



Jacob Paxy Alumkal

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ Implied in the Image of the Paschal Lamb in 1 Cor 5:7

An Intertextual, Exegetical
and Theological Study



Peter Lang

General Introduction

First Experience with the Passover

The most vivid picture of the Paschal Lamb in my mind is the Paschal Lamb made by my father when I was an eight year old boy. My father was also a professional decorator and once for the Holy Thursday liturgical celebrations he decorated the altar and the stage where the Holy Eucharist would be celebrated, with a Paschal Lamb. Since my parish church could not accommodate all the believers of the parish (around five thousand people) we used to have liturgical celebrations on the Holy Week in an open churchyard. My father made a Paschal Lamb out of thermocol. Its throat was cut and blood was flowing down directly over the tabernacle. This is the first vivid picture of the Paschal Lamb in my life. And my father explained to me that Passover Celebration is the greatest feast of the OT¹ which indicates the total liberation of the Israelite from the bondage of Egypt. And in the NT Jesus Christ is our new Paschal Lamb. Of course I did not understand any more than these statements. And every year during the Holy Week my father used to read from the OT books of Exodus and Leviticus and from the NT the Gospel according to John. And this remains vibrantly in my memory even now.

Interest in Paul

As a discalced Carmelite I was really impressed by the teachings of our Holy Father John of the Cross. During the novitiate I read all the works of St. John of the Cross. I found that the teachings of St. John of the Cross were very much influenced by St. Paul. When I started my theological course in 1996, Fr. Jacob Palliparambil OCD explained in the class the personality of Paul and his unique theological contributions. I was really fascinated by the personality and thinking of Paul. Therefore, for my BTh thesis I took Pauline letters to

1 OT = Old Testament; NT = New Testament.

study. My topic was the concept of New Man according to St. Paul, lived and actualized by St. John of the Cross. When I was doing my MTh Studies at St. Peter's Seminary Bangalore, I told my moderator Fr. Lucian Legrand about my interest to write a thesis on Pauline teaching and took Gal 3:26–28, for an exegetical and theological study. I was thinking that if I study the letters of the Galatians I can better understand the letters to Romans.

Beginning of the Research

My study on Paul and his teachings during my Bachelor and Master degree has considerably increased my interest in him. I cannot but continue my studies on Paul. So when I was asked to do doctoral studies, I decided to do my further studies on Paul. Dr. Jacob Palliparambil, Dr. Augustine Mulloor and Fr. George Ollatupuram SSL, the scriptures scholars from my province have supported my decision to continue my research on Paul. Thus I came to Switzerland and revealed my desire to Prof. Walter Kirchschräger. He agreed upon my decision and helped me to find a suitable subject to do the research on. He was kind enough to go through my MTh thesis to get to know my way of thinking. We discussed some of the possible themes and finally Prof. W. Kirchschräger suggested me to study the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ symbolised in the Paschal Lamb. In fact I did not see much scope at the first reading, but Prof. Kirchschräger was so confident and encouraged me to proceed and gave me the necessary direction to start my research on it.

Studies on the Subject and its general Trend

There are not many studies on this topic. There is only one particular study on this subject. It is an exegetical study made on this topic by D.O. Wenthe.²

2 D.O. Wenthe, "An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 5:7b", *Springfielder*, (1974) Vol. 38, No. 2, 134–140.

There is also a general study on the Passover theme in the 1 Corinthians by J.K. Howard.³ The remaining studies are part of the commentary on the passage. There is one more study by H. Sahlin who sees salvation as new Exodus⁴. H. Conzelmann mentions the possibility that the death of Jesus Christ could be explained in the Jewish Cultic categories as expiatory sacrifice, covenant sacrifice and Passover Sacrifice in so far as they represent the character of reconciliation as an act.⁵ Most of the commentators take for granted that in this particular pericope, Paul is speaking of the cultic Passover sacrifice. And the sacrificial theology could be applied to it.

Methodology and Content of the Study

We are basically following the historical critical method in our biblical analysis. We try to combine the historical critical method to the canonical method. In this work we always follow the method of analysing the text or concepts exegetically and draw from it the theological nuances. This work is an exegetical and theological study on 1 Cor 5:6–8. In our analysis our main concentration is on the Paschal lamb symbolism for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our study consists mainly of five chapters and an additional sixth chapter dealing with the spiritual side of the exegetical and theological analysis for the postmodern Christian churches of the East and West. As a prelude to our study we made a survey of the mentioning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by Paul in the undisputed Pauline Corpus. In the light of this survey we study the centrality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the theological nuances connected with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The background study is inevitable to situate the theological context of the text. Since we are concentrating on the Paschal lamb we study the lamb motive and the blood rite in the Ancient Near East and in the OT in the second chapter. Paul takes

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- 3 J.K., Howard, "Christ our Passover: A Study of the Passover-Exodus Theme in I Corinthians", *Ev Q*, XLI. 2, (1969) 97–108.
 - 4 H. Sahlin, "The New Exodus of Salvation according to St. Paul", A. Fridrichsen, *The Root of the Vine*, London, Dacre, 1953.
 - 5 H. Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, G. W. MacRae (ed.), *Hermeneia*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1984, 99.

the Passover symbolism directly from the OT. The Passover lamb and the blood rite at the so called first Passover in Egypt and its annual celebration by the later generations are totally different. The first Passover was unique and its effects were unique too. Then in the third chapter we study the exegetical and theological meaning of the Passover in the first letter to the Corinthians in general context and in the particular context of 1 Cor 5. In our study of the exegetical and theological meaning of 1 Cor 5:6–8, we arrived at the firm conviction that Paul is referring to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the Passover, keeping in mind the first Passover and not the annual cultic Passover celebrations of the Jews. This brings a drastic change in the theology connected with the Passover. Consequently we translate that the Paschal lamb was *killed* and not sacrificed. And the theology connected with this Passover symbolism is not a sacrificial theology but a unique Passover theology for Paul. And this is quite meaningful from the historical context of the 1 Cor 5.

In the fourth chapter we study the Lamb motive in the post-Pauline NT writings in order to see the Paschal lamb motive in the NT. Jesus as the Lamb of God was a pre-Pauline Christological concept but the interpretation of it varies according to the theological view attached to it by the various NT authors. In the fifth chapter we examine the theological impact of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in particularly the theological impact of the Passover lamb motive on humanity. Here we bring out the unique findings of our exegetical and theological study of 1 Cor 5:6–8. This chapter is the result of the exegetical and theological analysis of the previous chapters. And the sixth chapter as I said already is a short spiritual reflection on our study. It is only an attempt how the Passover theology can better influence postmodern Europe and India. It is not conclusive but open for further reflections.

Uniqueness of our Study

When Paul spoke of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the symbol of the paschal lamb, Paul was trying to explain the salvific effects of the paschal mystery in the light of the First Passover Lamb. In the history of Israel there was only one unique Passover by which the Israelites

were saved and liberated from the slavery of Egypt by God. God is the author of the salvation in Jesus Christ too. The term Passover has very deep theological meanings which were lost in the Judeo-Christian context due to the over-emphasis of the meaning on the “passing over” or “limping over” or “jumping over”. But etymologically and theologically the first meaning of the root term is “to have compassion” and secondly “to protect”. We go to these root meanings in order to find the essence of the theological meaning of the Passover event. The yearly Passover celebration does not bring out a decisive salvific event. It is only a reliving of the past experience of salvation by God. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and its salvific effects cannot be adequately explained theologically by the yearly cultic Passover celebration theology. It is unrepeatable like the first Passover. And from the overall exodus context of the first letter to the Corinthians it is clear once again that Paul is comparing or presenting Jesus Christ as the eschatological Passover lamb after the model of the first Passover Lamb. And therefore the death of Jesus Christ is to be explained not as a sacrifice but a killing. The first Passover was not a sacrifice in strict sense. The sacrificial theology and the expiatory sense of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are limited. The Passover symbolism presents a much deeper and holistic theology connected with it. And we have enough grounds to believe that Paul is speaking of a Passover theology rather than a sacrificial theology. Theological explanation of this passage from the view of sacrificial theology is possible. But when we conclude from various exegetical possibilities the most probable explanation would be that the Passover symbolism of Paul in 1 Cor 5:7 must be explained in the light of the unique theology of the Passover. Since Paul wanted to make the Corinthians aware of the indicative reality of their Christian existence in Baptism, he brings the OT symbol of Passover by which the Israelites became God’s own people. The baptism theology of Paul too supports our view. And with regard to the Passover theology either in the OT or in the NT we have not come across with a single monograph. Therefore we have come to our own theological propositions of the Passover symbolism. We have tried to explain the theology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology and the ethical nuances of 1 Cor 5:6–8 in the light of the Pauline Passover theology. And this is the unique contribution of our study. Passover theology has a wider scope than the sacrificial theology. Each sacrifice has a specific function and it belongs to the cultic celebration. Passover theology also could include the sacrificial aspect of the cult yet

goes beyond the sacrificial theology. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has many theological nuances of which the expiatory aspect of sacrificial theology is just one element. And Pauline Christology could be explained other than expiatory perspective. After this study I find that there is a wide scope of exploring the Passover theology in Pauline letters and to explain the Christo-centric -soteriology in the light of this view. Also there is an extensive possibility of theological exploration so called “First Passover” of the OT and its impact on salvation history of the OT.