

The Hunt for the Fourth Cup

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I HAVE a vivid recollection of a conversation with a friend at an Evangelical seminary we attended ten years ago. Walking over, he said, "Scott, I've been reading fascinating stuff on the sacraments."

"Sacraments bore me," I replied sharply. Little did I know.

I thought of the incident recently as I made my way home from an inspiring hour of Benediction. I got the urge to write about the Scripture study which led me into a Catholic understanding of the Holy Eucharist (and eventually into the Catholic Church) about five years ago.

It all started with a Sunday morning service at the local Evangelical church which my wife and I attended during our last year at seminary. The preacher had just finished an exciting sermon on the meaning of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. But something he said stuck with me. In the middle of the message, he raised a simple question: "In John 19:30, what did Jesus mean when he cried, '*It is finished*'? What does the 'it' refer to?"

After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

Instantly the standard Evangelical answer came to my mind: Jesus' words signify the completion of our redemption at that moment.

The preacher happened to be a fine Scripture scholar as well as one of my favorite seminary professors, so I was taken aback when he proceeded to show quite convincingly that Jesus could not have meant that. For one thing, Paul teaches that our redemption is not complete without Jesus being "raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). The preacher also showed how the standard Evangelical answer is taken from theology and read into the text ("eisegesis"), instead of being drawn from the text interpreted in context ("exegesis"). To my amazement, he candidly admitted he didn't have a satisfying answer to his own question.

I couldn't hear the rest of his sermon. My mind began racing ahead in search of a solution. It only came after graduation, in my first year as a pastor while studying Scripture in preparing a series of sermons on what we Presbyterians called "the Lord's Supper."

THE FIRST stage of my discovery process came in studying the Old Testament background to Jesus' Last Supper. The occasion was the Jewish feast of Passover (Mark 14:12-16). This memorial celebrated God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. During that fateful night, every firstborn son in Egypt perished except those in Israelite families where a lamb without blemish or broken bones (Ex. 12:5, 46) was slain and eaten as a substitutionary sacrifice. Then Moses led Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, where the Law was given and the covenant was sealed between God and his people through sacrifice and communion.

Recent study of biblical covenants by scholars such as D. J. McCarthy shows how such a covenant formed a sacred flesh-and- blood bond between Yahweh and Israel, making them one family. This family bond was expressed in relational terms of father and son (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 1:31; 8:5; 14:1) as well as husband and wife (Jer. 31:32; Ezek. 16:8; Hos. 2:18-20). Liturgical feasts and rituals were to signify and strengthen the family communion that existed by covenant between Yahweh and Israel.

THIS WAS an important part of the Jewish understanding of Passover during the time of Jesus. It is significant that Jesus in the Gospels uses the word "covenant" on only one occasion, when he institutes the Eucharist during the Passover celebration in the upper room: "And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks [eucharistesas] he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, 'This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many'" (Mark 14:23-24). In his own mind, as both the Firstborn Son and Lamb of God, there was a connection between Passover and the self-sacrifice by which the new covenant was to be established.

The second stage of my rethinking came from studying the Jewish Passover liturgy. The structure of the Passover seder, known as the Haggadah, appears to have been formalized long before the time of Jesus. In fact, the Gospel accounts seem to assume its structure in narrating details of the Last Supper.[Readers may complain about my assuming the proto-Talmudic character of the liturgical structure of the seder. Someone could argue that it is anachronistic to retroject the seder liturgy from the Mishnah back to the first century. I respond by pointing out that virtually all scholars recognize substantial similarities in form between the Jewish paschal liturgy recorded in the New Testament and the Mishnah. For instance, Paul's mention of "the cup of blessing" (1 Cor. 10:16) surely connects with the third cup. I don't know any commentator who denies a connection here. Moreover, the Mishnah is not known for an innovative approach to liturgical reforms. Thus, so long as I am not building my argument on a comprehensive identity of form between the two, I think I avoid any anachronism and remain on safe ground--indeed, the same safe ground as the vast majority of exegetes (e.g. Joachim Jeremias) and liturgiologists (e.g. Joseph Jungmann).]

The Passover meal was divided into four parts. First, the preliminary course consisted of a festival blessing (kiddush) spoken over the first cup of wine, followed by the serving of a dish of herbs. The second course included a recital of the Passover narrative and the "Little Hallel" (Psalm 113), followed by the drinking of the second cup of wine. The third course was the main meal, consisting of lamb and unleavened bread, after which was drunk the third cup of wine, known as the "cup of blessing." The Passover climaxed with the singing of the "Great Hallel" (Psalms 114-118) and the drinking of the fourth cup of wine.

New Testament scholars see this pattern reflected in the Gospel narratives of the Last Supper. In particular, the cup blessed and distributed by Jesus is identified as the third cup in the Passover Haggadah. This is apparent from the singing of the "Great Hallel" which immediately follows: "And when they had sung a hymn. . ." (Mark 14:26). Indeed, Paul identifies this "cup of blessing" with the Eucharistic cup (1 Cor. 10:16).

At this point a significant problem arises. Instead of proceeding immediately to the climax of the Passover, the drinking of the fourth cup, we read: "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Mark 14:26). While it may be difficult for Gentile Christians unfamiliar with the Haggadah to perceive the serious disorder this sequence represents, it is not lost to Jewish readers and students of the seder. For them, Jesus skipping the fourth cup could be compared to a

priest omitting the words of consecration at Mass. The fundamental purpose or goal of the liturgy seemingly was missed.

Not only is the omission conspicuous, it appears to be underscored by the words of Jesus in the preceding verse: "Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25). It is almost as though Jesus meant not to drink what he was expected to drink. On the other hand, a few scholars speculate that psychological factors account for Jesus' forgetfulness. They point out how, subsequently, "he began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death'" (Mark 14:32). Perhaps he was too upset to be bothered with liturgical precision in following the rubrics.

WHILE THIS analysis may seem plausible, further reflection renders it improbable. For one thing, if he was so distracted and confused, it seems doubtful Jesus would forget and interrupt the Passover liturgy after expressly declaring his intention not to drink the fourth cup, especially since he went ahead and sang the "Great Hallel." Why would he declare himself so plainly before acting in so disorderly a fashion? His other actions that night indicate a man admittedly distressed but in full possession of himself. Why then did he choose not to drink?

The third stage of my discovery process was reached when the answer to that question seemed to become more evident by my focusing on Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Notice what he prayed: "And going a little farther, he fell on his face and prayed, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but thou wilt'" (Matt. 26:39). Three times altogether Jesus prayed for his Father to take away "this cup." An obvious question arises: What cup was Jesus talking about? [Some scholars explain Jesus' language by identifying it with "the cup of God's wrath" in the Old Testament prophets (Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15). Surely there is a connection here, but the connection seems less direct than does the primary link suggested by the Passover setting. Note how Jesus' resolution not to drink "the fruit of the vine" seems to reappear in the scene at Golgotha right before he is crucified: "And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not take it" (Mark 15:23). The narrative does not explain his refusal, but it probably points back to Jesus' pledge not to drink until his Kingdom is manifested in glory. Incidentally, the synoptic Gospels often recount sayings of Jesus combining imagery of banquet feasts with his Kingdom glory (Matt. 22:1ff; Luke 22:15ff).]

The fourth stage of the process was reached when I found in John's Gospel a perspective on Jesus' Kingdom glory decidedly different from that found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. [Critics may say what I am attempting is methodologically unsound and precritical (*mea maxima culpa*) because I correlate the synoptic and Johannine accounts in my argument. My response is that I am assuming that critical exegesis has been done and shows the synoptic and Johannine accounts to be different but complementary and, hence, non-contradictory. Where I pick up, therefore, is in the province of biblical theology, where exegetical results are correlated according to theological concerns. Another point regarding John's Gospel: I discovered in my research that the paschal character of the Last Supper is typically rejected by Catholics who approach such matters with a "more critical than thou" mindset. I find the supposed conflict between the synoptics and John is resolved to my satisfaction by Annie Jaubert, *The Date of the Last Supper* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1965). She argues two calendars were operative in Christ's time and accepts the ancient Syriac testimony of a "Holy Tuesday" institution of the Eucharist. Granted, there are difficulties in that, but her work helps harmonize the five trials of Jesus (Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, and Pilate), which fit much easier into a Tuesday-to-Friday time frame than in a Thursday-midnight-to-morning frame. She also

published an article arguing that even John's account of the upper room shares a paschal background, "The Calendar of Qumran and the Passion Narrative in John," in J. Charlesworth, ed., *John and Qumran* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), 62-75. I have read criticisms of Jaubert's thesis, but I don't feel much force behind them; for a popular summary of the alleged problems, see Raymond Brown, "The Date of the Last Supper," in *The Bible Today Reader* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1973), 322-28.] John depends on irony in depicting the Kingdom glory of Jesus in connection with the suffering of the cross: "And Jesus answered them,] The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. . . . Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.' He said this to show by what death he was to die" (John 12:23, 31-33).

With profound spiritual insight, John links Jesus' "hour of glory" with the supreme manifestation of his love upon the cross (John 3:14, 7:37-39, 8:28, 13:31). Following this to the end of the fourth Gospel, I began to notice several places where John deliberately weaves together various strands of Kingdom and Passover imagery in depicting Jesus' trial and passion. The result was to draw a little nearer to what Jesus meant when he said, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

First, Jesus' claim to kingship in John comes precisely at the moment when he appears weakest and most vulnerable--when he is standing accused before Pilate (18:33-37). Pilate's cynical response is to dress him in a purple robe with a crown of thorns and to present him to his own unbelieving people: "Now it was the day of preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him!'" (19:14). John realized that the sixth hour was when the priests were prescribed to begin slaughtering lambs for the Passover.

Second, only John mentions that Jesus was stripped of a seamless linen tunic (19:23-24). The same word for "garment" (*chiton*) is used in the Old Testament for the official tunic worn by the High Priest in sacrifice (Ex. 28:4; Lev.16:4). This is meant to remind faithful readers that Jesus, their glorious King and Passover lamb, is also the High Priest of the New Covenant (19:23-24).

Third, the identification of Jesus with the Passover lamb is reinforced by John's noting Jesus' bones remained unbroken, as prescribed by the law for the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:46): "that the Scripture might be fulfilled, 'Not a bone of him shall be broken'" (19:33, 36). This brings to fulfillment the words used in John's introduction of Jesus at the start of his Gospel: "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29).

GRADUALLY these Passover and Kingdom themes from John's Gospel began to converge in my mind as I reapproached the question of Jesus' meaning in saying, "It is finished" (John 19:30). For one thing, I noticed that my King, Priest, and paschal victim, in his "hour of glory" while suffering on the cross, made a profound gesture: "After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.'"

Jesus was thirsty long before this closing moment of his life. His words, therefore, must reflect more than a desire for a last drink of fluid. He seems to have been in full possession of himself as he realized that "all was now finished." Whatever it is that "was now finished" seems to be directly connected to his utterance, which he spoke "to fulfill the Scripture." More things fall into place upon reading what followed his expression of thirst: "A bowl of sour wine stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth" (19:29). Only John noticed that

hyssop was used, the branch prescribed in the Passover law for sprinkling the blood of the lamb (Ex.12:22).

This verse reveals something significant. Jesus had left unfinished the Passover liturgy in the upper room by not drinking the fourth cup. He stated his intention not to drink wine again until he came into the glory of his Kingdom. As we have seen, he refused some on one occasion, right before being nailed to the cross (Mark 15:23). Then, at the very end, Jesus was offered "sour wine" (John 19:30; Matt.27:48; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36). But only John tells us how he responded: "When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished'; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (19:30).

AT LAST I had an answer to my question. It was the Passover that was now finished. More precisely, it was Jesus' transformation of the Passover sacrifice of the Old Covenant into the Eucharistic sacrifice of the New Covenant. I learned Scripture teaches that the Passover sacrifice of the New Covenant began in the upper room with the institution of the Eucharist, not merely with Jesus being crucified on Calvary, as I was taught and had been teaching. In Jesus' mind, his Eucharistic sacrifice as the Passover lamb of the New Covenant was not finished until Calvary. In sum, Calvary begins with the Eucharist and the Eucharist ends with Calvary. It is all of one piece.

It did not occur to me at the time that this is the teaching of the Catholic Church on Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharist. I was still anti-Catholic in my theological outlook as an Evangelical Protestant, though I must confess I had never thoroughly read a single Catholic work explaining or defending the Church's teaching. Besides, I had never attended Mass. On the other hand, some of my parishioners and students were ex-Catholics, and a few of them began warning me about certain "Romish" tendencies they detected in me. I assured them I was only following Scripture.

Further study of the matter led me to additional revisions. For one thing, I sought confirmation and clarification elsewhere in Scripture for my conclusion regarding the inseparable connection between Jesus' Passover sacrifice in the Eucharist and on Calvary. In particular, further study of John's Gospel presented considerable support for this conclusion, especially in Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life in chapter six.

The occasion for the discourse is explicitly stated: "Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand" (6:4). John shows how Jesus miraculously provided bread for five thousand after "he had given thanks [eucharistesas]," thereby evoking Eucharistic imagery. Jesus then identified himself as the "true bread from heaven" (6:32ff.) and the "bread of life" (6:35), drawing a parallel with Moses, through whom God supernaturally fed manna to the Israelites while forming a covenant with them right after the first Passover (Ex. 16:4ff.). In this way John prepares his readers to understand how Jesus formed a new covenant family by means of his own Eucharistic sacrifice as High Priest and paschal victim.

Even clearer testimony is provided when Jesus declares, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (6:53-56).

I CLEARLY remember when I first studied this passage in the midst of my discovery process. It felt as if I had never really comprehended the words before, though I had read the fourth Gospel all the way through many times. It became evident that Jesus deliberately used the strongest language to convey the connection between his sacrifice as the Passover Lamb and the Eucharist, even in the face of unbelief and scandal (6:60-69).

The reason for this connection lies in the Old Testament Passover itself. It was not enough to kill the lamb. Death was only one aspect of the sacrifice. The ultimate goal was restoring communion between God and his people, which was vividly accomplished by the Passover meal. In other words, you had to eat the lamb. Jesus' sacrificial death, begun in the upper room and finished at Calvary, was not the full end of his Passover sacrifice either. The ultimate goal is restoring communion, which is accomplished by the Eucharist. In sum, we too have to eat the Lamb.

PAUL shares a similar perspective when he states, "Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed." (1 Cor. 5:7). Notice he does not conclude, "There is nothing more to be done." Instead, he says in the very next verse, "Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8). In other words, something more remains for us to do. We are to feast upon Jesus, the bread of life and our Passover Lamb.

Paul reinforces the reality of this communion elsewhere: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation [koinonia] in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation [koinonia] in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). Such language reflects a solid belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. No wonder Paul warns, "For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Cor. 11:29).

I saw a similar outlook in the Epistle to the Hebrews. This came as a surprise, since I had always taught, as I had been trained, that Hebrews, more than any other New Testament book, contradicted the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist as a sacrifice. The main theme of Hebrews is the priesthood of Jesus, particularly as it relates to his "once for all" sacrifice (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:10). This is succinctly stated: "Now the point in what we are saying is this: We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tabernacle which is set up not by man but by the Lord" (Heb. 8:1-2).

Unlike priests in the Old Testament, Jesus does not make daily offerings of distinct sacrifices (Heb. 7:27). On the other hand, "every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer" (Heb. 8:3). Does this mean that Jesus' "once for all" sacrifice is exclusively past? Or does it not assert that Jesus' sacrifice, precisely because of its "once for all" character, has become the one perfect and perpetual offering he continually presents in heaven on our behalf? The conclusion is that Jesus no longer bleeds, suffers, or dies (Heb. 9:25-26). He is enthroned in his resurrected and glorified human body as our High Priest and King (Heb. 7:1-3).

It is precisely in this manner that the Father beholds a perfect and perpetual offering in the living body of the Son. If Jesus' offering has ceased, there would be no basis for his ongoing priesthood, but Jesus' priesthood is said to be permanent and to "continue forever" (Heb. 7:24). Moreover, there would be no reason for an earthly altar if Jesus' offering is ended, which is what I believed as an Evangelical Protestant--until I discovered that Scripture teaches the reverse: "We have an altar from

which those who serve the tent have no right to eat" (Heb. 13:10). The "once for all" character of Jesus' sacrifice points to the perfection and perpetuity of his offering. It can be re-presented upon our altars in the Eucharist so that "through him [we] continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God" (Heb. 13:15).

FINAL confirmation came for me when I came upon an exciting feature of John's vision of Christ in the Book of Revelation. Upon hearing the angel announce the appearing of Jesus as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," John looks and beholds "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:5-6).

In other words, he who is our celebrant priest and reigning king in the liturgical worship of the heavenly assembly also appears continually as the Passover Lamb of the New Covenant. He appears as the Lamb because his sacrificial offering continues. It will continue until he restores communion with each of his children through the Eucharist. Indeed, it will continue that way for God's family forever into eternity. After all, our everlasting blessedness is depicted in John's vision of the New Jerusalem as "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9, 21:2, 9-10, 22:17).