

SOME NOTES ON EASTER AND THE PASSOVER HAGGADAH

by

Prof. David Flusser

Brocke's article has shown us how important is the study of the Improperia and it seems that further investigation is needed in order to clarify the subject.¹ It is difficult for me to accept the thesis that there is not much "likelihood of straight dependence between specific Jewish and Christian texts." It is possible though to reach such conclusions when you see the whole material from the point of view of *Traditions-geschichte*. According to this method you can find more parallels than Brocke has given.² For instance, there are in Jewish tradition many examples of juxtaposing God's benefits and Israel's sins; as was the special ceremony in the Dead Sea Sect, when "The priests enumerate God's righteous deeds together with His wondrous acts, and recount all the merciful acts of grace towards Israel. Then the Levites enumerate the sins of the children of Israel and all their guilty transgressions and their iniquities during the ascendancy of Belial" (I QS 1, 21-4). One type of *historia sacra* begins with the Exodus from Egypt and ends with the conquest of the land (and sometimes with the building of the Temple) often without any reproaches to Israel. We find such historical approach not only in the Dayyenu in the Passover Haggadah, but also in the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:1-19 and (without the mention of the Temple) in Psalms 136. It seems to me that, besides the narrow literary problems, the broader problem is how the list of God's gracious gifts to Israel was combined with the stress on Israel's sins until finally God's benefits were followed by a single misdeed of Israel. The final stage was evidently reached in a supposed Jewish Improperia, preserved in later form in a poem of Kalir, and in the Christian Improperia. This development was surely a complex one, and we will try to elucidate some of its points.

Brocke quotes in his article a passage from V Ezra (Chapters 1 and 2 of IV Ezra), a text which is undoubtedly Jewish, untouched by Christian

¹ We quote the Haggadah with the introduction of E. D. Goldschmidt, *The Passover Haggadah, Its Sources*, Jerusalem, 1960 (Hebrew). Important for our subject is H. Auf Der Maur, "Die Osterhomilien des Asterios Sophistes als Quelle für die Geschichte der Osterfeier," *Trier Theologische Studien*, Bd. 19, Trier, 1967. Two new studies were published about the Improperia: W. Schütz, "Was habe ich Dir getzn, mein Volk? Die Wurzeln der Kartreitags-Improperien in der alten Kirche," *Jahrbuch für Liturgie und Hymnologie* 13, Kassel, 1968, pp. 1-38; H. Becker, "Popule mens quid feci tibi?" *Ibid.* 14, 1969, pp. 114-116.

² See also H. Auf Der Maur, pp. 135-137, and W. Schütz, pp. 4-5.

hands." This text was not only recognized by M. R. James as similar to the *Improperia* of the Roman Church, but is also quoted *in extenso* by E. Werner (HUCA 37, 1966, p. 208) who says, not without exaggeration, that this text "must have been the immediate *Vorlage* of Melito, both in its literary contents and in its chronological vicinity." I do not contest the probability that the passage in V Ezra is Jewish and untouched by Christian hands; I want only to show that V Ezra is a Christian work, (and a strange one) whose anti-Judaism is patent: Jews are rejected because they are sinful, but nothing is said about their guilt of killing Christ. The figure of Jesus appears in the book (2:42-7) as the "Son of God," but the designation Christ or Jesus is lacking, and so also is his death and resurrection. The principal message of the book is summarized by Matt. 21:43: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a nation that yields the proper fruit." According to V Ezra, this new Christian nation will possess Jerusalem in the last days. An adherent of this idea was Justin Martyr (c. 100 - c. 165) and other Christians of his time, though this particular view was not then commonly accepted. In his "Dialogue with Tryphon," (80, 1) Justin puts the whole concept in the mouth of Tryphon, the Jew: "But tell me, do you really admit that this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt; and do you expect your people will be gathered together and made joyful with Christ and the Patriarchs, and the Prophets, and the saints of our nation and the proselytes who joined them before your Christ came?" (see also *Ibid.*, 26, 1). The same concept is expressed by V Ezra, where (1:24) God says to Israel, "I will turn to other nations and give them my name in order that they may keep my decrees." "And now, father, look with glory and take note of the people coming from the east,³ to whom I will give as leaders Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Hosea, and Amos, and Micah, and Joel and Obadiah, and Jonah and Nahum and Habbakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi" (1:38-40). Here the patriarchs are named and the prophets become the twelve minor prophets! And "this is what the Lord says to Ezra: Inform my people that I will give them the kingdom of Jerusalem which I would have given to Israel..." (2:10). And the nation of Christians will be on Mount Zion together with the Son of God (2:42-7).

The Christian character of V Ezra is evident, as it's similarity of its message to Justin's eschatology. Thus we have to use the parallels found in this Christian book to Melito and the *Improperia*, with some caution.

³ Is it a hint that the homeland of the Christian author of V Ezra was in the East? In his description of the eschatological Jerusalem and the crowd on Mount Zion, it depends evidently on the Eastern Book of Revelation, and in 2:8-9 he prophesies upon Assyria (in reality Syria?). For the Patriarchs and the Prophets see Luke 23

We want to show the literary ties between the Dayyenu in the Pass-over Haggadah and the Homily of Melito. It should not be forgotten that both Dayyenu and the Improperia are said in the Pascal evening as was Melito's Homily. The litany Dayyenu ("it were enough") is a twofold enumeration of God's benefices to Israel from the Exodus to the building of the Temple. It begins with the words: "How many are the benefits which God has conferred upon us!" The first enumeration is built in the following way: "Had He brought us out of Egypt, and not wrought judgement on them – It were enough. Had He wrought judgement on them, and not on their gods – It were enough," and so on, always with the refrain: "It were enough." The second enumeration summarizes the same benefits and begins in the following way: "All the more then doubled and redoubled is the bounty which God has conferred upon us, for He brought us out of Egypt, He wrought judgement on them, and wrought (judgement) on their gods" and so on "and He built us His Chosen House, to atone for all our iniquities."

The litany Dayyenu contains two identical lists of benefits, where the second summarizes the first. It is very important for the ties of Melito to the Litany Dayyenu, that Melito⁴ brings twice the same list of God's benefits to Israel – and this twofold list, as was seen by others, resembles very much the list of Dayyenu. The pre-history in lines 622-627 corresponds to lines 651-654, the lines 628-641, the list parallel to Dayyenu, correspond to 655-665, the benefits of Christ to Israel (lines 642-644) correspond to lines 666-678 (and 558-570), lines 645-650 form a transition to the second list and lines 674-679 are the conclusion. The conclusion begins with the words: "Priceless are the benefits which were granted by Him to you." This is parallel to the beginning of Dayyenu: "How many are the benefits which God has conferred upon us," and to the opening of the second list of this Jewish litany: "All the more then doubled and redoubled is the bounty which God has conferred upon us."⁵ The two identical lists and the parallel between the beginning of the conclusion in Melito and Dayyenu show that there is a literary connection between Melito's Homily and the Jewish litany of the Passover night. This is true even if we take into account that Melito in his Homily likes repetition of the same motifs.⁶

The inner history of the Improperia is very complex and is, to a great part, unknown, (because there are many missing links) but there are

⁴ We quote according to the edition of O. Perler, *Meliton de Sardis sur la Paque*, Sources Chretiennes No. 123, Paris, 1966.

⁵ Similarly God says in V Ezra: "I have bestowed so many benefits on them" (1:9) and "Where are the benefits I bestowed on you?" (1:17).

⁶ As already seen Melito's lines 666-678 are also parallel to lines 558-570. The following supposed misdeeds of the Jews against Christ (lines 570-579) resemble those of the Improperia, W. Schütz (*op. cit.*, note 1, p. 1-2) thinks that this list in Melito and the list in the Improperia are based upon common tradition.

some stages which are recognizable. In Melito's Homily there is a contrast between God's good deeds to Israel from the Exodus to the conquest of the Holy Land, and Jewish wickedness and her killing of Christ: but in the passages parallel to the Dayyenu it is only said that Israel was ungrateful and her guilt is not specified. The description of Israel's wicked deeds against Christ, which is parallel to the Improperia, is to be found already in Melito, lines 570-579, and this reappears (enlarged with variations) in lines 695-710. And so only what the Jews have supposedly done to Christ is enumerated and these misdeeds are not interwoven with the list of God's benefits.

If there were any Jewish Improperia included in or directly connected to V Ezra, they were included in the book by the Christian author and it is impossible to know precisely the wording of the Jewish *Vorlage*. In the pertinent passage of V Ezra there is no accusation of the Jews that they acted against Jesus, but already here the accusations of Israel are interwoven into the list of God's benefits to Israel during the Exodus. Some accusations are general, but there are also concrete accusations, expressing the unthankfulness of Israel during her stay in the wilderness.

Especially interesting for the development of the Improperia is the Homily XXVIII, 5-7, written by Asterius the Sophist⁷ (d. after 341 C. E.). This passage also contains the list of God's benefits to Israel from Exodus to the occupation of the Holy Land,⁸ as in the Improperia, each benefit of God is followed by a wicked deed of Israel. It is very significant for our problem that at the beginning Christ says: "I sweetened the bitter waters by wood, but they embittered me by their idols." Very often a beginning betrays an older stage. The following pairs, as in the Improperia, are built upon the contrast between God's goodness towards Israel and their wicked deeds against Christ.

In the Didascalia (VI 3, 1 and VI 16, 6), we find two passages containing the common list of God's favours to Israel, contrasted with their ungratefulness to God and to Moses. In both passages the wicked deeds of Israel are referred to, only after the list of God's benefits. In the Jewish parallel to the Christian Improperia, the poem of Kalir,⁹ as in the Christian prayer, each benefit to Israel is always immediately contrasted with a wicked reaction of Israel from Exodus to the conquest. In contrast to the Christian text, Israel's wickedness has naturally nothing to do with Christ.

As far as we are able to see, the point of departure of our question must be the Dayyenu; we have seen that there is a connection between Melito and the Jewish hymn. Another result of our study seems to be that Jewish predecessors and parallels to the Improperia accused Israel of ungrate-

⁷ Auf der Maur, pp. 127-9.

⁸ The list is contained in strophes 3-7, 14-26.

⁹ Published with English translation in *The Authorized Kinot for the Ninth of Av*, translated by Rev. Abraham Rosenfeld, London, 5725-1965, p. 1237.

ful response to God's benefits during the period from Exodus to the conquest of the land and the building of the Temple. In the Christian texts, instead of Israel's wickedness in the Wilderness, Jews are guilty of rejecting, torturing and killing Christ, which happened long after the Exodus. In Melito's Homily these accusations are not stylistically connected with the two lists of God's favours during the Exodus: in the passage parallel to the Dayyenu Israel's unthankfulness is expressed only in common terms. We can also see that there was no accusation of deicide written by Christians, namely in the *Improperia* in the V Ezra and in the beginning of the passage from Asterius. The main difficulty of knowing how both the Jewish and the Christian *Improperia* developed lies in the fact that we possess only one such Jewish text in its original form, namely the poem of Kalir. In this poem each benefit of God is followed by a misdeed of Israel, as in the passage from Asterius and in the *Improperia*. Was there a parallel development between the Jews and the Christians towards a more perfect form, or should we look elsewhere for explanation?

Melito's Homily was recited primarily on the night of Passover, when the Jews of Sardis observed their seder (see its description in the Homily, lines 580-595), and they said on this occasion, evidently in Greek, something similar to the Hebrew Passover Haggadah. Melito's Homily shows indirectly that there was such an affinity between the Hebrew Haggadah and the "Greek Haggadah" from Sardis. This can be seen from the fact that not only did Dayyenu have its parallel in the Christian Homily, but also the passage, beginning in Hebrew with the words *Lefi-khakh* (therefore).¹⁰ This fact strengthens the assumption of dependence of Melito from the Jewish Passover rite. Both Dayyenu and the passage *Lefi-khakh* are at the last stage of the Jewish Passover night festivity. The second passage, beginning with the words "Therefore" is a kind of preface to the reciting of Hallel. It appears also in the Mishnah (Pesahim 10:5), but it seems there it is a very ancient addition, originating in the Passover Haggadah.¹¹

Dayyenu and the second passage in the Haggadah, both of which have parallels in Melito's Homily, shows how complex is the history of liturgical texts. There are versions of the Haggadah, where the Dayyenu is lacking:¹² this shows that there were rites in which it was not said. Melito is, as we think, the oldest witness that Dayyenu is really an ancient Jewish text destined for the Passover seder. The passage, beginning with the word "therefore" figures in all the rites, but the history of the passage itself is very interesting. And this is the translation of the Jewish text: "Therefore it is our duty to thank . . . to Him Who performed for our fathers and for us all these miraculous deeds, He brought us out from bondage to freedom,

¹⁰ This was already seen by Werner.

¹¹ See Goldschmidt, pp. 53-54.

¹² See Goldschmidt, p. 48.

from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a festival day, and from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption." – The words "from sorrow to gladness and from mourning to a festival day" are taken from Esther 9:22, and it is very probable that they are a later addition. These words are also lacking from the parallel in Melito's Homily.

Melito compares Jesus with Moses in the time of Exodus and (in lines 489-493) he says: "It is He who brought us out from bondage to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life, from tyranny to the everlasting kingdom." Pines has shown that in two prayers in the Jewish-Hellenistic novel *Joseph and Asenath* God is praised because He called from darkness to light, and from death to life. It is significant that these prayers are connected to the reception of proselytes, which has, naturally, its parallel in Christian baptism. The passage in Melito's Pascal Homily is derived from the parallel in the Passover Haggadah. If we eliminate the probable interpolation from the Book of Esther, then the parallel between Melito and the Haggadah is as follows:

It is He who brought us out	He brought us out
from bondage to freedom	from bondage to freedom
from darkness to light	from darkness to light
from death to life	and from servitude to redemption
from tyranny to the everlasting kingdom	

Thus the parallel is complete, only the words "from death to life" are lacking from the Haggadah.

It is important to know that according to some texts of the Haggadah it is only said that God "has brought us from bondage to freedom" – and the rest is lacking.¹³ As it can be seen from manuscripts, this was also the original text in Mishnah Pesahim 10:5. The prints naturally "completed" the Mishnah according to the current text of the Haggadah. Thus the original text of the introduction to the Hallel on the night of Passover was enlarged by a beautiful addition, which was finally expanded by the quotation from Esther 9:22. Both the original and the enlarged text were in use by various Jewish communities and the enlarged text was recited, probably in Greek, by the Jews of Sardis (before 160-170 C. E.) when Melito wrote his Homily.

The most important idea of the ancient addition is the concept that the Exodus means the passing "from darkness to great light." This sublime understanding¹⁴ was fostered by a midrashic understanding of Isaiah 9:1; "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; light has

¹³ See Goldschmidt, p. 54. In the manuscript of the Jewish Prayer-book according to the Persian rite, the short original version appears, but also the addition is supplied there by another hand. The poem Dayyenu is lacking from the Persian rite.

¹⁴ Compare also Wisdom of Solomon 17:1-18:4.

dawned upon them, dwellers in a land as dark as death." And this is the meaning of the verse according to the Aramaic Targum: "The people, even the House of Israel that walked in Egypt, as it were in darkness, have come forth to see a great light; they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, light has shined upon them." According to this explanation the people who walked in darkness is the House of Israel, when they dwelt in Egypt, and when they left Egypt they "have come forth to see a great light." Thus, when God "brought us out from bondage to freedom," He brought us "from darkness to great light." When Isaiah 9:1 is applied to the Exodus, it is not difficult to understand why Melito in the parallel passage speaks about the liberation "from death to life." The Hebrew word for "as dark as death" is understood as "shadow of death" both in the Aramaic and in the Greek translation. So, if the House of Israel was in Egypt in the shadow of death, when it was freed from the Egyptian bondage, it was brought "from death to life." It seems, therefore, that the antithetic pair "from death to life" formed once a part of the Jewish Passover text, and that it disappeared for unknown reasons.

We cannot describe here all the relevance of the deep idea, connected with the Exodus in the Passover Haggadah and in Melito, that God has brought us out "from darkness to great light." It can however, have an eschatological aspect and also this association could connect it with the Passover night, when the Jews hoped that the salvation would come.¹⁵ "Then the middle of heaven shall be laid open in the dead and darkness of the night, that the light of the descending God may be manifest in all the world as the lightning. — This is the night which is celebrated by us in watchfulness on account of the coming of our king and God, of which night there is a twofold meaning: because in it He then received life when He suffered and thereafter He is about to receive the kingdom of the world." These are Lactantius' words (*divin. inst.* VII 19:2-3). This quotation leads us towards the Easter Vigil.

The night of Easter is connected, both in the liturgy and in practice, with light.¹⁶ It is strange that in contrast to this fact, in the Jewish Passover night festival, there is no connection in Jewish Halakhah or liturgy with light and its meaning — with one exception, namely the verse of the Haggadah: "He brought us out . . . from darkness to great light." This is precisely the verse which occurs in the passage of Melito's Homily, and, as we have seen, it is in the Jewish Passover liturgy a part of an addition. Does this mean there once existed a symbolism of light, connected with the

¹⁵ See my forthcoming article on "Hystaspes and John of Pathmos," and meantime R. Le De' aut, "La nuit pascale," *Anolectia Biblica* 22, Rome, 1963.

¹⁶ In *Auf der Maur*, pp. 31-2, 63-71, 116-122. The author (pp. 69-70) supposes that the use of light at Easter stems from the baptism at this night. As we see, the situation seems to be more complex. It seems that the importance of light at Easter arose as a contamination between a Jewish concept, connected with the Passover night and the baptism.

Exodus and the Passover night, (in a kind of ancient Judaism) which was not identical with its main stream, in which the liberation from Egyptian bondage was understood as a rescue from the sphere of darkness into the sphere of light? We mentioned a passage from the Hellenistic Wisdom of Solomon.¹⁷ Another Hellenistic Jew, Philo of Alexandria (*spec. leg.* II 155), spoke about the feast of unleavened bread, saying that "the feast begins at the middle of the month, on the fifteenth day, when the moon is full, a day purposely chosen, because at this feast there shall be no darkness, but everything shall be continuously lighted up."¹⁸ It is therefore possible that there were Jewish groups for whom the Passover night was linked with light and darkness, and that Christianity inherited from such Jewish circles the ties between the Easter Vigil and light.

An affinity between the symbolism of light in the Haggadah and the Easter Vigil can be recognized in Christian liturgy. Especially instructive is the *Benedictio Cerei Gelasiana*.¹⁹ We find in it all the elements which we know from Melito (lines 489-493) and the passage from the Haggadah (where the pair 'death-life' is lacking): the mystery of this night is the resurrection of the Lord; then the darkness and death were overwhelmed by the light and slavery was vanquished by the splendour of liberty. Though darkness-light, death, slavery and liberty appear here as in Melito's passage, the content of the liturgical text shows that it does not derive from Melito.

As already said, the liberation from darkness to light and from death to life does not appear only in Melito's Paschal Homily, but also in *Joseph and Asenath*²⁰ in connection with the reception of proselytes. Philo also (*de virtutibus* 179; see also 221) says that the proselytes were "blind at the first" and "that they have recovered their sight and had come from the deepest darkness to behold the most radiant light." Is it possible that Isaiah 9:1 (about which we have spoken in connection with Exodus) was also understood as referring to proselytes as if they were the people who walked in darkness and in the shadow of death, and now they see a great light? In any case the concept that a proselyte comes from darkness to light is a Jewish idea and according to Judaism the proselyte is a new-born child. The baptized Christian also is born from spirit and water; by baptism the Christian dies with Christ and resurrects to life. And, as the Jewish proselytes according to *Joseph and Asenath* and Philo, also those who are baptized as Christians, receive the divine light. The baptism is named "illumination,"²¹

¹⁷ See above, note 14.

¹⁸ See also (*leg. spec.* II 210,) about the Feast of Tabernacles. Here the connection with Hanukkah, the Feast of Tabernacles of Kislew, the Feast of Lights can be only hinted at.

¹⁹ See Auf der Maur, p. 118, note 276: "Magnum igitur mysterium et noctis huius mirabile sacramentum dignis necesse est laudibus cumulari. In quo dominicae resurrectionis miraculo diem sibi introductim tenebrae inveteratae senserunt, et mors quae olim fuerat aeterna nocte damnata, inserto viri fulgoris lumine captivam se trahi dominicis triumphis obstipuit, et quod praevarieante primopla(u)sto tenebrosae praesumptione fuerat in servitute damnatum huius noctis miraculo splendore liber(t)atis inradiat."

²⁰ Marc Philomenko, *Joseph et Asenath*, Leiden, 1968, p. 55.

²¹ Justinus Martyr, I Apol. 67; Dial. 39:2; 122:1, 4, 5; 123:2.

and the baptized are named "the enlightened." Thus the connection between the motifs of the passage *Lefi-khakh* and its parallel in Melito, on the one hand, and the ideology of Jewish proselytism and of Christian baptism on the other hand, is clear enough. How far this affinity between proselytism (and baptism) and the passover night influenced the fact that the Easter Vigil was the preferred time for baptism of neophytes in the ancient Church we do not know.

It is an unknown fact that the custom of baptism of neophytes at the night of Easter is the sequel of the Jewish custom of baptism of proselytes in the evening of Passover, a time which includes even the night of Passover. This custom is well attested in Jewish sources,²² and it is clear why the proselytes liked to be baptized at the evening of Passover, having been circumcised some days before: they were permitted to eat the Passover lamb, which is, according to the Law of Moses, forbidden to the uncircumcised. Thus, this Jewish custom passed to Christianity; those who became Christians were baptized at the night of Easter and were admitted to the Eucharist, a symbol of Christ – the Paschal lamb. The baptism of Christians at the night of Easter was surely very ancient; it is difficult to assume that it was later than the first half of the second century C. E. The baptism of proselytes at Passover evening is in accordance with the school of Shammai; the school of Hillel opposed it. Thus the custom of Easter night baptism was accepted by the Church before the Jewish Halakhah became completely Hillelite.

The symbolic meaning of Christian baptism and of the Jewish reception of proselytes, of the night of Passover and Christian Easter Vigil have common motifs: darkness and light, bondage and liberation, death and life, and, as we have now seen, there was also another cause why in Judaism new members of the community were baptized in the night commemorating the Exodus. There are also complex ties between the poem said at Passover and the Improperia. Though there was, and sometime is, a tension between Christianity and Judaism, it was Paul who said to the Christians "that our ancestors were all under the pillar of cloud, and all of them passed through the Red Sea." (I Cor. 10:1-5). But it seems to me that even the deepest theology is a far easier business than a historical investigation of such a complex phenomenon as human spiritual history is. Thus I have brought this contribution as an example illustrating the complexity of one such problem.

Professor David Flusser is professor of Judaism of the Second Temple period, and early Christianity, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

²² See Mishnah Pesahim VIII, 8 and Tosefta Pesahim VII, 14. See S. Safrai, *Pilgrimage at the Time of the Second Temple*, Tel Aviv, 1965, pp. 92-93 (Hebrew). About the baptism on the night of Easter see also Auf der Maur, pp. 37-63.