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### *THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL.*

THE fact that the Fourth Gospel, when it comes to record the last hours of the life of Jesus, leaves out the institution of the Lord's Supper, is an idiosyncrasy which has repeatedly attracted attention. No real light is thrown on this striking difference from the three synoptic gospels by arguing that the latter simply follow the Pauline tradition, and that the supper was really never instituted at all, but rose out of post-resurrection meals at which visions of Christ were enjoyed. Still less can we accept such suggestions as (a) that the aged apostle forgot about it, or (b) that he assumed his readers would be sufficiently familiar with its origin as described in the earlier gospels, or (c) that the account of it was either excised by some later redactor of the Fourth Gospel or perhaps accidentally lost. It is more relevant to argue that the writer may have considered that he had discussed the Sacrament already at sufficient length in the sixth chapter. This theory is not adequate to the full data of the problem, but it has the merit of recognizing that the omission of the Lord's Supper in the thirteenth chapter is neither an isolated nor an accidental phenomenon. To deal with the matter satisfactorily we have to correlate three data in the structure of the gospel; (i.) the institution of the supper is omitted just where it was natural to expect the mention of it, (ii.) the writer further substitutes for the Lord's Supper another supper of Jesus and His disciples, and (iii.) he inserts in an earlier dialogue what appears to be an interpretation of eucharistic language or a comment upon the significance of the rite.

In the Lucan tradition (xxii. 14 f.), after the eucharistic supper, a dispute arose among the disciples upon their relative positions of importance. Jesus settled the argument by pointing out that humble service ranks higher with God than any pretensions, adding, "I am among you as one who serves." The following eschatological paragraph (28-30) did not appeal to the writer of the Fourth Gospel, but he fixes on the previous section, and expands it into the acted parable of the foot-washing,<sup>1</sup> which leads up to the Lucan point that the example of lowly service shown by Jesus is to be the pattern and standard of Christian brotherhood.

Such is the Johannine equivalent for the Lord's Supper or eucharistic meal of the earlier tradition, the remarkable thing about it being that the writer replaces the primitive sacrament by a different feast. In view of the general character and attitude of the Gospel, it is impossible to doubt that this was done deliberately. Dr. Abbott, indeed, endeavours to account for the strange omission of the synoptic sacrament by suggesting that, while John knew the spirit of what Jesus had said at the last supper of the earlier tradition, he was ignorant of the exact words. "If he knew precisely what was really uttered, his silence would be—from any modern and logical point of view—unpardonable. We ought (I think) to do him the justice of assuming that he did not know precisely what the words were."<sup>2</sup> Now it may be difficult to lay one's hand on the specific motive which led the writer to differ at this crucial point from the synoptic tradition, but I do not think we are doing him any sort of

<sup>1</sup> A menial task. Cf. Plutarch's *Vit. Pompeii*, 73, where Faonius attends to Pompey, rendering him such services *ὅσα δεσπόταις δούλοις μέχρι νύφως ποδῶν*. If the foot-washing is to be connected with a sacrament, it symbolises baptism rather than the Lord's Supper, perhaps as an implicit protest against the idea of repeated religious lustrations as magically efficacious for salvation (Pfleiderer, *Primitive Christianity*, iv. pp. 232-233). But this aspect is subordinate, at the most.

<sup>2</sup> *The Son of Man*, 3437.

injustice in supposing that, here as elsewhere, he was moving with conscious freedom, and that he had some special reason for the change which he introduced. What that reason was, we can best hope to discover by analysing the passage in the light of the general texture and tendencies of the Fourth Gospel as a whole.

When the Fourth Gospel is connected with the contemporary development of the church's organisation in Asia Minor, it is an attractive hypothesis that the emphasis on the foot-washing, which leads up to the new commandment of brotherly love, was an implicit side-stroke against abuses on the part of prominent leaders and officials. On this view, the author, in chapter xiii., as elsewhere, is opposing the monarchical episcopate, which he regarded as tending to arrogance and mercenary practices. The bishop, as the responsible, paid superintendent of the Lord's Supper and the alms offered in connexion with the rite, is prefigured in the Judas of the Gospel and the Diotrophes of the third Johannine epistle; as against the assumption of supreme power by the financial and administrative official in any congregation, the author shows that what Jesus meant by His supper was to inculcate a spirit of humble brotherhood and a duty of hospitality among the members of the church, not to found a rite which permitted self-seeking officials to show pride and harshness at the eucharistic meal. He wanted to promote in the rising episcopate the duty of hospitality as the note of true apostolic succession, not any aggrandisement on the score of ecclesiastical function. In short, the thought uppermost in his mind was a development of such a warning against the mercenary spirit as Paul addressed to the presbyters at Miletus, or such as that conveyed in 1 Peter (v. 1-5); *tend the flock of God . . . not for filthy lucre, but willingly . . . yea, all of you, gird yourselves with the apron of humility, to serve one another.* In

this perspective the object of the fourth evangelist becomes clear. "He would put in the background the sacred meal which had become the scene of strife and display, and instead he would place an incident which would give the real idea and substance of the sacrament, and emphasise that duty of hospitality which was being neglected. . . . It is by hospitality and humbleness that we get the bread of God—not by partaking of sacred ordinances in a proud spirit. The essence of the Holy Communion is brotherhood and service, and where these are there is a true partaking of the body and blood of the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

But the anti-official motive in the Fourth Gospel is not prominent enough to bear the weight of this interpretation, nor does it explain the particular form of the Johannine account of the supper. Had this been all that the writer wished to convey, he could have done it as Luke has done it (or at least woven into the story of the eucharist a similar warning); there was no particular reason why he should have omitted entirely the institution of the eucharist. What we have, in the thirteenth chapter of the Fourth Gospel, is not a fresh interpretation of the Lord's Supper from a special, spiritual point of view; it is a different feast altogether. It is true, as we shall see in a moment, that brotherliness is the outstanding lesson of the Last Supper in the Fourth Gospel, but this would not have been of itself sufficient to lead the writer to give up the Lord's Supper altogether.

A more obvious explanation of the omission lies in the incongruity between the eschatological element of the Lord's Supper and the strongly marked tendency of the Fourth Gospel to eliminate or transmute the apocalyptic material of the primitive tradition. This also is a *vera causa*, but it does not cover all the data. The Last Supper

<sup>1</sup> H. T. Purchas: *Johannine Problems and Modern Needs*, pp. 30-31.

contained the promise of a future feast, when Jesus and the disciples would be together in the Messianic realm. "I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's realm." These words breathe the high confidence of Jesus in the result of His sacrifice. The conception of the future bliss as a feast was familiar to rabbinic piety, and had naturally passed into some circles of apocalyptic faith; thus in Enoch (lxii. 14) the elect eat together with the Son of Man in the new age. It is in these terms that Jesus expresses His anticipation of the blissful reunion which, in spite of, or rather in consequence of, His death, the Son of Man and His followers are to enjoy in the immediate future. Probably it was owing to such a well-marked eschatological element in the tradition, that both Mark and Matthew omitted any reference to the repetition of the supper, although, as the traditions of Paul, Luke, and the Didachê prove, the repetition of the rite was not incompatible with its eschatological outlook. Had the author of the Fourth Gospel felt any difficulty over the latter, he could have surmounted it by leaving out the apocalyptic saying, as Justin does, and retaining the Lord's Supper in its proper place. Here again, we may argue, he could have got his effect without recourse to the daring step of dropping the Sacrament. The alternatives were not, omit it or retain it in an eschatological shape. Whatever led the writer to leave out the institution of the sacrament, it was not necessarily or primarily its eschatological setting in the primitive tradition.

Another solution of the problem, which lies closer to the Johannine pragmatism, is that the reference to the broken body of Jesus was unsuitable to the writer's theology. In the primitive tradition the broken bread symbolised the crucified body of the Lord, but the author of the Fourth Gospel saw a mystical significance in the fact that Jesus, the

true Paschal Lamb, was not mutilated ; His limbs were not broken (xix. 33, 36). This omission of any reference to the breaking of the bread is paralleled by the account of Justin, but Justin's account again shows that the institution of the Sacrament could have been described without any such reference as would have been incongruous with the Johannean pragmatism.

None of these solutions is adequate by itself. They need to be supplemented by a further consideration. It is in the writer's special conception of the death of Jesus that the clue to His treatment of the Supper is probably to be found. Upon the one hand, he dissociates it from the Jewish paschal meal. The last supper is eaten before the passover : Jesus crucified is the Christian paschal Lamb, inaugurating the redemption of God's people. How far the adoption of this view was due to the writer's anti-Jewish tendencies, and how far it was the result of the Quartodeciman movement in Asia, is irrelevant to our present purpose. The point is that his omission of the institution of the eucharist is deliberate. And if we ask why he could not have mentioned it as well as Paul did, who shared the same view about Jesus being the Paschal Lamb of the church, the answer must be that he intended to dissociate the rite not only from the Jewish passover, but from the Christian agapé. The latter was more to him than the eucharist.

This motive is of supreme importance for an appreciation of the Fourth Gospel's sacramental position. The anti-Jewish motive was early noted. Thus Origen found a special significance in the fact that the passover was called *the passover of the Jews* (ii. 13, xi. 55), not the passover *of the Lord* as in the Law ; he saw in this the fulfilment of the Isaianic saying that God hated the Jewish feasts and disclaimed them (Isa. i. 13-14). The spirit of this interpretation is not untrue to the tendency of the Fourth Gospel,

with regard to the Lord's Supper, but it needs to be combined with a recognition of the fact that the writer also had probably in mind the primitive love-feast of the churches and that he connected this primarily with the Last Supper. I do not lay stress on the coincidence in the opening words : " Jesus, having loved his own within the world, loved them to the end," still less upon the possibility of connecting the alms of the agapê with the allusion to Judas giving something to the poor. The Johannine association of the Last Supper with a prototype of the agapê rather than of the eucharist is not rooted in such secondary traits. But in the foot-washing, which in the ancient world was the work of a slave, and in the consequent lesson on humility and brotherly love, we see pretty plainly what the writer meant—it was a sort of love-feast, inaugurating solemnly the new commandment of love. The last and supreme order of Jesus is not to eat bread and drink wine in memory of Him, but to wash one another's feet, after His example. So Christians have part and lot in His life. It is a higher form of the agapê-feast, a Johannine glorification of the religious significance attaching to this institution of the church.

The early history of the agapê is dim. Père Batiffol has recently denied its existence till the third century, but his arguments involve too arbitrary a treatment of some of the documents, and we may assume without much hesitation that it was connected with the eucharist in the early church, either as a prelude or as a sequel, down to the time of Ignatius at least. In Ignatius *agapê* (Smyrn. 8) means the love-feast and the eucharist together ; he forbids either baptism or the agapê being held apart from the presence of the presiding bishop, to avoid schism. The writer of the Fourth Gospel prefers to secure unity in the church by less ecclesiastical means ; his mystical inward spirit emphasised the love-feast as a symbol which expressed and realised the true unity of



Christians and Christ. He avoids the Pauline use of "the Body" of Christ, owing to its associations with the eucharist, and chooses the metaphors of the flock and the Vine to convey the same truth.

If this suggestion is well founded, we thus gain, in the Fourth Gospel, an important witness to the time and the reasons for the dissociation of the eucharist and the agapê. It is usual to date this separation from the edict of Pliny, and I think Batiffol<sup>1</sup> is right in holding that this edict did induce the Asiatic Christians to give up their second meeting or eucharist in Bithynia, whether they had an agapê or not. It is later dogmatic prejudice, I am afraid, which makes us disinclined to allow that any early Christians could sit loose to the eucharist. But the Fourth Gospel shows a tendency—we do not know how far it was typical or commanded sympathy—to concentrate upon the love-feast and ignore the eucharist, not so much for prudential reasons—to avoid suspicion of Thyestean banquets—as on grounds connected with a deeper and more spiritual view of communion—at any rate spontaneously, not in obedience to a Roman edict which was hostile to religious clubs.

Historians of the early church are fond of noticing that the agapê was not a universal practice, and that its forms varied. If our reading of the facts is accurate, the practice of the Lord's Supper, as a sacrament, was not universal either; the very formulas used in connexion with it were in a state of flux during the early centuries, and more than the formulas. If this inference sounds startling, it is because we are apt insensibly to read back modern notions of the sacraments into the early literature, and fail to do justice as historians to the gaps which the history of the primitive church reveals in this sphere of its praxis. The Fourth Gospel was indifferent to the Lord's Supper for much higher

<sup>1</sup> *Etudes d'Histoire et de Théologie Positive*, i. (third edition), pp. 298 f.

reasons than those which induced the Bithynian Christians to drop its observance, but in both cases the underlying motive was the frank conviction that communion with Christ did not depend essentially upon participation in such a rite. The Fourth Gospel points positively to the spirit of the agapê as the normal and healthy guarantee of such fellowship with the Lord.

But, we may ask, had the writer any place in his theology for the Lord's Supper? And if so, what? The answer to these queries lies in the eucharist-dialogue which is inserted at the close of the sixth chapter, in connexion with the story of the feeding of the five thousand, not as a substitute for or a counterpart of the synoptic institution, but independently. Whether that story had originally a eucharistic motive or not, is a problem which we may leave aside. Such a motive was found in it by the writer of the Fourth Gospel, though it was surely not the motive conjectured by Schweitzer<sup>1</sup> that Jesus, in feeding the crowd, consecrated them, in an eschatological sacrament, as partakers in the Messianic feast to come. The dialogue has three movements, in the third of which it reaches its climax; after describing the incarnate Christ as the bread of life, it insists upon the need of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and then proceeds to give the explanation of this strange language.

The distinctive feature of the dialogue emerges as we read it in connexion with the faith and praxis of the early church. Roughly speaking, we may distinguish three cardinal elements in the primitive conception of the Supper, elements which varied in their relative prominence: (i.) the commemoration of the sacrificial death of Jesus, expressed in the words, *do this in memory of me*, (ii.) the social union of Christians in the Body of Christ, and (iii.) the communion of Christians with the living Christ. The first of these elements is present

<sup>1</sup> *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, pp. 374 f.

to the mind of the author, of course, but it is not prominent ; we cannot say that it is the leading thought in his argument. What interests him chiefly is the third, i.e. in his eucharist-dialogue of the sixth chapter. The second is prominent in the thirteenth chapter, with its account of the love-feast, but it is noticeably absent from the eucharist-dialogue. To the primitive church the eucharist had always been more than a memorial feast, such as was not uncommon throughout the Greek and Roman world, in honour of a society's founder or a family's departed head. It never suggested any idea of a reminder or memorial offered to God, but it did recall vividly by its very praxis the Lord's death till He returned in glory ; it was a *δρώμενον*, one of those actions of a symbolic character which flashed upon the imagination and faith of the worshipping church at every celebration the real presence of the Lord whose historical death lay underneath their fellowship with the Father and their hope for the future.

Now the remarkable feature of the Fourth Gospel's pragmatism is that the writer is only interested in the third of these aspects, as far as the sixth chapter goes. Whatever was his attitude to this sacrament, the importance he attaches to it here is primarily connected with the thought of the individual's personal communion with the risen Christ. Though this communion naturally implies the death of Christ, the stress does not fall upon the conception of that death as sacrificial. In this respect, the Johannine view approximates to that of the *Didachê*, although in the *Didachê* the absence of any reference to " showing the Lord's death " is accompanied, as it is not in the Fourth Gospel, by an eschatological outlook and a direct emphasis upon the unity of the church which is symbolised by the bread. Possibly the Johannine view, that participation in Christ as the Living Bread implies the resurrection, may have been a

contributory reason for the omission of the institution of the rite during his lifetime, as if the writer felt that while Christ was on earth, communion in this sense was unthinkable. "The Spirit did not yet exist for men," he says elsewhere, "because Jesus was not yet glorified." In his view, it was the Spirit which made the rite efficacious. "It is the Spirit which gives life; the flesh is of no use." At any rate, the stress on the spiritual communion of the individual believer with the risen Christ denotes an attitude towards the death<sup>1</sup> of Christ which is in accord with the general theology of the gospel. It is an attitude which is not wholly unexampled in the history of the church, particularly on the side of the mystically-minded. We get a curious parallel in Catherine of Genoa, for instance. Her devotion to the eucharist as the food of life eternal for the individual Christian led her to ignore not simply the death of Christ as a sacrifice but the death of Christ entirely in this connexion. Baron von Hügel points out how "her symbols and concepts are all suggested by the Fourth Gospel, in contrast to the Synoptists and St. Paul. For the eucharist is, with her, ever detached from any direct memory of the Last Supper, Passion, and Death, the original, historical, unique occasions which still form its setting in the pre-Johannine writings. And," he adds, "Catherine follows John in thinking predominantly of the single soul, when dwelling upon the Holy Eucharist."<sup>2</sup> I cite Catherine of Genoa as a partial, though rather morbid illustration of the effect which may be produced upon the conception of the death of Christ by the mystical temper, such as we find it in the Fourth Gospel; but there are two obvious qualifications to be made. The first is, that this testimony is derivative; it does not explain

<sup>1</sup> That is, the death and resurrection are viewed as completing the purpose of the incarnation.

<sup>2</sup> *The Mystical Element of Religion*, ii. pp. 87-88.

the origin of the attitude in the Fourth Gospel. The second is that it assumes—what I think is extremely hypothetical—that the Fourth Gospel, in its dialogue of the sixth chapter, makes communion with Christ culminate in the eucharistic feast.

With regard to the former point ;—

The seedplot of the Johannine terminology is not far to seek. Apocalyptic piety in Judaism looked forward to a renewal of the celestial manna in the Messianic age ; thus in the apocalypse of Baruch (xxix. 8), “ it will come to pass at that self-same time that the treasury of manna will again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years.” The author of the Fourth Gospel, however, has no interest in such eschatological anticipations. His Christ, as incarnate and ascended, is the heavenly bread, here and now, for faith : he is not the giver of it in the remote future. Already in Paul, and in Philo before him, the manna had been interpreted in this sense : thus Philo (*De Leg. Alleg.*, iii. 59 f.) calls it the word and reason or Logos given by God to the soul. He explains how the verse, “ man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,” means that the perfect soul is nourished by the whole of God’s word ; only, he adds, with a characteristic touch, “ we must be content to be nourished by a portion of it.” The author of the Fourth Gospel has a better hope and promise. It is the entire Christ, the whole personality—flesh and blood—who is the bread of life for Christians. The writer mentions blood along with flesh, since according to the Hebrew conception the life of the flesh lay in the blood ; perhaps, too, he has a subtle antithesis in mind when he speaks of the Christ’s flesh in connexion with the spiritual manna, for according to the old story in Numbers (xi. 12–13), Moses, at the giving of the manna, cried out in despair, “ whence should I have flesh to give this people ? for they

cry to me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat." The Christ of the Fourth Gospel gives a manna which is real flesh, adequate nourishment for the soul.

All this is elaborated in the middle paragraph of the dialogue — a paragraph which is in striking contrast to the simple and beautiful language of the Didachê, but which is characteristic of the Fourth Gospel's style and thought. It is unnecessary to suppose that vi. 51b-56 (59) is an interpolation of the later church, in the interests of the realistic sacramentalism. The motive which has suggested this hypothesis is correct, viz., the perception that, literally, it is out of keeping with the context, and even repellent in its defiant realism. But it can be read as it stands, without dislocating the argument, if we bear in mind the writer's standpoint; instead of missing his point by reading into his words a Western literalism which, to do him justice, he has done his best to prevent. He is developing this dialogue, on the basis of the story about the feeding of the five thousand, for the purpose of expressing his cardinal convictions about faith and life in Christ. What these are we learn from passages like the following: "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst"; "This is the will of my Father, that every one who beholds the Son and believes on him, should have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Down to verse 51 this line of thought is clear and simple. Spiritual faith in Christ as the Son of God is the bread and food of the soul. It is the middle section, with its abrupt and paradoxical language about "eating his flesh and drinking his blood," which is the difficulty. You can cut the Gordian knot by removing it as an interpolation, but interpolations ought to be the last resource of sanity, and it is worth while to see if the knot cannot be untied.

Which brings us to the second point. Does the language

of the dialogue disclose the author's estimate of the rite in question? The current view is that behind the Fourth Gospel, as already to some extent behind Paul, there shimmers the sacramental idea of participation, by means of a sacred feast, in the eternal nature of the Deity—the worshipper eating the bread and drinking the blood of the sacrifice, and thereby renewing the substance of his soul as his life blends with the immortal life of the Deity Himself. In the Fourth Gospel, it is held, this prevalent theory is put in terms of the Logos-theology, according to which Christianity is the religion of the Spirit or absolute Reality, mediated through Christ to a perishing world of flesh, and received by the Christian in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. There are various presentations of this view. According to Reinach and others, the writer accepted the notion of theophagy in a highly spiritualised form, analogous to that of the mystery-cults. The Christian eucharist would thus represent an anthropomorphic transformation of the periodic totem-sacrifice. More sensibly it has been suggested that he compromised between the realistic church-view and the higher mystical interpretation. He did not reconcile them; what he did was to protest against a mechanical and superstitious use of the sacraments. Still, he held that life eternal was infused, by the sacraments, as a hyperphysical force, into the personalities of the believing recipients, and that their fleshly nature was thus invested with divine vitality.

At first sight, this reading seems not only plausible but highly probable from more points of view than one.

It claims to place the Fourth Gospel in relation to the early church between Paul and Ignatius, and to do justice at once to its characteristic contribution and to the toll which, like all progressive thinkers, the writer had to pay to the contemporary conditions of his age. But, on closer study, the

theory appears to me open to serious challenge. The alleged instances of worshippers in the cults sharing the life of the deity by partaking of him in a meal are distant, late, and dubious. Even the appeal to Paul is uncertain; and, for another thing, the theory does not suit the exact aim and object of the Fourth Gospel. This particular section of the eucharist-dialogue is not an expression of the writer's essential doctrine in terms of a rite which he found existing in the church: it is neither his attempt to adjust his doctrine to it nor his whole-hearted statement of it. I should prefer to say that it is a use of realistic language, such as may have been current in some quarters, by one who used it just because he felt quite detached from the rite. He spoke in terms of it, as freely and aptly, for example, as Luther spoke to the reformed churches about the Cross. "The cross of Christ has been divided throughout the whole world," he wrote to an Augustinian prior, "every one meets with his own portion of it. Do not you therefore reject it, but rather accept it as the most holy relic, to be kept not in a gold or silver chest, but in a golden heart, that is, a heart imbued with gentle charity." Here Luther speaks vividly and frankly in terms of the mediæval worship of the cross, just because he had parted with that superstition. The higher reaches of religious interpretation afford repeated instances of this attitude; it is characteristic especially of the mystical temper but not confined to it; and we may fairly take the strong metaphors of this Johannine passage in this light.<sup>1</sup> As if to remove misconceptions, the author not only prefaces his paragraph with the words on faith which I have already quoted, but he goes on to add: "it is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is

<sup>1</sup> I do not mean to suggest, of course, that the author of the Fourth Gospel regarded the eucharist as Luther regarded the cross-superstition. But his deliberate omission of the eucharist, together with his appropriation of eucharist-language in another connexion, may serve to indicate how independent he felt communion with the living Christ to be of any such rite.



of no use." "The words I have spoken to you, they are Spirit and life." It is in these words of verse 63, as most editors recognise, that we have the writer's characteristic mind. They are really his way of warning his readers that the foregoing language is not to be taken literally and misunderstood, any more than the psalmist's appeal to taste and see that the Lord is gracious. My point is that we are justified in interpreting the middle paragraph by the preceding and the following, where the writer speaks more in his own dialect; verse 63 is the climax to which all leads up; <sup>1</sup> taking the gospel as a whole, there is little doubt that the conception of faith and eternal life is bound up with a spiritual perception of the personality of Christ, which assimilates Him by trust and obedience. Unless there is strong reason to the contrary, it is unsymmetrical to find in this paragraph an awkward attempt to come to terms with the realistic view of the Supper. The Alexandrian background of the Logos, which is more dominant in the Fourth Gospel than the Hellenistic, did not require any recourse to the sacramentalism of the cults. Judaism cannot be described as a sacramental religion. It is staggering to find a critic like Pfeiderer committing himself to the assertion that "on the testimony of the History of Religion, no popular religion can subsist without sacramental ceremonies." Judaism, to say nothing of Islam, is certainly a testimony to the contrary, and the ethos of the Fourth Gospel, even in its exploitation of the Logos-theory, is Jewish rather than Hellenistic. I imagine the author of the Fourth Gospel would not have failed to

<sup>1</sup> The discussion, according to Wendt (*Teaching of Jesus*, ii. 335), implies "anything but the requirement of a mystical union of the disciples with His glorified heavenly nature"; it is rather "the energetic declaration of the fact that Jesus based the saving significance entirely upon the word of teaching which He, as a man, exercised upon earth." This interprets the Johannine theology too strictly in terms of the synoptic, and undervalues the "mystical union," but it is nearer the truth than the opposite view,

sympathise with Philo's passionate aversion to all mystery-religions.

His attitude to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper might be, so far as his language goes, one of (a) opposition to the church's doctrine, or of (b) interpretation in a higher sense, or (c) of indifference. The first view is held by Kreyenbühl (*Das Evangelium des Wahrheit*, ii. 25 ff.), who finds in the antithesis between manna and bread in chapter vi. Menander of Antioch's repudiation of the pagan magic on its first appearance within the sphere of the Christian sacrament. He also, with much more plausibility, notes the mystical emphasis upon the eternal presence of Christ, as opposed to the eschatological setting of the sacrament in the primitive communities and the realistic view which, he claims, was introduced by Ignatius. Even apart from the special Gnostic hypothesis which Kreyenbühl employs, however, it is not possible to accept such a view as adequate to the genesis of the Johannine theology; the realistic view was probably hovering round some circles earlier than Ignatius, and it is a modern definition of "spiritual" which finds any radical incongruity between a sacramental feast and the ideal worship of God in spirit and in truth. Where Kreyenbühl's theory is right is in its stress upon the critical attitude of the Fourth Gospel to the Lord's Supper. This attitude is interpreted by the majority of critics (b), however, as an attempt to correct a current view of the sacrament which was losing sight of the spiritual reality in a pre-occupation with the material rite. The writer brusquely reaffirms sacramental doctrine; he makes no attempt to conciliate pagan critics. At the same time he restates the doctrine of the Supper, in order to show Christians that external participation was of no avail apart from faith, and that the eternal life and spirit of God could only be mediated through the bread and wine of the rite to a receptive personal experience. "It is the Spirit

which gives life ; the flesh is of no use." The writer, on this view, shared the contemporary idea of the sacramental cults, and held that the life of the Logos was imparted to Christians in the elements of the sacrament ; only, he wished to protest against the popular theory that the efficacy of the rite was mechanical and automatic.

Even this view, however, does not quite correspond to the full presuppositions of the gospel. To what has been already said on this point, I will simply add that if such an interpretation had been presented in the thirteenth chapter, at the institution of the sacrament, it might have been tenable, but the definite substitution of an agapê-feast there suggests that the eucharist-dialogue of the sixth chapter must be read in another light, as an expression of what may be called the writer's (c) indifference to the rite. If there is a sense in which he can be termed legitimately a mystic, he is the first of the mystics or quietists who attached no specific significance to the Supper as a means of communion with God. He is not embarrassed by the presence of sacraments in the church. He feels free, by his faith, to use their very language for his own ends. The paradoxical and defiant way in which the sacramental language is employed points to the serene freedom with which he regarded the sacrament itself, not as the sole or supreme means of enjoying communion, but, perhaps at most, as one traditional rite connected with the experience.

"I am the living Bread which came down from heaven ;  
if any one eats of this bread, he shall live for ever ;  
yea, and the bread I shall give is my flesh, for the life of  
the world.

Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his  
blood, you have not life in yourselves.

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,  
and I will raise him up at the last day.

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me  
and I in him."

It is not modern, it is consonant with the characteristic mysticism of the writer's faith, to say that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper must have been for him symbols, at best, of the presence and benefits of Christ. Then, in answer to the feeling that this last is a hard saying—that language like this is staggering—the reply comes, that it is only intelligible in the light of the resurrection. If connected with a human Jesus who never died, it is incredible. But "it is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is of no use; the words I have spoken to you are spirit and life." This is the apex of the dialogue, and it determines the sense in which the writer intends the slope of the preceding argument to be viewed.

How difficult it was for the early church to maintain this position may be seen from the retrograde conceptions which Ignatius started but apparently failed to popularise, and the significant alteration in the Johannine text made afterwards by the Sinaitic Syriac, which boldly reads: "It is the Spirit which gives life to the body; but you say, the body profits nothing." The most natural interpretation of this Syriac gloss is that it is directed against a depreciation of the eucharist; probably it was due to an ecclesiastical feeling that verse 63 somehow failed to emphasise sufficiently the realistic significance of the Sacrament. The same mistake is repeated by moderns who persist in reading verse 63 as if it meant "the Spirit (i.e., as mediated through the cultus) gives life." This is to subordinate the last paragraph to a literal and realistic interpretation of the second, to isolate the latter from its context and the rest of the gospel, and to assume that for the Fourth Gospel the sensible media were essential to any participation in the spiritual Christ. That assumption is not justified by the available evidence. The aim of the writer, it seems to me, was exactly the reverse.

For him Christ is the food of the soul, the bread of life eternal which sustains the faith of man. Like a genuine mystic he has stated this truth in terms of daring realism, simply because these terms had no longer for him any vital connexion with the literal actions; communion for him was infinitely wider than eucharistic experiences. And finally, to prevent misconception, he adds the clue in the closing paragraph; "The Spirit gives life; the words I have spoken to you, they are Spirit and life."

One ingenious interpretation <sup>1</sup> of this verse as it stands may be set aside, I think, without much hesitation. It is proposed to take *ῥήματα* according to a well-known Hebraism as equivalent not to words but to things, the things just spoken of. When Jesus said, "τὰ ῥήματα which I have spoken to you are Spirit and life," what He meant, we are told, was, "The matters of which I have been speaking, the subject of my discourse, i.e. my flesh and blood, they are something more than mere flesh and blood, they are Spirit and life." But this rendering of *ῥήματα* is inconsistent with the Johannine usage. In the Fourth Gospel the *ῥήματα* of Christ, it is true, are something more than mere words, in our modern sense of the term, but that "something" is not what this interpretation claims. The Hebraism is Lucan, not Johannine. The Johannine *ῥήματα* have a special function; <sup>2</sup> they lie somewhere between mere words and the semi-metaphysical "logoi" or *δυναμείς* of the Philonic Logos. They are almost personified sometimes as living and active expressions of the Spirit of Christ, charged with His vitality for faith, i.e., their effect is not magical but conditioned by moral obedience and trust. Invariably in the Fourth Gospel the phrase means utterances: "Thou hast the *ῥήματα* of

<sup>1</sup> Loisy, *Le Quatrième Évangile*, p. 473; Gore, *Dissertations* (Note c.), *The Body of Christ*, pp. 290 f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Goguel, *La Notion Johannique de l'Esprit et ses Antécédents Historiques*, p. 102.

eternal life," " He whom God has sent speaks the *ῥήματα* of God," and so forth. It is in this sense alone that the words can be taken in the present passage. They refer, as the earliest patristic interpreters<sup>1</sup> saw, to the eating of the bread and the drinking of the blood ; these, we are told, are *verbum visibile*. To adhere to the words and person of Christ, to inwardly digest the sayings of the Logos-Christ, that is the meaning of this highly figurative language and of the rite which it recalls. When we take the passage thus, we are not explaining it away, we are explaining it as the writer intended us to explain it.

It may be objected to the interpretation I have outlined in this paper that it seems to leave the Fourth Gospel out of direct relation to what is supposed to have been one of the vital rites of the contemporary church. I have partly met this objection already, by anticipation, and here I shall only add a single word. If it is asked whether such a writer would be likely to pass over the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, when he was able to embrace baptism in his religious scheme, the answer is that so far as we can speak about " the sacrament," it means for the Fourth Gospel, not as it does for most of us, the Lord's Supper, but rather baptism ; also, that even in the third chapter the allusion to water in the rite is incidental—we might almost say, accidental. The single mention of water, even if it is not a later gloss of the church, is in striking contrast to the reiterated emphasis upon the Spirit, just as in the sixth chapter. And, supposing that the Fourth Gospel ignored or stood aloof from the rite of the Lord's Supper, it would not be quite alone in the early Christian literature. For example, to take an almost contemporary instance, Ephesians deliberately omits it, even in recounting the media of unity in the church ; no epistle is richer in its stress on the moral and mystic unity of

<sup>1</sup> From Tertullian (*De Carne Resurr.* 37) onwards.

Christians in the body of Christ, but " we have one faith, one Lord, one baptism "—not a syllable about the eucharist.<sup>1</sup> The same holds true of the later Shepherd of Hermas, with all its strong ecclesiastical and mystical leanings ; baptism is everywhere, the eucharist is nowhere. The significance of such data is not evaporated by warnings against pressing the argument from silence. It is a modern preconception which leads us to expect evidence in the early church for a widespread devotion to the eucharist as the centre of Christian worship and the indispensable rite of faith. There were evidently circles where it lay only on the [circumference of piety, and these circles, sometimes, as in the case of the Johannine, of semi-mystical character, often voiced types of the finest piety native to the early church.

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<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 5-8.