**Jesus’ resurrection as the Christian passover**

1 “The supreme paradigm of the divine redemptive power in human history” is, for Christians, the fact that Jesus died for us and didn’t stay dead: it is the EASTER fact. Its parallel in Judaism is PASSOVER, the celebration of “Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian bondage.” So either event can be used as an analogy of the other.

2 John of Damascus, whose writings are, for Greek Christians, the summary and summit of Christian theology, wrote an Easter hymn - beloved in the Christian world - analogizing from the Jewish Passover. Here’s how it begins:

*The day of resurrection! Earth, tell it all abroad, / The passover of gladness, the passover of God.*

3 The quotations in my first paragraph are from page viii of *Gates of Freedom; A Passover Haggadah,* an elegantly illustrated new translation and commentary by Rabbi Chaim Stern (1982). My wife and I were the Christians present at its dedicatory first use, a three-hour Seder in the home of Chaim and Susan Stern.

4 While the meanings of Passover (the supreme Jewish meal) and the Lord’s Supper (or Eucharist, Mass, Mystery - the supreme Christian meal) are crystal-clear, the details of their origins and possible interrelationships are murky. Chaim says (page ix) that the haggadah (ritual narrative of the Passover) “as a book dates from the ninth century.” He was a liberal Jew, the editor of *Gates of* *Prayer* (1975), the official prayerbook of Reform Judaism. But he resented Christian celebration of this well-developed and distinctly Jewish Passover-meal ritual as (he said to me) “one more Christian rip-off of Judaism.”

Emphasis on “celebration”: he favored Christian education on the Passover, Christian attendance at Passover, Jewish or even Christian demonstration of Passover to a Christian assembly. But Christian “celebration” of either the Passover or a Christianized version of it was a confusion of the two religions’ separate supreme meals and thus of the religions.

5 The historical data are too skimpy to remove the murkiness of the relationships between the two meals’ relationships. In the New Testament, the first three Gospels associate Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples (later, and now, called the Lord’s Supper) with Passover; but the Fourth Gospel, seemingly unaware of that tradition, represents a tradition in which the Last Supper (John 13-17) was “*before* the festival of the passover” (13:1). Jesus’ arrest was *before* Passover (12:28). Since early Christian days, the Lord’s Supper - with overtones of Passover - has been celebrated on Sundays, the day of Jesus’ resurrection: every Sunday is Easter! And so annually, on big Easter, we sing, “The day of resurrection!...the Passover of God.” We Christians believe that God’s deliverance of humanity from bondage to sin and death by Jesus’ death and resurrection satisfies hopes created by God’s “passover” deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt.

6 With its Jewish part and its Christian part, the Bible visualizes a unique and intimate though difficult relationship between the two religions. Personally, I welcome all efforts to know each other and persuade each other, but am persuaded that Christians’ *celebrating* a Jewish festival lacks authenticity and even integrity.

7 Finally, a story about Rabbi Stern’s eagerness to understand Easter. We lived in Chappaqua NY & entrained onto Manhattan. But one morning, he picked me up and drove me 37 miles to my work at New York Theological Seminary. As I was getting out of his car, I said, “Chaim, what’s for you today on Manhattan?” “Nothing,” said he, “I’m headed home. I just wanted to talk to you about Jesus’ resurrection.”

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