ABSTRACT
In early Christianity, we find the Eulogia used as a sign of communion. One of the earliest references we find is that of Victor Of Rome, who, in the early 2nd century, already speaks of it as a tradition. The practice continued in the west and was a sign of community of faith between the bishop and the presbyters (priests).

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During the summer of 1995 the U.S. space shuttle Atlantis was united in outer space with the Russian space station Mir. I was struck by a news photo of the cosmonaut in his living quarters. In the background was an icon of the Saviour. (Indeed, how could anyone spend time in outer space and not believe...) When gifts were exchanged between the two crews, the Russian gave bread and salt. There is immense symbolism in this gift. Bread and salt are two of the primary gifts of membership in the body of Christ. At baptism, a small amount of salt is placed on the tongue of the catechumen and at chrismation the bread of life is received in holy communion.

Bread has always been an important part of the life and worship of mankind. It is the staff of life and is often considered the most basic food. The ancient Egyptians used leavened bread and made it the basis of their administrative system. The Greeks had a bread goddess. Most early societies honored their gods with the first fruits of the harvest. Grain processed into bread is the most common primal offering. In the Old Testament, we find many references to bread: the bread of idleness, wickedness, deceit, adversity, and tears. The bread of tears evolved from the recollection of God's curse on Adam, who was to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. During the Hebrew holiday of Shavu'ot the Israelites were told to bring two loaves of bread made of wheat flour as an oblation or offering to Yahweh. There is also a feast of unleavened bread which relates to the deliverance from Egypt. Later the Hebrews offered shewbread, or 'the bread of the presence'; but it was our Lord who exalted it and gave it the highest of values - "This is my body." In the New Testament account of the breaking of the bread we find the recurrence of certain words - took, gave thanks, broke and gave. When we consider the significance of Christ's offering (the bread that is His body) to people who had such an understanding of the role of bread in their faith, we gain a greater insight into the real presence of Christ in the bread of the Eucharist. In the era of modern grocery stores, our perception can become rather superficial with the numerous varieties and bakers of bread. It hardly seems the same substance.

In the Western Rite, we have a custom of the gift of blessed bread. In the beginning of my life in Orthodoxy, I heard a reference to the French practice of pain bene; but to me these words only had the same meaning as antidoron.(1) Having experienced the use of antidoron in the Eastern Rite, I assumed that the tradition had been adapted for use in the Western Rite. Upon further study, I found early mention of the same practice within our own Anglo- celtic heritage. In a Medieval Book of Penances (2) St. Columba and St. Patrick, the two great fathers of the ancient British Church, mention the custom of blessed bread. They call it Eulogia which is the Greek word for a blessing or a gift. The holy loaf or Eulogia was an ordinary loaf of bread cut into small slices and distributed to the people immediately after Mass. In the Rule of St. Columba, we see that just as a secular father reminds a child to wash his hands before eating, the abbot, with a father's patience, remonstrates the faithful to cleanliness, "He who unwashed receives the holy bread (will receive as a penance) nine strokes." At first glance, the reference appears to apply to the Eucharistic bread; but on further research it turns out that this particular statement refers to the Eulogia. In his book Church of Our Fathers, D. Rock indicates that the Eulogia was "meant to be an emblem of brotherly love and union which ought always to belong to Christians together." In the Penitential books it is also a allowance given to a member who has been temporarily excommunicated, (also referred
to as interdict). At that time excommunication was a common form of penance. When under the penance of excommunication the penitent was still expected to fast. The Eulogia provides some small sustenance to the faithful who have been fasting since the previous day. Aside from the penitent, we also find it taken to the sick by the Deacon. The catechumen and those not in the communion of the faithful are offered the gift during or directly after Mass. It is taken "for the health of mind and body, and as a protection against disease and the snares of all enemies". It was and is not a "Snack" during Mass and there are prescribed penances for the abuse of the Eulogia, varying from a number of strokes (beating) to a period of fasting. We know that the distribution of eulogia continued in Britain until at least the 15th century, for in that time Miss Margaret Odom bequeathed property to a guild to provide for a Priest to say Mass at a jail chapel and give the prisoners holy water and holy bread. The practice in the *Rituale Romanum* describes it as a sacramental to be eaten with lively faith for the health of soul and body.

In early Christianity, we find the Eulogia used as a sign of communion. One of the earliest references we find is that of Victor Of Rome, who, in the early 2nd century, already speaks of it as a tradition. The practice continued in the west and was a sign of community of faith between the bishop and the presbyters (priests). These exchanges exemplify the Greek understanding of the word "gift". A gift is only a gift at the will of the receiver. The accepting party blesses it in receiving it. Paulinus of Nola mentions Eulogiae interchanging it with the Latin word *Benedictiones* (blessings).

The single loaf which we have sent to your charity, as a token of unanimity, we beg that you will bless it by accepting it.

We find mention of it from St. Basil to St. Benedict, from Alexandria to Rome and beyond, into modern poetry.

"The Second Rising"
From *Becoming Bread* by Gunilla Norris

God longs for God and uses us, rises in us... becomes in us. Let us be silent, a quiet dough. Where God moves into every pore... Where God lives as God pleases. Let us rise simply a quiet dough.

Bread is a mystery to those who bake. If one is not careful the mere temperature of the water can kill that which causes the dough to rise, the leaven or yeast. Baking bread is a "whole spirit" exercise. One must have knowledge, stamina, patience and understanding to create a perfect
loaf of bread. In performing this task, we invest our time, effort and resources; and through that investment, it is already a part of us. As it is consumed, it becomes intimately mingled with our life - it sustains, gives life, fills the soul. It is this commingling, this union, which is so significant in Holy Communion. The bread of life completes us and restores us to the state of Adam before the fall. We need this spiritual renovation as much and more than we need what natural food can provide. Our life is a life of fall and regeneration, of being punched down and rising again. Even in its preparation, the whole symbolism of bread is a microcosm of the spiritual life. When asked what happens in a monastery, a wise abbot replied, "We fall down and then we get up, we fall down again, we get up again." In her book Becoming Bread Gunilla Norris shares this thought:

"To take nothing for granted and to receive much, this changes everything, makes us empty, makes us new. It transforms us. All gratitude comes from this, that we truly receive our lives, each other, and the world. Time and space, air and fire. Earth and water, the hot and the dry, spring and summer. The cold and the moist, fall and winter. Sight. Sound. Touch and smell, mercy. Terror. Limitation. Pain. When we receive all of it, the whole of life's beauty .... it is bread .... it is love and we can pray the ancient prayer, 'Holy one of blessing, your presence fills creation, bringing forth bread from the earth.'

Being human and ordinary, we will often fail to love the whole, the dark and difficult parts. We will always try to avoid something. We will tremble, we will be blind, we will be uncertain. We will continue to hurt one another and miss the essential. We will always need mercy and compassion. We will be ineffective, stubborn and very human. It is ultimately our vulnerability and our powerlessness that God loves the most, I believe. For there we can and do receive, must receive, and know that everything is a gift. Even our suffering.

Full of that knowledge, that sustenance, we cannot help but share our love and our lives with each other. Then we are not only becoming bread .... WE ARE BREAD."

"The earth, o lord, is filled with the fruit of thy works: that thou mayest bring food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man. And oil to make him a cheerful countenance: and bread to strengthen man's heart." (3)

Sources


Becoming Bread. Gunilla Norris. Bell Tower, 1993


Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Oxford University Press, 1977


Footnotes

1. Antidoron is the spare bread left after the priest has removed the portion used for the Eucharist.
2. The Medieval Books of Penance were guidebooks for priests and abbots containing prescribed penances by offense and spiritual advice. Included in this collection was the monastic rule of St. Columba.
3. Communion Tone 1, Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.