PENTATEUCHAL CRITICISM IN "LA BIBLE DE JERUSALEM"

The *Book of Exodus*[1] by its very name makes us think immediately of the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt. Yet the book contains much more. Another main event is the covenant made on Sinai. Fr Couroyer conveniently divides the book into three parts: the deliverance out of Egypt, I.1–XV.21; the journey through the desert, XV.22–XVIII.27; and the Covenant on Sinai, XIX.1–XL.28 (pp. 7–8).

A feature which the book of *Exodus* has in common with the other books of the Pentateuch, especially *Genesis*, is its composite character. Like *Genesis*,[2] it is composed of the three main traditions J, E and P. In Exodus D also can be traced. The matter can be divided into narrative sections and sections dealing with laws and institutions.[3] Regarding the narrative sections, Fr Couroyer considers as certain that J dominates; E and P relate the same main events as J and appear as parallel stories or as complements. A few sections only are proper to E and P. E connects the revelation of God's name with the call of Moses (III.13–15), P does the same (VI.2–12). E alone relates the victory over Amalec (XVII.8–15). The account of the story of the golden calf would include elements of E and J. P, as usual, has dates and genealogies (I.1–5; VI.14–25, etc.). A division of the narrative sections according to sources is particularly difficult. A survey can hardly be given as there is no agreement amongst the critics. The notes therefore give the proposed divisions with great reserve (pp. 8–9). Hence Fr Couroyer is extremely cautious in these notes. Some mention only the general opinion of the critics (see e.g. p. 28, note *e*). In others a kind of reluctance can be noticed (see p. 25, note *a*; p. 61, note *e*). Others are stated decisively (see p. 40, note *b*; p. 43, note *b*). In general, they show us a personal approach.

As to the sections dealing with laws and institutions, the distinction of the sources can more easily be made. E has the decalogue

[1] *L'Exode*, ed. and tr. B. Couroyer, O.P. Editions du Cerf, Paris 1952. Pp. xvii +156; 736 explanatory notes and 145 critical notes.

[2] See my foregoing article on the same subject, *Scripture*, V (1952), pp. 99–102. The letters J, E, P and D are used in the sense explained in my article "Moses and the Pentateuch", in *Scripture*, V (1952), pp. 60–7, dealing with the general introduction to the Pentateuch in the *Bible de Jérusalem*.

[3] This word is used in its general sense of "something that has been instituted". In that sense it can be used as the equivalent of the French word "institutions", as it appears in this introduction to the book of *Exodus*.

(XX.2–17) and the so-called[1] Code of the Covenant (XX.22–XXIII.19). The decalogue of J is found in connexion with the renewal of the Covenant (XXXIV.10–27). P has the ritual of the Pasch (XII) and the organisation of the cult with its sanctuary and priesthood (XXV–XXIX). Chapters XXX–XXXI appear to be a later addition, and this is made sufficiently clear by the notes. The execution of the orders, given in XXV–XXXI, is told in chapters XXXV–XL. The latter form a recent addition, replacing an originally shorter ending (p. 9).

It can be read again here, how these traditions are based on written (referring to XVII.14 ; XXIV.4–7 ; XXXIV.27) and oral sources and thus go back to the time in which the events happened and to the person of Moses, as has already been explained by Fr de Vaux in his general introduction.[2] Fr Couroyer admits that the three main events of the book of *Exodus*—the departure from Egypt, the religious experience on Sinai, and the establishment of the law and the cult—with Moses as the central figure were formed into an epic by the living tradition amongst the people and sometimes took on a liturgical character (p. 10).

The introduction has two interesting paragraphs on the legislation and the cult (pp. 15–19). The book contains Israel's first legislative texts : the decalogues of E and J and the Code of the Covenant. The profound religious character of this legislation is evident. A religious character can be found in other codes of the Ancient East as well, but not such a compenetration of sacred and profane elements. This is typical of the Code of the Covenant, containing civil and criminal laws intermixed with religious ones which are all given as representing the covenant with Yahweh.

Excluding this religious character, several of these laws, when compared with other codes of the Ancient East, point to a common social and juridical background. The Code in Exodus supposes a community of shepherds and peasants quite in keeping with the actual circumstances of Israel, forming itself into a people and settling down. Apart from the contents, the differences in the formulation of the laws are proofs of the composite character of this legislation. That is, however, the outcome of the adaptation necessary with a legislation which goes back to the time of the origin of the people. Some of these laws date back further still (pp. 16–17).

The decalogue contains only religious and moral matters. This is no reason to deny its antiquity. The religion of Yahweh had, from

[1] "So called", because it got this name from the passage which follows it, XXIV.7. The real Code of the Covenant is the decalogue. The one in question is the application of the decalogue to civil and criminal matters and was, therefore, placed immediately after it, see p. 100, note *a*.

[2] See p. 14, the second half of note 2.

the very beginning, a moral character. One must, however, admit that Ex. XX.2–17 does not give the ten commandments word for word as Moses received them on Sinai; *cf.* the decalogue in Deut. V.6–18. The two texts go back to an originally shorter form (p. 17).

As regards the cult, stress is laid that at its origin a sanctuary must have existed where they could consult Yahweh. Since they could not have an image of Him, there had also to be a symbolic representation of His presence in the midst of His people; these two were respectively the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant, whatsoever their form might have been at the time. Sacrifices had to be offered up in this sanctuary and therefore ministers were necessary for this cult. It must be admitted, however, that the magnificent cult of the Temple at Jerusalem has influenced the description of this sanctuary and its ritual; see chapters XXV–XXXI and XXXV–XL (p. 17).

The remarks about the religious calendar, the different feasts, their respective origin and the historic signification connected with them, are worth reading (p. 18). No less interesting are the paragraphs on the doctrine of the book, the exodus in the life of Israel,[1] and the book in the life of the Church [2] (pp. 19–23). Of course, the introduction deals also with the historical date of the exodus. After a detailed study of the different arguments,[3] Ramses II (1290–1224 B.C.) is proposed as the Pharaoh of the oppression, and Meneptah (1224–1214 B.C.) as that of the exodus. An alternative and posssibly better solution is added, giving Seti I (1310–1290 B.C.) as the Pharaoh during whose reign the oppression started and the second half of the long reign of Ramses II as the time of the actual exodus (pp. 10–13).

The paragraph on the exodus and the geography is of not less importance (pp. 13–15).

There are several elaborate notes referring to some main questions, a few of which should be mentioned here. Note *a*, p. 34, deals with the revelation of the name Yahweh; its etymology and the theological import of the text are still under discussion. As to the former some of the proposed explanations are given. One is surprised that the possibility of an archaic causative form of the verb "hawah" is not amongst them. This would bring us to the meaning, "He causes to be". As to the latter—the text "I am who (I) am"—the explanation is given that it affirms the existence of Yahweh as opposed to that of the idols.

[1] e.g. the return of the exiles from Babylon is represented in Deutero-Isaias as a second exodus.

[2] e.g. the parallelism between the arrangement of matters in the first chapters of the Gospel of St John and in the book of *Exodus*.

[3] It is interesting to note that the mention of Israel on the stele of Meneptah is said to apply possibly to a group which had not gone to Egypt.

Mention is made of another possible explanation : God does not want to make known His name because, according to old semitic ideas, the knowledge of a being's name gives power over that being. God, therefore, gives nothing but a word by which the people can address him. Yet I think the old objection stands, namely that Moses asks God for His name and that the actual text does not suggest a refusal to that request. Moreover, the passages XXXIII.18–23 and XXXIV.5*b*–9 seem to be more in harmony with the explanation that God makes His name known. The explanation of "I know you by your name", i.e. with an individual knowledge, the name representing the person,[1] could be applied here.[2]

The plagues of Egypt are dealt with on pp. 47–8, note *a*. Due attention is paid to literary criticism. "None of the different traditions relates all the plagues, J 7, E 4, P 4". But how many plagues have there been ? The text as we have it now, gives a total of 9 plagues besides the extermination of the first-born. Is this total exact ? What have we to think of the third and the sixth plague, mentioned only in P ? Amplification is admitted regarding the features of some of the plagues (only the Nile in J and all the waters in P). Has tradition amplified their total number too ?

The passage of Israel through the Sea of "reeds" is well known (Ex. XIV). The main point of the narrative is the divine assistance given to Israel at a highly critical moment, when the exodus seemed to end in catastrophe. The different traditions have embroidered this historical fact in the course of time (complete extermination of the Egyptian forces ; water forming a wall on both sides). The text affirms the reality of divine assistance in the fact which it relates, whether this help was given by means of natural phenomena or not (p. 74, note *a*). In connexion with this incident, I should mention the Canticle of Moses. It is entitled "victory song". A victory song is admitted as being quite normal after the danger had passed, but it could hardly have the perfect form it has in the actual text, since it was impromptu. Moreover, its contents provide sufficient arguments to place the composition of this song at a later time. It is therefore supposed to be a later development made after the theme of the short victory song in XV.21, and it comprises the victorious advance of Israel as far as Jerusalem (p. 78, note *a*).

Other elaborate notes deal with the decalogue (p. 97, note *a*), the

[1] Ex. XXXIII.12 ; see note *a*, p. 154.

[2] It seems obvious that the passage in question (III.13–15) is overcharged, although Fr Couroyer does not mention it. Perhaps his reason is that it is difficult to say how it originally was and what has been added. The text as it is now stresses not so much that God reveals His name, but that this God is the same as the God of the Fathers.

Code of the Covenant (p. 100, note *a*) and the cult and construction of the sanctuary (p. 117, note *b*).

Nothing has been said as yet about the translation of the text which was, perhaps, the main aim of the publication. Undoubtedly, those who are acquainted with Fr Couroyer are certain that the translation was made with the greatest care. The many notes containing literal translations in support of those given in the text, confirm this expectation. Yet there may originally have been more of these notes, for one would sometimes expect them where they are lacking. As to the notes in general, it could be added that the somewhat frequent stress on difficulties and the not rare confession of our present ignorance are striking. This latter, however, apart from being a sign of discretion, is the right of the scholar, as Fr L. H. Vincent once remarked in his archaeological conferences. On the other hand, there are several notes where Fr Couroyer speaks without hesitation. I regret that, because of lack of space, I am unable to deal with the numerous notes referring to difficult Hebrew words or to words and institutions of possibly Egyptian origin. This volume, like the others, is the work of a scholar; it is thoroughly up-to-date and merits the attention of serious students of the Old Testament.

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