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THEOLOGY OF THE EUCHARIST
IN THE ROMANIAN CONTEXT:
A HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL EVALUATION
FROM AN EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The purpose of the thesis

Howard Marshall in his treatment of the Lord's Supper¹ presents two intricate questions, a historical question: "What actually happened at the Lord's Supper?" and a theological question: "What was the significance of what happened?" The present thesis will focus upon these two crucial important areas of the Lord's Supper in the Romanian context and particularly upon the Evangelicals and their perspective in relation to other denominations in Romania.

The first goal will be an interaction with the historical and theological context of the Orthodox Eucharist through the lens of Evangelical Protestantism. The second will be to produce a comparative analysis of the Eucharist in the context of the main Romanian confessions. The third aim will be a critical evaluation of the implications for the Romanian churches in ecumenical meetings on the basis of the Eucharist. The main objective will be to define a biblical theology of the Eucharist connected with an Evangelical Protestant Ecclesiology, Pneumatology and Christology.

The methodology of the thesis

The title of the thesis focusses on an historical and critical analysis of the Eucharist in the Romanian context. The methodology will involve first establishing the historical situation. History is important. One cannot deal with the theology of the Eucharist without knowing the historical background and the developments in which that theology was worked out. This applies to the various communions reviewed and the Lima Document as well.

To accomplish the aims mentioned above, the first chapter of the thesis will provide an overview of the main eucharistic literature written in the Romanian language and in other languages as well. The works written in the Romanian language but not yet translated and published in English, which will be used in argumentation of the thesis, have been personally translated.

¹ I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1980), 17.

Chapter two points out the problems when it comes to available literature on the subject of the Eucharist. The period of subjection under the Ottoman Turk Empire brought a severe testing time for the peoples and churches of Eastern Christianity. It began in the late fourteenth century and lasted at least four centuries: Serbia, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria did not attain independence from the Ottoman Turks until the nineteenth century. This is one of the reasons why theological works in the Romanian language prior the end of ninetieth century cannot be found. This also happened when Romania fell under communist control after the Second World War. It was a time of severe trial especially for the protestant and reformed churches. Communist authorities exerted strict control of any literature that was produced during that period.

It is in this chapter, following a brief introduction to the historical context, that the sacramental theology of Orthodoxy will be explored. Throughout this work, often the designation “Orthodox” or “Orthodoxy” without the adjective, “Eastern” is used. While it has become common for Western Christians to refer to “Eastern Orthodoxy,” this is not the usual Orthodox practice: they rarely use the adjective, unless they are consciously relating to Western Christianity. Using Eastern Orthodoxy (or Orthodoxy) and Eastern Christianity as synonyms will allow for variation in terminology and still honor the basic Eastern Christian perspective. In the chapter agreements and disagreements between the liturgical Orthodox Eucharist and the Lord’s Supper celebration in Protestantism will be discussed. It will become clear that the celebration of the Eucharist in Orthodoxy does present some challenges for evangelical Christians. Orthodox perspectives will be compared to the main scriptures texts for evaluation. Again throughout this dissertation the terms “Protestant,” “evangelical” or “evangelical Protestant” have the same connotation and are interchangeable terms. In the Romanian context they define specifically Baptist, Pentecostal and Brethren. Romanian authorities usually call them Neo-Protestant.

Chapter three will examine in a historical and critical manner other major Romanian perspectives on the Lord’s Supper such as Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Hungarian Reform and Baptist. The model used for accomplishing the task is the following: a short history, the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, admission to the Lord’s Supper and the practice of the Lord’s Supper. Using the same pattern for each church makes it possible to identify more easily the agreements and disagreements between the churches.

Chapter four will highlight the document entitled *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, developed by the World Council of Churches, Faith and Order Commission with the assistance of Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic scholars and approved at its meeting at Lima, Peru in 1982, probably the most significant recent ecumenical document. The Lima Document has a long history, over 50 years of consultations and debates. This history will be briefly summarised. The final section of the chapter provides a critical evaluation of the document which seeks to “call us to visible unity.”

Chapter five, the Summary and Conclusions, is probably the most important chapter of the thesis because it seeks to provide a final response to the challenges of each chapter regarding the Eucharist. Four particular matters need to be stressed. (1) The authority to define the doctrine of the Eucharist is not Tradition but Scripture. (2) The words of Jesus - “This is my body... This is my blood” really mean symbol and spiritual presence. (3) The nature of the eucharistic meetings of the church do not have a sacrificial character but they are memorial in kind. And finally, the character of the Lord’s Supper is revelation and proclamation, rather than mystery.

The contribution of the thesis

Uniqueness of the research. The uniqueness of this research project lies first in the fact that while in the past a number of theological works connected with the theology of the Eucharist were written, the present study is the first attempt in Romania for a detailed development of a topic of wide interest to all Christian denominations involving a historical, comparative and critical study. Second, it is the first attempt by an evangelical Christian from Romania to present an analytical, comparative and critical study of the theology of the Eucharist. In the field of Romanian Evangelical protestantism is the first work of its kind.

Originality of the work. Even if for the writing of this work many research papers, writings and works of reference were consulted, the theme, the research design and methodology used to achieve the goal is solely the author's work.

The challenge of the research. The present research will not certainly cover all theological aspects of the Eucharist, but it can become a platform for further discussion of the subject in question and an invitation for all those entitled to provide the necessary answers to the questions or critical elements of the project. The same challenge remains for Western theological scholars, as they are provided here with the first detailed critical and comparative discussion in the field of the Eucharist. Again,

this research project had enabled the translation of certain Romanian sections of literature on the subject, which was not available for reflection for western academics until now. For the author of this project the study has been both an opportunity and a responsibility to define a biblical theology of the Eucharist, which would give an appropriate explanation of the importance of the Lord's Supper for evangelical Christians concerned with its meaning and practice.

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