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## **PESAH, SHAVUOT AND SUKKOT**

**– PREFIGURATION AND CONTINUITY –**

**REZUMAT ÎN LIMBA ENGLEZĂ**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of contents .....	1
List of abbreviations .....	4
Introduction .....	5
The subject of the thesis in the theological works .....	9
In patristic writings .....	9
In Romanian theological studies .....	12
In foreign studies .....	14
Preliminary .....	19
1. The meanings of the sacred time .....	19
1.a. Time, man and world .....	19
1.b. The sacred time in paganism .....	22
1.b.1. The time as return to origins .....	23
1.b.2. Mythical time .....	24
1.b.3. Reversible, irreversible and circular time .....	27
1.c. Sacred time in Judaism .....	28
1.d. Sacred time in Christianity .....	30
1.d.1. Sacred time, expression of eternity .....	31
1.d.2. The time as a sacrifice to God .....	32
2. The feast in Old Testament .....	34
2.a. Semantic aspects .....	34
2.b. The characteristics of Old Testament's feasts .....	35
2.c. The feasts in the thinking of the prophets .....	38
3. The feast in Christianity – a few essential coordinates .....	40
4. The relationship between the Jewish and Christian feasts .....	44
5. The annual Jewish pilgrimage feasts – general view .....	47
CHAPTER I. THE PASSOVER .....	50
1. Semantic implications of the word <i>pesah</i> (פֶּסַח) .....	50
2. Theories about a Pesah before the Exodus .....	53
3. Pesah in biblical context – historicity and historicization. The theory of documents and the origin of Pesah .....	58
3.1. The context in which was instituted the Pesah .....	66

3.2. The first celebration .....	70
3.3. Legislative aspects relative to the first celebration of Pesah .....	81
3.4. Pesah during the wandering through the wilderness .....	86
3.5. Paschal celebration after the settlement in Canaan. Paschal legislative "contradictions". The evolution of the feast .....	90
3.6. Pesah after return from exile .....	98
4. The relationship between Pesah and the feast of Unleavened Bread .....	103
5. The issue of the waved sheaf .....	111
6. The issue of the paschal lamb .....	115
6.1. The lamb in Bible .....	115
6.2. The paschal lamb from foreshadowing to fulfillment .....	116
6.3. The paschal lamb as completeness .....	125
7. From the paschal dinner to the Holy Liturgy .....	129
8. Aspects of the theology of Lord's resurrection of the Lord in Christian hymnology.	135
CHAPTER II. THE FEAST OF WEEKS – THE PENTECOST .....	143
1. Terminological specifications .....	143
2. Theories on the pagan origin of the feast .....	146
3. The relationship between Passover and Pentecost. The celebration time .....	149
4. Legislative and ritual descriptive texts and for the celebration of Pentecost .....	152
5. Other prefigurations of Pentecost .....	160
6. Judaic Shavuot, Christian fulfillment .....	168
7. Pentecost in Christian hymnology .....	173
CHAPTER III. THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES .....	178
1. Terminological specifications .....	178
2. The Feast of Tabernacles in biblical criticism .....	180
3. The relationship between Pesah, Shavuot and Sukkot. The Sukkot's celebration time .....	185
4. Ritual and legislation in the celebration of Sukkot .....	187
4.1. From institution time until the Babylonian captivity .....	188
4.2. Sukkot in post-exilic period .....	194
4.2.1. The feast's ritual .....	194
4.3. Sukkah and lulab .....	202
4.3.1. About sukkah .....	202
4.3.2. About lulab .....	204

4.4. Collateral issues .....	206
5. The ritual of water libation and lighting of the Temple Court - symbol and eschatological fulfillment .....	210
5.1. The ritual of water libation and <i>the living water</i> .....	211
5.2. Lighting of the Temple Court as foreshadowing of the Messianic Light ....	219
5.3. Sukkot and the eschatological fulfillment .....	222
5.4. Sukkot and the Apocalypse. The crowning of the prefigurative act .....	228
CHAPTER IV. <i>The agrarian aspect and the pilgrimage</i> . Controversy and analysis .....	231
Conclusions .....	240
Bibliography .....	258

The feast's desacralisation is a reality more and more obvious these days. Also, the feast's deprivation of its liturgical act has become a constant of the modern society, determining the conversion of the feast from time of spiritual fulfilling and doxological orientation, to time of physical and spiritual apathy. The feast constitutes the orientation point of person's life on the direction to God. Its deprivation of the sacramental content constitutes a serious distortion of its specific denotation. Far away from facilitating the person's spiritual progress, the feast being reft of its natural sacramental content, maintains the human person into the materiality and ingratitude towards God.

This thesis focuses on the first three feasts of the Old Testament: Passover, Pentecost and Feast of Tabernacles. These represent, according to biblical information, the first feasts of Hebrew people, and, what is most important, the first two underlay two of the most important Christian feasts: The Resurrection of Jesus Christ and The Descending of Holy Ghost.

I consented to analyze this subject having a double motivation: scientific and spiritual. Thereby, for a theologian initiated in the study of the Bible, this study is relevant from both perspectives: spiritual and scientific. The analyzing of some aspects that are connected to the spiritual side, but which are relevant in the subject approached in this thesis (the spiritual meanings of the paschal lamb, the living water, the light of the world etc.), will be also made by revealing their spiritual contents. For the believer who did not fathom theology, this study wants to reveal the divine origin of the Christian feasts, trying to resize the vision desacralized towards the feasts.

The title of the thesis: *Pesah, Shavuot and Sukkot. Prefiguration and continuity*, shows its purpose:

1. According to the first part of the title, the intention is to analyze the three Jewish feasts (Passover, Pentecost and The Feast of Tabernacles) from historical-biblical perspective, showing also the criticism positions.
2. According to the second part of the title, this study shows how the cultic realities of the Old Testament (in this case, the three feasts) have been accomplished by the implementation of some new senses in relation to the salvation of humankind.

We will begin by presenting the way that the subject is analyzed in the theological works. After that will be a *Preliminary* chapter in which we will analyze the impact of the time over the world, its desacralisation because of Adam's sin, and the necessity of trying to reestablish its sacramental content, context in which have appeared the pagan feasts; farther we will expound how the Jewish feasts have appeared, then we will analyze their characteristics.

Then we will present briefly the Christian feasts, after that we will make a general presentation of the three Jewish pilgrimage feasts, which is the subject of this thesis.

Next there will be four chapters. The first three will analyze each of the three feasts and the fourth will have as subject the presentation of two essential aspects: *the agrarian sense* and *the pilgrimage*. The structure of the first three chapters will be similar:

- a. The name and the origin of the three feasts;
- b. The analyzing of the theories which doubt the origins of the feasts;
- c. The worship acts and the evolution in time;
- d. The typological aspects and the meanings of the new Christian feasts well-founded on the Jewish feasts. The chapter about Pesah will also have a subchapter intended for analyzing the paschal lamb, and another one intended for analyzing the relation between the paschal sacrifice and the Eucharistic theology.
- e. The chapters about Pesah and Shavuot will have a briefly presentation of the way they are revealed in the orthodox hymnology.

The Feast of Tabernacles has not been continued in the Christianity under a new form, as the two others have, but this does not mean it will be deprived of typological analyzing, because, as we will see, it prefigures the eternal feast in the Kingdom of God, which will be instituted after the end of this world. So, for it does not have a correspondent to Christian feasts, it can not be presented by hymnology perspective, because, normally, it is not in the cultic books.

The final chapter named **Conclusions** contains a briefly reiteration of every feast's essential points and the final ideas pertain to the entire doctoral thesis.

This thesis has been accomplished using almost exclusive foreign bibliographic sources, and that is because the theme is new in the Romanian theology. The Romanian biblical Archaeologies make only succinct presentations to this three feasts. Besides the specific sources of the biblical international research, we have also used patristic texts which evoke and analyze the three main Jewish feasts, because our intention was to generate a complete view on them.

In addition to studies and dictionaries<sup>1</sup>, this thesis uses some biblical commentaries to each verse<sup>2</sup> and Old Testament theological<sup>3</sup> books.

This research work is new in the Romanian theology for it does not exist until now a study to make an ample synthesis over the three great Jewish annual pilgrimage feasts, to analyze the theories about their origin and to reveal the relations between them and the Christian correspondent realities.

The **Preliminary** chapter starts by revealing the contents of the notion **time**. The time was created along with the material world. From the beginning the man was under time. In Eden the time was preeminently sacred. The fall of the man into sin gave birth to profane time.

The fallen man tried to remake the affinity with God; as such appeared the external cultic manifestations and special days called feasts. For the archaic man almost every life aspect had a religious connotation. He had the impression of the lost paradise and of the edenic primordial time in his mind, so the tendency for returning to the initial perfection of things existed in him. The religious condition of the man in paganism conducted him to the idea of catching up with the time, this being considered reversible.

In Judaism, the first religious form revealed by God, the time was directed ahead. The objective was the attainment of the communion with God and the holiness. In Christianity, the sacred time gets the most sublim sanctification form. God, before getting the man up to Him, descends Himself in the world, sanctifying history, which becomes the history of salvation.

In Christianity, the sacred time becomes expression of the eternity. The holly Liturgy makes the man contemporaneous with historic Christ, and also with heavenly realities. It begins by anticipating the Kingdom of Heaven, and the time of its development attires the raiment of eternity. It does not only commemorate events from the salvation history, but makes the man contemporaneous with them, and that not by transposing the man (spiritual) in those times, but

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<sup>1</sup> D. N. Freedman, A. C. Myers and A. B. Beck, *Eerdmans dictionary of the Bible*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000; Matthew Easton, *Easton's Bible dictionary*, Oak Harbor, Logos Research Systems, 1996; *Dicționar enciclopedic al Bibliei*, trad. de Dan Slușanschi, București, Ed. Humanitas, 1999; Pr. Dr. Ioan Mircea, *Dicționar al Noului Testament*, București, EIBMBOR, 1995; *Dicționar Biblic*, red. princ.: J. D. Douglas, ed. a IV-a, rev., Oradea, Ed. Cartea creștină, 2008 și *Dicționar enciclopedic de iudaism*, trad. de Viviane Prager (coordonator), C. Litman și Țicu Goldstein, București, Ed. Hasefer, 2000 etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary, New American Commentary, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Go out and meet God: A commentary on the Book of Exodus, International theological commentary* etc.

<sup>3</sup> Edmond Jacob, *Theologie de l'Ancien Testament*, Paris, Delavhaux & Niestle, 1955; Walter Brueggeman, *Theology of the Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1997; Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vol., Louisville, WJK Press, 1995-96; Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, 2 vol., London, SCM Press Ltd, 1998; Westermann Claus, *Theologie de l'Ancien Testament*, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 2002.

bringing in present all those redemptive acts. It is indubitable that in / by the Holy Liturgy the time gets the most sublime sanctification act.

The Old Testament's feasts, although were only type of Christian feasts, were based on the Law revealed by God. Nevertheless, their formal celebration determined the initiatives of the prophets for rediscovering their real meanings. Therefore, according to the prophets, the feasts appealed to honesty and to a moral life; it was a time when man met God. The prophetic message about feasts, although contains menaces, is a message of hope. God blames the sin, but promises forgiveness.

In Christianity the believer is called to make a permanent feast by behavior and attitude. „*For us life is a feast because we are convinced that God is with us forever and everywhere; we work and praising Lord, we travel by sea praising Lord and we live our entire life thinking of God*”. Living virtuously *with* and *in* Christ makes the entire life a feast, an ascending movement to God.

Related to the Jewish feasts, Christianity had two coordinates: continuity and innovation. If in Judaism the purpose of the feast was the remembrance (Ex. 13, 3, 9; 15, 26; Deut. 5, 15; 16, 3, 12 etc.) of providence work in the history of chosen people, in Christianity the feast does not only recall, but brings in present events of the salvation history.

## **Chapter I**

### **PASSOVER**

The word Passover has its origins in the Bible, where is mentioned as *pesah* (evr. *ḥag ha-Pesah* (חג הפסח) – cf. Ex. 34, 25, gr. τὸ πάσχα), but its etymology is uncertain and debatable. The word has been linked with the verb *psh* (*pasah*), which means *to pass over* or *to jump over*, and it refers to the action of the angel of death who during the tenth plague brought by God over Egypt – the death of the first-born – passed or jumped over the Jewish houses marked with lamb blood, sparing their lives.

Since the Middle Ages, Greek uses the plural when is about Christian Passover. So is today in Romanian language, where predominates the plural *Paști* in the detriment of singular *Paște*.

The newer biblical criticism considers that Passover is a feast older than the moment of the great exodus. It would have been a feast specific to semi-nomads shepherds and supposed the slaughtering of a lamb, greasing the door with blood, eating all the meat and burning the remains. Its purpose was ensuring the prosperity of the flock. The paschal lamb's sacrifice



would have been known before the Exodus, it would have been an apotropaic character (against bad spirits), but the moment of the tenth plague and the release of the Hebrew people from bondage made a radical change in the content of the feast.

The text from Ex. 12, 21 was frequently used to support the idea of a pre-exodic Pesah; here the word Passover is used for designating not the feast, but the sacrifice. Also, in Ex. 12, 17 past tense is used when it is about the great Exodus. There are no arguments to prove certainly that Pesah was an adapted ritual; but there are no proves to demonstrate the opposite.

The Old Testament modern criticism is overwhelmingly tributary to the theory of documents, according to which, the first five (sometimes six with Joshua) Old Testament books constitute an integer resulted by compiling four documents called generic: The Yahvist, The Elohist, The Deuteronomist and The Priestly Source. This raises questions about the origins of Pesah and about the origins of the two other feasts: Shavuot and Sukkot, because, if the texts about their institution are so recent as they suggest it means that their origin is more than ambiguous and problematic.

The biblical criticism denies not only the divine origin of those three feasts, but also the historicity of the events presented in Pentateuch. The Jewish and Christian tradition always accepted the historicity and the truthfulness of the Pentateuch.

The context of Pesah institution was the tenth plague sent by God over Egypt: the death of the first-born. After that event the Hebrew people became an independent nation.

The first celebration was on the evening of 14 Nisan. On 10 Nisan they choosed one year old lamb, male without blemish. It had to be sacrificed in the evening. It was eaten wholly, and what remained was burnt. Its blood was used to grease the door's poles as well as the lintel. The Jews had to be clothed as if they were to travell, with the staff in their hands.

Considering the sacredness of the feast, Pesah could be celebrated only by those who were respecting the Law, but there were no discriminations in regard to social status. On 15 Nisan the days of unleavened bread began. During them the people was not allowed to work. On the first day and on the last day the sacred assembly took place.

Those who were unclean because they have touched dead people had to celebrate the Pesah a month later, at the same date and following the same ritual.

There is no information about the Pesah during the wandering in the desert. Probably it was celebrated ordinary.

After the Jews entered Canaan, the feast amplified, so that in addition to paschal lamb, a lot of bulls, rams and goats were sacrificed. If at the beginning the feast was celebrated in the family, later all the Jews gathered to the central sanctuary. There were periods when the Pesah

was not celebrated as it should have been, so the religious reforms of the kings Hezekiah and Josiah restored the celebration.

In the post-exilic period the religious life of the Jews was very well organized and so was the paschal celebration. In 70 A.D. the Temple was destroyed and the paschal sacrifice ceased. The Passover started to be celebrated as a special dinner called Seder.

The relation between Pesah and The Feast of Unleavened Bread is one of the most controversial aspect relating to the feast of Pesah. The most probably there were two distinct feasts, which later were cumulated into one. There is not a common point of view towards this aspect along the researchers.

After the Jews entered Canaan, Pesah got also an agrarian component: the beginning of barley harvest.

The paschal lamb's sacrifice is the most important sacrifice of the Old Testament, for the lamb is the type of Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation presents Christ, the slaughtered lamb, as the victorious God.

There is a strong link between the sacrifice of the paschal lamb and the Holy Eucharist. The Lord's Supper is the time when Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist.

The Christian hymnology reveals how the Pesah was the prefiguration of the Passover. It celebrates the Resurrection of Christ, the main event of humankind's redemption.

The **Pentecost** is the second Jewish pilgrimage feast. Its Hebrew name is Shavuot, which means *weeks*. The word comes from *shavua* (*week* in Hebrew), and it derives from *sheva*, translated by *seven*.

According to biblical criticism Shavuot was a Canaanite pagan agrarian festival, assimilated by the Jews. It would have been celebrated during summer and its purpose was thanksgiving for harvest.

Pharisees celebrated Shavuot on 6 Sivan and the Sadducees on the first Sunday of the seventh week after Pesah. The feast had a Eucharistic character. It meant the end of barley harvest and the beginning of wheat harvest. In post-exilic period the feast got an historical character in conjunction with the moment when God gave to Jews the Law on the mount Sinai. The Hellenistic period meant almost a total disappearance of agricultural character of the celebration.

Shavuot became in Christianity the feast of Pentecost. The latter has been prefigured in the Old Testament through the tangle of tongues at the Tower of Babel (the opposite of glossolalia), through the giving of the law on Sinai, through prophecy of Joel 3, 1-6, etc.

Christian Hymnology shows how Shavuot was accomplished at the time of the descending of the Holy Spirit, and the latter brought about the renewal of the world through grace.

The Feast of Tabernacles is the last of the three Jewish pilgrimages feasts. Its Hebrew name is *hag hassūkkôt* (חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת) (cf. Lev. 23, 34) and it derives from the word סֻכָּה (*sūkkâh*), which means tent.

According to biblical criticism Sukkot was an agrarian feast reported at the fall harvest and its name derives from the tents in which dwelt the farmers during the harvest.

Sukkot was celebrated in the seventh month of the year (Lev. 23, 34; Num. 29, 12), the month Ethanim (I Regi 8, 2), whose correspondent is september-october. The debut of the feast was on 15 Ethanim; it lasted 7 days (Lev. 23, 34; Num. 29, 12; Deut. 16, 13; Iez. 45, 25), and after that followed a special day, the eighth.

During its celebration the Jews had to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There they lived seven days in booths made of leafy branches. During the celebration they brought a number of sacrifices that had no equal in any other Jewish feast. Everybody was allowed to celebrate Sukkot, regardless the social status. From seven to seven years the Law was read in front of the entire people. In post-exilic times two new rituals were introduced: the bringing of the water from the pool of Siloam and the light of the women court. Every participant at the feast had to carry in the hand the lulab. This was a bundle made of willow, myrtle and palm leaves. In the other hand the Jews carried a lemon.

Sukkot was not continued in Christianity, like Pesah and Shavuot, but in its celebration exist two elements full of typological senses. The first is the bringing of the water from the pool of Siloam. The Gospel of John presents a moment when Christ was at Jerusalem for the celebration of Sukkot. Referring to the ritual of water libation, Jesus speaks about the living water which will flow from those who will bind to his message. This living water constitutes the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The second typological ritual of Sukkot is the light of women court. Christ, referring to this ritual, presents Himself as the Light of the world.

The two themes, *the living water* and *the light of the world*, suggest the essential theme of Sukkot: *the eschatological fulfilment*. In the patristic and New Testament theology, the tent, essential element of the feast, becomes metaphor of the mortal body. The book of Revelation, without naming the Feast of Tabernacles, fulfils its prophetic senses. Into a pure eschatological context are revealed the two themes: *the living water* and *the light of the world*. The Kingdom

of God is symbolized by the image of a tent in which the man will live forever, but not alone, but with God (Apoc. 21, 3), with the saints.

*The agrarian aspect* and *the pilgrimage* represent two controversial aspects of the three feasts. The first has been added to the feasts after the entry of the Hebrew people in Canaan. Concerning the pilgrimage, there are no certain information about the time when it was implemented in the structure of the three feasts, but some scriptural allusions confirm that it was specific to these feasts since the first period when the Jews lived in Canaan.

Pesah, Shavuot and Sukkot constitute three essential reference points in the social and religious context of the Hebrew people, marking from the beginning the history of this people and contributing to the proliferation of the monotheistic consciousness and of the special mission which the Jews, as chosen people, had in the world. Although their origin and their development during the history is problematic and disputed, they have a great value. Fulfilled in the most important Christian feasts, Pesah, Shavuot and Sukkot are conclusive evidences of the providence work, showing once again that the entire biblical message constitutes a certain unity with concrete relevances in the soteriological act. The feasts reveals once again their contribution in the final purpose of the evangelical preaching: the human salvation.

Keywords:

- passover, pentecost, feast of tabernacles, the pascal lamb, typology, tabernacle, pilgrimage.