

# THE WEDDING-FEAST OF ISRAEL

By JAMES QUINN

**T**HE time we live in is the sacramental age of the Church. God speaks to us in the sign-language of faith, for vision is yet to come. But already, by means of the Church, we live in the supernatural world of heaven. The sacraments belong to Christ's Easter world of the new creation.

At the very heart of the sacramental world is the foretaste, and the reality, of heaven: the Eucharist. Here is Emmanuel, God with us. Here is the source of joy, God's presence. Here is the fountain of everlasting life.

## *The History of Salvation*

The Eucharist spans the whole history of salvation. It is a great, many-splendoured rainbow overarching the horizon of time. It stretches back in history to the incarnation, and beyond. It is itself the very mystery of redemption. It looks forward to the glorious fulfilment of incarnation and redemption in the great day of Christ at the end of time.

The Eucharist takes us back to the origins of mankind in Eden. It sweeps us forward to the consummation of all things in paradise. It is the guiding star by which the course of the world's history is set. It gathers up into itself the whole of God's revelation, and cradles within its narrow limits the boundless world of divine reality.

There will be a time, an eternity, when the Eucharist will be no more. But the reality that it enshrines will last for ever. It is the reality of God's presence and of his love. The Eucharist speaks to us in simple, human language of God's abiding love for mankind. It tells us that communion between God and man is by a covenant of marriage, celebrated by a wedding-feast and sealed by a new presence of God that brings joy to his bride.

## *The Divine Community of Love*

God is love. In fact, God is a community of love. God's life is an eternal communion: a communion of Being shared inexhaustibly by three divine Persons. This surpassing mystery is the resplendent

sun that lends warmth and colour and radiance to all lesser truths. This is the key to unlock the meaning of the Eucharist.

The eternal community of love chose freely to call into being a second community of love, which was to be linked for ever with the divine Exemplar, the blessed Trinity. God created Adam and Eve to found this community which would unite the whole human family in one supernatural society, made one with the eternal community of love.

The lesser community was to be modelled on the greater. The self-giving love of God was to be its pattern and its life. The way of entry into the community was to be the fruitfulness of marriage, the echo of God's self-giving love. The fruit of marriage was to be not only life but grace. Every conception was, in God's plan, to be immaculate and full of grace.

### *The Wedding-Feast*

The joy of marriage is the recurrent symbol of grace. The wedding theme runs through the history of salvation, from Eden to paradise.<sup>1</sup> Christ is 'the Bridegroom';<sup>2</sup> grace is a wedding-feast.<sup>3</sup> The meaning of the 'sign' of Cana turns on this theme.

The story of Cana<sup>4</sup> involves the interplay of three concentric dramas: Cana, the fall and the redemption. It begins with the simple village drama of a wedding-feast where the supply of wine fails. 'They have no wine': Mary puts before her Son the distress of bridegroom and bride. For the Jews a wedding-feast without the wine of joy was no feast at all.

The words of his mother strike the imagination of our Lord. His mind's eye ranges over the whole history of salvation. He looks beyond this bridegroom and bride to the first bridegroom and bride of all: Adam and Eve, faced in Eden with the greatest tragedy of all. The wine of grace, the very life-blood of the community of love, has failed, not only for Adam and Eve but for the whole human race. Only God can restore it. 'They have no wine': our Lord chooses to read into these words a meaning perhaps never intended, a spiritual meaning that throws a flood of light on his symbolic gesture at Cana.

Our Lord smiles, the smile that is unrecorded because it is so natural. His mother sees the smile, and knows that a deeper meaning underlies the apparent refusal. 'My hour has not yet come':

<sup>1</sup> Gen 3, 15; 2 Cor 11, 2-3; Eph 5, 22-33; Apoc 19, 6-9; 21, 2-3 & 9-11; 22, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ps 44; Mk 2, 18-20; cp. Jn 3, 29. <sup>3</sup> Mt 22, 2-14; 25, 1-13. <sup>4</sup> Jn 2, 1-11.

it is the awaited hour of redemption, the hour when he will give to a thirsting world miraculous and abundant wine. The wine he will give is the holy Spirit of joy, and the joy-giving Eucharist.

The 'sign' of Cana is a promise in action that the hour of redemption, the hour of the Eucharist, though 'not yet come', is at hand. It is the promise in action of the best of all wines kept for the best of all wedding-feasts. The mystery of redemption will be celebrated by the wedding-feast of the Eucharist, and sealed by a new presence of God, bringing joy to his bride.

### *From Eden to Paradise*

The bliss of Eden is thus symbolized in our Lord's mind by a joyful wedding-feast. The wedding of Eden, like the wedding of Cana, was hallowed and made joyful by God's presence. But the wine of grace failed in Eden, and God no longer favoured with his presence the garden where he had walked in friendship with the bridegroom and the bride. A new community of love had to be established. A new wedding-feast and a new presence had to be planned. The 'sign' of Cana is God's promise of restoration. The wheel is turning full circle from Eden to paradise.

God is never defeated in his love by man's refusal of it. No sooner had Adam sinned than God revealed his purpose of founding afresh the community of love that he had planned. The new community would be a still more wonderful display of God's power and goodness.

God had in mind nothing less than a wedding between his eternal Son and human nature. Self-giving love had been the pattern of the first, frustrated, human community of love. It was to be the pattern also of this second, everlasting community of love. The wedding between God and human nature was to bear fruit in the new community of love. A new community was to be born of God's self-giving love.

### *The People of God*

As the first step in the unfolding of God's plan a people had to be prepared: the preparatory community that would flower in the new Israel of God. The history of salvation is the saga of two Israels: the Israel of Sinai and 'the Israel of God', which is the Church.<sup>1</sup>

Israel as a people was called into being on God's initiative. This was to be no merely human society. What was to create this people

<sup>1</sup> Gal 4, 22-31; cp. 6, 16.

as God's people was not the bond of human kinship, however strong; it was God's overshadowing love and his divine purpose for the future. The Israel born on Sinai was born, like the Israel of God which it prefigured, 'not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God'.<sup>1</sup>

Israel's fashioning as a people began with a series of divine wonders, leading up to the dazzling glory of Sinai. On the mountain God entered into a covenant with his new-born people. Israel was to be faithful to God's law; in return she was to experience the protection of God's almighty providence.

The covenant ritual was completed by the blood of sacrifice; that is, by a meal on the sacred mountain in God's presence,<sup>2</sup> by communion between God and man, by a gift shared between friends. The same framework of sacrifice is the setting for the Passover meal and the sacred meal of the covenant. Passover and covenant are two moments in one divine mystery of love. They fuse into one in the Eucharist, which is at once Passover meal and covenant meal. Passover and covenant bequeath to the Eucharist their sacrificial character and their content of divine love.

### *The Bridegroom of Israel*

The covenant on Sinai was in no way a treaty of peace between two powers, carefully defining their respective spheres of influence. There was but one sphere of influence, identical for both contracting parties. A new society was born on Sinai. A contract of marriage had been signed. Henceforth the interests of Yahweh and Israel were one.

Under the guidance of prophetic insight the covenant of Sinai was later seen in its true splendour as a marriage-covenant between Yahweh and Israel.<sup>3</sup> God was now the bridegroom of Israel, and Israel was bound by marriage-vows to be faithful to her divine Lover. To these nuptials God brought the added joy of a never-failing wedding-feast. The new order of sacrifice, ratified on Sinai and continued in the tabernacle and the temple, represents the first stirrings towards the new dispensation of love. Sacrifice in Israel was not only a sacred meal in the presence of Yahweh,<sup>4</sup> the sign of friendship and of peace; it was also a festival of joy celebrating the wedding between God and Israel. Unfaithful and idolatrous Israel was therefore a wicked and adulterous Israel.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jn 1, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Exod 24, 3-11.

<sup>3</sup> Hos 2, 14-24; Ezek 16, 8-14.

<sup>4</sup> Deut 12, 5-7.

<sup>5</sup> Hos 2, 1-13; Ezek 16, 15-59.

### *The Glory of God*

Like every true lover, God is not satisfied with protestations of his love. A marriage-contract in words must find fulfilment in a more personal relationship. Nor is God satisfied even with a fatherly providence exercised as it were at a distance. He must show his love for his bride by taking up his dwelling in her presence.

God's presence in the Old Testament is always real, even where it is invisible. But for the sake of his people it was by a created symbol of his glory that God manifested his presence among them. God's glory had been expressed, in terms of light: in the burning bush, in the fire on Sinai, in the cloud of glory enveloping the mountain.<sup>1</sup> Light is the first-born of creation, the primeval manifestation of God's glory.<sup>2</sup> It is the image which least inadequately reflects 'the brightness of His Glory and figure of His substance'<sup>3</sup> as God dwells 'in light inaccessible'.<sup>4</sup> The image of light will be used later in Israel's history to describe Wisdom's glory,<sup>5</sup> looking forward to the true Light which enlightens the darkness of the world.<sup>6</sup>

It was in a radiant cloud of glory that God dwelt among his people. God took up his dwelling as the *Shekinah* in the curtain-enclosed Holy of Holies in tabernacle and temple, enthroned between 'the cherubim of glory' on the mercy-seat above the ark, containing the marriage-covenant between Yahweh and Israel.<sup>7</sup> So too the *Shekinah* of the new covenant was to take up his dwelling behind the curtain of his human nature, when God the Son in person became the new alliance between God and man, in a marriage consummated in the flesh.<sup>8</sup>

### *The City of Peace*

With the divine Presence in their midst the pilgrim people journeyed on from Sinai. But wayward Israel forgot the guiding hand of God, refused to trust his providence and demanded food and drink in the wilderness. In answer to Moses' prayer, God provided his people with miraculous and abundant food and drink, notably the manna from heaven and the water from the rock, promises of greater gifts – and a greater Moses – to come.<sup>9</sup>

With God's presence to sustain them, with Jesus (Josue) to lead

<sup>1</sup> Exod 3, 2-6; 19, 18; 24, 16-17.    <sup>2</sup> Gen 1, 3.    <sup>3</sup> Heb 1, 3.    <sup>4</sup> 1 Tim 6, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Wis 7, 24-30.

<sup>6</sup> Jn 1, 4-14; Jn 1, 1-7; Apoc 21, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Exod 29, 42-46; 40, 32-36; Heb 9, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Jn 1, 14; Heb 10, 19-22. Cf. *infra*, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> Exod 16, 1-36; 17, 1-7.

them, the Israelites passed through Jordan into the land that flowed with milk and honey, and the foretaste of heaven. They were, like Abraham their father, in search of 'a City that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God'.<sup>1</sup> Eventually the royal city of Jerusalem was established, the image of 'the holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride for her husband'.<sup>2</sup>

The city of peace, especially under King Solomon, was a prophetic symbol of the heavenly city, where Israel was to dwell in peace under the protection of the indwelling Glory.<sup>3</sup> This was the golden age of Israel's greatness. Yet the city of peace was to be the capital of a more extensive kingdom than even Solomon knew. Sion was to be the mother-city of all nations, with a peace surpassing that of any earthly kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Dwelling-Place of the Glory*

The heart of the city of peace was the temple. The central shrine of the whole nation, the focus of its life, was the Holy of Holies, the dwelling-place of the Glory. The presence of God, the Shekinah, was the abiding sign of, the divine seal set on, the covenant and on Israel's fidelity to her bridegroom.<sup>5</sup> The presence, even more than the covenant, made Israel one.

God's greatest gift to Israel was his own presence in the Glory. This was the true source of Israel's greatness. No nation had its God so near to it as Israel.<sup>6</sup> Sion was in fact the city of the presence.<sup>7</sup> Sion without the Glory was a widowed Sion, a city of lamentation. The true Israel was Israel with the Glory.<sup>8</sup> Israel without the Glory was an Israel of longing and expectation, an Israel of sorrows awaiting her consolation in the return of the Glory.

But if God was present to Israel in the Glory, equally Israel must be present to God in the mutual surrender of love. Israel moved in God's presence by her reverence for the Glory, and by her grateful remembrance of God's wonderful works on her behalf. The recurrent festivals kept in the memory of Israel the signal proofs of God's predilection for his people. The festivals were more than a memorial: they were a celebration of an ever-present reality. Each mighty act of God in history was a reflection in time of the eternal truth of

<sup>1</sup> Heb 11, 10; 12, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Ps 47; Joel 3, 16-21; Zech 8, 1-8.

<sup>5</sup> Ps 131.

<sup>7</sup> Ps 45; Ps 46; Ps 47; Apoc 21, 10-11.

<sup>2</sup> Apoc 21, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ps 71; Ps 86; Isai 60, 1-22; Mic 4, 1-8.

<sup>6</sup> Deut 4, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Rom 9, 4.

God himself. Israel's festivals were too a hope for the future, a longing for fulfilment. In the same way, the great festival of the new Israel makes present one surpassing mystery of redeeming love, embracing within it the past, the present and the future.

### *The New Temple*

The temple of stone was the symbol of a greater temple yet to come. God longed to dwell in Israel's heart of flesh. But Israel's heart had to be broken in order to be made whole. A new heart of flesh had to be formed for Israel. A new covenant was promised by the prophets. It was to be a covenant written not now on tables of stone but in a heart of flesh.<sup>1</sup>

The way of purification for Israel was the way of suffering and sacrifice. The temple of stone, the very heart of Israel, was to be cast down. A new and spiritual temple, not made with hands, was to rise on its ruins: the new Israel itself, the body of Christ which was itself to be cast down, to rise more gloriously.<sup>2</sup>

The Glory was to flee from Israel's temple of stone. But in prophetic vision Ezechiel was to see the return of the Glory from the East, from the captivity in Babylon, to re-enter through the Eastern gate of a new and spiritual temple.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Vocation of Israel*

Israel was most aware of her unique destiny as she gathered in holiness around the altar of sacrifice, as she shared in the sacred meals with Yahweh in the communion-sacrifices of the temple. The presence of God created and sustained the identity of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

Israel knew no higher vocation than to prepare the dwelling-place of the Glory. The new Israel brought that vocation to fulfilment. Yet the old Israel was more privileged than she knew. Israel was chosen to prepare the living temple, not made with hands, that was the dwelling-place of the Son of God.<sup>5</sup> It was a maiden of Israel, the virgin daughter of Sion, who fashioned this temple of the new Israel. Within this temple there is a greater presence and a greater sacrifice, for Christ's body is the temple of the new presence and the altar of the perfect sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> Israel prepared also the structure of the new temple of Christ's mystical body. Israel was a kingly priesthood, a holy nation: to these titles the new Israel falls heir.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jer 31, 31-34; Ezek 37, 26-27.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek 43, 1-5.      <sup>4</sup> 1 Sam 4, 21-22; Ps 67.

<sup>6</sup> Apoc 21, 10-11 & 22-23.

<sup>3</sup> Jn 2, 18-22; Eph 2, 19-22.

<sup>5</sup> Lk 2, 32; Rom 9, 3-5.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Pet 2, 4-10.

With these titles the Israel of Sinai handed on to the new Israel her spiritual inheritance. Pre-eminent in this inheritance were a profound reverence for the sovereign majesty of God and the loving consciousness of God's presence to Israel. This was the inheritance of wisdom.

### *Divine Wisdom*

Through suffering, through sacrifice, Israel was to grow in wisdom. Equally, Wisdom was to grow in Israel. The quest of wisdom goes back in history far beyond Israel. But it was Israel's glory to direct man's age-old search for wisdom along highly spiritual pathways. Israel began by seeing that human wisdom was no true wisdom without the divine Wisdom which 'reacheth from end to end mightily and ordereth all things sweetly'.<sup>1</sup> Israel's contemplation of wisdom as it gathered insight was preparing the world for Christ. In the fullness of time wisdom revealed itself in all its splendour to Israel as divine Wisdom in person, entering the world of his own creating.<sup>2</sup>

For Israel divine Wisdom was God's Word, which 'came forth out of the mouth of the Most High, the firstborn before all creatures'.<sup>3</sup> Wisdom was thus the faithful mirror of God's mind. But Wisdom was not only God's Word within his eternity. Wisdom flashed forth as God's creative Word, the expression of God's creative Will.<sup>4</sup> This Word of God revealed itself to man in the world of creation around him, and in the mighty hand of God's providence which sustained it.<sup>5</sup>

In a special way, however, Wisdom revealed itself to Israel in the Torah, the word and law of God which pointed the way of righteousness to God's presence. Word and presence were for Israel intimately linked.<sup>6</sup> They were twin aspects of God's all-embracing providence. Where wisdom revealed itself to Israel in the Torah,<sup>7</sup> wisdom gave itself to Israel in the Presence,<sup>8</sup> in the cloud of glory which took up its dwelling within the Holy of Holies, above the Ark of the Covenant which enshrined the law. The Presence to Israel was thus the earthly counterpart of Wisdom's dwelling in the sanctuary of Heaven.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wis 8, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Jn 1, 14; Heb 1, 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> Sir 24, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Prov 8, 22-31.

<sup>5</sup> Sir 42, 15-43; 37.

<sup>6</sup> Sir 17, 9-11.

<sup>7</sup> Sir 24, 32-33. Cf. THE WAY Vol. 2 (July 1962), pp 219-21.

<sup>8</sup> Sir 24, 12-16.

<sup>9</sup> Wis 9, 1-12.



*The House of Wisdom*

Divine Wisdom sought Israel in a true marriage of mind and heart. Wisdom on Israel's part was her surrender in love to divine Wisdom, offering the homage of her mind by her fidelity to covenant and Torah, and the devotion of her heart by her service of Wisdom in the liturgy of the temple.

Here was the house of Wisdom. This was the place where above all Israel was present to Wisdom: the place of covenant and of presence. Here Israel dwelt continuously in the presence of divine Wisdom. Here Israel kept in grateful remembrance the wonderful works of Wisdom's providence. Here Israel looked forward to 'the consolation of Israel' in the messianic age to come.<sup>1</sup> Here bridegroom and bride met in love. Here in Wisdom's house Israel shared the joy of Wisdom's banquet.<sup>2</sup>

*Wisdom fulfilled*

The new house of Wisdom in the messianic age of fulfilment is the temple of Christ's body; for Christ is divine Wisdom in person: word and presence, Torah and Shekinah. Wisdom's creative Word spreads a new banquet of joy in Wisdom's presence. 'Take ye and eat; drink ye all of this':<sup>3</sup> the invitation to Wisdom's new banquet echoes the cry of Wisdom to Israel as her messengers sped through the city: 'Come, eat my bread and drink the wine which I have mingled for you'.<sup>4</sup>

From the body of Christ, Wisdom's new temple, springs up the fountain of Wisdom: 'If any man thirsts, let him come to Me and drink';<sup>5</sup> for Christ is 'the Word of God on high', the very 'Fountain of Wisdom'.<sup>6</sup> Here too is Wisdom, the teacher of Israel. Wisdom of old had invited Israel to submit her neck to Wisdom's 'yoke'.<sup>7</sup> Now divine Wisdom in person addresses the new Israel in the self-same language: 'Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me'.<sup>8</sup> The new school of wisdom is Wisdom's house, the temple of Christ's body.

*The Eucharist*

Wisdom's presence in the Eucharist makes the new Israel the house of Wisdom where alone true wisdom is found. Here is the Torah. Here is the Shekinah. Here is the banquet of Wisdom. At this wedding-feast the bridegroom breaks for Israel the bread of the Torah, which is the new law of the Gospel, and the bread from heaven,

<sup>1</sup> Lk 2, 25-38.

<sup>4</sup> Prov 9, 5; Isai 55, 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Sir 1, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Prov 9, 1-5.

<sup>5</sup> Jn 7, 37; 4, 6-15; Apoc 21, 6; 22, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Sir 51, 34.

<sup>3</sup> Mt 26, 26-27.

<sup>8</sup> Mt 11, 29-30.

which is the body of Christ. Here in the presence of Wisdom the new Israel grows in wisdom, for the school of wisdom is the presence of creative Wisdom in person.

Wisdom's house is also a temple of sacrifice,<sup>1</sup> of self-giving: love and sacrifice go hand in hand. Here the new Israel brings to the banquet of wisdom her sacrificial gifts: the homage of her mind in faith, her hope of fulfilment and the devotion of her heart. For the Eucharist is not only a sacrament, the covenanted way of communion with Wisdom; it is also a sacrifice. Here is the mutual giving of the greatest of all gifts, the gift of self. The self-giving of Israel is the measure of her communion with divine Wisdom.

### *The Blessings of Israel*

The prayer of thanksgiving that is still offered by the Jewish people after food and drink looks back on Israel's blessings with the hope of restoration. 'Have mercy, O Lord our God, upon Israel thy people, upon Jerusalem thy city, upon Sion the dwelling-place of thy glory, upon the kingdom of the house of David thy Anointed, and upon the great and holy house that was called by thy name'. These words on Jewish lips are a prayer of hope for messianic fulfilment. On the lips of Christ they were no wistful hope for the future but the creative words of divine Wisdom. Each blessing came to fulfilment as divine Wisdom spread for Israel the banquet of the Eucharist, the new banquet of Wisdom.

The Eucharist is Israel, the assembly of the new people of God. The Eucharist is the thronging city of peace, the mother-city of the nations. The Eucharist is Sion, city of the presence, for the name of the city is, in Ezechiel's words, 'The Lord is there'.<sup>2</sup> The Eucharist is the new kingdom of the house of David, for here the kingdom of the new Israel gathers in the presence of its shepherd-king.<sup>3</sup>

The Eucharist is the great and holy house where sacrifice is offered to God's name; for it is the temple of Christ's body, the living sanctuary of the new liturgy in spirit and in truth.<sup>4</sup> This new temple is a greater and holier house than ever Israel knew, for it is the house where Wisdom dwells in person. Here the bridegroom of Israel, divine Wisdom, celebrates his nuptials in a wedding-feast where the joy-giving wine cannot fail, where Israel's love for her bridegroom is sealed with a new and glorious presence, the foretaste and the reality of paradise.

<sup>1</sup> Prov 9, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek 48, 35.

<sup>3</sup> Ps 22.

<sup>4</sup> Jn 2, 19-21; 4, 21-26.