**Foreword to Robert D. Macina*, The Lord’s Service. A Ritual Analysis of the Order Function, and Purpose of the Daily Divine Service in the Pentateuch***

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We all have our intellectual bind spots. That, sadly, is all too often the case even with scholars, who necessarily have a narrow focus in their specialized studies and a firm commitment to their theoretical presuppositions. These blind spots prevent them and us from seeing something that lies in plain view before our very eyes. Or, if we see it, we overlook and discount what is there, because it should not be there, or else, more commonly, because it is held to be of little or no importance, like a smudge on our spectacles. We disregard that matter because it does not fit in with our personal prejudices and our mental preconceptions.

If we want people to see what their preconceptions otherwise prevent them from seeing, it is not enough to describe what has been overlooked, because that does nothing for their blind spots. Two things are required for them to understand what is obscured and hidden from them. On the one hand, what they fail to see must be explained for them within their own frame of reference, like the translation of words in a foreign language into their own language. On the other hand, their frame of reference with its concomitant mentality, the way of imagining, thinking and feeling that corresponds with it, must be expanded and reconfigured, so that they can grasp and receive what they have as yet not been able to see and appreciate.

As far as I am concerned the best Biblical scholars do just that. These groundbreaking scholars do not just repeat what has already been said and confirm what is already known; they open up our eyes and our minds to comprehend and appreciate what has previously been overlooked and disregarded because it has made little or no sense to its readers. They perform a kind of mental surgery by their removal of a blind spot from our minds, like a cataract from our eyes. An instance of this for me was Gerhard von Rad’s monograph on “Wisdom in Israel.” It opened up that approach to the world and its view of human life which produced the book of Proverbs and the other wisdom literature in the Old Testament.

The removal of a blind spot opens up new vistas for investigation and provides new insights for the enrichment of understanding. To be sure, such scholarship does not have the final word to say on the matter for study, for that can never be. Instead, it enables those who enter a new place by the door that it has opened, to see it from inside and explore it for themselves. In that way their minds are enlarged and their capacity for understanding is enhanced. They see what they had previously been unable to see. Like a blind person who has gained sight, they perceive what they experience in a new way and have a bigger, better picture of the world before them.

My former student, Robert Macina, has done just that in his groundbreaking investigation of the divine service in the Pentateuch. To be sure, he, like every Biblical scholar, builds on the work of other scholars who have been working to remove similar blind spots in the interpretation of the priestly material in the Pentateuch. These blind spots have to do with the lack of insight into the nature and purpose of the ritual legislation in the Pentateuch. Two such blind spots are a contempt for ritual in general and for the sacrificial ritual in ancient Israel in particular.

The lack of attention to the ritual legislation in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers is surprising, given that it lies at the heart of the Pentateuch. The whole of Exodus 25 to Numbers 10:10 reports God’s institution of ritual enactments for Ancient Israel. Even more are given before and after that. Testimony to its importance is found in the rest of the Old Testament and the whole Jewish tradition up to the Mishnah and the Talmud. Yet despite the overwhelming evidence for its importance, scholars tend to belittle it, or dismiss it out of hand. Ritual enactments are regarded, by and large, as primitive, superstitious, empty mumbo jumbo, and the range of rites that are legislated in the Pentateuch are treated piecemeal as curiosities with minimal coherence and little ongoing significance, or as a kind of charade for the inculcation of moral or spiritual ideas. But in themselves they are held to have no intrinsic value, because they do nothing that could not be done better by other more pertinent means.

While some scholars, such as the social anthropologist Mary Douglas have addressed the contempt for ritual among intellectuals and much of Western society since the Enlightenment, other Biblical scholars, such as Haran and Milgrom, have made good sense of many aspects of ritual legislation in the Pentateuch and the symbolic social and religious world view that these rites embody. Macina advances their studies by his close ritual analysis of the daily service that was enacted as the main public ritual enactment for Israel as God’s people. It revolved around the burning of incense and the presentation of a burnt offering each morning and evening. He builds his case mainly on the legislation for the divine service in Exodus 25:1 - 31:10 and the account of its inaugural enactment in Leviticus 9. In his view the daily offering was a single, complex service that was performed in seven stages, each with its own coherence and indispensable function, and each as an important part of a whole sequence of acts which all made their unique contribution to the common purpose of the whole service. Most significantly, he argues that God had instituted the whole service for him to meet with his people at the sanctuary to purify, sanctify and bless them. That divine purpose determined the order of the service and the function of each part of it. The loss of it meant that Israel lost assured access to God’s gracious presence and the blessings that came from his residence with them.

In itself this careful, meticulous study succeeds in making good sense of the daily service and all its parts. Yet it does even more than that. It helps us to understand why the performance of that service, first at the tabernacle and then at the temple in Jerusalem, was so significant in the life of Israel in the pre-exilic period, as is evident even from a cursory reading of its history from Joshua to Chronicles, as well as in the life of Israel after the exile, as is evident from the focus on it in Ezra-Nehemiah and 1-2 Maccabees. It also helps Christian readers to understand why Paul includes the divine service in Romans 9:4 in the seven-fold legacy of the church from the Old Testament, as well as why Hebrews regards the service of worship in the church as both a partial continuation and the complete fulfilment of what was established for Israel in the Pentateuch.

Macina’s study provides a great service for the discerning readers of the Pentateuch who wish to make sense of it in all its parts. It helps to remove some of the blind spots that bar access to the significance of its ritual legislation for the divine service and helps them to appreciate its theological purpose and relevance. It helps Jews and Christians to understand what they receive from God by the performance of the Aaronic benediction.