

## Eucharist and the Mimesis of Sacrifice

Each act of Eucharist is a mimetic moment, involving ritual gestures, a defined liturgical group, and an agreed- field of the meaning of what is done. By conceiving of the Eucharist within the New Testament in mimetic terms, we can overcome two impediments to understanding that have emerged repeatedly in the critical literature. The first of these has been the tendency to reduce all Eucharistic acts to a single origin—usually a heroic, mythologized account of “the Last Supper.” The desire to distance criticism from that mythology has produced the second impediment: efforts to locate the genesis of Eucharist apart from Jesus (in the influence of Paul, for example) prevent us from accounting for the generality of the practice within earliest Christianity. Mimesis is sufficiently varied *and* sufficiently general to steer us between Charybdis and Scylla, provided that we absolve Jesus from having to explain *all* Christian practices, and that we allow for the mimetic recollection of Jesus as a unifying element within the varieties of that practice.

Over the past fifteen years, I have developed an account of the development of Eucharistic practice within Christianity, beginning with the contributions of Jesus as a conscious practitioner of Judaism. The first book that explored this issue engaged explicitly with the work of anthropologists of sacrifice, including René Girard, in order to assess Jesus’ position in relation to the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Eucharist at the time I initially researched the book was not foremost on my mind. My principal concern had been to evaluate Jesus’ attitudes toward and his actions within the Temple in Jerusalem. But in the course of that work, I saw the direct connection between Jesus’ last meals with his followers and his action in the Temple. The Eucharist emerged as a mimetic surrogate of sacrifice. Encouraged by several scholars, notably Bernhard Lang, I then undertook a strictly exegetical study in order to detail the evolution of the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Temple of Jesus. His Sacrificial Program Within a Cultural History of Sacrifice* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992). In this paper, as in my earlier work, I deploy Aristotle’s definition of *mimesis*, rather than Girard’s. For that reason, I do not identify *mimesis* or sacrifice with violence, although I agree that sacrificial *mimesis* might justify or occasion violence (see the analysis of the Johannine Eucharist below).

texts within the typical practices of the first Christians.<sup>2</sup>

Here I wish briefly to explain the six types of Eucharist attested within the New Testament that I have identified on exegetical grounds. These types are mimetic moments that characterize the particular groups that produced them. In the way of mimesis, the types attest fluidity in their ritual acts, their constituent communities, and their accounts of meaning. Even Jesus, in my reading, developed not one but two types of Eucharist during his life. At the end of this paper I wish to return to a theoretical question, in order to be more precise about the moment Eucharist emerged as a mimetic surrogate of sacrifice within Jesus' practice, because that appears to have been the moment generative of the subsequent types, and therefore of Christianity's emergence as a religion separate from Judaism. In the sense of recent, sociological discussion, I will suggest that at this generative moment Jesus' practice may usefully be said to have been magical.

### **Six Types of Eucharist in the New Testament**

The Mishnah, in an effort to conceive of a heinous defect on the part of a priest involved in slaughtering the red heifer, pictures him as intending to eat the flesh or drink the blood (*m. Parah* 4:3\*\*). Because people had no share of blood, which belonged uniquely to God, even the thought of drinking it was blasphemous. To imagine drinking human blood, consumed with human flesh, could only make the blasphemy worse. So if Jesus' words are taken with their traditional, autobiographical meaning, his last supper can only be understood as a deliberate break from Judaism. Either Jesus himself promulgated a new religion, or his followers did so in his name, and invented "the Last Supper" themselves. Both those alternatives find adherents today among scholars, and the debate between those who see the Gospels as literally true reports and those who see them as literary fictions shows little sign of making progress. But in either case, the nagging question remains: if the generative act was indeed anti-sacrificial (whether that act

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<sup>2</sup> *A Feast of Meanings. Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus through Johannine Circles: Supplements to Novum Testamentum* 72 (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

was literal or literary), how did the cycles of traditions and the texts as they stand come to their present, sacrificial constructions?

There is another, more critical way of understanding how Eucharist emerged in earliest Christianity, an approach which takes account of the cultural changes which the development of the movement involved, and which allows for the consistent concern for effective sacrifice across the cultures involved. Interest in the social world of early Judaism, and in how Christianity as a social movement emerged within Judaism and then became distinct from it within the Hellenistic world, has been growing for more than a century.

We are no longer limited to the old dichotomy, between the “conservative” position that the Gospels are literal reports and the “liberal” position that they are literary fictions. Critical study has revealed that the Gospels are composite products of the various social groups that were part of Jesus’ movement from its days within Judaism to the emergence of Christianity as a distinct religion. When we place Eucharistic practices within the social constituencies that made the Gospels into the texts we can read today, we can understand the original meaning Jesus gave to the last supper, and how his meaning generated others.

The Last Supper was not the only supper, just the last one. In fact, “the Last Supper” would have had no meaning apart from Jesus’ well-established custom of eating with people socially. There was nothing unusual about a rabbi making social eating an instrument of his instruction, and it was part of Jesus’ method from the first days of his movement in Galilee.

Meals within Judaism were regular expressions of social solidarity, and of common identity as the people of God. Many sorts of meals are attested in the literature of early Judaism. From Qumran we learn of banquets at which the community convened in order of hierarchy; from the Pharisees we learn of collegial meals shared within fellowships (*chaburoth*) at which like-minded fellows would share the foods and the company they considered pure. Ordinary households might welcome the coming of the Sabbath with a prayer of sanctification (*kiddush*) over a cup of wine, or open a family occasion with a blessing (*berakhah*) over bread and wine.

Jesus' meals were similar in some ways to several of these meals, but they were also distinctive. He had a characteristic understanding of what the meals meant and of who should participate in them. For him, eating socially with others in Israel was an enacted parable of the feast in the kingdom that was to come. The idea that God would offer festivity for all peoples on his holy mountain (see Isaiah 2:2-4) was a key feature in the fervent expectations of Judaism during the first century, and Jesus shared that hope, as may be seen in a saying from the source of his teaching conventionally known as "Q" (see Matthew 8:11 = Luke 13:28, 29<sup>3</sup>):

Many shall come from east and west,  
and feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob  
in the kingdom of God.

Eating was a way of enacting the kingdom of God, of practicing the generous rule of the divine king. As a result, Jesus adamantly accepted as companions people such as tax agents and others of suspect purity, and to receive notorious sinners at table. The meal for him was a sign of the kingdom of God, and all the people of God, assuming they sought forgiveness, were to have access to it.

Jesus' practice of fellowship at meals caused opposition from those whose understanding of Israel was exclusive. To them, he seemed profligate, willing to eat and drink with anyone, as Jesus himself was pictured as observing in a famous saying also from "Q" (Matthew 11:19 = Luke 7:34<sup>4</sup>):

A man came eating and drinking, and they complain:  
Look, a glutton and drunkard,

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<sup>3</sup> Because my interest here is in the traditional form of the saying, prior to changes introduced in Matthew and Luke, I give a reconstructed form; see Chilton, *God in Strength: Jesus' announcement of the kingdom* (SNTU 1; Freistadt: Plöchl, 1979; reprinted as Biblical Seminar 8; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987) 179-201. More recently, see *Pure Kingdom. Jesus' Vision of God: Studying the Historical Jesus 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and London: SPCK, 1996) 12-14.

<sup>4</sup> When I participated in the Jesus Seminar, I noticed that the enthusiasm of the fellows for the authenticity of this saying was surpassed only by their refusal to see its implications for Jesus' conception of purity. See Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover and The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels. The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).

a fellow of tax agents and sinners.

Some of Jesus' opponents saw the purity of Israel as something that could only be guarded by separating from others, as in the meals of their fellowships (*chaburoth*). Jesus' view of purity was different. He held that a son or daughter of Israel, by virtue of being *of Israel*, could approach his table, or even worship in the Temple. Where necessary, repentance beforehand could be demanded, and Jesus taught his followers to pray for forgiveness daily, but his understanding was that Israelites as such were pure, and were fit to offer purely of their own within the sacrificial worship of Israel.

As long as Jesus' activity was limited to Galilee, he was involved in active disputes, but essentially inconsequential ones. (Deviant rabbis in Galilee were far from uncommon.) Jesus' practice coincided to some extent with that of a *chaburah*, although his construal of purity was unusual. Given the prominence accorded wine in his meals,<sup>5</sup> we might describe the first type of his meals—the practice of purity in anticipation of the kingdom—as a *kiddush* of the kingdom. Indeed, there is practically no meal of Judaism with which Jesus' meals do not offer some sort of analogy, because the meal was a seal and an occasion of purity, and Jesus was concerned with what was pure. But both the nature of his concern and the character of his meals were distinctive in their inclusiveness: Israel as forgiven and willing to provide of its own produce was for him the occasion of the kingdom. That was the first type in the development of the Eucharist.

Jesus also brought his teaching into the Temple, where he insisted on his own teaching (or *halakhah*) of purity. The incident that reflects the resulting dispute is usually called the “Cleansing of the Temple” (Matthew 21:12-13 = Mark 11:15-17 = Luke 19:45-46 = John 2:13-17). From the point of view of the authorities there, what Jesus was after was the opposite of cleansing. He objected to the presence of merchants who had been given permission to sell sacrificial animals in the vast, outer court of the Temple. His objection was based on his own, peasant's view of purity: Israel should offer, not priests' produce for which they handed over

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<sup>5</sup> See the order of wine followed by bread in 1 Corinthians 10:16; Luke 22:19-20; *Didache* 9:1-5, and the particular significance accorded the wine in Mark 14:25; Matthew 26:29; Luke 22:18.

money, but their own sacrifices which they brought into the Temple.<sup>6</sup> He believed so vehemently what he taught that he and his followers drove the animals and the sellers out of the great court, no doubt with the use of force.

Jesus' interference in the ordinary worship of the Temple might have been sufficient by itself to bring about his execution. After all, the Temple was the center of Judaism for as long as it stood. Roman officials were so interested in its smooth functioning at the hands of the priests whom they appointed that they were known to sanction the penalty of death for sacrilege. Yet there is no indication that Jesus was arrested immediately. Instead, he remained at liberty for some time, and was finally taken into custody just after one of his meals, "the Last Supper." The decision of the authorities of the Temple to move against Jesus when they did is what made this supper last.

Why did the authorities wait, and why did they act when they did? The Gospels portray them as fearful of the popular backing that Jesus enjoyed, and his simultaneously inclusive and apocalyptic teaching of purity probably did bring enthusiastic followers into the Temple with him. But in addition, there was another factor: Jesus could not simply be dispatched as a cultic criminal. He was not attempting an onslaught upon the Temple as such; his dispute with the authorities concerned purity within the Temple. Other rabbis of his period also engaged in physical demonstrations of the purity they required in the conduct of worship. One of them, for example, is said once to have driven thousands of sheep into the Temple, so that people could offer sacrifice in the manner he approved of (see *Besah* 20a-b in the Babylonian Talmud). Jesus' action was extreme, but not totally without precedent, even in the use of force.

The delay of the authorities, then, was understandable. We may also say it was commendable, reflecting continued controversy over the merits of Jesus' teaching and whether his

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<sup>6</sup> Professor Albert Baumgarten has pointed out to me that a Rabbinic tradition in the name of R. Nehemiah supports this analysis. In the Tosefta (Chagigah 3.19), as Baumgarten says in a personal letter, Nehemiah "explains the willingness of temple authorities to be flexible, understanding and willing to trust all Jews at the time of pilgrimage festivals as motivated by the fear lest someone set up his own altar or offer his own red heifers. Erecting one's own altar or offering one's own red heifers were intolerable assaults on the legitimacy of the Jerusalem temple. Accordingly the law was to be stretched as much as possible to avoid that outcome."

occupation of the great court should be condemned out of hand. But why did they finally arrest Jesus? The texts of the Last Supper provide the key; something about Jesus' meals after his occupation of the Temple caused Judas to inform on Jesus. Of course, "Judas" is the only name that the traditions of the New Testament have left us. We cannot say who or how many of the disciples became disaffected by Jesus' behavior after his occupation of the Temple.

However they learned of Jesus' new interpretation of his meals of fellowship, the authorities arrested him just after the supper we call last. Jesus continued to celebrate fellowship at table as a foretaste of the kingdom, just as he had before. But he also added a new and scandalous dimension of meaning. His occupation of the Temple having failed, Jesus said of the wine, "This is my blood," and of the bread, "This is my flesh" (Matt 26:26, 28 = Mark 14:22, 24 = Luke 22:19-20 = 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 = Justin, *1 Apology* 66.3).

In Jesus' context, the context of his confrontation with the authorities of the Temple, his words had one predominant meaning. He did not mean to say, "Here are my personal body and blood"; that is an interpretation that only makes sense at a later stage. Jesus' principal point was rather that, in the absence of a Temple that permitted his view of purity to be practiced, wine was his blood of sacrifice, and bread was his flesh of sacrifice. In Aramaic, "blood" and "flesh" (which may also be rendered as "body") can carry such a sacrificial meaning, and in Jesus' context, that is the most natural meaning. The meaning of "the Last Supper," then, actually evolved over a series of meals after Jesus' occupation of the Temple. During that period, Jesus claimed that wine and bread were a better sacrifice than what was offered in the Temple: at least wine and bread were Israel's own, not tokens of priestly dominance.

No wonder the opposition to him, even among the Twelve (in the shape of Judas, according to the Gospels) became deadly. In essence, Jesus made his meals into a rival altar, and we may call such a reading of his words a ritual or cultic interpretation. This second type of Eucharist offered wine and bread as a mimetic surrogate of sacrifice.

The cultic interpretation has two advantages over the traditional, autobiographical

interpretation as the primary meaning Jesus attributed to his own final meals. The first advantage is contextual: the cultic interpretation places Jesus firmly with the Judaism of his period and the final dispute of his life, and at the same time accounts for the opposition of the authorities to him. The second advantage is the explanatory power of this reading: the cultic interpretation enables us to explain sequentially four subsequent developments in the understanding of Eucharist within early Christianity.

The third type is that of Petrine Christianity, when the blessing of bread at home, the *berakhah* of Judaism, became a principal model of Eucharist. A practical result of that development was that bread came to have precedence over wine, and Acts refers to the ritual as the “breaking” of bread (see Acts 2:42-47). More profoundly, the circle of Peter conceived of Jesus as a new Moses, who gave commands concerning purity as Moses did on Sinai, and who expected his followers to worship on Mount Zion. As compared to Jesus’ practice (in both its first and second stages), Petrine practice represents a double domestication. First, adherents of the movement congregated in the homes of their colleagues, rather than seeking the hospitality of others. Second, the validity of sacrifice in the Temple, rather than its replacement, was acknowledged. Both forms of domestication grew out of the new circumstances of the movement in Jerusalem and fresh opportunities for worship in the Temple; they changed the nature of the meal and the memory of what Jesus had said at the “Last Supper.” The application of the model of a *berakhah* to Eucharist was a self-conscious metaphor, because the careful identification of those gathered in Jesus’ name with a household was emphatically metaphorical (cf. Mark 3:31-35).

The fourth type of Eucharist, the contribution of the circle of James (Jesus’ brother), pursued the tendency of domestication further. The Eucharist was seen as a Seder, in terms of its meaning and its chronology (see Mark 14:12-16, and the contradictory, more historical, timing explicitly indicated in vv. 1-2). So understood, only Jews in a state of purity could participate fully in Eucharist, which could be truly recollected only once a year, at Passover in Jerusalem

among the circumcised (so Exodus 12:48). The Quartodeciman controversy (concerning the timing of Easter) of a later period, fierce though it appears, was but a shadow cast by much a more serious contention concerning the nature of Christianity. The Jacobean program intended to integrate Jesus' movement fully within the liturgical institutions of Judaism, and to insist upon the Judaic identity of the movement and upon Jerusalem as its governing center. Nonetheless, there is never any doubt but that Eucharist is not portrayed as a literal replacement of all the Seders of Israel, and the Jacobean "Last Supper" does not supplant the other types of Eucharist in the New Testament. For those reasons the language of metaphor is appropriate here, as well as at the Petrine stage, in order to convey the type of mimetic activity involved.

Paul and the Synoptic Gospels represent the fifth type of Eucharist. Paul vehemently resists Jacobean claims, by insisting Jesus' last meal occurred on the night in which he was betrayed (1 Corinthians 11:23), not on Passover. Paul emphasizes the link between Jesus' death and the Eucharist, and he accepts the Hellenistic refinement of the Petrine type that presented the Eucharist as a sacrifice for sin associated with the Temple (see, for example, Romans 3:25).

In the Synoptic Gospels the heroism of Jesus is such that the meal is an occasion to join in the solidarity of martyrdom.<sup>7</sup> The Synoptics insist by various wordings that Jesus' blood is shed in the interests of the communities for which those Gospels were composed, for the "many" in Damascus (Matthew 26:28) and Rome (Mark 14:24), on behalf of "you" in Antioch (Luke 22:20). The Synoptic strategy is not to oppose the Jacobean program directly; in fact, the Passover chronology is incorporated (producing internal contradictions). But any limitation of the benefits of Eucharist to circumcised Israelites is superseded by the mimetic imperative to join Jesus' martyrdom and its sacrificial benefits.

The Synoptic tradition also provided two stories of miraculous feeding – of five thousand and of four thousand — which symbolized the inclusion of Jews and non-Jews within Eucharist,

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<sup>7</sup> I would not deny for a moment that a sense of impending martyrdom might well have suffused Jesus' last meals with his disciples; see *Rabbi Jesus. An intimate biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000) 253-268. The elevation of that sense to the predominant meaning, however, seems to me a later development.

understood as in the nature of a philosophical symposium (see Mark 6:32-44; 8:1-10 and parallels). This willingness to explore differing meanings with Eucharistic action attests that any such meaning, taken individually, was understood metaphorically, and that it was reproduced mimetically.

The feeding of the five thousand—understood as occurring at Passover—is taken up in John 6 in a fully Paschal sense. Jesus himself identified as the *manna*, miraculous food bestowed by God upon his people. The motif was already articulated by Paul (1 Corinthians 10:1-4), but John develops it to construe the Eucharist as a Mystery, in which Jesus offers his own flesh and blood (carefully defined to avoid a crude misunderstanding; John 6:30-58). That autobiographical reading of Jesus' words—as giving his personal body and blood in Eucharist—had no doubt already occurred to Hellenistic Christians who followed Synoptic practice and appreciated its sacrificial overtones.

The Johannine practice made that meaning as explicit as the break with Judaism is in the fourth Gospel. Both that departure and the identification of Jesus himself (rather than his supper) as the Paschal lamb are pursued in the Revelation (5:6-14; 7:13-17). The sixth type of Eucharist can only be understood as a consciously non-Judaic and Hellenistic development. It involves participants in joining by oath (*sacramentum* in Latin, corresponding to *mysterion* within the Greek vocabulary of primitive Christianity;<sup>8</sup> John 6:60-71) in the sacrifice of the Mysterious hero himself, separating themselves from others. Eucharist has become sacrament, and involves a knowing conflict with the ordinary understanding of what Judaism might and might not include.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Günther Bornkamm, “*mysterion, mueo*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. G. Kittel, tr. G. W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 802-828. More recently, see *The Ancient Mysteries. A Sourcebook: Sacred Texts of the Mystery Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World* (ed. Marvin W. Meyer; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987); Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries. Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> In this regard, see Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (eds), *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

“The Last Supper” is neither simply Jesus’ “real” Seder nor simply a symposium of Hellenists to which the name of Jesus happens to have been attached. Such reductionist regimens, which will have the Gospels be only historical or only fictive, starve the reader of the meanings that generated the texts to hand. The engines of those meanings were diverse practices, whose discovery permits us to feast on the richness of tradition. A generative exegesis of Eucharistic texts may not conclude with a single meaning that is alleged to have occasioned all the others. One of the principal findings of such an approach is rather that meaning itself is to some extent epiphenomenal, a consequence of a definable practice with its own initial sense being introduced into a fresh environment of people who in turn take up the practice as they understand it and produce their own meanings. The sense with which a practice is mediated to a community is therefore one measure of what that community will finally produce as its practice, but the initial meaning does not entirely determine the final meaning.

The meanings conveyed by words must be the point of departure for a generative exegesis, because those meanings are our only access to what produced the texts to hand. But having gained that access, it becomes evident that Eucharist is not a matter of the development of a single, basic meaning within several different environments. Those environments have themselves produced various meanings under the influence of definable practices. Eucharist was not simply handed on as a tradition. Eucharistic traditions were rather the catalyst that permitted communities to crystallize their own practice in oral or textual form. What they crystallized was a function of the practice that had been learned, palpable gestures with specified objects and previous meanings, along with the meanings and the emotional responses that the community discovered in Eucharist. There is no history of the tradition apart from a history of meaning, a history of emotional response, a history of practice: the practical result of a generative exegesis of Eucharistic texts is that practice itself is an appropriate focus in understanding the New Testament.

### **The Moment of Magical Surrogacy**

The cultic sense of Jesus' last meals with his disciples is the generative moment that permits us to explain its later meanings as Eucharistic covenant, Passover, heroic symposium, and Mystery. Those four last types of Eucharist, developed within distinct circles of practice and believe within the primitive church, evolved from the initial two types, eschatological banquet and surrogate of sacrifice, which Jesus developed. In that evolution, Jesus' insistence on the mimetic surrogacy of his meals is evidently the key element. If Jesus is seen as generating Eucharist as a surrogate of sacrifice, the question emerges: why did he undertake such an action, with such an understanding? In terms of circumstances at the time, his failed occupation of the Temple provides an adequate occasion, but not a sufficient cause from the point of view of later developments. How did the framing of a meal as a mimetic surrogate of sacrifice lead to the emergence of a new sacrament in a religious system distinct from Judaism?

Since the work of Morton Smith, the identification of Jesus as a magician has featured in the critical literature.<sup>10</sup> Ralph Schroeder has made an especially productive contribution from this point of view by actively criticizing the work of Max Weber.<sup>11</sup> Schroeder explains:

The most undifferentiated form of magic, in Weber's view, is where magical power is thought to be embodied in a person who can bring about supernatural events by virtue of an innate capacity. This belief is the original source of charisma. "The oldest of all 'callings' or professions, Weber points out, "is that of the magician" (1981a:8). From this point, charisma develops by a process of abstraction towards the notion that certain forces are "behind" this

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<sup>10</sup> See *The Secret Gospel* (New York; Harper and Row, 1973) and *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). Throughout, the influence of Hans Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1956) is apparent. It may be that some of Smith's other assertions about Jesus have obscured this well-documented and incisive aspect of his contributions. Recently, for example, I have come to the reluctant conclusion that Smith perpetrated a fraud when he claimed he had discovered a "Secret Gospel of Mark;" see Chilton, "Unmasking a False Gospel," *The New York Sun*\*\*.

<sup>11</sup> See *Max Weber and the Sociology of Culture* (London: Sage, 1992) 33-71, a chapter entitled "The Uniqueness of the East." For further discussion, see Chilton, "Eucharist: Surrogate, Metaphor, Sacrament of Sacrifice," *Sacrifice in Religious Experience: Numen Book Series XCIII* (ed. A. I. Baumgarten; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 175-188.

extraordinary power—although they remain within the world (1968: 401).<sup>12</sup>

Schroeder complains that Weber's perspective leads to an analysis of magic as static, while from a sociological perspective religion is notable for its capacity to change and to cause change.<sup>13</sup> What Schroeder does not say, and yet may easily be inferred from his study, is that magic should not be seen as the changeless foundation of religion, but as a specific manifestation of religion, when the entire system is held to be concentrated in an individual or individuals. Magic expresses more the crisis of a system than the presupposition of systems.

Such a description accords well with some of the figures whom Josephus calls false prophets. There has been a tendency to class John the Baptist with these leaders, who were presumably called prophets by their followers. In fact, Josephus simply calls John a good man (*Antiquities* 18 § 117), and describes Bannus' similar commitment to sanctification by bathing in approving terms (*Life* § 11). Nothing they did (as related by Josephus) can be compared with what Josephus said the false prophets did: one scaled Mount Gerizim to find the vessels deposited by Moses (*Antiquities* 18 §§ 85-87); Theudas waited at the Jordan for the waters to part for him, as they had for Joshua (*Antiquities* 20 §§ 97-98);<sup>14</sup> the Egyptian marched from the Mount of Olives in the hope the walls of Jerusalem might fall at his command (*Antiquities* 20 §§ 169-172), so that he might conquer Jerusalem (*War* 2 § 261-263). If there is an act in the Gospels which approximates to such fanaticism, it is Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and his occupation of the Temple; apparently he expected to prevail against all the odds in insisting upon his own understanding of what true purity there was, in opposition to Caiaphas and imposing authority

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<sup>12</sup> *Max Weber and the Sociology of Culture*, 37, citing *Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1981) and *Economy and Society* (New York: Bedminster, 1968).

<sup>13</sup> *Max Weber and the Sociology of Culture*, 40.

<sup>14</sup> According to Colin Brown, Theudas was inspired by John the Baptist, whose program was not purification but a re-crossing of the Jordan; see "What Was John the Baptist Doing?" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 (1997) 37-49, 48. That seems a desperate expedient to avoid the obvious connection with purification. In this avoidance, many conservative Evangelical scholars are at one with the Jesus Seminar. The equally obvious obstacles are that crossing the Jordan is not a part of any characterization of John's message in the primary sources, and that Josephus does not associate John with the "false prophets." For the context of John's immersion (and Jesus'), see Chilton, *Jesus' Baptism and Jesus' Healing. His Personal Practice of Spirituality* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998).

of a high priest sanctioned by Rome. When Jesus is styled a prophet in Matthew 21:11, 46, that may have something to do with the usage of Josephus, but to portray John the Baptist in such terms is incautious.

These acts of "magic" are not spontaneous or heroic foundations of new religions by means of Weberian charisma. Rather, each instantiates a response to a sense of crisis, the conviction that the entire religious system has gone wrong, and may only be retrieved by a magician who takes that system on to himself. Finding Moses' vessels, parting the Jordan, taking Jerusalem, and occupying the Temple are all examples of the attempt to right the system by seizing and manipulating its most central symbols. They are instances of magic as theurgy, the access of divine power in order to change and mold the ordinary structures of authority, whether social or natural.

Seen in this light, Jesus' mimetic surrogacy of sacrifice, as well as his occupation of the Temple, represents a distillation of principal elements of his own religious system into his actions and his person. Raw materials of Christology, as well as of Eucharistic theology, were generated by this deliberate—and in Schroeder's terms magical—concentration. But the directions of those streams were no more determined by their source than a thunderstorm can be thought to guide a river in the twists and turns of its environment. In the manner of a magician, Jesus concentrated the sacrificial ideology of Israel in his own meals with his disciples—and released forces whose results he could scarcely have calculated.

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