

Author And The Ministry

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Author: Right or Wrong

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A Response To The Leuenberg Concord

TRANSLATED BY JOHN DRICKAMER

The Outside Limits Of Lutheran  
Confessionalism In Contemporary  
Biblical Interpretation

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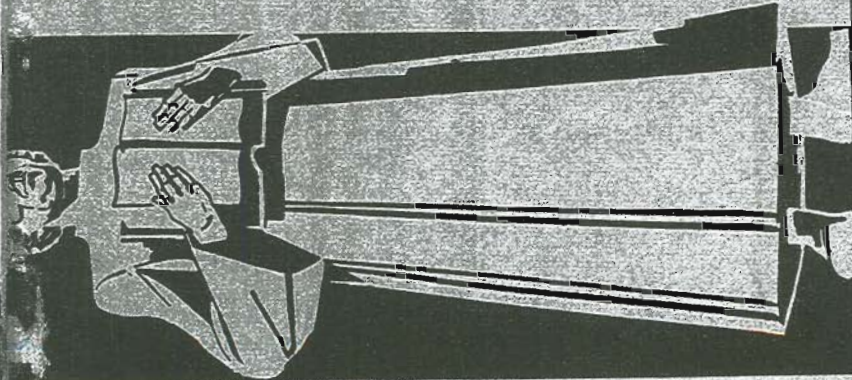
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pg. 31

Theological Refractions

Book Reviews

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# Theological Refractions

## THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PASSING THROUGH THE SEA AT THE EXODUS FOR OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY.

The mainstream of contemporary biblical study has given much deserved attention to the covenant concept, around which the theology of the Old Testament has been reconstructed. A greater depth of understanding has resulted from the careful analysis of the Old Testament covenant structure and its theological function in comparison with that of the covenant formularies of the Ancient Near East. Not only has this study benefited serious students of the Old Testament, but it has also given New Testament students insights into the function of the New Covenant made by God with His New Israel.

Concerning the analysis of the comparison of covenant formularies of the Old Testament with those of the Ancient Near East, it has been found that generally all are closely related in structure,<sup>1</sup> but that the content of the Old Testament formularies is quite distinct from the content of Ancient Near East formularies. Klaus Baltzer, Professor at the University of Munich and essayist at the 1971 convention of the *Society of Biblical Literature*, incisively discerns this basic difference as he discusses the historical content of the Old Testament formularies:

The history that they record, however, is incomparable and unique. The 'antecedent history' of the covenant formulary tells of God's acts among his people from generation to generation—ultimately, in fact, from eternity. These acts are saving acts, 'demonstrations of Yahweh's righteousness.' Israel's loyalty to its Lord, its keeping of the commandments, is a response to God's acts of grace in history.<sup>2</sup>

According to Baltzer, then, the distinction lies in the *Vorgeschichte* or historical prologue. Whether this distinction is tenable or not, an understanding of the theological function of the *Vorgeschichte*, both as a part of the formulary schema and as an event in and of itself, is crucial for a correct covenant theology. It would, therefore, be especially helpful to give attention to the theological function of that event upon which the covenant relationship of Israel with Yahweh was based. It can be seen that this event, namely the deliverance from Egypt, made a profound impression on the people of Israel and served a varied number of theological functions. Perhaps most interestingly, it will be seen that the theological functions of the Sea deliverance closely parallel those of the resurrection of Christ in the New Testament.

The first of the theological functions of the Sea deliverance was to establish the ground for Israel's faith in Yahweh. As is well known, although the Israelites were the people of God by virtue of the Abrahamic covenant (Ex. 2:24, 8:1), their faith as a people was not grounded in Yahweh during the time of their stay in Egypt. In fact, although Yahweh had responded to their cries for help (Ex. 3:7, 8), they even rebelled against Him. Ex. 14:12 indicates, "Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians.?'?" Upon reaching the Sea they again rebelled, and Yahweh graciously provided a path of deliver-

ance. It was not until they had passed through the Sea and had seen the annihilation of their enemies that the Israelites "believed His words; they sang His praise." (Ps. 106:7-12) They recognized that their deliverance from Egypt was completely worked by Yahweh and was contingent upon the Sea deliverance. Further, this deliverance was not one merely of a physical nature: it carried vast spiritual significance,<sup>3</sup> for it was on the basis of this specific event that the Israelites truly accepted Yahweh as their God and Moses as their leader. (Ex. 14:30) It was in this specific event, namely the Sea deliverance, that Yahweh was creating and separating out a people for Himself, as He had promised to Abraham.<sup>4</sup> (Ex. 15:1-19, 19:4; Is. 43:1, 2, 15, 16; Ps. 114:1-3; Deut. 7:6-9, 26, 27; 14:2; I Kings 8:53; Amos 3:1, 2; Jer. 7:22-26) This deliverance was so impressive to them that they freely agreed to enter into covenant relationship with Yahweh, even without knowing the particular stipulations, as is indicated by the truncated covenant in Ex. 19:4-8.<sup>5</sup> It is now apparent that the theological function of the Sea crossing was to serve as the basis for the solidification of the faith of Israel as a people. This is its most important function<sup>6</sup> and puts the covenant concept into proper perspective. Evidently, as important as it is, the covenant concept can no longer be seen as the key foundation of the Old Testament faith, since the covenant itself was grounded on this salvatory event, namely the Sea crossing, as indicated by the historical prologue in the covenant on which all others ultimately were based.<sup>7</sup> (Ex. 19:4) Furthermore, the prologue to the Decalogue, "a comprehensive epitome seeking to set forth the inner meaning and purpose of all actual laws,"<sup>8</sup> was to indicate that the covenant was solidly grounded solely upon the *hesed* (grace) of Yahweh, as expressed by the deliverance from Egypt. This great act of deliverance was to provide the primary motivation for Israel to keep the stipulations of the covenant, as is partly indicated by its position in the covenant schema. Furthermore, it is evident that the clause "I am the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt" is the basis of all cultic practices and social conduct, since all laws are ultimately grounded on the covenant which marked the beginning of Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel. (But this can be even specifically seen by its use in concluding sections of Levitical laws and of the Holiness Code: Lev. 11:45, 19:35, 20:26, 22:31-33.)

This second major function is important, for it is from this perspective that the prophets preached against empty ritualism, legalism, and idolatry. They clearly saw that great salvatory event as the basic tenet for the faith of Israel and the grounds for obedience. (Micah 6:3, 4; Hosea 13:4; Jer. 2:6, 9ff, 32:21, 36) The prophets, as Eichrodt expresses it,

make no reference to the Sinai covenant, but instead call to mind the deliverance from Egypt. In no other way could they have illuminated more clearly the gracious favour of Yahweh, or guarded against the false perversion of his activity into an obligatory performance by the covenant deity.<sup>9</sup>

And it was when the people of Israel forgot Yahweh and how He had delivered them that they fell into legalism and apostasy. (Hosea 13:4-6; Jer. 7:21-23; Ps. 106-13, 14, 21, 22; Deut. 6:12) Therefore, this event, the deliverance, can be seen as the basis of punishment in the case of a lack of obedience to the covenant. (Jer. 2:6, 9, 7:22-23, 32, 11:4, 8, 32:21-23;

Hos. 13:4) A prime example of this principle was seen in the destruction of the temple and the exile of Israel. (I Kings 9:7-9, ". . . and they will say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' Then they will say, 'Because they forsook the Lord their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt . . .'" and II Kings 17:7-18, "And this was so, because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt . . . and removed them out of his sight . . .")

Not only was the Sea deliverance viewed as the principal basis for punishment and exile, but conversely, it was also seen as the grounds for expectation of future deliverances. This function is first evident in its use as motivation for faith in a successful acquisition and occupation of the territory of Palestine. (Ex. 15:17; Deut. 7:7-10, 17-19, 20:1, "When you go forth to war against your enemies, . . . you shall not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.") This first great act of deliverance was also the grounds for expectation of future deliverances in general.<sup>10</sup> (I Kings 8:53--Solomon's prayer; Dan. 9:15--Daniel's prayer; Is. 63:10-16, 51:9, 10; Ps. 74:2, 13) Indeed, at times these expected deliverances were described in the same terms as that first salvatory event, (Is. 10:26) usually with special reference to the Sea deliverance. A third theological function of this type was to describe the Great Deliverance in the Messianic Age.<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 11 and 51:9-11 and Micah 7:15 used the Sea deliverance motif as a point of comparison with the Great Deliverance. Just as Yahweh had rescued His people in such a spectacular manner, so also would He again show His might, but on a much grander scale. Not only would He make a path through the Sea; He would completely annihilate it (Is. 11:15), and the Nile would be completely dried up so that people from all over could pass through to salvation. (Zech. 10:9-11)

It is at the time of this Great Deliverance that Yahweh would initiate a "new thing" and a greater act. (Is. 43:15-21) This act would then be the grounds for praise of God by the New Israel.<sup>12</sup> "You will say in that day 'I will give thanks to thee, O Lord . . . Behold, God is my Salvation . . .'" (Is. 11:15-12:4) It is at the time of the Messianic reign that people would no longer recite, "As the Lord lives who brought us out of Egypt," (which is the content of the prologue of the old covenant), but instead would confess, "As the Lord lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them." (Jer. 23:5-7) Although the covenant made at the time of the deliverance from Egypt would no longer be in effect, the grace of Yahweh would continue. The stipulations of the New Covenant would be written on the hearts of the members of the New Israel, and sin would be completely wiped out. (Jer. 31:31-34) The event which would effectuate this New Covenant was the death and resurrection of Christ. His death and resurrection would, in effect, serve as the historical prologue to the New Covenant. (A careful study of Heb. 8, 9, 10 would be valuable at this point.)

But for the New Testament Israel, Christ's death and resurrection not only serves as the prologue; it also serves as the ground of faith. Just as the mighty act of God at the Sea was the basis for faith, so also it is because of God's mighty act in raising Christ from the dead (Eph

1:19) that Christians have faith and hope in God. (I Peter 1:21)

The resurrection also serves as the basis and motivation for the obedience of the New Israel to the precepts of the New Covenant.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, through baptism, which is a baptism into the Salvatory Event, the New Israel gains the power to live the holy life which God desires. (Rom. 6:1-12) This theological function closely parallels that of the Sea deliverance. St. Paul had keen insight into this concept in viewing the Sea crossing as a baptism, for it was in this event that the Israelites were baptized into God's grace and became His people. (I Cor. 10:1, 2) Baptism for the New Testament Israel has the same theological function of initiating people into God's grace and into the New People of God.

By the resurrection of Christ, the New Israel is assured of deliverance in the future. Just as the Sea deliverance was the basis for Israel's expectation of a future Great Deliverance, so also the resurrection ascertains for the New Israel the Final Deliverance and resurrection. This is indeed reason for great rejoicing, hope, and comfort, even as the Sea deliverance was for Israel. (Ps. 66:6, 136:11-15, 74:2, 13) In addition to the praises which the New Israel renders to God, the New Testament Israel also remembers the Mighty Act of God with an act of worship, similar in function to the three cultic acts which Israel celebrated annually. These acts were the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Offering of the First-Born. The latter two were to be observed for the expressed purpose of remembering and proclaiming the deliverance from Egypt. (Ex. 13:1-16) The celebration of the Passover is especially linked theologically with the celebration of the Eucharist in many ways. For example, just as the Passover through the years looked back to the deliverance from death and from the Egyptians, so also the celebration of the Eucharist looks back on the Great Deliverance from Death and is likewise a constant proclamation of God's grace as shown by Christ's death and resurrection until the Final Deliverance.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to its central function in the Eucharist, the death and resurrection of Christ have the foremost place in the apostolic kerygma (Acts 2:24-32; 3:15; 4:1, 2; 23:6, 8; 24:4, 5) and in the New Testament credal statement. (I Cor. 15) As important as the New Covenant concept is, the Event upon which it is based is of the utmost importance; therefore, it is because of this that the Event rather than the Covenant is the content of the New Testament preaching. The prophets of the Old Testament, as seen previously, likewise preached God's grace (as especially evidenced by the deliverance from Egypt) rather than emphasizing the covenant. The great act of the Old Testament likewise had a foremost position in the ancient credal statement of the Old Testament, "A wandering Aramean was my father . . ." (Deut. 26:5-10)

The two salvatory events, the deliverance from Egypt and the Great Deliverance, can now be seen to be closely related as to their theological functions. As is indicated above, their primary functions were to manifest God's saving grace and to establish faith in God so that Israel, both the Old and the New, might have Deliverance through Christ's death and resurrection and might also keep God's precepts. In addition, the Sea deliverance seems to have much the same theological function as the resurrection. Both are of such central importance that an attack on the resurrection would be just as destructive and offensive to one of the New Israel as

an attack (or any mitigation of) the Sea deliverance would be to a member of the Old Israel. In both cases one can see that covenant terminology, apart from the facticity of the primary salvatory event—either the Sea deliverance in the Old Testament, or the death and resurrection in the New Testament—becomes a hollow shell with no valid basis. The salvatory event itself and its facticity are crucial. From a theological perspective, any challenge would be devastating.<sup>15</sup>

The concept that the Old Covenant and the New Covenant are grounded on the two salvatory acts of God—acts wrought by God alone—lends a great deal to the understanding of the Old and New Testaments as a unit: the thread of grace can be traced distinctly throughout. Perhaps the significance of this most important concept has been somewhat overlooked as a result of excitement over recent studies of Ancient Near East covenant material; however, Klaus Baltzer is taking a positive step in discerning the basic distinction between the covenants. Much more attention must be given to this distinction. Much more attention must be given to the event and its theological function as the ground of Israel's faith, the ground of all laws, of proclamation, of praise, and of expectation of future deliverance, especially that of the Great Deliverance of Christ, which in turn is the ground of faith, of laws, of preaching, of praise, and of the future Final Deliverance of the New Testament Israel.

#### NOTES

1. There are six principal parts to a typical covenant: 1) Preamble—which identifies the author of the covenant with emphasis on the power and majesty of the king, 2) Historical prologue, antecedent history, or *Vorgeschichte*—which relates a careful description of actual events and benevolent deeds done by the king, 3) Stipulations, 4) Provision for deposit in a sacred sanctuary and periodic reading, 5) Invocation of the gods as witnesses, and 6) Curses and blessings. For a summary of the covenant concept see Virgil H. Todd, *Prophet Without Portfolio*, (North Quincy, Mass.: The Christopher Publishing House, 1972), pp. 75-78, or Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1969).
2. Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary*, (David Green (trans.) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 91.
3. Israel Abrahams, in "Moses," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, XII, (N.Y.: The Macmillan Co., 1971) published and printed in Jerusalem, p. 376, states, "The covenant with Yahweh was the real purpose of the Exodus. Freedom was not just the negative of servitude: it must have positive spiritual content."
4. Cf. also Todd, *Prophet Without Portfolio*, p. 80; John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 27; and Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, I, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 369.
5. Bright, p. 195.
6. It was so important that Jeroboam used it as the grounds for the faith of the people in the gods which he placed at Dan and Bethel. (I Kings 12:28) So, Israelite faith, even many years after the event itself, was dependent upon it.
7. It must be understood that the deliverance from Egypt was ultimately effectuated by and dependent on the deliverance through the Sea. Thus, the Sea deliverance lies behind the theme, "Herausführung aus Agypten," as Noth discusses it in *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch* (W. Kohlhammer Verlag Stuttgart, 1948), pp. 50-54.
8. D.M.G. Stalker, "Exodus," *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, eds. Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley (Great Britain: Nelson, 1962), p. 226.
9. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 52.
10. As Hanoch Reviv expresses it in "History," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, VIII, p. 576: "The Exodus from Egypt left its imprint on the memory of the nation and became the symbol of the hope of liberation for all generations."
11. It may be of interest to note that on the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus discussed his *exodus* with Moses and Elijah, Luke 9:30,31.
12. Cf. also the *Benedictus*, Luke 1:68-73. Perhaps this reflects the connection between the two salvatory events.
13. It is interesting to note that Paul's exhortations in Rom. 6:12f closely resemble those of Moses in Deut. 7:7-11 and are used in a similar context as being based on God's gracious act.
14. There are further similarities between the Passover and the Eucharist with regard to their relationships to the events on which they were based and to their theological function in connection with these events, which may be valuable for further study.
15. It is for this reason that the views of Noth, Alt, van Raaij, etc., concerning the origin of Israel and interpretation of Ex. 1-15 can be seen somewhat as a misunderstanding of the objective evidence.

## MASS. By Leonard Bernstein.

Leonard Bernstein's setting of the mass treats the various rubric components in a free modern style, sometimes attaining an attitude of worship, not unacceptable in the modern church. Much religious feeling is evident, though, like many masses, a concert performance is envisioned by the setting. The *Mass* was written for the dedication of the Kennedy Memorial, indicating the first audience, to which the composer addresses himself. But Bernstein is offering more than a mass. He has observed the modern scene, the troubled priesthood in contemporary society, the defection of thousands of priests, and the hunger of many worshipers for more modern forms, and the composer creates a dramatic conflict by bringing the sounds of the raucous inquirer and the offending world into the church. (But, perhaps surprisingly, Bernstein is not bringing the songs of the "underground mass" into the church.) The conflict develops until the call of the world and the cry of the streets "get to" the priest at the most sacred moment of the elevation of the chalice. The chalice falls, the priest declares it an accident—but it is apparent that the "accident" does not explain the scene. The people amazingly understand and forgive and stand beside their troubled priest.

It is not hard to understand that the Catholic Church might react unfavorably to such a public dramatization of its plight. The *Mass* has a chance of becoming very popular, perhaps next to *Jesus Christ Superstar*; it seeks the same audience. The record sales indicate that a Broadway production of the *Mass* may be a possibility.

The *Mass* moves rapidly through many numbers, beginning with a sprightly call to worship. After the Kyrie Eleison follows a sweet and lovely Simple Song, what the ancients might call an "idiotic psalm." A *Halleluia* sparkles with tinkling sounds, followed by a *Street Chorus*, like a New Orleans funeral procession. The *Dominus* receives a fugato treatment. A chorale anthem is followed by an oboe, which sounds like Boito's *Mephistofeles*. Sometimes Bernstein is antiphonally charming, sometimes mocking. The Old Testament portions receive better treatment than the New Testament portions. The *Credo* is overly rhythmic, imitating public recitation. There is also a "non-credo." The *Epistle* is serious; the *Gospel* sounds like "Green Pastures." The *Agnus Dei* is strangely energetic. The *Miserere* is moving, in elevated modern style, followed by the wild cry of the world. After the dramatic scene of the broken chalice and the wrecked altar there is a *Pax* and a wistful closing choral.

Throughout the work there is no doubt of Bernstein's mastery of the medium and his most intimate characterization of the feelings of the people involved. He understands the tragedy which has befallen the church and responds to it in a manner which reveals his own bias. Perhaps one can understand some discomfiture on the part of the "angel" who commissioned the work, the former Mrs. John Kennedy. If it is ungracious on her part not to have acknowledged the work, it may equally be ungracious of the composer to have revealed this fact so early. Neither of these animadversions would "cut any ice." More pertinent would be the question whether Bernstein's *Mass* is a conception for a great national occasion, the dedication of a memorial to a popular president. Must the fact of his church membership be brought into the scene? One must allow the artist his freedom. But frequently talented people have also needed guidance as to the highest ideals. Viewed from this vantage point, the *Mass* is not a national memorial.