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Parousia and Liturgy^[1]

Although there are various possible translations of *Maranatha*, (Our LORD comes, Our LORD has come), the fragments at the end of the Book of Revelation show that it was understood at that time to mean *Come LORD*. The LORD himself assures his people that he is coming soon to bring the judgement (Rev.22.7, 12, 20), and the prayer reflects this hope of his imminent return. The position of these fragments at the end of the Book of Revelation suggests that they were no longer central to the message of the book. In other words, *Maranatha* was being understood in another way.

The same prayer appears elsewhere as the closing lines of a letter which give no indication of how it was understood (1 Cor.16.22), but also at the close of an early Eucharistic prayer, possibly the earliest known outside the New Testament, a very significant context (Didache 10). *This links the return of the LORD to the Eucharist*. Other lines of the prayer are ambiguous: 'Let this present world pass away', for example, could imply either a literal understanding of the LORD's return or the present transforming effect of the Eucharist. *Maranatha in the Eucharist, however, must be the original epiklesis, praying for the coming of the LORD*. The Didache prayer has no reference to the words of institution at the Last Supper and no Passover imagery. As implied in John's account of the Last Supper (John 13.1-20), Jesus is 'Thy Servant Jesus', and thanks are offered for the knowledge, faith and everlasting life made known through him. The bread and wine are spiritual meat and drink (cf. John 6.25-58) which cause the Name to dwell in the hearts of those who have been fed. This could indicate that John's understanding of the Eucharist was the formative influence here, and that it was his new understanding of *Maranatha* which led to its transformation into the Eucharistic *epiklesis*.

Passover or Day of Atonement?

Despite the apparently clear accounts of the Eucharist in the Synoptic Gospels, there are many problems as to its true origin and significance. *The Passover is the least likely context as this was the one sacrifice not offered by a priest* (m.Yoma 5.6), and the earliest tradition remembers Jesus as the great High Priest^[2]. The words of institution known to the evangelists (Matt.26.26-28; Mark 14.22-24; Luke 22.14-20) and Paul (1 Cor.11.23-26) indicate as their context the priestly sacrifice of the Eternal Covenant, in other words, the Day of Atonement. The position of the Christian altar in a church building, beyond the boundary between earth and heaven, shows that it derived from the *kapporet* in the Holy of holies, the place where the Atonement blood was offered.

Even though Paul knew Christ as the paschal lamb (1 Cor.5.7), he had also been taught that his death was 'for our sins in accordance with the scriptures' (1 Cor.15.3). This indicates that the earliest interpretation of the death of Jesus was based on the fourth Servant Song, which, in the form known at Qumran, depicts a suffering Messiah figure who bears the sins of others (1Q Isa^a 52.13-53.12). He was the High Priest who sprinkled the atonement blood (Isa.52.15) and *was himself the sacrifice* (Isa.53.10). A similar expectation is found in Peter's temple sermon; the Servant, the Author of life, was about to return from heaven bringing 'times of refreshing' (Acts 3.13-21). Again, these texts indicate that the original understanding of the death of Jesus was the renewal of the Eternal Covenant on the Day of Atonement.

The original context of the Eucharist should sought in the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest took

the blood into the holy of holies and then returned to complete the rite of atonement and renewal. At first the Christians had prayed for the literal return of the LORD to bring judgement on their enemies and to establish the Kingdom. Their hopes for the history of their times were based on the ancient ritual pattern of the Day of Atonement. Jesus, the great high priest, had sacrificed himself as the atonement offering of the tenth jubilee, had passed into heaven, the true holy of holies, and would emerge again to complete the atonement. When this did not literally happen, John learned in his vision of the returning high priest (Rev. 10) that the expectations of the Church should return to the temple liturgy whence they had come. In the original temple ritual, the anointed high priest, even though he 'was' the LORD, had taken into the holy of holies the blood of a goat which represented his own lifeblood. As he emerged, he sprinkled 'his' blood, i.e. he gave his life, to cleanse and consecrate the creation. This renewed on earth the kingdom of the LORD's anointed. Hence 'Thy Kingdom come.'

The Messiah, both High Priest and victim, was the theme of the Eucharist as it was of the Day of Atonement. Dix concluded: 'From the days of Clement of Rome in the first century, for whom our LORD is 'the High-priest of our offerings' Who is 'in the heights of the heavens (1 Clem.6) it can be said with truth that this doctrine of the offering of the earthly Eucharist by the heavenly Priest at the heavenly altar is to all intents and purposes the only conception of the eucharistic sacrifice which is known anywhere in the church... there is no pre-Nicene author Eastern or Western whose eucharistic doctrine is at all fully stated who does not regard the offering and consecration of the Eucharist as the present action of the LORD Himself, the Second Person of the Trinity.'^[3]

Interpreting the Eucharist as the Day of Atonement offering, Origen wrote: 'You who came to Christ the true high priest, who made atonement for you... do not hold fast to the blood of the flesh. Learn rather the blood of the Word and hear him saying to you "This is my blood which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." He who is inspired by the mysteries knows both the flesh and the blood of the Word of God (On Leviticus 9.10). Jerome, commenting on Zephaniah 3 wrote of 'the priests who pray at the Eucharist for the coming of the LORD'. He too went on to link the day of the LORD's coming to the Day of Atonement, and 'wait for me, for the day when I rise' (RSV Zeph.3.8) was read as 'Wait for me on the day of my resurrection'. This association of the two advents of the LORD with the Day of Atonement is found as early as the *Letter of Barnabas*, a Levite. As in Jerome, the earthly life of Jesus is compared to the role of the scapegoat who bore the sins, 'but the point of there being two similar goats is that when they see him coming on the Day, they are going to be struck with terror at the manifest parallel between him and the goat (Barn.7). The implication is that the blood of the goat being brought from the holy of holies was believed from the very earliest period to prefigure the Parousia and that the association of the Eucharist and the Day of Atonement was well known. Justin in the mid-second century linked the sacrificed goat to the second coming, (Trypho 40) and Cyril of Alexandria wrote some two centuries later: We must perceive the Immanuel in the slaughtered goat... the two goats illustrate the mystery (Letter 41).

In the Eucharist, the bishop or priest 'was' the High Priest and therefore the LORD (e.g. Ignatius Magn. 6 'Let the bishop preside in the place of God'). He took into the holy of holies the bread and wine of the new bloodless sacrifice which became the body and blood of the LORD; this effected the atonement and renewal of the creation, and thus established on earth the expected Kingdom. Hence the eschatological emphasis of the earliest Eucharists. Dix again: 'The Eucharist is the contact of time with the eternal fact of the kingdom of God through Jesus. In it the church within time continually, as it were, enters into its own eternal being in that Kingdom.'^[4] In other words, it was the ancient high priestly tradition of entering the holy of holies beyond time and matter, the place of the heavenly throne. A fragment of this temple belief in the eternal present of events which humans have experienced as history, is to be found in the writings of the Deuteronomists who did so much to suppress the mystical elements of the ancient cult. The rebellious generation who had been at Sinai were told they would not live to enter the promised land (Num.14.26-35); nevertheless, Moses reminded their children: 'Not with our fathers did

the LORD make this covenant but with us who are all of us here alive this day' (Deut. 5.3).

Had the original understanding of the Eucharist derived from the Passover, we should have expected the Exodus imagery of liberation from slavery and becoming the chosen people. Instead, the expected benefits of the Eucharist were those of the Day of Atonement. Early evidence drawn from a variety of sources is consistent in this respect. Bishop Sarapion's Prayer Book, for example, used in Egypt in the middle of the fourth century, speaks of 'the medicine of life to heal every sickness and not for condemnation' i.e. of the Eucharist bringing judgement and renewal which are the twin aspects of atonement. He prayed for angels to come and destroy the evil one, and for the establishment of the Church, i.e. for the banishing of Azazel and the establishing of the Kingdom. He prayed that the congregation would be made 'living men' ^[5](c.f. Thomas 1 'the living i.e. resurrected Jesus'), able to speak of the unspeakable mysteries. 'Make us wise by the participation of the body and the blood.' This is the high priestly tradition of the temple, and the 'living men' are the first resurrected, the kingdom of priests reigning on earth after the evil one has been bound (Rev.20.6). The *Liturgy of John Chrysostom* prays that the holy mysteries may bring remission of sins and forgiveness of transgressions, the gift of the Spirit, access to the LORD and a place in the Kingdom, healing of soul and body, not judgement and condemnation. Even earlier, the *Anaphora of Addai and Mari* had prayed for enlightenment, and hopes for remission of sins, pardon of offences, hope of resurrection and new life in the Kingdom, and the *Liturgy of James* had prayed for peace and salvation, for forgiveness and protection from enemies. *All these themes derive from the covenant renewal of the Day of Atonement.*

There is a striking similarity between these prayers and the Qumran Hymns, and it would be easy to imagine the singer of the Hymns as the priest who had offered the Eucharistic prayers. The singer knows the mysteries and has been purified from sin (1QH IX formerly I and XII formerly IV). He is one of the angels in the holy of holies, (1QH XIV formerly VI), he is strengthened by the Spirit (1QH XV formerly VII), he has experienced light and healing (1QH XVII formerly IX), he has been purified and become one of the holy ones, been resurrected and given understanding, he has stood in the assembly of the living, those with knowledge (1QH XIX formerly XI). A creature of dust, he has been saved from the judgement, entered into the Covenant and stands in the eternal place illumined by perfect light (1QH XXI formerly XVIII).

A recurring theme of the liturgies is that of fear and awe. A homily on the mysteries attributed to Narsai (Homily XVII A, late fifth century) speaks of 'the dread mysteries... let everyone be in fear and dread as they are performed... the hour of trembling and great fear.' As the Spirit is summoned to the bread and wine, 'the priest worships with quaking and fear and harrowing dread.' The people stand in fear as the Spirit descends. In the mid-fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem speaks of the 'most awful hour' when the priest begins the consecration and of 'the most awful sacrifice' (Catecheses 23.4,9). John Chrysostom has similar words to describe the coming of the Spirit (On Priesthood 6.4. 34-36), and the people are commanded in the liturgy 'to stand in fear.' Perhaps the oldest example of all is the *Anaphora of Addai and Mari* which speaks of 'the great, fearful, holy, life-giving, divine mystery', before which the people stand in silence and awe. The priest prays as did Isaiah (Isa.6.5): 'Woe is me... for mine eyes have seen the LORD of Hosts', and, in the manner of Moses in the tabernacle (Exod.5.22): 'How dreadful is this place, for this day I have seen the LORD face to face...'

Again, the setting is the holy of holies and the imagery drawn from the Day of Atonement. The earliest biblical account warns Aaron only to enter the Holy of holies once a year, after elaborate, preparation on the Day of Atonement. The LORD warns that he will appear in the cloud upon the *kapporet*, and Aaron might die (Lev.16.2). The *Mishnah* records the fear of the high priest as he entered the holy of holies: he spent as little time as possible in the holy place (m.Yoma 5.1), and at the end of the ritual 'he made a feast for his friends because he had come safely out of the holy of holies' (m.Yoma 7.4). When the Glory of the LORD came to the desert tabernacle, Moses was not able to enter (Exod.40.35) and when

the Glory came to the temple, the priests had were not able to continue their ministrations there (1 Kgs 8. 10-11). The very purpose of the tabernacle was to provide a place where the LORD could dwell in the midst of his people (Exod.25.8), and if this holy place was not pure, the LORD departed (Ezek.8-11). John described the incarnation as the Glory dwelling on earth, the Word made flesh (John 1.14).

Theurgy and Apotheosis

Several passages in the Merkabah texts have suggested to scholars that drawing down the LORD into the temple was a major element of the temple service. 'The temple and the service performed there were thought of as able to attract the Shekinah (the presence of the LORD)... we can seriously consider the possibility that temple service was conceived as inducing the presence of the Shekinah in the holy of holies.'^[6] The Hebrew Scriptures show that the LORD had been expected to appear in his temple (Num.6.23-26, Isa.64.1, Mal.3.1), enthroned between the heavenly beings (Isa.6.1-5), or to speak from above the cherubim of the *kapporet* (Exod.25.22). The psalmist prayed that the Shepherd of Israel, enthroned upon the cherubim, would shine forth and come to save his people (Ps.80.1-2, 3, 7, 19), that he would shine on his servant (Ps.119.135). The psalmist also prayed for the LORD *to arise* and come to help his people (e.g. Pss 3.7; 7.6; 68.1), and he was certain that the LORD would appear (Ps.102.12). The Levites were appointed to serve before the ark, to invoke, to thank and the praise the LORD, the God of Israel (1 Chron.16.4), and there may have been a double meaning to the familiar cry 'hallelujah', since the first meaning of *hll* is 'shine'. Was the cry 'Make the LORD shine', cause his presence to shine forth, as the psalmist had prayed?

The theurgical practices of pagan mysteries in the early years of Christianity are relatively well known. The Chaldean Oracles describe how to make an image of the goddess Hecate and how to draw her down into it. Certain words, materials and objects (*symbols*) were believed to have a special affinity with a particular deity. 'The objects became receptacles of the gods because they had an intimate relationship with them and bore their signatures (*sunthemata*) in the manifest world.'^[7] The gods gave instructions how the rites were to be performed and the ritual of invoking the deity was *theourgia* or *hierourgia*, divine or sacred work. 'The body of the theurgist became the vehicle through which the gods appeared in the physical world and through which he received their communion.'^[8] The theurgic acts were believed to unite the soul to the will and activity of the deity, but not to effect complete union. It was believed that the divine order was impressed on the world. The symbols of theurgy functioned in an manner similar to Plato's forms in that both revealed the divine order. Plato had taught that the Demiurge completed the moulding of the world after the nature of the model (Timaeus 39e). He too had been moulded after the nature of the model (Gen. 1.27).

Now this correspondence of heaven and earth is familiar from the temple and its rites, and it was far older than Plato. There is much in the Timaeus, for example, which seems to be dependent on the teachings of the Jerusalem priesthood of the first temple. The high priest, too, 'was' the LORD on earth when he wore the sacred seal which enabled him to 'bear' the sins of the people (Exod.28.36-38). It has also been suggested that much of the Syrian Iamblichus' theurgy, written early in the fourth century CE, derived directly from the practice of the Jewish temple mystics. Even his Semitic name invites speculation, deriving as it does from 'the LORD is King'.^[9]

Dionysius used the language of theurgy when he described the Christian mysteries in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. The bread and wine were the *symbols* of Christ (437CD) whose original divine work had been to become a man. The bishop repeats the sacred work with the sacred symbols: 'He uncovers the veiled gifts... he shows how Christ emerged from the hiddenness of his divinity to take on human form' (444C).

The mystery at the very heart of the first temple has been lost, but some texts invite speculation. When Solomon was enthroned as king *he became the LORD*, although the Chronicler does not explain the process (1 Chron.29.20-23). Since the *kapporet* was the throne of the LORD, there must have been some link between the enthronement of the human king as the LORD and his being set on the place where the LORD used to appear. Origen implies that in the Day of Atonement ritual, the sacrificed goat was the LORD, the king (Celsus 6.43 PG XI 1364). The blood of this goat was sprinkled first on the ‘throne’ and then brought out from the holy of holies to effect the atonement by cleansing and healing the creation. In other words, the blood ‘carried’ the power of the divine life. In the bloodless sacrifice of the Christians, the wine was substituted for the blood of the goat (cf. Heb.9.12), but the same process was believed to take place. The Christian altar, as we shall see, derived from the *kapporet* in the holy of holies, the place where the atonement blood was transformed and the LORD was present.

The royal psalms suggest that when the king entered the Holy of holies he was ‘born’ in the glory of the holy ones and became the Melchizedek priest, the LORD (Ps 110). He was raised up, that is, resurrected to the heavenly life (Ps.89.19; Heb.7.15-17). This must have been the moment when he became king and was declared to be the Son (Ps.2.7). Praying for the presence of the LORD in the holy of holies and in the person of the royal high priest at his inauguration, must have been the original context of the *Maranatha* prayer. Since, as the writer to the Hebrews knew, the high priest offered himself as the atonement sacrifice but was represented by the blood of the goat, the LORD must also have been invoked at every atonement sacrifice when the life of the royal high priest was represented by the blood of the goat. The first Christians, believing that they were seeing the ancient liturgy fulfilled in history, used the *Maranatha* prayer initially to pray for the Parousia in their own lifetime. After John’s vision of the angel in the cloud, however, the prayer returned to its original setting as they prayed for the LORD to come to the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

When the Day of Atonement is recognised as the original context of the Eucharist, other elements in the tradition fall into place. The *epiklesis* derived from the *Maranatha* prayer. The earliest forms do keep the word ‘come’ and are addressed to the Second Person whereas later forms are prayers to the First person to ‘send’. Serapion’s *epiklesis* preserves the older belief about the presence of the LORD dwelling in the holy of holies: ‘O God of truth, let thy holy Logos come and dwell (*epidemesato*) upon this bread, that the bread may become the body of the Logos and upon this cup that the cup may become the cup of the truth.....’ There is a long *epiklesis* in the *Acts of Thomas* 27 which calls on Christ to ‘come’. All those who have been sealed with baptism perceive a human form and then receive the bread of the Eucharist. In the earlier period, the Spirit was understood to be the Logos (e.g. Justin, Apology 1.33: ‘It is wrong to understand the Spirit and the Power of God as anything else than the Word who is also the first-born of God’). It was not until Cyril of Jerusalem (mid-fourth century) that the Third Person Spirit *epiklesis* began to be used, the prayer for the Father to send the Spirit onto the bread and wine.

The form in *Addai and Mari* is addressed to the Son: ‘O my LORD, may thy Holy Spirit come and rest upon this offering’ but other unique features of this prayer invite speculation as to its ultimate origin. The original form has no mention of God the Father or of the Trinity, of the crucifixion or resurrection of Jesus, it does not mention bread, wine, cup, Body or Blood, or the name of Jesus. There is no reference to partaking or communion. Dix again: ‘All these things... are not of the framework of the prayer as they are the framework of the prayers that have been inspired by the systematic Greek theological tradition. Addai and Mari is a eucharistic prayer which is concentrated solely upon the experience of the Eucharist... *Maranatha*... The ecstatic cry of the first pre-Pauline Aramaic speaking disciples is the summary of what it has to say.’^[10] Was this derived from a temple prayer from the Day of Atonement? There were ‘a great many of the priests obedient to the faith’ in the earliest days in Jerusalem (Acts 6.7).

Several writers reveal that it was the Word which came into the bread and wine, but complications arise from the fact that *logos* can be understood to mean both the Word, the Second Person, or simply a prayer. Irenaeus, for example, argued ‘...if the cup which has been mixed and the bread which has been made receives the Word of God and becomes the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ...’ (Against Heresies 5.2.3. PG 7. 1125 also 1127). Origen, commenting on the Eucharist, said that the consecration was ‘by the Word of God and prayer’ (quoting 1 Tim.4.5), where ‘word’ could be understood in either sense (On Matthew 11 PG 13 948-9), but his usage elsewhere suggests that he intended the Second Person. Athanasius taught that after great prayers and holy invocations, ‘the Word comes down into the bread and wine and it becomes his body’ (Sermon to the Baptised PG 26.1325). As late as the early sixth century, Jacob of Serug could write ‘Together with the priest, the whole people beseeches the Father that he will send his Son, that he may come down and dwell upon the oblation.’

The Traditions of the Priests

The mystery of the Eucharist was associated with Melchizedek. Eusebius wrote: ‘Our Saviour Jesus, the Christ of God, even now performs through his ministers today sacrifices after the manner of Melchizedek’ (Proof 5.3). Melchizedek is known in the Hebrew Scriptures only as the king of Salem, the priest of God Most High who brought out bread and wine to Abraham (Gen.14.18), and as the royal high priest, the divine Son who would bring the Day of Judgement (Ps.110). In the Qumran Melchizedek text, however, he is divine, the heavenly high priest, the anointed prince who comes to Jerusalem to perform the great Atonement at the end of the tenth Jubilee and to establish the Kingdom. In the New Testament, Jesus is identified as this Melchizedek (Heb.7.15), and the bread and wine of his sacrifice must have had some link to the bread and wine of Melchizedek.

What this was we can only guess, but the meal of bread and wine was associated with the vesting of the (high?)priest. The *Testament of Levi* describes how seven angels vested him and fed him ‘bread and wine, the most holy things’^[11] (T.Levi 8.5), suggesting that consuming bread and wine was a part of the consecration process. In the Hebrew Scriptures ‘the most holy things’ are the priests’ portion of the offerings, and only the priests could consume them (e.g. Lev.6.29; Ezek.42.13; Ezra 2.63). The *most holy* was originally believed to communicate holiness (e.g. Exod.29.37), but at the beginning of the second temple period there was a new ruling from the priests and only uncleanness was held to be contagious (Hag.2.12). This is significant as it suggests that the communication of holiness through consuming sacrificial offerings was a characteristic of the ‘Melchizedek’ cult of the first temple but not of the second. It was, however, known to the author of the *Testament of Levi*, and so this may have been how the elements of the Eucharist were originally understood.

The *Testament of Levi* also describes the priestly service of the archangels in the highest heaven; they offer atonement sacrifices before the Great Glory and these offerings are described as bloodless and *logike*, literally ‘logical’ or ‘intellectual’ but commonly rendered ‘reasonable’, ‘the reasonable and bloodless sacrifice’ (T.Levi 3.6). It has been suggested, however, that *logike* in the context of liturgy indicates ‘belonging to the Logos’, just as it is used by Clement to describe the flock of the Good Shepherd who were not *reasonable* sheep, but sheep of the Logos (Instructor III 112i)^[12]. The atonement sacrifice offered by the archangels in Levi’s vision would then be the bloodless sacrifice of the Logos. What we cannot tell is whether or not this was a pre-Christian text and whether or not other references to the ‘reasonable’ sacrifice should be understood in this way.

There is nothing in the Hebrew Scriptures or in any related text which describes or explains the mystery of the Holy of holies and how the presence of the LORD was believed to be present. This must, however, have been known to the priests who officiated there, and raises the question of what it was that Jesus the high priest is said to have transmitted secretly to a few of his disciples after his own experience

of 'resurrection'. The evidence is consistent from the earliest period. Ignatius of Antioch, wrote early in the second century, that our own high priest is greater (than those of old) for 'he has been entrusted with the Holy of holies and to him alone are the secret things of God committed' (Phil.9). Clement of Alexandria condemned people who were 'making a perverse use of divine words... they do not enter in as we enter in, through the tradition of the LORD by drawing aside the curtain' (Misc.7.17). The 'true teachers preserved the tradition of blessed doctrine derived directly from the holy apostles (Misc.1.1) and this tradition had 'been imparted unwritten by the apostles' (Misc.6.7). There had been mysteries concealed in the Old Testament which the LORD revealed to the apostles and 'there were certainly among the Hebrews some things delivered unwritten' (Misc.5.10).

The most likely mysteries to have been concealed in the Old Testament and transmitted unwritten are those of the priests, especially the secrets of the Holy of holies. There is no known explanation of the rites of atonement; all that survive are the practical details of how the ritual was to be performed. The blood of the sacrifice had to be stirred by an attendant to prevent it clotting so that it could not be sprinkled (m.Yoma 4.3), but of the high priest's prayer in the temple no detail is given (m.Yoma 5.1). Only the public prayer is recorded (m.Yoma 6.2). Gardeners could buy the surplus blood for their gardens (m.Yoma 5.6), but no 'theology' of the blood sprinkling is offered.

Fragments of sanctuary lore, apart from the evidence in the Book of Revelation itself, have survived in Daniel 7 and the *Parables of Enoch*. In Daniel's vision, thought to be closely related to the royal rites of Psalm 2, the Man came in clouds (of incense?) before the One on the heavenly throne and 'was offered in sacrifice to him' (Dan'7.13.). The word usually rendered 'was presented before him' (*qrb*, literally 'brought near') is the term used for making a temple offering^[13]. Given the temple context of this vision 'offered as a sacrifice' is the more likely meaning. The one offered is then enthroned and given power 'over all peoples nations and languages.' In the *Parables of Enoch*, the blood of the Righteous One was taken up before the LORD of Spirits, together with the prayers of the righteous ones. The holy ones in heaven 'unite with one voice to pray and praise and give thanks and bless the name of the LORD of Spirits.' This is the thanksgiving element of the Eucharist. Then the books of the living were opened and read, and the 'number' of the righteous whose blood 'has been offered' was brought near to the throne (1 En.47.4, where the Ethiopic implies the same word as in Dan.7.13). This corresponds to the reading of the diptychs in the liturgy, the names of the living and the names of the dead who were remembered at the Eucharist. Next, in the Parables, the Man was given the Name in the presence of the LORD of Spirits (i.e. he became the LORD), in the time and place before the stars and the heavens were created, (i.e. in the holy of holies, Day One of Creation). He became the staff of the righteous, the light of the Gentiles, and all on earth were to worship him. All these things were 'hidden before the creation of the world and for eternity', i.e. in the holy of holies (1 En 48). Then the kings of the earth were judged, and 'the light of days,' rested upon the holy and righteous ones. This is the establishing of the Kingdom, the place of divine light (Rev 22.5). The sequence is interesting and it must be related to the sequence in the Liturgy. It was certainly known to the early Christians: the anointed one in human form, (the Man) poured himself out, was raised up (into heaven), given the Name, and then worshipped (Phil. 2. 6-11).

Origen, who knew 1 Enoch, said that Jesus 'beheld these weighty secrets and made them known to a few' (Celsus 3.37). There were doctrines spoken in private to Jesus' genuine disciples, but the words were not written down (Celsus 3.60; 6.6). 'If anyone is worthy to know the ineffable things he will learn the wisdom hidden in the mystery which God established before the ages' (On Matthew 7.2). 'Before the ages' in temple terminology means 'in the holy of holies'. Origen had had contact with Jewish scholars when he lived in Caesarea and must have had good reason to write: 'The Jews used to tell of many things in accordance with secret traditions reserved to a few, for they had other knowledge than that which was common and made public' (On John 19.92).

Basil of Caesarea, writing in the mid-fourth century, emphasised that some teachings of the Church were

drawn from written sources, but others were given secretly through apostolic tradition. If we attacked unwritten customs, he argued, claiming them to be of little importance, we would fatally mutilate the Gospel. There was no written authority for signing with cross, and none for praying facing towards the East, although Origen knew that this latter was linked to the Day of Atonement (On Leviticus 9.10). Above all Basil cited the words used in the Eucharist: 'Have any saints left for us in writing the words used in the invocation over the Eucharistic bread and the cup of blessing? As everyone knows we are not content in the liturgy simply to recite the words recorded by St Paul or the Gospels, but we add other words both before and after, words of great importance for this mystery. We have received these words from unwritten teaching... which our fathers guarded in silence, safe from meddling and petty curiosity'. The uninitiated were not even allowed to be present at the mysteries, and this he linked to the custom of the temple: 'Only one chosen from all the priests was admitted to the innermost sanctuary... so that he would be amazed by the novelty and strangeness of gazing on the holy of holies'. He went on to distinguish: 'Dogma is one thing *kerygma* another; the first is observed in silence while the latter is proclaimed to the world.' (On the Holy Spirit 66). Basil preserved the mystery he had received, but there are enough hints here to show he was speaking of the words of the *epiklesis*, and that these were associated with the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement.

Church and Temple

Later texts also indicate that the temple was the setting of the Eucharist, and the Day of Atonement its immediate model. Narsai (Homily XVII A) compared his contemplation of the mysteries of the Eucharist to Isaiah's vision of the LORD enthroned in the holy of holies. Only those who bore the mark like the temple priests were permitted to participate. They were also described as clad in garments of glory, and, like the guest without a wedding garment at the great wedding feast, outsiders were cast out (Mat.22.13). The celebrating priest 'bore in himself the image of our LORD in that hour', and was warned to be worthy of that state, as were the temple priests who were warned not to bear the Name of the LORD in vain (Exod.20.7). The curious situation of the one who represents the LORD offering elements which also represent the LORD exactly parallels the temple custom, where the High Priest representing the LORD offered the blood of the goat which represented the LORD (Lev.16.8 *lyhwh*, 'as the LORD', cf. Heb.9.12 which implies this).

Narsai offers two sets of symbolism, one derived from the death and burial of Jesus, but the other from the temple. This may reflect the differing emphases of Antioch and Alexandria, but it could also be a memory of the early Church describing the earthly life of Jesus in terms of the high priestly traditions of the temple. There is evidence of this as early as Peter's temple sermon, where he describes the Parousia as the heavenly high priest emerging from the Holy of holies to renew the creation (Acts 3.13-21). For 'Narsai' the sanctuary of the church is 'a type of that Kingdom which our LORD entered and into which he will bring with him all his friends' (c.f. the holy of holies as the heavenly city Rev. 22.16). The Christian altar is the symbol of the great and glorious throne (as was the *kapporet* above the ark in the Holy of holies, Exod.25.17-22). As on the Day of Atonement, so now, the priest 'trembles with fear for himself and for his people at that dread hour.' The people are exhorted to contemplate the Messiah enthroned in heaven who is also the one lying slain on the altar (c.f. John's word play on the themes of crucifixion and exaltation: 'the Son of Man is lifted up' John 3.14; 8.28; 12.32,34).

There follows a description of the scene in the sanctuary that evokes the descriptions of heavenly worship in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and the moment of silence which preceded the appearance of the great high priest (Rev.8): 'The priests are still and the deacons stand in silence, the whole people is quiet and still, subdued and calm. ... the mysteries are set in order, the censers are smoking, the lamps are shining, and the deacons are hovering and brandishing (fans) in the likeness of the Watchers. Deep silence and peaceful calm settles on that place; it is filled and overflows with brightness and splendour,

beauty and power.’ The people join in the Sanctus, the song of the angels in Isaiah’s throne vision and John’s (Isa.6.3; Rev.4.8), and the priest speaks the words which ‘the chosen apostles have not made known to us in the Gospels.’ The Spirit comes to the bread and wine and ‘the Spirit which raised him from the dead comes down now and celebrates the Mysteries of the resurrection of his body.’ *The consecration is the moment of resurrection*, another remarkable link to the royal traditions of Israel, for the king was deemed to be resurrected (translated ‘raised up’, 2 Sam. 23.1) and he too became the LORD enthroned and he too was worshipped (1 Chron.29.20-23), the LORD with his people.

The Anthem of the Sanctuary in the *Liturgy of Addai and Mari* describes a similar setting: ‘Thy throne O God endureth for ever. The cherubim compass the terrible seat of thy majesty and with fear moving their wings cover their faces for that they cannot lift up their eyes and behold the fire of thy Godhead. Thus art Thou glorified and dwellest among men, not to burn them up but to enlighten them. Great O my LORD is Thy mercy and Thy grace which thou hast showed to our race.’ The ultimate source of this must be Isaiah 33.13-22, which contrasts the fear of sinners at the prospect of the everlasting fires, and the vision of the king in his beauty which awaits the upright. Compare also Enoch’s account of the flaming fire around the heavenly throne, that no angels could enter because of the brightness (i.e. no ordinary priests could enter the holy of holies), and that no flesh could gaze upon the Glory. Enoch lay prostrate and trembling until invited to enter (1 En.14.21.25).

Priests and deacons, ‘thousands of Watchers and ministers of fire and spirit go forth’ with the resurrected LORD, said Narsai, and the people ‘rejoice when they see the Body setting forth from the midst of the altar.’ This is exactly the procession described for the Day of the LORD, the Day of Judgement, when the LORD goes forth from his Holy Place with all his holy ones (Deut.32.43 expanded in Ass.Mos.10; Deut.33.2-5). The effect of receiving the Body of the risen LORD, was that of the Day of Atonement, when the high priest emerged from the Holy of holies, carrying the blood which cleansed and hallowed (Lev.16.19), healing and renewing the creation which the temple represented. The Body of the Risen LORD, wrote Narsai, ‘pardons debts, purifies blemishes, heals diseases, cleanses and purges stains with the hyssop of his mercy.’ (c.f. Acts 3.19 ‘times of refreshing come from the presence of the LORD’ when the Anointed One returns).

Germanus of Constantinople (early eighth century) in his book *On the Divine Liturgy* presents the temple symbolism in great detail, alongside symbolism drawn from the life of Jesus. ‘The church is an earthly heaven’, he wrote, ‘in which the super-celestial God dwells and walks about’ (Liturgy 1). This must be the garden of Eden, which had been represented in the temple by the Great Hall. After comparing the apse to the cave of Christ’s birth and burial and the table to the place where his dead body rested, he continues: ‘The holy table is also the throne of God on which, borne by the cherubim, he rested in the body... The altar is and is called the heavenly and spiritual altar where the earthly and material priests who always assist and serve the LORD represent the spiritual, serving and hierarchical powers’ (Liturgy 4, 6, also 41). The holy table, the spiritual altar, corresponds to the *kapporet* over the ark, the cherub throne where the blood of the LORD was offered by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. The chancel barriers correspond in function to the veil of the temple, separating ‘the Holy of holies accessible only to the priests’ (Liturgy 9). The twenty four presbyters are the seraphic powers (c.f. Rev.4.4) and the seven deacons are images of the angelic powers (c.f. Rev.4.5, Liturgy 16, but also the Qumran Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice which describe the seven angels who are the ruling princes of the sanctuary and the account by John Chrysostom of an old man - presumably himself - who saw angels in shining robes around the altar (On Priesthood 6.4.45-50).

The priest before the altar speaks to God, as did Moses in the tabernacle, when the LORD spoke to him from above the *kapporet*, between the cherubim (Exod.25. 22, Liturgy 41) and the priest sees the glory of the LORD. ‘God truly spoke invisibly to Moses and Moses to God; so now the priest, standing between the two cherubim in the sanctuary and bowing on account of the dreadful and uncontemplable

glory and brightness of the Godhead and contemplating the heavenly liturgy, is initiated even into the splendour of the life-giving Trinity...’ (Liturgy 41). The heavenly host in the sanctuary is represented by the deacons holding fans ‘in the likeness of the six winged seraphim and the many eyed cherubim’ (Liturgy 41), exactly as in the Hebrew Scriptures, where the priests were the angels of the LORD (e.g. Mal.2.7), and in the Qumran Hymns and Blessings: e.g. ‘May you attend upon the service in the temple of the Kingdom and decree destiny in company with the angels of the presence... may he consecrate you to the holy of holies’ (1Q Sb IV); ‘...standing with the host of the holy ones...with the congregation of the sons of heaven’ (1QH XI formerly III). The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* speak of ‘the priests of the inner temple, ministers of the presence of the most holy king... their expiations shall obtain his goodwill for those who repent from sin...’ (4Q400), and of the wings of the cherubim falling silent as they bless the heavenly throne (4Q405). As in the liturgy, there are processions through the doors of glory when the *‘elohim* and the holy angels enter and leave, proclaiming the glory of the King (4Q405) c.f. ‘The Cherubic Hymn signified the entrance of all the saints and righteous ahead of the cherubic powers and the angelic hosts who run invisibly in advance of the Great King, Christ...’ (Liturgy 37). The Qumran *Hymns and Blessings*, and the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* must derive from the actual temple services which have survived as Christian liturgy.

The Sogitha on the Church of Edessa, composed in the mid-sixth century, mentions ‘the cherubim of its altar’, a description (late fifth century) of the church at Quartamin mentions a cherub over the altar and the account of the Muslim capture of the church of St Jacob in Aleppo alludes to the destruction of the cherubim above the altar, all three indicating that the earliest Christian altars derived from the *kapporet*. In Ethiopian churches, there is an ark in the sanctuary.

The Sacrifice

Perhaps the most striking parallel of all between the Day of Atonement and the Liturgy is the manner of preparing the bread. The central portion of the loaf is removed in the manner of a sacrifice, and is then known as the holy bread or the Lamb. An exactly similar procedure was used for the sin offering on the Day of Atonement in the first century CE, according to the *Letter of Barnabas* which differs at this point from the *Mishnah*. According to the latter, the high priest cut open the goat of the sin offering and removed the sacrificial portions, (the fat over the entrails, the kidneys and a part of the liver Lev.4.8-10) and then burned them on the altar before sending the rest of the carcass to be burned outside the temple (m. Yoma 6.7; the comparison in Heb.13.10-13 is confused). Barnabas, however, says that the goat was eaten: the people consumed the carcass, but the priests had the sacrificial portions, mixed with sour wine. ‘What does it say in the prophet? Let them eat of the goat which is offered for their sins at the fast and, note this carefully, let all the priests but nobody else, eat of its inwards parts, unwashed and with vinegar. Why was this? Because ‘When I am about to give my body for the sins of this new people of mine, you will be giving me gall and vinegar to drink...’ (Barn. 7).^[14] Barnabas, a Levite (Acts 4.36) interpreted the crucifixion as the sin offering and the vinegar which Jesus drank (John 19.29) as the vinegar of the sacrificial portion eaten by the priests. This must be the origin of the custom of removing the middle portion of the loaf and mixing it with wine.

The role of the bread in the temple is another mystery. Twelve loaves ‘the Bread of the Presence’ (literally ‘the Face’) were set on a golden table in the Great Hall of the temple, together with incense and flagons for drink offerings (Exod.25.29-30). The bread became holy while it was in the temple: before being taken in it was placed on a marble table but when it was brought out it was placed on a table of gold because it had become holy (m. Shekalim 6.4). The loaves were eaten by the high priests every Sabbath, perhaps the origin of the weekly celebration of the Eucharist. The prothesis prayer in the liturgy of the Coptic Jacobites preserves the tradition of the Bread of the Face: ‘LORD Jesus Christ... the living bread which came down from heaven... make thy face shine upon this bread and upon

this cup which we have set upon this thy priestly table.’

The Older Testament?

There is much about the temple that is still unknown. There are also several texts in the Hebrew Scriptures which cannot be placed in any known context. Together, however, these texts have a certain consistency which at the very least invites speculation.

- Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High brought out bread and wine (Gen.14.18). Until the discovery of the Melchizedek text at Qumran, Melchizedek was thought to be a relatively minor figure in the tradition; it is now clear that he was the Messiah, expected to make the final atonement sacrifice at the end of the tenth jubilee. Melchizedek was ‘born’ in the holy of holies among the holy ones (LXX Ps 110) and was the eternal priest, not by virtue of descent from Levi, but because he had been raised up i.e. resurrected (Heb.7.15-16).
- Moses, the high priests and the elders who stood before the heavenly throne, saw the God of Israel and ate and drank before him. They suffered no harm (Exod.24. 9-11). What was this meal?
- When Moses offered his own life for the sins of Israel he was told that such a sacrifice was not possible; each man bore his own sin (Exod.32.30-33). What older view of atonement was excluded from the Hebrew Scriptures?
- The secret things belonged to the LORD and were no concern of humans (Deut.29.29). What mattered was keeping the Law, and nobody needed to go up to heaven to receive that (Deut.30.11-14). Who had formerly gone up to heaven to learn the secret things?
- Aaron was only permitted to enter the Holy of holies once a year; had the earlier practice been different? (Lev.16.2).
- Ezekiel knew that the mark of the LORD was a *tau*, at that period written as a diagonal cross (Ezek 9.4). This mark protected from the wrath.

When Eusebius described the re-establishment of the churches in the time of Constantine, he included an account of the oration delivered to Paulinus, Bishop of Tyre (History 10.4). The new building was compared to the tabernacle and the temple, its builder to Bezalel and Solomon. This could indicate that the church was deliberately adopting the temple as its model and that all temple elements in the later liturgies were a conscious imitation of the older rites. Origen, however, had known of the temple traditions a century earlier, and he had also known of the secret traditions of both Jews and Christians. It is more likely that there had been an unbroken tradition from the temple liturgies into the Church.

There is insufficient evidence for certainty, but such as there is indicates that the great high priest gave his followers a new way of offering the sacrifice of atonement. *It was the very oldest understanding of the Day of Atonement, and it was perpetuated in the Eucharist.*

[1] This section was first published as an Excursus in my book *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* Edinburgh 2000

[2] In the Temple Scroll calendar (11QT), the Day of Atonement always falls on a Friday, but Passover always falls on a Tuesday.

[3] G.Dix *The Shape of the Liturgy* London (1945) 1949 p.186

[4] *Ibid.*p.225

- [5] C.f. the opening words of the Gospel of Thomas ‘The words of the living (i.e.resurrected) Jesus.
- [6] M.Idel *Kabbalah. New Perspectives* New Haven and London 1988 p.168.
- [7] G.Shaw *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* Pennsylvania 1995 p.48
- [8] Ibid.p.57
- [9] J.Vanderspoel ‘Merkavah Mysticism and Chaldean Theurgy’ in *Religion in the Ancient World* ed. M.Dillon Amsterdam 1999 pp.511-22
- [10] Dix op.cit.n.3 p.252
- [11] Reading R.H.Charles’ translation
- [12] C.Kucharek *The Byzantine Slav Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* Ontario 1971
- [13] This is implied here in the Greek of Theodotion.
- [14] This reference cannot be identified, but it is not impossible that something relevant to Christian origins has dropped from the Hebrew Scriptures, as can be seen from the Qumran texts of Deuteronomy 32.8 (which mentions *the sons of God* who have disappeared from the MT at this point) Deuteronomy 32.43 where the Qumran Hebrew corresponds to the longer LXX and Isaiah 52.14 (which identifies the Suffering Servant as *the Anointed One* and not, as in the MT, the disfigured one).

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