

SYNOPTIC PRESENTATION OF THE EUCHARIST
AS COVENANT SACRIFICE

Bernard Cooke, S. J.

In his book, *Eucharist and Sacrifice*, the Swedish theologian Gustaf Aulén attempts to show that Catholic and Protestant views on the Eucharist are slowly approaching one another.¹ There is, no doubt, some truth to his opinion; but recent studies of Jeremias, Higgins, Leemardt, and Cullmann all manifest a constant, though subtle, adherence to the classic Protestant approach to the Eucharist.² These writers base their rejection of the Catholic view upon an analysis of the NT texts; hence, any furtherance of Catholic-Protestant understanding on the central issue of the Eucharist will be dependent upon Catholic study of these same NT passages.

Much important work in this area has been done in recent years by Catholic theologians such as Betz, Benoit, and Schurmann.³ Building upon these studies, the present article attempts to examine the Synoptic teaching on the Eucharist from just one point of view: Do these Gospels present the Eucharist as a covenant sacrifice? For all its apparent delimitation, this question touches upon several of the key aspects of Christianity: the relation between Old and New Testament, the distinguishing nature of Christianity as a religion the essence of Christian redemption, the nature of the Church--in short, the very issues that separate Catholic from Protestant, and Christian from Jew.

No attempt to study the Synoptic teaching on the Eucharist as covenant can prescind from the OT covenant and Christ's relation to it, since covenant dominated the religious history which is the Old Testament, and Christ is presented by the Synoptic writers as the fulfillment of that history. For that reason, the present study will approach an analysis of the Eucharistic texts by seeing how Jesus as depicted by the Synoptics recapitulates and fulfills, in their various stages of evolution, the priesthood, the Temple, and the sacrifices of Israel.

Fulfillment of the Old Testament Priesthood

The primitive traditions underlying the Pentateuch point towards a certain universalism in the attitude towards sacrifice during the patriarchal period. Abraham and the other patriarchs are described as offering sacrifice that was acceptable to God; but so is Melchizedek, who was not an ancestor of the elected people. There was as yet no unification of the cult, no official priesthood, no central shrine. With the Mosaic covenant began the movement towards nationalism and organization, the designation of a group specially set aside to provide for divine worship, and the beginnings of a prescribed religious ceremonial for Israel as a people--though there was not as yet any noticeable centralization.⁴ This centralization received an important impetus with the Davidic dynasty, the building of the Temple, and the organization of a Temple priesthood and a Temple ceremonial; but this process

of unification was quite slow and may not have been significantly achieved until the reform measures of Josiah in 622.⁵ With the Exile and the post-exilic restoration came the ascendancy of the priesthood, especially the rise to power of the high-priestly family and the final codification of a detailed religious ceremonial centered around the Temple sacrifices.⁶

Accompanying this progressive centralization was an evolution in the idea of the Israelitic priesthood. It would seem that the principal function of the Levites in the early stage of their history was connected with the communication of divine revelation rather than with sacrifice; theirs was the special care of the Ark and the Tabernacle, from which God spoke and directed His people.⁷ This oracular function of the Israelitic priesthood throughout the coming centuries persisted and was gradually concentrated in the office of the high priest (cf. Jn II:51). However, with the increasing centralization of cult, the stabilizing of the Temple ceremonial, and the dominance of the Temple priesthood, the function of sacrifice began to take over as the principal, and finally almost exclusive, role of the priest and Levite; so much so, that another group, the scribes, took over the official interpretation of the Law (the oracular function of the priesthood) and thereby gained a certain priority over the priests.⁸

Christ's relationship to this Israelitic priesthood, as presented in the Synoptic Gospels, is not simple: He preserves and intensifies the development towards exclusiveness at the same time that He abolishes the national limitations of the Israelitic priesthood: His priesthood is completely sacrificial, but relinquishes none of its "prophetic" prerogatives; His priesthood involves opposition to and revocation of the Temple priesthood, yet He is ultimately the raison d'être of that priesthood and the only thing that gives the OT priesthood its full intelligibility.

At first sight, it is not too evident that the Synoptic writers think of Jesus as a priest. He is never referred to as hieruus; His lineage is not traced to Levi or Aaron but to David; He is never depicted as participating in the official Temple worship (though this is taken all for granted), much less exercising any priestly function there. Yet all three Evangelists point to Christ as a priest, and Luke's Gospel might justifiably be called the Gospel of Christ's priesthood.

By beginning his Gospel narrative with a scene of Temple sacrifice, Luke places his history of Christ's life in a Temple framework that confines right up to the final verse of his Gospel, where he tells us that the disciples returned from the Ascension to praise God in the Temple. The significant prominence of the OT priest, Zachary, at the beginning of the Gospel; the priestly meaning Zachary attaches to the promises of salvation and to their realization; the fact that John, the "greatest of the prophets," comes from a priestly family--all this quite clearly sets a sacerdotal tone for Luke's Gospel. A less evident indication of this priestly tone is the frequency of the word hagios in the early section of Lk.⁹ Mary is told that the "holy" spirit will overshadow her, and therefore her Son will be "holy"; in the Magnificat it is God's name that is called "holy";¹⁰ in the Benedictus Zachary uses the word of the prophets and of the covenant; and in the scene of the Presentation, Luke indirectly applies it to the Christ child by citing the Law, according to which each first-born is "holy" to the Lord.¹¹

¹ This article appeared in *Theological Studies*, 21 1960, 1-44. It is reprinted here with permission.

show the two sides of Jesus' fulfillment of the OT priesthood: at the presentation there is a sacrificial action in which Christ, still utilizing the instrumentality of the official priesthood, manifests that when, as a boy of twelve, Christ remained in the Temple to hear and question the doctors of the law, we see Him again respecting the official prophetic function exercised by these scribes, but already displaying His ability to perform the same role.

In the public life of Christ the emphasis seems to be almost entirely upon the prophetic aspect; in this regard it does not seem to be accidental, nor due merely to reasons of practicality, that so much of Jesus' most important teaching was done in the Temple precincts. Of old, Yahweh had spoken from His Tabernacle through the mediation of Moses; now from His Temple the Father speaks through the mediation of His own Son become man.¹² Christ thus effects the perfect synthesis of the prophetic and priestly offices.

This apparent preponderance of the prophetic aspects deceiving, however, because a closer examination reveals the fact that the structural events of the Synoptic narrative (baptism, temptation, Transfiguration) are fundamentally sacrificial, for they are "sacraments" of that acceptance of the priestly role of the Servant which is the essence of Christ's death itself. These focal events of the public life stress a continuity with Israel's religious past, and it is not unlikely that part of the significance of the appearance of Moses and Elias at the Transfiguration springs from the fact that one was the traditional founder of the Israelitic worship of Yahweh, and the other was the prophet who fought unrelentingly for the establishment of that worship. Then, too, if one stops to think of it, there is deep significance in the fact to which the Synoptics scarcely draw attention: that Jesus participated regularly in the Jewish feasts, and therefore in the Temple sacrifices. Obviously, Christ's compliance with the OT ceremonial laws gave to the Temple ritual a new dignity and perfection; but it also means that there was a certain absorption of the old sacrificial cult into the new priestly dispensation--all Christ's actions were part of the priestly activity in the new covenant, and among these actions was His participation in the Jewish ritual. Moreover, because of the commemorative element in the Temple ceremonial, each Jew entered into and relived Israel's religious past, shared in Israel's cumulative religious experience; so, too, Christ absorbed liturgically Israel's history of covenant relationship to God and incorporated it into the synthetic experience of His Father's covenant providence that guided His own priestly and redemptive action.

There is, then, an undeniable element of continuity between the Old and New Testament priesthood; but the Synoptic writers also indicate that Christ definitely broke with the OT priesthood. Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan indicates His estimate of many of the priests and Levites of His day; and His parable of the unjust custodians of the vineyard makes it clear that the priestly guardianship of Israel will be taken away from them, that the covenant with the family of Levi is revoked as Malachi had foretold (Mal 2:4-5).¹³ Christ indicates that the OT ceremonial has been transcended when He states His superiority to the Sabbath and the Temple; and His assertion of authority over the Temple itself (by driving out the merchants) showed clearly the Messianic priesthood that was His. The constant and bitter opposition of the leaders of the Jewish priesthood is sufficient indication that they realized that Jesus challenged their very existence--in a sense, the prominence in the Synoptic narrative of this conflict between Jesus and the official priesthood is one of the clearest indications of the extent to

which a sacerdotal point of view enters into these three Gospels.

Fulfillment of the Temple

Christ's rejection of the official Jewish priesthood was due to its failure to fulfill the pastoral obligation of caring for God's people; but there is not simply question of replacing them in an office that itself remains the same; the change is more profound, there is a new priesthood. The OT priesthood was unique in the sense that it was restricted to one nation and to one family within that nation. Christ's priesthood, though much more unique (since there is only one sacrificial action), is not limited by nation or family; His brethren are all those who do the will of the Father. This abolition of the nationalistic exclusivity of the Israelitic priesthood is perhaps best seen in Christ's relation to the Temple, the symbol of that exclusivity.

There is no need to dwell on the prominence in the OT of the idea of God dwelling with the chosen people, on its intimate connection with the idea of election and covenant, on its expression in the patriarchal shrine of Bethel, the Mosaic Tabernacle, and finally the Solomonic Temple. It represented a familiarity of God with men and a certain nationalistic limitation of God's relation with mankind. In the prophetic and postexilic periods there was a current of thought (best represented by Deutero-Isaiah) that tended towards a more spiritual and universal interpretation of this "dwelling of God"; but, at the same time, another current of thought concentrated attention upon Jerusalem and its Temple, and so emphasized the sacred and awesome aspect of God's Temple presence that the element of divine familiarity with men was greatly diminished.¹⁴

Christ Himself thought of the Temple as the place where God dwelt in a special way; for Him it was "the house of God" (Mt 12:4). Yet there are clear indications in the Synoptic Gospels that Jesus thought of Himself as the fulfillment of this "dwelling," and that He was just that--thus realizing in undreamed-of fashion the idea of God's familiarity with men. Joseph is told by the angel that Jesus will be called Emmanuel, and attention is drawn to the fact that this name means "God with us" (Mt 1:23). One feels that there is a certain continuation of this notion of Christ as Emmanuel, and a fulfillment of the prophecy that "God Himself will come to His Temple" (Mal 3:1), in the narration of the Presentation, when for the first time Christ comes to His Father's house. And if the words εν τοις του πατρος of Lk 2:49 are to be translated "in the house of my Father,"¹⁵ that would be a clear forecast of the predilection He later shows for the Temple as a place of preaching. Christ is quite evidently troubled by the impending doom of the Temple, sorrowful because of the destruction of something He genuinely loves. There seems to be a reflection of this in Mk 11:11. It is Palm Sunday, Jesus had gone up to the Temple in triumph, and "when it was evening, after He had looked at everything (περιβλεψαμενος παντα), he departed for Bethany." The word περιβλεψω, when used in the middle, has the meaning of "gaze carefully or lovingly at something";¹⁶ and it would seem that Christ is described as looking fondly at all the details of the doomed structure. It was also on Palm Sunday that His love for the Temple impelled Him to drive the buyers and sellers from the Temple precincts, and it is interesting to note that Christ does not call the Temple His Father's house; He cites Is 56:7, where the Temple is called "my house," and it is not out of the question that Christ means this "my" to refer to Himself.

Yet Christ foresaw the destruction of this Temple that no longer had any meaning; for He Himself was "greater than the Temple" (Mt 12:6). His body was the temple in which God dwelt hypostatistically; henceforth His dwelling among men would not be determined by the limits of a building, but by the presence of His disciples: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst" (Mt 18:20).

OT thought, particularly that in the priestly tradition, looked upon the temple not only as the dwelling of God, but as the place where man could meet God, where God revealed to man His covenant will, where God ruled.¹⁷ This idea extends back beyond the Solomonic Temple to the Ark and the Tabernacle of the Mosaic covenant. Many pages in the Gospel mention how Christ fulfilled this oracular function by His teaching of the new law of the Kingdom; we might simply recall Christ's words (Mt 11:25 ff.) telling His hearers that it is only through the Son that the Father is revealed to men, and that it is by coming to Him that men will find that peace and rest which OT thought had always looked for from Yahweh and of which the Sabbath was the symbol and the pledge.

Again, the Temple was the center of Israel's worship of Yahweh; it was the place par excellence of prayer and sacrifice. It was here that Israel, and each individual Israelite, renewed liturgically the covenant with Yahweh. In this respect, too, Christ was at once the fulfillment and the replacement of the Temple; this we can see more easily if we examine the Synoptic attitude towards the Temple sacrifices.

Fulfillment of the Temple Sacrifice

Israel's oldest tradition of sacrifice is closely linked with the idea of covenant.¹⁸ There is the element of acknowledgment of the sovereignty of the covenant God; there is thanksgiving for the freedom from enemies, for the salvation wrought by Yahweh; there is the aspect of communion with Yahweh that is especially noticeable in the "peace offerings" (Zebah Selâim), for in these sacrifices there was the idea of a meal shared with God; there is the pledge of one's friendship and devotion to Yahweh signified by the offering of a gift.¹⁹ Of these, the notion of communion that the covenant achieves; in a sense the covenant (as the enduring state consequent upon the contract) is this communion.²⁰ This communion with Yahweh both presupposed and helped to constitute a communion among the Israelites themselves. For this reason one could only participate in the sacrifices if one was a member of the covenant people; hence the need for admission to the people by circumcision, the need for reconciliation if one had been for some reason excluded from the sacrificing community, the need for reconsecration (since Israel was a consecrated, an elected, people) if one had been defiled.²¹ However, it is interesting to note that it is by means of individual sacrifices (e.g., for cured lepers) that the final step is achieved in that reconciliation and reconsecration which allows the individual in question to rejoin the community sacrifices. Linked with these reconciling sacrifices is an aspect of the Israelitic sacrifices that gradually came to the fore with an increasing awareness of personal moral guilt: that of expiation.²² This was particularly prominent in the postexilic Temple ceremonial and above all in the great annual feast of Atonement.

All these various aspects and functions of the OT sacrificial system are reflected in the Synoptic Gospels. Luke's Gospel opens with the scene of

Zachary's incense offering, and the account points to the still-existent efficacy of the OT ritual; for there does seem to be a link between the sacrifice and God's first action in inaugurating the new covenant. Christ's circumcision and presentation, as described by Luke, signal Christ's legal incorporation into the chosen people, and the journey of the twelve-year-old Jesus to Jerusalem indicates the consummation of this incorporation that came with actual participation in the paschal feast.²³

A second aspect of the Presentation was the purification of Mary. It is evident that there could be no question of a need for purification on Mary's part, and this very fact gives us an insight into the meaning of this Jewish rite: the period of "impurity" of a Jewish mother was not a matter of punishment for moral guilt, but rather a temporary semi-excommunication from the sacrificing community because of the loss of blood in her child-bearing (cf. Lv 12); and the rite of purification accomplished a readmission to the consecrated community, a reconsecration of the mother.

These two elements of consecration to God and entrance into the sacral community, on the part of both child and mother, are admirably symbolized by the offering of two doves; the one offered in holocaust was a sign of the utter giving of one's self to God; the other, the sin offering, was a sign of communion and alliance with God through the mediation of the Priest who ate of the offering and interceded with God for the offerer (cf. Lv 5:10; 7:6; 10:17).

A second example in the Synoptic Gospels of this element of admission (or readmission) to a consecrated people is furnished by the incident of the cure by Christ of the lepers and His injunction that they offer the appropriate Temple sacrifice (Mt 8:4). Here again we have a case where there was no question of moral cleansing, but where there was a form of excommunication from the ritual community, an excommunication that is terminated by a sacrifice of reconsecration and readmission to the people. The element of reconsecration is much clearer in this case than it was in Mary's purification: in the cleansing of a leper there is parallel offering of two doves, one for holocaust and the other as a trespass offering; but there is also a very interesting ceremonial attached to the offering a lamb and of oil (or of flour mixed with oil). This ceremonial, which consists in a form of anointing with the oil and the blood of the lamb after they have been sanctified by offering them to God (Lv 14:14 ff.), is strikingly similar to that associated with the consecration of priests (Ex 19). It requires but little reflection to see the covenant connotations in the consecratory use of blood in this ceremony.²⁴

There is an unquestionable prominence in the Synoptic Gospels of the annual feasts of Pasch and Tabernacles, in which (as is indicated by Dt 15:19; 16:17) the idea of covenant was focal and in which at least some of the sacrifices, perhaps even the Pasch itself,²⁵ fall in the category of peace offerings. It seems, too, that a peace offering is indirectly referred to in Mt 5:23, where Christ tells His auditors to be first reconciled with their brethren before giving their gift on the altar. The altar in question was the *mišbêah*, and while it is true that the word had taken on a somewhat general tone, it is also probably that it kept a certain amount of the implication of *zêbah*; and so it may well be that the kind of sacrifice to which Christ referred is the *zêbah Selâim*. This interpretation is certainly in accord with the context, for a disposition of discord with one's brother would be in direct

conflict with the sacrifice which was an exterior symbol of a willingness to conform to the covenant with Yahweh.

Strangely, there is no mention of the great public sacrifices of atonement; and, if we except the cases of Mary's purification and the cleansing of the leper (where, as we saw, there is no moral guilt involved), the Synoptic Gospels are silent on the expiatory aspect of the Temple sacrifices. This omission becomes significant in the light of the conflict over Christ's power to forgive sin. For the Jews of Christ's day the accepted means of being freed from moral guilt was the "sin offering," which had an intercessory power with God and won God's pardon for the sinner (cf. Lv 4-5). Christ's forgiveness of sin was a claim to a sanctifying power superior to that of the Temple sacrifices and priests--a power which, if made generally available to men, made the expiatory Temple sacrifices obsolete.

Allied to this conflict on Christ's forgiveness of sin, and like it colored by the idea of the advent of a new covenant dispensation, is the opposition of Jesus to the Pharisaic notions on ritual purification. There is, evidently, no opposition in principle to rites of purification; after all, Jesus Himself utilized baptism as an instrument of sanctification. What Christ opposed was a false concentration on the externals of Jewish purifications and a lack of attention to the corresponding internal dispositions. Actually, this viewpoint of Christ represented the truest tradition of Hebrew thought on sanctity; for without in any way denying the need for purity, it had accorded the primacy to consecration.²⁶ This balance of values had been upset by the Pharisaic and legalistic insistence on minute observance of the Jewish purification code; a large part of Christ's teaching is devoted to restoring the correct point of view.

This insistence of Jesus on internal dispositions characterizes the Synoptic theology of sacrifice, which continues and completes the prophetic emphasis on the moral and individual aspect of sacrifice. The frequent citation of Hos 6:6 shows that the continuity with the prophets was conscious and deliberate. One must be careful, however, not to exaggerate the opposition (either in the prophets or in the Synoptic Gospels) between cult and internal dispositions of soul.

It is true that in the Sermon on the Mount Christ inculcates justice and mercy towards one's fellow men, and an attitude of open and trusting sincerity towards the Father, and says that this is the fulfillment of the "Law and the prophets" (Mt 7:12); and when one recalls that the OT sacrifices formed part of the Law, one can see in the teaching on the Mount a reflection of Christ's attitude towards the Temple sacrifice. This same attitude can be seen in Christ's words to the Pharisees: "On these two commands (i.e., the double law of love) depends the whole of the Law and the prophets" (Mt 22:40). In a way, an even more striking example is the text of Mk 12:33, where the young scribe says: "To love one's neighbor as oneself is better than holocausts or sacrifices"; and Jesus answers approvingly: "you are not far from the Kingdom of God."²⁷

Another text that merits attention is Mk 3:35: "He who does the will of my Father is my brother...." On the surface, the text has nothing to do with sacrifice; yet the notion of covenant can serve as a middle term to join it to Christ's doctrine on sacrifice. In OT thought a bond of brotherhood was

established between men by means of a berit. Actually, the text does not replace the idea of sacrifice with that of conformity to God's will; rather it points to the fact that this conformity is the essence of the sacrifice.

Granted that interior dispositions of soul are given the primacy, it is still true that for the Synoptics the Temple sacrifices had a genuine role in sanctifying men. The "trespass offering" made at the Presentation and at the healing of the leper must have had a real function and meaning; otherwise Jesus could not have sincerely participated in the one and enjoined the other. On neither of these occasions did the sacrifice change the interior dispositions of those making the offering; but the sacrifice did symbolize the interior disposition, and in this same act of offering it introduced (or reintroduced) the offerer into the realm of the consecrated, into alliance with God--the achievement of which consecration and covenant was itself symbolized by the participation, through the mediation of the priest, in the consecrated food.

This view of a sacrificial sanctification constituted by admission into the realm of the sacred--a view in which the only source of ontological sanctity involved seems to be God, and in which human sanctity seems to be a question of relationship to this divine holiness, is expressed several times in the Synoptic Gospels. For example, in Mt 23:19, Jesus upbraids the Pharisees for their perversion of the true meaning of God's law and their lack of comprehension of the Temple and its sacrifices, and he tells them, "It is the altar that sanctifies (hagiazon) the offering." In other words, the offering is not holy because of itself or because it fulfills the Law or even because it represents the good dispositions of the offerer, but it receives its holiness from a sharing in the divine holiness given to it by the altar that symbolizes God.²⁸

An important element in the OT spiritualizing of the idea of Temple and sacrifice was the gradual realization of the role of the prayer that was always joined to sacrifice. There are rather clear indications that this prayer--above all, the internal dispositions of prayer--came to be looked upon as an integral part, perhaps even the most important part, of the sacrifice. This was probably due in considerable measure to the increased employment of the Psalms in the Temple ceremonial; but it was also grounded in the growing appreciation of the importance of individual morality and holiness.²⁹

Such a view of the sacrificial prayers is reflected in Luke's account of the vision of Zachary, where attention is drawn to the people who were praying in the Temple court during the sacrifice. It also seems to be in the background of Christ's reference to the Temple as "a house of prayer" (Mt 21:13). But it is much more strikingly and significantly seen in Luke's use of proseuchomai when Christ is the subject. Mt and Mk quite frequently use the word of Christ; but what is notable about Lk is the introduction of proseuchomai in the account of the pivotal events of the Gospel: baptism, temptation, Transfiguration, the Agony in Gethsemane--though in the account of the Last Supper it is replaced by eucharisteg. These are the same events that portray Christ as the Servant, in which the externals of the scene manifest Christ's acceptance of His Father's will; and it is proseuchomai that is used to indicate that inner disposition. In this way the whole development of Christ's ministry is placed in a sacrificial light; all is governed by His priestly prayer that reaches its climax in Gethsemane,

where the word *proseuchomai* recurs like a refrain (Lk uses it five times in seven verses).

Thus, in the section of the Synoptic Gospels prior to the Passion narrative, there is a delicately balanced appraisal of the relative importance of the external and internal elements of the OT priesthood, Temple, and sacrifice; and this judgment is made in terms of the covenant function that these three were meant to serve. The Evangelists show that Jesus respected the validity of these institutions, which remained in force up to the establishment of the new dispensation in the Passion; but they also show how the replacement and revocation of these OT institutions began with Christ's public life, which is, as it were, an overlap period between the two covenants. Moreover, one finds the same notion of abrogation by way of fulfillment that is noticeable in Christ's realization of OT propheticism and Kingship; but it seems that the idea of Christ as priest represents more of a break with the OT than does Christ as prophet or king.

The Last Supper

Any study of the Synoptic notion of covenant naturally enters the text of the Last Supper, since it is for practical purposes the only direct use of *diathēkē* by the three Evangelists. Moreover, the institution of the Eucharist is unquestionably one of the key events in the Gospel narrative: it is the culmination of much of the teaching of the public life; it places the Passion in its true cultic setting; it, more than any other Gospel text, links the life of the early Christian community with the life of Christ. Thus, if this event is dominated by the idea of covenant--as we shall try to show--it indicates rather clearly the importance of covenant in the theology of the Synoptic Gospels. The following study will comprise three points: a) the text itself, its origin, historicity, etc.; b) the attendant circumstances of the Supper that aid in interpreting the text; c) the meaning of the Eucharistic text, and particularly of the word *diathēkē*.

The Text

Since it is practically impossible to discuss the Eucharistic texts of the three Synoptic Gospels without referring to the Pauline version in 1 Cor 11:23-25, all four texts will be utilized in our analysis. Obviously, the four texts are not completely identical, and that leads to several questions. Which of them, if any, contains the actual words used by Christ? Which version is most original? To what extent did the liturgical practice of the primitive Church influence these Gospel texts?

There is no NT text that is so likely to have been influenced by the nascent Christian liturgy as that of the Last Supper, since it was precisely to Christ's action on the eve of His death that the origins of the Christian Eucharist were traced.³¹ Then, too, the regular celebration of the Eucharist began immediately after Pentecost; and this would certainly have influenced the primitive catechesis of the Church and the Gospel narratives.³² To say this is in no way to deny the historical authenticity of the Synoptic descriptions of the Last Supper: it is highly probable that the early liturgy would have respected the words used by Jesus Himself at the Supper and preferred them to any creation of the community itself; and this probability becomes a practical certainty when one reflects that the Eucharist was looked upon from the beginning as an *anamnēsis*, as the repetition or

re-enactment of what Jesus Himself did in the Cenacle.³³

Mt and Mk are quite evidently in the same textual tradition and bear more noticeable trace of liturgical influence: there is greater parallelism between the formulae for the bread and for the wine than is the case in Lk and Paul.³⁴ The two consecratory formulae are immediately joined, without the indication given by Lk/Paul that the two were separated at the Last Supper.³⁵ There is less trace of the original paschal setting in Mt and Mk than there is in Lk; and the absence of reference to the *anamnēsis* can itself indicate that the well-established practice of the Eucharist made this inclusion in the Cenacle narrative unimportant at the time when Mt and Mk were written.³⁶ On the other hand, if we take Lk 22:17-18 as referring to the Eucharistic chalice, the somewhat odd arrangement of Luke's text might be explained by his acquaintance with two accounts of the Cenacle: one contained in a primitive Passion narrative, the other enshrined in the Eucharistic liturgy.³⁷ So, without being able to determine the exact extent of liturgical influence on our texts, it is quite clear that there is some such influence; and this very fact is a precious indication of the meaning that the Synoptic writers attached to Christ's action in the Cenacle and of the connection that they saw between the Last Supper and the Christian celebration of the Eucharist.³⁸

When we ask which text is the most original, we must be careful to circumscribe the question. There is, first of all, the special difficulty attached to the text of Lk: Is the "long" or the "short" version (i. e., with or without vv. 19b-20) the authentic and original text? At present there seems to be a shift of scholarly opinion in favor of the long version, with the accompanying acknowledgment that the source of Lk may well be other than Pauline.³⁹ Secondly, if one asks which of the four versions can be pushed back the furthest historically, it would seem that this should be attributed to 1 Cor, because Paul had already preached to the Corinthians (probably around 50 A. D.) this Eucharistic doctrine that he had himself received earlier, very likely in his visit to Jerusalem (cf. Acts 9:26), when he would have come in contact with the primitive catechesis and liturgy.⁴⁰ Thirdly, as to which version most closely reflects the original Aramaic, the answer is most inconclusive: all four versions bear clear traces of the Aramaic substratum, though Mk and Lk seem to have a slight edge over Mt and Paul.⁴¹ Fourthly, if one asks which version is least "liturgized" and presumably, therefore, a more exact mirror of the historical event itself, this would seem to be Lk.⁴² Thus, though an apodictic answer is impossible, it would seem that the version Lk/Paul furnishes us with an older form than does Mt/Mk: it is well-nigh impossible to choose between Lk and Paul.⁴³

One conclusion emerges from any comparative study of the Eucharistic texts: it is impossible to reconstruct exactly and with certitude the words that Christ Himself used at the Supper; and while the elements common to all four versions enjoy the privileged position of most probably forming part of Christ's own words, there is no conclusive reason for rejecting as non-authentic any of the elements mentioned in any of the Eucharistic texts.⁴⁴ For that reason, our explanation of the text will draw from the four texts in their entirety; it can be noted, however, that that which is essential to establishing the central role of the idea of covenant--namely, that Jesus spoke of His blood as the blood of a covenant--is from a textual point of view indubitable.

