

~ Snippets of Hebrew? Greek actually! ~

(Written in Exile, in Redditch!)

Aporia

Moses spoke to the people of Israel after they left Egypt saying: “And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: but all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.”

Exodus 13 v 13.

Aporia is a literary device which poses two contrasting concepts in order to give prominence to one of them. It's a bit like stating the “exception that proves the rule”.

Etymologically aporia consists of the prefix “a” meaning “without”, and “poria” meaning “passage”. No way through or impassable. It usually refers to two contradictory statements which one cannot reconcile in philosophy. In rhetoric however, it describes the introduction of doubt. But the purpose of the doubt is to render clarity to a proposition. Here, in this passage, the doubt is whether to redeem one's firstborn. An almost ridiculous choice, but that is the role of this literary device. So much for the explanation of the title of this episode.

This is one of the conditions for which they were to offer a sacrifice. Such a sacrifice was a sacrifice of gratitude for the birth of a child. Who doesn't celebrate the birth of a child with gratitude! It is interesting to note that it only applies to the firstborn. If the idea of the sacrifice is as a thanksgiving for the gift of giving life, then perhaps it is assumed that further offspring are also possible, having demonstrated a couple are fertile. The Bible is very interested in the inability to produce offspring, to the point that those who do so after much delay, find that their offspring are very special. And they are special to God, because it seems he blesses them with special roles.

Why then is the opportunity given to not redeem the firstborn of an ass? I should think the mother of the foal would be very distressed to find her owner had dealt with her foal so cruelly.

This might turn out to be like the law that says a rebellious son should be taken before the elders and tried, and if he is found to be rebellious he should be stoned. Rabbis say that this never ever happened. If a Rabbinical court sentenced anyone to stoning more frequently than once in seventy years, it was described as a bloody court. They bent over backwards to preserve life. They took, “thou shalt not kill” seriously.

If the parents have to take their son to a court and explain why he is worthy of death then, it is hoped, the heat might go out of the situation. This is because the parents are then under the legal system, which will not allow them just to stone their rebellious son. The parents then will come under the law and be subject to the same fate if they were to take the law into their own hands. The Rabbis see the law that instructs parents to take their son before the court as a form of protection from hot headed parents. Not as an indication that God hates rebellious teenagers.

Returning to the ass I see a clue to one possible meaning in the next words: “and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem”.

Clearly, the question of redeeming the firstborn child is beyond question. Therefore the ass can heave a sigh of relief! There is no suggestion that the breaking of the neck of an ass, is acceptable, otherwise it begs the question whether human firstborn must be redeemed. It is just there in contrast to the idea that redeeming your own firstborn is mandatory, not even held in question, unlike the Egyptian first born, and also possibly as a polemic against the nations which practise child sacrifice. Was God saying to Israel “you are my firstborn, out of Egypt I have redeemed you”?

Aporia is a Greek literary device, it seems unlikely to have been used in early Hebrew, unless of course the Pentateuch was written during exile. This example seems to fit the pattern, but might not be evidence that the Pentateuch was written during exile, but it could just be evidence of its redaction in exile.

As for a lesson from this, the writer might be trying to suggest that it cannot be that God's redemption will fail! And Jesus said "If God so clothes the grass of the field how much more will he clothe you?"

Geoff Walker

~ Minutes of Church Meeting held on Sunday 27th of June 2021 at 11.15am ~ (Zoom)

Present: Brenda, Margaret, David (minutes), Andy, Margaret E, Enid, Nicola, Gwen, Alan and Margaret R, Lorna, Geoff and Carole.

Apologies: Steve and Gwyn.

Minutes were approved. (Pension scheme funding, resolution to agree to work with GM Commoners.)

Matters arising: None

Future of Worship at Union Chapel

A document entitled 'Union Chapel After COVID19' had been circulated. This contained initial ideas and comments concerning the future of Worship at Union Chapel together with the organisation of Church Life after the pandemic. The Bullet points given below represent points raised by individual members attending the Meeting some of whom spoke more than once.

Chair: Useful document compiling people's thoughts has been circulated previously, thanks to compilers. Not expecting to make decisions today.

- When we return to church I am reluctant to lose people who have been joining us over the internet. Some have joined us very regularly over the internet and have been appreciated. Membership has continued through the church Weekend for some previous attenders at the church. I favour a Zoom meeting then a Chapel meeting on a two week cycle. There is a place for informal bring-your-own lunch, following a service which started at 11.00.
- Unable to crystallise a contribution. Has found online services easy to take part in (less time recently), always encouraging numbers online when compared with physically present at chapel. A meal together is practical and biblical. Appreciates 10.00 too early to start for some.
- Flexible to accept whatever system we end up with.
- People who are not members but attend the service should still have a voice. It would be nice if those who were at the service this morning could have been part of this church meeting.
- interested to try things out. Official membership not essential.
- Not everyone can get to Chapel whereas people would always be able to get to a Zoom service even if ill or less mobile. We need to try to get online those who used to attend physically.
- With a Zoom meeting other people may join who hear about us. (2 this week, through website).
- We need to be aware that circumstances often prevent attendance.
- Two groups of people a) Sunday joiners outside M/c, b) Members who do not join online but might be encouraged to. Contributions

from both groups have been made to the document/discussion. For a), they are often committed to other churches but some might like to go to both if possible. Hybrid services (Zoomed from Chapel) may not be ideal. Some in both groups are happy to go with the flow.

- with a new baby not easy to join by zoom.
- Will go with the flow, thinks alternate Sundays (Zoom/Chapel) would work well. Likes the Idea of an evening event, occasionally. Physically present preferred, or online if necessary.
- Responding to thoughts on the service in Chapel and musicians sitting away from the rest of the congregation, it would be good to include them so that they are sitting with the rest of us.
- Responding to comments in the document arguing that we are too small a congregation to sing hymns. We can still sing hymns even though small in number.
- agree about singing hymns. We need to choose hymns we can manage.
- Junior church younger end have been missing out. Younger children would be better in a physical setting. We need to have a simple physical service, taking people out etc. is not ideal. Would like a service that works for everyone.
- I like the motivation of a physical meeting to get out and meet in person.
- I like to sing and I like the music. The anticipated smaller number of people in the future means we need to reach out more to increase numbers. Consideration of long term.
- Some people feel part of UC although unable to come at all.
- 5th Sunday 6.00 evening service would be welcome there would be a different atmosphere.

- more able to concentrate on Zoom than when physically present.

Some general points from the discussion:

Service online may be more appealing to younger people. It was pointed out that we would need to be a bit more personally organised if we had a varying timetable. It was agreed to have another meeting – in 2 weeks? 11th July. Aim for initial timetable. Invite those who attend the service. Need to reflect today's thoughts back to them, and acknowledge their sensitivity towards allowing us to make decisions without them pushing us a particular direction.

GM Commoners: It was suggested that we invite GM Commoners to the next picnic, the first one of which happened yesterday (26th July)

Christward: Magazine editor wants minutes for church magazine, church weekend reports, further reflections.

Date of Next Meeting: Scheduled would be 18th July; we may want extra meetings to continue our discussion and it was **Agreed to have another meeting on 11th July.**

If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this magazine and so start a discussion or if you would care to write an article for us on a topic of your choosing such contributions would be welcome. Please send them by email to alan.redhouse@virgin.net or by post to The Editor, Christward, Union Chapel Fallowfield, 2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6EQ.

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