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Baptism, Passover and Eucharist

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THIS review-article has two purposes. One is to take notice of a splendid work on the sacraments that deserves to be widely read and studied: Neville Clark's *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments*.¹ The other is to take serious issue with the author's handling of the Passover and to make some suggestions on problems that arise.

A statement by a Baptist in one of the Lund volumes might well set off by way of antithesis the standpoint from which Clark writes:

The fact is that there is no group of Christians anywhere to whom the ordinances are as utterly destitute of meaning from the standpoint of saving efficacy as they are in the thinking of the Baptists. To us the ordinances are not sacraments; that is, they are not vehicles of grace.²

If Neville Clark, himself a Baptist, has read this affirmation, he must have shuddered as he did so. His book has a richness of sacramental teaching that is in marked contrast to the saying just quoted. His emphasis is upon the sacramental, the sacrificial and the corporal. One can not help asking which line of thought represents the genuine Baptist position and what this clash portends for the ecumenical scene.

The first three chapters give us a treatment of baptism in the light of modern scholarship that would be hard to better for balance and insight. He relates baptism in the Synoptics to its Old Testament background as initiatory, ethical, eschatological, and universal (p. 10). Like Cullmann he finds the key to the baptism of Jesus in Jordan in the fusion of the concepts of Messiah and Servant (p. 14). The obscurity of the references in all four Gospels to the practice of baptism by Jesus and his disciples is given a suggestive theological light in terms of their concern with the "real" baptism of Jesus on the Cross.³ The baptism in Jordan is only a partial fulfilment of John's rite. "Christian baptism remained an impossibility until in death Jesus had fulfilled his baptism for all men" (p. 19). The baptism of the Spirit, prophesied by John, became possible and actual at Pentecost. "Christian baptism has been inaugurated" (p. 19. Cf. on the Fourth Gospel, pp. 27f.).

Although much awaits solution in the relation of water-baptism to the outpouring of the Spirit, Clark argues with strength that they are inseparable. Regarding *Acts*, in which the Spirit is the *fons et origo* of the Church, two generalizations are safe. (1) Baptism is the outward manifestation of a

1. Neville Clark, *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments*. London: S.C.M. Press, 1956 (Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 17). Pp. 96. \$1.65.

2. R. Claibourne Johnson in *Ways of Worship*, ed. Edwall, Hayman and Maxwell, pp. 142f.

3. The whole subject is discussed in relation to the writings of Cullmann, Flemington, Lampe, Dodd and many other scholars, British and Continental.

believing response to the Gospel,⁴ and, as such, the appointed rite of initiation into the Church, and (2) it is connected with cleansing and forgiveness and the reception of the Holy Spirit (p. 21). Clark feels that these attitudes are still too reminiscent of John the Baptist. The profounder meaning emerges only in St. Paul, with whom the primary meaning of cleansing becomes "overpowered by the connection made by Jesus between baptism and the cross" (pp. 22f.). Paul made this truth potent by identifying the Spirit with the Spirit of Christ. "The Galatians are reminded of what the putting on of their garments after baptism really signifies" (p. 24). To be in the Spirit is to be in Christ, and this means to belong to the Church. Clark quotes Bultmann with approval: "'In Christ' . . . is primarily an ecclesiological formula" (p. 24).⁵

Part of Clark's good service is to show how integral to Paul's theology the sacrament of baptism is. It is often in Paul's mind even when there is no more than an aorist tense to show that this is so (p. 25: e.g., Rom. 8:15, with Gal. 3:2; Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:3). "There is little doubt that the New Testament view of baptism is of a rite that is effective rather than merely symbolic" (p. 32). It unites us with Christ by giving us "entry into the Church which is his resurrection body" (p. 30). There is some confusion of expression on this valuable page, where Clark is expounding with an excellent spiritual realism the meaning of Christ's *body*. The statement just quoted needs to be reconciled with this other one: "The Church did not create the sacraments: rather are the sacraments perpetually creative of the Church" (p. 84). The heart of the matter is the truth that union with Christ is impossible apart from the unity of Christ which is his total body (p. 33). As we might say, baptism is not just a doorway. It is the house also.

One must confess to a strong feeling of tedium as once more in Clark's book one is taken through the minutiae of the question whether the last supper was a Passover or some other kind of meal. No doubt there is cause for admiration at the spectacle of how much detail is known and can be adduced by New Testament historians regarding times so remote from our own. But on the other hand the almost complete uncertainty as to how much weight is to be allowed to each *pro* and *con* and the conjectural character of many of the considerations advanced appear to render worthless any decision made on their basis. In this controversy it is interesting to compare Clark with another scholar, A. J. B. Higgins, who has written a book in the same S.C.M. series with the title, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament*. Higgins supports the thesis that the last supper was a Passover. A main purpose of Clark's work is to oppose Higgins by name on this point. Like Higgins, however, Clark rejects *kiddush*, *Passover-kiddush*, and *haburah-meal* as fitting the occasion. One begins to hope that we shall cease to be troubled with these so-beggarly suggestions as antecedents for the eucharist.

4. The hint of R. Claibourne Johnson in this statement could have been obviated by reversing the order of the points.

5. Cp. also and much earlier C. A. Anderson Scott, *Christianity According to St. Paul*, pp. 154ff.

But surely in Clark's proposal that the actual antecedent is an ordinary Jewish meal we have reached the very nadir of the whole process. Before taking issue with this conclusion, let us call attention to the excellent structure which Clark builds upon this seemingly unpromising foundation.

The very meagreness of this beginning enables Clark to demand that we do not "underestimate the transforming impact of the creative personality of our Lord" (p. 48). It is certain that, whatever our Lord started with, he gave it a new meaning in terms of the revelation that he brought. To put the matter in more Biblical phraseology than Clark's, we should say that the eucharist is the great example of the prophetic function of embodying revelation in signs. The fellowship meal of Jesus with his disciples "was something more, something new; made new, made different, because for the first time filled with a richer content and a deeper meaning" (p. 61). ". . . This means, at the very least, that the last supper and thus the eucharist is through and through sacrificial in implication and significance" (p. 63).

Rejection of the sacrifice of the mass has well-nigh occluded the power of thought upon this matter in the Protestant world except in an *ex parte* way. Clark's book, one may hope, will give a strong impulse to the re-examination of this subject, already well under way, so that on the one hand medieval error may still be rejected and on the other a recovery may be made from the impoverished teaching that is so widespread. Oddly enough, the commonest Protestant understanding is largely that the eucharist is "an ordinary meal" with religious overtones. Clark will have it that the eucharist, after the transformation at the last supper, is not at all now an ordinary meal, but essentially a sacrificial one. We may recall St. Paul's teaching that the bread and wine carry a transformed reference to the flesh and blood of a slain animal (1 Cor. 10:21 and context). As Clark says, "What was done once for all in historical actuality at Calvary, was done proleptically in the upper room, is done memorially at each and every eucharist" (p. 62). A suggestive page following this statement contains an insistence, well argued, that the word *memorially* must be given its full Biblical meaning, which is quite different from the thin modern notion of remembering. "Henceforth when the disciples 'do this' it will be for the bringing of Christ Crucified out of the past into the present, for the 're-calling' of his sacrifice before God, thus making it here and now operative" (*ibid.*). At this point again the place of the Lord's *body* has to bulk large in our thought. Clark does well to avoid the partial understanding of St. Paul's remark about "discerning the Lord's body" which finds here only a reference to the Church. While that meaning is emphatically present, it depends upon the more fundamental fact that the bread means Christ himself, and that in partaking of it the Church becomes one with his resurrection-body.

A chapter on *Agape and Eucharist*, which looks at the New Testament evidence and also discusses the disappearance and re-appearance of the *agape* in early times, is designed to draw a parallel between the meal within a meal in Church usage and the similar double character of the last supper.

The closing chapter, *Towards a Theology of the Sacraments*, is replete with suggestion. "Four basic questions emerge—the question of creation and redemption, the christological and trinitarian question, the ecclesiological question, and the eschatological question" (p. 73). Clark gives excellent pointers to show how much is lost by failure to have a relevant doctrine of creation. In the trinitarian question, a right understanding of the Ascension is crucial (p. 75. Cf. p. 56). The ecclesiological question means rightly enunciating "the relationship of identity and distinction between the crucified, the mystical, the sacramental and the glorified body of the Lord" (p. 79). The eschatological question, which is kept well to the fore throughout the book, may be indicated in his earlier appealing words: "Because they (the baptised) have risen with Christ, the eucharist is possible. Because they await the resurrection, the eucharist is necessary" (p. 35). These are only sketchy indications of the contents of a very rich chapter.

One regrets offering criticism of a book that offers more wealth than has even been named. But Clark's handling of the Passover is so inadequate that one cannot leave the matter untouched. It is legitimate to hold, as many New Testament scholars do, that the last supper was not a Passover. But in view of the fact that the Passover is featured so prominently in the New Testament in connection with the last supper and Calvary, it is theologically purblind to thrust it into the background as Clark does. If the last supper was not a Passover meal, we should at least feel compelled to make use of Clark's principle of "the transforming impact of the creative personality of our Lord" to account for his filling the occasion with paschal meaning. Perhaps Clark, contrary to the implications of his own principle, has been too much dominated by historical considerations. He seems also to have felt that the Passover would stand in the way of a sacrificial interpretation of the last supper. For he refers to Dalman and Gray in a note (p. 63) and reminds us that "the passover was connected neither with sin-offering nor atoning sacrifice." But he might have quoted the latter in a place where he throws another light on the matter. For in discussing the "P" document Gray also says that "broadly speaking, the sacrificial system as a whole is expiatory: all sacrifices in Ezekiel, the blood of all sacrifices in P expiate."⁶ The sacrificial Passover brings every sacrificial act into view and plays into the Saviour's hands as he erects the new temple of his own sacrifice.

Fulfilment of the Jewish revelation must be our starting-point in understanding the work of Jesus. This is Higgins's starting-point, on the first page of his first chapter. In rebuttal of regrettable remarks by Clark about Higgins's scholarship (p. 36), we must say that Higgins shows a better historical understanding here. It is not good enough to attempt to solve the problem whether the last supper took place on the Passover evening or not in terms of lesser, even though relevant, considerations of chronology and usage to the neglect of the quite major consideration that our Lord, with explicit and deliberate intention, brought his ministry to its climax at the

6. G. B. Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, p. 76.

time of and in direct connection with the Passover festival.⁷ This fact is itself a known *historical* one, and a heavy *onus probandi* lies upon anyone who may desire to break or loosen the connection. Yet Clark not only rejects the "last supper = passover equation," as he calls it, on the temporal issue but also consistently plays down the significance of the Passover for our understanding of the Lord's last days on earth.⁸ Higgins, on the other hand, very clearly sees the historical and theological parallel between Exodus-Passover-Holy People of the Old Testament and "Exodus" (Luke 9:31)-Eucharist-Church of the New Testament. The weakness in Clark's position shows very markedly in the facts that, accepting what he believes to be the Johannine chronology, he makes no serious use of the theological—that is, the paschal!—meaning of this chronology, and at the same time offers us no theological reasons and insufficient historical ones for what he believes to be the Synoptic variation.

To the reviewer, his handling of Higgins's treatment of the historical considerations is far from demonstrating his case (pp. 41ff.). Readers may form their own conclusions. Only one feature seems worth mentioning here, namely, the alleged contradiction in St. Mark's account. Mark reports that the chief priests and scribes decided, or at least did not want, to arrest Jesus on the feast day, "lest there be an uproar of the people" (Mark 14:2). The problem was not one of the unlawfulness of an arrest on a festival day (vide Clark, p. 41f.), but simply one of the danger of a tumult leading to trouble with the Roman authorities. We may, like Clark, be unimpressed by the explanation taken by Higgins from Jeremias that the words, "not on the feast (day)", mean "not in the presence of the festal crowd" (p. 42). But there is another and quite simple explanation. At this point in the narrative, the priests and scribes do not know that they are going to have the assistance of one of Jesus's inner circle. When Judas unexpectedly turns up, they *gladly* accept his help (14:11). The significance of their gladness should not be missed. Mark does not mean to say, as has been thought, that the arrest did not take place on the feast day. He means to point out that Judas solved the problem of the priests and scribes by enabling them to make the arrest *secretly*, without any danger of a popular uproar. In the event, the arrest could and did take place on the Passover evening, as Mark affirms.⁹

7. Plain statements should be plainly read: Mark 14:12ff. (cf. Matt. 26:17ff.; Luke 22:7ff.); John 11:55; 13:1.

8. Again and again Clark refers to what he calls the "background" of the Passover, without drawing its significance, as he ought, into the centre (cf. pp. 48, 52, 54f., 63, 64, 70). The last reference is the most revealing, where he banishes to a mere footnote the observation: "This is the point at which the passover background becomes relevant for the understanding of the last supper."

9. It is fair to point out that Jeremias envisages the explanation here adopted. On the assumption that the decision was taken not to arrest Jesus during the feast, he asks the question: "How do we know that the decision of the Sanhedrin was implemented? For it was taken before Judas had offered to play the traitor, which provided an unexpected opportunity of arresting Jesus at the very time of the feast" (*The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, p. 47). The expression, "not in the presence of the festal crowd," may or may not be a good rendering of Mark's words, but it does express what was in the mind of the Sanhedrin. Mark 12:1 prepares us for what actually happened. The arrest was made during the feast but not before the crowd. The Sanhedrin achieved their "ruse."

If this conclusion supports Higgins and those who accept the "last supper = passover equation," so also do some things that should be said regarding the Fourth Evangelist. Unfortunately Clark does not give us enough on this matter. Satisfied with his attempted demolition of Higgins's use of the Synoptics and "John," he adds: "The Johannine chronology is not disputed by St. Paul and is supported by Jewish and perhaps by early Christian tradition" (pp. 43f.). This is insufficient support for a chronology that has its own difficulties.

The two major points in this connection on which John differs from the Synoptics are his omission of the institution of the eucharist and his timing of the Lord's death to coincide with the killing of the Passover lambs. No satisfactory reason has yet been offered why such a markedly sacramental writer should have omitted the institution of the eucharist. His reason—historical or theological or both—must have been of major proportions to make it impossible for him to recount the institution on the night upon which he depicts the meeting between Jesus and the Apostles. May it not be that, while he makes the occasion sacramentally as suggestive as he can, he does not recount the institution because everyone knew it did not take place until the next day? It might be retorted at once that this argument applies *a fortiori* to any change in the day of the crucifixion. But the logic of the situation does not lead to this conclusion. For the Church would readily appreciate the symbolical and theological motives of the author in timing Christ's death with the killing of the lambs. Being themselves free from a barren historical "literalism," they would not expect the author, for the reason of mere consistency with such literalism, to change the date of the last supper also. He therefore does not claim that the eucharist was instituted on the day before the Passover, and seemingly omits the institution.

But it is actually an error to assume (as for the sake of argument we have momentarily assumed) that John gives us no account of the institution. His account is contained in the sacramental words: "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water" (19:34. Cf. Clark, p. 56). In the nature of the case, this act could not be made to coincide exactly with the hour at which later in the day the Passover would be eaten. But John's mention of it here supports the contention that he makes no claim that the eucharist was instituted on the previous evening. The truth that Clark sees so clearly with respect to baptism (p. 28) applies also to the other great sacrament. For John, *they are both instituted on the Cross*. In particular, the fulfilment of the Passover is the institution of the eucharist. Instead, then, of suggesting, as we did a moment ago, that John refrained from giving an account of the institution on the previous evening because he had no "literalistic" impulse to do so, it would be better to insist that the Crucifixion is itself the institution and the incident of the spear is the sign of it. The hour had come. The death of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world is the "true" preparation of the "true" Passover (19:14, 31), which can now be eaten

(1 Cor. 5:7).¹⁰ This interpretation reinforces Clark's own desire to identify the last supper and the eucharist with Calvary. Whatever attitude may be adopted, two things at least should be acknowledged: firstly, that John's timing of the Crucifixion should probably be taken in relation to his "omission" of the institution; and, secondly, as a *minimum certainty*, that a sacramental writer who of set purpose made this "omission" must be regarded as designedly repudiating any intention of claiming that the eucharist was instituted on the evening of the day before the Passover. His positive intention, we have suggested, it to say that the true Passover could not be eaten before the Lord's sacrifice was made. If this be so, the unanimity with which all four evangelists insist upon the identity of the eucharist with a fulfilled Passover is accompanied by a unanimity in their timing of it.

In general we may suggest three conclusions. The first is that Clark is abundantly justified in fastening upon sacrifice as the major theme of the last supper and the eucharist. If the meaning of liturgical action as *action* is really to be understood, we must cease thinking of the Lord's Table as the place where we receive the "benefits" of Calvary, as if Calvary and eucharist were two separate events related as cause and effect. We must rather see the Table as the place where through the Eternal Spirit—

We here present, we here spread forth to Thee
That only offering perfect in thine eyes,
The one, true, pure, immortal sacrifice.

If on the one hand we must avoid a wrong notion of repetition, we must also on the other hand, ceasing to be affrighted by medieval ghosts, refuse to make a wrong division. Indeed, the medieval error is that "repetition" makes this division. The Protestant error has been to continue it.

Secondly, we must allow full weight to the New Testament emphasis upon the role played by the Passover. Christ's sacrifice marks God's covenant with and calling of a new people. The divine action took place and became revelation in connection with the Passover and its transformation. What is joined together in the divine action must not be sundered in our theologizing.¹¹ Thirdly, the controversy upon the question whether the last supper was a Passover meal or not must be reduced to its proper proportions. Most of all it is necessary to insist that conclusions upon this issue be not allowed to determine our theology of the matter. For the theology of the matter, that is, what our Lord purposed in his action, is a major part of the historical event itself. If the New Testament, in its very capacity as historical documentation, has not reliably informed us on this point, discussion of subsidiary matters is worthless.

10. John 13:29; 19:14, 31 all show that the Passover is still to be eaten. Is John perhaps saying that the death of the Lamb of God is the "preparation" of the Christian Passover? Taking these texts to refer to Passover preparation in conjunction with the fact that John does not claim that the eucharist was instituted on the evening before the Crucifixion does away with the problems discussed by Higgins (p. 22) and Clark (p. 43).

11. See J. J. Enz, "The Book of Exodus as a Literary Type for the Gospel of John," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXVI, Part III (September, 1957). Enz does not deal with the Passover type, but his ample evidence strongly reinforces the position here adopted.