

EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY AND EUCHARISTIC ORIGINS *(continued)*

Part 2

How, then, are the convictions which have been claimed to lie behind the doctrines of the Eucharistic Sacrifice and of the Real Presence related to the probable intentions of Jesus at the Last Supper? The exegetical thicket which must be pierced in the temerarious but necessary³⁴ task of discerning those intentions is dense and intractable, and in a brief treatment one may be forgiven the use of an axe.

It will be assumed that Jesus did not expect a long interval, if indeed he expected one at all, between his death and the arrival of the Kingdom. His actions and words at the Table are therefore to be interpreted solely with reference to their immediate context in the events of the night before he suffered. The command to repeat the rite is secondary, and the term 'Institution Narrative' a misnomer.³⁵

Secondly, discussion of the interpretative words of Jesus – which are taken, in their briefest form, to be historical – will be limited to the Word over the Bread, since at present there is no way of being sure which of the two oldest forms of the Word over the Cup (I Cor. 11:25 and Mark 14:24) is the more likely to represent what Jesus said. This apparently cavalier procedure, indefensible in any more extended treatment, may be justified by the consideration that the Word over the Cup – even though in all probability separated in time from the Word over the Bread by the entire duration of the meal³⁶ – either reinforced or supplemented³⁷ the Word over the Bread, and obviously in no sense qualified or diminished the latter's force. Nor is it proposed to reopen the question of the Aramaic or Hebrew expression which may be held to underlie Paul's and Mark's *soma*.³⁸ Our purpose will be simply to ask to what extent the intention of the historical Jesus, as enigmatically communicated in the word and the gesture, can be seen to have given rise to the interpretative development of which I Cor. 10:16 and 11:26, and the whole doctrinal sequel from these passages, are the legitimate expression.

Both what was done with the Bread and what was said over it communicated in two senses of the word. Jesus was signifying something, and it is clear that what he was signifying was the meaning, in the first place, of his death. The breaking up of the hard *mazzoth* and the distribution of its fragments were an eloquent sign both of the approaching death itself and of the intention of Jesus' delivering

himself up to that death for the benefit of the little company reclining around the table. Perhaps, indeed, it was not simply for their benefit. Perhaps the disciples were meant to be not only the beneficiaries of but also – for the two possibilities are not quite mutually exclusive – participants in the martyrdom Jesus was about to undergo. This suggestion,³⁹ however, attractive as it is, must remain hypothetical. What is important is that, whether it was intended to convey the meaning of Christ's death as vicarious, or was a way of confronting the Twelve (or the Eleven) with the grim invitation, at this last moment, to take up the cross with their Master, the acted parable of the broken and distributed *mazzoth* and the word which accompanied it constituted a uniquely memorable action. It combined the most completely familiar – the ritual breaking of bread which was the normal opening of any meal – with the utterly unexpected and almost incomprehensible. Something which, for the disciples of Jesus, had already become intimately associated with his manner of presiding (as he doubtless did) at the fellowship meals which had been so characteristic of the ministry, was now joined with the assurance of his self-deliverance to them and for them with a completeness which was overwhelming. We may fairly claim that Jesus was bestowing on the act of breaking the Bread a significance going beyond symbolism, in order that, for so long or short a time as might still remain before the End, the disciples might know at the deepest level, and appropriate, what he was about to do for them.

The 'convention', then – for want of a better word – by which the eucharistic rite in itself (probably without any explicit allusion to the death of Jesus⁴⁰) signified for both Paul and the Corinthians the death of Jesus – and did so so completely that to celebrate it was to proclaim that death – was continuous with the intention of Jesus himself in concentrating the meaning of what he was about to undergo in his two distinctive actions at the Last Supper. It is the inward, inherent 'nexus' between the Cross and the Eucharist implied by this 'convention' that constitutes the essential content of the doctrine of Eucharistic Sacrifice.

What may be said, along similar lines and with the same caution, about the doctrine of the Real Presence as it has been discussed above? The following may be suggested. The meaning of the Word over the Bread was surely by no means exhausted in its allusion to the imminent death of Jesus. Both the gesture (as we have already noticed) and the word have their wider context in the whole of Jesus' short ministry to the '*am-ha-aretz*' ('peasant', but an expression carrying 'in addition to the expected implication the stigma of a religiously uneducated person'⁴¹ and specifically of one who did not observe the Pharisees' unwritten interpretations of the Torah, and who in many cases transgressed the Torah itself). The meals which

Jesus shared with them must have formed a quite distinctive feature of life lived in his company,⁴² and the last of these meals (for most if not all of the disciples were no doubt themselves 'am-ha-aretz) naturally recalled to mind both the earlier ones and the menacing hostility they had aroused.⁴³ May it, then, have been part of the significance of the breaking and distribution of the Bread, together with the word uttered at the same time, that the whole of what Jesus had been doing during the brief itinerant period in Galilee (and perhaps in Judea) had been given, as in his ministry so now in a different and final way in his death, for the sake of the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' whom the Pharisees so bitterly despised? It was for their sake that he had incurred the latter's opposition, and it was for their sake, therefore, in a quite specific sense, that his death was brought about. The gesture and the word signified the self-commitment of Jesus, in life as it was shortly to be in death, to those 'Jews who had made themselves Gentiles'⁴⁴ who were the forerunners of the multitudes of Gentiles in the proper sense to whom the preaching of the Gospel was so soon to be largely directed. The significance of the action and its interpretation related not only to what was about to happen but also to the intention, the total self-dedication to men and women in need of salvation, which had made that foreseen outcome inevitable. *Non mors placuit*, said St. Bernard, *sed voluntas ipsius morientis*. It was that 'will of him who died', self-surrendered to the Father for the sake of those he had gathered around him, that was signified in the breaking and distribution of Bread. The little ceremony enacted the 'for your sake' which the tradition so soon made explicit. And since that 'for your sake' had been the caption over the whole ministry of Jesus, the ceremony signified something about the living Man and not only about the meaning of his death.⁴⁵ The *purpose* of his presence in the disciples' midst was declared in the uniquely pregnant action.

IV

The following, then, is perhaps as plausible a reconstruction as any could be of the development by which Jesus' actions and words at the Last Supper provided after Easter the germ of the first Christians' interpretations of their corporate meals, and so ultimately, through a route of which we can observe in I Corinthians a vital and very early section, of the two doctrines we have been considering. During the remarkably few years following the Resurrection in the course of which Christianity was created – almost totally hidden from us as they are – the disciples assimilated their experience of Jesus' exaltation. They reflected on the meaning of that continuation of his own preaching to which they were so quickly committed.⁴⁶ They began to celebrate again, in expectation of the End, the common meal which

Jesus had shared with them during his earthly life-time. It was natural that in doing so they should remember the special character of the last of those earlier occasions. In connection with this remembering, no doubt, narratives which explained that special character were formed, in more than one of the local communities,⁴⁷ perhaps principally for the instruction of neophytes. It was natural, too, that in retrospect they should see in the actions in relation to the Bread and the Cup a significance which was new and yet continuous with the intention of Jesus.

At the Last Supper, Jesus had made the familiar rituals of every fellowship meal into signs intended to convey (possibly) the real meaning of all such meals enjoyed during his ministry – of which they formed such an eloquent symbol – and certainly the meaning of the death to which (in a sense⁴⁸) they had committed him. The signs expressed and embodied that spending of self on behalf of the lost which had motivated both his ministry and his acceptance of the certain prospect of death. In retrospect upon those signs as then given, but still more in reflection upon the renewal and continuation of the common meals under the new conditions created by the first Easter, the disciples found that the breaking of the Bread and the saying of grace over the Cup that was to be shared interpreted for them, in the terms of words which they knew Jesus to have uttered, the meaning of his death. What they did at table was both commemoration and interpretation of the very recently past Event. But it was more than that. Jesus was now vindicated and exalted. The self-giving to the point of death which they commemorated was the act of One now again accessible to them, and an act crowned with manifest fruits in the Spirit-endowed life of the Church. Jesus' intention 'to seek and to save', at whatever cost, was now being served by the apostolic work of the first preachers of the post-Easter Gospel. The rites with the Bread and the Cup must, almost inevitably, have taken on a significance that was more than retrospective (and more, too, than a simple exultation in the prospect of the coming Kingdom⁴⁹). These rites had been from the start, and remained (as they still do) the focal point, the expression and also the occasion for the deeper realization,⁵⁰ of discipleship; and discipleship was above all a relationship of the greatest possible intimacy, involving common destiny, with Jesus as Lord. Even if such evidence as is available suggests that, at the beginning, the exaltation of Christ was often conceived in terms of an absence in Heaven until the time of the Parousia,⁵¹ it is none the less hard to resist the sense that the renewed fellowship-meal must from the first have provided a complementary awareness of Christ as present and accessible within the common life of the Church. Christ as Lord communicated himself to his Church within history as well as being poised above history, as the Church's

advocate, in readiness to bring about her final vindication.

It is reasonable to believe that this growing appreciation and penetration of the meaning of the Supper, in a manner which remained loyal to the intentions of Jesus in the Upper Room, are the ultimate source of Paul's doctrine of the Eucharist. Jesus' effective presence was uniquely experienced during the re-enactment of the two simple rituals with the Bread and the Cup (which thereby acquired a derived sanctity in which the interpretative words of Jesus took on a new meaning); and, at the same time, the rituals commemorate his death in a way which repristinated the sacrificial intention which they had been employed to signify. In turn, Paul's doctrine, and the understanding of the Eucharist that he could presuppose in formulating it, lie at the root of the whole subsequent development.

Manifestly, this sketch rests on a series of assumptions all in varying degrees insecure. A tradition of belief and interpretation has had to be traced through a period about which our ignorance is almost total. Moreover, even the most faithful interpretation always imports something new, and thereby exposes those who accept it to the risk of an interruption in the essential continuity of intention, so that what is done or believed is largely or wholly different from the practice and faith which were its origin. This essay has tried to argue that this was not the case in the present instance. Eucharistic theology has retained, in spite of adverse pressures, a genuine continuity with the origins of the Eucharist. It is a continuity grounded in the intention of Jesus and in the intention of God Himself for the rescue of men, as these intentions have been perceived and responded to in faith.

NOTES TO PART 2

34. N. Pittenger prefaces his discussion of the New Testament origins of the doctrine of the Eucharist – with the conclusions of which the present essay is largely in agreement – by a denial of the *necessity* of finding in the historical origins of the rite the meaning which later tradition gave it: to believe otherwise, he says, is to commit the 'genetic fallacy' (*The Christian Sacrifice* (New York, 1951), pp. 29ff). He is right to the extent that a 'valid and proper expansion' (p. 30), or as Schillebeeckx would more precisely say 'explicitation', does not mean a breach in continuity of intention. Yet there is more than a hint here of what might be justly called modernism. Those to whom we transmit the Christian understanding of the Eucharist may be less ready than some of us are to trust the Church, and they have the right to be shown (as Professor Pittenger himself proposed to do) – at least as far as the evidence allows – just what is the extent of the Church's fidelity to Jesus in this matter.
35. It is hoped that these somewhat apodeictic statements will be felt to represent a view of Jesus' own viewpoint in relation to eschatology which, with one notable exception, would find fairly wide agreement among students of the New Testament. The exception is J. A. T. Robinson's view in *Jesus and his Coming* (London, 1957), that Jesus expected a vindication that would follow immediately after his death (p. 81).

36. as stressed by Marxsen, *The Lord's Supper as a Christological Problem* (Philadelphia, 1970), p. 6. In very brief summary, Marxsen claimed that the Eucharist originated in the meals eaten with the disciples by Jesus during his ministry, was revived and continued after his death, and only then invested, in the course of at least two parallel developments now to be traced in the Pauline and Marcan versions of the Supper respectively, with an interpretation which related the meal to the death of Jesus. Not only the interpretative words, but even the dating of the Supper on the eve of the Crucifixion, are secondary features expressing this interpretation. A short essay on the Eucharist by Marxsen is available in English in R. R. Williams (ed.), *Word and Sacrament*, S.P.C.K., Theological Collections 10 (London, 1968). It is followed, in that collection, by a short criticism by the editor, given by him as chairman at the Anglican-Lutheran conference of 1966 to which Marxsen was a delegate. (The Bishop of Leicester* also presided over the colloquium at which the present paper was delivered.) Many of Marxsen's claims remain persuasive, despite the unacceptability of the post-resurrection origin which he assigns to the interpretative words.
37. 'reinforced', if Mark 14. 24 is taken as the nearer of the two versions to Jesus' *ipsissima verba*; 'supplemented', if I Cor. 11. 25 is the better indication Marxsen stresses the difference between a saying about the contents of the Cup and one about the Cup of Blessing as part of a ritual.
38. Obviously, an original *guph* (with meanings, according to Jastrow's *Dictionary of the Targumim*, which include '(1) body, person, self . . . (2) essence, substance') would substantiate the interpretation offered later in this article better than *basar/bisra*, which now seems generally agreed to be the only possible original. It should be noted, however, that J. A. Baker is too sweeping in saying (in *Thinking About the Eucharist*, p. 46), apparently in dependence on Jeremias, that '*guph*', 'in post-biblical Hebrew "body" as opposed to "soul"', is out of the question here': in addition to the evidence used by Jastrow there is now Targum Neofiti to Gen. 47: 18. But the whole discussion of what could or could not be said in a language of which we know as little as we do of Galilean Aramaic in the first century is bound to be tentative.
39. By C. K. Barrett in *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (London, 1967), p. 50.
40. It was argued in the section omitted from the present version of the paper given at Leicester that neither the interpretative words nor a Passion Narrative formed a normal feature of every Eucharist at Corinth or elsewhere. This (as far as an 'institution narrative' is concerned) was the view of A. M. Farrer, 'The Eucharist in 1 Corinthians', in *Eucharistic Theology Then and Now*, S.P.C.K. Theological Collections 9 (London, 1968), pp. 15-25; cp. P. Neuenzeit, *Das Herrenmahl: Studien zur paulinischen Eucharistieauffassung* (München, 1960), pp. 98-100, 132f.
41. G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (London, 1973), p. 54.
42. as finely brought out by N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London, 1967), pp. 102-8, and earlier by H. E. Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* (London, 1965), pp. 306-11 ('Discussion of the concept "fellowship with Jesus"'). Jeremias insists on the importance of these fellowship meals for understanding the Last Supper, art. cit., p. 197.
43. e.g. Mark 2. 16, Luke 15. 1.
44. The phrase was used of the '*am-ha-aretz*' by the Pharisees, Perrin, op. cit., pp. 93f.
45. Thus J. Bonsirven took the word over the Bread to signify '*tout son être divin et humain*', '*Hoc est corpus meum. Recherches sur l'originel araméen*', *Biblica* 29

* Dr. R. R. Williams.

- (1948), p. 217; cp. J. Betz, *Die Eucharistie in der Zeit der griechischen Väter*, II/I, Freiburg im Breisgau (1961), p. 37: 'soma in the original apostolic Supper narrative indicates a whole living person, the man's self participating in bodily existence and thereby exposed to historical limitation (*Geschichtlichkeit*) and transitoriness, the concrete human figure'.
46. A. Strobel and E. Schweizer develop in other directions the large element of continuity between the meaning of discipleship before and after the first Easter: see *The Beginnings of the Church in the New Testament* (Edinburgh, 1970), especially pp. 73-9 and 98-104. It is the essence of the argument being offered at this stage that, if discipleship, both before and after Easter, is above all else a relationship with Jesus, it is likely that, as before, so after Easter, table-fellowship was a principal expression of that relationship.
 47. on the assumption that Mark and Paul, and possibly Luke, conserve liturgical traditions which had undergone separate development from originally separate starting-points.
 48. This is not the place in which to enter the complex discussion of the true reason for Jesus' execution. But a very largely contributory factor, at least, was the alienation of the Pharisees, which may well have been as much exacerbated by Jesus' social commitment to the 'am-ha-aretz as it was by his radical exposition of the Torah.
 49. Lietzmann's well-known distinction between two types of early Eucharist, one being essentially joyful in character while the Pauline one centred on the Cross, surely overlooks the psychological realities.
 50. Cp. the Agreed Statement, paragraph 2: our relationship with God is 'nurtured and deepened through the Eucharist'.
 51. I Thess. 1. 10, and Acts 3. 21 if this speech of Peter may in any way be seen as correctly reflecting the attitudes of the earliest days.

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