacrifices of blood* or of libations are offered upon the Altar, but *true and spiritual praises and thanksgivings.*" These are the only *thusiai* or sacrifices offered "at the Eucharist of the Bread and the Cup." (344 C.). Here we have Justin's view that the only sacrifices at the Eucharist, which is held in commemoration of God's gifts⁴ and the passion of Christ, are our praises and thanksgivings. This surely shows that he could not have entertained any idea of a physical change in the bread and

¹ See article *anamnesis* (Protestant Dictionary by the present writer.)

² *euchai kai eucharistiai teleiai monai thusiai.*

³ *poiein*, to prepare, not to sacrifice, which meaning would be absurd here. It is the context that fixes its significance.

⁴ *alethinous kai pneumatikous ainous nai eucharistias.*

wine. Their name and use had been altered; but their substance remained. He used the words of Institution, and as he, too, was arguing against Gnostic Docetics, he emphasised "the flesh" of Jesus, without the identification of the bread and wine, after consecration, with the actual body and blood of Jesus.

The Greek Fathers, who had no Hebrew and could not, therefore, perfectly understand the Old Testament, were entirely wrong in comparing the Lord's Supper with the meal offering or *Minchah*. There is absolutely no parallel between them, as the latter consisted of frankincense, oil and flour, was partly burnt and partly eaten by the priests, and the wine offering was quite distinct. However, it furnished them with a useful argument against the Jews that the Jewish sacrifices were rejected in Malachi i. 11, but what they declared without fear of contradiction was that the Scriptural prototype of the Lord's Supper was to be accepted by God. Justin gives no support to the later idea that the Logos or Word (Jesus in His Divine Nature) was united to the consecrated bread and wine as His Body. There were several forms of that theory in later days, such as impanation and augmentation. But they cannot be read into Justin. Again it is clear from his remarks that our blood and flesh are nourished¹ by the Eucharist, being turned by digestion into them, that he could not have conceived of any change in the substance of the elements, which were thus changed into the substance of our bodies. Again (*Dial.* 51) he believed that our Lord by "the fruit of the vine" meant real wine, for he says: "He said that He should come again to Jerusalem and there eat and drink with the disciples." If it was real wine still, after His consecration, is it anything different after man's consecration?

¹ Pusey (*Real Presence*, p. 145) makes this point that the outward part of the sacrament could not nourish our bodies if the substance thereof had been changed into another substance.