

## THE LAST SUPPER AND THE PASCHAL MEAL.

Two problems come before us when we attempt to investigate the question whether the Last Supper was a Paschal Meal. We have (1) to consider the probabilities as to the historical facts, and (2) to explain the statements of the Evangelists. As every one knows who has studied the subject, some statements in the Gospels imply that the Last Supper was a Paschal Meal, some statements imply that it was not. No answer therefore is sufficient or final that does not account for the statements against the proposed solution, as well as those which support it.

First, then, as to historical probabilities.

There can be little doubt that general considerations make against the theory that the Last Supper was a regular Paschal Meal. The arguments are familiar, but they will bear repetition. Jesus was condemned and crucified by authority. The trial may have been irregular and unjust, but at least the pretence of law was observed; it was no mere assassination, or the result of a chance riot. This being the case, we can hardly imagine that the Jewish 'High-Priests' who compassed Jesus's death would have thought the actual Festival-day an appropriate time. They would be engaged with other duties. Either they would get the thing done before Passover began, or if they had Jesus arrested they would wait till the Feast was over. As a matter of fact, this view is actually echoed in the New Testament: 'Not on the Feast-Day, lest there be a riot' is what Caiaphas and his advisers thought, according to Mk. xiv 2; and Acts xii 4 tells us that when Herod had Peter in custody, though he had every intention of killing him and knew it would be a popular act, he nevertheless waited till Passover-time should come to an end. With regard to 'Not on the Feast-Day' in Mk. xiv 2, Wellhausen acutely remarks that the Evangelist probably judged the intention of the Jerusalemite Grandees *a posteriori*, from their actual performance, i. e. we may infer from the verse that the arrest of Jesus was actually accomplished before Passover arrived.

With these general considerations agree many details in the Christian tradition. (1) St Paul speaks of 'Christ our Passover', i. e. (if we may press the phrase) our Lord died when the Paschal lambs were being killed. Some weight also must be given to the fact that when he speaks of the Last Supper he dates it as 'the night when He was betrayed': had it been the Paschal meal it would have been more perspicuous to have said 'at the last Passover'. (2) The Johannine

writings carefully avoid connecting the Supper with the Paschal meal, and in Joh. xviii 28 and xix 14 it is definitely asserted that the Crucifixion took place before Passover-time. (3) The saying at the Supper peculiar to St Luke ('With desire I have desired', Lk. xxii 15, 16) is at least equally interpretable on the theory that the Supper was not the Paschal meal, as that it was the meal. (4) A good many features in St Mark imply that the Feast had not begun at the time of the Crucifixion.

What is there, then, on the other side? The answer is plain: certain statements in St Mark's narrative definitely imply that the Last Supper was the Paschal meal. These must now be considered. But before doing so, it is proper to notice the simplification in this old vexed question caused by our present understanding of the Synoptic Problem. Mark is the source both of Matthew and Luke, practically the only main source of Matthew's whole Passion narrative and one main source of Luke's. All the statements in Matthew and Luke which imply that the Last Supper was a Paschal meal are taken from Mark. If we can find an explanation of the statements in Mark our problem is solved.

Formerly the case was different. When the agreement of Matthew, Mark, and Luke was regarded as in some way a consensus of three traditions any other view than that set forth by these three Gospels seemed like a minority protest, something maintained in the face of ancient Christian tradition. It was as if the *consensus fidelium* could be invoked for the theory of a Paschal meal. Indeed the alternative view was commonly spoken of as the 'Johannine' chronology, as if in this matter the author of the Fourth Gospel was a voice crying in the wilderness, whether he was supposed to have reached his position from superior historical information or from dogmatic grounds.

The point is of considerable importance, since it affords a justification for reopening this much-discussed affair. It will therefore bear restatement from another point of view. It might be urged that this problem cannot primarily be one of the interpretation of the text of particular narratives, that the nature of the Last Supper is a matter about which there must have been in the earliest times a *consensus fidelium*, and that our only business is to find out what this *consensus* really was. It seems natural to the modern Christian, for whom the narrative of the Passion has so much associated religious meaning, who is so familiar with this part of the Gospel-story as a feature in his liturgical exercises, to imagine that such an important element of the background as the relation of these events to the Jewish festival cannot ever have been left in doubt. This or that story of Jesus in Galilee may rest upon the evidence of a single narrator, but the date of the Last Supper (we feel) must have been notorious.

I venture to think this view, though now it seems plausible, is false. There is first the obvious fact that the Gospels themselves are, at least superficially, at variance over the date, and that this difference is reflected in the difference of East and West over the ritual use or non-use of 'azymes'. But further there is one fact which can hardly ever be too much emphasized, when we attempt to realize for ourselves how far the common knowledge of the earliest believers extended, the fact, I mean, that the Passion-Gospel of Matthew is wholly based on Mark. And this is the case though 'Matthew' appears to be Palestinian, and can tell us how the Jews call such and such a place in Jerusalem 'unto this day'. This seems to me clearly to indicate that for matters of incident and history, such as the things we are considering, there was no *consensus fidelium* at all, and that the ancient Church, as well as ourselves, are indebted to the reminiscences of St Mark—his own, and what he had heard at various times from Simon Peter—for a knowledge of the 'events' of the Passion.

We must therefore consider carefully the statements in Mark which tend to represent the Supper as a Passover. They are to be found in Mk. xiv 12-21, 26, for *vv.* 22-25, containing the account of the Bread and Wine, are neutral, if not actually incompatible with the Paschal view. Our Lord takes bread (*ἄρτον*, *v.* 22), which does not suggest an unleavened cake, and there is no hint in these verses of a material lamb at the meal.

With the other verses it is different. They do all imply that the Evangelist intends to represent the Supper as the Jewish Passover. Let us take them in order. A formal date is given in *v.* 12: 'on the first day of the Unleavened Bread, when they slew the Passover'. This sounds like a contradiction in terms, for the Lambs were killed in the afternoon of 14 Nisan (Jewish reckoning), and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (*τὰ ἄζυμα*) did not begin till after sunset, i. e. 15 Nisan. But it is conceivable that 14 Nisan might be reckoned as the first day of unleavened bread, for no leaven was eaten on that day after the first meal. Thus the date in Mk. xiv 12 means 14 Nisan. The evening meal of *v.* 17, therefore, is on 15 Nisan, i. e. it is the Paschal meal, which had been 'prepared' by the two disciples (*v.* 16). Wellhausen further points out that 'dipping' in the 'dish' (*v.* 20) suggests something cooked with sauce or gravy (*harōseth*); and, as it is not supposed that Jesus and the Disciples ate meat every day, this also implies the Paschal Lamb. Coming in to the City from Bethany indicates that the Supper was a Passover, which could only be eaten in a certain local area. Finally, the *ὕμνησαντες* of *v.* 26 suggests the singing of the *Hallel*: this is perhaps the most telling argument of all to a modern investigator, for the word is dropped by the way. No

stress is laid by the Evangelist on the singing, but our knowledge of Jewish custom tells us that it was a piece of the *Seder* ritual.

Undoubtedly there is here a good deal of evidence, though not all of it is of equal weight. 'He that dippeth with me in the dish' very likely means, as Wellhausen himself points out, no more than 'My table-companion'. It is only in Joh. xiii 26 that the phrase is materialized into an actual individual sop given there and then to Judas. But the other details must be held to shew that Mark thought the Supper was the Passover, and I confess that I find it difficult to refuse to accept *ἑμνήσαντες*. I am not sure there was a Lamb on the table, but I must believe that the disciples sang.

The verses above examined are the only ones in which either the Last Supper is regarded as the Paschal meal or the story of the Crucifixion is told in such a manner as to suggest the Feast had already begun. The afternoon of the Crucifixion is merely described as Paraskeue, i. e. the time before the Sabbath (*προσάββατον*, Mk. xv 42); Simon of Cyrene comes in 'from the country' (*ἀπ' ἀγροῦ*, Mk. xv 21), apparently still in his working clothes; the prisoner to be released at the Feast is still in custody (Mk. xv 6). Granting, then, that the true date for the Crucifixion is 14 Nisan, and consequently that the Last Supper took place twenty-four hours before the time of the Paschal Meal, what explanation can be given of the procedure of Mark, who evidently intends to describe it as the Paschal Meal?

Several hypotheses have been put forward. First there is the theory of Mr Box, that the Eucharistic acts correspond not to the Paschal Meal itself, but to the *Kiddush* before Passover, a Jewish rite of hallowing or preparation. Mr Box urges, and with reason, that there is a striking resemblance between the actually practised *Kiddush* and our Lord's recorded actions with the Bread and Wine.<sup>1</sup> But even if we accept this our problem is not solved, for *Kiddush* immediately precedes the actual celebration of the day, e. g. *Kiddush* for Sabbath is done on what we call Friday evening, not twenty-four hours earlier. Moreover, we have to account for the definite wording of Mark. We read: 'they prepared the Passover (*τὸ πάσχα*), and when it was evening Jesus came with the Twelve, and while they were eating . . . And having sung they went out.' Whatever the historical facts were, the narrator evidently imagines himself to be describing *τὸ πάσχα*.

Another theory is that it was an anticipatory Passover. But it does not seem to be proved that anticipatory Passovers were ever held to be admissible by any variety of the Jewish people.

Yet I venture to think that both of these theories contain some

<sup>1</sup> G. H. Box *The Jewish Antecedents to the Eucharist* in *J. T. S.* iii 357-369.

amount of truth. Only they must be so stated as not to imply that either Jesus or the Disciples supposed that they were in any way 'keeping' Passover, or doing anything legal or valid from the Jewish point of view. *Observata lege plene cibis in legalibus*—that is the theory which must, I think, be rejected. I do not think there is any Jewish ceremony, binding or optional, to which the Last Supper corresponds, beyond the obvious binding duty of Grace before eating and drinking.

And here I would bring in the consideration of Lk. xxii 15, 16, interpreting the words in the sense of my article in this JOURNAL (vol. ix 569 ff), viz. that they imply that Jesus had much wished to eat the Passover of that year with the Disciples, but after all would *not* be able to do so. From other recorded sayings of that eventful evening, it appears that He already anticipated that He would be arrested and His followers scattered that very night, before cock-crow. The catastrophe would come in any case before the time for eating Passover. Events had moved rapidly: the triumph of the adversaries might not have seemed inevitable on Palm Sunday or on the Monday or Tuesday, but by the time of the meal with Simon the Leper Jesus already anticipates immediate death. Why had He so earnestly desired to eat that Passover with His Disciples? Perhaps He was convinced that it was a date which would mark a second Deliverance, comparable to that of Israel from Egypt. What a Feast that would be, when those who had persevered with Him in His trials ate at His table in the Kingdom of God! If on the coming Friday He and they would be parted, they could not eat that Passover together. But though they could not eat Passover together there was yet time for a farewell supper—and Jesus and the Disciples were actually in possession of an appropriate room, where they had planned to hold the Passover. They could have a Last Supper on Thursday evening.

According to this view the Last Supper was not a Jewish festal meal at all, any more than the 'Feast at the House of Simon the Leper' was. But if Jesus designed during the course of it to perform a solemn symbolical act with the bread and wine on the table—whether this act was intended (or specifically commanded) to be repeated does not matter for this argument—then it is only likely that the 'form' of this act would have a general likeness to existing religious practices at table. Hence the resemblance to *Kiddūsh*; it was not a *Kiddūsh* of something to come, but the form of the sacrament (if we may use the later technical terms) was the form of *Kiddūsh*, especially in the detail of a single cup handed round to all present. Further, Jesus and the Twelve may really have sung the *Hallel* or part of it. The crowd of Galilean sympathisers had shouted *Hosanna*: this

suggests that Ps. cxviii was just at this time in the mouth and hearts of the Disciples.

But how are we to explain the view, the mistaken view, of Mark? Here I venture to think a little of what some persons might call 'rationalizing' may, after all, not be out of place. Let us suppose that the Second Evangelist is, as tradition declares, none other than John Mark. Is it not possible that his exceptional position may have been the reason why so much of his story of Maundy Thursday night bears the mark of an eyewitness, and yet may have actually contributed to his confusion of the Supper with a Passover meal?

For the eyewitness we may in the first place appeal to Mk. xiv 51, 52, the quite pointless story of the youth who had followed Jesus to Gethsemane and was so nearly arrested—pointless, that is, unless the youth is the writer himself. From the moment the youth disappears the narrative becomes general; before that we have the amazing scene of the 'Agony' (when Peter was asleep!) and the dramatic picture of the Arrest. The youth had followed with the others (συνηκολούθει, v. 51); therefore he had been at the house where the Supper was held. It is a reasonable conjecture, then, that the house was the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where afterwards we find the Christians assembled (Acts xii 12).

But this leads to further inferences. The episode of the man with the pitcher of water (Mk. xiv 13 ff) is very odd. What is particularly odd is that Matthew, who tells the story from Mark, evidently does not regard the rendezvous as in any way miraculous (Matt. xxvi 18). We must therefore suppose that an arrangement had been made: for aught we know, the man with the pitcher may have been Barnabas, Mark's uncle, or (quite as probably) Barnabas may have been the person called οἰκοδεσπότης in Mk. xiv 14. In that case, if Mark was a young boy about the house he may have actually remembered the two men coming to his home and the preparation of the room as for a *Seder*. He may have heard the company singing *Hosanna* and other *Hallel*-strains before they departed. His acquaintance with Jewish customs, judging from other passages in his Gospel, appears to have been a sort of ignorant familiarity, the reminiscences of boyhood as distinct either from really accurate knowledge or from book-learning.

Here, as elsewhere, Mark writes ὅσα ἐμνημόνευσε, οὐ μέντοι τάξει, from memory but not on a consistent plan. No doubt those who thought of our Lord as the true Paschal Lamb were confirmed by that thought in dating the Crucifixion just when the Paschal lambs were being slain. But, on the other hand, those who regarded the Christian Eucharist as the equivalent of the Jewish Passover, or had begun to cherish any of the lines of thought leading up to the symbolism and

doctrine expressed in the Corpus Christi Hymns of St Thomas Aquinas, those who wished to keep the Fast of Holy Week in connexion with a Sunday Eucharist and not (like the *Quartodecimans*) in connexion with a lunar month—all these would feel that it was congruous that the Last Supper should have been a Passover. And if this view be specially associated with Rome, as Dr B. W. Bacon points out, then Mark at Rome writing thirty years after the event might very well feel that his reminiscences of a Paschal character concerning the Last Supper shewed that it really was a Passover. Even so he writes ἀκριβῶς. He introduces no lamb, and he makes no alteration in the story of the Trial or Crucifixion to suggest that the day was actually the day of the Feast. The details which he actually records may really have happened: what is wrong is the construction which he puts upon his reminiscences.

The view here defended is in a sense eclectic. It takes account both of the *Kiddūsh*-element noticed by Mr Box, and the anti-Quartodeciman element noticed by Dr Bacon. Wrede, no doubt, would have called it 'psychologizing'. But I venture to think that this is one of the cases where imaginative psychology is as safe a weapon as literary critical analysis. I do not think there were two documents before the Evangelist; I do think he was confused by his own recollections, the recollections of his boyhood.

One other consideration may be noticed. The household in which John Mark lived was, if not definitely 'Christian' already, at least in full sympathy with the Prophet of Galilee. In that household Jesus and His Twelve had had their last meal, in the room which had been got ready (or was at least partly got ready) for their Passover. That was on 14 Nisan. Passover was to be eaten on the following evening, on the evening of Good Friday. What sort of a Paschal Feast can we suppose was eaten in that household? Is it to be supposed that it was eaten at all? What memory of the *Seder* of that year would John Mark carry in his mind? Would not this tend to make him think of the other Supper as a Paschal Meal?

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