

**A SHORT HISTORY
OF CHRISTIAN
THEOPHAGY**

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BY
PRESERVED SMITH, Ph.D.



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TO MY SISTER
WINIFRED SMITH
with Gratitude and Admiration

PREFACE

On December 27, 1915, I read, by request, before the American Society of Church History, at its annual meeting in New York, a paper on "The Evolution of Luther's Doctrine of the Eucharist." In that paper originated the present study; for, with the understanding of the sacramentarian controversies of the Reformation, came the clear perception that the dogma of the sacrifice of the mass, repudiated by nearly all the Reformers, and the dogma of the Real Presence, repudiated by some of them, were in reality far more ancient than medieval scholasticism; that they were, in fact, the teachings of the primitive church, and that, pushing our inquiry ever further back, they had been derived by her from a pre-Christian, and from a very remote, antiquity. The idea of the god sacrificed to himself, that his flesh might be eaten by worshippers thus assured of partaking of his divinity, arose at the dawn of religion, was revived by the mystic cults of the Greeks, and from them was borrowed by Paul and implanted, along with the myth of the dying and rising Savior God, deep in the soil of the early church. Though foreign to Jesus, whose beautiful, ethical, and almost purely Jewish thought shines on us in its genuine

form only in the document known to scholars as Q — the source of the sayings reported by Matthew and Luke but not found in the other gospels — these doctrines appealed so strongly to the mentality of the early Gentile Christians, that they were rapidly adopted and became fixed in the ritual and creed of the church.

The subsequent history of the eucharist is chiefly the record of attempts to rationalize a doctrine that, after the first three or four centuries of the vulgar era, no longer seemed natural. In transubstantiation, in consubstantiation, in the various explanations of the modes of the real presence evolved by the Reformers, we see but so many efforts on the part of reason to grasp the mystery of the words: "This is my body." As, in the controversies following Luther's revolt, the matter received the most thorough discussion that it ever received, the period of the Reformation bulks large in the present work. After the sixteenth century, little that was new or important was said upon the subject. The Zwinglian theory that the bread and wine were mere symbols was silently adopted by most Protestants, by all, indeed, except a small band who consciously clung to whatever was ancient and impressive in ritual and to the "credo quia absurdum" in doctrine. Both among Christians and rationalists the matter ceased to attract attention.

There have, indeed, been a few modern histories of the eucharist by believers, but secular his-

torians have been content to let the subject drop as not worth study. In this they have been wrong; for, as Franz Cumont says in the introduction to his *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans*, the history of man's errors and failures is often as instructive as the history of his successes. The present study will be accepted, I hope, as a purely objective history in the field of comparative religion, written by one who has no propaganda to spread, and no cause to serve save that of knowledge for its own sake.

Though the manuscript was complete by the end of 1915, publication was postponed for various reasons. After keeping the manuscript for nearly a year, during which the brochure had the advantage of being read and occasionally corrected by several learned theologians—to whom I now tender my thanks—The Society of Church History returned it with the statement that they would publish part of it, but the whole was too long for their biennial volume. As I preferred to have it all published together, I sent it to Dr. Paul Carus who, with kind alacrity, promised to bring out the whole in book form as soon as peace was signed with Germany. The first two sections were given to the public in the *Monist* of April, 1918, but the rush of business due to the war, and the sad interruption caused by Dr. Carus's death, have postponed the publication of the whole until the present. In the meantime, I have continued to study