6-1-1952

Primitive Eucharistic Belief as Reflected in the Catacombs of Rome

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PRIMITIVE EUCHARISTIC BELIEF

AS REFLECTED IN

THE CATACOMBS OF ROME

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

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by

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June 1952

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PREFACE

The interest of the author in the Roman Catacombs was first aroused by a personal visit to the Catacombs of St. Callixtus, Holy Week, 1945. However, the suggestion to write this thesis, and encouragement during its formation, was given by my advisor, Dr. Alfred M. Rehwinkel. I should like to acknowledge this with gratitude.

Most of the reference works cited were obtained from the libraries of Harvard College and Harvard Divinity School, and the University of Chicago; Concordia Theological Seminary; the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; and the St. Louis Public Library.

The bibliography was compiled from the pertinent works listed by the above-mentioned schools (excluding the University of Chicago) and Columbia University; Washington University, St. Louis; and St. Louis University.

CHAPTER I

SURVEY OF THE CATACOMBS OF ROME

"There is light in this darkness,
There is music in these tombs!"[1]

The Catacombs of Rome are a vast and intricate network of underground burial galleries located, not within the walls of the city itself, but under the rolling Campagna surrounding it. Up until recent times popular belief had it that the geographical extent of the Catacombs was so great that no one man could ever hope to examine all of them. For example, in the last century a Yale professor visited Rome and wrote concerning these subterranean passages: "They are continued underground, as is said, twenty miles to Ostia, the port of Rome at the mouth of the Tiber in one direction, and to Albano, twelve miles in another."[2] This of course is not factual; the Roman Catacombs are all located within a few miles of the city walls.

The huge extent of the Catacombs consists not in the actual territory they underlie, but in the aggregate length

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[1]Taken from a pilgrim's inscription of 1321 on a wall of the Catacombs, listed in The Catacombs of Rome (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1854), p. 175.

[2]Silliman, "A Visit to Europe," quoted in The Catacombs of Rome, p. 245.

of their galleries. This is because the passages have been dug on various levels, one above the other, forming complicated honeycombs. There are as many as five levels in certain instances. Northcote and Brownlow believe "....that if stretched out in one continuous line, they would extend more than 350 miles, i.e., more than the whole length of Italy itself."[3] Karl Baedeker, however, usually a very competent authority, lists a larger figure: 545 miles. He also states that the general coverage of the Catacombs is 615 acres.[4]

The topmost corridors lie twenty-two to twenty-five feet below the surface of the earth; the lowest may extend forty to fifty feet deeper.[5] These galleries are from six to ten feet in height, and from two to four feet in width. The burial niches, dug horizontally in the sides of the passages, are no more than flat rectangular shelves, intended for one or more bodies. The following designations indicate the Catacombs' internal structure:

> Loculi: ....ordinary niches in the walls, closed by a marble slab or large tiles set in mortar

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[3]J. Spencer Northcote and W. R. Brownlow, Roma Sotterranea (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1879), I, 2. Throughout this chapter the designation R.S. will be used to refer to this source.

[4]Karl Baedeker, Central Italy and Rome (15th Revised Edition; Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1909), p. 453.

[5]Loc. cit.

Arcosolia: arched tombs; for the wealthy and martyrs. A space excavated in the wall, above which a semi-circular recess was cut out. A slab of marble covers this grave horizontally.

Cubicula: family vaults; small chambers, at various intervals, among the rows of shelves. Found near these are

Luminaria: shafts, like chimneys, which cut through to the surface of the earth for purposes of lighting and airing.

The word arcosolium is derived from the Latin arcus, which refers to the arch over the grave, and from solium, which originally meant a square marble bathtub, which the shape of the grave resembles.[6]

The secret entrances and passages of the Catacombs are of interesting construction. One reason for the building of these was an edict of Valerian, in the third century, forbidding assemblies in the Catacombs. The entrances to the galleries are located in large sandpits (arenaria), and the paths leading from them were deliberately cut in an irregular, winding fashion. The Christians could thus escape by some such secondary passage after having been flushed by government agents from the city. Northcote and Brownlow describe the system this way:

> A staircase is made which seems to promise easy access to the cemetery, but it is not continued to the bottom; it only reaches to the roof of the subterranean

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[6]Orazio Marucchi and Elwood S. Berry, The Roman Catacombs (Wheeling, W. Va.: Catholic Book Company, 1921), I, 26.

> galleries, not to the floor, so that, whilst full of peril to a stranger who should attempt to use it, it might still do good service to those who were in the secret. The old staircases are in some instances cut off; elsewhere old galleries are blocked up with earth ....recourse is had to many and ingenious devices, whereby the curiosity and malice of the Pagans may be baffled.[7]

Symbolical frescoes make up most of the interior decoration of the Catacombs; there are few purely historical paintings. The symbolical pictures largely represent the hopeful Christian doctrines, such as the resurrection and the sacraments. Scenes taken from the Old Testament are also popular: Daniel in the lions' den, Noah in the ark (quaintly shown standing in a small box), the three men in the fiery furnace. The last two are shown in Figures 1 and 2. A number of the better known frescoes are treated in detail in Chapter II. The Christian art in the Catacombs, including the sculptured sarcophagi, is strictly of a contemporary nature: it is in no way original or novel. And it also partook of the gradual degeneration of Roman art in general in the third and fourth centuries, when "artistic forms became distorted and unpleasing."[8]

St. Jerome, in the middle of the fourth century, draws this scene of the Catacombs:

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[7] R.S., I, 154-5.

[8] Baedeker, op. cit., p. 452.

Fig. 1. Noah in the Ark.

Fig. 2. The Three Men in the Fiery Furnace.

> When I was at Rome, still a youth, and employed in literary pursuits, I was accustomed, in company of others of my own age, and actuated by the same feelings, to visit on Sundays the sepulchres of the apostles and martyrs, and often to go down into the crypts dug in the heart of the earth, where the walls on either side are lined with the dead; and so intense is the darkness, that we almost realize the words of the prophet, "They go down alive into Hades." Here and there a scanty aperture, ill deserving the name of a window, admits scarcely light enough to mitigate the gloom which reigns below; and as we advance through the shades with cautious steps, we are forcibly reminded of the words of Virgil: "Horror ubique animos, simul ipsa silentia terrent. Horror on all sides, even the silence terrifies the mind."[9]

Burial Practices of the Early Christians

The term in use among the early Christians for burial was depositio since this, in a sense, expressed belief in a future resurrection, and because they viewed burial as "a merely temporary trust committed to the earth."[10] The Jewish custom of burial was strictly observed, in keen opposition to the Roman practice of cremation. Northcote and Brownlow quote Minucius Felix as saying, "Christians execrate the funeral pile and condemn burial by fire....We follow the ancient and better plan of burying in the ground."[11]

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[9]William Ingraham Kip, The Catacombs of Rome (New York: Redfield, 1854), pp. 39-40.

[10]R.S., I, 12.

[11]Ibid., p. 93.

The Christians rarely used a coffin; instead a corpse was wound in wrappings, following the Jewish tradition. But first the body was anointed with sweet spices (Mark 16:1); Bishop Kip gives Boldetti's report that some of the tombs, when opened for the first time in his presence, released an odor like that of spices.[12] Next, the body was placed in a loculus; the arms were then extended along the sides of the body, flowers and perfumes were scattered about, and the tomb was closed. An epitaph was traced in the fresh mortar or carved on the slab that sealed the loculus.[13]

The fact that the Christians adhered so rigorously to the Old Testament burial traditions explains the immense number of graves in the Catacombs. They refused to bury their dead in any other place or in any other manner. In the Old Testament the Jews feared burial among strangers and went to great lengths to assure burial with their ancestors; for this we have the examples of Jacob and Joseph, recorded in Genesis, chapters 47 and 50. Another reason for the multitude of graves, which is cited by Northcote and Brownlow, is the prominence given to the doctrine of a bodily resurrection. Thus the Christians would not have been less careful than their heathen neighbors in the matter of burying[14]

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[12]Kip, op. cit., p. 61.

[13]Marucchi and Berry, op. cit., p. 55.

[14]R.S., I, 95.

- the Roman heathen who had enacted strict laws to safeguard their gravesites, even though they had no hope of a resurrection.

The Geology of the Catacombs

A description of the geological strate about Rome will yield with it two interesting proofs for the exclusively Christian origin of the Catacombs. This is in contradistinction to the claim that pagans had at one time quarried sand and stone for construction purposes - and that the Christians had brought their dead to these abandoned quarries, improvising the tunnels into cemeteries.

The earth surrounding Rome is largely of volcanic origin. There are strate, generally horizontal, consisting of:

1. Pozzolana: ....volcanic sand, famous for making mortar
2. Tufa litoide: ....a reddish volcanic stone, used for building purposes
3. Tufa granolare: ....earth too coarse for sand used in cement, too soft for the stone used for construction. The Catacombs excavated in this soil.

In the use of the tufa granolare lies the best proof for the Christian origin of the Catacombs. This material has always been considered worthless; only pozzolana and tufa litoide were quarried, and the Catacombs have been, almost without exception, quarried in the tufa granolare alone. Therefore, for what reason would the Romans have dug

extensive mines in the useless tufa granolare?

Concerning the tufa granolare, however, Northcote and Brownlow write:

> (It)....was admirably adapted for the reception of the dead. It is easily worked, of sufficient consistency to admit of being hollowed out into galleries and chambers without at once falling in, and its porous nature causes the water to quickly drain off from it, thus leaving the galleries dry and wholesome, an important consideration when we think of the vast number of dead bodies which once lined the walls of the subterranean cemeteries.[15]

Another proof of the exclusively Christian origin of the Catacombs is the manner in which they have been carved out. In the case of quarries for sand and stone the object was to carry away as much material as possible, as easily as possible. Thus sharp angles were avoided, the paths made wide, and the arch of the roofs made to spring from the floor: all this to facilitate the passage of carts. But in the Catacombs the paths are generally straight, crossing each other at sharp angles, and narrow; and the roofs are flat or only slightly arched. All this quite plainly points to the fact that the Christians did not adapt themselves to sandpits or stone quarries, but rather were the original diggers for the exclusive purpose of constructing cemeteries.[16]

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[15] Ibid., p. 379.

[16] Ibid., p. 380.

The Principal Roman Catacombs

One characteristic of the location of the Catacombs is high ground, which was specifically chosen to prevent the infiltration of water and consequent complications.[17] The following list has been adapted from Baedeker:[18]

1. St. Callixtus: located on the Via Appia, 1 1/4 miles from the Porta San Sebastiano. This is one of the largest, and certainly the most famous, of all the Catacombs.

2. Catacombs of Domitilla: near St. Callixtus, on the Via delle Sette Chiese. Contains the largest number of inscriptions (more than 900). The basilica of St. Petronilla was built in the center of the Catacomb, on the second level, the roof extending into the open air. This church was used from the fifth to the eighth centuries.

3. St. Praetextatus: close to the Via Appia, in the direction of Sant' Urbano.

4. St. Priscilla: on the Via Salaria, 1 3/4 miles from the city gate. Famous for the Capella Graeca (described in Chapter II). Said to contain the oldest depiction of the Madonna in existence.

5. San Sebastiano: on the Via Appia, below the church of that name. The only Catacomb which continued to be visited in medieval times.

6. Sts. Peter and Marcellin: located near the Torre Pignatarra. One of the largest Catacombs. Some of the frescoes belong to a very early date.

7. Jewish Catacombs: in the vicinity of San Sebastiano; built about the third century. The inscriptions are exclusively Greek and Latin. The seven-branched

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[17] Ibid., pp. 392-3.

[18] Baedeker, op. cit., pp. 453-6.

> candalabrum is a frequent symbol. Also, figures of animals occur in two chambers - contrary to Mosaic law.

Origin of the Term Catacomb

There has always been controversy concerning a satisfactory etymology of the term catacomb; the issue still has not been settled. Some claim it is allied with the Sanskrit kumbhas, a pit.[19] Others claim it is derived from κατά, down, and τύμβος, mound, tomb; or from κοιμάω, to go to sleep; or from the Latin cumbo, part of decumbo, I lie down; or from κατά and κύμβη, a hollow, a canoe from the resemblance of a sarcophagus to a boat. Furthermore, this word was first applied in the sixth century; before then the terms crypts (κρύπται, secret places) and cemeteries (κοιμητήρια, sleeping places) were used.[20]

However, the most probable explanation is that given by De Rossi, the dean of all scholars of the Catacombs:

> De Rossi is of the opinion that even the word catacomb derives its origin from the same source as cubiculum; and that....it is a hybrid word, half Latin, half Greek; the latter half coming from the same root as accumbo,

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[19]William Smith, A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, edited by William Smith and Samuel Cheetham (Hartford: J. B. Burr Publishing Company, 1880), p. 295.

[20]Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, edited by John M'Clintock and James Strong (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1894), II, 145.

> recumbo, etc., and the former being the preposition κατά, used (as was common in later Latin) instead of ad. He takes the whole word, therefore, as equivalent to ad coemeteria, or accubitoria, Christianorum; ....it was first applied to a spot where the chief of the Christian cemeteries were situated, whence in later times it has come to be extended to them all.[21]

Purposes and Uses of the Catacombs

As it has already been pointed out, the Catacombs were constructed only for the purpose of burying the Christian dead. They had their origin when some of the wealthier converts in Rome followed the example of their pagan neighbors and set apart a plot of ground for burial purposes, "following a form of sepulchre not altogether unknown even among the heathen families of Rome, and in common use among the Jews both in Rome and elsewhere."[22]

The Catacombs also have served the purpose of places of worship. The arcosolia were used on the anniversaries of the deaths of the martyrs they held, while some of the cubicula (family vaults) were used as oratories and places of public assembly.[23] The celebration of the Eucharist itself is taken up in detail in the following chapter. After the year 410, when Alaric sacked Rome, the Catacombs were no longer used as ordinary Christian cemeteries; instead

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[21] R.S., I, 7-8.

[22] Ibid., p. 6.

[23] Ibid., p. 14.

they became shrines for Christian worship, and, because of the martyrs, "became an object of enthusiastic devotion."[24]

Finally, the Catacombs offered refuge and hiding during the Roman persecutions. Northcote and Brownlow list numerous incidents of martyrdom right in the Catacombs themselves. Because of the secrecy connected with them, and because of the fact that the Catacombs lay outside the city walls, no other place offered quite as much security for the hunted. Consequently, "the heathen contemptuously derided them as 'a skulking, darkness-loving race' ('latebrosa et lucifugax natio' - Minucius Felix); and the emperors sought to close against them even this last place of retreat."[25]

The Order of Fossors

"They wandered in dens and caves of the earth"

(Hebrews 11:38)

> They (the order of fossors) were an inferior order of the clergy in the primitive Church, whose business was to take care of funerals, and provide for the decent interment of the dead, particularly of the poor; an office, whose duties, in times of persecution, were not discharged without peril. "The first order among the clergy," says St. Jerome, "is that of the fossarii, who, after the example of holy Tobias, are admonished to bury the dead." They received their name of fossarii from their digging the graves.[26]

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[24] Ibid., p. 15.

[25] Ibid., pp. 237 and 156.

[26] Kip, op. cit., p. 155.

In the preceding quotation Bishop Kip sketches the work of the fossors; but he does not emphasize the enormity of the work that they accomplished. They were not merely a group of common laborers - though their lives were laborious - but in reality, artificers. In fact, a master fossor must have been what amounts to a civil engineer, as may be clearly seen in the complicated but logical layouts of most of the Catacombs.[27] For example, Northcote and Brownlow present this account of the working plan of a catacomb: the modus operandi was borrowed from the old Roman plan of making a camp or laying out a new city. The area was determined; an opening was made; and at a proper depth a gallery was cut to the limit of the property. Another gallery was dug, at right angles with the first, and this reached again to the area limits of the section to be worked. These two fundamental lines corresponded to the decumanus and the cardo of Roman measurements; the succeeding stages of the work were easy, and other parallel lines were then added, till the whole section was honeycombed.[28]

Representations of the fossors appear on the walls of the Catacombs themselves. Examples are given in Figures 3 and 4. They are pictured with the tools of their trade: pickaxes, lanterns, short tunics, hatchets, chisels, and

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[27] R.S., I, 207.

[28] Ibid., p. 208.

Fig. 3. A Fossor Beginning the Excavation of a Catacomb.

Fig. 4. A Fossor at Work, Hewing out a Gallery.

compasses. Over one of these crudely drawn pictures this inscription is written (of questionable Latin grammar and doubtful translation of the date, as a result, by Kip):

DIOGENES - FOSSOR - IN - PACE - DEPOSITVS

OCTABV - KALENDAS - OCTOBRIS

Diogenes, the fossor, buried in peace, on the eighth kalends of October[29]

Competent authority places the fossors among the orders of the clergy. In an official document of the early fourth century, enumerating the clergy, "they appear immediately after the bishop, priests, deacons, and sub-deacons."[30] Furthermore, the fossors were of necessity supported entirely by the freewill offerings of the faithful. They did not receive any specific salary for their work: there is little evidence that gravesites were purchased before an individual's death, and consequently the noble and lowly, rich and poor were buried without discrimination. This was the practice until the time of Constantine.

The end of the fourth century, and especially the fifth, brought with them a change in this procedure, as Northcote and Brownlow indicate.[31] The fossors apparently <u>owned</u> the burial places and sold the graves directly, and

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[29]Kip, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 157.

[30]<u>R.S.</u>, I, 210.

[31]<u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 212-6.

for high prices at that. A fossor's descendants, after his death, took over his property rights, and could buy and sell. Some of the recorded prices range from one golden solidus to six and one-half golden solidi. These prices were probably determined by the location of the gravesites: a spot near a martyr would surely bring a higher price. And in addition, the payment was undoubtedly tempered by the wealth and charity of the purchaser, An over-payment would provide for the poor. The title of fossor, however, disappears from Christian inscriptions after the first quarter of the fifth century. Moreover, as has already been stated, the Catacombs ceased to function as Christian burial grounds after 410.

The Fate of the Catacombs throughout the Centuries

The Early Persecutions

"Strange conquest, where the conqueror must die,
And he is slain that wins the victory!"[32]

For two and one-half centuries the Christians of Rome suffered persecutions at the hands of the government; for 129 years of this period the persecutions were active, while

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[32]Kip, op. cit., p. 100.

there was comparative peace during 120 years.[33] Historians generally reduce this process to ten stages of persecution; not all of these stages centered in Rome, however, but in other provinces of the Roman empire.

1. Nero, 64-68. On July 18, 64 A.D. a fire which lasted for ten days broke out in Rome and destroyed ten of the fourteen sections of the city. Nero blamed the Christians, many of whom were killed by animals, burning, and drowning.

2. Domitian, 95-96. Directed against Christians in the higher classes by an emperor of vicious character.

3. Maximinius, 235-238. Aimed principally against the clergy.

4. Decius, 249-251. One of the most severe and widespread persecutions. Insistence on reverence of pagan gods. Numerous apostates because of previous period of peace.

5. Valerian, 257-260. Bishop Sixtus beheaded while conducting service in the Catacombs of St. Callixtus, along with six deacons.

6. Aurelian, 274-275. This persecution was brought to an end by the emperor's death.

7. Diocletian, 303-311. Most cruel and systematic of the persecutions; his object was to terminate Christianity in a very definite way. Persecutions came to an end with the Edict of Milan, 313.

Naturally the Catacombs played an important role during this time by offering at least temporary refuge to the Christians. Many instances of martyrdom took place in the galleries themselves. For example, Candida, a Christian

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[33] Mary Loyola, Visualized Church History (New York: Oxford Book Company, 1942), pp. 18-25. The factual material in this section has been provided by this work.

Lannus, the martyr of Christ, rests here. He suffered under Diocletian.

Fig. 5. An Epitaph of a Christian Martyr.

woman, was thrown down the shaft of a luminaria. While she lay there, her persecutors hurled stones through the opening until she was dead.[34]

It is not the task of this brief introductory survey to delineate the causes of the persecutions. But it is of interest to look into the state of the Roman mind at this time in order to grasp their viewpoint. The Annals of Tacitus, as quoted by Northcote and Brownlow, record Cassius as saying:

> Now that we have nations amongst us who have different rites and ceremonies, foreign religions, or perhaps no religion at all, it is impossible to keep such a rabble (conluviem istam) under restraint in any other way than by fear. True, indeed, some innocent persons will perish with the guilty. But, whenever it is necessary to make some striking example of severity for the public good, there will always be incidental injustice to certain individuals.[35]

Furthermore, the Christians were frequently used as scapegoats. At one time in the second century (under Marcus Aurelius, 162)[36] there was war against the Parthians in the east, rumors of wars in Britain and Germany; a famine had occurred the previous year; and, finally, the Tiber had flooded its banks. Consequently the famous cry, recorded by Tertullian, was raised, Christianos ad leones! This proved

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[34]Kip, op. cit., p. 57.

[35]R.S., I, 308.

[36]Ibid., p. 130.

a shrewd psychological device to soothe the discontent of the common people.

The Post-Persecution Period

Northcote and Brownlow advance elaborate evidence to show that during the persecution of Diocletian the Christians filled the principal galleries of the Catacombs with earth.[37] They took this measure in order to prevent their enemies from desecrating the graves. But this created a problem when the persecutions ended, and the Catacombs became objects of mass veneration. The very fact that the crowds became so great necessitated enlargements of the underground chapels and improvements to the entrance ways. The person who took this task upon himself was Damasus, a bishop of Rome (366-385); he was a man of fine aesthetic sense, fully recognizing the value of the Catacombs to posterity.

Damasus set up various inscriptions, written in verse, and, incidentally, all carved by the same artist.[38] They describe the works of the martyrs and what he himself did in the way of restoration. Some of the walls were also decorated with frescoes at this time, and as a result they "differ materially from those of the earliest Christians in

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[37] Ibid., p. 410.

[38] Ibid., p. 16.

subject and treatment."[39]

The Catacombs suffered pillaging during the ransackings of Rome by Alaric in 410, the Goths in 537, and the Longobards in 755. Skeletons and single bones took on the value of gold; they were given arbitrary names of saints and were carried home to be sold at soaring prices as relics. Baedeker quotes an undocumented source: "The bones of those who had in their time descended to the Catacombs as sinners, were suddenly brought to light again as the remains of the saints in heaven."

In these centuries an incalculable number of bones had been transferred to the churches within the walls of Rome. This occurred in spite of the restorations of John III (560-573) and Paul I (757-768). When the Pantheon was consecrated as a Christian church in 609, Hadrian IV had twenty-eight wagon-loads of bones from the Catacombs placed beneath the altar! And 2,300 corpses were buried in Santa Prassede on July 20, 817. Finally, after a few more attempts at restoration, the whole project was abandoned by Paschalis I (817-824). Imperceptibly the Catacombs slipped into oblivion. Kip translates from Canzone xi of Petrarch:

> They are become robbers' caves,
> So that only the good are denied entrance;

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[39] Baedeker, op. cit., p. 450. Factual information in the two subsequent paragraphs has been taken from this source.

And among altars and saintly statues,
Every cruel enterprise seems to be concerted.[40]

The Catacombs in Modern Times

"Truth shall spring out of the earth" (Psalm 85:11)

The rediscovery of the Catacombs took place accidentally on May 31, 1578, when workmen were shovelling pozzolana in a vineyard and broke through to an underground cemetery. The location: the Via Salaria, about two miles beyond the city walls of Rome.[41] Previous to this time only a handful of pilgrims and humanists had dared to explore a few of the Catacombs. Serious investigations began in the sixteenth century when given impetus by the amazing discovery off the Via Salaria.

A number of miscellaneous writers became sufficiently interested in the Catacombs to make notations and copies of the paintings, but none of them drew up a comprehensive work. That is, until the time of Antonio Bosio, "who has been justly called the true Columbus of this subterranean world."[42] Bosio, who was born in Malta, was a lawyer by profession. Before writing, he first digested huge amounts of factual material to help explain his discoveries in the

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[40]Kip, op. cit., p. 44.

[41]R.S., I, 27 ff.

[42]Ibid., p. 32.

Catacombs: all the Fathers, writings of the Councils, lives of the saints, and Church history. He wrote thousands of pages by his own hand in addition to ransacking every new Catacomb that was discovered. Although these examinations continued for thirty-six years, Bosio died (1629) before his Roma Sotterranea was published in 1632.

After this period many private searches were made, without any supervision of the Roman authorities: this proved disastrous, since in the eagerness of the faithful, much of the archeological value was destroyed or carried away. The papacy finally brought order to the situation in 1668 and restricted entry to the Catacombs.[43]

A series of lesser studies on the Catacombs appeared sporadically during the next two centuries by such men as Fabretti (1700), Boldetti (1720), and D'Agincourt (1780-1786). Northcote and Brownlow treat this last scholar severely because he "taught the modern fossors the last lesson in the art of destruction"[44] by attempting to remove frescoes from the walls of rock on which they had been painted. He failed; some of the monuments were thus irreplaceably destroyed.

The Jesuit Marchi (1841) revived an interest in the Catacombs in the nineteenth century. He was for some time

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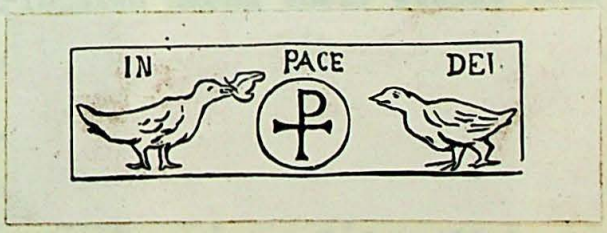
[43] Ibid., p. 37.

[44] Ibid., p. 44.

their custodian in an official capacity and published a volume on early Christian art.

The greatest of all Catacombs' scholars (and remains so to this day) is Giovanni Battista de Rossi, who died in 1894. His famous work of a lifetime is Roma Sotterranea Cristiana, in three volumes, 1864-77. Northcote and Brownlow's Roma Sotterranea, which is used extensively throughout this thesis, is based directly on De Rossi's work. This man had an uncanny knack for making, and even predicting, new discoveries in addition to the articulate gift of scientific organization of his materials. Even though he was a Roman Catholic, many Protestant scholars have, without reservation, praised his objectivity and trustworthiness. De Rossi was invaluably aided, it should be noted, by his brother, who was both a mathematician and a geologist. Since this time several eminent scholars have written about the Catacombs, such as Wilpert and Styger, but nothing has yet surpassed the classic quality of De Rossi's Roma Sotterranea.



CHAPTER II

EUCHARISTIC EVIDENCES IN THE ROMAN CATACOMBS

The Eucharist during the Era of the Catacombs

It is an almost universally accepted fact that the Eucharist was regularly celebrated in the Catacombs, even after the Roman government had officially embraced Christianity. Prudentius, writing in the fourth century, reports:

> Not far from the city walls, among the well-trimmed orchards, there lies a crypt buried in darsome pits. Into its secret recesses a steep path with winding stairs directs one, even though the turnings shut out the light....To such secret places is the body of Hippolytus conveyed, near to the spot where now stands the altar dedicated to God. That same altar slab (mensa) gives the Sacrament, and is the faithful guardian of its martyr's bones, which it keeps laid up there in expectation of the eternal Judge, while it feeds the dwellers on the Tiber with holy food.[1]

In fact, the ministers who celebrated the Sacrament in the Catacombs had special permission to consecrate the elements there, in contrast to the regular clergy of Rome. Every Sunday the city pastors were required to receive the Sacrament for distribution among their people from the bishop, according to a statement of Innocent I (404 A.D.).[2]

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[1]J. Spencer Northcote and W. R. Brownlow, Roma Sotterranea (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1879), I, 168-9. Hereafter the designation R.S. will be used to identify this source.

[2]Ibid., p. 244.

The Didache (first part of the second century) quite probably gives an accurate, if scanty, witness to the Eucharist as it was conducted by the Christians of Rome. There are four passages which allude to it.

1. Concerning liturgical assemblies: "Meeting together on the Lord's Day, breaking bread and return thanks after confessing your sins, that your sacrifice be pure."

2. A warning against sacrilege: "Give not holy things to dogs."

3. An admonition before Communion: "Let him who is holy keep firm, and let him who is not repent."

4. A prayer of thanksgiving: "Thou, O Lord, Creator of all things, hast given to mankind food and drink that they may thank Thee, and Thou givest us spiritual Food and Drink and eternal life through Thy Son."[3]

The Eucharist was generally celebrated on the slab, or mensa, covering the tomb of a martyr. In a decree of Felix I (269-275) there is a specific order that the sepulchers of martyrs alone were to serve as worship locations.[4] Some reasons suggested for this are that there should be a concrete identity between the martyr's tomb and the altar of Christian worship; or possibly to prevent the Eucharist from being conducted on the arcosolia of those who were not

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[3]Orazio Marucchi, The Evidence of the Catacombs for the Doctrines and Organization of the Primitive Church (London: Sheed and Ward, 1929), p. 27.

[4]R.S., I, 241.

martyrs. However, not all worship sites in the Catacombs are located directly over the bodies of martyrs; some of the altar slabs may have been placed in front of, or in the near position of, the martyrs' sepulchers.

Walter Lowrie, a prolific writer on the subject of early Christian art, objects to the foregoing interpretation. He argues that:

> ....in an age when the primitive conception of the altar as the common table was still preserved, when the very position of the altar between the priest and the people still expressed this idea, the eucharistic use of these so-called table tombs, in the manner which is commonly supposed, is very far from obvious. Furthermore, the frequent and practically private Eucharists which this view implies are hardly to be reconciled with the jealousy of the Roman bishop for his prerogative as the proper dispenser of the Eucharist....and the congregations were obliged to wait for the consecrated elements which were carried to them by deacons from the episcopal altar.[5]

But, as it already has been pointed out in this section, the worshipers in the Catacombs had received a special privilege in this regard, and thus Lowrie's contention loses considerable ground.

The manner of receiving the Lord's Body was this: the hands were folded crosswise, one upon the other, and upon reception, the congregation said Amen.[6] The bread was dis-

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[5]Walter Lowrie, Christian Art and Archeology (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), p. 46.

[6]Ethel Ross Barker, Rome of the Pilgrims and Martyrs (London: Methuen and Company, 1913), p. 166.

tributed by the "president" or by deacons or other inferior ministers.[7] From the famous Autun epitaph, discovered in France in 1839, there is this evidence:

Ἔσθιε, πῖνε, δυσὶν Ἰχθύν ἔχων παλάμαις

Eat and drink, receiving the Fish in your two hands.[8] Even though the Autun inscription has been placed in the fourth century, the ideas it expresses are possibly as old as the days of St. Irenaeus.[9]

During the first centuries the custom of kneeling to receive the Eucharist did not exist, claims Marucchi. And this did not detract at all from the belief in the Real Presence. "For the faithful received the Eucharist standing to signify the Resurrection of Christ, and the celebrant in the Latin rite still communicates standing, as do all the faithful among the Greeks."[10]

Introduction to the Eucharistic Frescoes

The eucharistic frescoes described on subsequent pages of this chapter all possess this feature: unintelligibility to those without knowledge and understanding of the Christ-

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[7] R.S., I, 240.

[8] J. Spencer Northcote, Epitaphs of the Catacombs (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1879), p. 136.

[9] Loc. cit.

[10] Marucchi, op. cit., p. 8.

ian religion. They are a mixture "of things natural and supernatural, simple and allegorical....whilst eminently liturgical in character."[11] But they remain surprisingly plain in spite of the heavy doctrinal content they carry. What the artists stressed was precisely doctrine: aesthetic perfection obviously did not concern them. To illustrate this point, Weidlé, a theological professor teaching in Paris, recently maintained that:

> Form in it (frescoes of the Catacombs) does not express religious feeling; does not expound sacred story; does not create saintly figures. To put it bluntly, it is not an art at all. It is a language coined to convey thought within a religion.[12]

Other reasons for this lack of clarity in the eucharistic frescoes have been suggested, such as feeling of deep reverence, and the desire to keep secret from the world at large (and also the catechumens) the mystical ceremonies of the Church.[13] Lowrie feels that this secrecy, which lasted till the Middle Ages, was an unwise policy:

> The Church exposed itself needlessly to the horrible suspicions which were current among the pagans, that in this sacrament the Christians murdered infants in

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[11] R.S., II, 84.

[12] Wladimir Weidlé, The Baptism of Art (London: Dacre Press, 194-?), p. 11.

[13] C. C. Rolfe, The Ancient Use of Liturgical Colors (Oxford, Parker and Company, 1879), p. 47.

order to drink their blood.[14]

In the minds of the early Christians an extremely close connection existed between the Eucharist and Baptism. Therefore these sacraments are often pictured together in the frescoes of the Catacombs. Frequently they were administered on the same day;[15] this was so because they were regarded as parts of the initiatory mystery, according to Weidlé. And "as early as the Epistle to the Hebrews (vi. 4-8) baptism and communion form links in a single chain: 'ye were enlightened, and tasted....the heavenly gift.'"[16] Thus, in the belief of the Catacombs' Christians the two sacraments easily fused into a unity. By Baptism the soul was born into Christ; by the Eucharist the new life was nourished and sustained.

Portrayals of the Eucharist are also inseparably bound up with the doctrine of the Resurrection, especially since the frescoes were painted in cemeteries. The Resurrection and the immortal life with Christ are probably the most dominant themes in the art and epitaphs of the Catacombs. Right in the galleries of the dead, then, the Eucharist is pictured:

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[14] Walter Lowrie, Art in the Early Church (Pantheon Books, 1947), p. 72.

[15] R.S., II, 93.

[16] Weidlé, op. cit., p. 24.

> ....for the Eucharist was believed to bring eternal life not only to the soul of the communicant, but to his body also....So St. Ignatius: "Breaking one bread which is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote that we should not die but live forever in Jesus Christ."[17]

Cullmann, now teaching at Basel, in discussing the significance of the Eucharist in the early Church, speaks of the joy the Christians had in eating with Christ while eating with their brothers and "....de rappeler de nouveau que la Sainte-Cène a été dans la primitive Église, une fête de la résurrection." Furthermore, the Eucharist was "....comme une anticipation de son (Christ's) retour messianique définitif."[18] Since the Communion was with the living Christ, the Sacrament relates itself to His Resurrection and "points toward....the complete fellowship with Christ in the future."[19]

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[17]Gladys Mary Bevan, Early Christians of Rome (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 97.

[18]O. Cullmann, "La Signification de la Sainte-Cène dans le Christianisme Primitif," Revue de'Histoire et Philosophie, XVI (Janvier-Février, 1936), 22.

[19]Ragnar Bring, "The Lord's Supper - Its Origin and Significance," Augustana Quarterly, XIX (October, 1940), 297.

A. The Chapels of the Sacraments in the Catacombs of St. Callixtus

1. Fresco: Seven Men Partake of a Eucharistic Meal

In the Catacombs of St. Callixtus are found several cubicula which, because of the nature of their frescoes, have been termed the Chapels of the Sacraments. In the most noteworthy of these paintings there are unmistakable references to the Eucharist, even though, as Louis Bréhier indicates, "il ne faut pas chercher dans ces célèbres 'Chambres des Sacrements' un exposé systématique de la doctrine théologique des sacrements."[20]

The most famous scene (Figure 6) depicts seven men wearing tunics, seated at a couch-table; two dishes of fish are placed before them, with eight wicker baskets of bread in the foreground of the fresco. (This subject is repeated in other chambers, with varying numbers of baskets.) According to Northcote and Brownlow, this appears to be a literal representation of the events in Chapter 21 of the Gospel of St. John, where Christ provides a meal for the disciples on the shore of the sea of Tiberias.[21]

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[20]Louis Bréhier, L'art Chrétien (Paris, 1918), p. 48.

[21]R.S., II, 67.

Fig. 6. Fresco: Seven Men Partake of a Eucharistic Meal.

St. Augustine explains this miraculous meal: when Christ placed the fish upon the burning coals for the disciples, it was really a portrayal of Himself who had suffered: "Piscis assus, Christus passus." Christ is also the bread that came down from heaven. Furthermore:

> The fish caught by the apostles are the Church, which must be incorporated into Christ, in order to become a partaker of everlasting happiness; we ourselves.... are represented by those even disciples....that we too have a share in so great a Sacrament.

With this story St. John concludes his Gospel, because it forms a connection from the earthly to the heavenly (i.e., on account of the eucharistic implications in it) in a mystical manner. In the Eucharist we have a foretaste of the fuller life in heaven. And this interpretation was almost unanimous with the Fathers.[22]

Barnes bears out this general interpretation: "Once again the Fathers explain the picture, and tell us that the fish roasted on the ashes is Christ Himself."[23] The constant use of the number seven in this and similar frescoes further endorses a eucharistic explanation. In the symbolism of the early Christians that number indicated universality; "....in the present instance it implied that at the Banquet of the

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[22] Ibid., pp. 68-9.

[23] Arthur Stapylton Barnes, The Early Church in the Light of the Monuments (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1913), p. 130.

Eucharist....all the Christians throughout the entire world partake."[24]

Bread and fish are the two great symbols of the Eucharist in the Catacombs. These not too thickly veiled symbols of course refer to Christ: bread, because of its nourishing quality for the body and the soul, since Christ said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and the fish, because the Greek word for fish is an acrostic formed from the initials of the motto, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior:

ΙΗCΟΥC = Jesus
ΧΡΙCΤΟC = Christ
ΘΕΟΥ = of God
ΥΙΟC = Son
CΩΤΗΡ = Savior

Marucchi stresses this symbolism very clearly: "Ma il pesce unito al pane acquista un significato speciale e rappresenta senza dubbio l'Eucaristia."[25]

German scholars of the nineteenth century, it goes without saying, could not permit a view quite so sacramental to pass unchallenged. Hans Achelis, who meticulously investi-

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[24]Joseph Husslein, The Mass of the Apostles (New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1929), p. 291.

[25]Orazio Marucchi, Le Catacombe ed il Protestantesimo (Second Edition; Roma: F. Pustet, 1911), p. 38.

gated the fish symbolism of the Catacombs,[26] disagrees that this scene has John 21 as its basis. Attempting to refute De Rossi (who established the traditional view), he continues:

> Von diesem Punkte aus lässt er sich den weiteren Weg seiner Interpretation vorschreiben durch die Aeusserungen zweier Schriftsteller des fünften Jahrhunderts über dieses Galiläische Mahl: Pseudo-Prosper und Augustin. Ersterer wird falsch citiert und falsch verstanden, indem ihm in den Mund gelegt wird, jenes Mahl der Jünger sei ein Typus des Abendmahls. Augustin deutet wirklich die sieben Jünger als die gesammtheit der Kirche, Fisch und Brot als Christus; die eucharistische Auffassung des Mahles wird auch ihm mit Unrecht beigelegt.[27]

Achelis objects to forcing upon a third century fresco the allegorical interpretation of a fifth century writer, Augustine. Ultimately, he thinks this fresco has a number of references:

> Die drei symbolischen Stücke des Bildes....sind also auf zwei reduziert: auf die durch die Sieben symbolisierte Kirche, und die in den Körben und Fischen angedeutete "wunderbare Speisung." Der Maler dachte sich die ganze Kirche als teilnehmend an der wunderbaren Speisung.[28]

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[26]Hans Achelis, Das Symbol des Fisches und die Fischdenkmäler der Römischen Katakomben (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1888).

[27]Ibid., p. 77.

[28]Ibid., p. 81.

Greater evidence, however, lies with the sacramental explanation which has been presented. The very function of such a fresco in a cemetery where worship was conducted would argue in favor of a eucharistic significance and not, as Achelis contends, of only a representation of one of Christ's miraculous feedings of bread and fish.

2. Fresco: Tripod, Man, and Orans

Upon a three-legged table with a circular top lie a fish and two or three loaves of bread; to the left of the table stands a man clothed in a loose tunic. Apparently he is blessing the fish and bread with his right hand, which is pointing to the table. To the right of the tripod stands an orans, a woman in the ancient attitude of prayer, her arms outstretched. This fresco, represented in Figure 7, is one of several similar groups which have no specific Biblical reference. Obviously the artist had a particular purpose in mind: since there is no direct historical connection, this must be symbolism intended to convey some doctrine.

> They were signs of religious ideas and truths, rather than imitations of facts; in a word, they were symbolical, or as Raoul Rochette calls them, ideographical paintings, not historical.[29]

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[29] R.S., II, 65.

When aligned with the other decorations of bread and fish in the Chapels of the Sacraments, it is at once clear that these scenes point to the Eucharist. This constitutes the prevalent view. For instance, Marucchi declares this fresco to represent "....the Eucharistic sacrifice in the very moment of Consecration when the bread becomes ΄ΙΧΘΥΣ ."[30] This is plainly a Roman Catholic statement of transubstantiation; regardless of the theological subtleties involved, though, this picture still evidently implies a blessing or consecration of the eucharistic elements. Marucchi goes on to announce that the figure of the praying woman symbolizes the Church praying from "....the altar of the Eucharistic Sacrifice."[31] To complete this viewpoint, Barnes even sees the tripod as a new eucharistic symbol representing the altar; in fact, the tripod also refers to the Trinity.[32]

In opposition to the foregoing, Paul Styger, a German scholar of recent times, insists flatly:

> Nur eine erkünstelte Deuterei konnte auch die üblichen Totenmahlszenen und den Tripodus mit Broten und Fischen auf die Eucharistiefeier oder die Jünger am See

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[30]Marucchi, The Evidence of the Catacombs, p. 36.

[31]Ibid., p. 37.

[32]Barnes, op. cit., p. 129.

Genezareth beziehen.[33]

Professor Styger feels that the early Christians merely took over these decorations from the prevailing culture "....ohne dasz es nötig wäre, hinter den leichtverständlichen Wanddekorationen tief-theologische Anleitungen vom Diakon Kallistus zu vermuten."[34]

A strongly iconoclastic position over against the traditional stand is emphasized also by Achelis. He states that this is not a scene of consecrating the sacramental elements: the man a priest, the tripod the eucharistic table, and the praying woman the Church. Where, he asks, is the wine? Furthermore, the pagan philosopher's costume (the tunic) wouldn't become a priest; and to represent the orans as the Ecclesia is too early for its time. The tripod is probably only an ordinary table, as elsewhere in Christian art. The scene represents two distinct persons, undoubtedly the buried ones, a man and wife, who are partaking of a meal. The woman is praying; the man is already reaching for the food, to indicate a change in the scene.[35]

Wilpert, one of the best known German writers on the Catacombs, also shares a divergent opinion. He contends

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[33]Paul Styger, Die Römischen Katakomben (Berlin: Verlag. für Kunstwissenschaft, 1933), p. 60.

[34]Loc. cit.

[35]Achelis, op. cit., pp. 90-1.

that the philosopher's mantle was not the customary garb of the clergy. Therefore the man in this painting cannot be a priest. On the contrary, the figure is "....Christus, wie er das Wunder der Vermehrung an einem Fisch und Laib Brod wirkt." And this scene shows the consecration: "Deshalb liegen der Fisch und das Brod auf einem Tische, dem Altare, auf."[36]

However, Wilpert makes this sane suggestion, entirely conceivable because of the location of the fresco in a gravesite:

> Die Orans, die rechts von dem Altare steht, bedeutet die in der Seligkeit gedachte Seele der Verstorbenen. Der Künstler hat durch diese Figur auf die Wirkung des Genusses der Eucharistie hingewiesen, wie auch die alten Schriftsteller nicht von ihr reden, ohne sogleich in irgend einer Weise die Wirkung der Communion zu betonen.[37]

In spite of these objections the ultimate interpretation of this fresco unquestionably is one which reveals a purely eucharistic significance. The frescoes which surround this picture overwhelmingly support this by a constant repitition of the fish and bread theme, whose sacramental bearing cannot possibly be denied. Subsequent sections of this chapter will substantiate the eucharistic

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[36]Joseph Wilpert, Die Malereien der Sacramentskapellen in der Katakombe des hl. Callistus (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1897), p. 21.

[37]Loc. cit.

bearing of this and similar frescoes.

3. Loaves and Fish

On two occasions Christ miraculously provided bread and fish for large numbers of people who had come to hear Him preach. All four evangelists record the first of these feedings, which satisfied the hunger of five thousand; five loaves and two fish constituted the working material of the miracle. The second feeding, mentioned only by St. Matthew (15:32 ff.), was performed with seven loaves and a "few" fish; in this instance, four thousand persons received food.[38] It appears that in these miracles the early Christians perceived a foreshadow of the Eucharist (as they also did in the miracle at Cana, to be taken up later). This was so, of course, because of the symbolical meaning of the infinite multiplication of the bread and the changing of water into wine. There was a similarity between the phraseology of the breaking and blessing of bread and the account of the Last Supper. "Obviously the evangelists purposed to teach that this miracle prefigured the sacrament."[39]

In the Chapels of the Sacraments one of the fresco decorations, Figure 8, displays seven wicker baskets filled

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[38] The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), V, 590.

[39] C. L. Dibble, "Primitive Symbolism in the Breaking of Bread," Anglican Theological Review, V, 191.

Fig. 7. Fresco: Tripod, Man, and Orans.

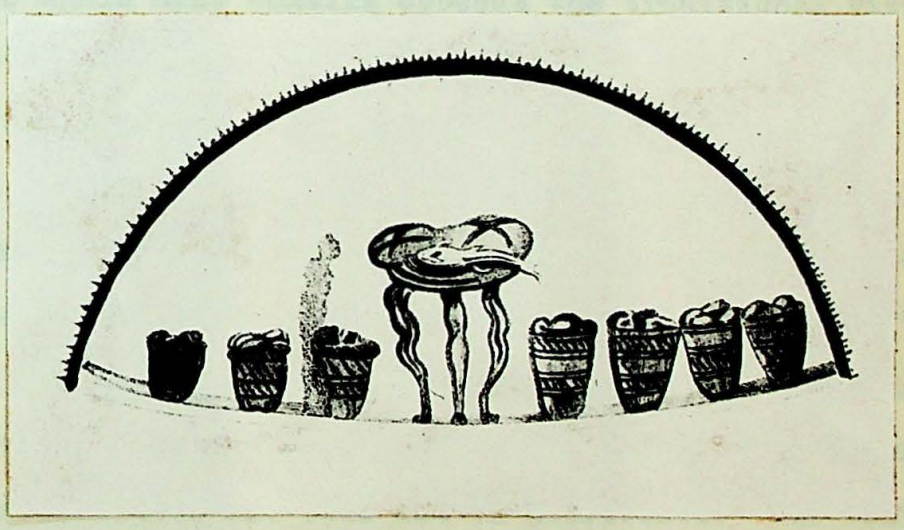

Fig. 8. Seven Wicker Baskets of Bread and a Fish on a Table.

with loaves of bread; they are arranged in a straight line which is interrupted, however, by a circular table with three legs. Upon this tripod rests a large fish. This scene is quite representative of more than thirty such frescoes of loaves and fish which still exist in the Roman Catacombs.[40] The number of elements in these pictures is not always historically accurate: the baskets, for example, are shown as numbering two, seven, eight, or twelve. The purpose of these departures from literal truth was to convey the thinking of the believer from external detail to the mystical and hidden meaning. "It was the symbolism of a religious idea they aimed at, and not the representation of a real history."[41]

Once again Hans Achelis opposes the traditional view that the table is the mensa Domini, the fish the ἸΧΘΥΣ, and the bread the sacramental element. On the contrary, he charges, there isn't the slightest hint to adopt a symbolical interpretation. The seven baskets are a component of the miraculous feeding story of Matthew 15, as are also the fish and the bread, whose number is merely a matter of artistic device. The painter lacked space for a more historical representation and thus had to abbreviate. But what about the tripod? This is the interesting, if far-fetched,

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[40] The Catholic Encyclopedia, loc. cit.

[41] R.S., II, 71.

notion of Achelis:

> Der Umstand, dass die letzteren auf einen Dreifuss, und nicht auf den Boden gelegt sind, hat darin seinen Grund, dass der Künstler ein Bogenfeld zu bemahlen hatte, das er auf diese Weise geschickt ausfüllte, indem der hohe Dreifuss über die niedrigen Körbe hervorragt.[42]

Here, it should be added parenthetically, that the distinction drawn between a representation found in St. Callixtus of two baskets, one of bread, the other of fish, is this: the bread indicates the element alone, the period before consecration, and the fish then signifies Christ, present after the consecration.[43]

B. The Capella Graeca in the Cemetery of St. Priscilla

1. The Fractio Panis

The Capella Graeca dates from great antiquity; it apparently formed the nucleus around which the rest of the Catacombs of St. Priscilla were constructed. It was not cut out of the tufa but regularly built up with brick and mortar. Furthermore, there are no graves, since the architect intended the chapel to receive only sarcophagi.[44] Lethaby,

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[42] Achelis, op. cit., p. 88.

[43] Katherine Lee Jenner, Christian Symbolism (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1910), p. 7.

[44] R.S., I, 115.

writing in the Cambridge Medieval History, draws this description: the Capella Graeca is roughly in the form of a small nave or body, eight by twenty-five feet, "....ended by an apse with lateral apses on each side of it." It opens from a long vaulted apartment or atrium. Located above the central apse is one of the most beautiful paintings, the Fractio Panis; thus it is close to where an altar once stood. The forms and features of the decorations are classic and gracious, composed in a few simple colors on a vermilion ground.[45]

The Fractio Panis is a fresco generally accepted as early second century. Seven persons are pictured at a table, reclining on a semi-circular divan. One of the banqueteers is a woman. The place of honor, to the right, is given to the "president" of the brethren, described by Justin Martyr in his account of Christian worship. The venerable and bearded president (προεστώς) is shown in the act of breaking bread.[46]

The discovery and conventional interpretation of this fresco belong to Joseph Wilpert, probably the most industrious of the German scholars of the Catacombs. He published his findings just before the turn of the century and devoted

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[45]W. R. Lethaby, "Early Christian Art," Cambridge Medieval History (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), I, 599.

[46]The Catholic Encyclopedia, loc. cit.

an entire book to the Fractio Panis fresco alone.[47] The following material represents Wilpert's approach to the eucharistic significance of the painting.

> Auch über die symbolische Bedeutung dieses Wunders kann kein Zweifel abwalten: wir wissen, dass das gesamte christliche Alterthum in der wunderbaren Speisung ein Vorbild des eucharistischen Mahles, das ist der Communion, sah.[48]

In the above quotation, first of all, Wilpert maintains that a eucharistic bearing of the fresco is to be found in the baskets and plates of fish and bread, which have direct allusion to Christ's miraculous feeding of the multitude. (That this miracle carried a heavy eucharistic slant was pointed out on pages 42 and 44.)

In this scene Wilpert clearly sees the Lord's Supper. The representation is so literal, that:

> ....der Kelch neben dem Teller mit den Fischen der liturgische Kelch oder, um einen Ausdruck des hl. Paulus zu gebrauchen, τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας, der Kelch der Segnung ist.[49]

What does the breaking of bread represent in the liturgical service?

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[47] Joseph Wilpert, Fractio Panis (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1895).

[48] Ibid., p. 9.

[49] Ibid., p. 14.

> Das Brodbrechen,....(ἡ κλάσις τοῦ ἄρτου) war also in das 2. Jahrhundert hinein der terminus technicus für das eucharistische Opfer.[50]

The man in charge of these proceedings is the president (προεστώς), who, Wilpert argues, must be a bishop since only a bishop may celebrate the Eucharist. "So ist es klar, dass er der Bischof ist und die liturgische Handlung des Brodbrechens vornimmt."[51] Wilpert also emphasizes this point: the whole bearing of the president indicates that he is actually breaking the bread, and not merely holding it up for view.[52]

In line with this type of thinking, Roman Catholic writers have swung over to a rock-bound interpretation of the Fractio Panis. To them it is an out and out representation of the mass. For example, the Catholic Encyclopedia states: "Such is the earliest representation in Christian art of the offering of the Mass."[53] And Barnes even makes an attempt at pinpointing the date of the fresco: "It is, indeed, an actual picture of the offering of Holy Mass, as it was performed in the early second century, about the year

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[50] Ibid., p. 15.

[51] Ibid., p. 16.

[52] Ibid., p. 9.

[53] The Catholic Encyclopedia, V, 591.

110."[54]

Finally, a small school of European interpreters insist on a variant explanation of the Fractio Panis. They claim that it portrays a heavenly banquet, an agape scene in the life to come. Carlo Cecchelli recently expressed this opinion:

> Il Wilpert....dette una grande importanza alla ormai famosa scena del cemeterio di Priscilla da lui ritrovata. In realtà si tratta di un' agape celeste cui partecipa una donna (quasi certamente la defunta). Colui che spezza il pane e forse il Cristo.[55]

In this heavenly agape the woman is of course the deceased who has been buried in the catacomb, and the president is none less than Christ Himself. Another authority, Laurent, suggests:

> ....c'est plutôt l'idée de la cena coelestis qui prédomine. Il en est de même, pensons-nous, pour les banquets des Sept représentés dans les chapelles des Sacrements, au cimetière de Calliste.[56]

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[54]Barnes, op. cit., p. 129.

[55]Carlo Cecchelli, Monumenti Cristiano-eretici di Roma (Roma: Fratelli Palombi, 1944), p. 110.

[56]Marcel Laurent, L'art Chrétien Primitif (Bruxelles: Vromant and Company, 1911), p. 104.

C. The Crypt of St. Lucina in the Catacombs of St. Callixtus

1. Fresco: A Fish Bearing a Basket of Bread on its Back

In Figure 9 a fish is pictured with a basket of bread resting on its back. The body of the fish is colored a dark, sea green; its mouth and gills are outlined in dark brown. The fish is drawn in an animated position, probably meant to show that it is alive and swimming. The wicker basket is brownish, a reddish tint showing through; the bread is delineated in an ashen-brown shade.[57]

The grayish color of the bread indicates that it is not of an ordinary type, the decussati which was divided into four parts by two crossed lines. Rather this type of bread was known among the Romans by the term mammhala, and the people of the East and the Jews used it as a sacred offering of the first-fruits to the priests.[58]

The bread is resting on top of the basket; in the middle of the basket, however, a reddish substance is seen, which Northcote and Brownlow contend is "....a something

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[57]Kurt Pfister, Katakomben Malerei (Potsdam: Kiepenhauer, 1924), p. 36.

[58]James Spencer Northcote, The Roman Catacombs (Philadelphia: Peter F. Cunningham, 1857), pp. 91-2.

that seems best to represent a glass containing red wine."[59] To support this stand, several writers produce this quotation of St. Jerome, who is speaking to Rusticus: "Nihil illo ditius quam qui corpus Domini in canistro portat vimineo et sanguinem eius in vitro."[60] "Nothing can be richer than one who carried the Body of Christ in a basket made of twigs, and the Blood of Christ in a chalice of glass." When applied to this fresco, the words of Jerome certainly possess a unique aptness. And because of the fact that in the early ages both wicker work and glass chalices were in use by the Christians, Northcote and Brownlow draw the conclusion that this painting "....at once the most ancient and the most simple that we know, of the fish united with the bread - was intended to refer to the mystery of the Holy Eucharist."[61]

An official Roman Catholic source alleges that this scene points to the miracle of the loaves and fish. Apparently the fish and basket of bread are drawn against a blue field, but in reality this is green upon closer examination. Also, the basket is placed close to, but not directly on the fish. The green, then, represents a field, and the whole picture is a reference to Christ's miracle of

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[59] R.S., II, 66.

[60] Marucchi, The Evidence of the Catacombs, p. 35.

[61] R.S., II, 66.

the loaves and fish. Next, the red coloration in the basket: "....evidently the artist in this detail had in mind the Eucharistic matter of wine."[62]

Marucchi brings out an interesting sidelight, in opposition to a Protestant view which would only recognize in this fresco a mere decoration. He says that the scene is obviously not a natural group, so we must accept a symbolical meaning in such a strange representation.[64] Marucchi, in another book, mentions the opinion held by Renan, who "....could only see in this painting nothing but an allusion to the fish eaten by Christ and His disciples on the lake of Tiberias."[65]

Achelis again advances a highly skeptical consideration. He vociferously denies the view that the red smudge on the basket is really a glass of wine, seen through the openings of the wickerwork. He concedes that chalices made of glass were used, but it is "höchst zweifelhaft." Furthermore, the loaves of bread are disproportionately small. Achelis continues: "Man müsste sich einen Deckel auf den Korb und unter die Brote gelegt denken, weil sie sonst den Wein

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[62] The Catholic Encyclopedia, loc. cit.

[63] Husslein, op. cit., p. 278.

[64] Marucchi, The Evidence of the Catacombs, p. 8.

[65] Orazio Marucchi, Christian Epigraphy (Cambridge: University Press, 1912), p. 120.

berühren würden." Of course the possibility remains that the artist conceived the scene without actual prototypes. But to Achelis the difficulties disappear "....sobald man den roten Fleck als Zufälligkeit irgend welcher Art ansieht, und ihm für die Erklärung kein Gewicht beilegt." This fresco, therefore, is an abbreviated version of the miraculous feeding scenes known to the artist. The purpose is to serve only as a decorative piece. Achelis then proceeds to cite parallels in other frescoes; he is forced to conclude, though, that "....ich den rätselhaften roten Fleck unerklärt lassen muss."[66]

D. Eucharistic Symbols

1. The Fish

For the Christians of the early centuries the fish was undoubtedly the most uncommonly significant symbol, for it not only possessed rich eucharistic reference but also was "....with wonderful brevity and distinctness, a complete abridgement of the Creed - a profession of faith....in the two natures and unity of Person" and in the saviorship of Christ.[67] An example of the fish is given in Figure 10. Florence Hedges writes that it was a common sight to observe

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[66] Achelis, op. cit., pp. 95-6.

[67] R.S., II, 62.

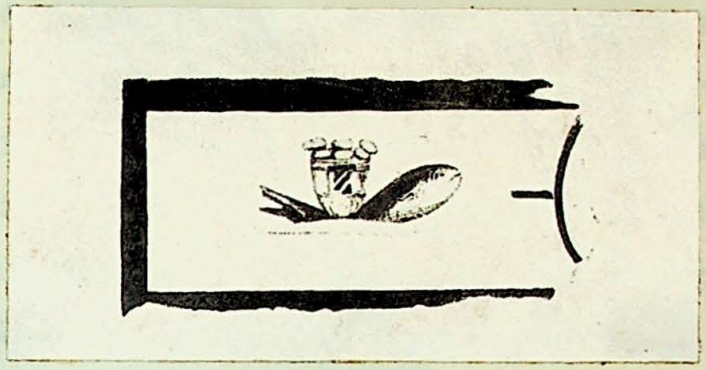

Fig. 9. A Fish Bearing a Basket of Bread on its Back.

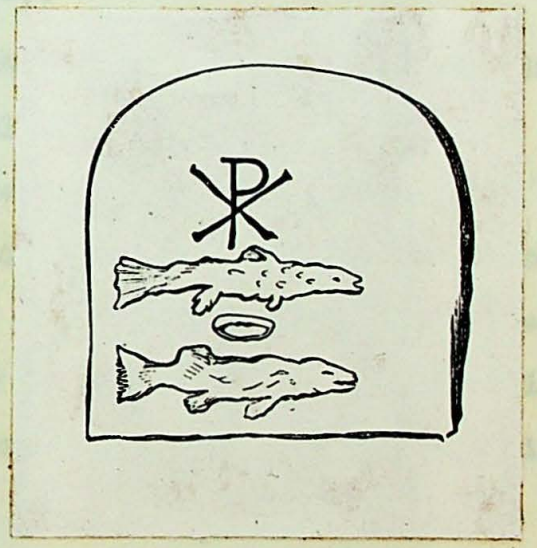

Fig. 10. An Example of the Fish used as a Christian Symbol.

some person of humble station draw a fish in the soft earth with a stick or on a stone; and should anyone be close by who understood the sign, a bond would spring up between them - words were not necessary.[68] In fact many small reproductions of fish have been found in the graves of the Catacombs carved in crystal, ivory, mother of pearl, enamel, and precious stones; some have holes drilled through them for wearing about the neck. One such ornament has the word ΣΩCAIC : May you save us! engraved on its back.[69] Also, fish formed in gold, silver, or bronze were worn about the neck as a sacred emblem, "....just as members of secret societies now wear pins and badges to signify their connection with them."[70]

This use of the fish as a symbol of the Christian hope dates back to nebulous antiquity: its precise origin is difficult to determine. Marucchi endorses the explanation that it was derived from the Sybilline books in which the Greek word Ἰχθύς is interpreted with the acrostic Ἰησους Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱος Σωτηρ: Jesus Christ, God's Son the Savior. However, that Sybilline book is

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[68] Florence E. B. Hedges, The Story of the Catacombs (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1909), p. 124.

[69] R.S., II, 64.

[70] John Harvey Treat, The Catacombs of Rome (Boston: Old Corner Bookstore, 1907), p. 45.

> ....now known to have been the work of an Egyptian Jew of the time of Marcus Aurelius, rearranged in the third century by an unknown Christian author, and was only first mentioned by Eusebius and later by St. Augustine and other writers of the fourth century.[71]

The fish symbolism has been used by many of the Fathers throughout the centuries, beginning with Clement of Alexandria. The convincing reason that Northcote and Brownlow publish for the Alexandrian origin is this:

> The Church of that city was composed largely of converts from Judaism; and it was a very common practice of the Jews to coin names for their military leaders or other great men, by means of a combination of the initial letters of some other names, or legend, or motto, closely connected with them. The name of Macchabees, for instance, is said to be made up of the initial letters of the motto which Judas Macchabeus is supposed to have ever had upon his lips and on his banners, "Who is like to Thee among the strong, O Lord?" (Exodus 15:11)[72]

That the sacramental reference of the fish symbolism also includes Baptism in its scope is more than logical because of the close connection between the fish and water. The believer is pictured as descending into the waters of Baptism and rising as a son of the fish.

> The fish denotes not simply Jesus Christ, but Christ the Saviour; not simply the Saviour, but a Saviour who works through sacraments; through that of communion, for fish is a food....through that of baptism, for fish

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[71] Marucchi, The Evidence of the Catacombs, p. 31.

[72] R.S., II, 62.

live in water.[73]

Hedges supports this curious information: the Messiah is called Dag (fish) in the Talmud. "The Jews had prophetically connected His advent with the time of conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of fishes."[74] And Tertullian is quoted in this same source location as stating: "The fish seems a fit emblem of Him whose spiritual children are like to the offspring of fishes, born in the waters of baptism."

The eucharistic meaning of the fish is clearly emphasized by the fact that it so often stands in conjunction with other symbols which verify this assumption, such as bread. Certainly, as previous paragraphs have shown, the presence of the fish emblem with a picture of loaves of bread indicates the doctrine of the sacramental presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In addition there is the implication that the Eucharist is one of God's means to give tangible nourishment to the spiritual life of believers.

2. Manna

Such an obvious symbol as manna (because of the sixth chapter of St. John) is very rare in the paintings of the

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[73]Weidlé, op. cit., p. 20.

[74]Hedges, op. cit., pp. 125-6.

Catacombs. In an arcosolium of the Catacomb of St. Cyriaca there is a scene which evidently sets forth the Old Testament incident of the fall of manna for the Jews in the wilderness.[75] From the clouds blue or grayish specks are falling, while:

> ....underneath two men and two women, in travelling costume, hold out the folds of their garments to catch the falling flakes; and although this does not correspond with the letter of the historical narrative (which tells us that the manna covered the face of the earth like dew - Exodus 16:14), there is nothing strange in supposing the artist to have departed from literal truth for the sake of selecting a position more suited to his purpose.[76]

In the context of the surrounding frescoes of this arcosolium, however, there is no reference to the Eucharist; yet from this picture of the manna falling from heaven it is permissible to interpret a sacramental tendency. Kip feels that the manna foreshadows Him who is the "bread from Heaven" and who gives us spiritual food in the age of the New Testament.[77]

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[75] Barnes, op. cit., p. 131.

[76] R.S., II, 194.

[77] William Ingraham Kip, The Catacombs of Rome (New York: Redfield, 1854), p. 133.

3. The Vine

The Catacombs contain only a few representations of the vine, but these unquestionably point to the Eucharist. In this respect it is meaningful that in one of the crypts of St. Callixtus, when it was first discovered, a *mensa* of a tomb was found in the rubbish. This had a vine sculptured on its edge in very low relief.[78] The connection between the vine and the Eucharists which had surely been celebrated many times on its surface is plain: here it indicates the wine. But the wine symbolism, of course, may also refer to St. John 11:1, where Christ calls Himself the "true vine." Marucchi says the vine recalls the true vine - *vitis vera* - of the Gospel; moreover it yields one of the elements of the Eucharist.[79]

Other paintings of the vine have been found in the oldest parts of the Catacombs, such as the vestibule belonging to the Flavian family in the Cemetery of Domitilla and the crypt of Ampliatus. Both of these date back to the first and second centuries.[80] And Michael Williams reports that in St. Callixtus a painting shows two figures gathering grapes from a vine arranged in decorative style, under

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[78] *R.S.*, I, 454.

[79] Marucchi, *The Evidence of the Catacombs*, p. 30.

[80] *Loc. cit.*

the influences of the symbolical doves of the Holy Spirit. This probably has a reference to Christ, although it may have a secondary reference to the chalice.[81]

4. Milk

In the ancient Cemetery of St. Domitilla a milk pail is shown hanging from a shepherd's crook, which stands behind a ram; a later painting in the Cemetery of Sts. Peter and Marcellin depicts a lamb carrying a milk pail. The pail has a nimbus around it; this small fresco is repeated in each corner of the roof of the chamber in which it is found. And in the Cemetery of St. Priscilla a lamb, its forelegs extended in the act of running, carries a milk pail on its back. Northcote and Brownlow believe that these pictures are analagous to the fish carrying the bread on its back, previously examined in this chapter. And since the vessel of milk, and not the lamb, in the chamber of Sts. Peter and Marcellin is surrounded by a nimbus, milk was undoubtedly intended as a symbol of the Eucharist.[82]

Another meaningful fresco, in the ancient chamber of the crypts of Lucina, reveals two sheep standing on either side of a vessel which rests on a crude pedestal or altar.

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[81] Michael Williams, Christian Symbolism (London: Talbot and Company, 1919), p. 71.

[82] R.S., II, 75-6.

Thus two Christians may be symbolized "....strengthened during their sojourn in this world by that food which is the pledge of everlasting life, and received after death to the possession of heavenly joys."[83]

Just as milk is the natural food of infants, so the Holy Eucharist is the supernatural food of Christians, write Church Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus. For example, Irenaeus:

> Christ might easily have come to us in His immortal glory, (but) we could not have endured its greatness; wherefore, being the perfect bread of the Father, He offered Himself to us as milk, because we were like infants....and having by such a course of milk-diet become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God, may be able also to contain in ourselves the Bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father.[84]

Augustine also reasons that while angels and heavenly spirits may feed on the Word Himself, no mortal could approach God directly. Therefore it was necessary for such Food to be made milk in order to feed mankind. But how does the meat become milk? He uses a simile: a mother, in order to feed her child, eats bread which then changes into her flesh (milk). And so the Wisdom of God has fed us on bread because the Word was made flesh, and we receive this flesh

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[83] Ibid., pp. 53-4.

[84] Ibid., p. 77.

(the Body of Christ) in the bread of the Eucharist.[85] In conclusion, Marucchi sums up concerning the eucharistic meaning of the milk symbol: it is a "....simbolo più chiaramente eucaristico, cioè a quello del latte che è il mistico nutrimento dato dal pastore al suo gregge."[86]

Weidle recently made these pertinent comments about the symbolism of milk and honey combined: the cup of milk and honey served in the Eucharist has long been maintained in the Roman, African, and Alexandrian rites. And the custom remains in use to this day in the Abyssinian and Coptic churches. From Hippolytus' Apostolic Tradition we learn that:

> ....milk and honey is given in token of the land of promise, that is, the kingdom of heaven, the land flowing with milk and honey, and at the same time by way of food for babes, with whom the newly-baptized are compared; the water, so that the inward and animal - not yet the spiritual - man might be washed, as his body had been in the font.

Another purpose of this practice (which the Christians of the Catacombs not improbably followed) was to symbolize in a striking way the regained infancy of the soul and newness of life. It "....suggests that what confers them is not merely the washing but the entire mystery." Weidlé also mentions the custom of antiquity of drinking water (spoken

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[85] Ibid., pp. 79-80.

[86] Marucchi, La Catacombe ed il Protestantesimo, p. 35.

about in the preceding quotation) during the Eucharist. The point of this was to bring out the inward unity of the sacraments. "The draught of water at the rite's end sends us back to the bath in water at its start, and dovetails baptism into the eucharist, as it were, between the bread and the wine."[87]

5. The Resurrection of Lazarus

Artists of the Catacombs pictured the raising of Lazarus several times, in the Cemetery of Sts. Peter and Marcellin, and in one of the St. Callixtus' Sacramental Chambers. In each instance Christ extends one arm toward Lazarus (wrapped like a mummy in the first cemetery's scene; in St. Callixtus pictured as a youth, the winding sheet hanging loosely) who is seen emerging from a vault-like affair, formally constructed above the ground. Northcote and Brownlow contend that this subject had a eucharistic meaning for the early Christians. The words Christ spoke at this miracle bear a striking resemblance to those which He spoke concerning the Sacrament (St. John 11:25 - 6:58). Because Christ seemed to connect the resurrection in a special way with the eating and drinking of His Body and Blood, the Fathers "....always speak of the one as a kind of pledge and

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[87]Weidle, op. cit., pp. 25-6.

earnest of the other."[88]

> Jesus had said about the Blessed Sacrament, "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day." At the tomb of Lazarus He uttered those solemn words, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live; and everyone that liveth and believeth in me shall not die forever."[89]

The mind of a Catacombs' Christian would therefore run quite naturally to the blessings of the Eucharist when he studied the frescoes picturing the resurrection of Lazarus.

6. The Sacrifice of Isaac

The Roman Catholic view strongly confirms the numerous scenes in the Catacombs of the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham in favor of their doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass. The men are shown as praying, and are identified by a faggot and the ram behind them. The sacrifice of Isaac is taken as a type of the sacrifice of the mass because it prefigured the priesthood and sacrifice of the New Law.[90] A. M. Smith comments in the American Journal of Archeology that the sacrifice of Isaac is depicted frequently on early Christian monuments of all sorts: frescoes, sarcophagi,

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[88] R.S., II, 98.

[89] Ibid., p. 99.

[90] Ibid., pp. 97-8.

mosaics, glasses, gems, and lamps. As to the event itself, he states: "The ram in the bush was Christ on the cross, Isaac was Christ in the Eucharist."[91] This is probably meant to imply the unbloody sacrifice (Isaac) of the mass. This is a stand bluntly opposed by Lutheran and other evangelical believers.

7. The Wedding at Cana

In the several Catacombs' frescoes showing the miracle at Cana, a number of writers have detected an allusion to the Eucharist. Roman Catholics, of course, immediately grasp this opportunity to clinch the doctrine of transubstantiation in the change of water into wine. Marucchi quotes St. Cyril of Jerusalem: "Once in Cana of Galilee, Christ turned water into wine which is like unto blood. Is it incredible that He should turn wine into blood?"[92] Christ touching the water pots, in fact, is to be taken as a symbol of the consecration.[93] The absence of bread in this scene is explained by the fact that the symbol of wine

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[91]A. M. Smith, "The Iconography of the Sacrifice of Isaac in Early Christian Art," American Journal of Archeology, XXVI (April, 1922), 159-60.

[92]Orazio Marucchi and Elwood S. Berry, Faith of the Early Christians (Wheeling, W. Va.: Catholic Book Company, 1921), p. 89.

[93]Bevan, op. cit., p. 102.

is merely substituted for the symbol of bread.[94] The miracle at Cana may very well be understood with reference to the mystical element in the Eucharist, but that it specifically touches a doctrine of transubstantiation must be seriously questioned. The senses perceive the elements of the Lord's Supper as still holding the properties of bread and wine after the consecration; obviously there is not a true and complete transubstantiation as there was at the wedding at Cana. Therefore such a close analogy is hardly permissible.

Epitaphs

The witness of the epitaphs of the Catacombs to the doctrine of the Holy Communion is rather faint, although some of the inscriptions testify to its practice. Because of the very nature of Christian epitaphs, the doctrine of the Resurrection of course plays the leading rôle. Northcote and Brownlow, in their separate volume on the epitaphs of the Catacombs, advance this conclusive statement: "One may say that nearly the whole of Christian sepulchral epigraphy testifies at least to one Christian doctrine, the doctrine of a future resurrection."[95] The following examples give pertinent reference to the Sacrament.

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[94] The Catholic Encyclopedia, V, 592.

[95] Northcote, Epitaphs of the Catacombs, p. 180.

Bishop Damasus, whose activity in restoring the Catacombs was stressed in Chapter I, set up a memorial for St. Stephen and St. Tharsycius; the merits of the latter were equated with those of St. Stephen. Tharsycius was either a deacon or an acolyte.

TARSICIUM SANCTUM CHRISTI SACRAMENTA GERENTEM
CUM MALE SANA MANUS PREMERET VULGARE PROFANIS
(ILLA VOLENS, NOSTRISQUE INHIANS ILLUDERE SACRIS,)
IPSE ANIMAM POTIUS VOLUIT DIMITTERE CAESUS
PRODERE QUAM CANIBUS RABIDIS COELESTIA MEMBRA.

Whilst the holy Tharsycius was carrying the Sacraments of Christ, and an impious band pressed upon him, anxious to expose them to the profane gaze (and to mock at our sacred things), he chose rather to give up his life and be killed than to betray the heavenly limbs to mad dogs.[96]

The third line of this epitaph has been supplied by De Rossi purely as a conjectural addition to fill out the thought. But the other lines without doubt indicate that during a persecution Tharsycius defended the sacramental elements with his life. This reflects the high reverence of the early Christians for the essential parts of their worship.

One martyr was surprised in the act of praying in the Catacombs. Kip lists the date as the fifth persecution, in the reign of the second Antonine, which began in 161. He

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[96] *R.S.*, I, 153.

lists a part of the epitaph:

GENVA ENIM FLECTENS VERO DEO SA
CRIFICATVRVS AD SVPPLICIA DVCTTVRO
TEMPORA INFAVSTA QVIBVS INTER SA
CRA ET VOTA NE IN CAVERNIS QVIDEM
SALVARI POSSIMVS

> For while on his knees, and about to sacrifice to the true God, he was led away to execution. O sad times! in which sacred rites and prayers, even in caverns, afford no protection to us![97]

This passage substantiates the fact that the Catacombs were used for eucharistic purposes during the persecutions. The arrest in this case must have been sinister to have caught the man while still on his knees!

The next is not properly an epitaph, but an inscription on a cup found in the Catacombs. As to the origin of these cups quite a divergence of opinion exists: at first it was thought that a cup was placed at the grave of a martyr, filled with his blood; another view alleges that they were to represent sacramental cups to indicate that the person had been a member of the Christian community and that he had been accustomed to partake of the Eucharist, showing his contact with Christ.

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[97]Kip, op. cit., p. 37.

VINCENTI PIE ZESE

Vincent, drink and live![98]

The fact that these words are engraved on a cup would endorse a eucharistic meaning and reflect the fact that these Christians treated the Sacrament as no mere symbolism of fellowship, but knew it to be of Divine efficacy.

Gilded Glasses and Silver Cruets

Probably for purposes of identification, glass cups were placed in the wet cement of numerous loculi of the Catacombs. In most cases, however, only the bottoms of these glasses have been preserved since they were protected by the plaster. The bottoms were fashioned into decorative medallions:

> ....the design having been executed in gold-leaf on the flat bottom of the cup, in such a manner as that the figures and letters should be seen from the inside....The gold-leaf was then protected by a plate of glass, which was welded by fire so as to form one solid mass with the cup.[99]

In the same chapter from which this quotation was taken, Northcote and Brownlow argue that these gilded glasses are almost exclusively of Christian workmanship, in spite of

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[98] Ibid., pp. 97-8.

[99] R.S., II, 299.

the fact that some of the pictures express little in the way of Christian thought. The explanation is that this type of craftsmanship was naturally known to pagan workmen too, and the cups were used by Christians. For the date of these glasses, the consensus of opinion holds that they belong to the third and fourth centuries; the gilded work was most popular from 300 to 350, and after 400 few glasses were made.[100]

The picture material of the glasses ranges from Hercules, Achilles, hunting scenes, charioteers, boxers, and a tailor in his shop, to domestic scenes of the nursery and schoolroom. The Biblical paintings show Christ changing water into wine, Tobias with the fish, the three men in the fiery furnace, and Christ healing the paralytic, who is carrying his bed. There are also representations of Mary, Peter, and Paul.

These gilded glasses probably were used on festive occasions, such as birthdays and marriages; or they may have been gifts for weddings and anniversaries. It is also likely that they were used at the agape. In fact, Northcote and Brownlow suggest that:

> It is, however, a more interesting question to consider whether it is not possible that some of them may have been used as patens or chalices in the celebration

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[100]Lethaby, op. cit., p. 605.

of the Holy Eucharist.[101]

Then they outline detailed evidence to prove that glass was popular in the early Church for use both as patens and chalices. Certainly it is within the realm of possibility that some of these gildad glasses were employed in the Catacombs' services of Holy Communion.

Lastly, a note about silver cruets. St. Gregory of Tours is reported giving the account of a group of Christian martyrs who were buried alive by Roman persecutors in an arenarium on the Via Salaria Nova. The Romans had spied them entering the crypt to visit the tombs of Chrysanthus and Daria (Christians who had been martyred there when the entrance was blocked up) and promptly began to heap up stones and sand to cut off their exit, "....so that they might be all buried alive, even as the martyrs whom they had come to venerate."[102] When the tomb was finally opened, not only did the discoverers find the skeletons of the men, women, and children, "....but also the silver cruets (urcei argentei) which they had taken down for the celebration of the sacred mysteries."[103] In this report, then, lies further evidence of the when, where, how, and why of the

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[101] R.S., II, 321.

[102] Ibid., I, 155.

[103] Ibid., p. 156.

celebration of the Eucharist in the Catacombs.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

The Sacramental Orientation of the Catacombs

The Catacombs of Rome reflect in a splendid way the beliefs and religious practices of a large segment of the earliest Christians. But it would be naive to assume the possibility of deriving from them a complete and orderly systematics of doctrine. Marucchi emphasizes this as a matter of common sense: he feels it is an exaggerated idea that the Catacombs are able to manifest the entire thought of primitive Christian society. After all, those first Christians never intended to do so, since the monuments of the Catacombs are solely sepulchral and thus mainly point up the heavenly life. They never imagined that future ages would use their testimony in religious controversies. Marucchi also proposes that the evidences of the Catacombs should be studied in conjunction with the whole of Christian tradition: the Fathers, the ancient liturgies - to give a fuller picture of their beliefs.[1]

In spite of these limitations, a good deal of factual material may be brought to bear upon the subject of the

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[1]Orazio Marucchi, The Evidence of the Catacombs for the Doctrines and Organization of the Primitive Church (London: Sheed and Ward, 1929), p. 5.

Eucharist; this has been done in Chapter II. The value of such a procedure is indicated by Benjamin Scott:

> As we call an aged man to prove, at law, a practice sanctioned by long usage, so we summon these silent witnesses, who will step forth from their hiding places of from fifteen to eighteen centuries, and speak of the religion of Christ.[2]

Also in this connection, Tertullian's saying is applicable: "Whatever is first, is true; whatever is more recent, is spurious."[3]

The most outstanding single impression that registers on the mind of a modern excavator of the Catacombs is this: the worship life of those primitive Christians was <u>sacramentally oriented</u>. This conclusion certainly would be the result of the most dispassionate, objective observation. The Holy Communion and Baptism were the foci about which their whole religious existence revolved.

> ....the Sacred Mysteries were not regarded by the ancient Christians as a mere memorial of the Last Supper, but as the centre of their worship, the soul of Christian life, the principal light of the Church, the Body and Divinity of the Lord.[4]

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[2]Benjamin Scott, <u>The Contents and Teachings of the Catacombs at Rome</u> (Third edition; London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1873), p. 115.

[3]William Ingraham Kip, <u>The Catacombs of Rome</u> (New York: Redfield, 1854), p. 202.

[4]Marucchi, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 46.

The fact that the monuments of the Catacombs reflect a sacramental orientation of life doesn't support the modern Roman Catholic concepts of a worship which is centered about the sacraments. In the first place, only the sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism are discovered in the galleries of the Catacombs; there are not seven sacraments, as in the Roman Catholic sect today. Secondly, the ancient Christian practice of a "sacramental life" differs considerably from that of the Roman Church, which has evolved from the primitive simplicity of a memorial meal, in the elements of which Christ was sacramentally present, the modern doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass. This development will be discussed next.

The Development of the Eucharist into the Sacrifice of the Mass

John Martin Creed, former Ely Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, believes that the sacramental theories of the Eucharist developed in the early Christian Church in order to meet the pagan objections that the Christians were atheists because they had no sacrifices. It was also a measure taken to solve the problem of post-baptismal sin: "....by so identifying the eucharistic action with the sacrifice of the cross as to make the former a means of securing the effects of the latter." Creed goes on to say that Cyprian (258) speaks of the Eucharist as an offering

of the Body and Blood of Christ; "....and a century later the eucharistic prayer of Sarapion conceives the liturgical action as 'making the likeness of death,' so being a reconciliatory sacrifice."[5]

Philip Schaff stresses this development in a succint way:

> This subjective offering of the whole congregation on the ground of the objective atoning sacrifice of Christ is the real centre of the ancient Christian worship, and particularly of the communion. It thus differed both from the later Catholic mass, which has changed the thank-offering into a sin-offering, the congregational offering into a priest-offering; and from the common Protestant cultus, which, in opposition to the Roman mass, has almost entirely banished the idea of sacrifice from the celebration of the Lord's Supper, except in the customary offerings for the poor.[6]

Here Schaff also indicates the intrinsic difference between the Eucharist of the Catacombs and the Communion of the bulk of the Protestant Churches; in this manner the meaning of the "sacramental orientation" of the Catacombs' Christians is drawn out. It is neither the sacrificial concept of the Roman sect, nor the idea of mere fellowship of most Protestants, but it is a way of life which recognizes its total dependence on the means of grace ordained by God. Therefore

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[5]The Encyclopaedia Britannica (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1951), VIII, 795.

[6]Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), II, 246.

the Catacombs reflect Christian lives wrapped up in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism, for they form an integral part of the means by which God enters the souls of men.

The Roman Catholic View

On the basis of the factual evidences of the Roman Catacombs, such an all-out opinion as held by Barnes is hardly creditable:

> ....monuments....bearing witness to the fact that what the Church teaches and believes now....that also she believed and taught in the fourth century....We could hardly ask for a proof more striking and unanswerable of the marvelous and unchanging unity of Catholic doctrine in all ages.[7]

It is obvious that the doctrine has changed considerably, especially with regard to the Eucharist; in fact, doctrines have been added in the Roman sect for which there is little or no substantiation in the Catacombs, such as the doctrines of purgatory and Mariolatry.

However, when directed against the larger bodies of Protestants (excluding the Lutheran groups), this comment of Marucchi is quite valid:

> ....per gli antichi fedeli l'Eucaristia non era gia

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[7]Arthur Stapylton Barnes, The Early Church in the Light of the Monuments (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1913), p. 137.

> uno sterile ricordo della cane, come pretendono i protestanti, ma era veramente il centro del culto, l'anima della vita cristiana, il sole splendidissimo della Chiesa.[8]

But Marucchi continues, in another book, to a more radical stand:

> The present Mass is only an elaborated form of those primitive liturgies, and is in substance the same as in the days of the apostles and of St. Justin.[9]

Certain fundamental structures of the present-day mass unquestionably do hark back to the days of St. Justin, but the elaboration not only of form but of content cannot be supported at all by the testimony of the Catacombs.

In spite of these objections, the Roman Catholic writers officially express their position in the quotations cited above. They believe that the doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass has its roots in the actual practice and conviction of the primitive Christians of Rome.

The Lutheran Viewpoint

Kip states that the dogmas formulated by the Council of Trent have placed a "great gulf" between the apostolic

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[8]Orazio Marucchi, Le Catacombe ed il Protestantesimo (Roma: F. Pustet, 1911), p. 55.

[9]Marucchi, The Evidence of the Catacombs, p. 46.

Church of Rome and the modern Church of the popes.[10] This separation was bridged by the Lutheran Reformation in its strict insistence on the Sola Scriptura principle. Consequently the Lutheran view of the Eucharist finds much supporting ground in the witness of the Catacombs' monuments. The centrality of the Sacrament as a means of grace; the doctrine of the Real Presence; and the emphasis on the sacrifice (thanksgiving) of the believers in the Holy Communion: these are shared by the Christians of the Catacombs and the Christians of the Lutheran Reformation alike.

The rediscovery of the Catacombs of Rome and the Lutheran Reformation both occurred in the sixteenth century. Was this a coincidence? Or was it the working of the Holy Spirit?

> A wise providence appointed the time when they (the Catacombs) were opened. Many ages ago....did He store away in the bosom of the earth....records of the early Christians; and when at last, the time was ripe, and the minds of men were awake, and they began to discuss the nature, and usages of the Christian church, when many were claiming that from the very first, it had held their erroneous doctrines and semi-pagan ceremonies; at this epoch....did God open these hidden treasures of truth. Suddenly, as if almost by miracle, there sprung from the dark bosom of the earth, a testimony in regard to the simplicity, purity, and piety of the primitive church, which has no parallel except in the books of the New Testament.[11]

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[10] Kip, op. cit., p. 11.

[11] The Catacombs of Rome (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1854), pp. 179-80.

The Catacombs, from the darkness of their crypts, shed light on a simple and uncomplicated faith. The faith which is reflected there dates back one and one-half millenia; yet in it and in the faith of the Lutheran communion there exists an integral harmony. This is especially true in the matter of eucharistic belief and practice.

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