

MEMORIAL AND TYPOLOGY IN JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN LITURGY

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We can see an ideological connection between the synagogue and the church: the essential element in the world of the synagogue is the proclamation of the Word of God, and the first part of the Mass is called the Liturgy of the Word. Nevertheless, it is essential to remember that when Jews speak about “redemption” either they are referring to the liberation from Egypt or to the eschatological redemption. Christians believe that redemption has already reached its climax in the person of Jesus the Nazarene and are expecting its completion at the end of history, when “God will be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). This means that we are looking together at the same moment in the future, but from different points of view.

The synagogue originated in the exile. The Jews, deprived of the Temple, sought for a means of replacing the animal sacrifices offered there. The Lord had associated his presence in a very special way with the Temple, and after its destruction he himself was, in a sense, in exile. Yet he continued to speak to his people through his Law (*Torah*). This was the principal means of communicating with him and of answering his presence among them.

But the origins of the synagogue were not merely contingent and due to historical situations; when the Jews returned to the land of their fathers and reconstructed the Temple, the use of the synagogue increased rather than diminished, thus proving its vitality. It was rooted in a religious need which became deeper and more widespread as time went on, a desire that religion should penetrate more deeply into daily life and that the non-priestly classes should have a more lively participation in its activities.

During the earthly life of Jesus, the synagogue for the Jew was perhaps the truest expression of spirituality. Jesus himself and his apostles frequently chose to teach in the synagogue. “Jesus went about teaching in their synagogues,” says Matthew (6:23). He was often in the synagogues of Capernaum and Nazareth (Matt. 12:9, 13, 54; Mark 1:21, etc.). He himself, summarizing his life’s work, says before the Sanhedrin: “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in your synagogues and in the Temple” (John 18:20).

Jesus’ Teaching in the Synagogue

Jesus spoke his own word during the synagogue worship. He had a reason for this and, in our opinion, his reason must be sought in the spirit of

the synagogue's worship itself, which was totally centered on the Word of God. This Word was solemnly proclaimed to the people and they responded by prayer.

The nucleus of synagogue worship was the Pentateuch, which the Jews consider to be in a special way *Torah*, hence, the teaching of God. By the time of Jesus the first reading was complemented by and joined to a second from the prophetic books. The oldest available information on the arrangement of these readings comes from texts slightly posterior to the time of Jesus. However, as religious traditions are in general conservative, we can think that this information applies also to the synagogue practice of the time of Christ. The prophetic text often explains and interprets the passage of the Torah. Sometimes it helps to place a feast in its historical context, at others it is a spiritual or homiletic comment on the chosen passage. Finally, the prophetic reading is messianic, in that it describes a vision of the future or a liberator who will come "on that day" to bestow God's Spirit of comfort, salvation, and plenitude upon his people.

The prophetic reading placed the Torah in its future perspective—the expectation of an event still to come, the coming of a long-awaited person. It can be said that in such instances as these, the liturgy of the synagogue seemed as if straining towards a fulfillment yet to come. Thus, at the end of the readings, the worshippers praised God who had just spoken his word to them, and in a prayer that is essentially eschatological, they asked him to hasten this fulfillment.

Magnified and sanctified be his great name in the world
which he hath created according to his will. May he estab-
lish his kingdom during your life and during your days,
and during the life of all the house of Israel, even speedily
and at a near time.¹

This prayer, the *Kaddish*, for many centuries has concluded the synagogue readings; it probably did so also at the time of Jesus. Hearing the promises of God aroused the desire of their speedy realization, and the *Kaddish* was the most natural response. The similarity of the *Kaddish* with the *Our Father* is obvious—they are both eschatologically oriented. It would seem that Jesus found in this future-orientated worship, and in those who shared it, the material and moral setting for the proclamation of his own word.

Many of the episodes in the life of Jesus can be fully understood only if they are seen in this light, for example the multiplication of the loaves as narrated by John (6:1-15).² This miracle explains the later

¹ *The Authorized Prayer Book*, rev. ed., commentary and notes by Joseph H. Hertz (New York: Bloch, 1948), 423.

² See Aileen Gilding, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960); R. Houston Smith, "Exodus Typology in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal de littérature biblique* (1962): 329ff.

discourses of Jesus in which he calls himself “the bread of life” (John 6:22). Between the pericope of the miracle, which occurred at some undetermined place on the banks of Lake Tiberias, and Jesus’ discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum, comes the account of the walking on the waters when the boat of the apostles almost floundered in the storm. This miracle must have been performed between Jesus’ leaving the place where he multiplied the loaves and his journey to Capernaum. In this context the evangelist states precisely: “It was shortly before the Jewish festival of Passover” (John 6:4), adding that “there was plenty of grass there” (John 6:10)—thus stressing the fact that the season was spring.

These details are given by the evangelist so as to place his narrative in its proper setting: the liturgical solemnity of the Passover. We know that the central point of the paschal liturgy for the Jews is the Exodus, and that the Canticle of the Red Sea is read in the synagogue, a canticle which celebrates God’s manifestation of his power in bringing his people through the Red Sea. What must have been the effect of this passage on the apostles who had just witnessed the extraordinary power of Jesus over the waters! They, and all those to whom the miracle was known, could not have failed to make this connection. They would have heard in the synagogue how “the LORD drove back the sea with a strong easterly wind all night, and he made dry land of the sea. The waters parted . . .” (Exod. 14:21), and they could scarcely have failed to remember that while a strong wind was blowing Jesus had walked dry-footed across the sea of Tiberias, almost as though a path had been opened for him.

The prophets, referring to the Exodus, had said that “on that day” (that is, the messianic times) a new way would be opened over the waters. Is there, perhaps, a connection between the words of the prophets and the miraculous event on the waters of the lake? The people of Israel had passed through the Red Sea, Jesus over Lake Tiberias; and Jesus was the one that some had begun to acknowledge as the Messiah.

During the Passover the account of the sending of the manna to satisfy the hunger of the Israelites in the desert is also read from Numbers 11. The discourse on the bread of life which takes up the greater part of Chapter 6 in John’s Gospel is an answer to the question: “What miracle will you show us that we should believe in you? What work will you do? Our fathers ate manna in the desert, as Scripture says, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’ ” (6:31). The gospel text makes no reference to the Passover liturgy; St. John evidently considered the previous reference to the feast to be clear enough.

To we who read these texts so long after they were compiled it is less clear why the crowd recalled the manna, which Jesus took as the theme of his discourse and of the subsequent discussion. But as soon as we realize that the account of the manna had probably just been read in the synagogue, the connection becomes clearer. Jesus uses the question to show how the Scripture can be read also as hinting at himself. The manna had saved the Hebrews from temporal death; he had come down from

heaven to save men from eternal death. “Your fathers ate the manna in the desert and they are dead. . . . I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.”

The parable of the Good Shepherd is found only in John 10, and it is completed by that of the lost sheep in Luke 15. John ends his narrative by saying that it was winter, on the Feast of the Dedication. This feast commemorated the purification of the Temple by Judah Maccabee after it had been profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes, and during the liturgy for this feast the patriarch Joseph’s instructions to his brothers—that it should be made clear to Pharaoh that they and their fathers before them had always been shepherds—is read (Gen. 46:28-47:12).

The account of David’s seeking permission from Saul to fight Goliath is also read. David describes himself as an intrepid shepherd, constantly attentive to his father’s flock (1 Sam. 17:34-36). The prophetic reading for the feast (Ezek. 34), shows the shepherd David in a different light—he is the “one shepherd” to whom God will entrust his sheep and to whom he is bound by the “covenant of peace.” David’s relationship with God is difficult to establish because, in the same passage, the prophet explains that *God himself* will gather his flock together “on that day.” He will seek out the dispersed sheep to bring them back so that he can heal their wounds and cure their sickness.

The entire liturgy of the Dedication, centered on the theme of the “shepherd,” gave Jesus the opportunity of presenting himself as the “Good Shepherd” who, in contrast to those shepherds who “fed themselves” (see Ezek. 34), defends his sheep like David, giving his life for them—the “one shepherd” who, like the Lord himself in Ezekiel, goes in search of his sheep when they are lost. Seen in the light of the liturgical setting of Jesus’ words, the parable of the Good Shepherd can be read as an explicit declaration by Jesus that he is the Messiah. And the identification of the Shepherd with the Lord himself (see Ezekiel) can lead to a very profound understanding of the nature of Jesus as Messiah.

The great autumn festivals are also reflected in the teaching of Jesus. The liturgy was performed in the Temple with certain “popular” elements introduced by the Pharisees, chief among these being the libation on the altar. This took place towards the end of the festival: water was drawn from a spring outside the walls of Jerusalem, carried into the city through a gate which is still called the Water Gate, and poured out on the altar in supplication for rain. The entire rite is given a messianic interpretation through the prophetic reading which follows it.

When that day comes,
 running waters will issue from Jerusalem,
 half of them to the eastern sea,
 half of them to the western sea;
 they will flow summer and winter.
 And the LORD will be king of the whole world.
 When that day comes, the LORD will be unique.

(Zech. 14:8-9)

These words of Zechariah urge the people to dwell no longer on the present, but to see in the water poured out on the altar, the eternal “living water” which “on that day” will make the earth fruitful. Ezekiel speaks again of the marvelous fertilizing power of this water (Ezek. 47). According to a rabbinical interpretation, this marvelous fertility will renew the earth in such a way that, no longer contaminated by man’s sin, it will be restored to its pristine fruitfulness.

Moreover, according to this interpretation, between the earth’s origin and its messianic renovation there is in salvation history the essential event of the exodus when Israel drank from miraculous springs in the desert.³ This must not be forgotten. Thus, when the Jews participated in this Temple liturgy, they looked back to the origin of the world, saw it already being renewed at a crucial moment of Israel’s history, and at the same time looked forward to the time when all their hopes would be realized.

It is against this liturgical background that Jesus cries: “If any man is thirsty let him come to me” (John 7:37). With these words Jesus hints in an implicit way—as was usual in his teaching—that he is the source of living water.

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus consistently placed his teaching in the context of synagogue worship. Luke tells of his preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth and places it in the first year of his public life, shortly after the miracle at Cana. News of that miracle would soon have reached Nazareth, which is close to Cana. This perhaps accounts for the fact that on the following Sabbath Jesus was called upon to read in the synagogue of Nazareth, where he was known only as “the son of Joseph.”

The story is familiar: how he was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, read the passage (Isa. 61:1-2), and then rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant and sat down. “And,” Luke’s account continues, “all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him” (Luke 4:16).

The hope of the people was not to be disappointed. On that day in the synagogue they listened to an explanation of Scripture such as they had never before heard. This was why Jesus said: “This text is being fulfilled today, even as you listen.”

The very presence of Jesus in the synagogue meant that the Word of God, revealed by the prophets and patriarchs, had found a new answer; a new step in history had been reached. In Jesus’ lips “today” means that, in his person, salvation had reached its climax, and now we have to wait for its completion in the whole world.

Out of the Synagogue: The Liturgy of the Word

The apostles, like Jesus, preached their good news in the synagogue. Even Paul, “the apostle of the Gentiles,” is recorded as preaching in

³ Exod. 15:22-27; 17:1-7. *Tosefta Sukkah*, 3.3-18.

the synagogues at Antioch (Acts 13:14-43), at Philippi (Acts 16:13), at Thessalonika, where he preached for three successive sabbaths (Acts 17:2-3), and finally at Corinth (Acts 18:4).

And the Liturgy of the Word that the Church developed grew out of the synagogue worship the early Jewish Christians were so familiar with. The Christian Liturgy of the Word is still marked by the synagogue from which it originated. If we compare the Sabbath services with the oldest forms of the Christian liturgy, we cannot fail to notice some similarities of structure. In the words of Righetti, "a true and exact continuity of worship was intentionally allowed by the first Christians."⁴

Justin Martyr, in his *First Apology*, has left us a very ancient description of the Mass. In the introductory part are to be found, although in a different order, almost all the elements of the synagogue service:

. . . And on the day which is called Sunday, there is an assembly in the same place of all who live in cities, or in country districts; and the records of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets, are read as long as we have time. Then the reader concludes: and the president verbally instructs and exhorts us to the imitation of these excellent things: then, we all together rise and offer up our prayers. . . .⁵

A description of the Eucharist follows, and the service ends with a collection for the poor. In Justin's account, there is no mention of the profession of faith (*Shema*) which is part of the synagogue service, nor of the blessing which closes it. But all the other elements are common to both synagogue and church.

The "prayers" mentioned by Justin could be what Christians today call the "prayers of the faithful." Like those of the synagogue, they conclude the Liturgy of the Word by presenting to God the needs of all men. They resemble the greatly venerated "Eighteen Blessings," which traditionally contain three parts—the first devoted to praise, the last to thanksgiving, and a central portion that changes according to the feast and contained prayers of petition suited to different occasions. It is also quite possible that when Justin speaks of "prayers," he also includes praying of the psalms. Selections from these were recited in the synagogue before the Scripture readings. In both church and synagogue the readings are followed by a sermon, and at the end of both services a collection is made for the poor.

⁴ Mario Righetti, *Manuale di storia liturgica*, 4 vols. (Milan: Ancora 1959-66), 3:62.

⁵ Justin's description is quoted at length in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1345.

On the basis of the data given by Justin, the following “order of worship” scheme can be drawn up:

Christian Liturgy of the Word

- ?
- Prayers of Intercession
- Psalms (?)
- Readings (Law, Prophets, Gospel)
- Sermon
- ?
- Collection for the Poor

Synagogue Service

- Profession of Faith
- Prayer of the “Eighteen Blessings”
- Psalms
- Readings (Law and Prophets)
- Sermon
- Priestly Blessing
- Collection for the Poor

The resemblance between these two structures is still more striking when we compare the Jewish with the more recent Christian form in which the people respond to the proclamation of the Word of God by a profession of faith, thus introducing into the Christian cult an element of Jewish worship which was not present at the time when Justin wrote.

From Passover Meal to Eucharist

It is still more significant to see how the Eucharist, the most important act of Christian worship, originated in the context of Jewish worship. Without entering into the question of the paschal character of the Last Supper, we would like to draw attention to the similarity of structure which exists between it and the Jewish Passover meal. Scholars continue to discuss whether or not the Last Supper has to be envisaged against the background of a Jewish paschal celebration; but it is certain that at a very early date Christians attributed a paschal character to the Eucharist.

There are no available texts of the Passover meal dating from the time of Jesus, but in the corpus of civil and religious rules called the Mishna, particularly the treatise on Passover (*Pesahim*), the additions to this treatise (*Tosefta*), and an interpretative text (*Sifrei*), there exists an

outline of the Passover meal. These documents date to the second century A.D. and can therefore be trusted to give an accurate description of the Passover ritual as observed by Jesus and his apostles.

According to the Mishna, the Passover meal (which the Jews call *seder*) was celebrated at the beginning of the Christian era in much the same way as it is celebrated today: after the blessing of the day had been recited over the first cup of wine, all the requisite foods are brought to the chief of the seder. Among these foods was, of course, the unleavened bread (*matzoh*). According to a well-documented custom of a later date, the unleavened bread is presented to the chief of the meal. He divides one of them in two, covering one part with a small napkin and placing the other with the uncut portions. Over them all he then recites the customary and already ancient formula for the blessing of bread: "Blessed art thou, O LORD our God, who bringest forth bread from the earth."⁶

The divided matzoh seems to have a special importance because a second blessing is pronounced over it immediately after the first: "Blessed art thou, O LORD our God, who hast sanctified us with thy commandments and commanded us concerning the eating of unleavened bread." After this blessing the chief of the seder eats a piece of the matzoh and distributes it to those at table.⁷ The portion which had been placed under the napkins is brought out at the end of the meal and consumed without a blessing. The final blessing over the rest of the food follows. It must be kept in mind that these details are found only in a relatively late text; but, given the scarcity of earlier liturgical documents we cannot exclude the possibility of their referring to a much earlier practice.

At this point the youngest child present must question as to the particular significance of the Passover night, how it differs from all other nights. Why is the bread unleavened, why are the herbs bitter, why is the meat roasted and not boiled? These questions prompt the chief to explain the meaning of the celebration, which he does according to the precepts of the Mishnah, "beginning with the humiliation and ending with the glory."⁸ In other words, he has to comment on the passage from Deuteronomy (26:5-10): "My father was a wandering Aramean. He went down into Egypt . . . there he became a nation, great, mighty and strong. The Egyptians ill-treated us, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with mighty hand and outstretched arm. . . ." He also has to comment on the text of Joshua (24:2-13)⁹: " 'In ancient days your ancestors lived beyond

⁶ *Berakhot*, 39b.46.

⁷ *Mahzor Vitry*, 94, 96. See Enrico Mazza, *La celebrazione eucaristica: genesi del rito e sviluppo dell'interpretazione* (San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo 1996), 29, 59.

⁸ *Pesahim*, 10.4.

⁹ Jerusalem Talmud, *Pesahim*, 10.4.37d.

the River [Euphrates] . . . then I brought your father Abraham from beyond the river and led him through all the land of Canaan. . . . Then I sent Moses and Aaron. . . . So I brought you out of (Egypt). . . . I gave you a land where you never toiled, you live in towns you never built; you eat now from vineyards and olive groves you never planted.”

These are two very ancient outlines of salvation history. They stress the Lord's call to the fathers of the Israelites to leave an idolatrous country in order to take possession of the promised land that he would give to them, his people, and the liberation from enslavement to the Egyptians when Israel truly became the free people of God. This brief summary of the history of Israel provides the chief of the seder with a particularly suitable context in which to explain the reasons for eating roast lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. In the Passover rite during which the eating of the foods is prescribed, every Jew can relive his historic past, actualized in the celebration. The paschal lamb (*pesah*) recalls how the Lord had “passed over” (*pasah*) the houses of the Israelites at the very moment when the first-born of the Egyptians were dying. The unleavened bread is a reminder that because they had to leave Egypt in haste there was not time for the bread to rise. The bitter herbs recall the bitterness of their sufferings in bondage.

Yet this history is never really past, since it is reenacted in the person of every Jew who participates in the Passover rite.¹⁰ According to the Mishnah, every Jew must “consider himself as having come forth from Egypt.” The Passover rite enables all Jews to become conscious of this liberation and to share in it. Therefore, every Jew is bound to

thank, praise, laud, glorify, exalt, honor, bless, extol, and adore him who performed all these miracles for our fathers and for us. He has brought us forth from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to holiday, from darkness to great light, and from bondage to redemption. Let us then recite before him a new song: Hallelujah.¹¹

These words mark the beginning of the recitation of the first part of the Psalms of Praise (*Hallel*), Psalms 113 and 114. These psalms must end with a mention of redemption, to which mention Rabbi Akiba (50-135 A.D.) gave a clearly messianic character:

¹⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie de l'Ancien Testament* (Geneve, 1963), 112 ff.

¹¹ Nahum N. Glatzer ed., *The Passover Haggadah*, rev. ed. (New York: Schocken, 1969), 51.

So, O LORD our God and God of our fathers, bring us to other festivals and holy days that come toward us in peace, happy in the building of thy city and joyous in thy service. And there may we eat of the sacrifices and the paschal offerings. . . . Blessed art thou, O LORD, redeemer of Israel.¹²

The history recalled by the chief of the seder is being continued in the person of every Jew who participates in the Passover rite, while at the same time it looks forward to that future foretold by the prophet, when Jerusalem will be rebuilt and unending worship will be celebrated there. At this point a second cup of wine is blessed and the meal begins. It is truly a ritual meal preceded and followed by readings and prayers. It is this celebration that makes it possible for the Jew in every age to share in the liberation wrought by God for his people.

The blessing "over the food" follows, in thanksgiving for the meal. A-third cup of wine is then blessed, after which comes a blessing for the earth and another blessing that begins, "To him who restores Jerusalem."¹³

The thanksgiving is completed by the blessing of a fourth cup of wine. This is the most solemn of all the blessings and the tradition says that David alone would be worthy to bless this cup, thus clearly attributing to the cup a messianic character. The blessing is followed by the other Psalms of Praise beginning with Psalm 115 ("Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to thy name give glory") and ending with Psalm 118.

There follows another prayer, of which the Mishnah gives only the name: "Benediction over the Song." However, Rabbi Johanan knew already in the third century¹⁴ that this prayer concluded the Psalms of Praise in almost every rite, and hence those of the Passover meal:

The breath of every living thing shall bless thy name, O LORD our God, and the spirit of all flesh shall glorify and exalt thy memory, our king, for ever. From the eternity of the beginning to the eternity of the end, thou art God, and except for thee we have no redeeming and saving king, liberating and delivering, and provident and compassionate in every time of trouble and distress. We have no king but thee, O God of the first things and the last, God of all creatures, the LORD of all generations, who is lauded with many songs of praise, who conducts his universe with mercy and his creatures with compassion.

¹² Glatzer, *The Passover Haggadah*, 53, 55. The formula of Rabbi Akiba has been preserved practically unchanged throughout the centuries. See Moses Maimonides, *Mishna Torah* (New York: Feldheim, 1971).

¹³ *Berakhot*, 48a.

¹⁴ *Pesahim*, 118a. See Rabbenu Shlomo bar Yitzhak in *Mahzor Vitry*, 282.

The LORD slumbers not nor sleeps. It is he who awakens the sleeping, and rouses the slumbering, and makes the dumb converse, and loosens the bound, and steadies the falling, and straightens the bent. To thee alone do we give thanks. Though our mouths were full of song like the sea, and our tongue of rejoicing like the multitude of its waves, and our lips of praise like the breadth of the horizon, and our eyes were shining like the sun and the moon, and our hands were spread like the eagles of the sky, and our feet light as the hinds—we should never thank thee enough, O LORD our God and God of our fathers, and to bless thy name, for one of the thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads of the good thou hast done with our fathers and us.

From Egypt thou hast redeemed us, O LORD our God, and from the house of slaves ransomed us, in famine fed us, and in plenty provided us, from the sword saved us, and from the pest delivered us, and from evil and serious illnesses lifted us. Till now thy compassions have helped us and thy mercies have not deserted us; and may thou never, O LORD our God, desert us. Therefore, the limbs that thou hast distributed among us, and the spirit and breath that thou hast blown into our nostrils, and the tongue which thou hast placed in our mouths—they shall give thanks, and bless, and extol, and glorify, and exalt, and reverence, and sanctify and crown thy name, our king.

For every mouth shall give thanks to thee, and every tongue shall swear to thee, and every knee shall kneel to thee, and every stature bow down before thee, and all hearts shall fear thee, the inward parts and reins shall sing to thy name. As it is written: “All my bones shall say: ‘LORD, who is like unto thee, / Who deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, / Yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?’” (Ps. 35:10). Who is like thee, and who is equal to thee, and who is comparable to thee, the God who is great, mighty, and awesome, God Most High, master of heaven and earth? We shall praise thee, and laud thee, and glorify thee, and bless thy holy name. As it is said: “Bless the LORD, O my soul; / And all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Ps. 103:1).¹⁵

¹⁵ *The Passover Haggadah*, 79, 81.

A medieval legend attributed this prayer to Peter. In the absence of data it is not possible to verify such an attribution, but it is easy to imagine that Peter, the only apostle to whom the Father had revealed the true nature of the Messiah (Matt. 16:16), would have grasped the significance of the Last Supper more clearly than the other apostles. In consequence, he might have formulated a prayer in which he recognizes that the incapacity of man to praise God adequately was the best expression of his own inward consciousness.

At this point in the Passover celebration another tradition (*Tosefta*) prescribes that it must end with the following verse from one of the Psalms of Praise: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD." This conclusion anticipates both by invocation and implied desire the coming of the Messiah and his salvation. It is followed by a final hymn to God, redeemer of his people.

There have been various attempts to specify at what point during the Passover meal Jesus could have pronounced the words of consecration, words which nobody before him had ever pronounced: "Take and eat of this, for it is my Body," and "Take and drink of this, for it is my Blood." The words of consecration over the bread transcend Jewish ritual tradition, but is it possible that they were introduced by the formula already quoted, which is still used by every observant Jew when he breaks bread: "Blessed art thou, O LORD our God, who bringest forth bread from the earth." The Last Supper was a meal overshadowed by the presentiment of death, and the apostles, even if they did not fully understand, surely felt something of this presentiment.

In such a context the above blessing must have assumed the tone and the importance of a prophecy of the resurrection. Jesus identified the bread with his body, so the implication was clear: just as the Lord brought forth bread from the earth so would he bring forth from the grave that body of his son soon to be buried. Moreover, Jewish mysticism later speculated that the bread and wine represent both Israel and the Messiah.¹⁶

Is it possible also to see in the broken matzoh, which is blessed twice during the Passover meal and hence is particularly sacred, the bread which Jesus consecrated and gave to his apostles? In Jewish tradition the unleavened bread had to be eaten with the lamb, and in time it recalled the lamb.¹⁷ This leads to the supposition that all the prescriptions relating to

¹⁶ E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, vol. 6 (New York: Princeton University, 1953-1968), 182.

¹⁷ Rashi, *Ad Pesahim*, 119b

the lamb were applied to the bread.¹⁸ Hence this would be the bread over which Jesus—whom John the Baptist called “the Lamb of God”—would have pronounced the consecratory words. All this is just a supposition.

As for the cup, this matter too requires conjecture. Paul would seem to suggest that it was the cup of blessing (see 1 Cor. 10:16). Luke, however, expressly states that the wine was consecrated after the meal, which would correspond with the traditional fourth cup of the Passover celebration. Based on Luke, it seems possible to identify the cup consecrated by Jesus with that cup which was and still is blessed with particular solemnity at the close of the ritual meal. It has already been said that a messianic character was attributed to this blessing and that the Jews expect King David, prototype of the Messiah, to come himself to bless the cup. The Psalms of Praise seem particularly suitable to the experience the apostles were just then living; indeed parts of these psalms seem difficult to understand outside of the particular context:

... Death's cords were tightening round me,
the nooses of Sheol;
distress and anguish gripped me,
I invoked the name of the LORD: “LORD, rescue me!” ...
What return can I make to the LORD
for all his goodness to me?
I will offer libations to my savior,
invoking the name of the LORD.

(Ps. 116:3-13)

In this psalm the agony of death alternates with a sense of security in the Lord's help, with a faith which we can define as faith in the resurrection. Perhaps Jesus alone understood the full meaning of these words. The apostles had heard them in an atmosphere of impending tragedy; this, and their uneasiness at the prophecy of Jesus' betrayal, had perhaps rendered them incapable of perceiving the hope and promise inherent in the psalm.

The Last Supper ended with the recitation of the “hymn” mentioned by the evangelists (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26), in which we can recognize the Psalms of Praise that close the Passover meal. Thus was concluded the rite of Jesus which, like his interpretation of the Scriptures in the synagogue, is both old and new.

By means of the blessed wine and matzoh the Jew was able to reactualize in each generation the redemption of Israel and anticipate in petition and desire the completion of the redemption to be wrought by the

¹⁸ *Enciclopedia Talmudith*, I, 134.5.

Messiah. That night the apostles could apply to one person the invocation which had for so long expressed the yearning of the Jews: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD."

As we have said, since that moment both Christians and Jews look together at the same point in the future: the coming of the Messiah or his coming back. For Christians, the Messiah has come, is coming, and *will* come. For the Jews, he *will* come.

At the Last Supper, Jesus once again performed an action in the context of Jewish liturgy. At Nazareth he had wanted the synagogue to be the background of his proclamation that the salvation foretold by the prophets was present, in a very particular way, in his own person. And again, at the crucial moment of his earthly life, when he was about to celebrate his own sacrifice under the veil of the liturgical signs, he chose the context of Jewish worship.

In the brief summary of the history of salvation which the chief of the seder makes for his guests, he mentions its beginning and the determining event of the exodus. Prophets had foreseen that this history would be completed in the messianic age. In the Christian faith vision, a new stage in salvation history has been reached in Jesus; and this stage is a point of arrival and at the same time a point of departure.

If the similarities between the Passover meal and the Last Supper we have pointed out were merely accidental, they would have been limited. On the contrary, these similarities seem to point out that Jewish roots are found in the Christian liturgy of the Eucharist. This being the case, we cannot avoid thinking that both the Jewish and Christian traditions might be linked at the deep level of liturgical life.

Typology and Memorial¹⁹

So far we have tried to find points of contact between the Jewish tradition and the Christian tradition, focusing mostly on details, even if important ones. But we have also to explore these points of contact at a more general and deeper level.

It is necessary to make some preliminary remarks. The history told in the Bible begins with creation and, passing through many events, reaches a climactic point.²⁰ For the Jews, this point is the liberation from Egypt. For Christians, this point is found in the coming of Jesus. The climax of biblical history is a point of arrival but at the same time also a point of

¹⁹ Sofia Cavalletti, *Il giudaismo intertestamentario* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1991), 104.

²⁰ The Jewish terminology differs from the Christian one: the Jews call "revelation" the central point of history (exodus); the eschatological completion is called "redemption." See Franz Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, trans. W. Hallo (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1985). The Christian tradition speaks of "creation," "redemption," and "parousia."

departure, because the prophets, above all, drive us to look forward to the completion or fulfillment of the redemption in eschatological time.

Therefore, biblical history is not only recounted. It is also eagerly awaited and hoped for. It extends beyond the boundaries of history in the usual sense of the term. In the Bible it is not so much the span of time—past, present and future—that is primary, but what Augustine calls the “golden thread” that connects the events together. For the people of God there is a plan of God, and this plan weaves together events as they are realized in history. Single events are considered individually, of course, but they are also viewed in terms of the “global picture” in which God is manifesting his plan in the history of mankind. In other words, according to the biblical reading of history, God is the Lord of time, and the Lord of history.

The people of God live with acute awareness that the constant presence of God in history bestows upon history its unity. This means that history can be understood and lived only in the light of the monotheism of Jewish-Christian tradition. The belief that God is *one* (see Deut. 6:4) leads to an understanding that history is one—and that the book that records this history, the Bible, is also one.²¹

One God. One History. One Book. A contemporary Jewish scholar, Stefano Levi della Torre, has described the Jewish people as “an ancient heart turned toward the future.”²² All this must be kept in mind when we try to penetrate into how the biblical message is listened to and lived by the two branches of the people of God, Jews and Christians.²³

To understand the sacred history recorded in the Bible, Christians use the method called *typology*. The word *typology* comes from Greek (*typto*, to beat) and refers to the imprint carved by a matrix. The typological approach to Scripture looks into resemblances and differences between the events of the history of salvation, and into how they impress an imprint, the one into the other.

This approach is found also in the Jewish tradition; in fact it goes back to the prophets. When Isaiah speaks about the eschatological renewal of Israel, he uses the same terms used in the biblical account of creation, in effect looking for a “new creation” (Isa. 65:17). When he speaks about the future liberation, he refers to the exodus, anticipating again what could be

²¹ Sofia Cavalletti, *Remember the Lord your God: A History of the Jewish People* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 2003), 1.

²² *Essere fuori luogo* (To be out of place) (Rome: Donzelli, 1995), 32.

²³ Pope John Paul II has spoken of the Christian people as “the budding, two thousand years ago, of a new branch from the common root” of Jewish faith and history. See “Address to Experts Gathered by the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews” (March 6, 1982).

described as a “new exodus” (Isa. 42:16). The same typological approach is found also in the New Testament, where attention is paid above all to the person of Jesus Christ. And typology continues to be a living part of the Jewish and Christian traditions.

To make proper use of this approach requires considering the entire span of history from the beginning to its ultimate completion. In a Vatican document, we read: “Our aim should be to show the unity of biblical revelation (Old Testament and New Testament) and of the divine plan, before speaking of each historical event, so as to stress that particular events have meaning when seen in history as a whole—from creation to fulfillment.”²⁴ The Second Vatican Council’s *Dei Verbum*, also pointed to the “content and unity of the whole of Scripture” as the hermeneutical method of reading.²⁵

The typological approach guides us to see each event in history as linked to what preceded it and at the same time projected toward completion—“when God will be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). Only such a reading respects the weight of the divine mystery in history. In order to see this mystery in its richness, we must not neglect the eschatological expectation inherent in the Jewish and Christian approach to history. A typology has to be considered in its three stages—beginning, redemption, and parousia—otherwise it would be a typology deprived of hope and would thereby mutilate the plan of God.

Neglect of this point has resulted—to it must be said the shame of we Christians—in what has been called the *theology of substitution*. This theology wrongly declares: once there was Israel, now there is the Christian Church. The tragic consequences and sufferings this approach brought about are still living in the body of many in the Jewish community. And it is still heavy on humanity’s conscience. We hope such consequences will teach us to reject this theology forever.

We return now to what was said about the Jewish passover and the Eucharistic celebrations. Both celebrations make us live past events in the present, orienting us to eschatology; this is evident for everybody who is familiar with these celebrations. Every liturgical event condenses time in some way, making us live in the present events that, without the celebration, would be lost forever, and projecting them towards the *eschaton*, thus preparing the completion of history.

²⁴ Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church* (1985): II, 1.

²⁵ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (November 18, 1965), no. 12.

This approach to liturgy, common to both branches of the people of God, is called “memorial.” When we speak about “memorial” in the liturgy, we find ourselves using the same terms we used when speaking about typology with regards to the reading of Scripture. Memorial and typology each annul the distance between historical events, causing them to converge into the “eternal present” of a manifestation of salvation and of God’s love which encompasses the whole of history. Typology makes the listening to the Word today capable of creating a link with past history and what is still the object of hope, trying to discover the “golden thread” of the plan of God which unites events into a single history. The memorial makes it possible to live today the salvation already realized in the events of the past and projected towards the eschatological completion, awaited now in hope and prayer.

What is the deep connection, the link that unites typology and memorial? The Second Vatican Council’s *Sacrosanctum Concilium* speaks about the “table” of the Word and of the Body of Christ, using the same term for both.²⁶ Therefore, it is in the uniqueness of the table, which both are referred to, that they find the reason of their similitude. Such a similitude is born from the very depth of both, issuing from the unique source from which they derive.

Typology and memorial are linked at the level of the reality which both help us to reach—the infinite mystery of God. The mystery expresses himself and acts; we can reach him through listening and sacramental celebration. When the mystery expresses himself and we listen, our listening follows the typological approach; when we celebrate the mystery in a sacrament, our participation is realized according to the memorial.

When we listen or when we celebrate the mystery, the reality we try to reach is always the same: the one “table” of the Word and of the Body of the Lord. If the “table” is one, also the “rules” of the table must be the same. In order to receive the divine message and live it, it is necessary to follow the same rules which help us to grasp its totality; that is to say, we always have to live history as if it is concentrated in the present, in its dual dimension of past and future.

We must say that typology and memorial are *the methods* connatural to the mystery of God revealing himself in history. It is not possible to really pry into the mystery (and not simply study the Bible) without typology. And it is not possible to celebrate the same mystery apart from memorial.

²⁶ Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), nos. 48, 51.

The fact that throughout the whole development of their traditions, Jews and Christians have shared the same approach, at such a depth of religious life, even if from different points of view, is something that must be pondered with the greatest attention.