

Beyond *Theologia Crucis*: Jesus of Nazareth from Q to John *via* Paul (or John as a Radical Reinterpretation of Jesus of Nazareth)

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The Diversity of Christian Origins

One of the major issues that will no doubt occupy our theological scholarship during the third millennium is the nature and the essence of Christianity. If I may put it quite directly, the issue at stake will be the choice between either its *soteriological* or *ecclesiological* character; either its personal and salvation-by-faith dimension or its communal one. In other words, the solution will depend on the emphasis one gives either to the Pauline version of the Christian *kerygma*, as well as his interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth with its climax in the famous *theologia crucis*, or the Johannine understanding of the mystery of incarnate Word and its eucharistic conception of reality.

This presentation is my first attempt to examine the theological trajectory from the very early stages of the Christian literary activity to the composition of the Gospel of John. It is based on some recent articles and scholarly contributions of mine on Q, Paul, and John.¹ It is my humble tribute to Professor Savas Agourides, the Orthodox biblical scholar who has been striving for nearly two generations to decipher the profound meaning of John the Theologian, the prototype of Orthodox theology. Professor Agourides was my mentor in biblical studies and the scholar who courageously wrote the critical report for my doctoral dissertation on the Q-Document.²

The scene is now becoming more or less clear after the great progress made in the biblical field, especially in the field of the Synoptic Gospel tradition, and more precisely in the study of Q. Progress has accrued not so much in terms of historical critical analysis of the earliest Gospel accounts, i.e., as a solution to the Synoptic problem, but in terms of the impact this analysis has had on the conventional picture of Christian origins that dominated biblical scholarship for almost a century. The second source of the Synoptic tradition, known as Q, which no serious study can now ignore, seems to expound a radically different theological view than that of the mainstream *kerygmatic* expression of the early Church. Along with the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas, the existence of an early "Christian" document designated Q by scholars, a document with a semi-canonical status, provides a vastly different perspective. The Q-Document lacks not only (a) a historical structure of *Jesus' life* of a Gospel type, i.e., with a "Passion and Resurrection story," but also (b) any reference to the *soteriological significance of Jesus' death*.³ Consequently, it "challenges the assumption that the early Church was unanimous in making Jesus' death and resurrection the fulcrum of Christian faith."⁴ The results of recent research on Q have "revealed the complexity of early Christian literary activity and also contributed to a reassessment of the originating impulse(s) of the whole Christian movement."⁵

In fact, the challenge of Q to the conventional picture of Christian origins, and by extension also to the quest of the historical Jesus, and the predominance of the Pauline interpretation of the Christ event, is more far-reaching than the making of a little room for yet "another Gospel," or another early Christian community, and so on. If Q is taken seriously into account, the entire landscape of early Christianity with all that it entails may need to be radically revised or at least thoroughly reconsidered.⁶

Of course, there have been voices from the discipline of archeology for some time now⁷ pointing out that the extant archaeological evidence supports this view.⁸ But no one (or very few) could have ever listened to them. Biblical scholarship was not ready to review or put to the test the conventional picture of early Christianity. Yet, more than a generation ago a number of scholars from all Christian traditions tried to reflect upon, and analyze, the origin of the *theological significance of Jesus' death*.⁹ They all illustrated that there was no unanimity among the first Christians with regard to the interpretation of Jesus' death on the cross. In fact, there was a considerable variety of attempts to give a theological interpretation to this significant and unique event in the divine plan of salvation.¹⁰

Besides the so-called "soteriological" interpretation, according to which the *raison d' être* of Jesus' death on the cross was the salvation of humankind, one can count at least another four crystallized interpretative attempts, with which the early Christian community attempted to grasp the mystery of Jesus' death on the cross:

(a) The "prophetic" interpretation,¹¹ according to which Jesus' death had no expiatory significance, being rather the true continuation of the persecution, sufferings, and violent end of the Old Testament prophets.

(b) The "dialectic" interpretation,¹² according to which Jesus' death was dialectically contrasted¹³ to the resurrection with the stress being more or less laid on the latter, and implying no soteriological connection to the cross.

(c) The "apocalyptic" or "eschatological" interpretation,¹⁴ where too Jesus' death is seen as having no soteriological significance but rather as being an eschatological act in full agreement with the divine plan.

(d) And finally the "eucharistic" or "covenantal" interpretation,¹⁵ pointing as well to other than the expiatory significance of Jesus' death. Here his blood seals the new covenant

that God established with his people.

The almost unanimous preference in the later New Testament literature given to the "soteriological" interpretation, which of course can surely be traced to the period before Paul's conversion (cf. 1 Cor 15:3ff.), was "due to its hellenistic background, compared with the more or less Jewish background of all the other interpretations... The lack of any reference in other pre-pauline strata of the early Christian tradition... suggests a limited usage in the early Christian community. On the other hand, the prophetic interpretation, traces of which are found in almost all layers of primitive Christianity (Q-community, Hellenistic community, Markan community, Pauline community), suggests that it was widespread during this creative period".¹⁶

In successive articles a few years ago I argued that, the time has come for scholarly research to distance itself as much as possible from the dominant scholarly syndrome of the priority of the *texts* over the *experience*, and *theology* over *ecclesiology*. There are many scholars who cling to this dogma, imposed by the post-Enlightenment and post-Reformation hegemony over all scholarly theological work. This approach can be summarized as follows. What constitutes the basis of any historical investigation, the core of Christian faith, cannot be extracted but from given texts (and/or archeological evidence¹⁷), from the expressed theological views, from a certain *depositum fidei* (be it the Bible, the Church (or apostolic) Tradition). Very rarely is there any serious reference to the eucharistic/eschatological experience that preceded them, in fact, from the communion-event which was responsible for and produced these texts and views.¹⁸

These views were met with some skepticism on the basis of a suspicion of a latent return to the pre-critical approach to the Gospels and additional questions about my previously expressed postmodern concerns.¹⁹ I do not hide my discon-

tent with modernism, at least because it has over-rationalized everything from social life to scholarship, from emotion to imagination, seeking to excessively control and constrict the irrational, the aesthetic and perhaps even the sacred. In the search to rationalize and historicize all, modernism has transformed not only what we know and how we know it, but also how we understand ourselves. Hence the longing by a wide range of intellectuals for wholeness, for community, for *Gemeinschaft*, for an antidote to the fragmentation and sterility of an overly technocratic society, and at the end of the road a consent to postmodernism.

Having said all this, it is important to reaffirm what sociologists of knowledge very often point out: that modernism, counter-modernism, postmodernism, and even de-modernism, are always simultaneous processes. Otherwise postmodernism can easily end up as a neo-traditionalism that neglects or even negates the great achievements of the Enlightenment and the ensuing critical order and of course the democratic structure of our modern society.²⁰

I felt obliged to say these things and reaffirm that all I argue for is the priority of the eschatological *experience* of the early Christian community over against its *literary products*. I admit of course at the same time that very early, even from the time of St. Paul, there has been a shift – no matter for what reasons²¹ – of the center of gravity from the *eucharistic experience* to the *Christian message*, from *eschatology* to *Christology* (and consequently to *soteriology*), from the *event* (the *kingdom of God*), to the *bearer and center* of this event (*Christ*, and more precisely his sacrifice on the cross). However, my view is that the horizontal-eschatological perspective always remained predominant in the early Church, both in the New Testament and in most of the subsequent Christian literature. The vertical-soteriological view was always understood within the context of the horizontal-eschatological perspective as supplemental and complementary.²²

This, however, is not something uncommon, even among the most fervent supporters of modernism within biblical scholarship of our time. More and more scholarly studies come out advocating the priority of the "eucharistic" conduct and/or "common meal" eschatological anticipation of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries, of Jesus himself "eating together" with his disciples, and of course of the early Christian community.²³ This wide recognition of the importance of the Eucharist in dealing with Christian origins has brought a new dimension to the understanding of its earliest stages. We are talking, of course, of the Eucharist neither in the sense of a mystery cult, nor as a mere ritual, but as the living expression of the ecclesial identity of the early Christian community, an expression of a *koinonia* of the eschata, and a proleptic manifestation of the kingdom of God, a vivid act of a community living in a new reality.

The issue at stake, therefore, is how the *ritual* developed into a *story*. To put it in different terms, how the transmission of the Jesus-tradition moved from an *eschatological*, experiential, didactic (sophiological?)²⁴ pattern to a *historical* narrative of the Markan type. How can one explain the trajectory of Jesus' traditions from a (non-Pauline) *logia* literary genre (Q and Thomas) to a *story* literary genre (Mark and then the rest of the canonical Gospels). In addition, one cannot ignore that Paul did not care about the *Jesus of history* (2 Cor 5:16ff.), and yet *Mark* theologically produced a Gospel of a Pauline type.

Before the consolidation of the Q hypothesis, everything was centered on the assumption of a soteriological emphasis from the very beginning of Christian origins. According to this explanation the trajectory went as follows: from the soteriological significance of Jesus of Nazareth, to Paul, to post-Pauline Christianity (Gospels), and then on to Catholic/Orthodox Christianity.

After the consolidation and the almost unanimous accep-

tance of the Q hypothesis, an alternative explanation can be convincingly advanced. And this explanation places a great deal of importance on the assumption of the priority of the eschatological teaching of Jesus of Nazareth re-enacted and performed around the "common meal" eschatological fellowships expressing the "eucharistic" perspective of the Christian community. According to this explanation the early Christian community developed in two trajectories:

(1) The kingdom-of-God teaching of the historical Jesus, to Q, to James, to the Didache, to Thomas, and then on to marginal Christian groups, especially to Gnostic Christianity.

(2) The kingdom-of-God teaching of the historical Jesus, to Paul, to Mark, to the rest of the canonical Gospels, to Acts, and then on to early Orthodox Christianity.

It is quite interesting that the later Catholic/Orthodox Christianity preserved both the eucharistic/eschatological element, prominent in the first trajectory, and the soteriological/christological one, around which the second trajectory developed.

With regard to the relations between Mark and Q, I rejected in an earlier study all the proposed solutions (either of direct dependence one way or the other, or mutual independence) and suggested that Mark did "have *knowledge of Q-traditions*... he was *acquainted with the Q-Documents* itself... [he did not] *derive* any material therefrom... [because] his attitude to the Q-materials [was] critical."²⁵ This might have been due to Q's non-soteriological motifs and perhaps to its lack of a *theologia-crucis* orientation on which the entire Pauline tradition was so dependent.

I take for granted the findings of some cultural anthropologists, that in Israel, like in all societies and religious systems, the connection between ritual and story was fundamental. The main story of the Jewish people, the exodus from Egypt, was ritually reenacted in Israel's major festival, the Passover, and the main promise of Yahweh to his people, i.e. his uni-

lateral covenant to all descendants of Abraham and later to Jacob (Israel), was reenacted in rituals and offerings during all their annual festivals. We also know that these promises of the blessings of that covenant had been a *hope rather than a reality*, which nevertheless stayed alive and was constantly renewed up to the time of the historical Jesus. In all its forms (Isaianic, Danielic, Enochic, or Qumranic) this hope was celebrated around the common meals in anticipation of the coming of the messianic meal with the anointed priest and/or the anointed king. And there were numerous prophets during Jesus' time, who attempted to reenact or to prepare for the messianic liberation of Israel.

Coming now to Jesus of Nazareth there is good evidence in all Gospel accounts that he, too, celebrated common meals with his disciples and friends, and this not only because he certainly was a devoted Jew, "marginal" or not. And there is no reason to doubt that the early Christian communities celebrated common meals in anticipation of the eschatological/messianic reality. Most probably the Christian community's meals had their origin in meals that Jesus celebrated with his disciples.²⁶

There is a growing awareness among most biblical and liturgical scholars working on the original form of the eucharistic accounts of the New Testament that Jesus' last meal, as well as the other common meals, must have been understood in *eschatological* rather than *soteriological* terms; that is, as anticipation of the banquet of God with his people in the kingdom of God. Whatever soteriological significance was later attached to them was certainly understood only within this eschatological perspective, never outside it.

It is not only (1) the apparent eschatological orientation of the overall "institution narratives" in all their forms (Marcan/Matthaeian and Pauline/Lucan). It is also clear that (2) the saying pertaining to the *cup* in its oldest form was not centered on the content of the cup (the wine, and further

through the sacrificial meaning of Jesus' blood, on its soteriological significance), but on the cup as the symbol of the new covenant;²⁷ and above all, (3) the *bread* in its original meaning was not connected with Jesus' crucified body, but had ecclesiological connotations, starting as a symbol of the eschatological community. Justin Taylor has convincingly argued for the eschatological importance of the "breaking of the bread" in early Christianity.²⁸ Perhaps the intermediate stage in the overall process was the Pauline image of the "body of Christ."

The story of Jesus' suffering and death remained fluid for a long time. Evidence for this is the different versions of the Passion narrative in the Gospel literature, owing to the oral performance of the story in ritual celebrations. As the early faithful in their ritual celebrations were reading again and again the Old Testament lessons and then told the story of Jesus' death, the Passion story was enriched by scriptural language.

At this stage Paul's theological interpretation of Jesus' death through his famous *theologia crucis*, his major contribution to Christianity, played a catalytic role. In view of the idea that, it is stories that create nations, and more precisely stories that can function as a founding element in any religious system, the *story* of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, and by extension the Gospel narratives, proved to be a significant factor in the development of Christianity. In this way the original *eschatological* dimension was able to survive and have a lasting impact in the course of history. The new eschatological community, which expressed its identity in *eucharistic ritual*, could only be nourished and sustained by this version of the story, namely the Passion narrative, a version derived from ritual, and which in turn ultimately has its roots in the commensal practices of Jesus.

The *theologia crucis*, the story, and the soteriological interpretation of Jesus' death in the course of history even-

tually overwhelmed the earlier ethical, eucharistic, and eschatological understanding of Christian identity. Ironically enough, the same process was in force in the understanding of the sacrament of the Eucharist, where for most of the time the personalistic and soteriological elements overwhelmed the prominent eschatological and ecclesiological ones; not as deviation and corrupted additional elements, but as a necessary part of a survival process. What, however, became quite damaging for the future of Christian theology was its elevation after the Reformation to an absolute approach to the Christian faith.

And here the other, equally unique, contribution of the early Christian community, namely the Johannine radical interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth, needs to be taken into consideration. The importance of Johannine theology, so badly overlooked in modernity as a tool for the proper understanding of the Christian identity, and completely ignored as a contribution to all quests for the historical Jesus, may need to be reconsidered.

The Johannine Contribution

The Gospel of John (hereafter GJ) is unique in religious literature, because it challenges the conventional approach to many religious issues. Ironically, it is also the theological treatise that has shaped the identity and self-understanding of the Christian Church, thus becoming *the* Gospel of Christianity. It is not only its “transcendent theology concerning Jesus,”²⁹ which determined the Christian doctrine, but its profound reflection on Jesus of Nazareth through its eucharistic theology. The originality of ideas of GJ provoked strong controversy in early Christianity. This controversy continued in the modern era, though for quite different reasons. It gained recognition, respect and renewed consideration only in postmodernity. For whereas in modernity the

focus of biblical theology with regard to Jesus tradition has mainly focused on the Synoptic Gospels, now in postmodernity more emphasis is given to the Johannine tradition.

GJ presupposes the Synoptic tradition but moves beyond its logic, as well as beyond some of the earlier (Pauline) theological views. Theologically it approaches the enduring problems of history, human destiny, death, and salvation starting not from anthropology but rather from *Christology*.³⁰ Christology in GJ, however, cannot to be understood apart from its *Pneumatology*, since “the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit” (14:26), according to GJ’s terminology, can be easily defined as the “alter ego” of Christ (“and I will ask my father and he will give you another Paraclete so that he might remain with you always” (14:16). This other Paraclete who “will teach you all things” (14:26) is “the Spirit of truth” (14:17; 15:26; 16:13); and in the final analysis the one who will “guide you into all the truth” (16:12). Consequently human beings are in communion with “the way, the truth and the life,” who is Christ, only through the Holy Spirit, whom he bestows upon the world as a gift of God the Father.³¹ The crucial question, of course, is how and on what condition one can become bearer of the Spirit. In answering this question modern exegetes are dramatically divided. Conservative scholars insist that according to GJ this can only happen within the Church through the sacraments, whereas liberal critics argue that it is in keeping the word of God and being in communion with Christ that salvation can be accomplished.

In GJ the Christian community (i.e. the Church), just as in the early Christian tradition, is not perceived as an institution, an organization with defined or set doctrines, and/or a specific social order. Rather, it is understood as communion with Christ, just as Christ is in communion with the Father, when believers keep Christ’s word and believe in him who had sent him (10:30; 17:21ff.). They are “of the truth” when they hear his voice, just as the sheep hear the voice of the

good shepherd (10:1ff). All these happen, when they change their lives, i.e. when they are born from above (3:3), by the Spirit (3:5ff.). But this birth by the Spirit, unlike natural birth, is the work of God that no one can control, just as happens with the wind. "The Spirit blows where he wills, [just as mysteriously and freely as the wind], and you hear its sound but you do not know from where it comes or where it goes. Thus it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (3:8). For this reason the proper worship of the community has to be "in spirit and in truth" (4:24).

This distinctly charismatic ecclesiological view, however, alternates with a number of seemingly strong sacramental references, which were so far either rejected in modern scholarship as later additions or interpolations, or explained in a conventional "sacramentalistic," i.e. pre-modern, way. As a matter of fact, there is no other issue that has so divided modern scholarship than the sacramental or non-sacramental character of the GJ.³² The debate is usually supported by its apparent silence regarding baptism and Eucharist, and by some passages that seem to speak in a veiled or symbolic manner. In my view, the issue at stake is whether the various "sacramental" references, are at all related to the "sacramentalistic" views of the ancient Hellenistic mystery cults contemporary to the early Church,³³ or have much more dynamic connotations, i.e., whether they actually stand as a further reflection on the traditional (Pauline and Synoptic) understanding of the Eucharist, thus being a radical reinterpretation of the Christian identity.

Although the GJ omits the words of institution of the Eucharist, it is rightly considered the "sacramental" book *par excellence*.³⁴ The miraculous change of the water into wine at the wedding in Cana (2:1-11) at the outset of Jesus' earthly ministry, the symbolism of the vine and the branches in the "Farewell Discourse" (ch. 15), the flow of blood and water from the pierced side of the crucified Jesus (19:34)

and so many other elements make the sacramental, or rather eucharistic, character of the GJ inescapable. Of course, the most discussed units in this respect are chapter 6 with its "Eucharistic Discourse" (especially 6:51b-58); the washing of the disciples' feet, which actually replaces the Synoptic account of the institution of the Eucharist, and in fact the entire chapter 13; the anointing of Jesus in 12:1ff; and the so-called "High-Priestly Prayer" in chapter 17, as a model of eucharistic prayer and a plea for the unity of humankind. I will briefly analyze these pericopes, starting with what I consider to be the indispensable theological framework of 11:51-52.

It has long been recognized that the GJ claims that the ultimate gifts of God, usually associated with the end times of history, are already accessible to the believer "in Christ." This claim is made, however, without compromising the future dimension of those gifts. The GJ seems to insist that these eschatological realities are present in the life of the believer, although there is still a future and unfulfilled quality to them. In doing this, it invites the readers to turn their attention from the future to the present quality of Christian existence. Nevertheless, it perfectly keeps the balance between the present and the future, giving the impression that it attempts to correct an excessively futurist orientation, without dispensing with the future altogether.

This ambivalence is, in fact, evident in the entire teaching, and especially the life and work, of the Jesus of history, all of which cannot be properly understood without a reference to the messianic expectations of Judaism, i.e., the coming of a Messiah, who in the "last days" of history (*eschaton*) would establish his kingdom by calling all the dispersed and afflicted people of God into one place to become one body united around him. The idea of "gathering into one place the scattered people of God and of all the nations," coupled with the descent of God's Spirit upon the sons and daughters of

God, is found in the prophetic tradition,³⁵ and is also evident in the early Christian literature.³⁶ And here a statement in GJ – generally overlooked in modern biblical scholarship – about the role of the Messiah is extremely important. In that statement the author of GJ interprets the words of the Jewish high priest by affirming that “he prophesied that Jesus should die...not for the nation only, but to *gather into one* the children of God who are scattered abroad” (11:51-52).

Jesus of Nazareth, therefore, identified himself with the Messiah of the end times, who would be the center of the gathering of the dispersed people of God. It was on this radical eschatological teaching about the kingdom of God that the early Christian community developed its theology, ecclesiology, spirituality, and its mission. It was exactly this gathering that has ever since been reenacted in the liturgical practice of the Eucharist. Already in the writings of Paul it was stated that all who believe in Christ are incorporated into the one people of God and mystically united into his body through Baptism. The GJ has further developed this teaching in regard to the unity of the people of God by pointing out that this incorporation into Christ’s body takes place in the Eucharist, a significant identity act which was seen not as a mystery cult but as a foretaste of the expected eschatological Kingdom.

To understand the overall Johannine eucharistic theology one has undoubtedly to start from chapter 6.³⁷ The entire chapter begins with three wondrous deeds: the feeding of the multitude, the walking of Jesus on the sea, and the landing of the boat (6:1–21). Then a lengthy discourse on the “bread of life” follows, where Jesus makes high claims for himself consistent with the announcement of his prologue (1:1-18). The result is a division among his hearers, which finds many who had believed now leaving him (6:22–71).

There is no doubt that the author obviously wanted to set the Christ event within the framework of the Exodus-

Passover theme. In the Johannine Passion story Jesus is made to die at the very time the lambs are being slaughtered in preparation for the Passover meal of the same evening (19:14). The symbolism suggests that Christ is to be viewed as the new Passover lamb by which God liberates humanity from oppression, just as Israel was freed from slavery in Egypt.

This Passover framework, however, is interpreted through clear sacramental references. Only the passage of the walking of Jesus on the sea (6:16-21) seems to be outside this scheme. But this is probably due to the fact that this very unit was preserved in the earlier Synoptic tradition (Mark 6:30-52; Matt 14:13-27), coupled with the account of the multiplication of loaves. At any rate, the entire discourse on the "bread of life" (6:22ff.) is a continuation of, and a commentary on, the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, which, by the way, had already been given in the Synoptic tradition an accented eucharistic dimension (Mark. 6:41).³⁸

In general, if Paul and the Synoptic Gospels underline the significance of the soteriological/sacramental understanding of the Eucharist, i.e., via the Pauline *theologia crucis*, it was GJ that went beyond this *theologia crucis* and gave it a life-orientated understanding. By doing so, it underlined a completely different dimension to the Christ event, thus pointing to another direction in the so-called quest for the historical Jesus. Without losing its connection with Jesus' death (cf. John 19:34), the eschatological meal of the community in GJ is essentially distanced from death and associated rather with life ("the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the *life* of the world," [6:51; see also 6:33, 58]). The antithesis between bread and manna illustrates perfectly this truth; for whereas the Jews who had eaten the manna in the desert died, those who partake of the true bread will have life eternal (6:58, 33).

Reading carefully through the entire Johannine eucharistic

discourse (6:22-71), a clear change of vocabulary and content in vv. 51b-58 is more than evident.³⁹ In these verses faith in Christ is no longer the basic presupposition for eternal life (“he who believes in me has eternal life. I am the bread of life” [6:47-48; cf. also 6:35]); eternal life now is linked with eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ (“Truly truly, if you do not *eat the flesh* of the Son of Man and *drink his blood* you will not have life in yourselves. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life... he who eats me, shall live by me,” [6:54f, 57]). However, as I have argued elsewhere,⁴⁰ the profound meaning of these sayings is given by the concluding remark of v. 6:56: “those who eat my flesh and drink my blood *abide in me, and I in them.*” With these words GJ denotes an unbroken relationship, communion, and abiding presence of God, which surpass both the Hellenistic concept of “ecstasy,” and at the same time the classical conception of the Jewish prophecy, because it transforms the eschatological expectation from a future event to a present reality. It also avoids any trace of pantheism, since there is no hint of the idea of “identification” of the initiate with the deity, the principal teaching of the mystery cults.

Here we have the beginnings of what has become axiomatic in later Christian tradition: to have “eternal life” – in other words to live an authentic and not conventional life – one has to be in communion with Christ. Communion with Christ, however, means participation in the perfect communion which exists between the Father and the Son (“Just as the living Father sent me, and I live through the Father, s/he who eats me will live through me,” [John 6:57]). What we have here in GJ is in fact a parallel expression to what has become in later patristic literature the biblical foundation of the doctrine of *theosis* (divinization; cf. the classic statement of 2 Pet 1:4). In the case of GJ, however, this idea is expressed in a more dynamic and less abstract way.

Taking this argument a little further, one can say that GJ

further develops an understanding of the Eucharist as the unceasingly repeated act of sealing the “new covenant” of God with his new people. This interpretation is, of course, evidenced also in the earlier Synoptic and Pauline tradition, although there the covenantal interpretation of Jesus’ death in the phrase “this is my blood of the *covenant*” (Mark 14:24, et al.; 1 Cor 11:25), is somewhat hidden by the soteriological formula “which is shed *for you*” (ibid).

This eucharistic theology of GJ, with the direct emphasis on the idea of the *covenant* and of *communion*, is in fact in accordance with the prophet Jeremiah’s vision, which was at the same time also a promise. Just as in Jeremiah, so also in GJ, it is the idea of a *new covenant*, of *communion*, and of the Church as a *people*, that are most strongly emphasized.⁴¹

Through this covenantal eucharistic dimension, the GJ does not only go beyond the *theologia crucis*; it also develops other important characteristics. It deals with both the profound meaning of the act of identity in the Eucharistic celebration of the early Christian community and with the question of who Jesus of Nazareth actually was. The pericope of the “Washing of the Disciples’ Feet” (13:1-20) is a key pericope in this respect. The incident in question, which is preserved only in the GJ, is placed in the context of the Last Supper, and in direct connection with Judas’ betrayal. In other words, in the same place the Synoptic Gospels have all recorded the dominical sayings of the institution of the Eucharist (Mark 14:22-25). Given GJ’s almost certain knowledge of the Synoptic tradition, one can fairly argue that its author obviously replaced the account of the institution of the Eucharist with the symbolic act of Jesus’ washing of his disciples’ feet. A careful reading of the reference to the new commandment of love (13:34-15), in the same context, brings immediately to the reader’s mind the institution narrative. The “*new commandment*” sounds very similar to the “*new covenant*” of the institution narratives of the Synoptic tradition.

In sum, GJ understands the Eucharist not as a mere “cultic” and “sacramental” act, but primarily as a diaconal act and an alternative way of life with apparent social implications. For in those days the washing of a disciple’s feet was more than an ultimate act of humble service and kenotic diakonia; it was an act of radical social behavior, in fact, a rite of inversion of roles within the society.⁴² To this should be added Jesus’ admonition to his disciples and through them to his Church: “For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). The diaconal implication of the Johannine understanding of the Eucharist becomes quite evident.

It is almost an assured result of modern biblical and liturgical scholarship that the Eucharist was “lived” in the early Christian community as a foretaste of the coming kingdom of God. It was experienced as a proleptic manifestation, within the tragic realities of history, of an authentic life of communion, unity, justice and equality, entailing no practical differentiation (soteriological and beyond) between men and women.

If this was the original meaning of the Eucharist, then the redaction by GJ of another ritually significant pericope, and closely related to the “eucharistic” incident of the “washing of the disciples’ feet,” namely that of the “Anointing of Jesus” (John 12:1ff.), may not be accidental. GJ not only placed this famous pericope in the same Passover setting as the pericope of the “Washing of the Disciples’ Feet” (John 13:1ff.); it also replaced the unknown woman by Mary, a figure from within Jesus’ most beloved family of Lazarus. In fact, Mary is presented in contrast with her sister Martha, who, according to an account in Luke’s Gospel was “anxious and troubled about many things [except] the one thing... needful” (Luke 10:41). What is, however, even more important for our case is the transfer of the original anointing of Jesus’ hair (Mark 14:3/Matt 26:7, originally understood as a

prophetic act of messianic character), to Jesus' feet (12:3).⁴³ In this way GJ proleptically anticipates Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet. By so doing, the "disciple of love" changed an act of "witness" into an act of "diakonia."

Before closing my reflections on GJ it is necessary to say a few words about ch.17, the famous "High-Priestly (Eucharistic?) Prayer," ultimately understood as a prayer for the unity of humankind. It is commonly accepted that GJ is structured according to two major parts: the "Book of Signs" (chs. 1–12) and the "Book of Glory" (chs. 13–20). Both of them are centered around the notion of Jesus' "glorification," of his "hour." Whereas in the first part Jesus' "hour has not come" (John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20), in the second part the presence of the "hour," Jesus' death and resurrection, is clearly affirmed (John 13:1; 17:1). In this second part GJ presents Jesus addressing his disciples alone (13–17), and narrates, but at the same time reflects on, Jesus' Passion and Resurrection (18–21).

John 14–16, the so-called "Farewell Discourse," deal with Jesus' final instructions to his disciples. They consist of a mosaic of themes introduced, explored, dropped, and reintroduced, the central point being the promise of the sending of the "Paraclete," "the Spirit of Truth," the first serious pneumatological reflection in Christian literature.

Nevertheless, the most important part is undoubtedly ch. 17, "Jesus' High-Priestly Prayer" for his disciples. However, Jesus' prayer in ch. 17 is not only a prayer on behalf of his disciples and their theosis in his glorification, but is also "on behalf of those who will believe in [Christ] through their word" (17:20). All the motifs and symbols used in this chapter remind us of the "Eucharistic Prayer," the *anaphora* of the later Christian liturgy, which as a "reasonable worship" and "bloodless sacrifice" is being offered not only for the Christian community itself, but also for the *oekoumene*, "for the life of the whole world." In addition, the basic aim of

Jesus' prayer is "that they may all be one" (17:21ff.), and it is by extension an appeal for the unity of humankind. It is characteristic that the whole argument is being developed on the model of the perfect unity that exists between Christ and his Father, i.e. the unity that exists within the Holy Trinity ("as you, Father, are in me and I am in you," (John 17:21), "that they may be one, as we are one," 7:22). It is not accidental that the Eucharist, the Church's mystery *par excellence*, is also an expression of the ultimate act of unity; nor is it accidental that it is a rite of glory, experienced as such in almost all Christian traditions, though more distinctly in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Therefore, if any conclusion is to be drawn from this affirmation of the ecclesial and diaconal dimension of the Eucharist in GJ, this is, so I believe, a radical reinterpretation of the picture of the Jesus of Nazareth as presented in the Pauline (and Synoptic) tradition through the famous *theologia crucis*.

NOTES

¹ P. Vassiliadis, "Paul's *theologia crucis* as an Intermediate Stage of the Trajectory from Q to Mark," in *Atti del VII Simposio di Tarso su S. Paolo Apostolo*, (ed. L. Padovese; Rome, 2002), 43-52; and idem "John II. With Special Reference to the Eucharist," in *Global Bible Commentary*, (ed. Daniel Patte; Abingdon Press, forthcoming).

² Η περί της Πηγής των Λογίων Θεωρία. Κριτική θεώρησης των συγχρόνων φιλολογικών και θεολογικών προβλημάτων της Πηγής των Λογίων (Athens, 1977).

³ cf. P. Vassiliadis, ΛΟΓΟΙ ΙΗΣΟΥ. *Studies in Q*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).

⁴ H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM, 1990), 86.

⁵ H. W. Attridge, "Reflections on Research into Q," *Semeia* 55 (1991): 223-34.

⁶ Cf. P. Vassiliadis, "Pauline Theology, the Origins of Christianity and the Challenge of Q. A Personal Journey," in *Atti del V Simposio di Tarso su S. Paolo Apostolo*, (ed. L. Padovese; Rome, 1998), 41-60.

⁷ Graydon Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Mercer, GA, 1985). cf. also L. M. White's more recent two-volume work in the Harvard Theological Studies series, entitled *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture*, vol. 1, *Building God's House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptations Among Pagans, Jews and Christians*, and vol. 2, *Texts and Monuments for the Christian Domus Ecclesiae in its Environment* (Valley Forge, 1996-1997).

⁸ G. Snyder, for example, has pointed out that "from 180 to 400 artistic analogies of self-giving, suffering, sacrifice, or incarnation are totally missing. The suffering Christ on a cross first appeared in the fifth century, and then not very convincingly." Snyder, of course, interprets these exemplars of early Christian iconography as representative of *popular* Christian religion as opposed to *official* Christian religion, simply because as an archaeologist he did not scrutinize theologically his extraordinary findings. "There is no place in the third century [or earlier] for a crucified Christ, or a symbol of divine death. Only when Christ was all powerful, as in the iconography of the Emperor, could that strength be used for redemption and salvation as well as deliverance" (G. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 29).

⁹ Cf. H. Kessler, *Die theologische Bedeutung des Todes Jesu. Eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung* (Düsseldorf, 1970); *Der Tod Jesu. Deutungen im Neuen Testament* (ed. K. Kertelge; Freiburg, 1976); O. Knoch, "Zur Diskussion über die Heilsbedeutung des Todes Jesu," *Theologisches Jahrbuch 1977/78* (Leipzig, 1978); G. Dellings, *Der Kreuzestod Jesu in der urchristlichen Verkündigung* (Göttingen, 1972); M. Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1981); F.-J. Ort Kemper, *Das Kreuz in der Verkündigung des Apostels Paulus dargestellt an den Texten der paulinischen Hauptbriefe* (Stuttgart, 1967); J. Roloff, "Anfänge der soteriologischen Deutung des Todes Jesu (Mk X.45 und Lk XXII.27)," *NTS* 19 (1972), 38-64; M.-L. Gubler, *Die frühesten Deutungen des Todes Jesu. Eine motivgeschichtliche Darstellung auf Grund der neueren exegetischen Forschung* (Fribourg, 1977); and P. Vassiliadis, *Cross and Salvation: The Soteriological Background of St. Paul's Teaching about the Cross in the Light of the Pre-Pauline Interpretation of Jesus' Death* (in Greek) (Thessaloniki, 1983), an English summary of which can be found in "Σταυρός: Centre of the Pauline Soteriology and Apostolic Ministry," in *L'Apôtre Paul. Personnalité, Style et Conception du Ministère*, (ed. A. Vanhoye; Leuven, 1986), 246-253.

¹⁰ P. Vassiliadis, *Cross and Salvation*, 47ff.

¹¹ Traces of the "prophetic" interpretation are found in the earliest pauline epistle (1 Thess 2:15), Acts (7:52), the Marcan tradition (cf. Mark

12:1-12), and the Q-Document.

¹² This is found in the earliest and most traditional strata of Acts (2:23ff.; 2:32ff.; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:39ff.) and the pauline literature (1 Thess 4:14; Rom 8:34; 14:19a; 2 Cor 13:4).

¹³ J. Roloff ("Anfänge der soteriologischen Deutung," 39) calls it *Kontrastschema*.

¹⁴ Cf. the synoptic passion predictions (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33).

¹⁵ Cf. the earliest layers of the eucharistic tradition both in Paul and the Synoptic Gospels (1 Cor 11:25; also Mark 10:45a; Luke 22:37b; 12:37b).

¹⁶ *Cross and Salvation*, 58.

¹⁷ Nevertheless, note the remarks above in notes 4 and 5.

¹⁸ P. Vassiliadis, "The Challenge of Q. The Cynic Hypothesis," *ΑΙΘΙΟΙ ΙΗΣΟΥ. Studies in Q*, 151f. cf. also idem, "Pauline Theology, the Origins of Christianity and the Challenge of Q," 57; and "The Eucharistic Perspective of the Church's Mission," *Eucharist and Witness: Orthodox Perspectives on the Unity and Mission of the Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), 49-66.

¹⁹ P. Vassiliadis, "Prolegomena to Theology of the New Testament" (in Greek), *Deltion Biblikon Meleton* 19 (2000): 5-21. cf. also my recent book, *Postmodernity and the Church* (in Greek) (Athens: Akritas Publications, 2002).

²⁰ The rationalistic sterility of modern life has turned to the quest for something new, something radical, which nevertheless is not always new, but very often old recycled: neo-romanticism, neo-mysticism, naturalism, etc. In fact, all these neo-isms share a great deal in common with the early 18th-century reactions to the modernist revolution.

²¹ Bruce Chilton, in *A Feast of Meanings: Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus through Johannine Circles* (Leiden, 1994), has discerned six such paradigm shifts from Jesus' time to the Johannine circles. D. Passakos, in *Eucharist and Mission* (in Greek) (Athens, 1997), 267, has analyzed this "paradigm shift" at the crucial moment of early Christianity and claimed that "the Eucharist in Paul" was understood not only as an icon of the eschata, but also as a missionary event with cosmic and social consequences. The Eucharist for him was not only the sacrament of the Church, but also the sacrament of the world. Within the Pauline communities the Eucharist had a double orientation (in contrast to the overall eschatological and otherworldly dimension of it in earlier tradition): "toward the world as *diastolic* movement, and toward God as a *systolic* movement." According to Passakos "the Eucharist for Paul is at the same time an experience of the eschata and a movement toward the eschata" (268).

²² This is why the liturgical experience of the early Church is incomprehensible without its social dimension (see Acts 2:42ff., 1 Cor 11:1ff., Heb 13:10-16; Justin, *1 Apology* 67; Irenaeus, *Adver. Her.* 18.1, etc.).

²³ Cf. H. Koester's recent lecture on "Story and Ritual in Greece, Rome and Early Christianity," <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/symposium/story.html>. Also B. Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings*; and E. Nodet and J. Taylor, *The Origins of Christianity: An Exploration* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998).

²⁴ My argument in what follows is not affected by the dispute over the priority in Q of the wisdom or apocalyptic element. More on this in J. S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Philadelphia, 1987).

²⁵ P. Vassiliadis, "Prolegomena to a Discussion on the Relationship Between Mark and the Q-Document," *Deltion Biblikon Meleton* 3 (1975), 45.

²⁶ The question which arises is whether these meals can be reduced only to the last one, commonly called the "Last Supper," before his crucifixion. Paul, our earliest source, seems to anchor the eucharistic tradition he received in the historical situation of the last meal of Jesus with his disciples. Thus, he claims continuity between the meals celebrated by the community with the meal celebrated by Jesus in the night in which he was handed over. However, the possibility that this connection was the result of his *teologia crucis* cannot be excluded.

²⁷ Cf. my "The Biblical Foundation of the Eucharistic Ecclesiology" (in Greek), in *Lex Orandi. Studies of Liturgical Theology*, EKO 9 (Thessaloniki, 1994), 29ff.

²⁸ J. Taylor, "La fraction du pain en Luc-Actes," in *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, (ed. J. Verheyden; Leuven, 1999), 281-295; cf. also E. Nodet and J. Taylor, *The Origins of Christianity*, 88-123.

²⁹ Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagite, *Epistle X*, 1117A and 1120A (208:4-5 and 209:12).

³⁰ E. Lohse, *Grundrisse der neutestamentlichen Theologie*, 1974 (all references here are from the Greek translation 1980, 184ff). cf. however the interesting essay of C. K. Barrett, "Christocentric or Theocentric? Observations on the Theological Method of the Fourth Gospel," *Essays on John* (1982), 1-18.

³¹ This does not mean that there are no pneumatological hints in the earlier synoptic tradition, as J. Karavidopoulos has shown, but there the references are limited and indirect.

³² Cf. Robert Kysar, "John, The Gospel of," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary on CD-ROM*.

³³ B. Lindars has stated that the discussion on the issue "would never

have arisen if it had not been for the effect of the Reformation on Western theology" (*The Gospel of John* [1972], 261).

³⁴ cf. O. Cullmann, *Les Sacraments dans l'Évangile Johannique* (1951), incorporated in his *Early Christian Worship*, 1953. The rediscovery of the sacramental characteristics in John's Gospel has in fact a long history in modern biblical scholarship: cf. S. Smalley, "Liturgy and Sacrament in the Fourth Gospel," *EvQ* 29 (1957), 159-170; C.T. Craig, "Sacramental Interest in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 58 (1939), 31-41; also J. M. Creed, "Sacraments in the Fourth Gospel," *The Modern Churchman* 16 (1926), 363-372.

³⁵ Isa 66:18, 2:2, 59:21; Joel 3:1; Ezek 36:24.

³⁶ Matt 25:32; Rom 12:16; *Didache* 9:4b; *Mart. Polyc.* 22:3b; Clement of Rome, *I Cor.* 12:6.

³⁷ According to R. E. Brown, "The Eucharist and Baptism in St. John," *Proceedings of the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine* 8 (1962), 14-37, the correct understanding of Johannine mysteryology very much depends on the proper understanding of ch. 6 (and ch. 3).

³⁸ G. H. Boobyer, "The Eucharistic Interpretation of the Miracles of the Loaves in Mark's Gospel," *JTS* 3(1952), 161-171, suggested half a century ago that Mark understood the miracle symbolically, but not eucharistically.

³⁹ For a history of interpretation see X. Léon Dufour, "Le mystère du Pain de Vie (Jean VI)," *RechSciRel* 46 (1958), 481-523; C. R. Koester, "John Six and the Lord's Supper," *Lutheran Quarterly* 4 (1990), 419-437. Among the most serious proposals, cf. R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 1 (1966); G. Bornkamm, "Die eucharistische Rede im Johannes-Evangelium," *ZNW* 47 (1956), 161-169; R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2 (1980); O. Cullmann, *Urchristentum und Gottesdienst* (1944), and its translation into English, *The Early Christian Worship*; G. H. C. MacGregor, "The Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 9 (1963), 111-119; O. S. Brooks, "The Johannine Eucharist: Another Interpretation," *JBL* 82 (1963), 293-300; E. Schweizer, "Das johanneische Zeugnis vom Herrenmahl," *Neotestamentica* (1963), 371-373; J. Jeremias, "Johann 6,51c-58 - redaktionell?" *ZNW* 44 (1953), 256ff.; J. Bonsirven, "Hoc est corpus meum," *Biblica* 29 (1948), 205-219; R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 218ff; P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven*, 1965 (cf. also his article "Unity of the Discourse in John 6," *ZNW* 50 [1959], 277-78); J. M. Perry "The Evolution of the Johannine Eucharist," *NTS* 39 (1993), 22-35.

⁴⁰ "The Understanding of Eucharist in St. John's Gospel," in *Atti del VI Simposio di Efeso su S. Giovanni Apostolo*, (ed. L. Padovese; Rome,

1996), 39-52.

⁴¹ Note the prophet's phraseology: "and I will make a *covenant ...a new covenant*," Jer 38:31; and "I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord... and they shall be unto me a *people*" (Jer 24:7).

⁴² More on this in A. Destro-M. Pesce, "Gestualità e ritualità nel Vangelo di Giovanni: la lavanda dei piedi," in *Atti del VI Simposio di Efeso su S. Giovanni Apostolo*, (ed. L. Padovese; Rome, 1996); J. D. G. Dunn, "The Washing of the Disciples' Feet in John 13,1-20," *ZNW* 61 (1970), 247-252; D. Tripp, "Meaning of Foot-Washing: John 13 and Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 840," *ET* 103 9 (1992), 237-239.

⁴³ E. Kasselouri, "The Narratives of Peter's Confession (Mt 16:13-20 par.) and of the Anointing of Jesus (Mt 26:6-13 par.). Parallel Messianic Narratives?" *Deltio Biblikon Meleton* 13 (1994), 27-33. Also, in "The Gospel of Matthew," in *Proceedings of the VII Conference of Orthodox Biblical Scholars* (in Greek) (Thessaloniki, 1996), 169-175.

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