

CONCLUSION

[to Prof. Chávez's "A Theological Introduction to the Christian Bible"]

It is not my desire to prolong these pages too much. We have come a long way, I think, in our overview of the Christian Bible and Christian, and especially Catholic, interpretation of it. I would like to summarize or conclude these pages by quoting an important Bible scholar, James A. Sanders, with whose views I may not agree totally, but who expressed himself in a 1975 article, "Torah and Christ," in ways that are very appropriate as concluding remarks to our work.

Sanders quotes another great one, James Barr, who in

The Bible and the Modern World, claims that the Bible is "soteriologically functional." He means . . . that the whole Bible functions in the believing communities to effect salvation; this is and always has been its job description for synagogue and church in their recitation and interpretation of it through the ages. This is to speak of the nature and function of canon. The Bible as the church's book is not primarily a historical document (though I am among those who insist that it is full of historical fact; that is not the point). It is primarily a canonical document, functioning in believing communities as canon to assist the on-going believing communities to seek answers in their times to the questions: *Who are we?* and *What are we to do?* In dialogue with believers, the Bible as canon addresses itself to the questions of identity and obedience—and in that order—first identity and then life style. To know who we are and to act like it is to experience and engage in salvation.

In Hebrew, and to a limited extent in biblical Greek, the words "salvation" and "righteousness" mean the same thing in certain contexts. Paul claims that Jesus Christ is God's righteousness and God's salvation for humankind, and when he does so he is saying the same thing in each case. In certain contexts in the Bible both salvation and righteousness mean a saving act or a victory of God. And the claim of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ is God's righteousness or salvation for us all. . . . Jesus is God's victory for us.²⁵³

After stating (380) that Torah primarily means revelation, Sanders goes on to say:

In [Rom] 10:4, Paul says the following: "For Christ is the *telos* of the Torah righteousness-wise for all who believe." *Telos* means end in the sense of *finis*, but it also means climax, main point or purpose. [fn. omitted] Paul in this statement summarizes the central belief of the early church: God had committed another righteousness in Christ, that the Christ event was like the exodus event, or the wanderings-in-the-desert event, or the conquest event, and like them was a mighty act

²⁵³ SANDERS, "Torah and Christ," 378.

of God [he calls this “good news” for Jews]. It was different only in the fact that it was climactic to them: it brought all those chapters of the Torah story to completion, fulfillment and made sense of them all. Paul in this whole section from the beginning of Romans 9 has been saying that to concentrate on the righteousness, or ethics, of which humankind or Judaism is capable, can be to miss the main point of the Torah story, namely, the righteousness or salvations or mighty acts of God in the Torah story.

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In other words, Paul is here saying if you really have in mind the Torah story and that point of view, then you can discern the righteousness of God. If you really know the Torah, and know what righteousness of God is, then you know that Christ is precisely that kind of act of God. And you know that in Christ, God really committed an ultimate kind of righteousness; he came *all the way* this time.

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Nobody succeeded in adding a chapter to the basic Torah story until the New Testament; and even then not for most of Judaism. Now what we can see from the point of view of the divine odyssey is that the New Testament really makes this quite bold and scandalous claim that in Christ God committed another salvation or righteousness and that it should be added to the Torah story as a climax, as the ultimate chapter of the whole story or odyssey.²⁵⁴

And so, we have little or nothing to further say, except to add Paul’s words in 2 Cor 3:14_b-16, regarding his fellow Jews and their reading and interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures, but applicable to all of us, too: “for until this day the same veil over their reading of the old covenant remains, it is not unveiled, because in Christ it is removed.”

And finally, a beautiful quote from Saint Bonaventure which is also an admonition: *Qui sine isto ligno [crucis] vult intrare mare Scripturae, submergitur.*²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ SANDERS, “Torah and Christ,” 382-383.

²⁵⁵ “Whoever wishes to enter the sea of Scripture without this wood [of the cross], will sink.” *In Hexaëmeron*, columns 13,5 (Quaracchi edition, vol. V, page 388).