

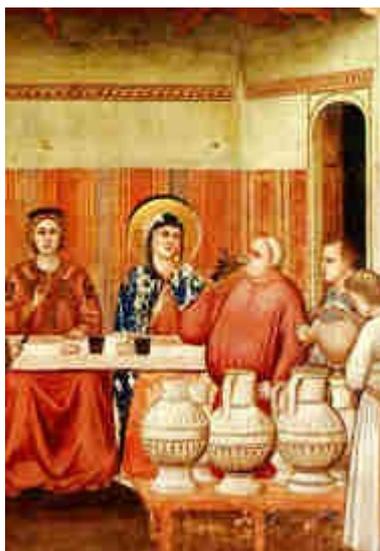


About alcoholism.

**Wine,
the wedding at Cana
and the Eucharistic sharing.**

- 1 - The wedding at Cana**
- 2 - Institution of Eucharist**
- 3 - The ritual of offering and its inversion**
- 4 - Freedom and community**
- 5 - The sex-mask of Christendom**
- 6 - Beyond crowned**

One can not really understand the problems of abstinence without evaluating the social weight of alcoholic drinks with their historical and religious roots. Because there is no gap between the Eucharistic partaking of the bread and the wine and the sharing of a snack on a building site or in a working team.



Giotto. The wedding at Cana.

The Lord's Supper is the last meal of Christ. It contains the founding act of the Church in the sharing of bread and wine. But the first miracle of the public life of Jesus is the transformation of water into wine at the wedding at Cana. The Christological drama is registered between the two events.

"But, there was no more wine because the wine of the weddings was exhausted... Jesus said: "Fill these earthenware jars with water." They filled them to the brim with water. "Draw now" he said to them "and take to the Master of the meal".

They took it to him. The Master of the meal tasted the water changed into wine... Such was the first sign of Jesus..."

The wedding at Cana

This miraculous transformation takes all its force by opposing the wine, pure drink, with the usually contaminated water, much feared in the arid environment of the Oriental Mediterranean.

From a religious point of view, simple water baptizes the bodies, the new water purified by Jesus, the wine, reaches the heart by penetrating the body. The Church sees in this miracle, the image of the radical change that Christ asked of men.

The institution of Eucharist.

The Eucharist instituted at the time of the Last Supper belongs to another level. The blood, the soul, the body and the divinity of Christ are present in the Species and appearances of the bread and the wine (dogma of transubstantiation). For the faithful receiving the communion, this presence is regarded as real or symbolic according to his faith. We will point out that the sacralization of the bread and the wine, memorialized by Christ, pre-existed the new religion since very old times:

- * bread and beer were, in ancient Egypt, two foods necessary to the deceased for his journey to hereafter;
- * bread, gift of Demeter and wine, gift of Dionysus, confer to these two divinities "the highest rank amongst men".
- * But in the Gospel bread and wine are (or represent) **the flesh and the blood of**

God come to embody the image of the man, then sacrificed. For this reason, we must pay all our attention to the Eucharistic meal.

The Eucharistic meal took place during the Easter festival, but it is not the Jewish Passover feast which normally reunites the family community. The Last Supper brought together disciples, friends, assembled for their attachment to their Master. This goes beyond of the natural bonds of the family and is in keeping with the universalist vision of the new religion.

The institution of the Real (or symbolic) Presence under the two species is described in this way:

- Jesus took the cup, returned grace and gave it to his disciples.
- He soaked a piece with the disciple who was going to betray him.
- He took bread and returned grace.
- He broke the bread and shared it to the disciples explaining the significance of the bread.
- At the end of the meal he took the cup and returned grace.
- He passed around the cup, explaining what it meant.

All these elements belong to the ritual of Jewish Passover, but Zizioulas raises a new reality in the interpretation of the meal:

- the bread which he blessed, broke and distributed to the disciples is his body given for "us";
- the cup, which he blessed and passed around, is his blood, the blood of a new alliance.

The disciples must, in their turn, break the bread and drink from the cup after having blessed them. The Pascal meal of the Jewish ritual comprised a sacrificial element: **the cutting of the throat of a lamb, the eating of the lamb offered up in meal of communion**. This event is essential and here its omission is only apparent: "the killing and the manducation of the lamb had to be missing at the Last Supper, said Zizioulas, because Christ himself is the paschal lamb".

"To understand the words ' this is my body, this is my blood ', it should always be remembered, says the author, that **Christ undertakes the role of the sacrificed lamb**".

From there we will better understand, not only the religious dimensions, but also social, cultural and moral of the partaking of divine blood in the Species and appearance of wine.

One is reminded that old people seeing blood leaving the body, saw nothing less than life with the breath of the soul leaving the body. With the transubstanciation of Wine into Blood we understand that the beverage becomes (and perpetuates) the principle of Life. Not according to the biological vision, induced in our minds by

modern scientific rationality, but a principle which objectively supports the soul, insufflated into each being by the Spirit.

Having said this, the dogma of the Eucharist implicated very largely the development of Western thought. So that a rapid review should be centred around two rigorously articulated points:

- The sacrifice of the higher term (Divine).
- The bonds of shedded blood with the social principles of meeting and sharing.

The ritual of the offering and its inversion.

The bread and the wine, memorialized by Christianity, pre-existed it. But the fact that the two Species thematise a sacrifice offered to man by his Creator, constitutes an inaugural phenomenon. Christ, by taking the place of the lamb introduces an inversion which reflects, in a systematized way, on the totality of the relations that each man maintains with himself, with his fellow creature, and his creator.

The sacralization of the goods of subsistence is found in all the religions and cultures. Food is commonly and electively the object of an offering, testifying to the power of God over men. In order to obtain the favours of Yahvé, the faithful offers again and again a sacrifice to him. The Gods of Olympia decided the fate of the mortals: they punished or rewarded but their idols received also their share. Prehistoric man used the same gestures to obtain the favours of the divinities who haunted their universe, and in this way, his means of survival.

One underlined the ancient resonance of the totemic meal, and so the Eucharistic manducation represents an **oral bond**. The act of sacrifice being intended for Men and not for God, it preserves the mark of these ancient origins.

The Eucharist, says the theologian, relates to "the personal existence of man", making it "possible for him to be fully inserted in his history, without being the slave". To the Hellenic formula "many gods, one man", is substituted the formula "one God, many men". This means to say that each man is established in his being by the sacrifice which Christ intends for him, instituting him as a "participant of divine nature".

In this, the Eucharist "permits him to say ' I ' but always in relation to the ' you ' and the ' us ' i.e. it helps him "to lose himself as an individual to become a person". But a being subjected to desires, of which Saint Paul points out the inner struggle: "All is permitted to me, but all is not advantageous (...) all is permitted to me, but I intend, not to let myself be dominated by anything" (1, Cor. 6-2).

Freedom and community.

But is man free and upright, **without the right to possess bread and wine?** Heritage of the agrarian discoveries, with which people "have a higher level of existence than animals", they are, and represent, in a very concrete but basic way, the good that each man must dispose of within his community. They testify to a membership where dignity is represented in economic terms and **by its two facets** which are the survival of the person and his participation in the productive work. The bread and the wine of Eucharist signify **a community of consumption, heir to a community of production, which enable the development of our social structure.**

For catholic liturgy indicates bread and wine as the "fruits of the ground and of the work of men". As the fruit of the work of men, wine evokes a representation which is rooted in the most ancient societies. **The act of passive gathering was revoked** in the beginning of the book of Genesis. The active and collective production of food is a richness resulting from the collective action of men in societies. Wine, recognised as the only salubrious drink, is therefore closely related to work and the capacity to work.

In ancient societies, the activities of hunting and fishing are followed by a collective sharing of food between all the members of the community, according to their rank, not forgetting the gods. In later times production is always reflected in the acts of consumption.

Proposing a toast or blessing human works, from the humblest to the most glorious, profane or sacred gestures, shows us to which point wine symbolism is related to men's productive and creative work, always in their collective action in societies. In day-to-day life, **there is no perceptible gap between the Eucharistic sharing of bread and wine and the sharing of a snack in a working team** or on a building site.

This presents a counterpart. In our cultures, the use of wine, so closely related to human work, induced, until recently, this question which often revealed a sincere concern of the family "if he can not drink any more, will he be able to work?" It was posed *à propos* the abstinence in which the patient was engaged. The wine reputedly giving force, the robust man's physical and mental strength must be testified to by his work. But more subtly, it is perhaps **the full right to be a member of the community** which is in question, and that a total abstainer can see taken away from him.

The sex-mask of Christianity.

Here we are approaching another facet of the symbolism of wine, more directly rooted in the corporal human being, yet remaining under the power of the mind.

Wellbeing, health, joy, force, heat, virility, freedom, are evocations which speak for themselves:

- "It is for the joy of humans that wine is given to them"; it is even regarded as one of the most significant gifts that gods made to men: wanting to punish them, God threatens to deprive them of wine.
- Etymological arguments connect life with the use of wine. In the Old Testament wine is often related to the Promised Land and one noted the ancestral relation between the installation (the sedentarisation) and the culture of the vine (3).
- The relation of wine with "health", is expressed in the most ordinary ritual. Wine, and not water, is offered for drinking, as a pledge and a guarantee of health. We know the reasons. But the therapeutic virtues of healer-alcohol are also largely honoured. The wellbeing which it procures, the warmth and joy, are communicable.
- Wine means also exaltation and courage. It develops the combativeness and virile power which are closely related to it, in the collective imagination. The capacity to drink is an assertion of virility ("if you do not drink, you are not a man"). Nowadays, this symbolism still concerns the man rather than the woman. (And not so long ago the access to alcohol was still privilege or necessity for one, fault for the other).

Expression of life itself, these exalted feelings are also those of the close relation with oneself and one's own desires. Recognized and united in the physical and mental emotions of love, they conceal the contents of these feelings, otherwise inexpressible. Nuances of pleasure, they are reinforced by the singular feeling of being withdrawn from time by the virtues of the beverage. The wine, symbol of divine love, becomes agent of dionysiac feelings which also belong to sexuality.

In a Judeo-Christian Occident which fustigates the eroticism, this popular symbolism becomes the only communicable form of that which belongs to sexuality: wellbeing, joy, pleasure, inner heat, force, health, etc... Would the vine leaf not be the sex-mask of Christianity?

Beyond the sacred.

A recognized point of the Eucharistic proposal is the substitution of the two Species to the habitual symbols of royalty, the Gold and the Glaive. On this ground, the "new royalty", is not only an image; it is inseparable from a temporal resonance. The progression was slow but inevitable: wine and bread become democratic symbols and, if necessary, revolutionary symbols, exceeding the ordinary prospects of the faith. On June 20 1789, the ladies of Paris went to Versailles to seek their King and their Queen, "the Baker and the Baker's wife" thus named because in their royal dignity they offended the people by making their own bread. But this

day the King had to publicly drink a glass of wine to the health of the Nation, while the butcher Legendre called him "Monsieur". This was probably the most historical moment of French Revolution.



Sanctuaire Notre Dame des Fontaines - La Brigue, arrière pays Niçois. Fresques murales attribuées à Canavésio au XVème siècle

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[Index](#)

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