10-2015

"Review of *The 'Grammar of Sacrifice': A Generativist Study of the Israelite Sacrificial System in the Priestly Writings with a 'Grammar' of Σ*"

Dale Launderville OSB
College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, dlaunderville@csbsju.edu

vailing norms for the academic study and teaching of Scriptures have been dictated by the classical tradition of biblical criticism, flourishing on a groundwork of giants of nineteenth-century historical scholarship. This tradition has been well perpetuated in the United States in secular schools and associations of higher learning and at times in parochial schools (e.g., JEDP will not substitute for *HaShem* in institutions of Jewish Orthodoxy, nor would the Jesus of history disconnect from the Christ of faith in Catholic and Christian [fundamentalist] schools and seminaries). Respecting institutional guidelines should not preclude an instructor's responsibility to work creatively and diligently at presenting a meaningful teaching experience. UbD philosophy is on this track and the experiential know-how of L., W., and J. assures a successful biblical course (general and thematic) model for both novice and veteran teachers in the field.

A personal note. Though I acknowledge the authors' enthusiasm for UbD, I prefer the traditional methods in teaching the Hebrew canon, NT, and rabbinics. I use a historical-critical method that stresses that two-millennia-old Jewish texts and related literature are engaging diversified Judaism (religion) as an interpretation of ethnicity in the context of the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman era. I limit the straight lecture approach, preferring student encounter, not encroachment ambience.

By encouraging the student to do research at home in order to explicate the text in class and answer questions of difficulty from a peer group, one plants in the students seeds of loyalty to great concepts, which otherwise would not grow from the total lecture method that often detaches the student from the material—nor, it appears, from the "hands on-feel good" *tanai* (condition/premise) related to the UbD model of personal relevancy. Furthermore, the student gains self-reliance from such an exposure; his or her own germane ideas are able to sprout; and a relaxed teacher–student relationship is created.

Zev Garber, Los Angeles Valley College, Valley Glen, CA 91401

NAPHTALI S. MESHEL, *The "Grammar" of Sacrifice: A Generativist Study of the Israelite Sacrificial System in the Priestly Writings with a "Grammar" of Σ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Pp. xxiii + 226 + 42. £85.

This book is a revision of Meshel's dissertation completed at the Hebrew University (2009) under the direction of Baruch I. Schwartz. He aims to formulate a grammar of the sacrificial system in the Priestly writings of the Pentateuch (Σ). Such a grammar would provide an inventory of the building blocks of the sacrificial model and the set of rules governing the combinations of these blocks. M. aims to identify and define the operative categories of Σ. In the preface, M. states that, from the perspective of ritology, his study is an attempt to compose a grammar of the Priestly ritual system analogous to the grammar of natural languages. In the conclusion, he anticipates objections to the appropriateness of this analogy but concludes that the term describes well the "rigorously, rule-governed" dimension of ritual and linguistic systems (p. 209). As an appendix, M. provides "A 'Grammar' of Σ," which he claims can be invalidated by "a single example of a sacrificial sequence in an Israelite text . . . that is here considered ungrammatical" (p. 227).

The core of the sacrificial system consists of the set of activities that describe "the

offering of *materia sacra* derived from animals upon an altar" (p. 9). The first operative category is zoemics: an examination of the five animals acceptable for sacrifice in P, viz., cattle, sheep, goats, pigeons, and turtledoves. Each of these classes of animals (i.e., zoemes) is bifurcated according to sex and age. The combination of these five animal classes divided according to sex and age yields twenty elementary blocks, which could generate as many as 2^{20} zoemes (i.e., members of the class of animals acceptable for sacrifice). Only some of these zoemes are attested in P, yet P's rules would allow the other potential zoemes. This creation of zoemes inheres in the generativist logic of Σ's grammar. To facilitate the identification of these zoemes, M. adopts a set of abstract symbols for each zoeme. For example, M. labels a "bull" as B↑, designating it as bovine, male, mature. The use of such abstract labels gives the logic of M's grammar a formal character akin to that of mathematics. M. claims that the rules of this grammar of Σ have a timeless character whether they are made explicit or remain implicit in the workings of the sacrificial system.

The complexity of M's grammar ramps up as he moves into his second and third operative categories: jugation and hierarchics. M. defines jugation as "the joining of two or more animal or non-animal sacrificial materials" (pp. xx, 63). The law in Num 15:2b-16 states that every wholeburnt or well-being offering must be accompanied by semolina with oil and a libation of wine and maps out the quantities of the nonanimal materials that are to accompany each zoeme. M. illustrates the subordination of semolina and wine to the zoeme and then the subordination of oil to semolina with a right-branching diagram. He notes, however, that the oil might be coordinate rather than subordinate to the semolina. M. argues that even though Num 15:2b-14 claims to cover votive and volitional offerings as well as calendric ones, it applies to the calendric offerings only as given in Numbers 28–29 since it would omit too many possible zoemes (p. 87). Hierarchics is "the study of the composition of sacrificial *types* wherein one or more sacrificial types constitute another sacrificial type" (p. xix). For example, in Num 28:11-15, the listing of two mature male bovines, one ram, and seven male lambs (level 0) are gathered under the label of wholeburnt offerings (level +1), and one male goat (level 0) is labeled a purification offering (level +1). These two groups of offerings combine to constitute the new moon ceremony (level +2). The combination of these offerings can be diagrammed as a vertical movement from level 0 to level +2. M. argues that, contrary to what is usually accepted, it is possible for a zoeme simultaneously to be more than one of the following sacrificial types: a wholeburnt offering (ʿôlâ), a purification offering (ḥaṭṭāʾt), a well-being offering (šĕlāmîm), and a reparation offering (ʾāšām). M. articulates six hierarchical rules by which such combinations of sacrificial types legitimately occur.

The fourth category, praxemics, is "the study of ritual from the point of view of the actions involved in its performance" (pp. xx, 130). In previous studies of ritual grammar, the praxeme was regarded as the basic category from which all others derived. But M. claims that these studies have been "more programmatic than proto-grammatical" (p. 132). M. argues that, in order to get at the underlying logic of Priestly sacrificial texts, the praxemics of an entire system must be mapped out "with a sensitivity to the existence of differential levels of conceptualization" (zoemics, jugation, hierarchics, praxemics) and "to rules of transformation between these levels" (p. 132). M. concludes that praxemics reveals that there is "a high degree of interdependency in the system" (p. 162).

Meshel finds "enticing" Frits Staal's hypothesis that ritual is meaningless and is to be

seen as pure syntax without semantics (p. 188). Nevertheless, he criticizes Staal's claim that ritual syntactic structures are devoid of semantics as an error because it overlooks "a rudimentary form of meaning" (p. 188).

This carefully argued book breaks new ground on the debated issue of whether it is possible to formulate a ritual grammar. M. hopes that the rigor of his grammar will allow "entry into the inner workings of an ancient culture" (p. 209).

Dale Launderville, OSB, Saint John's School of Theology • Seminary, Collegeville, MN 56321

DIEGO PÉREZ GONDAR, *Caín, Abel y la sangre de los justos: Gn 4,1-16 y su recepción en la iglesia primitiva* (Collección Teológica 131; Pamplona: Universidad de Navara, 2014). Pp. 295. Paper €21.

Pérez Gondar examines the reception of story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-16) in the early church. He balances historical-critical methods with reader-response approaches in an effort to avoid the potential irrelevance of the former and the potential subjectivity of the latter.

The study unfolds in seven chapters. In chap. 1, P.G. lists the major bibliographic sources that inform his analysis of modern (historical-critical) commentary on Gen 4:1-16 and reception history of the passage. He also outlines his approach, which is informed by reader-response theory, reception history, and *Dei Verbum*. Since the literal sense of the text informs other senses, he begins in chap. 2 with a careful study of the Hebrew text and the various ways modern interpreters have understood it. His purpose is not to identify the "correct" interpretation but to open up and examine the range of interpretations made possible by the laconic narrative. He occasionally identifies points that will be important in the history of interpretation, such as God's arbitrary preference for Abel's offering.

In chap. 3, P.G. examines Cain and Abel in the intertestamental literature. He begins with the LXX, which interprets the MT in significant ways and strongly influences subsequent reception. The LXX reduces the capriciousness of God and clarifies the motive of Cain. The word choice in the LXX is motivated by etymological analyses of the names Cain ("jealous") and Abel ("sorrow"), suggesting that Cain's motive is jealousy and Abel is an innocent victim. P.G. also discusses the reception of the story in other intertestamental texts, Philo, Josephus, and the targums. These texts already reflect a view of Abel as an innocent sufferer and expand on Cain's guilt, for example, as someone who waits too long before offering anything to God. As Abel and Cain begin to be seen as typifying good and evil respectively, God's contrasting responses to their offerings appear reasonable and ethical rather than arbitrary and unfair.

In chap. 4, P.G. offers a "canonical study" of Gen 4:1-16, meaning an analysis of its reception within the Catholic canon. In Wis 10:1-5, Cain is a murderer whose crime motivates the flood, a connection also made in the *Testament of Abraham*. In Matt 23:34-36 // Luke 11:49-51, Abel is the prototypical example of innocent blood that is shed like that of the prophets and Jesus. In Heb 11:4, Abel is an example of faith whose dispositions while offering explain why his gifts were accepted and Cain's were not. This interpretation elim-