

BOOK REVIEWS

Paul Kalluveettil

Declaration and Covenant

A comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East: *Analecta Biblica* 88, Rome (1982) Biblical Institute Press, XI, 284 p; bibliography (pp 214-235) and indices (Scripture references, OT words, ANE words, modern authors, general).

The 'covenant', considered by quite a number of scholars to be the centre of the OT, time and again attracts the attention of scholars and it seems to have become a key category for the interpretation of the OT; even so the 'covenant' remains a matter of dispute. Through his careful, extensive and highly specialized study *Declaration and Covenant*, originally submitted in 1980 as doctoral dissertation to the Biblical Institute, Rome, under the title "Declaration Formulae in the OT Secular Covenants", Fr Paul Kalluveettil seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the covenant concept in the OT in general and thus to provide the necessary background for an understanding of the covenant between God and Israel and he also hopes to throw some light on the social, tribal and political structure of Israel through his study. The focus of Fr Kalluveettil's investigation are the oral declarative acts of relationship in the 'secular' covenants in the OT, i.e., in such covenants in which Yahweh is not directly involved as one of the parties. The study is limited to two types of declarative acts of relationship in the OT, namely, to the declaration of vassalage and to the declaration of brotherhood. The author approaches his theme with constant and extensive reference to the Ancient West Asian environment making ample use of Ancient West Asian texts. This comparative approach shows similarities between the formulation and function of oral declarations in Ancient West Asia and Israel, and thus it proves to be extremely valuable for the understanding of the OT texts dealing with covenant relationships. On the whole, the study is an interesting and stimulating contribution to the understanding of the various social and political agreements of relationship in the OT as well as in Ancient West Asia.

The point of departure for Fr Kalluveettil's study is a brief discussion of the complexity and the range of the word 'covenant'.

With Mendenhall and others, Kalluveettil presupposes against Perlitt that we have to reckon with covenants and covenant relationships also in cases where the term *berit*—the most frequent term for covenant in the OT—does not occur: “Covenant seems to be a rather broad category which includes *berit* passages as well as other texts which contain the idea eventhough not always verbally expressed” (p. 3). Consequently, Kalluveettil studies in the first part of his book “*berit* texts” (pp 7-16) and “non-*berit* texts” (pp 17-91), which he subdivides into “synonym texts”, i.e., such texts which denote the covenant relationship with synonymous phrases or words for *berit*, and “non-synonym texts”, i.e., such texts in which the covenant relationship is implied but neither *berit* nor synonymous expressions are used. Like in Ancient West Asian Texts, also in the OT, synonymous phrases for *berit* describe either the act of covenant making or the stipulations or matters related to the stipulations. The texts which imply a covenant relationship (non-synonym texts) deal with pacts between the king and the people, covenants of vassalage, marriage agreements and social and political covenants. The study of the *berit* texts as well as of the non-*berit* texts shows the complex nature of what is subsumed under the category ‘covenant’. The word *berit* can refer to quite different kinds of agreements or relationships, such as political, social, tribal and familial, hence *berit* must not be identified with political treaties alone. The complexity and flexibility of *berit* occurs also in the Ancient West Asian texts where words like *beritu*, *riksu/rikiltu*, *adû* etc. denote a fairly wide range of agreements. The study of the non-*berit* synonym and non-synonym texts supports these findings. The idea of covenant comprises both political as well as non-political alliances of various kinds; in all cases, however, the relationship is essential. “The word *berit* does not adequately express the full richness of the OT covenant concept. Our synonym and non-synonym texts demonstrate the existence of non-*berit* covenants” (91).

The second part of the study is exclusively devoted to the Declaration Formula (DF) in Ancient West Asian historical documents. These texts attest to the existence of covenant declaration formulae which either effect a covenant relationship (establish, re-establish or renew a covenant), or re-affirm an existing treaty band or just refer to the existence of a covenant relationship. All DF express the idea of belonging-to-the-other. The relationship is expressed in the respective contexts as vassal-lord, father-son, brother-brother,

friend-ally relationship, or in a general way as "we are all one" relationship.

The third part, which in fact constitutes the main body of the study, deals with covenant declaration formulae in the OT, and consists of a detailed analysis of the vassal formula (we I are/am your vassals/servant) in Jos 9:8; 2 Ki 16:7; 2 Ki 10:5; 1 Sam 27:12 and the brother formula in 1 Ki 20:31-34 with an excursus on Judg 9:2-3. The texts containing the vassal formula are, with the exception of Jos 9:8, all non-berit texts. They all illustrate the phenomenon of oral declarative acts in vassal pacts. With the exception of 1 Sam 27:12 it is the inferior party which declares a vassal relationship, however this declaration does not become effective unless the superior party confirms and accepts the declared vassal relationship. The declaration is a covenant constituting act. The brother formula in 1 Ki 20:31-34 aims at equality of two parties.

The author summarizes the results of his study and points out that in the OT as well as in Ancient West Asian texts the existence of oral declarative acts which declare a relationship is clearly attested to. The covenant relationship is expressed either in generic terms ("we are all one") or by specific formulations (vassal-lord, father-son, brother, friend and ally). Most of the DF are "one way formulae", i.e., formulae which express only one side of the mutual relationship (e.g. "I am your son.") as against "two way formulae" expressing the whole relationship (I am your son and you are my father). The DF function to effect a new covenant relationship, to re-affirm an existing one, to re-establish a broken pact. DF can be found in relationship to enthronement scenes or to legal formulations concerning adoption, slavery, service and marriage, in these cases they are negative declarations in order to revoke an existing relationship. The relationship which is referred to by the DF is a quasi-familial band. "The act of accepting the other as one's own reflects the basic idea of covenant: an attempt to extend the band of blood beyond the kinship sphere or, in other words, to make the partner one's own flesh and blood" (p.212).

With great clarity the author has demonstrated in his study that the concept of covenant in the OT covers a wide range of very different more or less legally formalized relationships, which also are distinguished terminologically in the texts (berit texts, non-berit texts

synonym and non-synonym). In the light of this result would it not be logical to give up the idea of an all-embracing "covenant-concept" or "covenant-idea" in the OT? Does a definite reality in the OT correspond to the "concept" of the "idea of covenant", or is not rather this "concept" or "idea" a generalizing and simplifying – and perhaps therefore so attractive – construct in the minds of scholars, which is not fully adequate to the reality presented by the texts? Scholarly terminology ought to take into account much more the lexicographical and formcritical data. The declarative acts have different functions and it seems therefore to be difficult to subsume the submission of a group of Canaanites (Jos 9), the request for military assistance against a third party negotiated through diplomatic channels between kings (2 Ki 16:7), the declaration of loyalty to the leader of a military coup by the aristocracy (2 Ki 10), the contract between a king and a leader of a group of guerrillas (1 Sam 27:12) and a kind of peace treaty on equal terms (1 Ki 20:31ff) under the unifying and all-pervading head "covenant". It would be desirable to arrive at a much more differentiated terminology and thus to overcome the often somewhat careless usage of the "problematic concept" (p. 5, cf. p. 222 n.1) or word "covenant". Fr Kalluveettil's study actually provides ample material and data as a basis on which at least certain types of secular covenants or rather agreements could be distinguished.

A further question which the study raises, but cannot pursue or answer within the given scope and focus, is the question concerning the socio-historical origin of the DF. It is striking that in a number of DF which occur in political negotiations and agreements between kings the terminology to describe the relationship is derived from the sphere of the family ("Familial Terminology" p. 130). The familial terminology almost certainly is introduced only secondarily into the political sphere. The employment of familial terminology in DF on a political level then would indicate that an earlier, pre-political stage of society in which the family was the basic and comprehensive social unit still influenced the understanding of the organized and complex societies in a state. The family still provided the categories of understanding of political relationships and the social and political organizations of the state focussed on the family of the king. The oldest examples of history writing in the OT, namely, the History of David's Rise and the Succession Narrative are, to a large extent, family history of the royal family. Again Fr Kalluveettil's study

provides a good starting point for an investigation into the socio-historical background of the DF and the various forms of legally constituted social and political relationships.

Dr. Rudolf Ficker
U T C Bangalore

Othmar Gächter

Hermeneutics and Language in Purva Mimamsa

A study in Sabara Bhashya, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass,
1983, pp. x, 164, Rs. 100.00

The book is a slightly revised version of the author's doctoral thesis at the Banaras Hindu University. Hermeneutics is a very popular subject in Western philosophical and theological thinking today. Moving away from the traditional idea that the Bible is such a simple and direct speech of God to Man that any one can easily understand it, scholars realized that even the Word of God is expressed in the words of man and that the human writers of Scripture and the present-day readers have problems being separated by a cultural chasm of nineteen centuries or more. So starting with Schleiermacher a scientific attempt was made to cope with this big gap separating the author from the reader. Schleiermacher's own effort was to get behind the words of the author to his psychology and find out what he actually meant. William Dilthey used the historical method and the decisive role played by human will in the course of events to arrive at the real meaning of the text. But German Phenomenology directed attention to the text itself as a phenomenon independent of both the subject and the object, the writer and the reader. Heidegger's Existentialism viewed the meaning of the text as a self-presentation of being which even the author was only trying to understand. Hence Heidegger's disciple Gadamer has developed his hermeneutics "as a theory of the real experience that thinking is," or as a theory of understanding in a way fusing the particular horizons of both the author and the reader, taking the whole history of a text as a progressive manifestation of being. On the other hand, as Heidegger later in life insisted, "Being that can be understood is

language''. The French school of hermeneutics places greater emphasis on the language aspect of a text. Language as natural symbol has a universal meaning preceding even the particular syntax of an individual language. Hence according to Ricoeur hermeneutics creates a sort of arch liberating a text from the particularisms of an author's context and reincarnating it the particularisms of an author's context and reincarnating it in the particular context of the reader thus achieving the effective history of the original text itself in its authentic identity.

The great importance today of Sabara's commentary on the Mimamsa Sutras and the hermeneutics it proposes is that Sabara cuts through the radical opposition between the German and French Schools of hermeneutics. He does not deal with language as the intelligible aspect of reality like Heidegger and Gadamer, nor as mere symbol with a universal meaning like Ricoeur, but as *sabda*, Word, the authentic, original, eternal form of reality independent of any particular person uttering it. Sabara divides all reality into visible and invisible, and the only access to the latter whether heavenly or divine is through Scripture. Similarly what is termed *apurva*, an extraordinary power leading to an intended though unforeseen consequence of a sacrificial act, what did not exist before and is therefore new, is said to be expressed only through the Word. Such is the *bhavasabda* or the effective words or verbs that produce a new reality; they have an activity, a becoming, coming into existence as their direct object (p.30). The word is reality and is effective by itself because it has a share in *bhavana*, the efficient force expressed not only by verbs but even words indicative of an activity (p.31). The special force of *apurva* is not a matter of mere relation but pertains to the very nature of meaning held by Sabara. The invisible dimension of reality indicates that the reference to the invisible is obtained really and not ideally alone (p.35). The ground and support of such reference is the *atmān*, the ground of all reality. Against that ultimate background what the words in themselves stand for are neither the individuals (*vyakti*) nor their abstract universal concepts (*jati*) but *akrti*, the specific form. This *akrti* is permanently related to *sabda* and is present in every case of perception whether of individuals or of a class of individuals e.g., cows. *Akrti* is present and is represented through *viśeṣanā* the distinguishing factors (pp. 48-52). On account of this close relation between *sabda* and *akrti*, *sabda* is never apart from reality as a whole of which it is, in fact, a 'part' (p. 55). Thus

viewing language as if from above from its proper and originative source and not merely as a product of human convention Sabara is able to explain not only the revelative character of all Scriptures but also its prescriptive authority.

The great merit of Gächter's treatment of Sabara is that he lets Sabara speak for himself; he just follows the line of thinking of Sabara. Though he introduces the book with reference to present-day Western hermeneutics he does not attempt any comparison between the two traditions. But the comparison is obvious. All this makes us confidently assert that any student interested in Western hermeneutics can profit a great deal by following the ancient hermeneutics of Sabara.

Fr John B. Chethimattam