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On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective

Lawrence E. Toombs

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Luke (93). For such treatments Moloney refers the reader to bibliography in the footnotes.

At various places one might disagree with Moloney. For example, does the Lukan Eucharist indeed center around "a body broken and blood spilt" (85)? It all depends on how one copes with the text-critical problem at Luke 22:17 ff., but Moloney does not even indicate that there is such a problem. With regard to Matthew, Moloney accepts the structural outline of Bacon, without mentioning J.D. Kingsbury's trenchant critique of that analysis.

Nevertheless, this is an eminently useful book for the intelligent layperson who wishes to learn more about a responsible handling of Scripture.

Erwin Buck
Lutheran Theological Seminary

On Exodus: a Liberating Perspective

George V. Pixley

translated by Robert R. Barr

Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987

xx + 236 pp.

For many years the writer of this review has believed and taught that Yahweh's message to the Egyptian Pharaoh, "Let my people go", is a one-sentence summary of Old Testament theology. A commentary on Exodus dedicated to "the heroic struggle of the Salvadoran people" and addressed to "the person who feels an identification with the oppressed in their longing for liberation" (xv) would seem, on the surface at least, to fall directly within this perspective.

Through a section-by-section analysis of the entire book of Exodus, augmented by thirteen appendices, George V. Pixley draws on the results of biblical scholarship to make the case that "there is an affinity between the struggle of the Hebrew people against the forced labor and genocide imposed by the Egyptian state and the current struggles of the popular classes in such places as Central America" (xiv). As the commentary develops it becomes clear that more is at stake than this modest aim indicates. The book of Exodus appears as a justification of and a formula for revolution against the oppressor.

The possibility of this radical interpretation of the book lies in the author's isolation of four stages in the composition of the text. These correspond to changes in the social and political contexts of the writers. In the initial two stages, now obscured and almost obliterated by later reinterpretation, the Exodus narrative is an account of a class struggle. Originally, it was the battle for liberty of an oppressed peasant group in

Egypt against an exploitive, genocidal tyrant. Secondly, in the Period of the Judges it became the inspiration of egalitarian, anti-monarchical tribes at war with the despotic kings of the Canaanite city states. In the third stage, under the monarchy, the Exodus story ceased to be that of a class struggle, and became a national epic, pitting Israel against Egypt epitomized in the Pharaoh. The fourth transformation occurred after the dissolution of the monarchy, when the Exodus event was seen as the point of origin of the religious institutions of Israel. In the light of this analysis interest in the book of Exodus as a liberation document focuses of necessity on the first two stages of its composition when the issues were those of a class struggle, and not those of national or religious identity.

Exodus 1:1-13:16 is typical of the motivation and conduct of a revolutionary movement. The People of the Exodus was a classless group of enslaved peasants, ruthlessly exploited by a highly-structured class society. Their dream, and the dream of Moses, who became their leader, was to escape from their oppressors and to form a liberated society in a land of their own. When the power structure of Egypt began to perceive this people as a threat, it attempted to prevent the revolution, first by massive exploitation and then by genocide.

The liberation movement led by Moses involved first winning over the natural leaders of the people by convincing them of the possibility of success and then demanding concessions from the Pharaoh. The persistent rejection of these moderate demands demonstrated the intransigence of the Pharaoh, the impossibility of internal reform and the necessity of revolutionary action. The application of force against the tyrant took the form of a series of plagues, culminating in the death of the Egyptian first born. Pharaoh had made Egypt a land of death for the peasants. He would release them only when they had made it a land of death for him and his supporters. The resources for the escape were obtained from the oppressors by the plunder of the Egyptians.

Pixley interprets the traditions of Israel's "murmurings" in the wilderness (Exodus 13:17-18:27) as counter-revolutionary movements brought about by the difficulty of maintaining the vision of the new social order in the face of physical deprivation and the attacks of enemies.

For reasons which he states on pp. 120-121, the author experiences his greatest difficulty with Exodus 19:1-40:38, in which he sees the principles of the formation of a new, classless society. It rejects all forms of state domination, including monarchy and theocracy, and establishes a natural leadership based on kinship. The place of the king is held by Yahweh alone, and the norms of society are provided by divinely-sanctioned law, rather than by the interests or whims of an all-powerful state.

In any work which attempts to show the relevance of the Old Testament to a set of modern problems two streams must be made to flow together; the biblical text, honestly and critically interpreted, and the modern formulations of and responses to the problems. In the process one or other of the two streams inevitably becomes dominant. Pixley makes a strenuous

effort to maintain the priority of the biblical text, but the reader may be forgiven the suspicion that he sometimes allows the influence to run in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, the book has three outstanding values. It is a penetrating exploration of what the book of Exodus has to say to oppressed peoples, struggling to free themselves from the grip of tyranny. In addressing this question it makes a solid contribution to liberation theology, and provides a novel and stimulating exegesis of the biblical text. It is well worth a careful reading.

Lawrence E. Toombs

Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario

Paul and the Law

Heikki Räisänen

Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987

In 1983 two books were published which caused biblical scholars to rethink commonly held views about Paul's thoughts about the Jewish law. The book by Heikki Räisänen *Paul and the Law* was published in Germany while E.P. Sanders' *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* was released in the United States and Canada. In 1986 Räisänen's book was available for the English speaking world, and it is now available in a second edition. Räisänen has drawn our attention to the number of inconsistent statements in Paul's thought. Further, Räisänen has attempted to understand these inconsistencies without artificial harmonization. The response to his work has been both positive and negative.

On the positive side his work has led scholars to investigate the diversity of views about the law within Judaism and the early Christian movement in the first century. The diversity of views has led to new questions about the situations which gave rise to Paul's contradictory statements, situations which involved debate around his role as apostle to the Gentiles.

Not all are convinced by Räisänen's view that there is no development in Paul's thought. Many suggest that Räisänen should have tried harder to find a synthesis of Paul's statements about the law.

In the preface to the second edition Räisänen clarifies some of the issues and adds some insights gained from the debates. He has given further thought to his view that there is no development in Paul's thought about the Jewish law. Rather than development, Räisänen proposes the term *movement*. There is movement in Paul's treatment of an issue from one letter to another and sometimes even within the same letter (i.e., Paul's wrestling in Romans 9-11 with the question of the place of the Jewish people in God's plan) but Räisänen still maintains that there is no apparent development in Paul's thought about the Jewish law and the Jewish people