

SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS OF THE HOLY COMMUNION.

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IN connection with the institution of the Holy Communion there are some aspects of its historical background to which the writer feels attention might profitably be given. It is obvious that the first members of the Church were Jews familiar with their sacrificial customs and their significance, familiar as most of us are not familiar with the book of Leviticus, which according to Edersheim was the first book of the Old Testament studied in the Synagogue Schools. Obviously the typical interpretation of the sacrificial system in relation to Jesus Christ was a Christian development which is gradually unfolded in the New Testament and can be carried forward with great profit by the Christian student. But prior to that development and understanding of the Christian interpretation of the sacrifices of the law in relation to the atoning death of Christ there are some things which, humanly speaking, were axioms to the Jews and which are not obvious to Christians unfamiliar with a sacrificial ritual. It is to these that we wish to draw fresh attention. They have a direct bearing on the use and interpretation of the Holy Communion. Some are obvious and familiar. Others are less familiar, but recorded in the Old Testament. For instance, we sing in the Easter anthem, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast." The sacrifice of the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread are really two things, not just one. There were five different sacrifices instituted and regulated by the Levitical code, the burnt offering, the meal or meat offering, the peace offering, the sin offering and the trespass offering. Of each of these it is possible to quote New Testament Scripture as interpreting it in relation to the Sacrifice and offering of Christ. Sacrifice and offering are not precisely synonymous terms, though many writers on the Holy Communion ignore the distinction. It is especially in connection with the Peace offering that the writer feels we need to get back to Jewish thought and practice if we are to understand certain aspects of the Holy Communion. The Passover Lamb was a Peace offering, not a burnt sacrifice. Our Lord's language recorded in the discourse in St. John vi has certain clear references to the Peace offering, and what was plain to the Jews and caused at the time a large defection of His Disciples was His reference to eating the Bread of God, which by Jewish ritual and ordinance was never eaten. The Bread of God was the fat and blood of the Peace offering, Ezekiel xlv. 7, "My bread, the fat and the blood," and in Leviticus iii. 11 and 16 "food" = "bread." Jesus claimed to be the Living Bread and

that He would give that bread "His Flesh for the life of the world." He insisted that believers must eat it. If His language meant anything to His hearers it must have meant that He was to become a Peace offering for the life of the world.

In the ritual of the Peace offering the blood of the victim was sprinkled on the altar, the fat and certain other parts were burnt on the altar and the instruction with which Leviticus iii. concludes is the perpetual statute, "Ye shall eat neither fat nor blood." The remainder of the Peace offering was eaten. The Priest received the breast and the right shoulder, Leviticus vii. 31-34. The worshippers feasted on the rest. But they must be ceremonially clean. The victim was eaten the same day that the blood was spilled or even on the second day, but not on the third day. If any remained till the third day it was to be burnt, Leviticus vii. 17, 18. The Passover Lamb sacrificed was a Peace offering. By eating thereof one partook of the Sacrifice. A person unclean could not eat and would not be considered as partaking of its benefits. There can be no doubt that the Peace offering was the most popular type of sacrifice, for it afforded an opportunity for a common meal with a religious significance.

The Passover was a memorial feast recalling the national deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, and it was the general practice in Israel in the time of our Lord for the faithful to attend the Passover even if they did not keep the other feasts. As the Passover Feast was a continual remembrance of the national birthday of deliverance from Egyptian Bondage, so the Holy Communion is a continual remembrance of our Lord's Exodus which He accomplished for us at Jerusalem, thereby delivering us from the bondage of sin. This "Exodus" was the topic of conversation on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Whatever our private opinions may be in regard to the Day on which our Lord ate the Passover, the language of the Gospels is explicit that it was the Passover. By St. Matthew xxvi. 17, 19 His disciples made ready the Passover. St. Mark's language, xiv. 12 and 16, is practically identical. St. Luke xxii. 8, 11 and 13 agree with some added details. He too records in verse 15 our Lord's words, "I earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." The testimony is direct and explicit that the Lord's Supper was instituted at the Passover. It is not necessary to discuss here various explanations of St. John xviii. 28. Quite possibly the term Passover is used for the whole feast which lasted seven days. Our authority for the Lord's Supper rests on the New Testament, so does the statement that it was instituted at the Passover. Exactly when the Disciples first *realised* that the Lord's Supper was the memorial feast of the Birth of the Church as the Passover was of the birth of the Nation is not specially pertinent to our present inquiry. It is a fact that the forgiveness of sins is prominent in the early preaching recorded in Acts. That the Lord's Supper was to be kept in remembrance of Christ's death is obvious from the words of institution recorded in the Gospels, and

I Corinthians and the teaching of the Church Catechism that it is a continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the Death of Christ is happily not in dispute. But it is worth while remembering that the Passover feast was and is a memorial feast to this day among the Jews and that its historical association is still the feature most prominent at it. The words "Do this in remembrance of Me" would have a weight with the Apostles which we can hardly realise.

A second historical connection is perhaps not quite so familiar to us. Our Lord's words recorded in St. Luke xxii. 20, "This cup is the New Covenant of my blood which is shed for you," recall the words of Exodus xxiv. 8, "Behold the blood of the Covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." Again in St. Luke xxii. 29 He says, "I covenant unto you a kingdom as my Father hath covenanted unto me." It must be remembered that to the Jew eating and drinking together established a covenant relation between those who ate and drank. This is axiomatic among Orientals even to this day, and by partaking of the Lord's Supper the members of the early Church were constantly reminded of their Christian Fellowship in the Kingdom of Christ. This aspect of the Lord's Supper which has doubtless won for it the name of Holy Communion is not dwelt upon in the New Testament, probably because the point was so familiar and obvious to the members of the early Church that it did not occur to them to state it. The barrier between Jews and Gentiles, first broken down when the household of Cornelius was enrolled in the Christian Church, was largely an artificial barrier connected with eating and drinking. The objection to eating and drinking in the idol temple is based on the social significance of the common meal, I Corinthians x. 20, 21. St. Peter's withdrawal from eating with Gentiles at Antioch recorded in Galatians ii. 11-13 was a blow at the Unity of the Church publicly rebuked by St. Paul. Caste distinctions, whether national or social, are incompatible with eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper, and by the participation of the Cup we are together partakers of the covenanted privileges which we all share in the kingdom of heaven, manifested to us here on earth in the Church.

Let us then summarise the points which this brief survey brings out. The Lord Jesus spoke of giving His Body and Blood in language which clearly indicates that He was Himself becoming a Peace offering for the sins of the world. Both Priest and worshipper become partakers of the Peace offering by eating their portions of the sacrifice. Reservation of any part beyond the third day was forbidden. The Supper was instituted at the Passover preceding the Birth of the Christian Church as the Passover was instituted at the eve before the Deliverance of Israel from Egyptian Bondage.

The cup in the Lord's Supper is a visible symbol of Communion or fellowship in the covenanted privileges of the kingdom, and our Lord's words recall the old covenant at Sinai superseded by the

new covenant in His Blood. The Communion is a memorial feast of His sacrifice.

But we must go back now to the thought of the Peace offering. By the analogy familiar to the Jews those who ate their appointed share of the Peace offering partook of the sacrifice and all its benefits. Of the various offerings and sacrifices some were merely spectacular and some were of the character of a social meal. The burnt offering and to some extent the sin and trespass offerings were spectacular. Scripture proof can be adduced to show that our Lord fulfilled every one of the types of sacrifice. He was made "sin" for us, 2 Corinthians v. 21. His soul was made a trespass offering, Isaiah liii. 10. Some sin offerings were burnt without the camp, Leviticus viii. 17. Cp. Hebrews xiii. 11, 12 which specially refers to sin offerings on the day of Atonement.

"The Passover combines all the chief features of the five sacrifices, a he lamb, or a he goat, roasted entire; suggesting at once burnt offering (the lamb) (sin offering, the goat), peace offering and trespass offering, while the unleavened bread eaten with it suggests the meat offering. It may be said to apply all the sacrifices to Israel." (Notes by C. H. Waller.)

Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast.

The sacrifice and offering are both done. They were finished on Calvary. The Bread broken and the wine poured out are symbols of the Death of Christ, not only by the breaking of the Bread, but by the separation of wine representing His Blood from the Bread which represents His Body.

What is the effect of Consecration? Primarily it is by the repetition of Christ's act in breaking the bread and taking the cup with His words that we identify our Holy Eucharist with the sacrifice of His Death on the Cross. Where there is consecration those who eat and drink partake of His Sacrifice and claim the benefits thereof. The visible elements of which we partake assure us that we are partakers of His sacrifice. By partaking of that which is thus identified with Him we spiritually eat His Body and drink His Blood. Non-communicating attendance could have had no significance or be regarded as conveying any benefit to the worshipper in the early Church, any more than a non-participating slave assisting at the Passover would have been considered to share its benefits and privileges.

By the analogy of the Peace offering reservation beyond one day was forbidden and would almost certainly have been alien to the mind of a Christian Jew in the early Church.

By the analogy of the Peace offering the part of the victim eaten was really part of the sacrifice, but was not "the Bread of God," which was the fat and the blood, and yet the worshippers who ate were partakers of the sacrifice of the fat and blood.

Without consecration bread and wine can at any time be used as memorials of the Death of Christ, but the Communion is more than a memorial. Consecration of the elements is necessary not to

change the substance of the bread and wine but to identify them by the repetition of Christ's words and acts with His sacrifice.

Adoration of the elements is idolatrous because we are only to adore Christ. Participation of the elements assures us of our participation in His sacrifice. The benefits being spiritual must be conveyed to our spirits by the Holy Spirit of God.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper belongs to the Church which is His body. The officers of the Church have authority to designate who may consecrate the elements and to make regulations for its proper and reverent administration. There is no indication in the New Testament that this function must be confined to any one class of officials, but by the analogy of the Peace offering, the offering of the Bread of God was done by the Priests, and after that was done the head of the family or group would naturally preside at the subsequent feast as Elkanah the father of Samuel did.

We ought to encourage our people to come to Communion. Participation is historically necessary and non-participation historically incorrect. Participation cements the fellowship of the communicants in the Body of the Church. It actually conveys to them the covenant privileges won for us through Christ's death. But unworthy participation is strongly to be condemned because we do not discern the Lord's Body.

Consecration without participating communicants is subversive of the whole idea of the Peace offering.

THE REVEALING CHRIST. By the Rt. Rev. J. De Wolf Perry, D.D., and others. Pp. vi + 165. *Harper Brothers.* 5s. net.

For guidance and help during the Lenten season, the presiding bishop of the American Episcopal Church has caused to be issued this excellent volume of meditations and prayers to which ten outstanding preachers and teachers have contributed. Each day from Ash Wednesday to Good Friday has its own helpful chapter. Some idea of the contents and scope of the book may be gathered from the leading thought of each week: The Need, The Foreshadowing, The Character, The Message, The Kingdom, The Passion and Triumph of the Revealing Christ. Dr. Fort Newton, who is responsible for the meditations upon "The Message of the Revealing Christ," provides deeply thoughtful chapters upon the Mystery, the Fellowship, the Discovery, the Adventure, the Challenge, and the Companion. The other preachers, with no less power and spiritual insight, make their valuable contributions to this volume which, not only in the United States, but here and elsewhere, is sure of grateful reception, once its existence is known. It compares more than favourably with the books that have been recommended for Lenten reading by the authorities in England.

F. B.