

The eros of the meal: Passover, Eucharist, education

El eros de la comida: la pascua, la eucaristía, la educación

L'éros du repas: La Pâque, l'Eucharistie, l'éducation

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ABSTRACT

After outlining the common critique in selected texts Paulo Freire and Benedict XVI, we turn beyond the individual thinkers and into the mystagogy of their common religious traditions, beginning with an extended description of the Jewish ritual of Passover, foundational to a description of the Catholic celebration of the Eucharist to follow, but also definitive in its own right. In describing these two rituals we find a fuller consideration of the constructive responses by Freire and Benedict to the institutional objectification of the human person in the eros of the common meal. This is the mysterious freedom of eros that is a necessary condition for the possibility of true and lasting communion, essential for any liberating education and often missing in Marxist and other accounts of critical pedagogy that ignore its theological roots. Rather than reacting to these limits to the present, well-known literature, we carve out an alternate path.

Keywords: Eros, Paulo Freire, Benedict XVI, Passover, Eucharist, education

RESUMEN

Después de delinear una crítica de textos selectos de Paulo Freire y Benedicto XVI, los autores se mueven más allá de pensadores individuales hacia el análisis de la “mystagogía” de sus tradiciones religiosas; abren con una extensa descripción del ritual de la Pascua judía, fundacional para la descripción de la celebración católica de la Eucaristía – que adquiere su definición propia – y que a continuación describen. Al describir estos rituales, examinan las respuestas constructivas de Freire y Benedicto a la objetivización institucional de la persona humana en el eros de la comida en común. Esta es la misteriosa libertad del eros, condición necesaria para la posibilidad de una verdadera y perdurable comunión y esencial en una educación liberadora. Esta libertad del eros es dejada de lado en la versión marxista y en otras de la pedagogía crítica que ignoran las raíces teológicas. En vez de reaccionar a las limitaciones mencionadas, bien conocidas en la literatura, abrimos un camino alternativo.

Palabras clave: Eros, Paulo Freire, Benedicto XVI, Pascua, Eucaristía, educación.

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RÉSUMÉ

Après avoir résumé la critique commune de textes choisis de Paulo Freire et de Benoît XVI, nous dépassons les penseurs individuels pour nous tourner vers la mystagogie de leur commune tradition religieuse, en commençant par une description prolongée du rituel de la Pâque juive, qui est fondamentale à une description de la célébration catholique de l'Eucharistie qui lui succède, mais qui est aussi définitive de son propre droit. En décrivant ces deux rituels, nous trouvons une pleine considération des réponses constructives de Freire et de Benoît à l'objectification de la personne humaine dans l'éros du repas commun. Voilà la mystérieuse liberté de l'éros, condition nécessaire à la possibilité d'une communion vraie et durable, essentielle à toute éducation libératrice et qui manque souvent dans les explications Marxistes et autres d'une pédagogie critique qui ignore ses racines théologiques. Plutôt que de réagir à ces limites de la littérature présente bien connue, nous traçons une voie alternative.

Mots-clés: l'éros, Paulo Freire, Benoît XVI, la Pâque juive, l'Eucharistie, l'éducation

“Eat, friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, beloved ones.”

Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs), 5:1

אֲכָלוּ רַעִים שְׂתוּ וְשָׂבְרוּ דוֹדִים

“What the theory of dialogical action demands is that, whenever the moment of revolutionary action might be, it cannot dispense with communion with the popular masses.”

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido (Pedagogy of the Oppressed)*

“The original encounter with Jesus gave the disciples what all generations thereafter receive in their foundational encounter with the Lord in baptism and the Eucharist, namely, the new anamnesis of faith, which unfolds, like the anamnesis of creation, in constant dialogue between *within* and *without*.”

Joseph Ratzinger, *On Conscience*

Introduction

Before the drinking and eulogizing in Plato's *Symposium*, the great Hellenic text on *eros* begins according to the custom of its time: with a meal. Before the speeches to “that great God,” *eros*, before the account of the education of the soul through the mystical voice of Diotima, retold by Socrates, there is first a gathering to break bread and share wine. The primacy of the meal in Athens, Hellenism, and across classical antiquity, on display in our epigraph from *Song of Songs*,¹ is not a trivial bit of history or anthropology. The *eros* of the meal, in all its diverse forms of expression, is not reducible to a cultural or even culinary analysis. The common ritual and practice

¹ For our first analysis of *eros* in relation to *Song of Songs* and the phenomenon of death, see: Samuel D. Rocha and Adi Burton, “‘Strong as Death is Love’: Eros and Education at the End of Time,” *Espacio, Tiempo, y Educacion* 4(1), 1-12. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14516/ete.2017.004.001.154>

of the meal holds a universal form of life, richly layered with *eros* and brimming with educational insight. The appetite for *eros* is not a mere convention. Indeed, the meal itself is a particular kind of education that is attuned by *eros*, a form of pedagogy not closed off to mystagogy.² In this essay, we turn to this universality of the meal through a series of comparisons between Paulo Freire and Benedict XVI, the Jewish Passover meal, the Catholic Eucharistic meal, and the meal that is common to and for all. In this introduction, we lay out the range and scope of our analysis.

We begin with Paulo Freire's famous critique of the banking concept of education in *Pedagogia do Oprimido (Pedagogy of the Oppressed)*,³ which can be read as a distinctly Catholic insight, in the Latin American tradition of liberation theology.⁴ When read carefully, Freire's critique is not primarily aimed at teaching methods or instruction. At the heart of his critique is a pastoral diagnosis echoed by a contemporary of Freire's that some might find surprising and even controversial. This brings us to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

While the political and ideological positions of Freire and Benedict are historically opposed in significant ways, we find a common criticism of the institutional objectification of the human person shared between them, with historical overlaps that suggest a more nuanced sense of their relation. The points of continuity between these Catholic thinkers, although framed by the antagonisms between European and Latin American Catholic social thought of the past few decades, ought to show the durability of their shared concern and criticism of the objectification of the human person in the modern world. In addition to their critical diagnosis, they also offer educational suggestions for treatment that can also be understood within the sacramental context of their shared Roman Catholicism.

After outlining the common critique in Freire's turn to theological communion and Benedict's more secular turn to Plato's "regular familial discussion," we turn beyond the individual thinkers and into the mystagogy of their common religious traditions, beginning with an extended description of the Jewish ritual of Passover, foundational to the description of the Catholic celebration of the Eucharist to follow, but also definitive in its own right. In describing these two rituals, we find a fuller consideration of the constructive responses by Freire and Benedict to the institutional objectification of the human person in the *eros* of the common meal. This is the mysterious freedom of *eros* that is a necessary condition for the possibility of true and lasting communion (i.e., common union) essential for any liberating education and often missing in Marxist and other accounts of critical pedagogy that ignore its theological roots in Freire. Rather than reacting to these limits to the present, well-known literature, we carve out an alternate path.

Freire

In the second chapter of Freire's *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, we find that the core problem with the banking concept of education is not that students are treated as passive receptacles for storing deposits. The reading presented in this section, based on three successive passages in the opening pages of Chapter Two, justifies a far more radical understanding of Freire's critique. It is important to note here, from the outset, that Freire's metaphor of banking is first and foremost a

² The term 'mystagogy' will be explained in further detail in the section on Eucharist, but for now it simply means "initiation into the mystery."

³ We are using Rocha's English translation from the original Portuguese because the English translation by Myra Bergman Ramos (published by Bloomsbury) is woefully inadequate for scholarly use. Citations will be made in relation to the text used, with the original passage in Portuguese to follow.

⁴ This is a tradition Freire directly influenced as early as Medellín, the Latin American response to Vatican II, where Liberation Theology emerged and was later clarified in Puebla.

verb, something which “banks,” “deposits,” and “archives.” This active sense of banking extends beyond the modern banking institution and other economic allusions into the more general and nefarious bureaucratic nature of banking not limited to its strictly capitalist or neoliberal senses.⁵

In the first passage, Freire notes that “in this way [of the banking concept], education turns into an act of depositing, in which the educated are the deposited and the educator is the depositor.”⁶ This reading of Freire’s words in the original Portuguese shows that the deposits are not deposited *into* the person being educated, but, “the educated are the deposited.” The harm of the banking concept is rooted in the objectification of the educated themselves and, as Freire explains further in the second point just below the previous passage, becomes fundamentally ontological: “At the bottom, however, the great archives are men, in this mistaken ‘banking’ concept of education. Archived because, outside of the yearning, outside of praxis, men cannot be.”⁷ Here we again see that the archives are not merely stored within people, but that these archives *are the people*, whose archived status denies them the ontological requirements to be, and thereby dehumanizes them. The third passage extends the charge of dehumanization found in the second. Freire writes, “The question is in thinking what is authentically dangerous [about the banking concept]. The strange humanism of this ‘banking’ concept is reducible to the attempt to make men into their opposite—an automaton, which is the negation of their ontological vocation to *be more*.”⁸ Freire locates the authentic danger of the banking concept of education in a full-blown account of objectification, where the person is inverted into an automaton and denied their “ontological vocation to *be more*.”

For Freire, then, the problem of the banking concept of education is not pedagogical or instructional in nature; the pedagogical harm for Freire is the one that violates the “ontological vocation to *be more*,” by depositing and thereby objectifying not merely knowledge or information but, ultimately, the human person. This harm is the only one that contributes fully to the dehumanization that Freire condemns in the banking concept of education. He begins his analysis a chapter earlier in the notion of love itself, or the ontological opposition to it that characterizes the oppressor.

In chapter one, Freire refers to the oppressed as the “*desamados*” in Portuguese, the “disloved” or the “unloved ones,” and to the oppressors as “those who do not love.”⁹ This

⁵ This passage from a footnote of a paper presented by Freire in 1970 supports this interpretation: “So, as men become progressively subjected to a process of adaptation in which their creative power is asphyxiated, they will progressively become dehumanized. In general, this is what is happening in intensely bureaucratized social structures in which men cannot develop their capacity of expressing themselves and their world. It is this process of bureaucratization that explains the resulting distortion of the real meaning of ‘efficiency,’ so that in such societies of efficiency does not mean creation or recreation but the accomplishment of the given orders at the right time.” Paulo Freire, “Education as a Cultural Action--An Introduction,” paper presented at 1970 Catholic Inter-American Cooperation Program Conference (Washington, D.C.: Division for Latin America U.S.C.C., 1970), pp. 1-2.

⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, 17^a ed. (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Paz e Terra, 1987/1970), 58, translation by Samuel D. Rocha. “Desta maneira, a educação se torna um ato de depositar, em que os educandos são os depositários e o educador o depositante.”

⁷ Ibid. “No fundo, porém, os grandes arquivados são os homens, nesta (na melhor das hipóteses) equivocada concepção ‘bancária’ da educação. Arquivados, porque, fora da busca, fora da práxis, os homens não podem ser.”

⁸ Ibid., 61. “A questão está em que pensar autenticamente é perigoso. O estranho humanismo desta concepção ‘bancária’ se reduz à tentativa de fazer dos homens o seu contrário--o autômato, que é a negação de sua ontológica vocação de *ser mais*.”

⁹ Ibid., 42. “os que não amam” (Translator’s note: The term *dislove* is a neologism meant to retain the original term *desamor* that is not the mere absence of love we find in the English term *lovelessness*, but instead something more aggressively both lacking and against love).

positioning of the oppressors as ontologically opposed to love reveals the fundamentality of love and “dislove” in oppression itself, highlighting the dialectical line between the “disloved” and “those who do not love.” Freire refers to the core of oppression as “the dislove contained in the violence of the oppressors.”¹⁰ This “dislove,” argues Freire, can only be opposed and fought through a dialectical act of love. “Only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis, is true solidarity found,”¹¹ Freire writes. This suggests that the proper response to oppression is “this act of love,” even when it appears strange or counterintuitive. As he puts it, “It is true, however paradoxical it may seem, that it is in the response of the oppressed to the violence of the oppressors where we find the gesture of love.”¹² This “gesture of love,” for Freire, appears in the paradoxical movement from dislove to love. Freirian love commits dialectical violence against violence. The paradox of love we find in the gesture of love is the absurd dialectical negation of dislove by the love of the oppressed.

The fundamental relation of dislove to oppression and dehumanization illuminates the meaning and negative progression of “the ontological vocation to *be more*” in light of Freire’s critique of the banking concept of education. This foregrounds the chapters to follow where Freire moves from prognosis and diagnosis into treatment. The treatment emerges through the ontogenetic Word and its dialogic praxis (in chapter three) and leads to a repeated call for “communion with the popular masses” (in chapter four). Indeed, as our epigraph highlights, Freire insists: “What the theory of dialogical action demands is that, whenever the moment of revolutionary action might be, it cannot dispense with communion with the popular masses.”¹³

The repeated call to popular communion that concludes Freire’s text invokes several well-known Latin American revolutionary figures like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Freire also extols various Catholic clerical figures like Pope John XXIII and Father Chenu, who were both present at and instrumental to the Second Vatican Council of 1964, the church council called to address questions and issues of the Catholic Church in the modern world. This makes Freire’s *Pedagogia do Oprimido* a deeply conciliar text in the spirit of Vatican II and begins to explain our movement to another influential figure from Vatican II: Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. In 1972 Ratzinger co-founded the journal *Communio*, dedicated to defending and distilling Vatican II, and later became prefect to the Congregation for the Promulgation of the Faith from 1981 to 2005. In 2005, he was elected Pope and, in 2013, became the first pope since 1415 to renounce the papacy, now with the title of Pope Emeritus.

Benedict

In 2007, Ignatius Press published a slim book by Joseph Ratzinger (i.e. Pope Emeritus Benedict) titled *On Conscience*. It is comprised of two short speeches Benedict made as a cardinal in 1991 and 1984, originally published as Proceedings to the Tenth and Fourth Bishops Workshop, respectively, by The Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research and Education Center.¹⁴ These two speeches are introduced by John M. Haas as related to “the theme Cardinal Ratzinger took up

¹⁰ Ibid., 32. “ao desamor contido na violência dos opressores”

¹¹ Ibid., 36. “Só na plenitude deste ato de amar, na sua existenciação, na sua práxis, se constitui a solidariedade verdadeira.”

¹² Ibid., 43. “Na verdade, porém, por paradoxal que possa parecer, na resposta dos oprimidos à violência dos opressores é que vamos encontrar o gesto de amor.”

¹³ Ibid., “O que exige a teoria da ação dialógica é que, qualquer que seja o momento da ação revolucionária, ela não pode prescindir desta *comunhão* com as massas populares.”

¹⁴ The Medical-Moral Research and Education Center changed its name to The National Bioethics Center in 1998.

when he preached to the Cardinals before they went into the conclave that elected him Pope Benedict XVI [in 2005].” Haas claims that Benedict “warned them of their duty to protect the Church and the world from a ‘dictatorship of relativism.’”¹⁵ In this sense, these two speeches connect a broad and unified set of interests in Benedict’s life and thought, albeit perhaps on different terms than the ones focused on by Haas.

Benedict’s primary concern in *On Conscience* is not with the subjectivity of relativism. In the section titled “The Reduction to ‘Objectivity,’” we find Benedict instead dismantling the moral problem of objectification which he calls the “great inner threat to mankind today.” This threat is situated, for Benedict, as a result of a crisis brought about by a modern scientific quantification, which is a “method of what is not free.” The similarities between Benedict’s concerns in *On Conscience*, against the “reduction to objectivity,” and Freire’s in *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, against the “banking concept of education,” resonate together strongly in the following passage:

One can divide and distribute only that which has become a quantity. The success of modern science is based on the translation of the reality we encounter into quantitative measures. In this way the world becomes measurable and technologically exploitable. But could we not say that the crisis of humanity in our times finds its roots in this method and in its increasing domination in all aspects of human life? Calculation, which in turn is subject to what is quantitative, is the method of what is not free. It works when we are dealing with what can be calculated ... It is good for building cars... [S]ince human behavior is not at all so easy to repeat or reproduce identically in others, any attempt to subject human behavior to a purely scientific analysis encounters sooner or later an insurmountable limitation: namely, the limitations of humanity itself... Only at the price of ignoring what is precisely human could the question of morality be analyzed in the ordinary way of human knowing. The fact that this is actually being attempted in various quarters today is the great inner threat to mankind today.¹⁶

It is important to recall that these selected passages are delivered to moral theologians and bishops, pleading for an opposition to this “reduction to objectivity” in the realm of Catholic theology and teaching. This plea, however, extends well beyond the theological and magisterial office of the Roman Catholic Church. While Freire’s critique of the banking concept of education most directly takes on the teacher-student relation, it is easy to see how Benedict’s critique in *On Conscience* extends further into the relation between the teacher and the institution. The relationship between the theologian and the Church is structurally identical to that of the teacher and the Ministry of Education. This can readily be applied to the scientific standardization of schooling, and society at large, so thoroughly critiqued today, yet prevalent as ever.¹⁷

Perhaps even more profoundly complimentary is the treatment suggested by Benedict across the course of these lectures. Whereas Freire concludes *Pedagogia do Oprimido* with the Catholic notion of popular communion, Benedict turns not to the Catholic conciliar tradition but,

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *On Conscience: Two Essays* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007), 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46-49.

¹⁷ Benedict’s critique also complicates the simplicity of the teacher-student relation, since the teacher’s agency is often already determined by the greater agency of the institution. As much as the teacher might need to risk a gesture of love, that gesture is often bound prematurely by the institution’s equally oppressive dislove. In other words, teachers can be reduced to objectivity and banked or archived away just as easily as students, as we have seen in increased “teacher accountability” movements in educational policy. Thus we find Freire’s “banking concept of education” in full operation at a larger institutional scale within Benedict’s “reduction to objectivity.” Taken together, Freire and Benedict express a common set of distinctly educational conciliar concerns and criticisms that augment and support each set of claims and extend from within and outside the domain of the Catholic Church.

instead, to Plato, adding a more secular Hellenistic foundation to Freire's more overtly religious and revolutionary Catholic prescriptions of popular communion. Unlike Freire's direct route across the four chapters of *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, Benedict's path is a bit more circuitous in *On Conscience*. We will lay it out in its key relations to Freire in what follows.

Benedict's final thoughts in *On Conscience* address a famous ecclesial conflict in "the relationship between theologians and bishops" on the matter of whether the moral theologian can criticize the teachings of the magisterium. Here again we see the educational emphasis on the dynamic between teachers and institutional authority; even the word "magisterium" (from the Latin word for teacher, *magister*) conveys an educational sense to the institution. In the final section, titled "Criticism of the Magisterium: Its Rules and Limits," Benedict prescribes the following: "The most important thing in the relationship between the magisterium and moral theology appears to me, in the last analysis, to lie in what Plato recommends as the path to moral knowledge: in 'regular familial discussion'..."¹⁸ While this prescription remains unclear in our analysis thus far, we do get a final glimpse of Benedict refusing to provide an ecclesial or even religious "reduction to objectivity," opting for the wisdom of Ancient Greece, which appeals instead to "regular familial discussion," which, for Benedict, is rooted in his notion of *anamnesis*, a notion we will explain in more detail below.

After the cited section on "The Reduction to Objectivity," Benedict summarizes, "We see, then, that in the question of morality there cannot be experts in the same way that there can be experts in microelectronics or computer science."¹⁹ He continues, citing Plato, "Plato realized that when he said that a person cannot express 'with scholastic words' what the word 'good' means," and asks, "But in what other way can we learn it?"²⁰ To this question – What other way can we learn what the word 'good' means? – Benedict posits "The Community as a Source of Morality" in a section where he reinterprets the Latin word *mores* (morals) found in Augustine's comparison in *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* between the Catholic Church and Manicheans, a comparison that is considered "within the broader context of lifestyle."²¹ Benedict emphasizes that, for Augustine, "*fides et mores* [faith and morals] does not simply mean faith and morals in today's sense of the terms, but rather in the broader sense in which the customs of the life of the Church...are understood."²² This broader Augustinian sense of morals is in sympathy with the Platonic admonition against using scholastic words to understand the good and allows Benedict to assert the following: "'morality' is not an abstract code of norms for behavior, but presupposes a community way of life within which morality itself is clarified and is able to be observed."²³

The coherence of Benedict's communal idea of morality, pitted against the "reduction to objectivity" in relation to Freire's emphasis on "communion with the popular masses," continues to gain strength in Benedict's examination of how the conscience is able to recognize the morality it observes in communal life and how the magisterium is able "to speak its word in such a way that it will be understood in the midst of conflicts of values and orientations."²⁴ Again, Benedict repeats the same Platonic dictum:

¹⁸ Ibid., 75.

¹⁹ Ibid., 49-50.

²⁰ Ibid., 50.

²¹ Ibid., 53.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 64.

Here we need what Plato was referring to when he said the good cannot be known scholastically, but only after regular familial discussion can the notion of the good spring into the soul like a light springing from a small spark. This constant “familial discussion” within the Church must build up the community conscience.²⁵

This Platonic notion of “familial discussion” is deeply reminiscent of the *Symposium*, where the meaning of love is not sought in the abstract but instead at a banquet of friends. In the Platonic formulation, the notion of the good springs into the soul like a spark, which explains Benedict’s earlier use of the Platonic notion of conscience, *anamnesis*, as a replacement for the more traditional scholastic idea of conscience in *synderesis*.²⁶ This notion of conscience is the part that contains the “small spark,” an ontological spark like Freire’s sense of ontological vocation. This, for Benedict is the “inner ontological tendency within man, who is created in the image and likeness of God, toward the divine.”²⁷

To further understand *anamnesis*, Benedict pairs his development of the notion of *anamnesis* with Basil’s monastic admonition that “The love of God is not founded on a discipline imposed on us from the outside” and the complimentary claim that “the spark of divine love is hidden in us.”²⁸ The “small spark” from which light springs in familial discussion is nothing short of divine love which becomes the ultimate antidote to the “reduction to objectivity” that tries to know the good through scholastic words or, even worse, through technocratic domination. This technocratic domination would include the secular reading of Freire, in an impoverished translation, by so many Anglophone scholars within critical pedagogy who willingly or ignorantly exclude mystagogy from pedagogy.

From Plato to Freire and Benedict, we find a unique centrality of a meal in response to the critiques of objectification. To examine this meal in more detail, we now turn to the religious meals of Passover and Eucharist to begin to find the power of the meal to liberate the human person yesterday, today, and tomorrow, from the shackles of objectification that threaten to extinguish the wick of *eros* that prepares, nourishes, sustains—and illuminates.

Passover / *Pesach*

Parashat BaMidbar (the weekly Torah portion entitled “In the Desert”) concerns the census that Moses conducted following the erection of the Tabernacle. The counting for the census did not occur directly; instead each gave half a shekel so that the coins could be counted.²⁹ In the commentaries on this *parasha*, it is noted that the counting of Jews directly is forbidden, as it is written: “And the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which shall neither be measured nor counted.”³⁰ The commentaries on this law are many.³¹ *Halacha* (Jewish law) permits alternative methods, such as the counting of names or non-essential body parts like noses, because the ultimate offense is to reduce the humanity of persons to numbers (or in Hebrew, letters).³² People, ultimately, cannot be ordered nor quantified like cattle or coins. In the modern

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, 30.

²⁷ Ibid, 32.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ As explained in Exodus 30:12-13.

³⁰ Hosea 2:1.

³¹ The most common interpretation for this prohibition is that counting invites the evil eye, or could cause a plague (see Exodus 30:12 and 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21).

³² As with most Jewish studies, this is only one interpretation, and not necessarily a common one.

context, this prohibition immediately invokes the historical fear of counting Jews culminating in the *Shoah*, where numbers tattooed on forearms were a part of the literal and extreme dehumanization of Nazi bureaucracy and the Final Solution.

The law finds its origin in the desert because there is no more concrete expression of regaining one's humanity than the foundational event of Judaism: Exodus, most fully expressed in the *Pesach* (Passover) ritual.³³ *Pesach*, the most widely celebrated of Jewish holidays, commemorates the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt, from slavery to freedom.³⁴ The first night of the seven-day festival is observed through the *seder* meal. The *seder*, a tradition dating back millennia, consists of an ordered series of rituals, each with an extensive commentary and debate on their respective and relational meanings.³⁵ Accompanying the *seder* is a book called the *haggadah*, which guides the community through the steps of the *seder* with biblical texts, stories, songs, and rabbinical commentary.³⁶

The Hebrew word *seder* means "order", and yet the prescribed order of the *seder* through the *haggadah*, we would argue, is not a constraint upon the uniqueness of persons in their experience of the ritual.³⁷ Rather, it is a pedagogical frame to relate important lessons on the meaning of freedom within the Jewish community. The pedagogy of the *seder* is overt, containing explicit instructions on teaching children to engage with the *seder* on their own terms over the many hours during which each person around the table takes their turn reading aloud from the *haggadah*.³⁸ One of the key ways in which this is achieved is through the asking of questions. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov writes, "...we delay the recital of the *haggadah* [through songs] to prompt the children to ask questions about the unusual ceremonies that we perform. We strive to arouse their curiosity so that when we retell the story of Exodus, they will pay close attention and absorb its message."³⁹ Rabbi Kitov is referring to one of the first songs of the night, in which the youngest child at the table sings the question: "Why is this night different from all other nights?"

Ideally, the *seder* should be a movement through the prescribed rituals that includes at least four cups of wine and several rather unusual snacks before the main meal, punctuated by robust debates and rigorous interrogation of the practice, the story, and the commentaries. The mandate of questioning, however, is not without its limits.⁴⁰ One of the songs in the *haggadah* tells the story

³³ The commemoration of Exodus is so important that it is one of two events explicitly remembered in the *Kiddush* (blessing over the wine). The other is the creation of the world.

³⁴ Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know about the Jewish Religion, its People, and its History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 641.

³⁵ Eliyahu Kitov, *The Book of Our Heritage: The Jewish Year and its Days of Significance* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1997), 585.

³⁶ While *haggadot* across geographic and sectarian traditions are not identical by any measure, there are significant commonalities to be found within a relatively broad section of the global Jewish community. That being said, most of the sources cited here are of Ashkenazi origin. Burton herself is of mixed Ashkenazi and Mizrahi heritage.

³⁷ As Rabbi Kitov explains, "...each mitzvah should be performed separately, in the proper sequence and at the proper time. They therefore established an order of service for the Seder that has been followed throughout the generations and should not be changed." Kitov, *The Book of Our Heritage*, 584.

³⁸ As Maimonides says, "It is a mitzvah to tell one's children even if they do not ask, for the verse states: "And you shall tell your son." The singular is used – "son," and not "sons" – to teach us that a father should explain to each child, on his own level of understanding." Kitov, *The Book of Our Heritage*, 614.

³⁹ Kitov, *The Book of Our Heritage*, 588.

⁴⁰ Rabbi Kitov notes, "If one has no children, his wife should ask him [why things are done differently at the Seder]. If he is unmarried, then they [the people sitting around the table] should ask each other, "Why is this night different?" – even if they are all wise [and know the reason]. And if he is alone, he should ask himself." Kitov, *The Book of Our Heritage*, 614-615.

of the Four Sons. The first is the wise son, whose questions relate to the laws of *Pesach*. The second is the wicked son, who asks why the *seder* is celebrated at all.⁴¹ The third is the simple son, who asks what the *seder* and celebrations are. The fourth son does not know how to ask a question.

It is the story of the wicked son that illuminates the importance of the primary performance (and *mitzvah*) of *Pesach*: not just to tell the story of Exodus, but to teach the story to each of your children not as abstract history, but as a personal memory of liberation: “Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt.” The wicked son’s question is wicked not because he dares to ask a challenging question, but because he asks, “What is [the purpose of] this [*seder*] for you?” The *haggadah* prescribes the following response: “He says ‘to you,’ but not to him! By thus excluding himself from the community he has denied that which is fundamental.”⁴² The parent is instructed to answer: “It is because of you, my son, that we were driven out of Egypt, that we fled for our lives—so that you could live to see this day! Matzah and all the service that surrounds it is meant specifically for you. It is the sign of the miracle that was performed on your behalf.”⁴³

This reality is traditionally meant to be taken literally and concretely. Beyond the sharing of the meal (*shulchan orech*, meaning “the set table”), most of the rituals are designed to recreate the experience of oppression and liberation. Bitter herbs are consumed to relate the bitterness of slavery, with many traditions including salt water to symbolize tears. The *matazah* (unleavened bread) is the tasteless cracker that demonstrates the speed at which the Hebrews were forced to leave, in that they did not have time to allow the bread to rise. It is also called *lechem oni* (“bread of poverty”).

While Jews taste the pain of slavery, *Pesach* is fundamentally a celebration of liberation. In Burton’s own family, the singing gradually increases in volume as the night goes on, often in proportion to the volume of wine consumed. Jews relax in the joy of their freedom; one does not pour one’s own drink at a *seder*, and it is customary to recline or lean to the left as a symbol of affluence. The power of this story lies in the fact that the community, as Jews, are a part of the tradition through shared memory and practice. Its power also stems from the constant relevance of a story of oppression to a people who have experienced and witnessed it in many forms.⁴⁴ As Rabbi Kitov explains, “The power of the narrative is so great that all sons – wicked and wise, simple and

⁴¹ It is useful to note that the Mishna distinguishes between wicked and evil as: “A wicked person’ is someone who transgresses the laws between man and God, but is pleasant to others. ‘An evil, wicked person’ is someone who is also hurtful to people.” Therefore, the use of the word “wicked” in relation to the son is linked more closely with admonishment than serious moral condemnation. (Lau, *Rav Lau on Pirkei Avos*, 62.)

⁴² Kitov, *The Book of Our Heritage*, 617.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 623.

⁴⁴ This becomes yet more concrete in historical context. Howard Cooper, in “Tales of Freedom and Imagination,” describes examples of how the *haggadah* has been reinterpreted to address crises facing the Jewish community such as blood libel following the Crusades and throughout the Middle Ages, widespread anti-Semitism, genocide, and assimilation. In recent decades, it has been re-represented to support American nationalism, anarchism, communism, Yiddish culture, Zionism, liberation theology (particularly black liberation theology), feminism, Buddhism, vegetarianism, and many more (Howard Cooper, “Tales of Freedom and Imagination,” *Jewish Quarterly* 59, vol. 1 (2012): 16-18.). Rabbi Joseph Telushkin notes that the *Pesach* phrase, “Let my people go!” was a slogan for Jews in the Soviet Union campaigning for the right to emigrate to Israel (Joseph Telushkin, *Biblical Literacy* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997)). “They all,” Cooper points out, “engage with the underlying ethos of *Pesach* as the festival of freedom. The core liturgical texts and rituals often remain the same – a testimony to the enduring potency of the slavery/freedom archetype in the Jewish psyche and how it is rooted in the language of traditions” (Howard Cooper, “Tales of Freedom and Imagination,” *Jewish Quarterly* 59, vol. 1 (2012): 19.)
<http://jewishquarterly.org/2012/04/tales-of-freedom-and-imagination/>

unaware of what to ask – are transformed and together will join their fathers in singing and praise to God.”⁴⁵

Eucharist

The Greek etymological meaning of *eucharistia* is thanksgiving or giving thanks. The word refers broadly to the sacramental bread (or host) and wine (mixed with water) that is blessed, consecrated, broken, and consumed during the liturgy of the Eucharist that takes place during the celebration of the Mass.⁴⁶ The liturgical form of the Mass sets the movements and prayers for the ritual. This liturgical ceremony is for the purposes of prayer and worship, which is also a fundamental form of mystagogy.⁴⁷

One of the highest liturgical antiphons of the liturgy of the Eucharist, said or sung by the celebrant just after the consecration prayers over the bread and wine is “Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith.” The Catholic congregation responds with these words: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” As this ritual shows, the heart of the Eucharist is the *mysterium tremendum*, the unspeakable, unknowable, and inexpressible divine reality affirmed by the mysteries of Christ’s past death, present resurrection, and future coming.

Along with the mystical and mystagogical senses of Eucharist, the Eucharist is also the most concrete and direct encounter the faithful can have with Christ, by eating his body and drinking his blood (based on the “I am the bread of life” passage in the Gospel of John).⁴⁸ The Eucharist is consecrated every day of the liturgical year, except for Good Friday. Because of overlapping time zones, it is often said that Mass is always being celebrated across the planet, and this fact adds to the idea that the liturgy does not end in Mass – it extends across all time, pointing toward its more radical sense of being eternal. Some even pray the “Liturgy of the Hours” which puts this eternal reality into hourly practice. There are two days of the year where the Eucharist is explicitly memorialized in the liturgical calendar: on Holy Thursday, which recalls the Last Supper where the Eucharist is instituted by Christ, and Corpus Christi Sunday, which celebrates the Body and Blood of Christ and is often accompanied by public processions.⁴⁹

Even outside of the Mass, the practice of Eucharistic adoration is a popular devotion where the faithful sit, pray, and dwell in the presence of the Eucharist reposed in a tabernacle or exposed in the monstrance (also called an *ostensorium*), which comes from the Latin term *mostrare*, which means to *show*. A monstrance is essentially a showing vessel, to expose the Eucharist for adoration. All the receptacles, rituals, and prayers, from the vessels that hold the Eucharist to the altar where it is blessed, consecrated, and broken, are considered sacramentals, which refers to the idea of *sacramentum*, meaning a *sign* of God’s presence. The Eucharist is also one of the seven sacraments of the Church, and one of the four sacraments of initiation along with baptism, reconciliation, and confirmation. In this way, as we have seen, the Eucharist is both mystically hidden and sacramentally shown, a mystery and a sign, total concealment and absolute revelation.

⁴⁵ Kitov, *The Book of Our Heritage*, 620.

⁴⁶ While Roman Catholics have a particular Eucharistic theology and distinctly Latin Rite, the Eucharist has a place in many Christian churches, especially the Eastern Rites of the Orthodox and Alexandrian churches. For Rocha’s purposes, this sense of Eucharist will be mostly limited to Roman Catholicism, although it is impossible to avoid overlaps.

⁴⁷ Again, mystagogy meaning initiation into mystery.

⁴⁸ John 6:35.

⁴⁹ The account of the Last Supper can be found in all four gospels: Mt. 26:17-30, Mk. 14:12-26, Lk. 22:7-39 and Jn. 13:1-17:26.

The Eucharist is a common meal, prepared at the altar table, with specific and special instruments and rubrics for their care and cleansing. The prayers of preparation recall the Passover meal directly.⁵⁰ The celebrant prays over the bread, “Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.” The congregation responds, “Blessed be God forever.” Over the wine, after mixing it with a dash of water, he prays, “Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.” The faithful again respond “Blessed be God forever.” This is followed by consecration prayers. The Eucharistic meal is consummated in communion, where the Catholic faithful receive and consume the body and blood of Christ.

The sources for Eucharistic liturgy are first and foremost biblical, anchored in Jewish custom because of the historical development of Christianity and, more importantly, its theological patrimony in Judaism. The accounts of the Last Supper in all four gospels and all other Eucharistic mentions in the New Testament are ultimately rooted in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, accounts of miracles during the public ministry of Christ, like the wedding feast at Cana and feeding of the multitude, prefigure his Eucharistic sacrifice on the Cross, remembered through the instructions of the Last Supper, and his appearances after the Resurrection are confirmed by a blessing and the sharing of a meal. The resurrected Christ does not appear as a scholar of the law; he comes to share a simple meal.

Another example from scripture might make this point more clearly. In final chapter of Luke’s gospel, we find Jesus appearing to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus as they lament the loss of their teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had thought to be the messiah. The resurrected Jesus joins and converses with them unannounced, using the prophets to argue that the death of Christ was necessary and not final. After all these dialectical and revolutionary words, the disciples still do not recognize Jesus. After he agrees to stay with them for the evening they still do not see with whom they truly speak. His disciples do not recognize him until he takes bread, blesses and breaks it, and shares it with them, and then disappears—after which the two disciples return immediately to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. As the apostles stand talking about the appearance of Jesus on the road to Emmaus, Jesus again appears in their midst and greets them saying, “Peace be with you!” The apostles are terrified, thinking they are seeing a ghost; even after Jesus tells them to look at the wounds on his hands and feet they still stand before him dumbfounded. It is not until Jesus asks, “Do you have anything to here to eat?”— to which they give him a piece of fish, and he eats it before them – that they recognize he is real.⁵¹

The Meal

As we have seen, Freire’s sense of communion in *Pedagogia do Oprimido* is made within a religious and even cultural Eucharistic imaginary.⁵² Benedict is also explicitly Eucharistic in *On*

⁵⁰ As such, while the Jewish tradition informs the Christian (e.g. Jewish commentaries on Passover are often relevant for Christian understanding of the Eucharist), the reverse is not necessarily true. This is an issue of chronology and divergence in the traditions.

⁵¹ Luke 24:13-43

⁵² A close reader of Freire will find an overtly liturgical structure to *Pedagogia do Oprimido* identical to the Mass: beginning with a penitential rite, followed by the liturgy of the Word, followed by the liturgy of the Eucharist, which ends in communion (i.e., the reception and consumption of the Eucharistic meal). Freire’s repeated calls for “communion with the popular masses” measure and even limit “revolutionary action.” The sign of love for Freire is, ultimately, manifest in communion, an image and figure of speech profoundly Eucharistic and set within numerous

Conscience, and his sense of the Eucharist is also radically educational, situating his thoughts within the “original encounter” with Jesus by his disciples and to the disciples as teachers of other teachers.⁵³ The continuation of this point carries into the more general sense of the universality of the *eros* of the meal—and its educational disclosures. Benedict directly addresses the Eucharistic teaching that happens “in constant dialogue from *within* and *without*” as follows:

The original encounter with Jesus gave the disciples what all generations thereafter receive in their foundational encounter with the Lord in baptism and the Eucharist, namely, the new anamnesis of faith, which unfolds, like the anamnesis of creation, in constant dialogue between *within* and *without*. In contrast to the presumption of gnostic teachers, who wanted to convince the faithful that their naive faith must be understood and applied much differently, John could say, You do not need such instruction; as anointed ones (baptized ones) you know everything (see 1 John 2:20).⁵⁴

While Benedict writes in an explicitly Catholic context, his analysis is confined neither by Catholicism nor Hellenistic tradition; instead, it extends much further. The encounter with God, or the spark of divine love ever reaching outward, is found within. And yet, that love finds its fulfilment outwards in communion with others. It is between these spaces that freedom⁵⁵ is negotiated, between our engagement with the divine presence and our embeddedness within our communities and traditions. With an essentially erotic foundation, the ties that bind us through our interrelational experience of community in truth set us free to love.

This is a far cry from the Christian, Pauline concept of *agape* (i.e., to will the good of the other)⁵⁶ since the order and logic of *agape* is broken by the oppression that initiates the relation. Freire’s paradox of love is revealed through *eros* simply because *agape* is insufficient; there are no moral demands here to will the good for the other when the other is my oppressor. Yet, precisely because of the absurdity of this immense risk to love the other who does not will *my* good, we find *eros* – the structure beyond *agape* that determines love and dislove in Freire’s analysis. In other words, the “love” we encounter within a Freirian system of oppression is more easily, albeit wrongly, rationalized through *agape* than *eros*, because it is easy to build hierarchies around it and empty the paradoxical content of love itself into a facile sense of peace.⁵⁷ The radical Freirian call to risk a revolutionary gesture of love is a response to the erotic demand of being from which we find our ontological vocation to *be more*.

As such, Freire and Benedict’s diagnosis of the same fundamental problem of objectification, with profound and timely educational applications and implications, share an erotic

ecclesial sources. Indeed, it may even be said that in Freire’s constant call to communion we find a Eucharistic theopoetics.

⁵³ Benedict also has fuller-length theological treatments of the Eucharist, such as *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000) and *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

⁵⁴ Ratzinger, *On Conscience*, 35.

⁵⁵ It is no coincidence that this tension is set up in Passover, the festival of freedom, or the Eucharist that is modelled upon it. Nor is it coincidental that Liberation Theology, for which Freire is an influential thinker, turns primarily to Exodus for its theological arguments on oppression and liberation.

⁵⁶ We articulated this distinction between *eros* and *agape* in our previous article, mentioned in the introduction.

⁵⁷ More on this facile sense of peace: “In such situations it is not unusual, then, that man’s search for emotional security becomes one of his fundamental preoccupations. But, as insecure and frightened beings, men run to the mythified and technological world for security. In their relations with the machine, perceiving themselves also almost as machines, men search for the peace which they no longer find in human relationships. As frightened and insecure beings ‘men prefer to return,’ asserts Dr. Xacoby, ‘no longer to the maternal womb but to the mechanical womb, in whose functional exactness they hope to find peace and security.’” Freire, “Education as a Cultural Action,” 10.

root in their prescriptions because they identify objectification as the opposite of *eros*, which refuses to quantify or objectify the infinite and uncontainable beings whom it desires. Benedict's reduction to objectivity is not only the dehumanization or archiving of the persons themselves, but the quantification of what it means to be human and to pursue the "good." There is no formula or equation to be found in response to the ontological vocation to *be more*. As Freire puts it, verbalism (i.e., theory or scholasticism) and activism are never enough on their own. This is not figuring the good out by yourself, nor relying wholly on others. The constant dialogue between *within* and *without* is profoundly dialectical and serves as a critical pedagogical lesson that comes alive, as we have shown, through more than pedagogy. Initiated by the *eros* of divine love embedded ontologically in the heart, we love the other into being through "communion with the popular masses."

The meal, then, is perhaps as close to a universal point of communion as can be found both in the realities of everyday life and the central rituals of religions and cultures far beyond Judaism and Roman Catholicism. Without communion with the popular masses, without the willingness to eat and meet each other as unique and irreducible persons, dialectical and revolutionary actions remain insufficient. Here we see a profound weakness and failure of the legacy of Anglophone critical pedagogy. While the action of *agape* is what reaches out to the other, it lacks the spark of *eros* we find in the phenomenology of the meal. The meal is one path to enable Freire's revolutionary love found in *eros* and Benedict's reminder of the divine spark that sets the good aflame in our hearts.

This folk phenomenological sense of education offers educators a reminder of that most basic human encounter that happens daily in schools, towns, and homes. The simple placement of cookies and tea on a table improves the atmosphere and mood of a meeting. The sharing of conversation over lunch or dinner creates a relationship that cannot be replicated in a sterile environment, where the primal fullness of the human person is suppressed. Lively discussion and investigation over food and drink, even or especially in a classroom, brings us closer together. Are we willing to listen and respond to the erotic demand? We cannot ignore the spark present at the table if we want to transform what transpires at the desk.