

THE PASSOVER NARRATIVE AND RITUAL: A MEAL OF LIBERATION FROM HUNGER

Ma. Marilou S. Ibita

With the marginalized and hungry poor in view and the UN Millennium Development Goal No. 1 in sight, this paper explores the role of the Passover liturgy for a mindful celebration of God's liberating power particularly for those who are hungry. The focus of the study is two-fold: first, it looks at the Passover meal narrative in Exodus 12 and highlights the actions in the narrative that support a responsible sharing of food at Passover. Second, it examines the yearly Passover ritual through the tradition of the Haggadah focussing primarily on the HaLachma Anya, the explicit invitation for the hungry ones to partake of food. Various ways in which food is shared in the Jewish community especially at Passover time will be discussed. We will conclude with a challenge for Christians, especially in the Philippines, to continue re-discovering Passover as part of our heritage from the Jewish people both in the Bible and in the present day, whether in the Philippines or in Israel.

INTRODUCTION

On top of the list of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals is the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger: halve the proportion of people experiencing hunger between 1990 and 2015.¹ In view of the goals of the World Food Summit and the UN Millennium goals, Jacques Diouf, the director-general of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reported that “Far from decreasing, the number of hungry people in the

1. Available from <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> (accessed 22 February 2010).

world is currently increasing at the rate of four million a year.”² Worldwide but mostly in Asia and the Pacific, 2009 has shown an upsurge in people’s food insecurity related to the global economic crisis.³ In the Philippines, a survey on December 5-10, 2009 showed that an estimated 4.4 million households suffered involuntary hunger at least once in the past three months, setting a new record of 24.0%.⁴ In Israel twenty-two percent of the population (about 1,100,000 people) is food insecure: 60% are Jewish, 20% are Arabs, and 20% include new immigrants.⁵ These are staggering statistics and the challenge to address hunger, individually and communally, is heightened when one meets a hungry person face to face. Hunger is a complex issue with an equally complex, but not impossible, solution. While Diouf did not mention a direct faith-based response in combating hunger,⁶ from our perspective it is interesting to note how religious beliefs, convictions and rituals could play a significant role in providing concrete, relevant and ethical responses to such a problem.⁷ Passover is a significant example.

2. Available from <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2006/10/30/food-report.html#skip300x250> (accessed 22 February 2010).

3. For detailed information, see Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2009: Economic Crises-Impacts and Lessons Learned* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2009) available from <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/012/i0876e/i0876e02.pdf> (accessed 23 February 2010).

4. See “Fourth Quarter 2009 Social Weather Survey: Hunger at new record-high 24.0%” available from <http://www.sws.org.ph/> (accessed 22 February 2010).

5. There is no well established data on the population of Israel’s nutritional status. See information available from http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr03_MDG_tables.pdf (accessed 22 February 2010). For this reason, we rely on the information about hunger and food security in the country on secondary sources such as <http://mazon.org/get-involved/hunger-resources/facts/> (accessed 22 February 2010). The 20% new immigrants are ethnically unspecified.

6. Available from <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2006/10/30/food-report.html#skip300x250> (accessed 08 August 2007). Diouf only mentions the following: bringing an end to international conflicts, promoting economic growth, ensuring that access to food is not blocked or disrupted by wars and encouraging rural development.

7. For proposals towards eliminating hunger, see <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/012/i0876e/i0876e04.pdf> (accessed 23 February 2010).

Passover (*Pesach*) is the major story and festival in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. It is very important for the Jews from the time of Moses and the liberation from Egypt. As Jews, Jesus and his followers celebrated it, too.⁸ Passover is a story of God's liberation of the Israelites from slavery. Passover is a "zeman cherutenu," the season of liberation.⁹

The celebration recalls, according to tradition, not just one Passover but three. The Talmud makes the distinction between the "Passover of Egypt" and the "Passover of the succeeding generations" in *Pesachim* 9:5.¹⁰ For Jews who advocate against hunger, there is also what has been called the third *Pesach*, the "*Pesach shel atid*", a *Pesach* of a future time when all shall truly be free including freedom from hunger.¹¹

What has been an experience of redemption in the first Passover serves as a present day inspiration to the Jewish people, and, hopefully, to Christians as well, to be responsible and to assist in the future redemption of humanity, especially those who are oppressed or enslaved physically, intellectually, or ideologically.¹² From this line of

8. See Mk 14:1, 12, 14, 16; Mt 26:2, 17-19; Lk 22:1, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15; Jn 2:13; 2:23 to cite a few.

9. Peter S. Knobel, ed., *Gates of the Season: A Guide to the Jewish Year* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1983), 67.

10. See *Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation*, Volume IVE: *Pesachim* Chapters 9 and 10, trans. Jacob Neusner (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1993), 22.

11. This is advocated by a Jewish organization called MAZON ("Food"): A Jewish response to Hunger. They describe themselves as "Founded in 1985, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger is a national nonprofit organization that allocates donations from the Jewish community to prevent and alleviate hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds. Each year, MAZON grants over \$4 million to more than 300 carefully screened hunger-relief agencies, including emergency food providers, food banks, multi-service organizations and advocacy groups that seek long-term solutions to the hunger problem. MAZON ("food" in Hebrew) believes its dual purpose is to provide for those who are hungry today and to address the systemic causes of hunger and poverty, both domestically and globally. Although grants are provided to many organizations serving the Jewish poor, in keeping with the best of Jewish tradition MAZON believes it is important to respond to all who are in need. MAZON is supported by over 100,000 donors who incorporate social justice and hunger relief as crucial components of their everyday lives." See <http://mazon.org/about/> (accessed 23 February 2010).

12. Knobel, ed., *Gates of the Season*, 67.

thinking, we narrow our short study on Passover in relation to the call to work towards being free of the slavery of hunger and food insecurity. One midrash speaks of the Red Sea splitting only after the Israelites stepped into it implying that in the same way redemption cannot happen unless we take the first step.¹³ This “first step” will mean a two-pronged discussion: one of the Passover narrative and the other of the yearly Passover liturgy.

In this study we will focus on the biblical account and liturgical observance of Passover¹⁴ as a potentially effective resource in reflecting on some appropriate actions that can contribute to the wider struggle for liberation from the present slavery of hunger. We will first examine the Passover meal narrative in Exodus 12 from this perspective. Then, we will consider the yearly Passover ritual through the tradition of the *Haggadah* focussing primarily on the *HaLachma Anya*. We will conclude with a challenge for Christians, especially in the Philippines, to continue re-discovering Passover.

THE PASSOVER MEAL NARRATIVE: EXODUS 12

We begin our contribution to the “first step” towards liberation from hunger with our reflection on Exodus 12 (a part of Parashat Bo, Exo 10:1-13:16).¹⁵ This passage relates one of the most powerful

13. *Ibid.*

14. From the perspective of ritual celebration that could be analyzed in view of liberation from hunger, studies can also be made of other Jewish texts and Jewish feasts such as the feast of Sukkoth and the command to welcome guests. This study is limited to the Passover narrative in Exodus 12 and the HaLachma Anya of the Passover ritual. For a more detailed study on the development of Passover, see J. B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover: From the Earliest Times to AD 70*, London Oriental Series 21 (New York/ Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1963); Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies* (New York, NY: KTAV Publishing House, 1980), 211-244; Baruch M. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/ London: University of California Press, 1984); Tamara Prosic, *The Development and Symbolism of Passover until 70 CE* (London/ New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2004).

15. The Masoretic Text is divided according to Sabbath reading portions, *parashah* (sg.)/ *parashot* (pl.), not according to the convention of biblical chapters and verses.

stories of liberation. It is the story that is commemorated in the celebration of the *Pesach* when God led his people out of slavery in Egypt. It is very important to note that one of the most important features of this event is the Passover meal. In both the biblical account and the liturgical praxis, we are offered ample teaching and learning moments¹⁶ in view of our responsibility and response-ability that can help address the question of hunger. We will present and comment on some of them.

Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. 4 If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it (NRSV Exod 12:3-4).

In this text, we find two commands. One is explicit and the other is implicit. First, we have the explicit command to share. While the ideal would be to take a lamb for each family, there is a provision for smaller households to come together and share among themselves. This detail seems to discourage being choosy concerning table-fellowship. It fosters joining one's closest neighbour for the meal. It also encourages participants to be inclusive even within the community by requiring an openness to obtain the paschal lamb in partnership with another household and to share meal with the closest family. Those who could not afford are taken into consideration in the narrative by having an explicit provision for a possible combined meal with those who could. Sharing makes it possible to form a community. One does not eat the meal of liberation alone. *Havurah* refers to the "group gathering for this ceremonial".¹⁷ At this point a liberating realization is made possible:

16. Ruth Gruber Fredman, *The Passover Seder: Afikoman in Exile* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 9 comments that "The Seder is quite consciously convened as a teaching event whose performance is incumbent on each person."

¹⁷ Mishael Zion and Noam Zion, *A Night to Remember: The Haggadah of Contemporary Voices* (Jerusalem: Zion Holiday Publications, 5767/2007), 87 quoting Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Festival of Freedom: Essays on Pesah and the Haggadah*, ed. Joel B. Wolowelsky and Reuben Ziegler (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Pub. House, 2006), 23-24.

The slave suddenly realizes that the little he has saved up for himself, a single lamb, is too much for him. The slave spontaneously does something he would never have believed he was capable of doing, namely, he knocks on the door of his neighbour he had never noticed, inviting him to share the lamb with him and to eat together. No wonder our Seder commences with the declaration, "Ha lahma anya, this is the bread of poverty." Whatever we possess, even if it is just the bread of the poor, is too much for us, and we invite all to come and eat with us: "Let all who are hungry come and eat."¹⁸

Second, we also find in this passage the implicit command not to waste. By sharing with another family and by dividing the proportion of the lamb to the number of people who eat of it, wastage is discouraged and also prevented.

They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9 Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. 10 You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 11 This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD (NRSV Exod 12:8-11).

This command hints at the appropriateness of the meal that is shared, of the food that is divided. Not all food can be taken by anyone at all times. It is important that from this point in the narrative, we are told that even if they are suffering slavery in Egypt they still hold their dignity by eating what is culturally and religiously acceptable to them.¹⁹ There is a repetition of the command not to have leftovers.

18. Zion and Zion, *A Night to Remember*, 87 quoting Soloveitchik, *Festival of Freedom*, 23-24.

19. While some may point out that those who are hungry cannot be choosers, advocacy for food security for everyone cannot be thoughtless, insensitive and disrespectful. Advocacy against hunger and food insecurity is tied to the basic human right of freedom from hunger. See Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 25 available from <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>. In this paper we adopt the following definition: "Right to adequate food is a human right, inherent in all people, «to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual

In the text, one can perceive a tendency to prevent the possibility of any kind of leftovers. In vv. 3-4, the food is apportioned according to the number of participants. In v. 10, the command is not to let any of it remain until the morning. In v. 10, provisions are made for the case that, nevertheless, there should be leftovers. The command tells the Israelites to burn whatever might be leftover. While hygienic and ritual consideration could be behind the burning of the leftovers of the lamb, one scholar speculates that v. 10 might be connected with the story of the manna in Exod 16:19-24 where “[T]he prohibition of hoarding is a test of Israel’s faith in Providence”.²⁰ In the biblical context of Exodus 12 this triple provision to prevent leftovers seems to be connected with the situation of departure and radical breach from the context of slavery. It underlines the leaving behind of the Egyptian context and implies a new beginning elsewhere. The provisions are made so that nothing is wasted even if they have to eat in a hurry.

Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day shall be cut off from Israel. 16 On the first day you shall hold a solemn assembly, and on the seventh day a solemn assembly; no work shall be done on those days; only what everyone must eat, that alone may be prepared by you (NRSV Exod 12:15-16).

The charge “only what everyone must eat, that alone may be prepared by you” echoes the same important aspect of not wasting food. The call to only prepare food that can be consumed challenges the great disparity in the world today. On the one hand there is food

and collective fulfilling and dignified life free of fear.” (UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, 2002), available from http://www.fao.org/righttofood/principles_en.htm (accessed 29 February 2010). For a nuanced discussion of food security and right to food, see Kerstin Mechlem, “Food Security and the Right to Food in the Discourse of the United Nations,” *European Law Journal* 10/5 (2004): 631-348 available from http://www.fao.org/righttofood/KC/downloads/vl/docs/Mechlem_Food%20Security%20and%20the%20Right%20to%20Food%20in%20the%20discourse%20of%20the%20UN.pdf (accessed 22 February 2010).

20. William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 2 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999), 397.

waste in different kinds of celebrations and in excess food that are thrown away from hotels, restaurant or food chains, and even usual households.²¹ On the other hand, there is famine and food shortage in war-torn areas, in places of post-natural or human made calamities, as well as hunger among the homeless and informal settler colonies (squatters) in rural or bustling cities. “[P]repared by you” heightens the responsibility that partakers of the meal have not only for the meal - not to waste it - but also to prepare food for one another.

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb (NRSV Exod 12:21).

The Midrash Rabbah provides an interesting insight on this passage in view of the responsibility of those who share the meal from the perspective of God’s justice. Though, it presupposes a polarity between the Egyptians and the Israelites as in the biblical narrative, one can also infer its relevance in relation to the rightful action between those who have something to eat and those who have not:

A just balance and scales are the Lord’s. So also in Egypt. During the eighty years that Israel was enslaved there an Egyptian would go into the wilderness, seize a ram or deer, slay it, place it in a pot and cook it and eat it, while the Israelite would look on and taste nothing, as it says: When we sat by the flesh-pots, when we did eat bread to the full (Ex. XVI, 3). It does not say: ‘When we ate from the flesh-pots,’ but when ‘when we sat’, because they had to eat their bread without any meat. Hence did God say to them: ‘Since you made my children sick and weary by withholding them from meat, when you ate and gave them nothing, therefore will I do the same for my children; they will slay the lambs to whom you bow down, and will eat while you grow faint.’ Why? Because I am a righteous judge, and ‘A just balance and scales are the Lords.’ This is why it says: DRAW OUT AND TAKE YOUR LAMBS (Midrash Rabbah [Exodus] XVII.1).²²

21. See Haider Rizvi “U.S.-Massive Food Waste & Hunger Side by Side,” available from <http://www.organicconsumers.org/corp/hunger090604.cfm> (accessed 30 April 2010).

22. Rabbi Dr. S. M. Lehrman and Maurice Simon, translators, *The Midrash Rabbah (Exodus)* Vol. 2 (London/Jerusalem/ New York: Soncino, 1977), 211.

This insight can be an invitation to those who eat to be mindful of the hungry people surrounding them. As this midrash clearly illustrates, this insight on the justice of God can apply not only between individuals but also between groups or communities who live in plenty vis-à-vis those who are in want.

So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders. (...) 37 The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children.²³ 38 A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. 39 They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves (NRSV Exod 12:34, 37-39).

While trust in God's providence could be implied in relation to the burning of the leftovers of the lamb, this part of the biblical text also describes the people's participation and responsibility in view of provisions for the journey. The human action is vividly described here: they took the dough (the ingredient for the bread) with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders (a necessary material is noted to be carefully brought along on the journey), and they baked unleavened bread (they themselves acted to bake the bread). The two aspects of meeting the need of a hungry people, namely, trust in God's providence and human's participation, are therefore equally underscored in Exodus 12. These two aspects need to be attended to in the present day endeavours to respond to hunger.

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: This is the ordinance for the passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, 44 but any slave who has been purchased may eat of it after he has been circumcised; 45 no bound or hired servant may eat of it. 46 It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animals outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. 47 The whole congregation of Israel shall celebrate it. 48 If an alien who resides with you

23. It is interesting that women are not explicitly mentioned in this text, even if it can be assumed that they joined those who left Egypt. All the women played the timbrel and danced with Miriam after crossing the Red Sea in Exod 15:20.

wants to celebrate the passover to the LORD, all his males shall be circumcised; then he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it; 49 there shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you (NRSV Exod 12:43-49).

Here we find the tension in the text both in its being exclusive and inclusive. While the Passover is an ordinance for the Jewish people, there is also a way for the alien who resides with them to join them. This pushes people who have food to share not only to think of their own people but to widen the possibility of reaching out to those who hunger whether they are insiders or outsiders.

The various perspectives we have suggested on the biblical narrative of the Passover in Egypt have given us some points to ponder in relation to hunger. We have seen how the biblical account of Passover can be read with liberation from hunger as a lens. The injunctions to share the Passover meal and to minimize wasting the food in the account of the biblical Passover ritual continue to challenge us to confront the present slavery in the form of hunger. These biblical texts inspire and urge us to think of them in view of the current challenge of the global lack of food security for all. They prompt us to examine our responsibility and response-ability through concrete actions, individually and communally, in view of food insecurity.

THE YEARLY PASSOVER RITUAL: THE *HAGGADAH*

We now consider the Passover ritual, the *Haggadah*, and examine it in view of a potential guidance in dealing more effectively with the struggle to be liberated from the slavery of hunger.

In celebrating the yearly Passover to commemorate the Passover of Egypt, one is made aware of the rich tradition of the *Haggadah*.²⁴

24. There are about 3,500 editions of the Haggadah by the year 1976 according to Yehuda L. Bialer, *Jewish Life in Art and Tradition Based on the Collection of the Sir Isaac and Lady Edith Wolfson Museum, Hechal Shlomo, Jerusalem* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson London, 1976), 147.

There is not one definitive *Haggadah* for all time and for all Jews since the *Haggadah* is always adapted to particular local customs and vernacular language while its main features are constant.²⁵ However, in view of the arrangement of the table, psalms and benedictions used, and much of the *Haggadah*, today's Seder is "substantially that of the first century."²⁶

The Passover *Haggadah's* ritual and the partaking of the main meal offers manifold ways of becoming more aware of the ritual's sensitivity to the issue of hunger. As a commemoration of the first

25. Fredman, *The Passover Seder*, 8: "The Haggadah has been printed in the most elaborate and humble forms, in Hebrew and in the vernaculars, in over thirty-five hundred editions. Today, many Haggadahs are edited to accommodate the diversity of knowledge and experience in participants. These *Haggadahs* often include references to contemporary events in the form of additional readings or actions, and occasionally traditional passages are restated to make them more "relevant." Yet despite these improvisations, virtually all versions of the Haggadah include the traditional readings and sequence that are the core of the Seder service." She informs though that the Haggadah edited by Cecil Roth (1959) has been particularly useful as a reference since Roth provides more detailed instructions and historical and social commentary than are usually offered. See Cecil Roth, ed., *The Haggadah* (Jerusalem/ Ramat Gan/ Tel Aviv: Massada-Press and Alumo, 1959). To highlight some of our points, we will refer to this edition as well as to some other editions accordingly. One of the limits of Roth's version is the lack of use of the inclusive language prevalent during its time of publication. This is corrected in more recent versions.

For a concise treatment of Jewish Feminism concerning a critical consideration of the Passover and the *Haggadah*, see Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 112-116, with notes on pp. 282-284. She mentions the Jewish feminist criticism of the patriarchal aspects of the celebration both in the preparation and the ritual itself and the attempts to overcome these criticisms. She referred to the examples of many versions of Haggadot that include biblical Jewish heroines like Miriam, the midwives Shifra and Purah, and also modern ones like Anne Frank. Likewise, she cites the criticism concerning the Four Questions which are traditionally asked by the sons in the family and how daughters should also be allowed to ask them. She also critically delves into the practical preparations for Passover such as cleaning and meal preparation that are mostly the women's responsibility such as the critique on the symbolic act of gathering a few crumbs of *hametz* by the father in the Jewish household while the women have done the cleaning of the whole house. There is, however, no example given that relates to the *HaLachma Anya*.

26. John Bowman, *The Gospel of Mark: The New Christian Jewish Passover Haggadah* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 330.

Passover, the Seder meal in itself is a statement of celebrating liberation. From this viewpoint we now look at the *Haggadah* and its potential contribution in celebrating liberation from the slavery of hunger in a meal.

The *HaLachma Anya*, the opening invitation in the Passover ritual, offers a most striking act coupled with moving prayers that beckons profound insight in line with the issue at hand. The *mitzvah* of hospitality (*Hachnasat Orechim*), of inviting guests to join in the Seder meal, is very important and is one of the most distinctive features of Passover.²⁷ Its significance is underscored by having the invitation included in the text of the *Haggadah*, the accompanying action of lifting the *matzah* (unleavened bread),²⁸ and in using the Aramaic language for the prayer.²⁹ The action of the leader of lifting up the platter containing the *matzah*, assisted by all those present is coupled with a recitation of the ancient formula in Aramaic, *HaLachma Anya* (This is the bread of affliction).³⁰

Here we find at least two translations of the text:³¹

This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt.

27. Knobel, *Gates of the Season*, 69.

28. For a detailed explanation of the preparation of the *matzah* and its symbolic significance, see Fredman, *The Passover Seder*, 84-93.

29. Knobel, *Gates of the Season*, 69.

30. Roth, *The Haggadah*. (There is no page numbering in Roth's edition.) Roth explains that this prayer "may be the oldest portion of the entire ritual, and spoken not in Hebrew but in Aramaic, the vernacular generally spoken in Palestine at the beginning of the Christian era." This prayer seemed to have been added in the *Haggadah* after the destruction of the Temple. For those who see a resemblance between *HaLachma Anya* and "This is my body" in the Eucharist, see Lawrence A. Hoffmann, "A Symbol of Salvation in the Passover Haggadah," *Worship* 53 (1979): 519-537, reprinted in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, eds., *Passover and Easter: The Symbolic Structuring of the Season. Two Liturgical Traditions*, Vol. 6 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1999), 109-131; Israel J. Yuval, "Easter and Passover as Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue," in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times. Two Liturgical Traditions*, Vol. 5 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 98-124, especially 105-106.

31. The difficulty of transferring the Hebrew font limited the research with translations. Hebrew text available from http://judaism.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?zi=1/XJ/Ya&sdn=judaism&cdn=religion&tm=5&gps=161_8_1020_599&f=00&tt=14&bt=1&bts=1&zu=http%3A//www.chabad.org/article.asp%3FAID%3D275246 (accessed 22 February 2010).

All who hunger, let them come and eat:
all who are in need, let them come and celebrate the Passover.
Now we are here- next year we shall be in the land of Israel;
now we are slaves- next year, we shall be *free men*.³²

A more recent version reads:

This is the bread of poverty and persecution
That our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.

Let all who are hungry, come and eat.
Let all who are in need, come and share the Pesach meal.

This year we are still here-Next year in the land of Israel.
This year we are still slaves-Next year free people.³³

One can see that this prayer tells the story of the *matzah* in three parts: a memory, an action, and a hope. These are expressed, respectively, in the remembrance of the bread of poverty eaten in Egypt, the action of inviting all needy persons to join the table on this night and the hope for the future of being free in their own and national home.³⁴ The significance of this symbolic action, called for by the ritual, cannot be over emphasized. As Roth comments, "The unleavened bread is here uncovered and indicated by the Celebrant. The 'Bread of Affliction' (as it is termed in the Bible) is the historic emblem of the Exodus, the distinctive feature of the Passover feast, and the symbol both of freedom and of sympathy for the enslaved."³⁵

In contemporary Jewish settings, arrangements are made to see that no one has to celebrate this feast alone or that no one is prevented from doing so, especially those who are poor. It is incumbent in the *HaLachma Anya* invitation that both those who are poor and needy are given the opportunity to celebrate Passover.

32. Roth, *The Haggadah*.

33. Zion and Zion, *A Night to Remember*, 20. See also the Appendix at the end of this paper for some other translations.

34. *Ibid*.

35. Roth, *The Haggadah*.

Although they may initially seem redundant, the two invitations we issue in *HaLachma Anya* - “*Let all who are hungry, kol dikfhin, enter and eat*” and “*Let all who are in need, kol ditzrikh, come and celebrate the Passover*” – in reality are not. *Kol ditzrikh* refers to one who is alone, who has a lot of Matza and wine but no home or family. There are indeed many ways to be included among the *kol ditzrikh*. The invitation to “all who are in need” is not *yeitei ve-yeikhol*, “to eat with us;” rather, it is to spend the Pesach with us, *yeitei ve-yifsakh*, “to celebrate with us.” It is an invitation addressed to unfortunate and lonely people. They might be millionaires; it is completely irrelevant. Whoever is in need should come and celebrate.³⁶

HaLachma Anya's invitation is inclusive. Many communities make special arrangements for those who are alone, including the elderly, widows, widower, and college students who are away from home so that they can celebrate the feast.³⁷ Yet, as a potentially effective symbolic act by a community of people done in the midst of global hunger, the concern for the poor remains paramount. To make sure that everyone is given the opportunity to celebrate the Passover is not only limited to the night of the Passover ritual. The Passover celebration, particularly the part of the *HaLachma Anya* invites the participants that even days prior to the Passover eve, various activities are done to make sure that no one is hindered from observing this most important feast because they cannot afford it. This is symbolized mostly by the change of the main Passover symbol from the Paschal Lamb during the Temple times to the *matzah* after the destruction of the Temple³⁸ and as it is in contemporary times.

36. Zion and Zion, *A Night to Remember*, 21 quoting Soloveitchik, *Festival of Freedom*, 45-46.

37. Knobel, *Gates of the Season*, 69.

38. Rabbi George Wolf, *Lexical and Historical Contributions on the Biblical and Rabbinic Passover* (New York: George Wolf, 1991), 111-112. He explains lengthily how the shift in the symbolism happened: “In the Bible, the Pesach festival was a home ritual, a family observance, centered around the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb. After the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem, Pesach became a national pilgrimage festival of thanksgiving for the Exodus from Egypt, centered around the eating of the sacrificial Paschal lamb. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the Pesach festival, in Rabbinic Judaism, became again a holiday centered around the home, a non-sacrificial Seder, commemorating Israel's past redemption by the exodus from Egypt and offering assurance of her future redemption. In the

This shift of symbols is consistent with the transfer of celebration of the Exodus from the throngs in the Temple courtyard to the intimacy and enclosure of the home. The central symbol of the Passover celebration, the sacrifice cooked outside over an open fire, has been replaced by a food baked inside a doubly enclosed space, an oven either in the home or in a communal bakery. The key Passover food has been changed from an event of the evening, a sacrificial meal, to a form whose production brings the community together and focuses its collective mind for weeks before the festival. Matzah is also used to extend the community: the absolute need of each Jew to have matzah for the holidays has resulted in annual collections of money to buy matzah for the needy and mailings of matzah where none can be baked...³⁹

The practice of *Me-ot Chitin*, which literally means “money for wheat,”⁴⁰ concretely expresses this tradition of sharing. It indicates that originally funds were collected so that the poor could buy *matzah* for Pesach and celebrate it properly.⁴¹ In the third century, a Palestinian custom of giving wheat to the poor for the baking of the *matzot* was mentioned in connection with the special Passover charity tax.⁴² This is rooted in the original custom known as *chite haPesach* (“wheat

Rabbinic Seder, the unleavened bread assumed an importance equal to the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb. In the Babylonian Talmud, Samuel, a Babylonian amora of the third century C.E., used the word “matzah” instead of the word “Pesach” of the Mishnah, thus equating matzah with the Pesach or Paschal Lamb. How was Samuel able to equate the unleavened bread with the sacrificial Paschal lamb? This was made possible by the two connotations of the word ~x,l = 1) flesh 2) bread. Matzah or unleavened bread is a form of bread. The Paschal lamb is flesh. Thus the flesh of the paschal lamb is equal to the matzah or (unleavened) bread.”

39. Fredman, *The Passover Seder*, 135-136.

40. Knobel, *Gates of the Season*, 128.

41. *Ibid.*, 128-129. The same is true of the wine. From the Bavli Pesachim 10:1, *Talmud of Babylonia*, 35. “On the eve of Passover from just before the afternoon prayer [the afternoon’s daily whole-offering], a person should not eat, until it gets dark. And even the poorest Israelite should not eat until he reclines at his table. And they should provide him with no fewer than four cups of wine, and even if [the funds] come from *public charity*.” (*Mishnah*, Pesachim 10.1) Emphasis added; See also Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, 102.

42. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, 218.

for Passover”) where the recipients take the wheat to the mill, obtain their own flour and bake their own matzot.⁴³ Thus, in addition to inviting itinerant guests to the Seder and helping by means of *Me-ot Chitin*, there is also the option of giving out *Kimkha DePishka* (“Pesach flour”).⁴⁴ All of these efforts attest to the point that Passover has always been a time in which Jews redoubled their efforts to help the poor and needy in their communities.⁴⁵ This brings to mind the *Sifre on Parashat Re’eh* which declares, “To one for whom bread is suitable, give bread; to one who needs dough, give dough; to one for whom money is required, give money; to one for whom it is fitting to put the food in that one’s mouth, put it in.”⁴⁶ The first and the last descriptions in this saying recall the *HaLachma Anya*; the second the *Kimkha DePishka*; the third, the *Me-ot Chitin*. Changes in circumstances allowed these practices to evolve into the communal baking and distribution of *matzot* when communal bakeries were established, and later on to giving of money to the poor who bought their own wheat and baked their own *matzot* which persist even today in both forms of giving money and distributing food packages.⁴⁷ Eliyahu Kitov expresses thoughts that reflect these activities well when he says:

Even if a man has already fulfilled the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, in complete accordance with the law, he cannot appreciate the full implication of freedom if he knows that his neighbour is hungry and in need. If he knew that there were hungry people in his town and he had not bothered to come to their assistance, he would be guilty of telling lies- God forbid- on this “watch night” when he says at the beginning of the Haggadah, “Let all who are hungry come and eat.” If, however, he has busied himself to supply the needy with food, and then he says, “Perhaps there are still some people of whom I know not, I am ready to receive them at my table,” then his words are clearly sincere and he is rewarded for saying this just as if he had only now fed the hungry and gladdened the hearts of the poor.⁴⁸

43. *Ibid.*

44. Zion and Zion, *A Night to Remember*, 21.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Available from http://www.mazon.org/What_You_Should_Know/Hunger_and_Judaism/Jewish_Text_Sources.asp (accessed 10 August 2007).

47. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, 218.

In the same line of thought an interesting translation of the opening lines of the *HaLachma Anya* captures this sentiment very well: “Here is bread (or food), O you poor people!”⁴⁹ The focus is not only on the bread of affliction but also on the afflicted people.

Lest it be misconstrued that the practice of food sharing is limited to the time of Passover, it should be noted that the phrase *kol ditzrich yete veyifshach* was patterned from a phrase attributed to Rav Huna (3 CE). Coming from a life of extreme poverty, when Rav Huna’s fortunes improved he dedicated his means to the welfare of the poor and, according to the Talmud, whenever he sat down to a meal he would open the door and declare: “Whoever is in need let him come and eat.”⁵⁰ This story heightens the relationship of sharing food not only at Passover time but also outside of the season. Jewish groups offering food to the needy and reaching out to the poor not only in Israel or the United States abound.⁵¹

A thought from the Sfas Emes on the *matzah* as the bread of affliction is also worth considering. The Hebrew rendering of the *HaLachma Anya* as *lechem oni* is used and translated as “bread of poverty” and not “bread of affliction,” the Sfas Emes brings our thoughts and recollection of the reference to this bread not only as far back as *Shemot/Exodus* but even *Bereishit/Genesis*, beginning with Adam’s story.

48. This is quoted in Arthur Waskow, *Seasons of our Joy: A Modern Guide to the Jewish Holidays* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1991), 145. This situation, of course, changes and the challenges becomes more pointed in the world where there is a world wide web of communication concerning the massive amount of information on worldwide hunger.

49. I am indebted to Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman who shares his grandfather’s translation with me. He puts a comma between *lachma* and *anya* when reciting the formula.

50. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, 233.

⁵¹ For Jewish organizational responses to hunger see <http://www.amazon.org> (accessed 22 February 2010); See also Latet, Matan, Beyond the Horizon, Friendship’s Way, Tmura, Table to Table Meals Van, Pradler NGO Empowerment Program, BeerSova in <http://www.prattfoundation-israel.co.il/food2006.pdf> (accessed 22 February 2010). In the same way, the synagogue of Kol HaNeshamah spearheaded by R. Levi Weiman-Kelman and their “Lachma” project offers supermarket coupons for the needy of Baka-Talpiot in Jerusalem.

There is another historical dimension to the concept of the “bread of poverty.” Adam, in the aftermath of his sin was given a curse (...) *You will eat in sadness all the days of your life ... By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread* (Bereishis 3:17, 19).

Israel through two hundred years of toil and frustration, was not only preparing for the glorious future but as also rectifying Adam’s sin of eating the Forbidden Fruit (...). Consequently, Hashem’s curse to Adam, that man eats bread under stress and the earth itself would resist him, was lifted when Israel completed its period of slavery. According to this approach, the suffering of Egypt (symbolized by *matzah*) transmuted all “bread” (i.e. the entire material world) from a cursed commodity into a source of blessing. (5651)⁵²

This insight sheds light on the issue of hunger and gives hope that from the moment of eating the first unleavened bread, the time has come when “bread” will be eaten not under stress but in the spirit of a blessing. Precisely as a blessing, bread should be shared. This is significantly enacted at the moment of the *HaLachma Anya*, when the ritual calls for the opening doors to welcome the poor and the needy.

Nevertheless, this welcoming act of opening doors at the moment of the *HaLachma Anya* symbolizing hospitality to those in need,⁵³ has not been free of dangerous implications. An example of this is seen in the unfounded rumors like the blood libel or host desecration lies have been hurled at Jews especially at Passover time to justify

52. Rabbi Yosef Stern, *The Three Festivals: Ideas and Insights of the Sfas Emes on Pesach, Shavuot and Succot* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd, 1993), 59.

53. Zion and Zion, *A Night to Remember*, 20. On pp.114 they describe the two moments of opening doors during the Passover ritual: one at the moment of *HaLachma Anya* to remember the past, slavery and poverty, and the other at the pouring of Elijah’s cup to signify openness to the future with hope. The moment of opening the doors to Elijah is also accompanied by “Pour Out Your Wrath” which is a compilation of Biblical verses inserted into the Haggadah in the Middle Ages as a response to the Crusades and pogroms which usually happened during the Easter/Passover season. The text says: Pour out your fury on the nations that do not know you and upon the kingdoms that do not invoke your name, for they have devoured Jacob and destroyed his home. Pour out your wrath on them; may your blazing anger overtake them. Pursue them in wrath and destroy them from under the heavens of Adonai.” Nevertheless, the continued adaptation of the Haggadah

persecution of the Jews.⁵⁴ Time and again this rumor has been dismissed officially such as the declarations of Pope Innocent IV in 1247 CE and Czar Alexander I of Russia 1817 but the rumor lasted for many centuries and has not completely disappeared even to this day.⁵⁵ Even then, this rumor has not prevented the Jews from celebrating the Passover, from praying the *HaLachma Anya* and opening their doors as a sign of hospitality, and from doing the other acts of *tzedakah* related to the celebration of Passover and as a relevant response to the scourge of hunger.

In view of the foregoing we see that the role of the ancient prayer of the *HaLachma Anya* of the *Haggadah* continues to set the perspective from which the *matzah's* symbolism and all the accompanying action of the partakers of the Passover meal in relation to the “bread of affliction” can be viewed. Even if rumors attached to it endangered the Jewish community, they were not enough to deter them from celebrating Passover and doing the symbolic act.

also allowed for the inclusion of “Pour out your love” in 1521 which reflects appreciation and love for those who have aided and protected the Jewish peoples throughout the generations. The text goes: “Pour out your love on the nations who have known you and on the kingdoms who call upon your name. For they show kindness to the seed of Jacob and they defend your people Israel from those who would devour them alive. May they live to see the Sukkah of peace spread over your chosen ones and to participate in the joy of all your nations.”

54. See Michael A. Signer, “blood libel” in Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn, eds. *A Dictionary of Jewish- Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Cambridge Center for the Study of Jewish Christian Relations, 2005), 63; See also Leon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism* Vol.3, trans. Miriam Kochan (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 79, 89, 93, 346-348, 364, 414-416, and 456; Alan Dundes, (ed.), *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991). For a short on-line introduction on “blood libel,” available from http://www.religioustolerance.org/jud_blib2.htm (accessed 22 February 2010). Here is an example: “In 1144 CE, an unfounded rumor began in eastern England, that Jews had kidnapped a Christian child, tied him to a cross, stabbed his head to simulate Jesus’ crown of thorns, killed him, drained his body completely of blood, and mixed the blood into matzos (unleavened bread) at time of Passover. The rumor was started by a former Jew, Theobald, who had become a Christian monk. He said that Jewish representatives gathered each year in Narbonne, France. They decided in which city a Christian child would be sacrificed. The boy involved in the year 1144 hoax became known as St. William of Norwich.”

55. See http://www.religioustolerance.org/jud_blib2.htm (accessed 22 February 2010).

The various reflections on the *matzah* bring the scope of the Passover meal's relevance to a wider horizon that encompasses the story of integral human liberation especially freedom from human toil for food and having sufficient nourishment.

CONCLUSION

In this study we had a glimpse of the global hunger situation which stares us face to face everyday, wherever we are. It shows how far we are from reaching the Millennium Development Goal to halve the number of people experiencing poverty and hunger by 2015. We, then, discussed the Exodus narrative and the ritual of Passover, in view of this challenge of responding to hunger. We have seen that the continuous practice of the Passover and the retelling of the story both in the biblical text and the ritual itself (particularly the *HaLachma Anya*) continue to play a crucial role for an ethical and relevant individual and communal response to the problem of hunger from the Jewish religious tradition.

The biblical text and the Passover ritual in the *Haggadah* may present an idealized perspective. However, with the number of hungry people reaching the one billion mark⁵⁶ the right to food is not just an economic, moral, political, and legal imperative,⁵⁷ it is clearly a religious obligation, too. It is essential that a more cognizant celebration of empowering and liberating rituals such as the Passover and, in particular, the *HaLachma Anya* is kept from becoming an empty ritual, devoid of relevant and effective remembering that liberates real hungry people from suffering acute and chronic lack of food.

56. On June 19, 2009, "t"he Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations declared that the number of hungry people worldwide has reached the one billion. Information available from <http://www.wfp.org/stories/number-world-hungry-tops-billion> (accessed 01 May 2010).

57. On the occasion of World Food Day celebration on 16 October 2007 with the theme "The Right to Food," the FAO news states: "With more than 850 million people still deprived of enough food, the Right to Food is not just economically, morally and politically imperative - it is also a legal obligation." Information available from http://www.fao.org/righttofood/news4_en.htm (accessed 03 May 2010).

As we have seen, the biblical Passover text and the narrative in the *Haggadah* (especially actions like the *HaLachma Anya*)⁵⁸ have challenging implications in the quest for a world where no one goes hungry. They continue to shape the Jewish people's character to be a people who are truly liberated from hunger and are willing to help others be liberated from food insecurity. A continued study and appreciation of the Passover story, its cultic re-enactment, its potent symbolism, and the inherent challenge Passover poses can aid in the creative search for adequate individual and communal response to hunger not only by Jews but also by Christians.

Corollary to this challenge is a call to expand the Christians' knowledge for a more dynamic appreciation of present-day Judaism not only in view of the Israelites and Jews in the Bible but also of real flesh and blood Jews in our midst. This is particularly important in the Philippine setting where deeper understanding and appreciation of the traditions we share with the Jewish people are rather limited (if not, with varying degrees of dangerous potential),⁵⁹ where

58. We acknowledge here the limitation of the paper in only dealing with *HaLachma Anya*. We recognize the strong invitation to also explore the potentially more pro-active impetus that one can glean from the *Blessing after the Meals* in the Passover Seder in a future research.

59. An example of this dangerous potential is seen in the pejorative use of the noun "*Hudyo/Hudiyo*" in colloquial conversation which is disturbing particularly during the time of Lent and Holy Week. A scholarly treatment in this line is found in Amy-Jill Levine, *Same Stories, Different Understandings: Jews and Catholics in Conversation*. CBAP Lectures 2004 (Manila: Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 2004). This is a compilation of the lectures delivered by Levine, a Jewish New Testament scholar. She came to teach at various theological schools in the Philippines in the context of her being one of the major speakers of CBAP 5th Annual Convention held in July 2004. In her article, "A Jewish Reading of the New Testament," (21-37), she gives as an example the way the "Jews" are characterized in the *pasyon* (p. 34) in Rene B. Javellana, *Casaysayan nang Pasiyong Mahal ni Jesucristong Panginoon Natin na Suicat Ipag-alab nang Puso nang Sinomang Babasa* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1988) which describes the Jews in very disturbing ways such as "scheming Jews" (882), "ravenous Jews" (1615), "deceiving Jews" (1670, 1965), "deceitful Jews" (711, 2550), "cunning Jews" (1675), "accusing Jews" (1697), "treacherous Jews" (1710, 1938, 2160, 2488), "cruel Jews" (2295), "scoundrel Jews" (2482, 2484), and "criminal Jews" (2494). In another article in the same collection, "Hearing the Parables as Jesus' First Followers Did," (39-56), she invites bible readers to listen to the stories with "Jewish ears" (p. 52). We believe

interreligious dialogue often put the Jews in the Philippines on the sidelines, and more and more Filipinos depart as migrant workers in Israel.⁶⁰

APPENDIX

Select Translations of HaLachma Anya

Since liberation is also expressed in language, we provide here some translations of the HaLachma Anya. We note the increasing use of inclusive language in italics.

*Polychrome Historical Haggadah for Passover by Jacob Freedman, The Freedman Liturgy Research Foundation, Springfield 1974*⁶¹

Such was the meager bread which our ancestors ate while they were enslaved in Egypt.

All who are hungry, let them enter to eat with us!

All who are in need of fellowship, let them come celebrate Paschal feast with us!

For the present, we are here; but next year we hope to be in the land of Israel!

For the present it is as if we are still in servitude, but next year we hope to be truly *free men!*

*The Yeshiva University Haggada, Koren Publishers, Israel 1985*⁶²

This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt.

Let all who hunger come and eat.

that discussions on the *Pasyon*, in academic and non-academic circles, need to address the challenge of potential anti-Judaism in these texts in its socio-historical and religious contexts.

60. A recent on-line search for Jews in the Philippines has generated the following links, to name a few: <http://www.haruth.com/JewsPhilippines.html>; <http://www.jewishphilippines.net/>; <http://angilaw.wordpress.com/ang-ilaw/>; <http://www.chabad.ph/>; <http://pkwatch.blogspot.com/>; <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1087463.html> (accessed 22 February 2010).

61. Nahum Goldman Online Haggadah Course March 2006, http://members.ngfp.org/Courses/Shinan/trans_halachma.doc (accessed 22 February 2010).

62. *Ibid.*

Let all who are in need come and observe the Pesach!

This year we are here; next year in the land of Yisrael!

This year we are slaves; next year – *free men!*

*The Passover Haggada – Chabad Internet Edition*⁶³ This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt.

Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is in need, let him come and conduct the Seder of Passover.

This year [we are] here; next year in the land of Israel.

This year [we are] slaves; next year [we will be] *free people.*

*Passover Haggadah – the feast of Freedom, The Rabbinical Assembly, NY1992*⁶⁴

This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Mitzrayim.

All who are hungry, let them enter and eat.

All who are in need, let them come celebrate Pesach!

Now we are here; next year in the land of Israel!

Now we are enslaved; next year *we will be free*

Ma. Marilou S. Ibita
Sint-Michielsstraat 4
B-3000 Leuven, Belgium
Email addresses: *malou.ibita@theo.kuleuven.be,*
msikul2004@yahoo.com

* I would like to acknowledge the supervision of this paper by Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman during the Bat Kol Summer Class 2007 on the Book of Exodus held in Jerusalem, Israel.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*