

II

THE EUCHARIST, REVELATION OF THE LIMITATIONS AND OF THE PLENITUDE OF THE CHURCH

“BECAUSE THERE IS one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf.” (1 Cor. 10: 17). This Pauline claim, which only makes sense if this unique bread is the Body of Christ, means that the Supper constitutes the Church and reveals her.

The Church first appears, historically and sociologically, as a local congregation, and it is only as the Church shows proofs, in depth, of this localization that she is seen as the catholic community. To realize how the Supper reveals the limitations of the Church in no sense calls into question her plenitude.

When one says that the Supper reveals the limitations of the Church, one is stating that the Supper makes manifest the baptismal, apostolic and local character of the Church. These three adjectives must be studied more closely.

Entry to the Church comes after death to self. That is the meaning of the baptismal nature of the Church: she is a centre of resurrection, renewal and of future existence, since she gathers together the men and women who have confessed that their *raison d'être*, the profoundest truth about themselves, is found, not in themselves, but in the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, who is acknowledged and glorified as Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the world. This is why the Church of necessity adopts an authoritative line over her adherents, proclaiming herself as a community with its own rules, requirements and discipline. The Supper shows forth this baptismal community by enabling it to be constantly recreated and to be aware of its true nature.

There is then an intimate link between the Supper and Baptism: it is the meal eaten by the baptized, it restores and confirms those who communicate and enables them to grow into their baptismal resurrection, it reveals the Church as a community of those who know what succeeds the world and its history and who already live by it. The

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Church is not of the world. From which fact arises the necessity for an ecclesiastical discipline.

On this subject two matters are to be noted. It is idle to desire a eucharistic discipline if one has abandoned baptismal discipline, for the former presupposes and confirms the latter: a eucharistic discipline which does not translate the baptismal discipline into effective action would be artificial, suspect and altogether detestable. If obedience to the Gospel demands a rediscovery of discipline, it is this baptismal discipline which must first be rediscovered, otherwise the eucharistic discipline will be without foundation. When one sees the situation of the Church in the present-day world, one may well ask if one of the most urgent tasks which faces all the Churches does not consist in joining forces in order to subject baptismal practice to a criticism as radical and severe as was the criticism to which the Reformation subjected the eucharistic practice of the medieval West. So much for the first observation.

The second concerns the eucharistic discipline of the "younger" Churches. Today they are seeking to shake it off because the "older" Churches have allowed it to degenerate or have neglected it, and they fail to see why they should be expected to maintain it simply because they are "younger" (or perhaps even more because the majority of their members are non-whites). To keep their Church under a discipline which the white West no longer practises is to impede the emancipation of their Church and its progress towards adulthood. That they do not desire this is easily understood. It is well-known, too, that discipline is often exerted in a way which is at variance with the Gospel, doubtless because the eucharistic life, the only normal standard of a post-baptismal discipline, does not play, at least in the Protestant mission fields, the part which it is called to play in the Christian Church.

But discipline is not a pedagogic expedient which would lead, in the history of this world, to a moment when it would cease to be necessary because one would have allegedly emerged from childhood. It is only in the Kingdom of God that discipline will cease to exist, because therein it will no longer be necessary. To dispense with it before that is to imagine that the Kingdom is already established in history or else to refuse to acknowledge any ontological link between the Church and the Kingdom.

It would be very desirable that the "younger" Churches, instead of imitating our practices, should take us sternly to task and ask us who has given us the right to opt out of the eschatological situation (where

there are ambiguity, disputes and strife and for which a discipline is therefore necessary), in which Christ, between His Ascension and His Parousia, keeps His Church alive.

While revealing the limitations of the Church, the Supper in the second place reveals her apostolic nature. For if the Church is set apart from the world, it is not that she alone is to be sheltered from the shocks of history and the wrath of God, it is that she may enter the world to be salt and light therein. My last chapter will take up this problem in greater detail; I shall, therefore, only pause for the following brief remark which touches on one of the numerous aspects of the relation between the Word and the sacrament.

It is impossible to limit the Word. The Word leads the way and will not tolerate anything which would prevent it from gaining ground. It seeks to reach out to everything because the love of God, the Gospel, prevails over His anger and loathing. The Word is clearly seen as the bearer of the “prevenient grace” of God, to have recourse to a scholastic term. It is the aim of the Word to penetrate everything, to reconcile everything, to seep into the narrowest crevices, and any resistance it meets arises from the sin of men; what happened on Good Friday is there to prove it. I believe that it is impossible to attribute any such function to the sacrament. Seen from this angle—not the only angle, I admit—its function is rather to mark not how far the Word has gone, but how far it has been received, what it may seal and bring within the Divine Covenant.¹ Far from giving the Church a chance of opting out of her divine mission, the sacrament on the contrary simplifies and purifies the missionary obligation by delineating the frontier between the Church and the world: it shows her what is the essential point from which she may carry the Gospel to the world, and to which she must retire to give thanks and to intercede.

The Supper, in revealing the limitations of the Church, reveals its *local* character. Even if those whom the Supper nourishes have become strangers to the world through their baptism, even if the place where they foregather is for them only a sojourning place, a stage on their exodus, it is nevertheless still there, in their own homes, that they must be and act as the Church of God. Whence the essential importance of the local Church, the epiphany *hic et nunc* of the Holy Church of God. Indeed, if passing through the waters of baptism brings death, it also brings resurrection, and he whom it raises to life is the same

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person as he whom it brought to death: baptism does not do away with personal identity, rather it purifies and enhances it. So the Church, precisely at the central moment of her life, namely the Supper, has the clear duty of being the Church in such-and-such a place and at such-and-such a time. Indeed, although liberated from her environment so as to be in a position to confront it, the Church is also, secretly, the pledge of the future, the earnest or the first-fruits of the place and the age in which she is planted. She bears its future as Noah and his ark bore the future of that which was about to be swallowed up by the flood.

The local Church is guarantor and guardian "of the glory and the honour" of the place where she is (cf. Rev. 21: 26), of the hope of the future of such-and-such a spot, of such-and-such a moment in the world and its history. This is why we must never confuse unity in the Church with uniformity of Churches. A general levelling of Churches, their alignment to one single type of local Church, of which all the others under threat of sanctions would be an identical replica, would prejudice one of the really basic missions of the Church: that of welcoming to her Eucharist, through the narrow road of the baptismal process, those elements which make up the cultural and spiritual individuality of the time-place setting in which the Church finds herself. From this springs the right of a local Church to be "national", the people of God as it is gathered, not out of humanity looked upon as a general anthropological concept, but out of such-and-such a nation (in the N.T. sense of this term).²

If this is given due weight, the problem which then arises is how far a Church can encourage "nationality" without ceasing to be a Church, what is the norm which enables her to attest at one and the same time that she is indeed the Church which loves Jesus Christ, but that it is Jesus Christ that she loves. From the beginning and until the Parousia the Church has experienced, and doubtless will continue to experience, strong tensions on this point. But it must be remembered also that the more aware a Church is of her eschatological nature, the more she seeks primarily the Kingdom, the less she settles down in the world, the stronger in her is the sense of "inter- and trans-national" solidarity of the Church. For this reason the New Testament on the whole lays more stress on unity in the Church than on diversity of Churches.

By way of example of the limitations and of the play of the local individuality of Churches in the one Church, the question of the eucharistic species may be taken. It is a delicate question and at this stage I do not want to do more than call attention to it.

We are familiar with the species chosen by Christ at the time of the Institution: from what constituted the Jewish paschal meal (or possibly another type of Jewish communal religious meal), Jesus chose, He took (ἐλαβεν, λαβῶν) bread and a cup of wine. The bread must have been unleavened; the wine must have been red, apparently diluted with a little water. In the primitive Church these elements were respected,³ with this difference that the bread was ordinary bread, leavened, since the Jewish Passover had now been fulfilled and since the Eucharist was celebrated at least every Sunday. By the sixteenth century the Roman West had fairly generally abandoned red wine in favour of white; the custom had also arisen, between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, of replacing the leavened bread with wafers of unleavened bread. But no other eucharistic species are known, even in countries where wheat is not grown and in particular where the vine could not be acclimatized. The Reformers were hesitant. On the whole Anglicans and Lutherans clung to what had become usual in the West, while the Reformed (Calvinists) reverted to the ancient usage, the *panis cibarius*, ordinary bread. As a general rule, the Reformers renounced the practice of adding water to the wine, although this did not indicate any solidarity with the Armenians who objected to water being added to the wine (or yeast to the bread) because they were Monophysites.⁴ Bread and wine remain the normal elements of the Churches which are members of the World Council, as also of the Roman Church.

Is this remarkable traditional unanimity characteristic of the Supper? Could one not celebrate it with other elements, provided that one element is to be eaten and the other drunk, provided—as the Dutch Reformed theologian Hermannus Witsius (1636–1708) suggested—that food and drink are involved “which can serve the purpose of bread and wine and which have the ability to strengthen the body and gladden the heart?”

At first sight, there are two possible answers, each backed by valid reasons. If one regards the Supper as a meal prepared by such-and-such a local Church and where Christ is the invited guest (in the sense of Luke 24: 29 ff.; Rev. 3: 20) then one fails to understand why this meal must consist of the bread and wine which are basic foods in the Mediterranean area. The universality of His lordship ought on the contrary to enable Christ to sanctify rice or tapioca just as well as bread, and beer or palm-wine just as well as grape wine, and to use these to prefigure the Messianic feast. On the other hand, if it is Christ

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who sets up His table in such-and-such a local Church, He it is who will choose the elements.

It is the second alternative which tradition has retained and, I think, for very good reasons, of which I emphasize three. This solution seems to be right, first of all, because the initiative in providing the Supper springs not from the Church but from Christ. The Church has only to obey an order from Christ.

Then, this solution seems right because the Supper loses its power if it is reduced to a meal where Christ is invited in the hope that thereby it will become a Messianic meal. If it were only that, I see no strong reason for not allowing elements other than bread and wine. But if it is such a meal, that is not its sole nature: it is anamnesis and participation in the body and blood of Christ which assume most definitely the presence of the elements which Jesus used when He instituted the Supper and with which He claimed to be identified.

Finally, I wonder whether Christ's choice of bread and wine as eucharistic elements should not be understood in the light of the fact that when Jesus became man, He became a Jew, and therefore there are definite Christological reasons for respecting the traditional elements. It was in Jesus of Nazareth that the eternal Son of God came to encounter and to save *all* men. By becoming involved in "Jewishness", by assuming this scandalous limitation, He appeals also to men to become involved in this "Jewishness", to accept the fact that they can neither recognize nor encounter Him except in this distant past and in this particular nation to which He belonged. This "Jewishness" of Christ seems to me as irrevocable as the election of Israel (cf. Rom. 11: 29), and equally scandalous, and to wish to reject it threatens to separate Christ from His incarnation and turn Him into a vague spiritual principle. Because in a certain sense you cannot avoid becoming a Jew when you become a Christian, it seems to me that these elements of the Jewish paschal meal (or of other Jewish religious meals), the bread and the wine, must be honoured. It is in no sense a question of judaizing after the manner of those who wished to impose circumcision on those pagans who became believers. Judaizing is a soteriological anachronism; it calls into question the decisive, radically renewing nature of Christ's advent. To remember that this advent must be respected in its uniqueness and particularity (of race, place, date) is not judaizing, it is preaching the Gospel.

However, the problem of the "eucharistic menu" arises especially in mission areas where bread and wine are unfamiliar. What

is one to do in this situation? I suggest the three following rules.

(1) It must be demonstrated, by quoting the numerous historical examples, that whenever the Church has experienced a great missionary advance, she has found herself faced by the problem of celebrating the Eucharist in places where the traditional eucharistic elements are unknown. Nearly always she has held to the traditional elements, even in countries where, for example, the vine, if transplanted, could never become acclimatized, and where consequently the eucharistic elements have to be imported. Such an explanation could have the marginal, but welcome, result of showing to the Christian communities of Asia, Africa and of the Northern hemisphere, that even to Europeans the Gospel was once foreign.

(2) One must agree to a fraternal discussion of the question without taking any local decision except in agreement with the other Churches. In this matter, traditional unanimity is too firmly anchored for us hastily to assign the choice of the eucharistic species to the category of *non necessaria* in which the law of liberty is operative. It may be that this debate will show that the Supper loses neither its meaning nor its efficacy if it is celebrated with elements other than those chosen by Jesus. At a first estimate I do not accept this, but it would be hasty to come to this conclusion out of hand. This possibility should be left open, but open not to some arbitrary and "separatist" act by some local Church which would set itself, on its own authority, against the Gospel records and unanimous tradition, but open to mutual and brotherly reflection. For even if doctrinally such an individual and unilateral action can hardly be thought of as heresy, it would in any case be schismatic and arrogant.

(3) One must seriously wonder whether the occasional revival of the Agape would not correspond in a valid way to the "localization" of such-and-such a Church gathered for the Eucharist, in the sense that the elements of this Agape (although out of line with the traditional eucharistic elements yet still serving their purpose) would enable such a local Church to avow her "national" limitations without compromising her catholic position. I believe that, by looking in this direction, one could intelligently help the "younger" Churches who often rebel against having to celebrate the Supper "in the European manner" (often forgetting that with all the Churches, including those of Europe, they are celebrating it "in the Jewish manner").

This, however, would not prevent, in exceptional circumstances, the Supper from being celebrated with other elements than bread and wine.

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By setting up the Church, the Supper does more than reveal her limitations, it reveals also her plenitude. This is found only within the limitations emphasized, as it is in Jesus of Nazareth that God caused the fullness of His divinity to dwell. It is in the local Church then that the fullness of the Church must be sought. The Eucharist which gathers this local Church reveals the plenitude of the Church by revealing her structure and her mystery.

First, the Supper is the moment at which the structure of the Church becomes apparent, by the very fact that the Supper brings the Church into view and makes her visible by gathering her members together.

Negatively, this means that the elements of ecclesiastical structure and organization which normally have no eucharistic function or reference are unrelated to the essential nature of the Church and therefore irrelevant for ecclesiology, if not suspect. It is indeed possible to state that the celebration of the Supper, the heart and centre of the Christian community, provides the key to the interpretation of the structures of the Church, and consequently prevents any confusion between the institutions which are essential to the Church and her juridical organization. This organization is necessary to the institutions, but the two do not necessarily coincide, even though the function of the juridical organization is to express, and to express to the fullest possible extent, the structure which is essential to the Church. This eucharistic reference will thus enable us to combat that voracious bureaucracy which menaces every social body, by seeking to maintain the organization of the Church in simplicity and coherence.

Positively, this means that because of the Supper, for it and through it, the Church appears as an ordered body. Reduced to its basic expression, the structure of the Church which the Supper reveals comprises, in the unity of shared salvation, two poles: a shepherd and a flock, a father and a family, a visitor and those he visits, a witness of Christ and members of His body. This polarity affirms a necessary reciprocal relationship, the impossibility for the one to exist without the other. Without a flock a shepherd ceases to be a shepherd, but without a shepherd the sheep are not a flock; without a family a father ceases to be a father, but without a father the children are orphans; without people to visit a man in whom and by whom God visits His people, that is to say an *ἐπίσκοπος* loses his *raison d'être* and becomes a parasite, but without this visitor the others would be waifs and strays.