'EUCHARIST' AS A THEME THROUGHOUT SACRED SCRIPTURE
The EMMAUS INSTITUTE for Biblical Studies
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SESSION ONE
PART ONE: MAPPING OUT OUR STUDY
An Invitation to Ponder



1. WHAT DOES 'EUCHARIST' MEAN? The Eucharist (Grk. *eucharistia*, thanksgiving) is known by many names (*CCC* 1328-1332).

1328 The inexhaustible richness of this sacrament is expressed in the different names we give it. Each name evokes certain aspects of it. It is called: *Eucharist*, because it is an action of thanksgiving to God. The Greek words *eucharistein* and *eulogein* recall the Jewish blessings that proclaim—especially during a meal—God's works: creation, redemption, and sanctification.

1329 *The Lord's Supper*, because of its connection with the supper which the Lord took with his disciples on the eve of his Passion and because it anticipates the wedding feast of the Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem.

The *Breaking of Bread*, because Jesus used this rite, part of a Jewish meal, when as master of the table he blessed and distributed the bread, above all at the Last Supper. It is by this action that his disciples will recognize him after his Resurrection, and it is this expression that the first Christians will use to designate their Eucharistic assemblies; by doing so they signified that all who eat the one broken bread, Christ, enter into communion with him and form but one body in him.

The *Eucharistic assembly (synaxis)*, because the Eucharist is celebrated amid the assembly of the faithful, the visible expression of the Church.

1330 The *memorial* of the Lord's Passion and Resurrection.

The *Holy Sacrifice*, because it makes present the one sacrifice of Christ the Savior and includes the Church's offering. The terms *holy sacrifice of the Mass, "sacrifice of praise," spiritual sacrifice, pure and holy sacrifice* are also used, since it completes and surpasses all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant.

'The Holy and Divine Liturgy', because the Church's whole liturgy finds its center and most intense expression in the celebration of this sacrament; in the same sense we also call its celebration the Sacred Mysteries. We speak of the Most Blessed Sacrament because it is the Sacrament of sacraments. The Eucharistic species reserved in the tabernacle are designated by this same name.

1331 Holy Communion, because by this sacrament we unite ourselves to Christ, who makes us sharers in his Body and Blood to form a single body. We also call it: the holy things [Greek: *ta hagia*; Latin: *sancta*]—the first meaning of the phrase "communion of saints" in the Apostles' Creed . . . .

1332 Holy Mass (Missa), because the liturgy in which the mystery of salvation is accomplished concludes with the sending forth (missio) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives.

2. THREE KEY QUESTIONS "FUNDING" OUR STUDY:

2.1. Clearly the significance of 'Eucharist' is not exhausted by its basic definition of 'thanksgiving'. How do we investigate what that greater significance is?

2.2. The Gospels are of course the places where 'the Eucharist' is introduced to us as a special custom that Jesus performs. St. Paul also talks about it in certain places. But do the Old Testament (OT) stories develop our understanding of 'Eucharist' even before Jesus establishes it as a sacrament at the Last Supper? If so, where? And how?

2.3. What approach to interpreting Sacred Scripture will draw out the message(s) God has in mind for it to deliver?

3. 'MISSION' AS A STARTING POINT FOR INTERPRETING BIBLICAL TEXTS

3.1. God has an aim (***mission***) to put right something that went very wrong in the Fall (in the garden in Eden with Adam and Eve). In time, he pursues this mission by giving us something in the Mass (***missa***) from which we are sent forth (***missio***) to participate in the achievement of God's original aim. The Bible *itself* is part of that mission; an exhibit of his intentionality. It's one of the measures God takes to get his mission accomplished. This will affect how we approach reading biblical texts—our 'hermeneutic':

> A missional hermeneutic of the Bible begins with the Bible's very existence. For those who affirm some relationship . . . between these texts and the self-revelation of our Creator God, the whole canon of Scripture is a missional phenomenon in the sense that it witnesses to the self-giving movement of this God toward his creation and us, human beings in God's own image. . . . The writings that now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of and witness to the ultimate mission of God.[1]
>
> The very existence of the Bible is incontrovertible evidence of the God who refused to forsake his rebellious creation, who refused to give up, who was and is determined to redeem and restore fallen creation to his original design for it . . . . The very existence of such a collection of writings testifies to a God who breaks through to human beings, who disclosed himself to them, who will not leave them unilluminated in their darkness, . . . who takes the initiative in re-establishing broken relationships with us.[2]

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[1] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 48.

[2] Ibid., citing Charles R. Taber, "Missiology and the Bible," *Missiology* 11 (1983): 232.

3.2. One of our chief aims is to learn to interpret texts in a manner which draws out their intended meaning. Yet if a text's intended result is not merely the delivery of meaning, but also the transformation of the life of the reader, and of the world in which the reader lives, then we haven't fulfilled the task of interpretation until we've proclaimed what we've drawn out of the text.

A. Our careful interpretation of Sacred Scripture should result in the transformation of ourselves, which in turn results in our proclamation to the world, which finally results in the transformation of the world.

(Transformation is of course what God does, not what we do for ourselves, but our listening attentively to his words and straining to understand them becomes [one of] the means through which He transforms.)

B. Cardinal Sarah: "Through Sacred Scripture, when it is listened to and meditated upon in silence, divine graces are poured out on man. It is in faith, and not by traveling in distant lands or by crossing seas and continents, that we can find and contemplate God. Actually, it is through long hours of poring over Sacred Scripture, after resisting all the attacks of the Prince of this world, that we will reach God."[3.]

C. Sarah's words present Scripture almost as though it is the eighth sacrament—a *conduit* of grace from God to the faithful. But then listen to the Church's own official statement in Dei Verbum 21:

> "The Church has always **venerated** the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly **receives** and offers to the faithful **the bread of life** from the table ***both*** of God's word and of Christ's body." (emphasis added)

In an important sense, Jesus—the 'Bread of Life'—comes to the faithful through the delivery of his word *together with* the sacrament of his body. Both together are the 'bread of life'. Thus, reading and interpreting Sacred Scripture is a missional activity to the extent that the aim of Scripture and Sacrament together is to refashion the human person to participate in the life of the Trinity.

One may interpret other texts and encounter life-changing ideas, but no other text has been miraculously given and miraculously endowed with the ability to transform us in this way, because no other text is *the* word of God to man. Reading and interpreting other texts as a means to betterment is like being out in the sun. You'll get tan. But carefully interpreting Sacred Scripture makes one more than tan: it makes one *a sharer in the life of the sun* (/Son).

[3] Robert Cardinal Sarah, *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 23.

SESSION ONE
PART TWO: THE EUCHARISTIC ALTAR AS 'LIGHT FOR THE NATIONS'



1. THE FIRST ALTAR: GENESIS 8:20-22

> [20] Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. [21] And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.
> [22] While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

1.1. Noah 'built' (בנה) an altar; it comes about as a result of a process of construction.





1.2. On this 'building' he 'caused to go up' (עלה) *multiple* burnt offerings. There is no time frame clarified in the text, i.e., whether this was a single event in which Noah 'caused to go up' multiple offerings, or whether the multiple offerings indicate a routine he followed over time—e.g., offering *a* burnt offering on the altar multiple times over the course of the remainder of his life.

1.3. Whatever the case, the act of 'lifting/causing to go up' (עלה) a sacrificial offering represents something more ceremonious than merely 'setting' (שׂים) a carcass on an altar and 'lighting' (יצת) it on 'fire' (אשׁ). A pleasing aroma ascends "Godward," and God's responsive blessing descends "earthward."

1.4. It is by virtue of this ceremonious activity that *more than mankind itself benefits*. In fact, in the list of beneficiaries, the welfare of man and woman—as the pinnacle *of* God's creative activity (made in the image of God [1:27], blessed, commissioned to multiply and to complete the task of bringing the earth into its intended form [v. 28])—is sandwiched *between* what appears to be the overarching concern: creation broadly speaking; the *whole* project.

For it is the *ground* that is mentioned first (8:21b); at the front in the order of concerns. Living creatures are mentioned as an *addendum* to the protection extended to the ground (8:21c). But then back we go to the structure of the created order itself with the most attention in verse 22.

1.5. This makes all the more sense when we recall the speech offered by Noah's father Lamech in Genesis 5:28-29, upon Noah's birth:

> [28] When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son [29] and called his name Noah (נח), saying, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief (נחם) from our work and from the painful toil of our hands."

1.6. What then has been achieved by the construction of this altar and the 'causing' of something 'to go up' from it?

a. Clearly there is a vertical dimension:

b. But there is also a horizontal dimension:

1.7. In the New Testament, two texts should grab our attention in connection with this first altar and its achievement:

a. St. Paul's words in Romans 8:20-23

> **20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. **23** And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

b. St. Peter's description in his second epistle:

> **2 Peter 2:5** . . . [God] did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a ***herald*** [κήρυκα] of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

1.8. Summing up:

a. Noah, as the priest of the little church of his family, builds an altar

b. By virtue of the ceremony that takes place on the altar, not only is a vertical issue resolved, but a horizontal dimension is addressed as well: the curse oppressing the created order is being lifted.

c. Noah himself is a herald; a preacher. But whether and how this connects with the altar he builds is only a question that remains unanswered. On the other hand, what is achieved on the altar is *very* good news—not only for humankind, but for the whole created order. And that's the sort of thing one might expect a preacher to preach.



Ruins of Abram's first altar near Shechem

2. ABRAM'S* FIRST ALTAR: GENESIS 12:1-7

2.1. The mission (vv. 1-3)

> [1] Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. [2] And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

2.2. Abram's response (vv. 4-5)

> [4] So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. [5] And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the *people* that they had *acquired* in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan.

2.3. What, precisely, did Abram 'aquire' in Haran?

a. 'people' = Heb. עַם

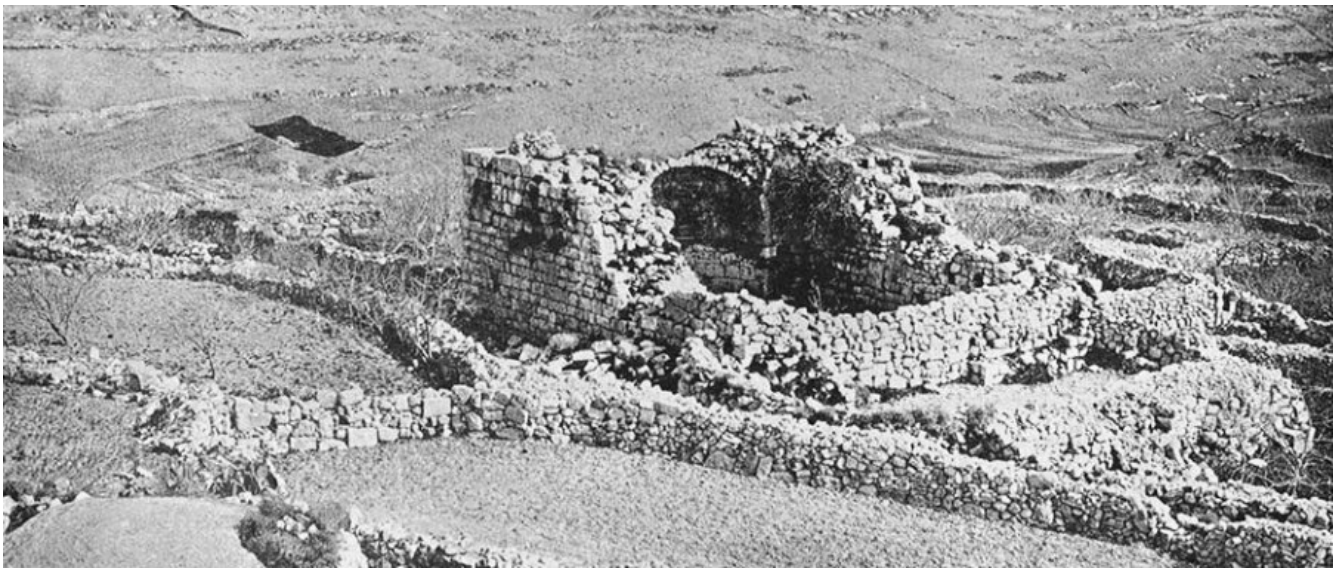
b. Other candidates: 'man'/'men' = אנוֹשׁ; 'man'/'mankind' = אדם

c. Verse 5 has הַנֶּפֶשׁ = _____ , 'which they had ~~acquired~~ _____' (Heb. עשׂה)!

2.4. Abram's first altar

> [5] When they came to the land of Canaan, [6] Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. [7] Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

2.5. What is the function of this altar?



Ruins of the altar Abram built between Bethel (on the west) and Ai (on the east)

3. ABRAM'S SECOND ALTAR: GENESIS 12:8

> [8] From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD *and called upon the name of the LORD*.

3.1. What is the function of this altar?

3.2. The mission continues (vv. 9-10)

> **[9]** And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb. **[10]** Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

3.3. The first altar revisited: Genesis 13:1-4

> 1 So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the
> Negeb. 2 Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. 3 And he journeyed on from
> the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and
> Ai, 4 to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of
> the LORD.

4. ABRAM'S THIRD ALTAR: GENESIS 13:14-18

4.1. Background: Genesis 13:5-12

> 5 And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, 6 so that the land could not
> support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell
> together, 7 and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of
> Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land.
> 8 Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your
> herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Separate
> yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand,
> then I will go to the left." 10 And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well
> watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar.
> (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11 So Lot chose for himself all the
> Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. 12 Abram settled in the
> land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

a. Again the Canaanites, now also the Perizzites; additional audience for A's homilies!

b. We might anticipate that Lot would—or *should*—go the direction he does, which appears in its present state 'like the garden of the LORD', i.e., not especially in need of the sort of missionary evangelism Abram has been about.

c. It's perhaps ironic, or fitting (!), what happens to these respective places!

4.2. Foreground: Genesis 13:14-18

> 14 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from
> the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, 15 for all the land
> that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring as the dust
> of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.
> 17 Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." 18 So Abram
> moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built
> an altar to the LORD.

a. Given the preceding development of the altar as a place where Abram 'called upon the name of the LORD', it may be suggested that Abram's doing the same here, though it is not mentioned, is nonetheless implied.

b. In Hebrew poetry, we call this 'ellipsis': omitted words, or what Robert Alter calls "hidden repetition,"[4] in which (usually) a verb (sometimes a noun) in the first line serves double duty for an implied corresponding member in the second:

[4] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 25.

> **Deuteronomy 32:7** Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you.
> . . . ask your father, and he will show you, *[ask]* your elders, and they will tell you.
>
> **Isaiah 1:3** "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."
> The ox knows its owner, and the donkey *[knows]* its master's crib . . .

This poetic feature of ellipsis can extend beyond adjacent lines of text to be deployed in adjacent narrative units within a larger story.

c. The altar-as-taking-ground-for-the-kingdom is made most explicit here in the LORD's own words in v. 17: 'I will give this land to you.'

d. The author of Hebrews corroborates this interpretation:

> **Hebrews 11:8-10** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. [9] By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. [10] For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

e. Understanding altar building as *proclamatory* suggests that the altar itself is not merely a means of _____ but also a means of _____ .

4.3. Four suggestions:

a. Altars ought to be made of stone

b. When we enter a Catholic Church and see an altar, we should attribute to it the dignity of the eternal.

c. We should regard it as not merely something of value to those who are in the Church and believe, but as an evangelistic testimony to those who are outside and do not believe.

d. It is a light to the nations: a monument whose function is not merely to address a problem in the vertical relationship between God and man through the lifting up of a sacrifice, but also a problem in the horizontally-viewed condition of the created order.

5. INTERLUDE: GENESIS 14:17-24

5.1. King of 'Salem' (short for 'Jeru**salem**'?), whose name is 'Melchizedek': _____ .

5.2. He brings out **bread** and **wine**, clarifying in the same sentence that "he was priest of God Most High"

5.3. He **blesses** Abram, then **blesses** God Most High

6. ABRAHAM'S* FOURTH ALTAR: GENESIS 22:1-19

6.1. Verse 1 – In obedience to God's decree, Abraham now steps into the role of priest, following Melchizedek before him, and Noah before Melchizedek.

6.2. Verse 2 – **Take** your son (v. 2//v. 12)

6.3. Verses 2-4 – constellation of literary features that are "thick" with theological significance

a. donkey (cf. Matt 21)

b. Isaac, 'son' (10x in vv. 1-19)

c. Cut wood for [burnt] offering

d. 'on the third day . . . saw the place' far off (v. 4//v.13)

6.4. Verse 5, and Abraham's provocative claim:

> Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and [we will] worship and [we will] come again to you."

For group discussion: What is Abraham's reasoning in verse 5?

6.5. Abram's obedience is reciprocated by Isaac's obedience

6.6. Isaac's question in verse 7, and Abraham's response in verse 8:

> 7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

For group discussion: What is Abraham's reasoning in verse 8?

6.7. Verse 9: Abraham builds the fourth altar

> 9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

For group discussion: Given what we've learned about Abram/-aham and what seems to be the principal motivation behind his decision to build altars, how might we conceive of his decision here in relation to his experience in verse 4, and his claim in verse 8?