



Jewish Liturgy and Christian Liturgy

IN ORDER TO RECOUNT THE GENESIS OF THE CHRISTIAN LITURGY, and even more importantly to understand it within its own context, we must get a proper start. In a work of this kind, the first steps determine all that follows. To imagine that the Christian liturgy sprang up from a sort of spontaneous generation, motherless and fatherless like Melchizedek, or trustingly to give it a sort of putative paternity which would definitively erase any perception of its authentic genealogy, is from the start to reduce all reconstructions to a more or less scholarly, more or less ingenious mass of misconceptions.

It is true that the Christian liturgy, and the eucharist especially, is one of the most original creations of Christianity. But however original it is, it is still not a sort of *ex nihilo* creation. To think so is to condemn ourselves to a minimal understanding of it. For it would mean that we should be mistaken about the materials that went into its construction, but, what is much more serious, we should already be misled about the movement that hatched them in order to build this spiritual temple, or rather this great tree of life that the anaphora is. The materials from which the Christian eucharist was formed are something quite different

from mere prime matter. They are stones that have already been polished and skillfully worked. And they do not come from some demolition yard where they would have then been refashioned without concern for their original form. Quite the contrary. It is in a studio which has consciously inherited both a long tradition of experience and its finished products that these will be prepared for their new function. And this will not be to do away with the first results but to complete them, through some re-finishing in which not a jot of the original engraving will be effaced.

With the first eucharistic formulas we can no more start from zero than we can with the Gospel. In both cases, by providential design, there is an Old Testament which cannot be overlooked. For if providence evidently did judge this stage necessary, we have neither the right nor the ability to push it aside.

Stating this already gives the direction in which we shall have to look for providence's preparatory work. It would be at least surprising if the Old Testament of the liturgy were not the same as that of the Gospel. It is nevertheless just what many scholars seem to admit as an axiom which needs neither proof nor discussion. It is a foregone conclusion, they would like to tell us, that either there is no prehistory to the eucharist or else, if there is, it can be found only outside of Judaism.

We must admit that the continued persistence of this state of mind, even with scholars who are as deeply intuitive as they are well informed, is somewhat disconcerting.

When we see Dom Odo Casel's immense effort to find the antecedents of the mystery of Christian worship in the most incongruous pagan rites, and the small concern he brought to the least contestable Jewish antecedents of this same mystery, we wonder how such an open mind could have remained so little open to certain obvious matters of fact. What is most surprising is that he was in no way ignorant of the Jewish texts whose comparison with Christian texts is indispensable before any other comparison can be made. He cites them.¹ He observed their

¹ Cf. O. Casel, *Le Mémorial du Seigneur dans la liturgie de l'antiquité chrétienne*, Fr. trans. (Paris, 1945), pp. 23 ff.

most striking parallels. But for him they are just noteworthy parallels. It seems he cannot see that the origin, and also the explanation of what is most *sui generis* in the Christian eucharist is to be found here. He looks for neither origin, nor explanation anywhere except in the pagan mysteries.

Another liturgist, still more scholarly and perhaps more ingenious than Casel, Baumstark, cannot resist the obvious.² For him there can be no doubt that there are borrowings from the Jewish liturgy in the Christian liturgy, as well as affiliations with it. But he did not arrive without difficulty at accepting this dependence as an original fact. In this area of the eucharistic prayer in particular there is a reluctance to assume that the thematic correlations (i.e. in the wording) can be original. For the most part, people seem to believe it is merely a question of a secondary fact, of a later contamination that came about at the time of the final working out of the eucharistic texts which were to become classic. This is an hypothesis with nothing positive to back it up and its unlikelihood will be weighed when we observe the frenetic antisemitism that unfortunately afflicted Christians from the end of the patristic period onward. Let us point out that it is the Syrian authors who generally evidence the most pointed antisemitism. We have only to think of the shocking texts of St. John Chrysostom that Lukyn Williams has assembled on this theme.³ Now it is they also who would have been responsible in this case for this overlaying of Synagogue forms upon those of the Church! How could we seriously believe that?

The question which then arises is unavoidable. Why have people wished with all their might to search so far and wide, and with such unlikely detours, in order to avoid finding the true sources of the Christian liturgy close at hand? It seems that we must give a series of answers to this question, answers which

² A. Baumstark, still reticent in *Trisagion und Qedušā*, in *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*, III (1923), pp. 18-32, in the third chapter of *Comparative Liturgy* (Westminster, 1958), reaches an opinion that is very close to everything that the present book will uphold.

³ Cf. A. Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos. A Bird's Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1935). See texts like: Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, P. G. 48, col. 843 ff.

are furthermore interconnected and interlocked. Our critical knowledge of the origins of Christianity first of all remains too dependent upon the work of Protestants and consequently reflects a basic Protestant prejudice: far from completing Scripture, tradition could only be a degradation and a corruption of it. Furthermore, the same knowledge remains overladen with conceptual contradistinctions of a Hegelian dialectic that sees no other explanation possible for the Catholic synthesis than a conflict between a "pagan-Christian" antithesis and the "Judeo-Christian" thesis. Finally, all of this becomes clogged in one of those erroneous critical "obvious facts" that the latter part of the 19th century accepted as intangible facts, but which are merely a sophistic development of tentative findings. What appears to be solid rock actually flakes off under the pressure of genuine criticism.

Let us take these points one by one. Catholic scholars do admit that in Christianity, starting with the New Testament, the inspired texts may not be isolated from that body where the Spirit who inspired them dwells. They admit it because they are Catholics and, without this, would no longer be so. Having admitted this they have no difficulty in establishing the well-foundedness of this *a priori* on the most irrefutable facts to the extent that Protestant scholars themselves, willingly or not but more and more decisively, are coming to agree with them. However, once we are no longer dealing with Christianity but with Judaism, the Catholic reflex no longer works. The old Protestant *a priori* then regains the upper hand. In the case of Christianity there was no difficulty in admitting and proving the reality of the statement that the inspired texts cannot be opposed to tradition nor isolated from it. To the contrary, it is in it and from it that they were derived. Since this truth, for the Old Testament, seems no longer necessary as of faith, it is forgotten that it is first of all a matter of a truth of good sense. And although one is Catholic for the New Testament, one becomes Protestant for the Old Testament. Here tradition can be synonymous merely with a "superfetation" that is foreign to the sacred texts and ends up as the degradation and ultimately the radical adulteration of their content. This was admitted once and for all by the old Protestant

school. The more modern Catholic school, seeing no obligation to doubt it, accepts it and idly endorses it.

Still it ought to seem peculiar that what is the condition of the truth of life in the New Testament is not the same in the Old, —that the sacred texts in one case cannot be separated from living tradition, whereas in the other they must be. Strange that the Word of God from Christ's time onward lives in the People of God in which the Spirit who is believed to have inspired that Word dwells, while before Christ this Word would have fallen from heaven, as if the Spirit had directly produced its letter without having to go through men's hearts, and therefore without having left any evidence there of his passing through.

In fact progress in biblical studies, among Protestants first of all, has shown the artificiality of this dichotomy.⁴ Revealed truth both in the Old and New Testaments, lives in men's hearts before being written down. And even though it becomes once fixed with the greatest authority, it is still living and susceptible of being developed in these hearts and this is even truer of the Old than of the New Testament. For, before Christ, we do not yet have the unique and ultimate authority of a transcendent personality, dominating every other expression of truth and imposing itself as *the* ultimate Truth. To isolate or separate the holy Word and tradition, the Word of God expressed once and for all and the life in the People of God of the Spirit who inspired this expression, is therefore still more contrary, if that is possible, to the nature of things in the Old Testament than in the New. Consequently it is impossible to imagine the relationship of the New Testament with the Old as a relationship that would be connected here only with the inspired texts in the strict sense alone and could or should ignore its contextual surroundings.

Nevertheless, on first sight, Jesus' objection that he voiced against the tradition of the scribes and Pharisees as a corrup-

⁴ See, as one of the first among these, Oscar Cullmann's article inspired by the problems raised by the *Formgeschichte* and published in the *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* (Strasbourg, 1925), pp. 459-477, 564-579. The Scandinavian school of exegesis deserves the credit for having shown the capital importance of Jewish tradition, and particularly the liturgical tradition, for an exact understanding of the Old Testament.

tion of the Word of the Old Testament, which was the prime obstacle to the transition from this Word to his own word, makes a very strong impression. Yet its power is very closely connected with its ambiguity. What Jesus denounced is not the tradition as such, but its aberrant or withered forms. Such a denunciation is just as valid in regard to the deterioration and decay in Christianity as in Judaism. These are the deviations or the petrifications which produce heresies today as they did yesterday. But it is not by those who have failed it that one should judge a tradition, whatever it may be. Our better acquaintance with the Pharisees,⁵ and more generally with these inspiratory movements in ancient Judaism that are too easily called sectarian, and which ought better be compared with our own religious orders, has convinced us of their positive value.⁶ Even though certain minds could become involved by them in their denial of the creative newness of the Gospel, those who found in them an incitation to make greater progress were no less numerous. And it is perhaps in St Paul, the Christian apostle who was most steadfast in his will for universalism and in his refusal to enclose Christianity within the ready-made categories of Judaism, that we find the best evidences of the close connection between these old categories and the newest formulations of the Gospel.⁷

Limiting ourselves merely to this unique example from St. Paul, the manifold studies on the relationship between his thought and rabbinical thought preclude our believing that the latter could be of some use to understand him merely in settling the grammatical sense of a formula or the literary type of a pericope. Still more grievous would be the error in believing that what is related in his thought to Jewish thought is merely dead-weight—a sort of straight-jacket which he is not quite able to undo completely. It is to the very flesh of Pauline thought and to what

⁵ Cf. the work, already old, of R. Travers Herford, which is still worth reading: *The Pharisees* (London 1924).

⁶ It is impossible here to give even an elementary bibliography on everything that has been written about the problem of the Jewish "sects" since the Qumrân discoveries. For a first glimpse, cf. A. Dupont-Sommer, *Les Écrits esséniens découverts près de la Mer Morte* (Paris, 1959).

⁷ Cf. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London, 1948).

is most personal in it that this Jewish thought is related, and not merely to its external clothing. We cannot comprehend his Christianity if we separate it from his Jewishness which antecedes it. It evolves through a process of change that lays greater emphasis on the flowering of that tradition than on its being cast off.

It will undoubtedly be said that in Christianity we have a simple criterion for distinguishing certainly authentic traditions from those that are questionable, or clearly heterogeneous: the former go back to Christ or at least to the apostles. Obviously this criterion no longer holds when we are speaking of traditions that are anterior to Christianity. But from the Christian viewpoint there is a reciprocal criterion for the latter, and its application is even easier. It is what apostolic Christianity in fact retained from Jewish tradition.

The more contemporary evidence multiplies, as has been the case since the Qumrân discoveries, the more obvious it becomes that the extent of this recreative preservation surpasses by far anything that could have previously been imagined. The supposition of the exegetes influenced by post-Hegelian views that what is original in Christianity would at the very least be defined in and by a substitution of essentially universalist themes of hellenistic thought for properly Jewish and therefore particularistic themes, seems groundless and even bereft of substance. This is merely an *a priori* mental fiction that could be imposed on the facts only to the extent that they were little or poorly known.

In the first place the knowledge we have today of hellenistic Judaism is enough to convince us that the fact that the Christians used the materials and even the instruments of Greek thought as a medium of expression, or of reflection, has nothing specifically Christian about it, and especially nothing that would permit us to oppose Christianity to Judaism. Nothing is clearer than that the Jews did this long before the Christians, and if there ever was any effective hellenization of early, if not primitive, Christianity, it was first of all a product of the school of the Jews and not a reaction against them.⁸

⁸ Cf. E. R. Goodenough, *By Light Light. The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic*

Moreover, the best contemporary studies on Philo give even better proof of the fact that for the Jews of this time already, it was much more a question of a judaization of the elements and themes of Greek thought than of a conversion to it or submersion into it.⁹ For a stronger reason the same must be said of the Christian authors whose originality, it was thought, could be boiled down to a hellenization process. It is the author of the fourth gospel who was especially thought to betray an evident transference of intellectual milieu and this religious metamorphosis. However, after a more thorough study and with the help of much broader comparisons, he has been discovered to be much more dependent upon Judaism and much more faithful to its spirit than we should ever have imagined one or two generations ago.¹⁰

But if there is one element in the whole of Christian tradition that in all of the forms in which it is known shows the continuity with and the dependence on Judaism, it is the eucharistic prayer. There is surely no more creative creation in Christianity than this, and we believe that the whole of the following study will show it. In spite of this, however, whether we are dealing with the basic themes, their reciprocal relations, or the structure and the development of the prayer, the continuity with the Jewish prayer that is called "berakah" is so unbreakable that it is impossible to see how we can avoid speaking of its dependence.

It is at this point that the last argument against the examination of such a hypothesis is raised. Its very statement, we will not deny, has such a decisive immediate effect that we might be tempted to abandon all discussion. But this would be to say that the argument either proves too much or else proves nothing at all.

Some people pose the prejudicial objection that we have not even one Jewish text that antedates the middle ages, which

Judaism (New Haven, 1935), and H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1948).

⁹ Cf. J. Daniélou, *Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1958).

¹⁰ Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, 1953).

therefore would seem to preclude any comparison between the Christian eucharists and the corresponding texts of the Jewish liturgy. How, they say, would it be possible to make a valid comparison between such late texts and the eucharist, either in its primitive state or as it has evolved in those forms which are still in use, and which became fixed for the most part in the patristic age? As striking as it may be, the argument is merely a paralogism. It relies completely on an implicit confusion between a text's date and the known date of the oldest manuscript or of the oldest collection that has preserved it for us. In this regard it is perfectly correct that the most ancient manuscripts of the Synagogue liturgy that we have are more or less recent medieval copies of the *Seder Amram Gaon*,¹¹ a collection which itself was composed only in the ninth century. But before coming to too hasty a conclusion, it would be good to remember that before the Qumrân discoveries we also had no copy of a Hebrew text of the Bible prior to this date.

More generally, before the more or less recent discoveries of Egyptian papyri, very few manuscripts of the authors of antiquity came down to us from before the Carolingian renaissance or the first Byzantine renaissance which is approximately contemporary with it. If there is any validity in the reasoning that concludes that the Jewish liturgy as we know it could hardly go back before this period, who would be ready to uphold a parallel thesis that should be equally valid for the literature of Greco-Roman antiquity? In fact, we might mention that as a matter of fact in the beginning of the 18th century it did find an erudite partisan to uphold it. It was Père Hardouin-Mansart, who with fearless logic did not hesitate to denounce Vergil, Horace, Cicero as well as Plato and Homer as mere pseudonyms assumed by unemployed monks of Byzantium or Gaul to cover up their own elaborate literary endeavors¹². It is true that the author of

¹¹ Cf. David Hedegard, *Seder R. Amram Gaon, Part I, Hebrew Text with critical Apparatus, translation with Notes and Introduction* (Lund, 1951). We shall have constantly to refer to this volume, which we shall designate by the abbreviation D. H.

¹² This unbelievable story was retraced by Owen Chadwick, *From Bosuet to Newman* (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 49 ff.

this astonishing theory, as erudite as he was ingenious, was to end his days in an insane asylum...

The same external cross-checking and internal criticism that destroy his specious argumentation in the case of the classical authors are equally valid in regard to the Jewish liturgy. Even though we do not have any complete copy of the texts going back further than Amram Gaon, we have too many precise and undeniably anterior allusions and citations for us to be able seriously to doubt that these texts, in their entirety, are much more ancient than their oldest copies surviving today. And this is corroborated by their content, their style, their language which cannot seriously be looked upon as medieval. The texts of Jewish prayers that may be put on a parallel with the most ancient texts of the Christian eucharist do not reflect the Jewish theology of the High Middle Ages, but that of the Judaism that was contemporary with the origins of Christianity. And both their style and their language are related to the prayers and the hymns discovered at Qumrân much more than to the Hebrew of the later *piyutim*, not to mention medieval Hebrew. But above all, the rabbinical sayings, the prescriptions or the citations of the *Mishnah* or the *Toseftah*, which are undeniably very early and which in one way or another make reference to them, are far too numerous to permit any serious doubt at least in regard to the general tenor of the prayers.

To this a counter-proof must be added. The astonishing closeness of the texts in the Seder Amram Gaon and texts still in use in the Synagogue of our own day¹³ attests to the liturgical conservatism of the Jews, which is even more noticeable than with the Christians; this assures us that here less than elsewhere we cannot deduce the date of a text from that of a manuscript or a collection. Furthermore we know on good authority that, if the Jews did in fact modify their liturgy after the beginning of the Christian era, when these modifications were not the simple

¹³ Cf. S. Singer, *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book of the United Congregations of the British Empire, with a new translation*, 15th ed. (London, 1944) and I. Abrahams, *A Companion to the Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, rev. ed. (London, 1922, reprinted, New York, 1966).

addition of new factors, they were generally motivated by a concern for removing from Jewish worship what might have been reused and reinterpreted by the Christians. This is especially the case for the calendar of biblical readings.¹⁴ Hence it follows that those parts of the Jewish liturgy that are undeniably parallel to the most characteristic Christian texts enjoy a special safety. If they are still there it is so because the Jews themselves judged them to be too essential and basic for the polemical concern behind the reform of their own liturgy not to have been held in check at the very point where it would have had the best opportunity to manifest itself.

Finally, we must add (and this is a capital point) that it is not only in the prayer texts that the Church's dependence on the Synagogue seems to be noticeable. It is also in all aspects of worship; architecture, sacred music, and even in an area which up until recent discoveries was never even considered, iconography.

Archeology has shown what might be called an obvious kinship between the arrangement of the synagogues contemporary with the origin of Christianity and that of the primitive places of worship like those that still exist, particularly in Syria. We have treated this point in another study, and we have just returned to it more in detail in a later volume.¹⁵ Let it suffice here to recall a few salient points.

Like Christian churches the old synagogues are, *domus ecclesiae*, the house where the faithful assembly comes together. They remain closely connected with the Temple of Jerusalem (or the memory of it). They are oriented toward the Temple for prayer. The direction of the *debir*, the "holy of holies" where the divine presence, the *Shekinah* was thought to reside, is marked out by a porch, behind an "ark" where the Holy Scriptures are kept, which in turn is furnished in imitation of the Temple with a veil and the seven-branched candlestick, the *Menorah*. Later, the

¹⁴ Cf. R. G. Finch, *The Synagogue Lectionary and the New Testament* (London, 1939).

¹⁵ See the chapter on Sacred Space in our work, *Rite and Man: Natural Sacredness and Christian Liturgy* (Notre Dame, 1963), and our book *Liturgy and Architecture* (Notre Dame, 1967).

porch which in fact had not been used for a long time, was to be replaced by an apse where the ark was finally placed. The assembly itself is centered around the "chair of Moses" where the presiding rabbi sits, in the midst of the benches of the "elders." The congregation is grouped around the *bema*, a platform supplied with a lectern, which the lector ascends to read, as we see in the Gospel, the texts that the *hazan*, the "minister" (ancestor of our deacon) has taken from the ark. Then all turn toward Jerusalem for prayer.¹⁶

In the ancient Syrian churches the chair of Moses has become the episcopal seat, and the semi-circular bench that surrounds it the seat of the Christian "presbyters." But as in the synagogue they remain in the midst of the congregation. The *bema* is also there, not far from the ark of the Scriptures which is still in its ancient place, not at the far end, but some distance from the apse. It is still veiled with its curtain and the candlestick is still beside it. The apse, however, is no longer turned toward Jerusalem but to the East, a symbol of the expectation of Christ's coming in his parousia. While it was empty in the old synagogues (later the ark was installed there), in the Syrian church this eastward apse now contains the altar before which hangs a second curtain, as if to signify that from now it is the only "holy of holies" in the expectation of the parousia.¹⁷

Along with the Jewish origin of Christian worship a comparison of these two arrangements illustrates better than any commentary, the newness of Christianity. The eucharist has replaced the Temple sacrifices and henceforth the *Shekinah* resides in the humanity of the risen Christ, who has no earthly dwelling place, but will return on the last day as the definitive East that each eucharist anticipates.

Iconographical comparison corroborates this genealogy of Christian worship. When the Dura-Europos synagogue was discovered and its frescos could be admired, it seemed to be an exception, in contradiction to Jewish iconoclasm. Actually, as Sukenik in

¹⁶ Cf. E. L. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (London, 1934).

¹⁷ Cf. the previously cited chapter in *Rite and Man*.

his study on the ancient synagogues shows, the Dura-Europos synagogue is an exception only because of the unique preservation of its decor.¹⁸ But in practically all of the ancient synagogues there are vestiges of a very similar decoration. We must conclude, he emphasizes, that it was only at a late date and out of an undoubted reaction against Christianity that the synagogues came to forbid any figurative ornamentation.

Moreover, the similarity between the selection of biblical themes in the synagogues and that which is found in paleo-Christian frescos or mosaics is striking. The same episodes are kept by both. Their treatment attests that in the Synagogue and the Church they were interpreted in the sense of an actual application to the People of God celebrating their "memorial" in its liturgy. We shall return to this point later, but we must emphasize that the analogies, indeed the identities, are so striking, for example at Dura-Europos itself between the synagogue which has just been mentioned and the church which was also discovered in the same locality, that some have come to ask whether what had been taken to be a synagogue was not rather a Judeo-Christian church.¹⁹ This supposition seemed to find support in the fact that among the manuscript fragments discovered in the supposed synagogue one was found which gives us one of the eucharistic prayers from the *Didache*, but in Hebrew! Actually too many signs indicate that we are indeed dealing with a synagogue, although it is still true that the continuity from the synagogue to the church is proved to be so strict that there is some excuse for being mistaken about it.

This discovery of a Hebrew original of a eucharistic prayer from the *Didache* emphasizes one final fact that leaves no longer any room for doubting the genesis of the Christian eucharistic prayer from Jewish prayers. We have a series of particularly valuable texts which form the connecting link between the Jewish and Christian liturgies. First there are texts, like those in the *Didache*, that are Jewish texts which the Christians were

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 82 ff.

¹⁹ This viewpoint was upheld in a paper given at the *Patristic Conference* of Oxford in 1963.

able to use for a certain time with hardly any revision. They simply gave a renewed meaning to certain essential themes, like *qahal-ecclesia*, *berakah-eucharist*, and others.

But we soon observe other texts succeeding these, like those whose Jewish origin Bousset pointed out in the 7th book of the *Apostolic Constitutions*,²⁰ and which Goodenough studied more in detail.²¹ Here, the essence and the body of the text remain Jewish, and only a few words were added to specify the Christian interpretation and transposition.

Go one step further and we find, as in the 8th book of the same collection, prayers that are undeniably of Christian composition, but which are still dominated by Jewish models, and even continue to incorporate fragments of Jewish prayers.

When all of these facts are taken into account, it becomes very hard still to reject textual comparisons. Therefore, in examining these texts point by point and following their evolution step by step, we believe that it will become obvious that the eucharistic prayer, like all the "novelties" introduced by Christianity, is something new that is rooted not only in the Old Testament in general, but immediately in the prehistory of the Gospel that is the prayer of those who "were awaiting the consolation of Israel."

²⁰ W. Bousset, "Eine Jüdische Gebetsammlung im siebten Buch der apostolischen Konstitutionen", in *Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologische-Historische Klasse*, 1915 (1916), pp. 435-485.

²¹ Goodenough, *op. cit.*, pp. 306 ff.