

Grazia Papola, L'alleanza di Moab: Studio esegetico teologico di DT 28, 69-30,20

[The Moab Covenant: An exegetical-theological study of Deut 28:69-30:20]

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This book is Dr. Papola's Gregorian University doctoral dissertation defended in 2007 slightly modified, a work directed by Bruna Costacurta with Santiago Breton as second reader. Figuring in an important way also are Pietro Bovati, Norbert Lohfink and Paul Beauchamp. All these save Beauchamp (whom I have read and who was a big influence on all whom he taught) were my professors, and so I came to this book as one being very much in line with the type of biblical theology founded on sound exegesis which I would like to practice myself. The book is divided into three parts: the first (about 50 pp.) is "introductory issues," the second (some 200 pp.) an exegesis of Deut 29-30, and the third a "theological synthesis" (about 50 pp.). For those unacquainted with Beauchamp (he was influenced by linguistic-structuralist studies and understands the Bible as a whole with deep, underlying interrelations sometimes carried to the point of great subtlety) and Costacurta's work, this book would be a wonderful introduction. A taste of this could be the last line of the book: "The double quality which the covenant of Moab has of being a beginning and an end, on the other hand, opens up this pact to the expectation of the definitive and complete fulfillment in the Lord Jesus of that promise with which it (the pact) is pregnant and which is forever" (p. 314). In short, this is biblical theology which respects the literal sense but proceeds to draw all possible consequences for a Christian reader, always based on the text itself and what is considered to be legitimately implied therein.

The book is a study of Deut 29-30 in its final form (that is, a synchronic approach is used). It thoroughly discusses all pertinent issues, as would be expected in a doctoral thesis. P. considers Deut 29:69 (MT numbering) as the title to Moses' third speech. She discusses the meaning of "separate from" applied to this Moab covenant to distinguish it from that of Horeb: it is not a question of abolition or supersession of the first covenant, and the Moab covenant does not alter the content of the first. Its difference must then reside elsewhere. Just before this passage is the covenant curse whereby Israel will be back in Egypt as at the beginning. In Deut 29 Moses again mentions Egypt as if it is matter of a new beginning. The real audience for these chapters is in exile in Babylon. P. believes that this Moab covenant evokes prophetic passages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel which speak of a "new covenant" (even when the language is "everlasting covenant").

The bulk of the book, the exegesis of Deut 29-30, is thorough and forms the basis of the theological conclusions of the third part. There is continuity and discontinuity between the Horeb and Moab covenants. The great difference lies in a change of heart which will make possible the fulfillment of what Horeb called for. It is God himself who will provide Israel with this new heart. The punishment of exile and its suffering, due to the people's infidelity, would be the occasion for God's giving of this new condition capable of obedience. The frequency of the word "today" cancels time (p. 272) and renders what is said always current, even in the sense of 'the Babylonian exile today' (see p. 273). In good Beauchamp/Costacurta fashion, references to the origin are not just to the beginning, but to a 'principle' (see p. 273) which is forever. In the desert experience Israel can understand the Torah for the first time (also a Lohfink idea); 'today' becomes

forever. Israel can thus know her Lord for the first time. In her punishment Israel sees her sin revealed, and this is a seed of hope for return.

As stated, this book reflects many of the ideas of Paul Beauchamp, who Bovati opined (in his Deuteronomy course at the Biblicum, Spring 1998) is little known because he is too difficult to understand (see, e.g., Beauchamp's "The One and the Other Testament," inexistant in English). It is a philosophical approach with difficult distinctions which require that rumination so praised by the rabbis. Some of the interesting points made involve "repetition" (one of the Jewish names for Deuteronomy is in fact *Mishnei Torah* [Repetition of the Torah]) and memory as the actualization of the foundational origins (called by Beauchamp *deuterosi*, p. 281). When the Moab covenant "repeats" the first covenant in Horeb, "it brings to fulfillment the movement already present in the first covenant from its very conception, because at the moment of its being made ["stipulation"] it is already broken and immediately renewed" (p. 281). This original sin of Israel manifested the people's inability to be faithful; or God, in the very giving of the covenant, revealed to Israel its sin. Thus the renewal of the covenant arises intrinsically from its original making and manifests God's original intention. "The new beginning, then, corresponds to and is intertwined with a new and definitive work of God which finally makes possible loving obedience" (p. 283).

As stated at the beginning, this book was for me a pleasure to read. It has much of that aesthetic quality which enables the reading of a technical biblical exegesis book to lead not only to theology, but to contemplation. For me, this is what the Bible and its study are all about, or, at least, how they are most fully explored and appreciated.

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