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Scripture

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THE HOLY EUCHARIST—I

(Translated from the French by the Editor)

The mystery of the Holy Eucharist is at the centre of our Christian life ; instituted at the Last Supper, celebrated from the beginning by the early church, it contains in a certain sense all the riches of salvation through Christ. In our efforts to explore this mystery we shall first give the exegesis of the texts, and then offer a theological exposition of them. In this first article we wish above all to recall the Last Supper and replace it within its historical setting, in order that we may understand the significance of the words which Our Lord pronounced at it, and the meaning of the actions he performed there. Finally we shall touch on the practice of the first Christians in order to clarify and confirm our conclusions.

1 *The accounts of the Last Supper.* There are four accounts : those of the three synoptic gospels, and that of St Paul in 1 Cor. 11:23-5. St John also tells us about the last meal which Jesus took with his disciples on the eve of his death (John 13-17), but he makes no mention whatsoever of the Eucharist in these chapters. We may suppose that he relied upon what his predecessors had already written so that he could omit any repetition of it, and write at greater length about other examples of Our Lord's tremendous love : the washing of the feet and the farewell discourse. (He does of course speak of the Eucharist in another place (John 6:53-8), to which we will have to return.) Now these four accounts in the Synoptics and St Paul do not form four independent sources. Matthew's appears to be very probably dependent on Mark's, which the former retouches slightly without adding anything essential. Luke's account presents us with a more delicate problem : verses 19-20 correspond almost exactly to the parallel verses in Mark and Matthew, and speak, as they do, of the eucharistic bread and cup. But he prefaces them with verses 15-18 where there is question of the 'Pasch,' that is to say, of the paschal lamb, which Jesus will eat no more, and of a cup of which he will drink no more. Many exegetes have wished, and still wish, to recognise in these verses 15-18 an authentic and original tradition, which Luke alone has preserved, and which would represent another early presentation of

the institution of the Eucharist, or else a remembrance otherwise lost of the beginning of the paschal meal which Jesus celebrated. Others¹ prefer to see in these verses the result of a redaction made by Luke himself, combining the tradition of Mark with that of Paul (I Cor.), to obtain a judiciously balanced diptych, in which the Jewish Pasch is contrasted with the Christian, the lamb and the cup of the old rite (vv. 15-18) giving place to the bread and cup of the new (vv. 19-20). This exegetical discussion is complicated by the fact that important witnesses among the manuscripts leave out the end of verse 19 and the whole of verse 20. It was fashionable until recently to hold that the shorter text was the authentic one written by Luke; but this opinion is losing favour and more and more critics recognise that the shorter text is a mutilation which cannot claim to represent the original, but which must be explained rather as a correction with a view to having only one cup in Luke's account, as in the parallel texts. Whatever be the truth in this discussion, into which we cannot enter any more here, we may well doubt that the third gospel represents an independent tradition. However interesting its literary presentation may be for a theological understanding, it is difficult to allow it the rank of an autonomous witness, and only two hold the stage: Mark and Paul.

Between these there is no immediate literary dependence one way or the other. They are parallel traditions of which the common features are explained by the common source from which they are derived. Which of the two best represents this? Mark, probably, for the Aramaic flavour of his account shows a very ancient Palestinian origin.² Paul on the other hand seems to pass on the tradition of a 'Hellenistic' church, such as that of Antioch, whilst perhaps contributing certain modifications of his own.

Moreover, it is most important to understand quite clearly that both of them represent *liturgical* traditions: the accounts which they give us are probably couched in the very words which were pronounced in the gatherings at Jerusalem or Antioch when the Lord's Supper was repeated. This is suggested by their context and their literary content. Paul lets it be clearly understood that he is quoting a traditional and fixed text (I Cor. 11:23; cf. 15:3). Likewise it has been often noted that Mark 14:22-5 is not perfectly at home in its present setting, for the beginning of verse 22 is a repetition of that of verse 18, and the complete absence of any allusion to the paschal lamb seems surprising after the preparations mentioned in

¹ cf. P. Benoit: 'Le Récit de la Cène dans Lc. xxii, 15-20,' in *Revue Biblique* XLVIII (1939), pp. 357-93

² cf. J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, Oxford, 1955, pp. 118 ff

verses 12-16. In both of them we feel that the text is terse, concise and reduced to the essential, without any claim to recount all that really happened at the Last Supper. It has not been deformed, but it has been simplified. In repeating the Lord's Supper the brethren of the early church have preserved only the important actions, those to which Jesus had attached a new value, whilst abandoning all the rest which belonged to the rite now past. This literary observation is doubly important. In the first place by recognising from Mark's or Paul's pen the very formulas which the first gatherings used to celebrate the Eucharist, it gives their texts a unique and precious quality both authentic and authoritative. In the second place, by granting that these formulas do not claim to tell us everything about the Last Supper, it gives us the right to look in other directions for a reconstitution of the historical framework in which these formulas fit, and from which they derive all their meaning. We feel invited, in other words, to go back beyond the liturgical commemoration, to the concrete reality of the Last Supper, in order to see whether it was a paschal meal, and what light this can throw upon Our Lord's intentions.

2 *Was the Last Supper a paschal meal?* We could have no doubt of this if we limited ourselves to the evidence of the Synoptics. Whether the initiative came from the disciples (Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12), or from the master (Luke 22:8), in either case it is clearly said that the day had arrived on which the traditional rite must be carried out, and that Jesus intended to keep it. The account of the meal itself makes no explicit allusion, at least in Matthew and Mark, to its paschal character; but we have just seen that this is sufficiently explained by its origin from Christian liturgical practice. Moreover we find indications in the circumstances which surround the central account, which are sufficiently suggestive of a paschal meal: its celebration in the holy city, and not at Bethany, as night fell instead of in the early evening; they were reclining on couches instead of being seated; the bread was broken, not at the very beginning but after the first course (Matt. 26:21-5; Mark 14:17-21); and it was concluded by the singing of the *Hallel* (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26).

Nevertheless there are difficulties. The least of them is that arising from the different incidents which the Synoptics themselves put on Friday, which according to them must be the first and great day of the feast. It has indeed been possible to show that none of these proceedings, not even Simon of Cyrene returning from the fields, nor the meeting of the Sanhedrin, nor the execution and the burial of Jesus, were absolutely incompatible with the sanctity of this important day.¹

¹ cf. J. Jeremias, *op. cit.* pp. 49-53

A much more serious difficulty is raised by the explicit statement of the fourth gospel that on the morning of Friday the Jews 'did not go into the pretorium, so as not to be defiled, and so that they could thus eat the paschal lamb' (John 18:28), a statement from which it follows that the paschal meal only took place that year on the evening of Friday and not of Thursday.

Many efforts have been made to solve this contradiction. Sometimes the Synoptics have been judged correct against John: the latter has delayed the paschal meal by one day for theological reasons, in order to have Jesus, the true paschal lamb (cf. John 19:36; 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7) die at the very moment when the lambs were immolated in the Temple. At other times John has been judged correct against the Synoptics: the latter have anticipated by one day the date of the Pasch, perhaps because Jesus himself had anticipated it in view of his death, so near at hand that it was to prevent him from celebrating it as was usual, on the evening of Friday. Others again have judged them both correct: the Pasch was in actual fact celebrated on two different days, according to the different reckonings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.¹ The discussion is by no means ended, but it is not of primary importance for our purpose. Whether it was celebrated at the usual time or anticipated, there is hardly a doubt in actual fact that the last meal taken by Jesus was held in the atmosphere of the feast of the Pasch, that the Master intended them to coincide, and made use of this for the institution of his new rite. It is therefore important for us to replace the words and actions of Jesus within the setting of the Jewish Pasch, if we wish to explore its full meaning.

We have a good knowledge, thanks to ancient Jewish documents, of the way in which such an important annual rite as this was carried out. Its purpose was to renew, by a commemorative meal, the repast which the Hebrews had taken long ago in Egypt, during that famous night when God had struck His final blow and delivered His people from their long captivity. Then it was a hasty meal, taken standing, with loins girded, sandals on their feet and staff in hand, ready for a journey (Exod. 12:11). Now it was a solemn meal, taken reclining upon couches in the style of free men and not of slaves; the joy of liberation was shown by the unusual splendour of the feast and the significance of the different parts of it, for which appropriate words

¹ Recently Mlle A. Jaubert, relying on an ancient tradition attested by the *Didascalia* and St Epiphanius, has suggested that Our Lord celebrated the Pasch on the Tuesday night, in accordance with an old sacerdotal calendar which seems to have still been in use in Jewish circles from which the Qumran documents came; according to the later and official calendar, the majority of Jews celebrated the Pasch on the Friday night, as in St John. cf. 'La date de la dernière Cène,' *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 1954, pp. 140-73.

served as commentary. At the very beginning a double blessing, for the feast and the wine, was pronounced over the first cup. Then they washed their right hand and ate the first course, a kind of hors-d'oeuvres consisting of bitter herbs dipped in a vinegar sauce and chewed quite deliberately, to recall the bitterness of the years of captivity. Then came the principal part of the meal. But before beginning this the father of the family did not fail to recall the meaning of the feast and the symbolism of the various foods: the unleavened bread was a remembrance of the bread which had not had time to rise on the night of the Exodus; the lamb recalled the first Pasch, whose blood had been put upon the doors of their houses and had thus saved the Hebrews from the blows of the destroying angel (Exod. 12:23); the wine was the symbol of joy and gratitude due to God for His blessings. After this exhortation, which the father of the family continued as long as he pleased, they recited the first part of the *Hallel* (Ps. 113 or 113 and 114), and they drank a second cup of wine. Then they washed both hands and the principal meal began; during it they ate the paschal lamb and the unleavened bread. The beginning and the end of this part of the feast were marked by two actions on the part of the father of the family, which were particularly solemn; at the beginning there was the blessing of the bread, which he broke and distributed to each at table; at the end there was a blessing of thanksgiving over a third cup, which he sent round the guests. This latter action marked the end of the meal; thenceforth it was forbidden to eat anything else, and the custom of a fourth cup is doubtful for Our Lord's time. They then finished the prayer of the *Hallel* (Ps. 114-18 or 115-18).

The reminiscences in the gospel can be placed without difficulty within the setting of this Jewish rite. The announcing of Judas's betrayal fits in very well during the preliminary course (Matt. 26:20-5; Mark 14:17-21), and the morsel which Jesus moistens and gives to the traitor (John 13:21-30) was probably those bitter herbs which they dipped in the vinegar sauce. In spite of what people often think, it was not the Eucharist; Judas goes out at the end of the first course, before the institution (John 13:30). The washing of the feet, which the fourth gospel relates before this, corresponds very well to the ablutions which were performed at the beginning of the preliminary course: Jesus thus took advantage of this rite of purification to give them his example of humble fraternal charity (John 13:2-15; cf. Luke 22:24-7). The words over the bread and wine which Jesus distributed to his disciples are clearly taken from the two solemn blessings which began and concluded the principal part of the meal. This principal part, consisting in the eating of the paschal lamb, has disappeared from the

account because it had disappeared from the practice of the early Christians; nothing has survived except the two actions to which Our Lord had given a new meaning. But the close proximity of these two actions as we have them now must not lead us to forget that they were separated in actual fact.¹ Another consequence of the liturgical character of the gospel account is perhaps the displacing of the 'eschatological pronouncement.' This saying, in which Jesus bids farewell to earthly wine in anticipation of the new wine which he will drink with his followers in the kingdom of God, is found after the words on the Eucharist in Matt. 26:29 and Mark 14:25; but in Luke 22:15-18 it is found before them, and in the form of a farewell to the old rite of the Jewish Pasch: Jesus will eat of this Pasch, that is, this lamb, no more (vv. 15-16); he will drink no more of this wine (vv. 17-18). The reference, understood in this way, whether it be due to an original tradition or to Luke's reconstruction, would link up very well with the double blessing, of the feast and of the wine, which took place at the very beginning of the Jewish rite; and it is possible to suppose that the third gospel has preserved, or rediscovered, the original place for this saying of Our Lord.

3 *The meaning of the Christian Pasch.* The words of the father of the family gave all their meaning to the actions of the paschal rite. Jesus at the Last Supper played the part of the father of the family, and his words must show us his intentions in adopting and transforming the ancient rite. He must certainly have said other things besides the few words preserved in the gospel; but we must trust the early Church and believe that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it has handed the essential down to us, sufficient to enlighten us if we can understand it aright.

Jesus gives his life as a sacrifice. The first lesson which stands out in the words of Christ, a lesson concerning which the disciples could not have made a mistake, is that he is going to die and give his life for them. Often already, during the latter part of his ministry, he pointed out to them more and more clearly the violent end which awaited him in Jerusalem: delivered to the Jewish leaders he would perish at the hand of the pagans. But the disciples had always shown themselves incapable of understanding. On this, the eve of his death, he returns to that theme with a new insistence. He begins by telling them that this meal is the last he will take with them: 'I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine' (Mark 14:25), or, more clearly still: 'I have ardently desired to eat this Pasch with you before suffering'

¹ We must note, besides, that Paul's account has retained a trace of this separation, in the words 'after the meal,' which precede the blessing of the cup (1 Cor. 11:25).

(Luke 22:15), a saying where 'suffer' does not mean any ephemeral trial but the passion which must end in death. Then he puts this imminent death, in a sense, before their eyes, by showing them under the bread and the wine his body and blood. The bread and wine are already of themselves rich in symbolism: the bread is broken for distribution; the wine is the 'blood of the grape' (Gen. 49:11), flowing from grapes which are crushed, as blood flows from the vanquished when trodden underfoot (Is. 63:1-6); its red colour, prescribed by the ceremonial of the Pasch, underlines this symbolism. The 'cup' also is the traditional expression for a tragic lot (cf. Mark 10:38; 14:36 and par.; Apoc. 14:10; 16:19). But there is something more, for the separation of the bread and the wine expresses the separation of the body and the blood, that is to say, death.

The teaching given by these actions, already so significant, is heightened still more by the words. This body will be 'given for you' are the words of Our Lord according to Luke 22:19, or 'broken for you' according to some manuscripts of I Cor. 11:24; even if these words, not found in Mark and Matthew, are not guaranteed as certain, they undoubtedly express the thought of Jesus, as is shown by the words said over the blood, this time attested by the three Synoptics: 'poured out for a multitude' (Mark, Matt.) or 'poured out for you' (Luke). Our Lord does not give only bread and wine as food; in order to be able to make this gift he begins by giving his body and blood, that is his life. It is clearly to the Father that he gives it, as a sacrifice of expiation and reconciliation: his very words are going to tell us so.

The blood of Jesus seals the new covenant. In the four accounts of the institution the words over the wine link the blood with the covenant; they are in two forms: 'This is my blood of the covenant' (Mark, Matt.) and 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood' (Paul, Luke). The first of these forms, with its Aramaic clumsiness, is probably more archaic, whilst the second gives one the impression of having been arranged. Fundamentally they come to the same thing: a covenant, according to the Semitic idea, must be made 'in blood,' that is to say by the immolation of victims (cf. Gen. 15:17), of which the blood is henceforth called 'blood of the covenant.' This is what had happened at Sinai when Moses, after having offered holocausts and immolated young calves, collected the blood and threw half of it upon the altar and the other half upon the people, with the words: 'This is the blood of the covenant which Yahweh has made with you' (Exod. 24:5-8). It is precisely this former covenant which the feast of the Pasch commemorated along with the deliverance from Egypt. There is therefore no doubt that Our Lord

thought of it when he spoke of the 'blood of the covenant.' But by qualifying 'blood of the covenant' with 'my' he lets it be understood that a new sacrifice is going to be substituted for the one of long ago: his own death; and by that a 'new' covenant will be established, as Paul and Luke explicitly state.

The truth is that the old covenant had become null, not, indeed, through God's fault but His people's, who had shown themselves unfaithful. Rebellious and disobedient, they had had to be chastised and go again into captivity. But at the same time that He punished them, God, ever faithful and merciful, had promised them for the future a pardon which would re-establish the good relations they had lost:

See, the days are coming—oracle of Yahweh—when I shall make a new covenant with the house of Israel. Not like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand and led them from the land of Egypt. That covenant—My covenant!—it is they who have broken it. . . . Here is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel . . . I shall put My law in the depths of their being, and write it upon their heart. Then I shall be their God and they will be My people. . . . For I am going to forgive their crime and remember no more their sin (Jer. 31:31-4).

The return to the true knowledge and love of God thus promised is nothing other than the kingdom of God, that kingdom whose imminent coming Jesus preached, and which he even said had arrived in his own person, and which he is now going to establish definitively. Since a covenant needs blood, he will give his own; not, indeed, to appease a stern and angry God, but to give that proof of love whereby the God of love desires the rehabilitation of His fallen creatures. For this it was that God sent him, to be the 'Servant' who sacrifices himself in place of his brethren. This, too, Our Lord's words suggest.

Jesus is the 'Servant of Yahweh' who suffers instead of sinners. In demanding an expiation which His justice claims, as does that of the human conscience, God remains so full of love that He Himself provides the victim of expiation. He announced this victim beforehand, in the Book of Isaias, according to the traits of the Servant: 'a man of sorrows,' innocent, yet 'struck by God and humiliated . . . pierced because of our sins, crushed because of our crimes' (Is. 53:3-5). More than once during his ministry Our Lord let it be understood that he was this Servant (Luke 4:17-21; Matt. 11:4-6; cf. Matt. 8:17; 12:18-21). Here also in this last testament he clearly suggests it. Had not God said to His Servant: 'I have marked you as *covenant* of the people and light of the nations' (Is. 42:6)? And had He not said of him: 'The reason why I will allot him crowds . . . is that he *poured out* his life in death . . . whilst he bore the faults of the

multitudes and interceded for sinners' (Is. 53:12)? We detect an echo of these oracles on the lips of Jesus: 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is going to be poured out for a multitude.' Thus he is really the Servant, and his impending death will accomplish the mission assigned to him, that of suffering for sinners (Matthew here is more precise: 'for the remission of sins'), for the mass of sinners, for pagans as well as for Jews, in short, for all men. The word which we translate 'multitude' underlines the greatness of the number without excluding anyone. And for another thing, the mission of the Servant was universal: 'It is too small a thing that you should be my servant for bringing back the tribes of Jacob and gathering together again the survivors of Israel. I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth' (Is. 49:6). Our Lord certainly made this universality of salvation his own, and it is in fact all humanity to the ends of space and time that he includes within that 'multitude' for which he is going to give his life 'as a ransom' (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45).

Jesus gives his life as food. Our Lord could have been content to teach us that his death, as a sacrifice of expiation and as a covenant sacrifice contains all these blessings, by his words. But look how he uses food to convey this lesson: 'Take and eat,' 'Drink of it all of you.' There is something new here, surpassing the imparting of knowledge, and offering another means of communication with the promised sacrifice, a means which is among the most intimate things in human nature, the assimilation of food, from which the body makes its own substance. As a matter of fact, whatever be the value of the symbolism in the bread and wine described above, it would not be sufficient to explain their role here. Jesus does not make use of them simply to illustrate his words; many other symbols would have been more expressive for this purpose. If bread and wine are brought in here, it is not as images but above all as food. We are in the midst of a meal, a religious meal in which the food is given a liturgical efficacy. The ritual of sacrifices among the Jews as throughout the ancient world, already included the eating of a part of the victim by those who had offered it; in this way they united themselves with the Godhead and experienced in a tangible manner the blessings associated with their offering. In the same way in the paschal meal, the sharing in the bitter herbs, the unleavened bread and the lamb, constituted the essential rite. It was more than a mere souvenir, along with a family feast; it was the means whereby they associated themselves in as physical a manner as possible with the events of the Exodus, and with the marvellous deliverance which the ever-living God continued to offer to His people. The words which the father of the family said

over the different foods to explain their meaning gave them in some way a new power ; so much so that by eating them the guests benefited anew and in a personal way from the favours which their fathers had received. We cannot expect less of the new rite which Jesus grafts upon the old Pasch. We can even expect much more, because of something absolutely new, the Incarnation and the Redemption which replaces the deliverance from Egypt with one of an altogether different efficacy. We shall have to return to this crucial point later ; it suffices for the moment that we have emphasised this gift of a spiritual food, made manifest by the words of Our Lord.

Jesus commands his disciples to renew his action. 'Do this in memory of me' Our Lord says, according to Paul and Luke. This order to repeat the rite is missing from Mark and Matthew ; and some critics rely upon this to question the authenticity of these words. They have appeared to them all the more suspect in that they assume a form used in the greco-roman world for the funeral meals celebrated in memory of someone deceased. But this similarity proves at the most that the wording has been borrowed,¹ not the idea. This is something quite different in the case of the Christian meal. It is not simply a commemoration of a departed friend, by means of a banquet, but the renewal of a sacred action by which the sacrifice of the undying Master is made present through the bread and wine. The disciples could not have dared repeat this action to which they attached so great an efficacy, if they had not been invited to do so by their Lord. Moreover he clearly wished to continue his presence among them by this rite, even after he had died and returned to his Father ; but this made a repetition of the rite necessary. In any case it is a fact that from the beginning of the church the Christians repeated the words and actions of the Last Supper, so much so that a liturgical formula was practically fixed by the time the gospels were written and even in the time of St Paul (1 Cor. was written in A.D. 57). Such a practice could not have been established against the wishes of Our Lord. We can thus take this command to repeat the rite as certain, even if the precise wording of it is not guaranteed. It was perhaps not necessarily repeated in the liturgical celebration, since it was sufficient to carry it out : this would explain Paul's using a formula well known to his readers, when he wished to mention it explicitly. However this may be, Jesus certainly wished his followers to renew the rite after he had gone, the rite which he had given them as a legacy on the eve of his passion, and we shall see that they fully responded to his wishes.

¹ Even this is not certain, for there are also good parallels in Aramaic for the formula, which could therefore come from Palestine.

4 *The celebration of the Eucharist in the early communities.* Immediately after Pentecost we see the brethren in the community at Jerusalem gathering together in one another's houses for the 'breaking of bread' (Acts 2:42, 46). We have here a technical term which, whilst in the first place referring to one of the significant actions in a Jewish meal, served in fact among the early Christians to indicate the Eucharist. We find it again, applied to the Sunday liturgy which Paul celebrated at Troas (Acts 20:7-11), and it is not impossible that St Luke is also thinking of the Eucharist when he uses the same expression apropos of the disciples at Emmaus (Luke 24:30, 35) and of Paul on his journey to Rome (Acts 27:35). In Acts 2:46 it is also said that the brethren 'partook of their food with joy,' and there are here two things to be noted: the spiritual gaiety which characterised the eucharistic celebration, and the addition of a complete meal in which they 'partook of food.'

We find these same two details at Corinth, although in a different atmosphere. Here, too, according to 1 Cor. 11:17-34, the Lord's Supper was preceded by another meal where everyone provided his own food and in which joy was not lacking. But there was some disorder and the joy was questionable: 'One man is hungry, whilst another is drunk.' It is understandable that the Church later brought this under control and separated the strictly eucharistic supper from the ordinary fraternal meal, which then became the agape. Already St Paul suggests to the faithful that they stay at home if all they want is to satisfy their hunger (v. 34). Above all he reproves them by recalling to their minds the serious nature of the eucharistic meal: to eat this bread and drink this wine is 'to announce the death of the Lord until he come' (v. 26).

Whatever may be said of these differences which are partly explained by the different situation, we have no reason to see any opposition between the eucharistic celebration at Corinth and that at Jerusalem, as some would do¹; nor must we think there is any opposition between the latter and the ordinary meals which the disciples of Jesus shared with him during his lifetime and also after his resurrection (Luke 24:30, 41-2; John 21:9-13; Acts 1:4). In commemorating the Last Supper the disciples did not claim to be establishing a radically new rite; they continued those common meals in which they had previously been gathered round their Master. These meals of the small group of apostles had always had a religious character, as was the normal thing among the Jews; at them Jesus blessed the food; the last of these meals had been more solemn and more sacred because it was the Pasch, but it was in the same line.

¹ We will return to this question in the next article.

Thus the first community continued quite spontaneously to gather round the Master spiritually present, for the purpose of partaking of their food with joy. Nevertheless there was one feature which was radically new, which transformed these meals and which brought about in them the presence of the Lord in a concrete way : it was the repetition of the words and actions which changed the bread and wine into his body and blood. It was a new rite, but one which was easily grafted on to the fraternal meal, and which omitted the other details of the paschal rite, which had become superfluous and void. This explains, as we have seen, the liturgical accounts which the gospels and St Paul have preserved for us.

These considerations can provide an answer to the questions arising recently apropos of the documents discovered at Qumran. In these writings of a Jewish sect identified with, or at least related to, the Essenes, people have noted that there existed a meal taken in common, with a priest presiding whose duty it was to take the bread and wine before the rest and bless them. Some critics have wanted to see in this a sufficient explanation of the origin of the eucharistic meal which would thus be in no way paschal in character. This conclusion is not compelling in the slightest. This new parallel simply clarifies in an interesting way the kind of community meals which were customary among religious groups of Jews, and which must also have been observed by the apostolic community. It in no way proves that the Last Supper was nothing more ; all that we have pointed out concerning the details of its celebration,¹ as well as the ideas formulated by Our Lord, leads us to say that it was wholly steeped in the paschal mystery, not only the mystery of the old Pasch to which Jesus bade farewell, but above all the mystery of the Christian Pasch, which he instituted sacramentally before realising it on the cross.

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¹ It will be noticed that the blessing of the wine is found at the beginning of the meal at Qumran, like that of the bread, whereas according to I Cor. 11:25 it comes 'after the meal,' i.e. for the third cup of the paschal meal.

(To be continued)