

## **Rhetoric and Hermeneutics of Blessing and Curse in the Pentateuch**

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The doctoral thesis submitted at the Department of Old Testament deals with two important theological issues, blessing and curse. The topic is clearly set out in *Chapter 1*, entitled slightly inaccurately *Concepts of blessing and curse in the Pentateuch* (pp. 7-93), as not only texts from the Pentateuch (pp. 7-85) are included, but also texts following the Torah, namely 1 Kgs 8,30-53; 9,3-9, 2 Chron 29,1-9 and texts of Latter Prophets Jeremiah and Amos (pp. 86-93). In my view, this chapter represents the best in the candidate's effort and was elaborated in great detail and with remarkable thoroughness.. All texts concerning the phenomena of curse and blessing are examined with sensitivity for linguistic, semantic and grammatical relations. The same goes for recognition of various Hebrew puns, etymological connections etc.

*Chapter 2*, entitled *Phenomenology of blessings and curses* (98-150) gradually introduces important texts from the Near East (Agade, Hittite vassal treaties, Babylonian *kudurrus*, curses written down in Esarhaddon's texts, and Semitic inscriptions from Syria), Graeco-Roman world (*katadesmoi* and relevant passages from The Iliad), and from Indian Epic Mahabharata. In all the above-mentioned texts, the curse and blessing is investigated and particularity of the respective traditions is delineated. This part instructively and relatively exactly describes the contents of the texts studied. Nevertheless, since an immense portion of ancient literature is taken into account, the outcomes cannot cover all the diversity.

*Chapter 3*, named *Theological-anthropological synthesis* (pp. 151-170), elucidates particularity of curses and blessings as they are expressed in the Old Testament by means of

two comparisons. The first comparison concentrates on the idea of God in blessings and curses in the Pentateuch and in extra-biblical sources. Here, the biblical idea stands for God as a merciful Lord who gives a new chance (see pp. 153f), whereas the extra-biblical texts present their god or gods, in both cases without capital G, as deities acting as human projections of “justice and protection” (p. 161). Though this conclusion is evidently very ‘confessionalistic’, the statement of the candidate on the previous page that there is “no developed conception of divine blessing close to the biblical pattern when a blessing is attached to a specific person or group through whom blessings expand and reach many” is balanced and has its sound support in the relevant research in this field of science.

The second comparison is in a similar vein and shows the idea of man in biblical sources (herein expanded by New Testament passages from Gal 3,6-13, which have not been dealt with at all so far) as more secured than people dependent on accidental fate run by impersonal deities, who reduce a man to a “cog in the vast universe now knowing what to expect from life (pp. 162-163). Again, this description is somewhat unconvincingly or contrariwise too convincingly proclaimed as valid when biblical and extra-biblical texts are paralleled.

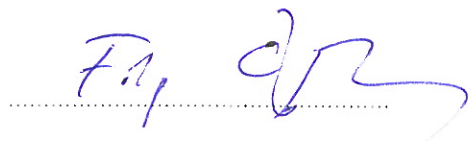
In the last part of the thesis named *General conclusions, considerations, implications* (pp. 165-170), the candidate utilizes her previous extensive analysis and persuasively documents the fact that curses and blessings are part of the religious and social universe of the ancient world. Moreover, as it is clearly documented, complex relation between blessings and curses represents specific grammar that enables these phenomena to create a paradigm of reality that sustains the very order of the universe.

The three-chapter arrangement of the thesis slightly reminds of the triadic ‘Hegelian’ thesis-antithesis-synthesis scheme used in many ways in older biblical scholarship which aimed to prove singularity of biblical religion (especially the one recorded in the New Testament; here, however, designated as faith /*Glaube*/ as opposite to religion /*Religion*/) as higher and more developed compared to other religious systems in the surroundings of Israel and early Christian church. This is all surely a legitimate procedure and the same applies to the idea of blessing as a means that comes to its perfection via a “theological bridge” (cf. p. 151) stretching eventually to the New Testament and there to the person of Jesus Christ. Yet, there are some questions that might be part of the public defense. These are as follows:

- How much genre and scope of particular ancient text(s) determines its interpretation?

- Does the Old Testament convey concepts that are open to other nations or does it contain other texts that go right in the opposite directions and exclude this harmonizing proposal?
- Does historical setting affect the specific 'shape' and formulation of curse/blessing (cf. Agade dated to 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE and Pentateuch dated to 7<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century BCE)?

To conclude, Elena Sidorova's thesis, which was very refreshing to read, is **in all respects sufficient for oral defense**. The candidate is **highly recommended to defend her thesis publically**.



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