

ROD OF JESSE

the wine of Passover, – ‘and they all drank of it’ – he said, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’ Is this the voice of the Beatitudes or of the prophet come into Galilee following his baptism by John? Surely, if Jesus said these things we must make a new sort of allowance for this man. What falls to the ground here when the story is taken literally is the mere conception of him as a rabbi. We lose the mere prophet. We lose the Great Teacher of humanity. Who can imagine a Confucius instituting such a rite? No Teacher speaks this way.

These words depend for all their honest meaning on his voluntary death. At very least we have here a man of unique imagination and self-regard, a holy figure – rather than a wise. We come close to Albert Schweitzer’s idea of a Jesus seeking martyrdom, but the difficulty is to know on strictly historical grounds whether he can have spoken these words which are at once so distinctive and so hard to accept. An easy solution is to deny them. For implicitly it is the cult god who would invite us here saying, Eat of my body, and be partakers of a New Covenant in my blood because I am one who has died and risen from the dead, and you may become a part of all that by accepting these tokens in good faith.

A few great names and others of distinction have accepted the words of Jesus as historically his own, or so they inform us. Mixing the great and the less great I name four of them as David Strauss, Ernest Renan, once again Albert Schweitzer and then – who for a fourth? Since our question rests on a radical doubt we look for minds that have suffered because of that doubt and I revive the name of an American humanist, Paul Elmer More, a gifted classicist and literary figure who will even say:

(As to the ‘historical authenticity of the Holy Supper’)... an unprejudiced study of the documents must lead to the conclusion that we have records, correct in essentials while varying, as would be expected, in details, of an actual event. That is to say, it is a simple fact of history that Jesus supped with a group of chosen disciples in Jerusalem just before his trial and crucifixion, and that under the shadow of the coming tragedy he did break bread and give the cup with the solemn words of the Institution.³¹

31. *The Catholic Faith* (Princeton 1931 p. 125.)