

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF BLOOD COVENANTING

Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts  
of the University of Ottawa as partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in Sacred Sciences.



*Reçu Conformé  
May 21, 1965  
J. Beauchamp - Ami  
Secretary*

William M. Lawlor

1965

1070 Crevier Street  
Saint-Laurent, Quebec.

UMI Number: EC55638

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**

---

UMI Microform EC55638  
Copyright 2011 by ProQuest LLC  
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

---

ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

CURRICULUM VITAE

William Michael Lawlor was born August 6, 1937, in Montreal, Canada. He received his elementary education at St. Willibrord's Academy, Verdun, Quebec, and his secondary education at Presentation Brothers Academy, Monte Bello, Quebec.

In 1957, he was granted a Bachelor of Commerce degree by Loyola College, Montreal. In 1960, he received a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Montreal and a teaching "A" Diploma from The St. Joseph Teachers College, Montreal.

He taught at St. Stephen's High School, Dorval, for four years before joining the Faculty of The St. Joseph Teachers College, Montreal, in September, 1963.

On April 4, 1964, he married Jeannine Agnes Bourassa.

At present, he is a full time member of the Faculty of The St. Joseph Teachers College where he lectures in Theology and Catechetics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author expresses profound prayerful gratitude to Father Walter Bédard, O.F.M., under whose guidance this thesis was written, to Father Maurice Giroux, O.M.I., Head of the Department of Sacred Sciences of the University of Ottawa, and to Mr. Paul Gallagher, Director of Studies, The St. Joseph Teachers College, Montreal.

Special acknowledgement must be made to the staffs of the St. Paul Seminary Library, Ottawa, and the School of Divinity Library of McGill University, Montreal, and to Mr. H. Frankenburg, Librarian, The St. Joseph Teachers College, Montreal. Further acknowledgement is due to Miss Véronique Belzil for her typing of the thesis.

Very affectionate gratitude is expressed to the author's wife, Jeannine, for her constant encouragement and unfailing understanding throughout the preparation of this thesis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	i
I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BLOOD IN THE BIBLE. . . . .	1
BLOOD AS LIFE: ITS SACRED CHARACTER. . . . .	1
CONSEQUENCES OF THE SACRED CHARACTER OF BLOOD . . . . .	2
Prohibition against the Shedding of Blood . . . . .	2
Prohibition against the Partaking of the Blood of Animals . . . . .	3
The Use of Blood in Cultic Practices. . . . .	4
II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "BLOOD COVENANTING" IN THE BIBLE. . .	11
THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM . . . . .	11
THE COVENANT AT SINAI . . . . .	15
Incomplete Symbolism. . . . .	20
Inadequate Efficacy . . . . .	22
THE NEW COVENANT FORETOLD . . . . .	25
THE NEW COVENANT RATIFIED IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST. . . .	27
The Circumcision of Christ. . . . .	28
The Last Supper and Sinai . . . . .	30
THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT . . . . .	33
Infinite Efficacy . . . . .	34
The Completed Symbolism . . . . .	38
CONCLUSION. . . . .	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	50
APPENDIX. . . . .	54

## INTRODUCTION

While much scholarly research has been done on the biblical concept of blood and on the biblical concept of covenant (cf. Bibliography), very little has been done on the biblical concept of the blood covenant as such. It is the aim of this dissertation to present and analyse the biblical concept of blood covenanting.

It comes naturally to men to give symbolic expression to their deep emotions and thoughts, and to convey this expression by rites. The Israelites were not exceptional in this regard. They expressed their innate religious sense by means of symbols which had much in common with the symbolic actions of their fellow human beings.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Israelites, less cultured than many other nations, had a tendency to follow their neighbours in the grosser practices of their religion.<sup>2</sup> However, under the direction of Divine Providence and in preparation for the "Mystery of Faith," the purer ideals and ideas of the Israelites were preserved and deepened.

What is true of symbolic expression in general is true of the universally common primitive practice of blood covenanting in particular. Blood covenanting, the symbolic expression of man's desire for union and peace, was common to all mankind and was practiced by the Israelites.

---

<sup>1</sup>J. Coleran, "Origins of Old Testament Sacrifice," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 2(1940), p. 139.

<sup>2</sup>J. L. McKenzie, The Two-Edged Sword (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1956), pp. 45-59.

The full biblical concept of blood covenanting must be one which from the very beginning admits of human as well as divine influences. The facts involved must be weighed and evaluated, compared and collated with one another and with Scripture. Accordingly, the author has included an Appendix which presents the rite of blood covenanting in its universal aspect. This is done in order to establish the fact that when Christ entered into a blood covenant, he was not introducing a new symbolic rite into the religious thought of mankind, but rather, he was giving a new validity, a unique reality, to a universally recognized symbolic rite. However, as significant as the Appendix is, its value must not be exaggerated. Too often the comparative method of religion is misused; revealed religion is seen as influenced by other religious practices but as having no real bearing on these practices. As R. de Vaux has aptly put it:

Historians of comparative religion are tempted to misuse the comparative method, and to bring forward, as an explanation of Israelite sacrifice, the practice or ideas of peoples with different religious concepts; in particular, they look for analogies between Israelite ritual and the customs of the so called 'primitive' peoples, for among these primitive peoples, they claim, we find the fundamental significance of ritual. Theologians, on the other hand, tend to use the sacrifice of the New Testament (and subsequent Christian doctrinal interpretations of it) in order to explain the true meaning of Old Testament sacrifice. Both parties tend to neglect or to underrate elements which may be proper to Israelite sacrifice. It is true that one must take into consideration the world in which Israel lived, and also inquire how the sacrifices of the Old Law are prolonged and fulfilled in the sacrifice of the New Covenant, but surely the first task is to examine the notion of sacrifice as presented in the Old Testament itself.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>R. de Vaux, Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions, trans. J. McHugh (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), p. 447.

Thus the first concern of this dissertation is to present the biblical concept of blood covenanting. In examining the blood covenants of Abraham, of Sinai, and of Christ, the author will contrast the imperfections and inadequacies of the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants with the uniquely perfect blood covenant of Christ. By way of background, the biblical concepts of blood and of covenant are first presented.

## I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BLOOD IN THE BIBLE

### BLOOD AS LIFE: ITS SACRED CHARACTER

The ancient Israelite, manifesting a universally dominant primitive conviction,<sup>1</sup> regarded the blood of any living being as its vital principle: "It is the blood that animates all living beings . . . the blood that holds the life" (Lv 17:11-14; cf., Gn 9:4; Dt 12:23). Because it is the bearer of life and essentially identifiable with it<sup>2</sup> blood is a divine reality<sup>3</sup> for all life emanates from God who exercises exclusive dominion over it.

---

<sup>1</sup>H. C. Trumbull, The Blood Covenant (Philadelphia; J. D. Wattles, 1893); W. R. Smith, The Religion of the Semites (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1894); P. J. Hamilton-Grierson, "Brotherhood," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings, II (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1910).

<sup>2</sup>M. J. Lagrange, Etudes sur les Religions sémitiques (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1903), p. 231, 243, 252 ff.; P. Van Imschoot, Théologie de L'Ancien Testament, I (Tournai: Desclée et Cie., 1954), p. 241; C. Spicq, L'Épître aux Hébreux, II (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1953), p. 272; J. Lécuyer, Le Sacrifice de la Nouvelle Alliance (LePuy: Editions Xavier Mappus, 1962), p. 16, 17; J. Pederson, Israel Its Life and Culture, I (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 268; J. E. Steinmueller, "Sacrificial Blood in the Bible," Biblica 40 (1959), p. 556, 557; opposed to the school of thought represented by the above, all of whom hold that blood is life, is L. Morris, who holds that blood does not signify life but rather, death. (cf., "The Biblical use of the Term Blood," Journal of Theological Studies, (N.S.), 3 (1952) 216, 227). However, the position taken by Morris is decisively refuted by L. Dewar, (cf., "The Biblical use of the Term Blood," Journal of Theological Studies, 4(1953), 204, 208).

<sup>3</sup>S. Lyonnet, "La sotériologie paulinienne," Introduction à la Bible, Edd. A. Robert et A. Feuillet, II (Tournai: Desclée et Cie., 1959), p. 869, 874; R. de Vaux, Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions, trans. J. McHugh (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), p. 419; C. Spicq et P. Grelot, "Sang," Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique Edd. X. Léon-Dufour et al. (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1962), p. 994; J. Lécuyer, p. 16, 17; C. Spicq, p. 272; P. Van Imschoot, p. 241.

## CONSEQUENCES OF THE SACRED CHARACTER OF BLOOD

Prohibition against the Shedding of Blood

As a prime consequence of the sacred character of blood, man is forbidden to shed the lifeblood of his fellow man. God has made man in His image and He alone has power over man's life. Those who attempt to usurp the power of God, by unjustifiably shedding human blood, encounter His wrath.<sup>4</sup> No one, regardless of position, is held exempt.<sup>5</sup>

Significantly, it is the "blood" of the victim that cries out for vengeance against the murderer. A particular instance of this is witnessed in Yahweh's dialogue with Cain:

Then the Lord said to Cain, where is thy brother Abel? I cannot tell, said he; is it for me to keep watch over my brother? But the answer came, what is this thou hast done? The blood of thy brother has found a voice that cries out to me from the ground. Henceforward thou shalt be an outlaw from this ground, that has opened to drink in thy brother's blood, shed by thy hand (Gn 4:10-12).<sup>6</sup>

Here, as elsewhere, blood is pre-eminently life, and even when poured out on the earth it does not lose its vitality. It continues to bear intelligent relations to its author, crying to heaven for vengeance. In the case of those who have been unjustly slain, Yahweh himself initiates

<sup>4</sup>cf., Gn 9:5; 2 Sm 16:7 ff; Ps 5:7, 26:9, 55:24, 59:3, 139:19; Pv 29:10.

<sup>5</sup>An Illustration of this is found in the case of David who was not permitted to build the temple because he had "shed much blood." (1 Par 22:8, 28:3; cf., 1 Sm 25:26,44; 2 Sm 16:7 ff; 3 Kgs 2:5-8 ff).

<sup>6</sup>cf., Jb 16:18; 2 Sm 21:1; Ez 24:6 ff, 35:6; 2 Mc 8:3.

blood vengeance (cf., Jg 9:23 ff; 1 Sm 2:32); an action precipitated by the violation of the sacred character of blood.

Prohibition against the Partaking of the Blood of Animals

As a second consequence of the divine reality of blood, man is forbidden to partake of the blood of animals: "But flesh with its life --that is, its blood--you shall not eat" (Gn 9:4; cf., Dt 12:16, 15:23; 1 Sm 14:32-35). This command was given to Noah after the Deluge when God would begin anew, as it were, by the revivifying of the world through the vestige of blood--of life--preserved in the ark. It allows man the use of animals as food but forbids the consumption of the flesh of any animal from which the blood has not been drained--for the life of the flesh is in the blood (cf., Gn 9:3-4; Lv 7:26, 13:17, 17:10-12, 19:26).<sup>7</sup>

While the injunction may have been ultimately influenced by hygienic considerations, there is no doubt that for the Israelites it was religiously orientated (cf., Lv 17:3,6,11,13,14; Dt 12:23, 15:23; 1 Sm 14:31-34).

Rigidly adhered to, it persisted into early Christian times,<sup>8</sup> facilitating a communauté de table between Jewish and Gentile converts

---

<sup>7</sup>This command forms the basis for the prohibition of blood found in the Jewish dietary or Kosher laws. cf., K. Kohler and J. Greenstone, "Dietary Laws," The Jewish Encyclopedia IV, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls co., 1925), pp. 596-600; B. Vawter, A Path through Genesis, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1957), p. 96.

<sup>8</sup>J. Bonsirven, Le Judaïsme Palestinien au temps de Jésus-Christ, II (Paris: G. Beauchesne & Fils, 1934), p. 180.

to Christianity. (Acts 15:20-29; cf., Acts 21:18-25).<sup>9</sup>

### The Use of Blood in Cultic Practices

A third consequence which flows from the sacred character of blood is the all-important value attached to it in the different cultic practices of the Israelites.

In sacrificial rites the blood of animals was used in various ways. In certain rites the priests sprinkled or splashed the blood on the altar or its base,<sup>10</sup> while on the great Day of Atonement the ritual called for sacrificial blood to be sprinkled on various objects in the Sanctuary (Lv 16:14-18).<sup>11</sup>

Leaving aside the complex and detailed ritual of the many sacrificial prescriptions, we may proceed to an examination of the significance of blood in the expiatory sacrifices, in particular. This significance is elucidated by Stanislaus Lyonnet:

For the Bible, expiation consists in effacing sin wherever it is found, that is to say, in the people of Israel and then in man as such. And this sin is not conceived as a mere soiling which it is in the power of man to remove, but is identified with the rebellion of Israel and man against God and what theologians were to call the aversio a Deo, expiation 'effaces' sin precisely by giving Israel the 'presence' of God in the midst of His people by once again uniting man with God. This is further confirmed by the meaning the Bible attributed to blood in the sacrifice of expiation with which it is indissolubly united-

<sup>9</sup>A. Lelièvre, "Sang," Vocabulaire Biblique, ed. J. J. Von Allmen (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé S.A., 1954), p. 279; C. Spicq et P. Grelot, p. 994.

<sup>10</sup>Ex 29:16-20; Lv 1:5-11, 3:2,8,12, 7:2,14,13, 8:19,24, 9:12; Dt 12:27; 4 Kgs 16:15; Nm 18:17.

<sup>11</sup>R. de Vaux, p. 452.

according to the rabbinical saying, no expiation without the shedding of blood (cf. Heb 9:22, which speaks of 'remission'). Contrary to the other religions of the ancient Orient in which the immolation of the victim generally occupied the central place, in Israel the rite of spreading the blood certainly constituted the central act . . . According to the description of Leviticus 16:15-19, the purpose of the blood was to "purify" and "sanctify" the sanctuary. Here again the Bible shows us that the Hebrews attributed to blood this role of purification and consecration "in virtue of the life that is in it," still more literally, "in as much as it is life" (Lev 17:11).<sup>12</sup>

Man is able to use blood for expiation precisely because blood is life and therefore eminently suited to consecrate to God, that is to purify.<sup>13</sup> Blood is the essential element in atonement as it is the very means of re-establishing union with God. However, the rite of expiation is not efficacious through any intrinsic power of the blood as such. Rather, the blood, as the seat of life, was sacred and therefore a most fitting means, in fact, a God-chosen means, (Lv 17:11), for purifying and sanctifying the holy places which had been defiled and desecrated by sin.<sup>14</sup> This shedding of blood expressed the desire for reunion with God from whom the sinner had been separated by sin;<sup>15</sup> the desire is for union, not appeasement--a point of distinction too often not sufficiently grasped.

In the sacrifice which inaugurated the deliverance of the

---

<sup>12</sup>S. Lyonnet, p. 869.

<sup>13</sup>ibid., p. 874; cf., R. de Vaux, p. 419; A. Lelièvre, p. 279-280.

<sup>14</sup>J. Heuschen, "Atonement," Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible, (a translation and adaptation of A. Van Den Born's Bijbels Woordenboek), ed. L. F. Hartman. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), pp. 167-174.

<sup>15</sup>H. W. Robinson, "Hebrew Sacrifice and Prophetic Symbolism," Journal of Theological Studies, 43(1942-43), pp. 134-35; cf., R. de Vaux, p. 453.

Hebrews from Egypt and their journey to the promised land the role of blood is one of consecration, not appeasement. In the words of Lyonnet:

In the rite of the first Pasch, the blood of the lamb, which the Apocalypse mentions twice (7:14 and 12:11) and St. Paul implicitly evokes (1 Cor. 5:7), certainly did not have, in the mind of the biblical narrator, the function of appeasing Yahweh but of indicating to the destroying angel the houses of those who belonged to the people, the first-born son of Yahweh, like the sign of the Tau in Ez. 9 with which the 'man in white' marked the foreheads of the faithful Israelites (4:6), while in the Apocalypse the servants of God thus marked are said to 'wear on their foreheads the name of the Lamb and of His Father.' This was therefore a rite of consecration, separating Israel from the pagan world, constituting it a people apart. And the Bible does not hesitate to call the ceremony of the Pasch a sacrifice . . . commemorating the day when Yahweh delivered Israel from a servitude that it was<sup>16</sup> to increasingly regard as the very type of slavery to sin.

There are a considerable number of hypotheses current as to the significance of blood in the Paschal Lamb deliverance.<sup>17</sup> Martin Buber sees the use of the blood in the deliverance as a preliminary form of the blood covenant to be enacted at Sinai.<sup>18</sup> Again, there is a link between the blood of the deliverance and the blood of the Abrahamic covenant. When Passover time came, signifying their deliverance, the Israelites underwent circumcision and mixed the blood of the Paschal Lamb with that of the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>19</sup>

The ceremony of the blood came to be incorporated into the

<sup>16</sup>S. Lyonnet, p. 880.

<sup>17</sup>M. Buber, Moses (London: East and West Library, Phaidon Press Ltd., 1946), pp. 70-73.

<sup>18</sup>ibid., p. 71.

<sup>19</sup>Only the circumcised could share in the Paschal Feast of the community--Ex. 12:43, 49; cf., R. de Vaux, p. 46.

Mosaic Law and continued to be an essential element in the liturgies of the Israelites; in fact, the blood becomes an increasingly important element in the cultic rites. There is a gradual evolution from the "magical" to the "mysterical" efficaciousness of blood.<sup>20</sup> This progressively deepening significance of blood will become clearer in our examination of the role of blood in the covenants.

The entire history of mankind, and especially that of the Israelites, is represented in the Bible as a progressive plan of salvation carried out by God through a series of covenants with man.<sup>21</sup>

Israelite tradition knows several enactments or repetitions of the covenant relationship with Yahweh. They begin with the relationship

---

<sup>20</sup>By way of contrast: The ceremony of blood is still practiced by the Arabs. In performing this rite they still believe that they are warding off the demons of plague from the house or the flock. (cf., J. Henniger, "Les Fêtes de printemps chez les Arabes et leurs implications historiques," Rev. Do Museu Paulista 4, Sao Paulo, 1950, pp. 389-432). In the Mosaic Law, there is already a realization that the rite is not to be magically efficacious but is to be subordinated to Yahweh (Ex. 12:27). cf., J. Pedersen, III-IV, p. 398.

<sup>21</sup>Covenants have been entered into throughout human history and are common to every age and place (Appendix). While the origin of the word berit, the Hebrew word for covenant, is uncertain, many suggestions have been made. Whatever its exact etymology, a covenant is a kind of brotherhood (Appendix; cf., Am. 1:9--the covenant of brotherhood), a mutual pact which imposes on its partners rights and obligations, the result of which is peace (salom). However, God's covenant with Israel was not an ordinary brotherhood relationship. It was unique--the very heart of Israel's existence. cf., P. Van Imschoot, p. 237-240; W. R. Smith, p. 270-285; J. Pedersen, p. 263-310; W. Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, I (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 36-69; J. Oesterreicher, The Israel of God (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 46-47; L. Bouyer, The Meaning of Sacred Scripture (Notre-Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), p. 1-21.

which Yahweh initiated with Adam, as recorded in Genesis 2:15-17.<sup>22</sup>

Genesis too, one chapter later, tells of its wilful violation by man.

Each of the succeeding covenants represents an attempt by God to re-establish union, to re-communicate, with man.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to treat of the covenantal relationship in all its ramifications; our immediate concern is the significance of blood in the covenantal rites.

A covenant was concluded with the performance of prescribed rites.<sup>23</sup> The rites may have consisted originally in mixing one another's blood;<sup>24</sup> as blood is the seat of life, by mingling their blood the members of a covenant would then become one soul and blood relationship would be effected symbolically.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>In each covenant it is Yahweh who launches the initiative.-- (cf., Gn. 15:9-18; 17:2; Ex. 19:4-6; 24:5-8; 34:10; Am 3:2; 9:7; Os 2:16-23; 11:1; Ez 16:3-14). Confirmation of this is found in the fact that He (Yahweh) is always the subject of the verb used to indicate the concluding of a covenant. cf., H.H. Rowley, The Faith of Israel (London: SCM Press, 1956), p. 68; R. Gleason, Yahweh (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 53.

<sup>23</sup>These rites had peculiar significance for ancient Israel and were judged to be the very means of producing the union between the covenanting parties (cf., P. Van Imschoot, p. 240).

<sup>24</sup>See the Appendix for detailed accounts of this widely-practiced primitive custom. God makes use of an established custom and gives it a new validity. cf., the expression "the blood of the covenant" (Ex 24:8; Za 9:11); P. Van Imschoot and B. Vawter, "Covenant," Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible, p. 434; W.R. Smith, p. 314, 315.

<sup>25</sup>S. Lyonnet, De Peccato et Redemptione, II (Romae: E Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1960), p. 123; P. Van Imschoot, Théologie de l'Ancient Testament, p. 244; B. Cooke, "Synoptic Presentation of the Eucharist as Covenant Sacrifice," Theological Studies, 21(1960), p. 27; J. Pederson, I, p. 172; cf., Appendix.

Often a common meal was eaten (Gn 31:46, 54; Jos 9:14; 2 Sm 3:20) in which salt was important.<sup>26</sup> Another rite consisted in cutting the sacrificial victims in pieces and placing them opposite one another so that the partners in the covenant could pass between them (Gn 15:9-20; Jer 34:18 ff), indicating that they willed the same fate for themselves if they betrayed the covenantal relationship.<sup>27</sup> It may be that the expression "cut a covenant" (Gn 15:18; 21:27, 32; 26:28) derives from this rite.<sup>28</sup> Simpler covenant rites were: offering the hand (Ez 17:18) or a gift (Gn 21:27-30; 33:8-11) or exchanging clothing and weapons (1 Sm 18:4).<sup>29</sup>

Accompanying the conclusion of these rites were certain oaths or curses often of an imprecatory nature.<sup>30</sup>

Finally as a memorial, a tree was planted<sup>31</sup> or stones were piled,<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup>The partaking of salt in common became a symbolic gesture signifying a pact of friendship which was therefore called "a covenant of salt" (Nm 18:19; 2 Par 13:5), that is, an inviolable covenant which must be preserved forever. (cf., M.J. Lagrange, p. 252).

<sup>27</sup>This rite seems to have been practiced in Assyria, Chaldea, Greece, and Rome. cf., P. Van Imschoot, p. 242-43; W. R. Smith, p. 480-81

<sup>28</sup>A. Gelin, The Key Concepts of The Old Testament (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1955), p. 37; J. Oesterreicher, p. 47; W.R. Smith, p. 480-81.

<sup>29</sup>cf., Appendix.

<sup>30</sup>Gn 26:28; Ez 17:18; Neh 6:18; Gn 14:13. cf., J.L. McKenzie, The Two-Edged Sword (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1956), p. 115; P. Van Imschoot, p. 240.

<sup>31</sup>H.C. Trumbull, p. 53, 266; J. Giblet, ed. The God of Israel, The God of Christians, trans. K. Sullivan (New York; Desclée Co., 1961), p. 24-25.

<sup>32</sup>H.C. Trumbull, p. 266-268-269.

and they were to stand as witnesses, that is, as a testimony and pledge, to the pact (Gn 21:33; 31:45-48 ff; Ex 24:4; Jos 24:26, 27).

These basically were the rites which accompanied the concluding of a covenant made with Yahweh.<sup>33</sup> It is the particular concern of this dissertation to examine the significance of blood in these covenantal rites.

---

<sup>33</sup>It is to be noted that these rites, quite traditional and common to covenanting primitive men, take on a new meaning and dimension when it is Yahweh who covenants with man (cf., Gn 15:17).

## II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BLOOD COVENANTING IN THE BIBLE

### THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

The Apostle James says: "Abraham . . . was called the friend of God" (James 2:23). God himself speaking through Isaias refers to Abraham as "Abraham my friend" (Isaias 41:8); and Josaphat, calling upon God for help, speaks of Abraham, thy friend (2 Chron. 20:7). This application of the term "friend" to any human being, in his relations to God, is unique in the Old Testament record. Yet the immediate narrative of Abraham's relations to God makes no specific mention of this unique term being then applied to Abraham.

However, as the narrative unfolds it becomes evident that the covenant entered into by Yahweh and Abraham<sup>34</sup> is one of "blood-friendship" thus earning Abraham the designation 'friend of God.'

Then God Said to Abraham, Thou, too, shalt observe this covenant of mine, thou and the race that shall follow thee, generation after generation. This is the covenant thou shalt keep with me, thou and thine; every male child of yours shall be circumcised; you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, in token of the covenant between me and you. Generation after generation, every male child shall be circumcised when it is eight days old . . . So my covenant shall have its seal in your flesh, ratified to all time. If any male person has the flesh of his foreskin uncircumcised there is no place for him among his people; he has violated the covenant between us. (Gn 17:9-14).

---

<sup>34</sup> Abraham's covenant with Yahweh is reported by two traditions. In the one, (Gn 15:2, 7-12, 16, 17), it is a solemn commitment signified by the passage of Yahweh between the bleeding halves of the immolated victims. Abraham does not pass between the halves of the victims. (cf., P. Van Imschoot, p. 247). The other tradition is the one presented in the text above.

Witness the ceremonial procedure in "cutting" the covenant. The covenant is consummated by Abraham giving of his own blood at the very source of paternity: "you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins in token of the covenant between me and you" (17:11). By so doing, Abraham pledges himself to Yahweh and pledges those who shall come after him in line of natural descent.

The divine promise was a perpetual covenant; therefore it had to have a sign that would endure after Abraham. This sign was found in the rite of circumcision . . . Its practice among the Hebrews dates from Abraham's coming into Chanaan, for it was not used in Mesopotamia. In the truest possible way, then, it was a sign of the covenant made with Him who had plotted Abraham's course and would continue to protect his heirs according to His promise. Circumcision became the sign of the true Jew and of those who had been brought into the house of Israel to share its privileges.<sup>35</sup>

The rite of circumcision had a religious significance from the very first and, as part of the widely practiced tribal initiation rites, it had peculiar and progressive religious meaning for the Israelites. They alone gave it the religious meaning found in Gn 17:9-14. Circumcision gradually became for them "a symbol of the purified people of God and summed up in itself all the fundamental convictions of Israel's election."<sup>36</sup>

Circumcised, then, Abraham bore in his flesh the sign that he

---

<sup>35</sup>B. Vawter, p. 144; cf., J. Giblet, p. 26; Still today, a Jewish child is circumcised into the covenant of Abraham--cf., J. Jacobs, "Circumcision," The Jewish Encyclopedia, IV, especially p. 95.

<sup>36</sup>W. Eichrodt, p. 138-139; R. de Vaux, p. 46-48.

had entered into a blood covenant of friendship with God.<sup>37</sup>

It is a peculiarity of the primitive rite of blood-friendship that he who enters into it must be ready to make a complete surrender of himself in loving trust to him with whom he covenants. He must so love and trust as to be willing to merge his separate individuality in the dual personality of which he becomes an integral part.<sup>38</sup> Only he who believes in another unreservedly can take such a step intelligently; this was Abraham: "So Abraham put his faith<sup>39</sup> in God, and it was reckoned virtue in him" (Gn 15:6; cf., Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6).

It is Abraham's faith that is reckoned virtue in him. Circumcision is the sign of the covenant which he entered into in faith (cf., Rom 4:9-12). As a sign of the covenant, the Israelites were obliged to circumcision (Gn 17:11). Without the underlying faith, circumcision was a sterile attempt to constitute one an heir of Abraham.<sup>40</sup> The rite of circumcision without the spirit of faith was an empty symbol. An Israelite, formally circumcised into the covenant of Abraham, was truly

---

<sup>37</sup>Circumcision, the mark in the flesh of Abraham, was to attest to his faithfulness to Yahweh's call. cf., Gal 6:17 "Henceforth let no man give me trouble, for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body." The marks of persecution attested to Paul's faithfulness to Christ. cf., J. Giblet, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup>See note 25 on page 8.

<sup>39</sup>The Hebrew word heemeen translated as 'put his faith in' conveys the idea of an unqualified commitment of self to another. It is from the root aman with the twofold idea of 'to be faithful' and 'to trust.' In this sense, faith means to accept God as the finality of my being--complete trust, complete commitment.

<sup>40</sup>B. Vawter, p. 144.

an heir of Abraham and a loyal covenant partner only if it signified faith in God's promise.<sup>41</sup>

In the case of Abraham, his faith was such that he was ready to commit himself to God as in the rite of blood-friendship; the result was that "he earned the title of God's friend" (James 2:23). This covenantal friendship was sealed in blood, that is, in life. When Abraham gave of his blood for Yahweh, he gave of his life. This was the sign of his willingness to give himself entirely to Yahweh, his covenant partner.

Such is the meaning of the ratification in blood of the covenant. This was no empty rite whereby Abraham pledged his blood, that is, his life, in the successive generations, to his God. By the rite of circumcision Abraham and Yahweh became "betrothed in blood," époux de sang.<sup>42</sup> United in a blood covenant, it is the blood that cements the union. In the words of Père Lagrange:

By circumcision one is really betrothed in blood. Perhaps this (circumcision) was a condition by which the begotten child was able to become . . . a member of the community, which was at one and the same time national and religious. Every time blood is shed, one may ask whether it is shed in order to exercise its own proper virtue, in the sense of magic, or in expiation, or whether it is shed in order to bring about union with someone by the exchange of blood and of lives. Here, it would seem to be union that is involved in that the rite is one of initiation: life will be transmitted<sup>43</sup> by an organ which is united to God by the shedding of blood.

<sup>41</sup>B. Vawter, p. 144 ff; J. Lécuyer, p. 59-61.

<sup>42</sup>C. Spicq, L'Épître aux Hébreux, II, - Commentaire (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1953), p. 274, 275 n. 5; F. Michaeli, "Circumcision," Vocabulaire Biblique, ed. J. Von Allmen (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé S.A., 1954), p. 44-45; cf., Ex. 4:25-26.

<sup>43</sup>M.J. Lagrange, p. 240-41.

The evidence of Abraham's fidelity as époux de sang is astonishing in its depth and tenacity (cf., Gn 22:1-10).

The story of the testing by God of Abraham represents the climactic point in the life of Abraham as told in Genesis. Isaac was the very child of promise through whom God's word was to be realized; yet, he was being asked to relinquish the child and the promise. As X. Léon-Dufour has put it:

This was a terrible trial . . . If He (God) demands the son of promise it is not to kill Abraham's hope, it is to stretch it beyond the limits which it had already set itself, it is to reveal in the believer, the pilgrim of the absolute. Abraham had renounced his own ways of reasoning and his belief in appearances. He had learned to trust God's promise. Now he must renounce the promise itself after it had been realized before his eyes. For the promise of God is not the God of promises.

If Abraham could make this act of confidence, it was because he had detached himself from all that is not God. Not that he does not love his country or Isaac ("he whom thou lovest" said God), but he prefers God to all else. The final motive of his perfect faith is God Himself . . . such is perfect faith.<sup>44</sup> It made Abraham "the father of many nations" (Rom 4:17).

This is the type of faith, of commitment, that is demanded of one who would enter into a blood covenant with Yahweh; this is what it means to be époux de sang to Yahweh; such is the faith that is signified by covenanting in blood.

#### THE COVENANT AT SINAI

It is with the call of Abraham that the covenant of Mount Sinai

---

<sup>44</sup>X. Léon-Dufour, "To believe in God," The God of Israel, The God of Christians, ed. J. Giblet, p. 117-118; cf., B. Vawter, p. 168-170

begins to take shape.<sup>45</sup> The prior covenants made with individuals: Adam (Gn 2:15-17); Noah (Gn 6:18, 9:8-17); and most especially, Abraham (Gn 13:18, 17:1-8) culminate in the Sinaitic covenant enacted between God and the nation, Israel.

Yahweh, demonstrating that He is Master of His own preferences, chooses Israel to be His 'special possession'; not solely for herself, but as a source of blessings unto all nations. The Sinaitic covenant is a divine educational operation which is universal in scope.<sup>46</sup> The choice of Abraham does not mean the exclusion of other races, but rather their inclusion (Gn 12:3). The promises to Abraham were not nullified by the election of Israel nor the universality of her call diminished. The spiritual welfare of all mankind remains at stake for the election of Israel is set within the universal redemptive plan of God.<sup>47</sup>

This solemn agreement enacted on Sinai, with Moses as intermediary, is the unifying principle of Jewish history. Accordingly, as the motivating force in her life and as the very heart of her existence, this unique covenant concludes in equally solemn ratification--

---

<sup>45</sup>M. Buber, p. 71.

<sup>46</sup>A. Gelin, The Religion of Israel, trans. J.R. Foster (London: Burns and Oates, 1959), p. 23; F. Moriarty, Introducing The Old Testament (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1960), p. 34.

<sup>47</sup>G.E. Wright, God who Acts (London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 74; W.L. Newton, Notes on The Covenant: A Study in the Theology of the Prophets, (Cleveland: Seminary Press, 1934), p. 8.

ratification in blood.<sup>48</sup> This ratification is recorded in the Book of Exodus:

So Moses went and told the people all the Lord had said, all the commands he had given; and the whole people answered with one voice, we will do all that the Lord has bidden us, Then Moses committed everything the Lord had said to writing; and when he rose next morning he built an altar close to the spurs of the mountain, and twelve memorial stones answering to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he directed some of the younger Israelites to make burnt-sacrifice there and bring welcome-offerings to the Lord, with bullocks for their victims. After this Moses took half of the blood, and set it aside in bowls; the other half he poured out on the altar. Then he took up the book in which the covenant was inscribed and read it aloud to the people. We will do all the Lord has bidden us, said they; we promise obedience; and Moses took the blood and sprinkled it over the people, crying out, Here is the blood of the covenant which the Lord makes with you, in accordance with all these words of his.

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abiu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up the mountain, and had a vision of the God of Israel, with a pavement about his feet that might have been made of sapphire, bright as the fashioning of the heavens. There they stood far removed from the rest of Israel, and the hand of the Lord never smote them down; they had sight of him and lived to eat and drink like mortal men. (Ex 24:3-11).

While brief, the ritual is complex. According to our present

---

<sup>48</sup>J. Considine and J. de Fraine, "Blood," Encyclopedic Dictionary of The Bible, p. 257; W. Eichrodt, p. 156-157; A. Gelin, The Key Concepts of The Old Testament, p. 37; J. Giblet et P. Grelot, "Alliance," Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique, p. 22; P. Van Imschoot, Théologie de l'Ancien Testament, p. 240-241; P. Van Imschoot and B. Vawter, "Covenant," Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible, p. 434; A. Lelièvre, "Sang," Vocabulaire Biblique, p. 279; S. Lyonnet, Introduction à la Bible, p. 870-871; A.G. Martimort, The Signs of The New Covenant, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1963), p. 192; J. Oesterreicher, The Israel of God, p. 47; A.M. Roguet, Christ Acts Through Sacraments, trans Carisbrooke Dominicus, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1954), p. 80; C. Spicq, L'Épître aux Hébreux, p. 274-275; C. Spicq et P. Grelot, "Sang," Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique, p. 996; G.E. Wright, The Old Testament Against its Environment, (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 58; "La Bible de Jérusalem," (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1956), p. 86, note f.

texts, the ratification takes place in two stages. In verses 3 to 8 the people accept the covenant and it is ratified in blood. In verses 9 to 11 it is ratified by Moses and the elders at a meal. Thus there are two originally independent early traditions combined here.<sup>49</sup>

At present we are concerned with the Elohist tradition (3-8) and the ratification in the blood of the covenant. According to this account Moses in response to the request of the people, in 20:19, that he should be God's spokesman to them, came and told the people all the words of the Lord, that is, he read them the Law whereupon the people promised obedience, replying: "we will do all the Lord has bidden us" (24:7).

Then follows the ratification by the sprinkling of blood. The blood of the victims, that is, their life, is sprinkled over the Altar which represents Yahweh, and over the people who are their own representatives.<sup>50</sup> By being sprinkled with the same blood, both contracting

---

<sup>49</sup>J. Giblet et P. Grelot, "Alliance," Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique, p. 22; La "Bible de Jerusalem," p. 86, note f; Peake's Commentary, p. 233.

It is extremely difficult to separate and reconstruct the different traditions presently fused here. However, it is clear that there are two distinct traditions--Yahwist and Elohist--concerning the ratification of the covenant. cf., M. Newman, The People of the Covenant, especially chapter 2, "Two Covenant Traditions and Two Mosaic Shrines," (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 39-71; J. Muilenburg, "The Form and Structure of the Covenantal Formulations," Vetus Testamentum, 9 (1959), 347-365; M. Haelvoet, "La Théophanie du Sinai, Analyse Littéraire des Récits D'ex XIV-XXIV," Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses, 29 (1953), p. 374-397; J. Lécuyer, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup>According to Hebrews 9:19, 20, the Book of the Covenant was also sprinkled with blood. This would be in accord with the common custom of blood staining the record of the covenant (Appendix). However, the material object matters little; what really matters is the signification. Both altar and book signify God, ie., are consecrated to God.

parties become as one life--one soul. That is, by having contact with the one and same life they become as it were, a single soul. P. Van Imschoot puts it this way:

The blood which is the soul (Lv 17:14), is sprinkled on the altar which represents Yahweh, and on the people, that is to say, on the two contractants; by contact with one and the same 'soul,' they become a single 'soul.' That is why the blood is called 'the blood of the covenant,' that is, the blood which produces the psychic community of the two parties.<sup>51</sup>

Thus the "blood of the covenant" is truly the "blood which ratifies the covenant."<sup>52</sup> It seals the desired community of life between the people and their God; as such, blood is the essential element. It represents the soul, the life of the being; it does not represent death. Blood symbolized life, not death.<sup>53</sup>

Immolation is but the preliminary rite and as such can be performed by the young men (Ex 24:5) whereas the essential sacrificial rite--the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and on the people--is reserved to Moses alone.

The actual slaughter of the animal was never a prominent part of the sacred function. In the sacrifices offered on the occasion when the Covenant of Sinai was made, the killing of the young bulls had been done by young men as a preparatory act for the liturgical function (Ex 24:5). In the sacrifice of

---

<sup>51</sup>P. Van Imschoot, Théologie de l'Ancien Testament, p. 244; cf., J. Pedersen, I, 292-293; J. Lécuyer, p. 17, 58; S. Lyonnet, De Peccato et Redemptione, II, p. 124; W.R. Smith, p. 314-322; B. Cooke, p. 27; W. Eichrodt, p. 156-157; A. Lelièvre, p. 278; Appendix.

<sup>52</sup>cf., Peake's Commentary on The Bible, Ex 24:8 and Za 9:11.

<sup>53</sup>This is a vitally important point. It has fundamental consequences for any theology of the Redemption. cf., S. Lyonnet, De Peccato et Redemptione, II, 124-125; R. de Vaux, p. 449, 452; C. Spicq, p. 272; J. Pedersen, I, p. 172; II, 315, 335; see also note 2 of this thesis.

Holocaust, the layman killed the bull, but only the priest proceeded with the blood ritual (Lv 1:5). Blood symbolized life, not death. Leviticus clearly states: "It is blood, as the seat of life, that makes atonement" (Lv 17:11). Instead of blood being offered to God--which would imply a destruction of life--blood was sprinkled on an object representing God: the sides of the altar (Lv 1:5); or the propitiatory--that is, the golden mercy-seat--immediately above the ark of the covenant.<sup>54</sup>

It is this common blood--as life--which brings about the longed-for union of the covenanting parties: "Just as human blood flowing from right arm to left unites both members in one living organism, this impressive ritual of blood symbolized a flow of life between God and His people."<sup>55</sup>

Yahweh had, in unique fashion,<sup>56</sup> made use of a custom common among the semites, a covenant of blood-friendship, to establish communion<sup>57</sup> with His people (cf., Zach 9:11; Heb 9:16-21).

#### Incomplete Symbolism

While the ritual of the blood covenant at Sinai quite definitely symbolized the union of man's nature with God, it did not signify or

<sup>54</sup>C. StuhlmueLLer, Commentary on The Book of Leviticus (New York: Paulist Press, 1960), p. 8, 9; cf., R. de Vaux, p. 452; H.W. Robinson, "Hebrew Sacrifice and Prophetic Symbolism," Journal of Theological Studies, 43 (1942-43), p. 131; C. Spicq, p. 272, note 3; Peake's Commentary, Lv 4:1-4.

<sup>55</sup>C. StuhlmueLLer, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup>W. Eichrodt, p. 43-44; M. Buber, p. 115.

<sup>57</sup>The aim of all the Mosaic sacrifices was communion, or restoration of communion, with God. The holocaust (Lv 1:6-16) and the peace-offerings (Lv 7:11-21; 19:5-8) were in communion with God. The sin (Lv 4:1-5, 13) and guilt-offerings (Lv 5:14-26) were for communion with God. cf., A. Edersheim, The Temple: Its Ministry and Services (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1875), p. 82; W.R. Smith, p. 320.

assure the permanency of that union. In fact, there were marked limitations in the symbolism which were a portent of things to come.

In the universal primitive blood-covenant rite itself the parties receive and partake of the blood which then becomes common to them both. In other religions where man attempted union with the divinity through the use of substitute blood, the offerer drank of the blood or that which represented it. By so doing it was believed that he then participated in the nature of the divinity.<sup>58</sup>

Père Lagrange states that the ideal would be to drink the blood, one of the other. "Since for the nomads of the desert all social rapport flows out of community of blood, no covenant is stable without a certain exchange of blood. The ideal would be to drink the blood, one of the other."<sup>59</sup>

However, Israel was not permitted to partake of blood<sup>60</sup> and hence the incompleteness of the symbolism. The ideal was not achieved.

---

<sup>58</sup>H.C. Trumbull, p. 251; W.R. Smith, p. 312, 313, 314, 315; M.J. Lagrange, p. 259; Appendix.

<sup>59</sup>M.J. Lagrange, p. 259; cf., A. Médebielle, L'Expiation dans l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament, I (Rome: Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1924), p. 25 ff.

<sup>60</sup>Was this as a reaction to the religiously orientated practices of their idolatrous neighbours? (cf., Za 9:7; Ez 23:25; Lv 19:26); cf., W. Eichrodt: The outspoken repugnance to the consumption of blood is not simply to be explained by horror at the idea of absorbing an alien kind of life, for the latter attitude is to be found elsewhere side by side with the acceptance of the practice of consuming the blood; rather it is connected with the rejection of the heathen customs which made the drinking of the blood a part of the cult of certain animals or as a means of inducing ecstatic prophecy or of orgiastic communion with the deity. (135); cf., A. Médebielle, p. 25 ff.

Inadequate Efficacy

Further, the substitute blood lacked the adequate efficacy to achieve a true permanent union. Even if the Israelites had been allowed to drink the blood, it would still have been substitute blood, representing man not God, and would not have achieved the desired participation in the divinity.<sup>61</sup> Even should the symbolism have been complete, the substitute blood lacked the necessary efficacy to attain union with God.

This inadequacy is manifested on the earthly level, where the offering of blood by the Israelite could not gain him entrance into the Holy of Holies, the symbolic dwelling place of the Lord. The high priest alone, and then but once a year, on the Day of Atonement--carrying substitute blood as a safeguard--was able to enter the inner Sanctuary (Lv 16; Heb 9:7-10).

This office of the high priest contained a lesson of the Holy Spirit, the author of the rites and of the Scriptures which record them. The lesson is this: since God's people, represented by the priests, were never allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, it must be concluded that God's heavenly dwelling was closed to them as well as his earthly residence. Neither the daily rites, as is clear from the fact that they were daily, nor the solemn ceremonies of the annual atonement really cleansed them so that they might be admitted to communion with God. He continued to dwell in light inaccessible to them, in the heavenly light symbolized by the gold of the inner tent; they remained in the darkness outside, the darkness of the cosmos.<sup>62</sup>

The use of substitute blood, "the blood of bulls and goats" (Heb 10:4), did not secure the personal spiritual union between God and man.

<sup>61</sup>M.J. Lagrange, p. 260.

<sup>62</sup>J.F. McConnell, Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, (11), The New Testament Reading Guide (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1960), p. 41, 42.

The enactment of these blood rituals failed to re-establish the Divine-human inter-union.<sup>63</sup>

Covenanting to be meaningful and effective demanded a faith-filled awareness of the symbolism of the substitute offerings. Otherwise they became purely external observance, empty rites. Without the corresponding intelligent dispositions the rites were meaningless symbols, operating on the level of magic rather than mystery.<sup>64</sup> The offering of blood without the underlying offering of one's life was an empty and futile gesture.<sup>65</sup> We have already seen that a fundamental and essential characteristic of primitive blood covenanting is the total and unre-served underlying commitment of the partners.<sup>66</sup>

The Sinaitic covenant was to be characterized by such commitment.<sup>67</sup> Yahweh first committed Himself to be the divine benefactor of

---

<sup>63</sup>cf., Ps 49:7-17; Dt 10:14-16; Hos 6:4-7; Is 1:11-17; Jer 7:21-23; Prov 3:1-4; cf., also, E.J. Kissane, The Book of Isaiah, I (Dublin: Richview Press, 1960), p. 11; P. Boylan, The Psalms, I (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Sons, 1926), p. 180.

<sup>64</sup>The primitive blood rituals of the neighbours of the Israelites fall into this category. They were effective simply by being carried out; they were automatic. They lacked the moral basis and orientation which were supposed to be of the essence of the Israelite covenant ritual cf., W. Eichrodt, p. 43.

<sup>65</sup>It is essential that the external action should express the true inward feelings of man; if not, we do not have a religious act at all. cf., R. de Vaux, p. 451; F.F. Bruce, Peake's Commentary, p. 1015, Commentary on Heb 10:4; C. Spicq, p. 278; A.G. Martimert, p. 187-188.

<sup>66</sup>cf., p. 13 f.

<sup>67</sup>W. Eichrodt, p. 45.

the Israelites, bestowing upon them rich blessings and continued assistance.<sup>68</sup> Reminding the Israelites of what He had done in the past, in consequence of that preliminary blood covenant,<sup>69</sup> Yahweh chooses them to be His own "special possession." He binds Himself to them.

Israel, aware of this unique privilege, freely and joyfully agrees to the covenant. The Israelites agree to observe all the obligations which flow naturally from their position as God's people. As the covenant is one of love, God's love for man, the only adequate response on Israel's part is a return of love--a love which issues forth in obedience and commitment (cf., Dt 10:12-15), a response of love that knows no reservations:

The obligation which the people of Israel, the people of the Old Testament Covenant, takes upon itself is clearly and very plainly formulated in these words: "All the Lord has spoken we will do." (Ex 24:3) These words contain everything touching on man's relation to God. They harbour faith in this God, hopeful trust in this God and love towards this God. They entail the total surrender of the person to this God,<sup>70</sup> readiness of the will to do everything this Godhead may demand.

Such is the obligation that the Israelites took upon themselves when they entered into blood covenant with God. The Israelites freely accepted God's invitation with faith in the divine promises.

Unfortunately, however, despite the formal symbolic solemnity of the ratification in blood and despite the ubiquitous presence and

---

<sup>68</sup> Ex 19:4; 23:23031; Dt 29.

<sup>69</sup> M. Buber, p. 71.

<sup>70</sup> J. Alfrink, "Biblical Background to the Eucharist as a Sacrificial Meal," The Irish Theological Quarterly, 26 (1959), p. 293.

blessings of Yahweh, the Israelites quickly lapsed into idolatry thus directly violating the covenantal relationship (Ex 32:8).

Their initial enthusiasm did not carry them far, as the pages of the Old Testament are filled with their numerous apostasies.<sup>71</sup> The Israelites were unable to meet the requirements of the covenant; they continually lacked confidence and trust in their God.<sup>72</sup> They were found wanting in the exchange of loving kindness demanded by the terms of the covenant. "Stiff-necked" as they were, they refused to mend their errant ways.<sup>73</sup>

The Old Testament is the story of the constant infidelity of the one covenant partner, Israel, and the unfailing fidelity and unconquerable love of the other covenant partner, Yahweh.

#### THE NEW COVENANT FORETOLD

In spite of having witnessed much catastrophe, and certain of Yahweh's loving fidelity, Jeremias foretold of a new covenant that would surpass that of Sinai:

A time is coming, the Lord says, when I mean to ratify a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Juda. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, on the day when I took them by the hand, to rescue them from Egypt; that they should break my covenant, and I, all the while, their master, the Lord says. No, this is the covenant I will grant the people of Israel, the Lord says, when that time comes. I will implant my law in their innermost hearts; I will be their

---

<sup>71</sup>Nm 11:4-6; 14; 16; 20:11-12; 25:3; Dt 1:21-26; 31:1-6; especially Psalm 77.

<sup>72</sup>Ex 14; Dt 1:33; Nm 20:6-12.

<sup>73</sup>2 Par 15:8-12; 2 Par 34: beginning and 29-31; Josh 24:14-15.

God, and they shall be my people. There will be no need for neighbour to teach neighbour, or brother to teach brother, the knowledge of the Lord; all will know me, from the highest to the lowest. I will pardon their wrong-doing; I will not remember their sins anymore. (Jer 31:31-34).<sup>74</sup>

This new covenant would admit of total and unswerving commitment on man's part. It would be a divine favor bestowed on each man making possible a personal knowledge of the Lord's will and permitting its unreserved service. As J. Alfrink has put it:

The Superiority of this 'new' covenant to the old, from which it has blossomed forth, lies in its effectiveness. It will be a covenant that realizes its aim: "I will be their God and they shall be my people" . . . The new relation will no more be broken. This new covenant will be truly effective because the covenant's benefits will indeed be realized, and be realized through the very covenant. First of all there will be knowledge of and fidelity to Jahveh: "All shall know me from the least of them even to the greatest." "To know" is again a Hebraism which widens its meaning from purely theoretical knowledge, to practical acknowledgment, including "service." The fidelity of the covenanted people will be such that God will no longer, as was the case with the earlier covenant, be forced to abandon this new covenant.<sup>75</sup>

To be true to this new covenant, man will have to prove a more loyal partner than in the past. Without a perfectly loyal covenant partner, the result would be a perpetuation of proceeding infidelities. Ezechiel shows the way: "They shall have a single shepherd to tend all of them now; who should tend them but my servant David? He shall be their shepherd, and I, the Lord, will be their God, now that he rules them on earth; such is my divine promise to them" (Ez 34:23, 24).<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup>cf., Ez 16:59-63; 36:25-28; 2 ?ac 1:3-4; Heb 8:8.

<sup>75</sup>J. Alfrink, p. 293; cf., J. Giblet, p. 31.

<sup>76</sup>cf., Ez 34:30; 36:25-28.

It is clear that the coming of this new epoch is connected with the mission of the Messiah promised to David: through him, by grace, they would be purified and given a divine gift, the spirit of God who would enable them to observe the Law. In this way, the hope of this new covenant was connected with the appearance of a person, the Messiah who would assure the realization of this union.

Israel's hope finds fulfillment in the person of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. In Christ all things are recapitulated and in him the covenant will be fulfilled.

#### THE NEW COVENANT RATIFIED IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

The new covenant is truly superior to the old. Christ himself indicates this when in promulgating the new covenant He speaks of "perfecting" the law (Mt 5:17 ff.). Henceforth the law is to have internal significance and will be an inner inspiration to live by and not just a mere charter to be consulted regarding external observance.<sup>78</sup>

As befitting such a superior pact, a complete and more meaningful ratification than that of the old bond is effected. In the ratification of the new covenant, the sacrificial priest and victim is the Logos, the Son of God (Jh 19:30-33); the blood poured out is His own blood--blood of the new and everlasting covenant.

In the New Testament, the word blood is used in reference to the

---

<sup>77</sup>J. Giblet, p. 32; cf., E.F. Siegman, The Book of Ezechiel, With a Commentary, II (New York: Paulist Press, 1961), p. 15, 16.

<sup>78</sup>A. Gelin, The Key Concepts of The Old Testament, p. 39.

'blood of Christ' some thirty-six times.<sup>79</sup> It is expressed in various ways: the blood of Jesus (Heb 10:19; 1 Jn 1:7), of Christ (1 Cor 10:16; Eph 2:13; Heb 9:14), of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:2), of the Lord (1 Cor 11:27), and of the Lamb (Apoc 7:14; 12:11).

It is the blood of Christ presented at the Last Supper and shed on the Cross which ratifies the new and everlasting covenant.<sup>80</sup>

According to some, this is merely a graphic expression for Christ's 'death,' simply a 'pregnant symbolic term' in which the emphasis is not on the blood as such.<sup>81</sup> However, it is contended here, that the word blood, as used in reference to the blood of Christ ratifying the new covenant, emphasizes an objective reality that surpasses mere symbolism and is more than a concrete expression for 'death.' The substantiation of this contention will become evident as the blood of Christ, and its relation to the new covenant, is studied in detail.

#### Circumcision of Christ

Christ's circumcision, (Lk 2:21 ff.), marked his incorporation

<sup>79</sup>cf., N. Thompson, R. Stock, Complete Concordance To The Bible (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., 1957); C. Spicq, p. 271.

<sup>80</sup>cf., Mt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 10:29; 12:24; 13:20; cf., also, P. Benoit, "The Holy Eucharist-I," Scripture, 8 (1956), p. 103-104; M.E. Boismard, "L'Euchariste selon St. Paul," Lumière et Vie, 31 (1957), p. 96; A. Lelièvre, "Sang," Vocabulaire Biblique, p. 279; P. Bonnard "Alliance," Vocabulaire Biblique, p. 13; A. Medebielle, p. 23; C. Spicq, p. 271, note 2, p. 275, 276; E.A. Laverdière, "The Eucharistic Covenant: Bond of Christian Unity," Emmanuel, 49 (1963), p. 305; J.E. Steinmueller, "Sacrificial Blood in The Bible," Biblica, 40 (1959), p. 564; B. Cooke, p. 5, note 12; p. 29; J. Considine and J. De Fraine, "Blood," Encyclopedic Dictionary of The Bible, p. 258; B. Vawter and P. Van Imschoot, "Covenant," Encyclopedic Dictionary of The Bible, p. 438, 439.

<sup>81</sup>L. Morris, 216-227; cf., J. Considine and J. De Fraine, p. 258

into the chosen people.<sup>82</sup> Circumcision was, as we have seen, the sign of the covenant (Acts 7:8), the indication that one belonged to Yahweh (Ex 4:25), or to the cultic community of Israel (Ex 12:48; Nm 9:14; Rom 4:11), a reminder of the obligations of the covenant (Gal 5:3).<sup>83</sup> Incorporated into the covenant of Abraham, the father of the circumcised (Rom 4:12), Christ bore in his flesh the sign of that covenant.<sup>84</sup>

For many the rite of circumcision was a sterile symbol, an empty rite.<sup>85</sup> Too often it was a purely external ritual and did not indicate an interior ratification; but, not so for Christ. The underlying faith, the willingness to give of oneself totally, as demanded in blood covenanting, characterized his life in infinite measure. It is these

---

<sup>82</sup>B. Cooke, p. 4, note 11; C. Stuhlmueller, p. 19-20.

<sup>83</sup>B. Vawter and A. Van Den Born, "Circumcision," Encyclopedic Dictionary of The Bible, p. 389.

<sup>84</sup>Christ's journey, at the age of twelve, to Jerusalem signifies the consummation of this incorporation that came with actual participation in the Paschal Feast. Circumcision was a mandatory prerequisite for participation in the Pasch:

Israel's oldest tradition of sacrifice is closely linked with the idea of covenant. There is the element of acknowledgement of the sovereignty of the covenant God . . . there is the aspect of communion with Yahweh that is especially noticeable in the peace offerings . . . of these, the notion of communion that the covenant is most intimately linked with covenant, for it is this communion that the covenant achieves; in a sense the covenant (as the enduring state of the contract) is this communion. This communion both presupposed and helped to constitute a communion among the Israelites themselves. For this reason one could only participate in the sacrifices if one was a member of the covenant people; hence the need for admission to the people by circumcision. (B. Cooke, p. 9); cf., W. Eichrodt, p. 64.

<sup>85</sup>cf., Jer 4:4; Jer 9:24; Dt 10:12-22; Gal 5:6; Rom 2:8 ff.

internal dispositions, symbolized by the external rite of circumcision, which Christ lived and insisted upon.<sup>86</sup> In so doing, he demonstrated what it really meant to be betrothed in blood," époux de sang.

#### The Last Supper and Sinai

It would seem that Christ's Last or Vigil Supper with the Apostles was a paschal meal.<sup>87</sup> Certainly, even if the Supper was not itself the Pasch, it is deemed by the Evangelists to have paschal significance and therefore covenant significance:

The Synoptics speak with undeniable clarity of preparations for the Pasch; Jesus says that He has longed to "eat this Pasch with you"; and Luke's account situates the institution of the Eucharist in the framework of the paschal meal itself. The fact that Mt and Mk do not refer to the paschal character of the Supper once they begin the account of the Eucharistic institution does not prove that they do not consider the Supper a paschal meal; rather, it indicates their consciousness that the Eucharist replaces the Pasch, which means that the Evangelists see an intrinsic link between the Eucharist and the Pasch. Thus, it seems more likely that the Supper was a paschal meal; and this much is rather certain; even if the Supper was not itself the Pasch, it is considered by the Evangelists as having paschal significance. This is equivalent to saying that the Synoptics view the Eucharist as having a covenant significance, because the meaning of the Pasch was inseparably bound up with the events that led up to the Sinaitic covenant.<sup>88</sup>

The Eucharistic texts read as follows:

And while they were still at table, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my body. Then he took a cup, and offered thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink, all of you, of this;

<sup>86</sup> B. Cooke, p. 12-13.

<sup>87</sup> J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. A. Ehrhardt (London: Basil Blackwell Publ., 1955), p. 14-57.

<sup>88</sup> B. Cooke, p. 21; cf., J. Jeremias, p. 146.

for this is my blood, of the new testament, shed for many, to the remission of sins. (Mt 26:26-28).

And while they were still at table, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, Take this; this is my body. Then he took a cup, and offered thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said, This is my blood of the new testament, shed for many. (Mk 14:22-25).

Then he took bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is my body, given for you; do this for a commemoration of me. And so with the cup, when supper was ended, This cup, he said is the new testament, in my blood which is to be shed for you. (Lk 22:19-20).

. . . the Lord Jesus on the night when he was being betrayed, took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it and said, Take, eat; this is my body, given up for you. Do this for a commemoration of me. And so with the cup, when supper was ended, This cup, he said, is the new testament, in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, for a commemoration of me. (1 Cor 11:23-25).

Many comparative studies have been made of the Eucharistic texts, leading to many and varied conclusions. However, there is one conclusion which emerges common to all such studies, and it is this: it is impossible to reconstruct with certitude the words that Christ himself used at the Last Supper. One further conclusion is of paramount importance: ". . . that which is essential in establishing the central role of the idea of covenant--namely, that Jesus spoke of His blood as the blood of a covenant--is from a textual point of view indubitable."<sup>89</sup>

Indeed, the difference in the formulas would seem to be a superficial one. When Paul and Luke say: "This cup is the new testament in

---

<sup>89</sup>B. Cooke, p. 19.

my blood," whereas Mark and Matthew say: "This is my blood of the new testament," the sense of the two formulas is the same.<sup>90</sup>

In saying that this cup is the new testament in his blood, or that this is his blood of the new testament, Christ unequivocally alludes to the words of Moses sealing the covenant of Sinai: "This is the blood of the covenant which Yahweh has concluded with you" (Ex 24:8). It is precisely the Sinaitic covenant which the feast of the Pasch commemorated along with the deliverance from Egypt. Undoubtedly Our Lord thought of it when he spoke of the "blood of the covenant."<sup>91</sup>

When Christ speaks of his blood being poured out--a direct reference to his death on the cross--the Apostles would have been reminded of the action of Moses pouring half of the blood on the altar and sprinkling the other half over the people.<sup>92</sup> "This is the crowning aspect of the comparison of Jesus to Moses, . . . and it points, at the

---

<sup>90</sup>J. Lécuyer, p. 178; J. Jeremias, p. 112.

<sup>91</sup>"In view of the marked difference at this point between the tradition of Paul-Luke on the one hand and of Mark-Matthew on the other, the question arises, what was the exact wording spoken by Our Lord. "The decision of the exegetes leans towards Mark 14:24 . . . because of its agreement with Ex 24:8 which Our Lord probably had in mind." J. Jungmann, The Mass of The Roman Rite, its Origin and Development, II, trans. F. Brunner (New York: Benziger Bros., 1955), p. 197, note 18; cf., C. Vollert, "The Eucharist: quests for Insights from Scripture," Journal of Theological Studies, 21 (1960), p. 417, 418; P. Benoit, p. 103, 104; B. Cooke, p. 33; A. Médebielle, p. 23; S. Lyonnet, Introduction à la Bible, p. 871; De Peccato et Redemptione, p. 124; E. Laverdière, p. 305.

<sup>92</sup>The Apostles could not help but associate the words of Christ with the blood of the Sinaitic covenant, especially in that they were gathered together to celebrate a meal that commemorated the Exodus and Sinai.

same time, to the profound continuity between the actions of Sinai and the Cenacle and to the transcendent superiority of the latter."<sup>93</sup>

#### THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT

Christ establishes the new covenant foretold by Jeremias (31:31) in whose thought the new covenant is the final unfolding and the supreme fulfillment of the covenant of Sinai.<sup>94</sup> The Eucharistic action of Christ continues, fulfills and immeasurably transcends the action of Moses on Sinai.<sup>95</sup> With the Eucharistic words there is witnessed the realization of a new covenant in which the Law would be written in the hearts of the human covenant partners,<sup>96</sup> thus surpassing the old even as the vivifying spirit surpasses the letter that kills.<sup>97</sup>

The ratification of the old covenant was in the blood of calves. The ratification of the new covenant is in the blood of Christ;<sup>98</sup> and it is this very blood that realizes the new covenant.<sup>99</sup> For this is precisely what is new in the relationship: this cup is the new covenant "in my blood" (Lk 22:20; 1Cor 11:25).<sup>100</sup> The contents of the cup, that is, "my blood" brings the covenant into being. Just as the old covenant was brought into being by blood--the blood of victims, so too, the new

<sup>93</sup>B. Cooke, p. 33. <sup>94</sup>J. Alfrink, p. 292. <sup>95</sup>B. Cooke, p. 34 ff

<sup>96</sup>A.G. Martimort, p. 193; J. Lécuyer, p. 181 ff.

<sup>97</sup>cf., Ez 36:25-28; Jer 31:34; 2 Cor 3:6-13.

<sup>98</sup>See note 80 on page 28. <sup>99</sup>cf., E. Laverdière, p. 305.

<sup>100</sup>According to Boismard, 1 Cor 11:25 is definitely to be understood as: "The wine contained in this cup is my blood which establishes and ratifies the new alliance." M. Boismard, p. 96.

is brought into being through blood--the blood of Christ.<sup>101</sup> It is in corresponding measure that the new covenant surpasses the old covenant; that is, as the blood of Christ surpasses the blood of calves. (Heb 9:13-20).

### Infinite Efficacy

In the old covenant, the blood, that is, the life, of the victim was the means of attempting union with God, and the blood itself was, in a sense, the essential mediator.<sup>102</sup> The blood did not successfully expiate the transgressions: "For it is impossible that sins should be taken away with the blood of bulls and goats" (Heb 10:4).

In that single statement, the writer of Hebrews condemned all the sacrificial liturgies of the old covenant. They were inefficacious, impotent; the victim was not a true equivalent. The guilt of sins could not be removed by the blood of goats and hence, union could not be achieved.

In the new covenant, the blood, that is, the life, of 'The Victim,' was the means of establishing union with God, and the blood itself was, in a sense, the essential mediator. The blood successfully expiated the transgressions committed under the old covenant, and union could be achieved.

The contrast in the value of the blood of the old covenant and

---

<sup>101</sup> cf., Heb 9:11-20; 10:1-18; C. Vollert, p. 417, 418; J. Jungmann, p. 197; J. Alfrink, p. 294; P. Benoit, p. 103, 104; E. Laverdière, p. 305; C. Spicq, p. 113; B. Vawter and P. Van Imschoot, "Covenant," Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible, p. 438.

<sup>102</sup> J. McConnell, p. 44.

the blood of the new covenant is presented by Ceslas Spicq as follows:

It is by the soul or the life, which is in the blood, that expiation takes place. Thus, as the value of the victim goes, so goes the value of the contract or covenant. In the old covenant, they could only shed the blood of animals, whereas Christ sheds his own blood, more exactly: he offers his life to God. That he obtains an "eternal redemption" is due to the fact that he is the Son of God. It is the dignity of the person whose blood is shed which determines the value of his blood; . . . One could not apply more exactly the axiom of Leviticus on the identity of blood and of life, nor express more clearly the transcendent efficacy of the blood of Christ by comparison to the sacrifices of the old Law and the spiritual character of the Savior's immolation as opposed to the ritualism of Leviticus. One comes to understand, then the whole force of the general line of reasoning of the Epistle (to the Hebrews): the unique sacrifice of the new covenant is better than all of the sacrifices of the old. This sacrifice, in effect, is the work of the incarnated Son of God, priest and victim. The shedding of his blood, the offering of his life is so potent as to present and unite to God all of a purified and sanctified humanity. The blood of Jesus Christ is the decisive factor of the new religion.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to the lack of a true equivalent victim, there was another inherent and essential limitation in the animal sacrifices: the insincerity and involuntariness of the priests and victims.<sup>104</sup>

The offerings of animal sacrifices were repudiated not only because the animals, themselves, were impotent substitutes but also because of the insincerity of those doing the offering. The offering of blood is of value only to the extent that it reflects man's openness to the will of God.<sup>105</sup>

In the case of the Sinaitic covenant, the offering of blood had been a mere external observance, an empty rite. As such, these offerings

<sup>103</sup>C. Spicq, p. 283. <sup>104</sup>L. Dewar, p. 208.

<sup>105</sup>cf., Is 1:11; Ez 54:7; cf., note 65, p. 23.

were unacceptable to God. What He desires is that which these offerings signified: the offering of a man's heart, a manifestation of love, a profound and deep desire for re-union with God; in other words, an interior ratification of what was externally signified. If God is to accept an offering of blood, it must be pure and perfect, both as regards the offering and intention of the offerer (cf., Os 6:6; Mich 6:5-8).<sup>106</sup>

The author of Hebrews puts the following declaration on the lips of Christ:

Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not, but a body thou hast fitted to me: In holocausts and sin-offerings thou hadst had no pleasure. Then said I, 'Behold, I come--(in the head of the book it is written of me)--to do thy will, O God.' (Heb 10:5-7; cf., Ps 40:7-9).

The infinitely efficacious offering of Christ is manifestly expressive of his intention to do the will of his Father. It is no token offering but rather the freely rendered offering of himself.

Calvary will represent a complete and voluntary acceptance of the Divine will.

This my Father loves in me, that I am laying down my life, to take it up again afterwards. Nobody can rob me of it; I lay it down of my own accord. I am free to lay it down, free to take it up again; that is the charge which my Father has given me. (Jn 10:17, 18).

Ceslas Spicq elucidates the distinction between the victims in the old covenant and The Victim in the new in the following manner:

To the incessant and sterile repetition of the innumerable victims of the old covenant is opposed the unique and sovereignly efficacious immolation of the new covenant. The effusion of the

---

<sup>106</sup> A.G. Martimort, p. 188.

blood of Calvary realizes, and to perfection, in one stroke, that which all of the efforts of the former liturgy attempted, but in vain, to obtain. The difference is: what is involved is not the blood of unconscious animals, but that of a person, not constrained, but free, not the blood of a sinner, but that of an innocent, the blood of the Son of God (Heb 9:13-14).<sup>107</sup>

The power of the blood of Christ is such that redeemed man is able to draw near to God.

Why then brethren, we can enter the sanctuary with confidence through the blood of Christ. He has opened up for us a new, a living approach, by way of the veil, I mean, his mortality. A great priest is ours, who has dominion over God's house. (Heb 10:19-21).

The high priest entering into the Holy of Holies with substitute blood is regarded, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as the prophetic figure of Christ entering "the greater and more perfect tabernacle" by virtue of his own blood in order to effect our redemption. By his blood we are made free.

". . . shall not the blood of Christ, who offered himself, through the Holy Spirit, as a victim unblemished in God's sight, purify our consciences, and set them free from lifeless observances, to serve the living God?" (Heb 9:14). We are freed of all the "barnacles" of mere external observances so as to be able to give of ourselves, totally and unreservedly, in true covenanted love.

Christ does not enter alone into the Holy of Holies. He brings us with him into the loving presence of God and he does so by means of

---

<sup>107</sup>C. Spicq, p. 278.

"his own blood."<sup>108</sup>

The Symbolism Completed

In addition to the impotent value of the substitute blood of the Sinaitic covenant and in addition to the insincerity of the offerers of that blood, the very symbolism itself was incomplete.<sup>109</sup> The Israelites were forbidden to drink blood.<sup>110</sup> Yet, as has been established, in attempting union by means of blood covenanting, the ideal is realized when the covenanting parties drink of the life-giving oneness of blood.<sup>111</sup>

In all ways, the new covenant, transcendently superior to the old, is the ideal blood covenant; the blood of the new covenant is of infinite value and potency; the sincerity of the offerer, unconditionally unreserved even unto death; and, with divine finesse, the symbolism employed is completed. The ideal achieved. Christ gives his own blood as drink: ". . . all of you drink of this; for this is my blood of the new covenant which is being shed for many" (Mt 26:28; cf., Mk 14:25). Or again, as St. Paul puts it: "This cup, he said, is the new testament, in my blood" (1 Cor 11:25; cf., Lk 22:20).

The mention of the cup directly characterizes the blood of Our

---

<sup>108</sup>cf., Heb 9:12; 9:25; 10:19; J. Steinmueller, p. 565-566; J. McConnell, p. 43-47; C. Spicq, p. 281; "Autant l'accès de celui-ci était rare et difficile dans l'ancienne Alliance, et permis seulement au Pontife suprême, autant l'approche de Dieu devient libre, sans obstacle, et possible à tous, grâce au Précieux Sang!"

<sup>109</sup>cf., note 58 and note 59, p. 21. <sup>110</sup>cf., note 60, p. 21.

<sup>111</sup>cf., note 59, p. 21, and Appendix.

Lord as drink.<sup>112</sup> To share in the Eucharistic cup is to communicate in the blood of Christ.<sup>113</sup> To communicate in the blood of Christ is to effect that which is symbolized, namely, union with Christ--divine-human inter-union.<sup>114</sup>

In his unparalleled discourse on the promise of the Eucharist, John, in having reference to the blood shared at the Last Supper,<sup>115</sup> alludes to the blood of the covenant as such.<sup>116</sup> By partaking of the blood of Christ, which is "real drink" (6:56), one becomes a beneficiary of that covenant and a sharer in that Life which the Father shares with

<sup>112</sup>J. Jungmann, p. 197.

<sup>113</sup>cf., 1 Cor 10:16; P. Grelot et C. Spicq, "Sang," Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique, p. 995; A. Lelièvre, p. 280.

<sup>114</sup>Aware of this symbolism and its significance, Paul enjoined his fellow Christians at Corinth not to participate in similarly oriented pagan ceremonies: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; you cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord and the table of devils" (1 Cor 10:21). A Christian cannot be united to God and to false gods. cf., C. Peifer, Commentary on First and Second Corinthians, (#8), The New Testament Reading Guide (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1960), p. 36, 37; R. Russell, "On the Holy Eucharist in the New Testament," Scripture, 4 (1949) p. 85, 86.

<sup>115</sup>R. Brown, Commentary on The Gospel of St. John and The Johannine Epistles, (#13), The New Testament Reading Guide (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1960), p. 41.

<sup>116</sup>Or c'est à ce sacrifice (le sacrifice de l'alliance) que le Christ se réfère explicitement la seule fois où dans les Synoptiques il parle de son sang, lors de l'institution eucharistique: "Ceci est le sang de la nouvelle alliance" (Mc-Mt) ou bien "cette coupe est la nouvelle alliance dans mon sang" (Lc- 1 Co., 11). En conséquence, il faut y rattacher aussi, au moins partiellement, toutes les allusions au sang eucharistique de Jésus, (Jn 6; 1 Cor 10, 16) et plus encore les passages où l'on affirme que le nouvel Israel est devenu peuple de dieu par le sang du Christ (Ac 20:28; Ap 5:9). S. Lyonnet, "La Sotériologie Paulinienne," Introduction à la Bible, p. 871; De Peccato et Redemptione, p. 124.

His Son--Divine Eternal Life.

Whereupon Jesus said to them, Believe me when I tell you this; you can have no life in yourselves, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood. The man who eats my flesh and drinks my blood enjoys eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. My flesh is real food, my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood lives continually in me, and I in him. As I live because of the Father, the living Father who has sent me, so he who eats me will live, in his turn, because of me. (Jn 6:54-58).

Here is communion through the most intimate of unions--a personal blood covenant with the incarnated Son of God. To drink the blood of Christ, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant, is to share the Life identified with that blood, that is, the Life of God. C. Spicq has captured and conveyed this truth:

Because blood is the source of life, whoever shall drink of this blood (of Christ)--the only one that God has ordained men to drink--will share the same Life as Christ, that is life eternal. The blood of Christ is the blood of a covenant not only new, but definitive and permanent, eternal (Heb 13:20), through the grace of which he has bound and consecrated a new people, the holy Church, which he has brought into communion with God. By his blood, the covenant is sealed, the Savior reconciles and pacifies heaven and earth. Such is "the mystery of faith" . . . St. John affirmed that the body of Christ was the bread which descended from heaven, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews one is able to say that the blood of Christ enables man to ascend to heaven (Heb 10:19).<sup>117</sup>

The incomplete symbolism of the ratification in blood of the old covenant gives way to the perfected symbolism of the ratification in blood of the new covenant. The ideal is achieved.<sup>118</sup> Christ gives his blood as drink: "Drink, all of you, of this; for this is my blood, of

<sup>117</sup>C. Spicq, p. 275, 276; cf., Jh 6:53-58; 1 Cor 10:16; Acts 20:28; Eph 11:13; cf., A. Lelièvre, p. 280.

<sup>118</sup>cf., note 59, p. 21.

the new testament, shed for many, to the remission of sins" (Mt 26:28).<sup>119</sup>

To be drunk, blood must be shed. The expression 'drink blood' should be set side by side with its use in 1 Chr 11:19, where it suggests the idea of death.

A blood covenant, that is, a covenant to give one's blood, one's life, was not completely consummated without the death of the covenanter (Heb 9:16-17). In Semitic mentality, a covenant was not valid in law without sacrifice.<sup>120</sup> A covenant made "in blood" necessitated the immolation of victims<sup>121</sup> whose blood was then referred to as "the blood of the covenant." This is what had transpired at Sinai. However, at the Cenacle, Christ qualified "the blood of the covenant" with "my" thus indicating that a new sacrifice was to replace the one of long ago: his own death.<sup>122</sup>

However, in the new covenant as in the old, atonement and salvation is wrought by the blood, by the life of the covenanter, not by

<sup>119</sup>cf., Jh 6:54-58.

<sup>120</sup>J. Alfrink, p. 292.

<sup>121</sup>The offering of the blood still within the body of the victim would represent a life not completely surrendered. The entire surrender of the whole life is essential before it can be given to God, and thus nothing less than the death of the victim is required. cf., L. Dewar, p. 207.

<sup>122</sup>Ainsi, le sang du Christ "ratifie" la nouvelle alliance comme le sang des taureaux avait "ratifié" l'ancienne alliance. Mais ne l'oublions pas, les taureaux avaient été immolés en sacrifice à Yahvé. On Peut donc penser que Paul établit un parallélisme entre la mort sacrificielle des animaux, lors de la conclusion de l'ancienne alliance, et la mort sacrificielle du Christ, lors de la conclusion de la nouvelle alliance. M.E. Boismard, p. 101; cf., J. Lécuyer, p. 178; C. Vollert, p. 147, 418; A.M. Roguet, p. 81; J. Giblet et P. Grelot, p. 26, 27.

his death as such; immolation is but the preliminary rite, albeit an essential one.<sup>123</sup> It is the blood of Christ, the life of Christ, which is the essential expiatory mediator, and it is given at the inevitable cost of his death.<sup>124</sup> The climax then is not his death but the pouring out of his blood--the offering up of his life.<sup>125</sup> The blood shed by Christ does not suggest simply that he loses life, but rather, that he gives life; thus enabling a unique community of life to take place between God and man.<sup>126</sup>

This gift of life, this promise of the covenanting cup, is made good on Calvary.<sup>127</sup> The Divine Covenanter poured forth his life-giving blood in order that all might be revived by its saving power.

The prophecy of Jeremias is fulfilled in Christ, at the Last Supper and on the Cross.<sup>128</sup> At the Last Supper the blood of Christ is his blood outpoured; on the Cross he actually poured out his blood. The Eucharistic rite of the Last Supper gave the event of the next day its meaning, but the rite itself would have had no meaning "if the immolation

<sup>123</sup>cf., p. 41, n. 121.   <sup>124</sup>J. McConnell, p. 44.

<sup>125</sup>L. Dewar, p. 206.

<sup>126</sup>A. Lelièvre, p. 279; cf., 2 Pt 1:4.

<sup>127</sup>cf., Mt 27:33-54; Mk 15:22-39; Lk 23:33-47; Jh 19:17-37.

<sup>128</sup>J. Lécuyer, p. 179, 180, 181; A.G. Martimort, p. 193; B. Cooke, p. 43; Heb 8:9.

of Christ had not already been present in the sign."<sup>129</sup> The Last Supper sacramentally realized the sacrifice of Calvary.

The Last Supper in its entirety is clearly, therefore, the celebration of the new covenant, established by Christ's effecting a sacramental identity between the Eucharist and His death on the Cross.

By instituting the Eucharist, the sacrifice of the new covenant, our Lord committed Himself, freely gave Himself up to His coming death, already sacramentally present and anticipated in His Eucharist.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup>A.G. Martimort, p. 193.

<sup>130</sup>C. Bouman, and M. Ryan, Key to The Missal (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides, 1960). p. 57.

CONCLUSION

In the Bible, blood is life and therefore, a divine reality. As such, it possesses a sacred character in consequence of which man is forbidden to shed the lifeblood of his fellow man and forbidden to partake of the blood of animals. Further, it is this sacred character which gives to blood its place of prominence in the Israelite cultic practices. In the sacrificial and the covenantal rites, by which man sought union with God, blood, as life, was the essential element. (Chapter One)

The entire history of mankind, and especially that of the Israelites, is represented in the Bible as a progressive plan of salvation carried out by God through a series of covenants with man. (Note 21).

Much scholarly work has been done on the biblical concept of blood and on the biblical concept of covenant (cf., Bibliography). It has been the aim of this dissertation to examine the biblical concept of blood covenant as such. Furthermore, this thesis has contrasted the inadequacies and imperfections of the Abrahamic and Sinaitic blood covenants with the uniquely perfect blood covenant of Christ.

The covenant which Yahweh entered into with Abraham was ratified in the blood of Abraham; it was, in fact, a blood covenant. By circumcision Abraham became the "betrothed in blood," époux de sang, of Yahweh, with all that that implies. (Chapter Two).

With the call and response of Abraham, there begins to take shape the covenant which lies at the very heart of Israel's existence,

the great covenant of Sinai. This covenant, too, was ratified in blood, the blood of calves. Here, as elsewhere, it is blood, as life, which seals the desired community of life between the people and their God. By contact with one and the same blood, that is, by contact with one and the same life or soul, the covenant partners attempt to become a single life, a single soul; they attempt to achieve, through oneness of blood, a psychic community. (Chapter Two).

However, the blood covenants of Abraham and of Sinai were deficient and that which they symbolized--union of man with God--was not achieved.

Specifically, these blood covenants were deficient in the following ways: First, the substitute blood lacked the adequate efficacy to achieve a true union. Substitute blood, by the very fact that it was substitute--representing man only and not God--did not possess the power necessary to restore the ruptured union between God and man.

Second, blood covenanting, to be effective, demanded a faith-filled awareness of the symbolism and a corresponding commitment to the underlying reality which was signified. Otherwise these offerings were purely external observance, empty rites. Without the underlying intelligent dispositions the rites were sterile symbols, operating on the level of magic rather than mystery. A fundamental and essential characteristic of primitive blood covenanting was the total and unreserved self-commitment of the partners to the covenant. The Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants were to be characterized by such commitment. However, the Old Testament is the story of the constant infidelity of the human

covenant partner and the failure of that human partner to respond in love to the unrelenting love of the divine covenanter.

Third, the inadequacies and imperfections of the underlying reality of these blood covenants, that is, the impotent value of substitute blood and the insincerity of the offerers, were reflected in the inadequacies and imperfections of the very symbolism itself. In the universal primitive blood-covenant rite the parties received and partook of the blood which became common to them both. In other religions where man attempted union with the divinity through substitute blood, the offerer drank of the blood or that which represented it. By so doing it was believed that he then participated in the nature of the divinity. The ideal was to drink the blood, one of the other. (cf., notes 58, 59, and Appendix). Israel was not permitted to partake of blood and hence the symbolism remained incomplete. The ideal was not achieved. Union was not achieved. (Chapter Two).

By contrast, in the establishment of the desired and promised new covenant none of the imperfections of the former blood covenants is present. The new covenant is ratified in the blood of Christ, blood which he presented at the Last Supper and which he shed on the Cross.

The old covenant had been ratified in the blood of calves. The new covenant is ratified in the blood of Christ, and it is this very blood that realizes the new covenant. This is precisely what is new in the relationship: this cup is the new covenant "in my blood" (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). It is the contents of the cup, that is "my blood" which brings the covenant into being. Just as the former covenants had been

brought into being by blood, the blood of victims, so too, the new covenant is brought into being through blood, the blood of the God-Man, Christ. According to the writer of Hebrews, the new covenant surpasses the old even as the truly redeeming and purifying blood of Christ surpasses the blood of the former victims. (9:13-20).

We have seen that the blood covenants of Abraham and of Sinai were deficient and failed to achieve the longed-for union between man and God. The blood covenant entered into by Christ is in no way deficient.

First, in the former covenants the blood, that is, the life, of the victims was the means of attempting union with God, and the blood itself was the essential mediator. The attempt was not successful for the blood lacked the potency and equivalent value needed to restore divine-human inter-union. In the new covenant, the blood, that is, the life of The Victim, proved the means of establishing union with God. The blood successfully expiated the transgressions committed under the former covenants, and union became possible.

Second, we have seen that the offering of blood is of value only to the extent that it symbolizes man's openness to the will of God; but, in the case of the old covenant, the offering of blood had been a mere external gesture, an empty rite. In that these offerings did not interiorly ratify what was exteriorly signified--the offering of man's heart, an unreserved self-commitment to the terms of the covenant--they were unacceptable to God. By contrast, the sincere offering of Christ is expressive of his intention to do the will of his Father in all

things. The blood of Christ is given at the cost of his death and Calvary represents a complete and voluntary acceptance of the divine will.

Third, the perfection of the underlying reality of the new covenant, the infinite potency of the blood of Christ and his free total self-surrender, is reflected in the perfected symbolism of this new blood covenant. The Israelites were forbidden to drink blood; yet, as has been established, in attempting union by means of blood covenanting, the ideal is realized only when the covenanting parties drink of the life-giving oneness of blood. The new covenant is the ideal blood covenant. Christ gives us his own blood to drink. (cf., Mt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:25). To drink of the blood of Christ is to effect that which is symbolized--union with Christ, and to participate in the Life which the Father shares with his Son--divine eternal Life. Here is communion through the most intimate of unions, a personal blood covenant with the incarnate Son of God.

The incomplete symbolism of the earlier blood covenants gives way to the perfected symbolism of The Covenant in the blood of Christ, and an underlying reality which totally transcends and fulfills the deepest desires of man for union with God. This longed-for union is realized by the sharing of a common life--found in oneness of blood. By partaking of Christ's blood we become "one" with him, as a single soul, a single life: "He who drinks my blood, lives continually in me, and I in him" (Jh 6:57; cf., Jh 15:4). The outpoured blood of Christ on the Cross, sacramentally present and shared in the Eucharistic rites of the Last Supper, both realizes and symbolizes the desired community

of life between God and Man. (Chapter Two).

This was not an utterly new symbolism that Christ was introducing into the religious thought of mankind. It was, rather, a new validity, a unique reality, that he was giving to a universally recognized symbolism. (Appendix). The world had been familiar with the shadow of truth and now Christ enlightened the world as to the substance of truth. Man had longed down through the ages for at - one - ment with God; now, through the blood covenant of Christ, complete and consecrated, this innate desire is realized. Union is achieved.

"The man who . . . drinks my blood enjoys eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day . . . my blood is real drink. He who drinks my blood lives continually in me, and I in him" (Jh 6:55-57).

In the establishment of union between God and man it is the blood covenant of Christ which is the decisive factor.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bonsirven, J. Le Judaïsme Palestinien au Temps de Jésus-Christ. Vol. II. Paris: G. Beauchesne et Fils, 1934.
- Bouman, C., and Ryan, M. Key to the Missal. Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides, 1960.
- Bouyer, L. The Meaning of Sacred Scripture. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958.
- Boylan, P. The Psalms. Vol. I. Dublin: M.H. Gill and Sons, 1926.
- Brown, R. Commentary on the Gospel of St. John and the Johannine Epistles. (#13--The New Testament Reading Guide.) Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1960.
- Buber, M. Moses. London: East and West Library, Phaidon Press Ltd., 1946.
- Edersheim, A. The Temple: Its Ministry and services. London: The Religious Tract Society, 1875.
- Lichrodt, W. Theology of the Old Testament. Vol. I. trans. J.A. Baker, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961.
- Gelin, A. The Key Concepts of The Old Testament. trans. G. Lamb, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Religion of Israel. trans. J.R. Foster, London: Burns and Oates, 1959.
- Giblet, J. (ed.). The God of Israel, The God of Christians. trans. K. Sullivan, New York: Descles Co., 1961.
- Gleason, R. Yahweh, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964.
- Imschoot Van, P. Théologie de l'Ancien Testament. Vol. I. Tournai: Desclée et Cie., 1954.
- Jeremias, J. The Eucharistic Words of Jesus. trans. A. Ehrhardt, London: Basil Blackwell Publ., 1955.
- Jungmann, J. The Mass of the Roman Rite, Its Origin and Development. Vol. II. trans. F. Brunner, New York: Benziger Bros., 1955.

- Kissane, E.J. The Book of Isaiah. Vol. I. Dublin: Richview Press, 1960.
- Lagrange, M.J. Etudes sur les Religions Sémitiques. Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1903.
- Lécuyer, J. Le Sacrifice de la Nouvelle Alliance. Le Puy: Editions Xavier Mappus, 1962.
- Lyonnet, S. De Peccato et Redemptione. Vol. II. Romae: E Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_. La Sotériologie Paulinienne. Vol. II. Introduction à la Bible. Edited by A. Robert et A. Feuillet. Tournai: Desclée et Cie., 1959.
- Martimort, A.G. The Signs of the New Covenant. Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1963.
- Médebielle, A. L'Expiation dans l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament. Vol. I. Rome: Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1924.
- McConnell, J.F. Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. (#11--The New Testament Reading Guide.) Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1960.
- McKenzie, J.L. The Two-Edged Sword. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1956.
- Moriarty, F. Introducing the Old Testament. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1960.
- Newman, M. The People of the Covenant. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.
- Newton, W.L. Notes on the Covenant: A Study in the Theology of the Prophets. Cleveland, Ohio: Seminary Press, 1934.
- Oesterreicher, J. The Israel of God. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963.
- Pedersen, J. Israel Its Life and Culture. Vols. I, II. London: Oxford University Press, 1926.
- Peifer, C. Commentary on First and Second Corinthians. (#8--The New Testament Reading Guide.) Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1960.
- Roguet, A.M. Christ Acts Through Sacraments. trans. Carisbrook Dominicans, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1954.

- Rowley, H.H. The Faith of Israel. London: SCM Press, 1956.
- Siegman, E.F. The Book of Ezechiel. New York: Paulist Press, 1961.
- Smith, W.R. The Religion of the Semites. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1894.
- Spicq, C. L'Épître aux Hébreux. Vol. II. Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1953.
- Stuhmüller, C. Commentary on the Book of Leviticus. New York: Paulist Press, 1960.
- Trumbull, H.C. The Blood Covenant. Philadelphia: J.D. Wattles, 1893.
- Vaux de, R. Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions. trans. J. McHugh. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961.
- Vawter, B. A Path Through Genesis. London: Sheed and Ward, 1957.
- Wright, G.E. God Who Acts. SCM Press, 1952.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Old Testament Against Its Environment. London: SCM Press, 1950.

#### Periodicals

- Alfrink, J. "Biblical Background to the Eucharist as Sacrificial Meal," The Irish Theological Quarterly, 26 (1959), 290-302.
- Benoit, P. "The Holy Eucharist--I," Scripture, 8 (1956), 97-108.
- Boismard, M.B. "L'Euchariste selon St-Paul," Lumière et Vie, 31 (1957), 93-106.
- Coleran, J. "Origins of Old Testament Sacrifice," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 2 (1940), 130-144.
- Cooke, B. "Synoptic Presentation of the Eucharist as Covenant Sacrifice," Theological Studies, 21 (1960), 1-44.
- Dewar, L. "The Biblical Use of the Term Blood," Journal of Theological Studies, 4(1953), 204-208.
- Haelvoet, M. "La Theophanie du Sinai--Analyse Littéraire des Récits D'Ex. XIV-XXIV," Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses, 29 (1953), 374-397.

APPENDIX

THE BLOOD COVENANT--A UNIVERSAL RITE\*

MEPHISTOPHELES

"But one thing!--accidents may happen; hence  
A line or two in writing grant, I pray."

FAUST

. . . . .  
"Spirit of evil! what dost thou require?  
Brass, marble, parchment, paper, dost desire?  
Shall I with chisel, pen, or graver, write?  
Thy choice is free; to me 'tis all the same."

MEPHISTOPHELES

. . . . .  
"A scrap is for our compact good,  
Thou under-signest merely with a drop of blood."  
. . . . .  
"Blood is a juice of very special kind."

---

\* The data contained in this appendix has been taken, in large measure, from H. Clay Trumbull, The Blood Covenant (Philadelphia: J.D. Wattles Publishing Company, 1893). Where other sources have been used, the full references are given.

AN ANCIENT SEMITIC RITEBetween Friends

It was two young men, who were to enter into this covenant. They had known each other for years; but now they were to become brother-friends, in a covenant of blood. Their relatives and neighbors were called together, in the open place before the village fountain, to witness the sealing compact. The young men publicly announced their purpose, and their reasons for it. Their declarations were written down, in duplicate,--one paper for each friend,--and signed by themselves and by several witnesses. One of the friends took a sharp lancet, and opened a vein in the other's arm. Into the opening thus made, he inserted a quill, through which he sucked the living blood. The lancet-blade was carefully wiped on one of the duplicate covenant-papers, and then it was taken by the other friend, who made a like incision in its first user's arm, and drank his blood through the quill, wiping the blade on the duplicate covenant-record. The two friends declared together: "We are brothers in a covenant made before God: who deceiveth the other, him will God deceive." Each blood-marked covenant-record was then folded carefully, to be sewed up in a small leathern case, or amulet, about an inch square; to be worn thenceforward by one of the covenant-brothers, suspended about the neck, or bound upon the arm, in token of the indissoluble relation.

The compact thus made, is called M'ahadat ed-Dam, the "Covenant of Blood." The two persons thus conjoined, are Akhwat el-M'ahadah,

"Brothers of the Covenant." The rite itself is recognized, in Syria, as one of the very old customs of the land, as 'adah qadeemeh "a primitive rite." There are many forms of covenanting in Syria, but this is the extremest and most sacred of them all. As it is the inter-commingling of very lives, nothing can transcend it. It forms a tie, or a union, which cannot be dissolved. Although now comparatively rare, in view of its responsibilities and of its indissolubleness, this covenant is sometimes entered into by confidential partners in business, or by fellow-travelers; again, by robbers on the road--who would themselves rest fearlessly on its obligations, and who could be rested on within its limits, however untrustworthy they or their fellows might be in any other compact. Yet, again, it is the chosen compact of loving friends; of those who are drawn to it only by mutual love and trust.<sup>1</sup>

H.C. Trumbull had personal testimony from native Syrians, concerning the observance of this rite in Damascus, in Aleppo, in Hasbayya, in Abayh, along the road between Tyre and Sidon, and among the Koords resident in Salehayyah. All the Syrians who had been his informants, were at one concerning the traditional extreme antiquity of this rite, and its exceptional force and sacredness.<sup>2</sup>

#### A Chieftain and his Men

A native Syrian, who had traveled extensively in the East, and

---

<sup>1</sup>H.C. Trumbull, The Blood Covenant (Philadelphia: J.D. Wattles, 1893), p. 5-7.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 8.

who was familiar with the covenant of blood in its more common form, as already described, told him of a practice somewhat akin to it, whereby a bandit-chieftain would pledge his men to implicit and unqualified life-surrendering fidelity to himself; or, whereby a conspirator against the government would bind, in advance, to his plans, his fellow conspirators,--by a ceremony known as Sharb el-'ahd, "Drinking the covenant." The methods of such covenanting are various; but they are all of the nature of tests of obedience and of endurance. They sometimes included licking a heated iron with the tongue, or gashing the tongue, or swallowing pounded glass or other dangerous potions; but, in all cases, the idea seems to be, that the life of the one covenanting is, by this covenant, devoted--surrendered as it were--to the one with whom he covenants; and the rite is uniformly accompanied with a solemn and an imprecatory appeal to God as witnessing and guarding the compact.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE PRIMITIVE RITE IN AFRICA

##### Dr. Livingston and 'Kasendi'

Travelers in the heart of Africa, also, report the covenant of "blood-brotherhood," as in vogue among various African tribes, although retaining less of primitive sacredness there than among Semites. The rite is, in some cases, observed after the manner of the Syrians, by the contracting parties tasting each other's blood; while, in other cases, it is performed by the inter-transfusion of blood between the two.

---

<sup>3</sup>H.C. Trumbull, p. 8-9.

The first mention which there is of it, in the writings of travelers in Africa, is by the missionary, Dr. Livingstone. He calls the rite Kasendi. It was in the region of Lake Dilolo, at the watershed between the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic, in July 1854, that he made blood-friendship, vicariously, with queen Manenko, of the Balonda tribes. She was represented, in this ceremony, by her husband, the ebony "Prince Consort"; while Livingstone's representative was one of his Makololo attendants.

Describing the ceremony, Livingstone says: "It is accomplished thus: The hands of the parties are joined((in this case Pitsane and Sambanza were the parties engaged). Small incisions are made on the clasped hands, on the pits of the stomach of each, and on the right cheeks and foreheads. A small quantity of blood is taken from these points, in both parties, by means of a stalk of grass. The blood from one person is put into a pot of beer, and that of the second into another; each then drinks the other's blood, and they are supposed to become perpetual friends, or relations. During the drinking of the beer, some of the party continue beating the ground with short clubs, and utter sentences by way of ratifying the treaty. The men belonging to each (principal's party), then finish the beer. The principals in the performance of 'Kasendi' are henceforth considered blood-relations, and are bound to disclose to each other any impending evil. If Sekeletu (chief of Pitsane's tribe--the Makololo--) should resolve to attack the Balonda (Sambanza's--or more properly, Manenko's--people), Pitsane would

be under obligation to give Sambanza warning to escape; and so on the other side. (The ceremony concluded in this case) they now presented each other with the most valuable presents they had to bestow."<sup>4</sup>

#### Stanley and Mirambo

Henry M. Stanley also reports this rite of "blood-brotherhood," in the story of his experiences in the wilds of Africa. On numerous occasions the observance of this rite was a means of protection to Stanley. One of its more notable illustrations was in his compact with "Mirambo, the warrior chief of western Unyamwezi"; whose leadership in warfare Stanley compares to that of both Frederick the Great and Napoleon.

It was during his first journey in pursuit of Livingstone, in 1871, that Stanley first encountered the forces of Mirambo, and was worsted in the conflict. Writing of him, after his second expedition, Stanley describes Mirambo, as "the Mars of Africa." For a time, during his second exploring expedition, Stanley was inclined to avoid Mirambo, but becoming "impressed with his ubiquitous powers" he decided to meet him, and if possible make "strong friendship" with him. They came together, first, at Serombo, April 22, 1876.

The African hero and the heroic American agreed to "make strong friendship" with each other. Stanley thus describes the ceremony: "Manwa Sera (Stanley's 'chief captain') was requested to seal our

---

<sup>4</sup>D. Livingstone, Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa (New York: Harper, 1858), p. 290-296.

friendship by performing the ceremony of blood-brotherhood between Mirambo and myself. Having caused us to sit fronting each other on a straw-carpet, he made an incision in each of our right legs, from which he extracted blood, and inter-changing it, he exclaimed aloud: 'If either of you break this brotherhood now established between you, may the lion devour him, the serpent poison him, bitterness be in his food, his friends desert him, his gun burst in his hands and wound him, and everything that is bad do wrong to him until death.'" The same blood now flowed in the veins of both Stanley and Mirambo. They were friends and brothers in a covenant, they exchanged gifts; as the customary accompaniment of the compact.<sup>5</sup>

#### Stanley and the Cannibals

At the island of Mpika, on the Livingstone River, in December, 1876, there was another bright episode in Stanley's course of travel, through this mode of sealing friendship. Disease had been making havoc in Stanley's party. He had been compelled to fight his way along through a region of cannibals. While he was halting for a breakfast on the river bank over against Mpika, an attack on him was being prepared by the excited inhabitants of the island. Just then his scouts captured a native trading party of men and women who were returning to Mpika, from inland; and to them his interpreters made clear his pacific intentions. "By means of these people," he says, "we succeeded in checking

---

<sup>5</sup>H.M. Stanley, Through the Dark Continent, I (Toronto: J.B. Magurn, 1878), p. 52, 492, 493.

the warlike demonstrations of the islanders, and in finally persuading them to make blood-brotherhood; after which we invited canoes to come and receive (these hostages) their friends. As they hesitated to do so, we embarked them in our own boat, and conveyed them across to the island. The news then spread quickly along the whole length of the island that we were friends, and as we resumed our journey, crowds from the shore cried out to us, 'Mwende Ki-vuke-vuke' ('Go in peace!)"<sup>6</sup>

More commonly, the rite of blood-friendship among the African tribes seems to be by the inter-transfusion of blood; but the ancient Syrian method is not unknown on that continent. Stanley tells of one crisis of hunger, among the cannibals of Rubunga, when the hostility of the natives on the river bank was averted by a shrewd display of proffered trinkets from the boats of the expedition. "We raised our anchor," he says, "and with two strokes of the oars had run our boat ashore; and, snatching a string or two of cowries (or shell-money), I sprang on land, followed by the coxswain Uledi, and in a second I had seized the skinny hand of the old chief, and was pressing it hard for joy. Warm-hearted Uledi, who the moment before was breathing furious hate of all savages, and of the procrastinating old chief in particular, embraced him with a filial warmth. Young Saywa, and Murabo, and Shumari, prompt as tinder upon all occasions, grasped the lesser chiefs' hands, and devoted themselves with smiles and jovial frank bearing to conquer the last remnants of savage sullenness, and succeeded so well that, in

---

<sup>6</sup>H.M. Stanley, II, 177 ff.

an incredible short time, the blood-brotherhood ceremony between the suddenly formed friends was solemnly entered into, and the irrevocable pact of peace and good will had been accomplished."<sup>7</sup>

Apparently unaware of the method of the ancient Semitic rite, here found in a degraded form, Stanley seems surprised at the mutual testing of blood between the contracting friends, in this instance. He says: "Blood-brotherhood was a beastly cannibalistic ceremony with these people, yet much sought after,--whether for the satisfaction of their thirst for blood, or that it involved an interchange of gifts, of which they must needs reap the most benefit. After an incision was made in each arm, both brothers bent their heads, and the aborigine was observed to suck with the greatest fervor; whether for love of blood or excess of friendship, it would be difficult to say."<sup>8</sup>

#### TRACES OF THE RITE IN EUROPE

##### Legendary Lore of the Norseland Peoples

Different methods of observing this primitive rite of blood-covenanting are indicated in the legendary lore of the Norseland peoples; and these methods, in all their variety, give added proof of the ever underlying idea of an inter-commingling of lives through an inter-commingling of blood. Odin was the beneficent god of light and knowledge, the promoter of heroism, and the protector of sacred covenants, in the mythology of the North. Lôké, or Lok, on the other hand, was the

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 281-83.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 286.

discordant and corrupting divinity; symbolizing, in his personality, "sin, shrewdness, deceitfulness, treachery, malice," and other phases of evil. In the poetic myths of the Norseland, it is claimed that at the beginning Odin and Lôké were in close union instead of being at variance; just as the Egyptian cosmogony made Osiris and Set in original accord, although in subsequent hostility; and as the Zoroastrians claimed that Ormuzd and Ahriman were at one, before they were in conflict. Odin and Lôké are, indeed, said to have been, at one time, in the close and sacred union of blood-friendship; having covenanted in that union by mingling their blood in a bowl, and drinking therefrom together.

The Elder Edda, or the earliest collection of Scandinavian songs, makes reference to this confraternity of Odin and Lôké. At a banquet of the gods, Lôké, who had not been invited, found an entrance, and there reproached his fellow divinities for their hostility to him. Recalling the indissoluble tie of blood-friendship, he said:

"Father of Slaughter, Odin, say,  
Rememberest not the former day,  
When ruddy in the goblet stood,  
For mutual drink, our blended blood?  
Rememberest not, thou then didst swear,  
The festive banquet ne'er to share,  
Unless thy brother Lok was there?"<sup>9</sup>

Another of the methods by which the rite of blood-friendship was

---

<sup>9</sup>T. Carlyle, "On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History," The Best Known Works of Thomas Carlyle (New York: Helycon, 1942), p. 159-184.

observed in the Norseland, was by causing the blood of the two covenanting persons to inter-flow from their pierced hands, while they lay together underneath a lifted sod. The idea involved seems to have been, the burial of the two individuals, in their separate personal lives, and the inter-mingling of those lives--by the inter-mingling of their blood--while in their temporary grave; in order to their rising again with a common life--one life, one soul, in two bodies. Thus it is told, in one of the Icelandic Sagas, of Thorstein, the heroic son of Viking, proffering "foster-brotherhood," or blood-friendship, to the valiant Angantyr, Jarl of the Orkneys. "Then this was resolved upon, and secured by firm pledges on both sides. They opened a vein in the hollow of their hands, crept beneath the sod, and there (with clasped hands inter-blood-flowing) they solemnly swore that each of them should avenge the other if any one of them should be slain by weapons."<sup>10</sup>

The rite of blood-friendship, in one form and another, finds frequent mention in the Norseland Sagas. Thus, in the Saga of Fridthjof of the Bold, the son of Thorstein:

"Champions twelve, too, had he--gray-haired, and princes in exploits,  
Comrades his father had loved, steel-breasted and scarred o'or the  
forehead.

Last on the champions' bench, equal-aged with Fridthjof, a stripling  
Sat, like a rose among withered leaves; Bjorn called they the hero--

---

<sup>10</sup>R.B. Anderson, Norse Mythology (Chicago: Griggs and Co., 1891), p. 59.

Glad as a child, but firm like a man, and yet wise as a graybeard; Up with Fridthjof he'd grown; they had mingled blood with each other, Foster-brothers in Northman wise; and they swore to continue Steadfast in weal and woe, each other revenging in battle."<sup>11</sup>

#### WORLD-WIDE SWEEP OF THE RITE

##### China

Concerning traces of the rite of blood-covenanting in China, where there are to be found fewest resemblances to the primitive customs of the Asiatic Semites, Dr. Yung Wing, the eminent Chinese educationalist and diplomat, gives the following illustration: "In the year 1674, when Kanhi was Emperor, of the present dynasty, we find that the Buddhist priests of Shanlin Monastery had rebelled against the authorities on account of persecution. In their encounters with the troops, they fought against great odds, and were finally defeated and scattered in different provinces, where they organized centres of the Triad Society, which claims an antiquity dated as far back as the Freemasons of the West. Five of these priests fled to the province of Hakwong, and there, Chin Kinnan, a member of the Hanlin College, who was degraded from office by his enemies, joined them; and it is said that they drank blood, and took the oath of brotherhood, to stand by each other in life or death."<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>R.B. Anderson, p. 191 ff.

<sup>12</sup>H.C. Trumbull, p. 43.

Burmah

The following description of the rite and its linkings, is given by the Rev. R.M. Luther, of Philadelphia, at one time a missionary among the Karens, in Burmah.

"The blood-covenant is well know, and commonly practised among the Karens of Burmah. There are three methods of making brotherhood, or truce, between members of one tribe and those of another.

"The first is the common method of eating together. This, however, is of but little binding force, being a mere agreement to refrain from hostilities for a limited time, and the truce thus made is liable to be broken at the briefest notice.

"The second method is that of planting a tree. The parties to this covenant select a young and vigorous sapling, plant it with certain ceremonies, and covenant with each other to keep peace so long as the tree lives. A covenant thus made is regarded as of greater force than that effected or sealed by the first method.

"The third method is that of the blood-covenant, properly so called. In this covenant the chief stands as the representative of the tribe, if it be a tribal agreement; or the father as the representative of the family, if it be a more limited covenant. The ceremonies are public and solemn. The most important act is, of course, the mingling of the blood. Blood is drawn from the thigh of each of the covenanting parties, and mingled together. Then each dips his finger into the blood and applies it to his lips. In some cases, it is said that the blood is actually drunk; but the more common method is that of touching the

lips with the blood-stained finger.

"This covenant is of the utmost force. It covers not merely an agreement of peace, or truce, but also a promise of mutual assistance in peace and in war. It also conveys to the covenanting parties mutual tribal rites. If they are chiefs, the covenant embraces their entire tribes. If one is a private individual, his immediate family and direct descendants are included in the agreement.

"I have never heard of the blood-covenant being broken. I do not remember to have inquired particularly on this point, because the way in which the blood-covenant was spoken of, always implied that its rupture was an unheard-of thing. It is regarded as a perfectly valid excuse for any amount of reckless devotion, or of unreasoning sacrifice on behalf of another, for a Karen to say: 'Thui p'aw th'coh li;' literally, 'The blood,--we have drunk it together.' An appeal for help on the basis of the blood-covenant is never disregarded.<sup>13</sup>

#### Borneo and the Cigarette of Peace

Yet another method of observing the rite, is reported from among the Kayans of Borneo. Its description is from the narrative of Spencer St. John, as follows: "Singauding (a Kayan chief) sent on board to request me to become his brother, by going through the sacred custom of imbibing each other's blood. I say imbibing, because it is either mixed with water and drunk, or else is placed within a native cigar, and drawn in with the smoke. I agreed to do so, and the following day was fixed

---

<sup>13</sup>H.C. Trumbull, p. 313 ff.

for the ceremony. It is called Barbiang by the Kayans; Bersabibah, by the Borneans (the Dayaks). I landed with our party of Malaya, and after a preliminary talk, to allow the population to assemble, the affair commenced . . . Stripping my left arm, Kum Lia took a small piece of wood, shaped like a knife-blade, and, slightly piercing the skin, brought blood to the surface; this he carefully scraped off. Then one of my Malaya drew blood in the same way from Singauding; and, a small cigarette being produced, the blood on the wooden blade was spread on the tobacco. A chief then arose, and walking to an open place, looked forth upon the river, and invoked their god and all the spirits of good and evil to be witness of this tie of brotherhood. The cigarette (blood-stained) was then lighted, and each of us took several puffs (receiving each other's blood by inhalation), and the ceremony was over.<sup>14</sup>

#### In the Eastern Archipelago

A traveler in the Malay Archipelago, tells of this rite, as he found it in Timor, and other islands of that region, among a people who represent the Malays, the Papuan, and the Polynesian races. His description is: "The ceremony is blood-brotherhood . . . or the swearing of eternal friendship, is an interesting nature, and is celebrated often by fearful orgies (excesses of the communion idea), especially when friendship is being made between families, or tribes, or kingdoms. The ceremony is the same in substance whether between two individuals,

---

<sup>14</sup>S. St. John, Life in the Forests of the Far East, I (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1863), p. 116 ff.

or (between) large companies. The contracting parties slash their arms, and collect the blood into a bamboo, into which Kanipa (coarse gin) or laru (Palm wine) is poured. Having provided themselves with a small fig-tree (halik) they adjourn to some retired spot, taking with them the sword and spear from the Luli chamber (the sacred room) of their own houses if between private individuals, or from the Uma-Luli of their suku (the sacred building of their village) if between large companies. Planting there the fig-tree, flanked by the sacred sword and spear, they hang on it a bamboo-receptacle, into which--after pledging each other in a portion of the mixed blood and gin--the remainder (of that mixture) is poured. Then each swears, 'If I be false, and be not a true friend, may my blood issue from my mouth, ears, nose, as it does from this bamboo!'--the bottom of the receptacle being pricked at the same moment, to allow the blood and gin to escape. The (blood-stained) tree remains and grows as a witness of their contract."

Of the close and binding nature of this blood-compact, among the Timorese, the observer goes on to say: "It is one of their most sacred oaths, and (is) almost never, I am told, violated; at least between individuals." As to its limitless force and scope, he adds: "One brother (one of these brother-friends in the covenant of blood) coming to another brother's house, is in every respect regarded as free (to do as he pleases), and (is) as much at home as its owner."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup>H.O. Forbes, A Naturalist's Wanderings in the Eastern Archipelago (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1885), p. 452.

North and South America

The covenant of blood-friendship has been noted also among the native races of both North and South America. A writer of three centuries ago, told of it as among the aborigines of Yucatan. "When the Indians of Pontonchan," he said, "receive new friends (covenant in a new friendship) as a proof of (their) friendship, they mutually, each), in the sight of the friend, drew some blood . . . from the tongue, hand, or arm, or from some other part (of the body)." And this ceremony is said to have formed "a compact for life."<sup>16</sup>

In Brazil, the Indians were said to have a rite of brotherhood so close and sacred that, as in the case of the Bedouin beyond the Jordan, its covenanting parties were counted as of one blood; so that marriage between those thus linked would be deemed incestuous. "There was a word in their language to express a friend who was loved like a brother; it is written Atourrassap. They who called each other by this name, had all things in common; the tie was held to be as sacred as that of consanguinity, and one could not marry the daughter or sister of the other."<sup>17</sup>

A similar tie of adopted brotherhood, or of close and sacred friendship, is recognized among the North American Indians. Writing of the Dakotas, or the Sioux, Dr. Riggs, says: "Where one Dakota takes another as his koda, i.e., god, or friend, they become brothers in each

---

<sup>16</sup>H. Bancroft, The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America, I (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1875), p. 741

<sup>17</sup>R. Southey, History of Brazil, I (London: Longman, 1810), p. 240.

other's families, and are, as such, of course unable to intermarry." And Burton, who made this same tribe a study, says of the Dakotas: "They are fond of adoption, and of making brotherhoods like the Africans; and so strong is the tie that marriage with the sister of an adopted brother is within the prohibited degree."<sup>18</sup>

#### LIGHT FROM THE CLASSICS

Lucian, the brilliant Greek thinker, who was born and trained in the East, writing in the middle of the second century of our era, is explicit as to the nature and method of this covenant as then practised in the East. In his Toxaris or Friendship, Mnesippus the Greek, and Toxaris and Scythian, are discussing friendship. Toxaris declares: "It can easily be shown that Scythian friends are much more faithful than Greek friends; and that friendship is esteemed more highly among us than among you." The Toxaris goes on to say: "But first I wish to tell you in what manner we (in Scythia) make friends; not in our drinking bouts as you do, nor simply because a man is of the same age (as ourselves), or because he is our neighbor. But, on the contrary, when we see a good man, and one capable of great deeds, to him we all hasten, and we (who would be friends) do all things together, so that we may not offend against friendship, or seem worthy to be rejected. And whenever one decides to be a friend, we (who would join in the covenant) make the greatest of all oaths, to live with one another, and to die, if need be,

---

<sup>18</sup>R.F. Burton, City of the Saints (London: Longman, 1861), p. 117.

the one for the other. And this is the manner of it: Thereupon, cutting our fingers, all simultaneously, we let the blood drop into a vessel and having dipped the points of our swords into it, both (of us) holding them together, we drink it. There is nothing which can loose us from one another after that."

Yet a little earlier than Lucian, Tacitus, foremost among Latin historians, gives record of this rite of blood-brotherhood as practised in the East. He is telling, in his Annals, of Rhadamistus, leader of the Iberians, who pretends to seek a covenant with Mithridates, King of the Armenians (yet farther east than Scythia), which should make firm the peace between the two nations, "diis testibus," "the gods being witnesses." Here Tacitus makes an explanation: "It is the custom of (Oriental) kings, as often as they come together to make covenant, to join right hands, to tie the thumbs together, and to tighten them with a knot. Then, when the blood is (thus) pressed to the finger tips, they draw blood by a light stroke, and lick it in turn. This they regard as a divine covenant, made sacred as it were, by mutual blood (or blended lives)."

There are several references, by classical writers, to this blood-  
friendship, or to this blood-covenanting, in connection with Catiline's conspiracy against the Roman Republic. Sallust, the historian of that conspiracy, says: "There were those at that time who said that Catiline, at this conference (with his accomplices) when he inducted them into the oath of partnership in crime, carried round in goblets human blood, mixed with wine; and that after all had tested of it, with an imprecatory oath,

as in man's wont in solemn rites (in Sharb el-'ahd," as the Arabs would say) he opened to them his plans." Florus, a later Latin historian, describing this conspiracy, says: "There was added the pledge of the league,--human blood,--which they drank as it was borne round to them in goblets." And yet later, Tertullian suggests that it was their own blood, mingled with wine, of which the fellow-conspirators drank together. "Concerning the eating of blood and other such tragic dishes," he says, "you read (I do not know where), what blood drawn from the arms, and tasted by one another, was the method of making covenant among certain nations. I know not but that under Catiline such blood was tasted."

In the Pitti Palace, in Florence, there is a famous painting of the conspiracy of Catiline, by Salvator Rosa; it is, indeed, Salvator Rosa's masterpiece, in the line of historical painting. This painting represents the covenanting by blood. Two conspirators stand face to face, their right hands clasped above a votive altar. The bared right arm of each is incised, a little below the elbow. The blood is streaming from the arm of one, into a cup which he holds, with his left hand, to receive it; while the dripping arm of the other conspirator shows that his blood has already flowed into the commingling cup. The uplifted hand of the daysman between the conspirators seems to indicate the imprecatory vows which the two are assuming, in the presence of the gods, and of the witnesses who stand about the altar. This is a clear indication of the traditional form of covenanting between Catiline and his fellow conspirators.

As far back, even, as the fifth century before Christ, we find an

explicit description of this Oriental rite of blood-covenanting, in the writings of "the Father of History." "Now the Scythians," says Herodotus, "make covenants in the following manner, with whomsoever they make them. Having poured out wine into a great earthen drinking-bowl, they mingle with it the blood of those cutting covenant, striking the body (of each person having a part in it) with a small knife, or cutting it slightly with a sword. Thereafter, they dip into the bowl, sword, arrows, axe, and javelin. But while they are doing this, they utter many invokings (of curse upon a breach of this covenant); and, afterwards, not only those who make the covenant, but those of their followers who are of the highest rank, drink off (the wine mingled with blood)."

Again Herodotus says of this custom, in his day: "Now the Arabians reverence in a very high degree pledges between man and man. They make these pledges in the following way. When they wish to make pledges to one another, a third man, standing in the midst of the two, cuts with a sharp stone the inside of the hands along the thumbs of the two making the pledges. After that, plucking some woolen floss from the garments of each of the two, he anoints with the blood seven stones (as the "heap of witness") which are set in the midst. While he is doing this he invokes Dionysus and Urania. When this rite is completed, he that has made the pledges (to one from without) introduces the (former) stranger to his friends--or the fellow citizen (to his fellows) if the rite was performed with a fellow-citizen."

Thus it is clear, that the rite of blood-brotherhood, or of blood-friendship, which is to-day a revered form of sacred covenanting

in the unchangeable East, was recognized as an established custom among Oriental peoples twenty-three centuries ago. Its beginning must certainly have been prior to that time; if not indeed long prior.

#### THE RITE IN EGYPT

Going back, to very ancient records, in the monuments of Egypt, we find evidence of the existence of the covenant of blood in those early days. Even then it seems to have been a custom to covenant by tasting the blood from another's arm; and this inter-transference of blood was supposed to carry an inter-commingling, or an inter-merging, of natures. So far was this symbolic thought carried, that the ancient Egyptians spoke of the departed spirit as having entered into the nature, and, indeed, into the very being, of the gods, by the rite of tasting blood from the divine arm.

"The Book of the Dead," as it is commonly called, or "The Book of the Going Forth into Day,"--("The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day,")--is a group, of series, of ancient Egyptian writings, representing the state and the needs and the progress of the soul after death. A copy of this Funereal Ritual, as it is sometimes called, "more or less complete, according to the fortune of the deceased, was deposited in the case of every mummy." "As the Book of the Dead is the most ancient, so it is undoubtedly the most important, of the sacred books of the Egyptians;" it is, in fact, "according to Egyptian notions, essentially an inspired work;" hence its contents have exceptional dogmatic value. In this Book of the Dead,

there are several obvious references to the rite of blood-covenanting. Some of these are in a chapter of the Ritual which was found transcribed in a coffin of the Eleventh Dynasty; thus carrying it back to a period prior to the days of Abraham.

"Give me your arm; I am made as ye," says the departed soul, speaking to the gods. Then, in explanation of this statement, the pre-historic gloss of the Ritual goes on to say: "The blood is that which proceeds from the member of the Sun, after he goes along cutting himself; the covenant blood which unites the soul and the god is drawn from the flesh of Ra, when he has cut himself in the rite of that covenant. By this covenant-cutting, the deceased becomes one with the covenanting gods. Again, the departed soul, speaking as Osiris,--or as the Osirian, which every mummy represents,--says: "I am the soul in his two halves." Once more there follows the explanation: "The soul in his two halves is the soul of the Sun (of Ra), and the soul of Osiris (of the deceased)." Here is substantially the proverb of friendship cited by Aristotle, "One soul in two bodies," at least two thousand years before the days of the Greek philosopher. How much earlier it was recognized, does not yet appear.

Again, when the deceased comes to the gateway of light, he speaks of himself as linked with the great god Seb; as one "who loves his arm," and who is, therefore, sure of admittance to him, within the gates. By the covenant of the blood-giving arm, "the Osiris opens the turning door; he has opened the turning door." Through oneness of blood, he has come into oneness of life with the gods; there is no longer the barrier of a door between them. The separating veil is rent.

An added indication that the covenant of blood-friendship furnished the ancient Egyptians with their highest conception of a union with the divine nature through an interflowing of the divine blood--as the divine life--is found in the amulet of this covenant; corresponding with the token of the covenant of blood-friendship, which, as fastened to the arm, or about the neck, is deemed so sacred and so precious in the primitive East to-day. The hieroglyphic character which is translated "arm" is also translated "bracelet," or "armlet," as if in suggestion of the truth, generally accepted, that the blood-furnishing arm was represented by the token of the arm-encircling, or of the neck-encircling, bond, in the covenant of blood. Moreover, a "red talisman," or red amulet, stained with "the blood of Isis," and containing a record of the covenant, was placed at the neck of the mummy as an assurance of safety to his soul. "When this book (this amulet-record) has been made," says the Ritual, "it causes Isis to protect him (the Osirian), and Horus he rejoices to see him." "If this book (this covenant-token) is known," says Horus, "he (the deceased) is in the service of Osiris . . . His name is like that of the gods."

There are various other references to this rite, or other indications of its existence, than those already cited, in the Book of the Dead. "I have welcomed Thoth (or the king) with blood; taking the gore from the blessed of Seb," is one of these gleams. Again, there are incidental mentions of the tasting of blood by gods and by men; and of the proffering, or the uplifting, of the blood-filled arm, in covenant with

the gods.<sup>19</sup>

Basic to all of these Blood Covenants is the belief that the blood is the life of a living being; not merely that blood is essential to life, but that, in a peculiar sense, it is life; that it actually vivifies by its presence; and that by its passing from one organism to another it carries and imparts life. The inter-commingling of the blood of the two organisms is, therefore, equivalent to the inter-commingling of the lives, of the personalities, of the natures, thus brought together; so that there is, in a sense, one life in the two bodies, a common life between the two covenanters. They become, as it were, "a single soul."

---

<sup>19</sup>cf., H.C. Trumbull.