

# Towards a Biblical Doctrine of Holy Communion\*

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THE purpose of this paper is to draw attention to a number of modes of thought which are present in the Old Testament, and to argue that these thought-modes were also present in the minds of Jesus and his contemporaries, and that therefore any discussion of the significance of the Lord's Supper must take them seriously into account, especially when we further seek to expound the significance of that institution for the Christian Church in our time.

## I

The most characteristic thought-mode of the Old Testament is surely that God is known by what he has done. Not the phenomenal world of nature but the temporal world of history is the supreme medium of revelation. This does not rule out a valid knowledge of God derived from his handiwork in creation, but it does indicate that such a knowledge is of secondary authority. God is primarily known in event. The prophet Micah cited the Exodus as the great example, and Psalm 78, while giving due prominence to that major event, presents us with a theological interpretation of all Israel's early history.<sup>1</sup>

Alongside this knowledge of God derived from history is the knowledge of God mediated by persons. It may be well to remember that the prophet does not here stand alone—the priest, the wise man, the king are other comparable instances—but the prophet is certainly the prime example. The Book of Deuteronomy expresses succinctly the Old Testament view of the prophet when it records God as saying to Moses: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (Deut. 18:18). Jeremiah similarly bears witness to the prophet's own sense of being charged with the divine self-revelation: "Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, Behold, I have put my words in your mouth" (Jer. 1:9).

A third characteristic thought-mode of the Old Testament is that God enters into a covenant-relationship with men. "I will be their God and they

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1. Cf. Micah 6:4f.; Ps. 135:5-14, and numerous other examples in the Psalter; Deut. 26:1-11.

shall be my people"<sup>2</sup> is the constant summary of this relationship, which obligates the people to their God and the God to his people—however much this latter thought is left inferred and not expressed.<sup>3</sup> This relationship of mutual election needs, however, to be initiated and renewed by some outward act or ritual; a particularly ancient example remains embedded in the Abraham story,<sup>4</sup> but the more usual ratification was a sacred meal.<sup>5</sup>

God is revealed in history and through personality and enters into a reciprocally obligating covenant-relationship with men. These are commonplaces of Old Testament studies, but they are not therefore to be dismissed lightly. They are commonplace because they are fundamental to Old Testament thinking as a whole. Nevertheless, having reminded ourselves of them, we can turn to other, possibly less often remembered aspects of Hebrew thought.

The men of the ancient world were clearly aware of the distinction between the material and the immaterial. Isaiah, for example, could say:

The Egyptians are men and not gods,  
Their horses are flesh and not spirit.<sup>6</sup>

But for the Hebrews there was no violent dichotomy of the two. The material and immaterial aspects of experience did not have to be divorced from each other and kept in watertight compartments. Rather, the material could be, and in fact generally was, thought of as impregnated and charged with immaterial forces of great potency. The opposed categories (so basic to any understanding of the sacrificial system) of *tame'* (unclean) and *tahôr* (clean) and of *qadhôsh* (holy) and *halîl* (common), presuppose that the material can be charged with immaterial qualities, and that these can indeed be transmitted from one material object to another. Haggai, for example, evokes a decision of priestly *torah*, whereby a man impregnated with uncleanness by touching a dead body and then coming into contact with food, is held to have transmitted that uncleanness to the food; similarly, the plans in the book of Ezekiel for the building of the Second Temple provide a vestry in which the priests are to unrobe "lest they communicate holiness to the people with their garments" (Ezek. 44:19). We may also recall the potency of Moses' rod,<sup>7</sup> and the disappointing lack of potency of Elisha's staff when it was laid on the dead son of the Shunamite woman (2 Kings 4:31).

In accordance with this same mode of thought we have the careful directions for obtaining and preserving the ashes of the red heifer for use in

2. Cf. Exod. 6:7; Levit. 26:12; Jer. 30:22, 31:33; Ezek. 11:20, 14:11, 36:28; Zech. 8:8, 13:9.

3. On covenants of sovereignty and of parity, cf. G. Mendenhall, in *Biblical Archaeologist*, XVII (1954), p. 55. But note also Ps. 44:17, 26, where the clear implication is that Israel has kept *hesedh* (covenant loyalty), but Yahweh has not.

4. Gen. 15:9–11. Cf. Jer. 34:18. The ass was particularly the covenant-ratifying victim in Mesopotamia, and Hamor (ass) was the name of the Shechemite prince in Gen. 34; Shechem was the centre of a covenant-cult (Judges 9:4).

5. See further below.

6. Isa. 31:3. 'El here is a generic term, parallel to 'adham.

7. Cf. Exod. 4:17 and *passim*; Num. 20:7–9.

purificatory rituals (Num. 19:9). Moreover, the basic tenet of the Levitical system of sacrifices provides very clearly a parallel instance, in that blood of a sacrificial animal was used to effect the purification of the Temple furniture and of the great altar of burnt-offering, as prescribed in the ritual for the Day of Atonement. It is worthy of comment, however, that this blood was never used in physical application to purify men, though its application to persons is provided for in the ordination rites detailed for Aaron and his sons in the Book of Exodus:

Then you shall take part of the blood that is on the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon Aaron, and his garments, and upon his sons and his sons' garments with him: and he and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons' garments with him.<sup>8</sup>

We may sum up our consideration of this mode of Old Testament thought by saying that the material aspect of man's experience can clearly be the medium for the transmission of those immaterial potencies of which he is aware in his day-to-day existence.

Another mode of Hebrew thought which is relevant to our subject is that of the so-called "acted oracle." When the prophet of Yahweh pronounced his divinely inspired message, he not merely announced but ensured that the thing prophesied would happen. The prophetic word was the divine word, and the utterance of it set in motion on the stage of human event the divine activity:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and return not thither, but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;  
it shall not return unto me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.<sup>9</sup>

But sometimes the divine activity was not uttered in words alone, but was also set forth in inspired actions. So Ahijah the Shilonite tore his new cloak into twelve pieces, giving Jeroboam son of Nebat ten (1 Kings 11:29f.); Jeremiah smashed in pieces the earthenware flask in the sight of the elders of Jerusalem (Jer. 19:1f.); and Ezekiel acted out in desperate mime the implacable decision of Yahweh to destroy the guilty city:

And you, O son of man, take a brick and lay it before you and portray upon it a city, even Jerusalem; and put siege works against it and cast up a mound against it; set camps also against it and plant battering rams against it round about. And take an iron plate and place it as an iron wall between you and the city; and set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house of Israel.<sup>10</sup>

In all such prophetic activity the intention was not merely to illustrate or to make more vivid the divine word, but in fact to set it in motion. Just as in a

8. Exod. 29:21.

9. Isa. 55:10f.

10. Ezek. 4:1-3.

missile, the reaction which occurs on a small scale in the detonator triggers off the explosion of the whole deadly machine, so what the prophet by divine command had done on the small scale would shortly take place on the vast.<sup>11</sup>

We may note in passing that this mode of thought and the one previously discussed came vividly together in the Elohist's account of the ratification of the Mosaic covenant.<sup>12</sup> After the terms of the covenant (*i.e.*, the Book of the Covenant, Ex. 20:22-23:33) had been read and agreed, Moses took half of the sacrificial blood and dashed it against the altar, and half he threw over the assembled people. The material, in this case sacrificial blood, is the medium of the immaterial covenantal bond, and the action of splashing it on altar and people alike is closely allied to an acted oracle, in that it effects the unity of God and people in one sacred covenantal society.

Another feature of Old Testament thought which we need to note is the assumption that to eat of the same sacrificed animal is to be bound in bonds of close relationship. We recall the poignant verse:

Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted,  
Who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.<sup>13</sup>

Even a common meal draws men together; but a sacred meal binds man and man in solemn covenant, as when Jacob offered sacrifice and ate bread with Laban and his party to ratify the covenant which they entered into before Yahweh at Galeed (Gen. 31:51-53), or as Moses and Jethro and all the elders of Israel ate together "before God" in the desert (Ex. 18:12). The sacrificed animal was a life, a *nephesh hayyah*, an individual potency; being shared by two who consume it together, it becomes a powerful bond of unity between them. This is true not only of man and man, but also of man and God. The offered life in which mortal and deity have shared binds them in a covenantal unity. Thus, in the Yahwist's account, the covenant between Yahweh and Israel was sealed by seventy elders of Israel going up to Yahweh's dwelling to eat with him there:

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel went up; and they saw the God of Israel and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the children of Israel; they beheld God and ate and drank.<sup>14</sup>

It is this same mode of thought which provides the rationale for the *shelem* or communion-meal type of sacrifice. Part of the animal was, by being burned on the altar, given to God as his share of the victim; part was taken by the priest as his fee; and the rest was eaten at the shrine by the wor-

11. Cf. Elisha's injunction to Joash to help him shoot "Yahweh's arrow of victory" (2 Kings 13:14f.). Because the king struck the ground with the symbolic arrow three times only, the number of factual victories could also be only three.

12. For this analysis of Exod. 24:1-11, cf. A. H. McNeile, *Exodus*, 3rd edit. (Westminster Commentaries, 1931), *in loc.*

13. Ps. 41:9.

14. Exod. 24:9-11.

shippers and their friends (cf. 1 Sam. 2:12-17). The community of God and man was thus actualized, not merely symbolized.

Finally we must pay particular attention to that mode of thought to which the "myth and ritual" school have directed our attention. According to their reconstruction of the New Year Festival, when the myth of creation was recited and the ritual of the primeval battle of the Creator with the forces of Chaos was re-enacted, the victory of Yahweh was renewed and his divine sovereignty was made effective for another year. This ritual was not simply a remembrance of the creation of the world; it was the act of creation's renewal. The divine power which ensures law and order in the cosmos was reasserted and the original moment of creation was renewed, so that this present is identified with primeval time and Yahweh becomes King *now*. "The Lord reigneth" (the opening phrase of Psalms 97 and 99, for example) is not intended as a general statement of an abiding fact, but is rather a cultic cry of coronation whereby Yahweh's kingship is recognized and reconstituted for another year. It should be translated: "Yahweh has become King."<sup>15</sup> Psalm 93 is eloquent of the thought-mode which underlies the whole festival:

Yahweh has become King; he is robed in majesty;  
Yahweh is robed, he is girded with strength.  
Yea, the world is established; it shall never be moved;  
thy throne is established from of old;  
thou art from everlasting.

The primeval act of lordship is now a contemporary truth. The rehearsal of the creative moment *b're'shith* has made that moment a fact of present experience. The famous tag *Urzeit wird Endzeit* can be paralleled by another equally true: *Urzeit wird Nunzeit*, the beginning has become now.

## II

I have taken my examples from the Old Testament with little regard for chronological periods, for (as Pedersen reminded us) the basic thought-modes of the Hebrews are remarkably uniform throughout the whole of the Biblical period. What I want now to emphasize is that there is, in this regard as in so many others, no violent break between Old Testament and New, and that these same mental attitudes persisted among the contemporaries of Jesus. They were therefore the natural ways of thinking of those who sat with him around the table of the Last Supper.

The biblical concept that revelation is primarily through significant events dominated Jewish thinking in the New Testament period as in the Old. Stephen's appeal to history at his trial (Acts 7), Paul's reliance upon history in his sermon in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16f.) and, more significantly, his working around in his Athens speech to historical event after commencing with cosmological and moral considerations (Acts 17:22-31), all indicate the thoroughly Hebraic character of the apostle's

15. Cf. H. Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen* (Göttingen, 1933), p. 95.

thought. The very nature of the apostolic kerygma as isolated by Dodd emphasizes the point. To proclaim an event, the crucifixion of Jesus, as the evident setting forth of God's love and forgiveness for mankind (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:18-24) is clearly to reveal that the New Testament Christians were fundamentally Hebrew in their manner of thinking.

The thought that God is revealed in personality comes to its climax in the New Testament. Indeed, this mode of thinking is taken in the New Testament far beyond what any Old Testament instance can parallel. Whereas the Hebrew prophet claims to be significant because he is cognizant of the divine intention (Amos 3:7), or even because he is the chosen instrument of divine policy (Isa. 49:1-6), but thereafter submerges himself in Yahweh's message, Jesus in all four Gospels is constantly drawing men's attention to himself. He forces himself on their notice, insisting that they make a judgment upon him. "Who do you say that I am?" is the most characteristic of all the Synoptic sayings. John the Baptist wants to know whether Jesus is or is not the Christ, but is told he must decide for himself;<sup>16</sup> a Pharisee in the Temple seeking to know by what authority Jesus acted is similarly told to make his own assessment;<sup>17</sup> and at his trial Jesus would do nothing to help his judges arrive at their verdict—it must be their own judgment entirely.<sup>18</sup> Pilate or High Priest, judge or private individual, each one must make up his own mind and answer for himself. Who is he? This is the all-important question. The person or office of Jesus is in the later New Testament view of more significance than the actual content of his teaching, and we may note that the extrapolation of this mode of thought into the second Christian century results in the Apostles' Creed, which is concerned only with the person and role of Jesus and not at all with his ministry or teaching.

So much is widely and readily agreed. That the other thought-modes we examined are also New Testament ways of thinking is by no means so widely recognized. For the recognition that the material may be impregnated with, or act as a channel for, immaterial potencies, we may recall that Jesus

16. Cf. Matt. 11:2-6.

17. Cf. Matt. 21:23-27; 22:41-45.

18. The enigmatic *su eipas* in answer to the High Priest's question (Matt. 26:64) is interpreted by Mark as an affirmative, but not when the same reply is made to Pilate, for in both Matthew and Mark Pilate regards the reply as no answer, and wonders at the prisoner's legal "failure to plead." Luke follows Mark in assuming that "you say that I am" (Luke 22:70) is an affirmative reply to the High Priest, for he bases the charge of blasphemy on these words only—in Matthew the charge arises out of the reference to the Son of Man being seated at the right hand of God—and yet practically the same reply before Pilate (*su legeis*) is clearly taken as "failure to plead," for Pilate finds no fault in the accused. Had he been understood to answer affirmatively to Pilate's question, there would have been no question about his guilt. It would seem therefore that (a) Jesus used an enigmatic reply to the charges laid against him, neither affirming nor denying; (b) the charge of blasphemy arose out of a reference to the Son of Man; (c) the natural desire of the persecuted Church to record that Jesus made "a good confession" by giving a clear affirmative to the High Priest's question has tended to obscure the real meaning of his reply, which was to this effect: Now you have raised the important question. You said it, not I. And I am not going to answer it, because it is you who have to make the decision. Am I a deluded fool? a dangerous rogue? or someone other?

used his spittle to make clay in order to restore the sight of a man born blind (John 9), and that he and his disciples found no quarrel with the thinking of the woman who believed that to touch but the hem of Jesus' garment would bring her healing (Luke 8:43-44). On the contrary, he says "Your faith has made you well; go in peace." In Acts, we are told that handkerchiefs or aprons which had been in contact with Paul were "carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them" (Acts 19:12). In the case of Peter, it was felt that even his shadow might be effective (Acts 5:15). The important thing of which we should take note is that neither the biblical characters nor the biblical writers scorn such ideas as superstitious or as unworthy of credence.

We noted a special instance of this mode of thought with regard to the blood of sacrificial victims as used in the Levitical cultus. We need here to recall that the sacrificial system was in full and undisturbed operation in Jesus' day and continued so for another forty years, which were the formative years of the Christian Church. So familiar were the contemporaries of Jesus and his immediate followers with this kind of thinking that it is a Christian and not a Jewish document which makes the general assertion: "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood" (Heb. 9:22). Certainly, these notions cannot be banished to the Old Testament as if they had no place in the New.

The concept of the "acted oracle" is represented notably in the New Testament by the much misunderstood incident of the barren fig-tree, in which the wrath of God falling upon an Israel barren of all righteousness is both foretold and ensured by the cursing of the fruitless tree and by its subsequent withering. The interpretation of the miracles of Jesus as "signs" by the Fourth Evangelist is clearly another indication of this same mode of thinking, but the simplest example is provided in the story in Acts, which tells how Agabus took Paul's girdle and bound his feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews of Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles'" (Acts 21:10-11).

The ideas associated with the communion meal persisted very strongly into New Testament times<sup>19</sup> as is illustrated particularly by the great stress laid on the communal meal among the Qumran covenanters.<sup>20</sup> The point needs no emphasizing, however, since the Passover meal itself was in Jesus' day, as before and since, the sufficient illustration.

19. The notion of *haburoth* as religious societies somewhat akin to the Methodist societies in the eighteenth-century Church of England (cf. G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* [Westminster, 1945], p. 50), having a weekly supper with its own particular rules and ritual, is strongly contested by J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Oxford, 1955), p. 25, and can no longer be cited as evidence.

20. Postulants were not admitted to the communal meal until the completion of their second year in the community (*Manual of Discipline*, col. VI, lines 20-21). Cf. also Josephus on the Essenes (*Wars*, II, viii, 7). Concerning the initiate he says: "And before he is allowed to touch their communal food (*tēs koinēs trophēs*) he is obliged to take tremendous oaths." Earlier he remarks that the Essenes approach the refectory "as a sacred shrine," wearing special garments which they lay aside again when the communal meal is over "as holy vestments."

The Passover was, however, in Jesus' day more than simply a fellowship meal, for the Temple was still standing, and the passover lamb could still be offered and in fact constituted the main item for the meal. This lamb was of a sacrificial character, since it was killed in the Temple and its blood was poured out at the foot of the great altar. Thus the *shelem* character of the Passover was still preserved, in that in this meal God and man shared in the same offered life and were reunited in the covenantal bond. It was a fellowship meal not only of man with man but also of man with God.<sup>21</sup>

This aspect of Passover was further emphasized by the fact that then as now it was a "memorial" feast. It "remembered" the first Passover at the time of the Exodus, but in accordance with Hebrew modes of thought this was no mere act of nostalgic recollection, but was a recalling of that great act of deliverance out of the past into contemporary experience. The experience of redemption from Egypt was relived and the covenant with Israel was reinstated. As the book of Deuteronomy emphasized in the seventh century B.C., the covenant first entered into in the thirteenth century is perennially contemporary: "Not with our fathers did Yahweh make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day." The four-fold emphasis hammers for our attention: "us, here, alive, this day." This emphasis is still prominent in the Passover Haggadah today: "Every man in every generation is bound to look upon himself as if he personally had gone forth from Egypt. . . . It is not only our fathers that the Holy One redeemed but ourselves also did he redeem with them." The "memorial" act in the New Testament as in the Old is a recalling, a reliving of the original act: *Urzeit wird Nunzeit*, the first time becomes now.

### III

It is now time to relate these ideas to the institution of the Christian Eucharist.

"Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." I have taken the Pauline version of the words of institution, as being probably the oldest. Against the background of our previous discussion, I wish to make these observations:

1. The bread, representing the body of Jesus, is solemnly broken. This is fully in accord with Biblical ideas of the acted oracle. As Ahijah's cloak represented Israel torn into twelve parts, so this bread broken represents the destruction of Jesus' body, *but does not merely represent*; it "announces oracularly," it ensures, it determines the future event, just as Jeremiah's breaking of the bottle made certain the approaching doom of Jerusalem.

21. Exod. 13:6 describes it as *Hag la'dhonai*. Deuteronomy tried to emphasize its sacral character by centralizing this celebration, along with all the other cultic acts (Deut. 16: 5f.), and we may think that the "plate for Elijah" in the modern celebration is a vestigial memory of the same thought.



The death of Jesus was "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).

2. Bread is for eating. Matthew inserts the words "Take, eat" and is here clearly true to the intention of Jesus. At the time of Passover, the thought of eating is indissolubly connected with the thought of eating the Passover lamb—whether this meal was (as I think) the Passover meal or not.<sup>22</sup> Jesus is here putting himself in the place of the Passover lamb.

3. "Do this in remembrance of me." The purpose of the Passover meal was to enact a memorial in the Biblical sense—that is, to recall the original moment of deliverance and make it contemporary, and thus to renew the covenant for another year. By making himself the Passover symbol, Jesus is declaring the breaking of his body to be the new act of deliverance which the new Passover is to commemorate. The act of commemoration will recall that act of deliverance as always contemporaneous, and will institute perennially the new covenant of God and his people.

4. The death of Jesus thus supersedes the Exodus as the outstanding event in history whereby God is revealed to man. This can only be at all thinkable if we accept the New Testament evaluation of the person and rôle of Jesus. If Jesus is God uniquely revealed in personal terms, then his meaningful death may reveal God as could no other event. Only men who thought in Old Testament modes concerning personality and revelation, and transcended them, could accept that valuation of his death.<sup>23</sup>

5. The cup of wine in the acted oracle of this prophetic moment represents the blood of Jesus, which is now determined as that which will be shed on behalf of his followers. In the Passover context, blood is primarily that which constitutes the covenant, and is that which is the material means of immaterial realities. Paul, Mark, and Matthew, the only authorities which mention the cup, are all agreed that its association is with the idea of covenant.<sup>24</sup> The Christian Passover is primarily concerned to renew the covenant which is made possible by the death of Christ. The "memorial" of that death serves to renew the Covenant whenever it is celebrated.

We may conclude this section with a consideration of the Lucan and Johannine interpretations of the Eucharist. The Lucan account mentions only the bread. The reference to the earlier cup is clearly not to the eucharistic cup and the manuscripts which do introduce a second and eucharistic cup are in my opinion conflated with the Pauline account.<sup>24a</sup> For Luke (who probably was not so well versed in Old Testament thought as the authors of I Corinthians, Mark and Matthew, and to whom cultic associations therefore did not so readily occur) the only tradition is of the bread, and this he relates to the thought of the eschatological feast. His

22. Jeremias (*op. cit.*, pp. 14–57) strongly and cogently supports the identification. See also his bibliographical note (p. 177f.).

23. As Luther saw so clearly, the death of Christ must be viewed in the light of his person, and his person in the light of his death. Cf. H. R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh, 1913), p. 231f.

24. It will be noted that the associations of the term "blood" with the idea of cleansing are not in the forefront of the New Testament accounts of the Last Supper.

24a. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, defends the longer text, but not I think convincingly.

characteristic name for the Eucharist is "the breaking of bread." These Lucan views might well represent a Syrian (largely Gentile) Christian attempt to interpret the institution in the light of their own background and interests. The Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, omits the whole account of the institution, but offers instead a midrash on the feeding of the five thousand, in which the manna of the wilderness wanderings following the Exodus is taken as a "type" of the eucharistic bread and the exposition which follows is in terms of hunger and nutrition, and the blood is briefly introduced as a source of renewal of vitality (John 6:53-56). Thus neither the Lucan nor the Johannine interpretations use the primary associations of the institution but take up a secondary range of ideas, to which the symbolism very naturally lends itself.

#### IV

The fact that Luke and John thus offer divergent expositions of the Lord's Supper from those of the earlier Pauline-Marcian accounts leads me to suggest that the very reason why Jesus gave us no book nor law, nor body of teaching, not even a constitution, but only a ritual, might well be because he wanted to leave his followers something which was capable of being viewed in many ways and with many emphases. If that is so, it is not merely true that there is in the Christian Church no agreed doctrine of Holy Communion, but it is also highly desirable that there never should be. Jesus said, "do this in remembrance of me", and we do it each with our variant understanding within the main lines laid down by the ritual and the words of institution. Acts and words guarantee sufficient unity, but the interpretations may legitimately vary widely. Thus we would do well, it seems to me, to remember that while the words "*merely* memorial" are not in the biblical vocabulary, any who approach the celebration of the Lord's Supper as pre-eminently a memorial are, if they understand the biblical sense of that term, very close to the original associations of the ritual. On the other hand, those who stress the eschatological reference of the Eucharist are in the Lucan tradition. Those again who emphasize the act of eating and drinking as a receiving of Christ into the heart are clearly in the Johannine tradition. Those who believe "the sacrifice of the mass" to be a memorial offering of Christ which repeats and is one with the original sacrifice, are remarkably biblical in their sense of the word "memorial," but are much less close to the original institution when they emphasize those expiatory associations of the term "blood" which are not to the fore in original Passover setting of the Lord's Supper. Such views lean on the markedly Hellenistic and quite un-Hebraic exposition of the significance of Christ's death by the writer to the Hebrews, rather than on any biblical account of the Lord's Supper; but at least they do not deviate from the original institution any more seriously than do Luke or John. There are again those who believe that the eucharistic bread and wine, having been consecrated to this high office, become charged with divine significance. Charles Wesley's great *epiklesis* comes to mind:

Come Holy Ghost our hearts inspire,  
 And realize the sign,  
 Thy life infuse into the bread,  
 Thy power into the wine.  
 Effectual let the tokens prove,  
 And made by heavenly art,  
 Fit channels to convey Thy love  
 To every faithful heart.

As we have seen the thought-form that the material may be the medium of the immaterial is to be found clearly present in both testaments, and the belief that the bread and wine may convey the presence of Christ to the faithful is undoubtedly a truly biblical idea.

The table of the Lord stands as always, where Jesus put it, at the centre of the Christian multitude. We look at it from differing points of view, and from very differing backgrounds. We all look through spectacles tinted by varying traditions and loyalties. If there is one place of all places where we should think and let think it is here. For any of us to claim that we, and we only, have the truth *here*, is inexcusable arrogance. When Luther and Zwingli parted company at Marburg in 1529, Christ was indeed crucified afresh, and while we are still divided at his table we deny him daily.

## V

While the foregoing paper completes the task it set for itself, it leaves untouched a secondary question of such significance that it would be culpable to ignore it. How far are these biblical thought-modes an accurate account of metaphysical reality? To put it crudely, is it "true", for example, that bread and wine when consecrated can "convey" Christ?

There are on the contemporary theological scene two major divergent attempts to answer this question, and the former attempt has two notable expressions. The first expression is that of medieval theology and its continuing expression in the Thomism of the Roman Church. By means of Aristotelian categories the Thomistic theology attempts to build a bridge between the symbolism of the Eucharist and the ontological realities of man's experiential world, and it thus arrives at the doctrine of transubstantiation. This doctrine (like its Lutheran parallel of consubstantiation) appears to me to be as devoid of understanding the true nature of biblical thought-forms as would be the attempt to impose the categories of Linnaeus on the highly stylized floral motifs of a medieval tapestry. Just as "there is no way from 'ought' to 'is' which logic has not blocked," so too there is no way whereby the symbolisms of biblical thought can be logically metamorphosed into categories of ontological reality. The second expression of this same answer is that of Bultmann and of Tillich. Both recognize the symbolic character (better perhaps termed "mythic character") of biblical thought, and both attempt to relate it to ontological reality by translating it, feature by feature, into philosophical terms. Tillich discusses this in his little book *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*, which is by way of

being an apologia for the grand attempt he is making in his *Systematic Theology* to translate the Christian myth into philosophically acceptable concepts. Bultmann, again, recognizes the mythic character of biblical thought and translates it (perhaps to nobody's satisfaction but his own) into the terms of existential philosophy.<sup>25</sup> In Tillich, the attempt results in an unsuccessful struggle by philosophical theology to accommodate elements foreign to its own enquiry but integral to the Christian myth (e.g., the "Fall"), and in Bultmann it results not so much in a "de-mythologizing" as in "re-mythologizing," so that we are as far from ontological reality as ever. All these attempts, Thomistic, Tillichian, and Bultmannian, are splendid failures, it seems to me, because they attempt what should not have been attempted—to make the image of the truths reflected in the mirror of myth step out of the frame into the cold light of ontological reality.

The other suggested way of solving the problem is to insist that the biblical myths are the only method of expressing truth which can boast the divine hallmark, and that our task is to live ourselves into "the strange new world of the Bible" and to stay there. This seems to be the summation of the Barthian refusal to countenance a philosophy of religion, and I do not see how Barth can be aggrieved if we group him in this respect with the Fundamentalists and charge him with intellectual obscurantism, and fail him because, in the classic examination-phrase, "he hasn't answered the question."<sup>26</sup>

My own view for what it is worth is that the study of biblical concepts shows that the Christian-biblical myth has to be taken as a whole and that it all adds up to an internally consistent interpretation of man and his place in the universe before God. But if we ask the philosopher (and even more the scientist) to start out from this biblical basis and relate the Christian *Weltanschauung* to his own, he has a right to reply as did the peasant, who was asked the way to Ballymena: "If I were going to Ballymena, I wouldn't start from here." But if the philosopher and the scientist are allowed to start from their own basis of thought they can (and often do) arrive at an account of man's existence which enforces the same moral imperatives and upholds the same sense of values as the Christian. The attempt to relate the human *goals* as envisaged by the philosopher on the one hand and the scientist on the other to the *goals* of Christian living is both legitimate and necessary. The attempt to relate the content of Christian myth to philosophical and scientific accounts of man's existence is on the contrary only to be achieved in terms of analogy and not of identity.

25. Cf. Ian Henderson's valuable monograph, *Myth in the New Testament* (London, 1952).

26. Cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (Naperville, Ill., 1960), p. 101: "One can seriously question whether Barth has solved the problem of history or merely avoided it."