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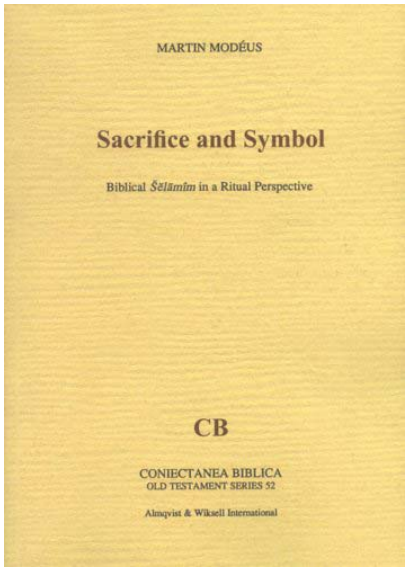

Modéus, Martin

Sacrifice and Symbol: Biblical* Šĕlāmîm *in a Ritual Perspective

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With this dissertation from Lund University, Martin Modéus makes a major contribution to ritual theory as well as to studies of ritual offerings in the Bible. The book, however, also illustrates some pitfalls along the path of combining ritual with textual studies.

Modéus immediately challenges the conventional search for the meaning of old rituals as "a scientific prejudice" (17). After briefly reviewing theories of sacrifice, he rejects the usefulness of the term "sacrifice." Instead he turns to "ritual" as a more suitable category because it is not burdened with a heritage of essentialized meanings derived from theology and academic theory. Modéus must therefore inquire into the nature of ritual and how it works before he can discuss the nature and meaning of the offerings called *šelāmîm* in the Hebrew Bible.

Modéus defines rituals as the products of particular *situations,* which he terms "the *causa* of the ritual" (35). Rituals provide a response to such *causae,* which should therefore be distinguished from any theological or ideological interpretations of the ritual. He illustrates this point by pointing to the birth of a child as the situation that provokes the ritual reaction of Christian baptism, rather than the theological explanation of a need for salvation. Ritual analysis should therefore focus on finding these *causae* that prompt ritual response. Modéus follows theorists of ritual such as Jonathan Z. Smith, Fritz Staal,

and Catherine Bell, who have maintained that rituals serve to differentiate special activities from normal ones. Rituals therefore call attention to these activities and their *causa* rather than to their meaning, and they define the nature of a *causa* in order to clarify a situation of transition, ambiguity, or conflict. Choice of ritual form, however, is usually dictated by cultural convention and is therefore largely arbitrary.

Modéus divides *causae* into six categories: nature, life cycle, constitutive, restitutive, crisis, and initiation. He then tries to classify all appearances of *šelāmîm* in the Hebrew Bible according to their *causae* but has to conclude that "there was … no single, common use of this sacrifice at all, and further, it is not possible to see a general line of development in the dating" (65). He thus embarks on a theory of ritual symbolism dictated by the observation that the rituals themselves need not convey symbolic meanings. It is the meanings of the *causae* that are defined by the ritual; the ritual merely serves to bring attention these significant situations.

In the ritual context, Modéus argues that symbols function in one of three ways: as defining, legitimizing, or marking symbols. Defining symbols help participants locate the ritual relative to the general ritual system (e.g., Santa Claus, who symbolizes Christmas). Defining symbols are therefore specific to particular rituals. Legitimizing symbols ensure the ritual's validity by their presence and so are frequently represented by an officiating minister or priest dressed in stereotypical ways. Marking symbols focus on and draw attention to the *causa.* Though meaningless by themselves, marking symbols differentiate the ritual from normal life. Modéus points out examples of marking symbols such as flowers and candles in modern life and *matsebot* (upright monoliths) in ancient Israel.

At this point, Modéus is able to apply his ritual theory to biblical texts about offerings. He argues that *šelāmîm* generally perform a marking function in the Hebrew Bible, since they appear over a wide range of *causae* and yet their absence from some ritual occasions suggests that they were not legitimizing symbols. The *šelāmîm* therefore did not have an essential meaning but were used to focus attention on a variety of situations. Modéus argues that the uses of *šelāmîm* to pay a vow or as thanksgiving offerings, which have often been classified as variant types of this offering, were instead merely distinct reasons, or *causae,* for the ritual.

Modéus then surveys modern interpretations of *šelāmîm* to show that most represent different aspects of ritual, rather than alternative understandings of the ritual's meaning. He argues that interpretations function on three different levels: "the level of ideology" involves conscious symbolic content as expressed by ritual experts; "the level of use" concerns a ritual's purposes for the worshiper; and "the level of structure" deals with the ritually reinforced kinship, status, and power relationships. Ideological interpretations of

offerings get expressed only rarely in biblical texts, but do appear in the equation of blood with life (Lev 17:11) and the repeated statement that the burnt offerings produce a "pleasing odor" to God. Modéus points to votive offerings as exhibiting all three levels of interpretation already in ancient and traditional cultures: the structural level is revealed because gifts materialize people's different social standings, the level of use is reflected in the instrumentality of a votive gift, and the ideological level is reflected in many speculations about the deity's reception of the gift.

At this point in his argument Modéus makes on observation that will be determinative for the rest of the book. Almost all mentions of *šelāmîm* appear in contexts that emphasize cult initiation, a description that applies to the entire Sinai section of the Pentateuch and also scenes of royal sponsorship of the cult in the historical books. In each case of cult inauguration, Modéus discerns an emphasis on the motif of the legitimate altar.

This observation leads Modéus to propose a redactional thesis: he argues that the word *šelāmîm* has been deliberately inserted in all instances of its occurrence in the Hebrew Bible to emphasize the motif of legitimacy. "Tentatively, I therefore suggest that all instances of *šelāmîm* should be considered as part of one single cultic glossation," which he regards as "post-Chronistic" (201–2). He argues that, because the *šelāmîm* mark a literary theme (legitimacy) rather than a ritual one (as a marking symbol), they must be the produce of scribal redaction.

The rest of the book adduces evidence in favor of this thesis. Modéus first investigates "technical traces" of the glossator, including the unclear position of the word *šelāmîm* in particular texts and unclear linguistic constructions that use inappropriate verbs with particular offering names. He suggests that the combination *zibḥê šelāmîm,* which appears commonly in P, resulted from the glossator adding the new term, *šelāmîm,* to the name of an old sacrifice, *zebaḥ.* The two-word phrase is itself the only evidence for glossation in these texts. Then he turns to evidence for the date and setting of the glossation. The distribution of appearances of *šelāmîm* in the Hebrew Bible suggests to Modéus that the glossation dates to a time between writing of Chronicles (where *šelāmîm* has been added) and the Samaritan schism and translation of Septuagint (because it was already present before these events), thus sometime in the Persian period. He concludes therefore that the glossator was a Jerusalem priest in the Persian period who had access to manuscripts of almost the entire Pentateuch as well as the Deuteronomistic History, Chronicles, and Ezekiel.

The last major section of the book explores possible motives for adding the *šelāmîm* gloss. Because the word appears in stories legitimizing one true altar, Modéus argues that the centralization of the cult was a major factor in motivating the addition. He observes that,

while none of the appearances of the offering name *zebaḥ* prior to Sinai have *šelāmîm* added to create the double phrase, almost all from Sinai to the entry into Canaan are expanded in this way. He argues on the basis of Lev 17:1–8 that the motivation for the glossator lay in cultic centralization that turned the *zebaḥ* in the open field (or anywhere else other than the tabernacle/temple) into a legitimate *zibḥê šelāmîm* when offered at the door of the sanctuary. The fact that *zebaḥ* could refer to both the temple sacrifice and the "secular" slaughter produced a need to distinguish legitimate sacrifice from slaughter, so the glossator added the term *šelāmîm* (an explanation anticipated by Robertson Smith and Snaith). It was not centralization itself but the textual ambiguity created by centralization that created the problem that the glossator addresses.

Modéus has trouble finding evidence for any other motive. Economic motives may have lain behind it, although these are hidden because economics already played a major role in the texts to which *šelāmîm* was being added. He does think, however, that the choice of the term itself reflects the fact that the offering provided priests remuneration for their work. The term may well have been old priestly vocabulary (hence the cognates in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Punic) for all sorts of transactions that provided priestly income. The identification of *šelāmîm* with the old temple *zebaḥ*, however, was an innovation of the glossator.

Evaluation of this book needs to address its ritual theory and its redactional conclusions separately, because, although the latter depend on the former, they undermine them as well.

Modéus has developed an explanatory system for ritual that can be applied with illuminating results to all kinds of ritual texts. In particular, his argument that life situations (*causae*) carry the weight of meaning while ritual symbols serve to define, legitimize, or mark the significance of these situations is a valuable contribution to ritual studies quite separate from its application to biblical texts. It could benefit, however, from further explication. He provides no theoretical justification for privileging situations (*causae*) as the locus of interpretation except to note that similar situations (births, coming of age, marriages, deaths) tend to provoke ritualization across a variety of human cultures. His case should be expanded not only with a wider range of examples but also with better explanation for why these kinds of situations seem to demand a ritual response.

The strength of Modéus's glossation analysis is that it explains why the double form *zibḥê šelāmîm* appears so frequently in priestly literature. It also makes sense of the curious distribution of the word *šelāmîm* in the Hebrew Bible. On the latter score, however, Modéus cannot account for a few texts where his explanation (a concern for the

legitimate altar) should have dictated that the word *šelāmîm* appear, but it does not. The most troubling of these is the Deuteronomic law code (Deut 12–26), where the word is entirely missing despite three parallels to texts in Exodus and Leviticus where it appears. He can only surmise that the glossator did not have access to the Deuteronomic code but is uncomfortable with the implications of that explanation—and rightly so.

Even apart from the problem of Deuteronomy, Modéus's theory of glossation makes some unusual assumptions about the early textual transmission of the Hebrew Bible. On the basis of the distribution of the word *šelāmîm* in the Hebrew Bible, he concludes that the glossator "had access to, and control over, at least some of the Scriptures, but not enough influence to enforce his views on the broader social context" (284). This model of textual centralization is at odds with most current descriptions of the early transmission of biblical texts, especially in light of the textual diversity of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Yet though Modéus makes much of alternative readings in the Septuagint, he finds little evidence for the glossation in the scrolls. One would think that such an extensive project of glossation would have left more evidence behind in the manuscript tradition.

The book still bears the marks of a dissertation in which the conclusions of the second stage on glossation have not been fully integrated into the first on ritual theory. The argument that a single glossation is responsible for all appearances of the word *šelāmîm* in the Hebrew Bible has the effect of rendering the first section's ritual description of the *šelāmîm* irrelevant, or at least misapplied. The *šelāmîm* turns out to be an author's literary creation; it is the *zebaḥ* that functioned ritually as a marking symbol in Modéus's explanation of the ritual function of Israel's offerings, as he in the end admits (307). His puzzle over why a marking symbol, in his ritual theory, has been used for purposes of legitimacy, according to his redactional theory (294), points to a deeper methodological conflict between ritual and textual approaches, one that has bedeviled many scholars' attempts to employ ritual theory in biblical scholarship. The problem, in essence, is that we do not have access to ancient Israel's rituals, only to texts that happen to describe or refer to them. The authors of texts describe rituals to further their own interests in writing, not to reflect whatever purposes may have lain behind a ritual's performance. Thus the application of ritual theories must always be deferred until those textual interests have been accounted for, or else the latter are likely to undermine the conclusions of the former. That has happened here, since Modéus's theory that all *šelāmîm* are glosses invalidates his analysis of the ritual function of *šelāmîm,* which he must then transfer to the *zebaḥ.*

Despite these criticisms, I recommend *Sacrifice and Symbol* to all scholars interested in ritual theory or the ritual texts of the Bible. Modéus's discussion clearly advances research

on both fronts, and, even if his conclusions require further evaluation, his arguments and the evidence he amasses deserve careful consideration.