An Invitation to Murder? A Re-interpretation of Exodus 22:I8 'You Shall Not Suffer A Witch to Live'

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ARTICLES

An Invitation to Murder? A Re-interpretation of Exodus 22:18[1] 'You Shall Not Suffer A Witch to Live'

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THIS verse from the Old Testament served as the main scriptural basis for the persecution of witches as late as the eighteenth century. It provided biblical authority to those who already believed in the demonic power of witchcraft and, woefully misapplied, it led to the committal of great cruelties. Matthew Hopkins, the 'Witchfinder General', had the text printed in 1647 on the title page of his book *The Discovery of Witches*, 'for the benefit of the whole Kingdom'.

Witchcraft and Wordcraft

The translators of the Bible during that period were understandably influenced by prevailing cultural, religious and superstitious beliefs, for witchcraft was regarded as a terrifying reality which must be expurgated ruthlessly. As a result, religious leaders, supported by literal interpretations of Scripture, roundly condemned witches as the agents of Satan for, was it not written in Exodus 22:18: 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'? It was on the basis of the inerrant nature of Holy Writ that Martin Luther declared: 'I would have no compassion on witches: I would burn them all'.[2] John Calvin was once involved in seeking out witches, and John Wesley wrote in his diary that he thought the giving up of the searching out of witchcraft was in effect giving up the Bible.[3]

It was the new translations of the Bible, undertaken under the auspices of the Reforming Movement, and later supported by King James I, which appeared to give authority for the active discovery and destruction of witches, although there were some theologians who could not accept the injunction as a positive law.[4] The King, when James VI of Scotland, believed that a storm, which nearly wrecked the ship carrying his Danish bride, was caused by a coterie of conspiratorial witches at North Berwick. Within a year of receiving the English Crown, James induced Parliament to pass legislation increasing the penalties against witches.

Described as 'a monarch who fancied himself as an authority on witchcraft, while at the same time being much afraid of it',[5] James authorized a new translation of the Bible. Possibly to gratify the King, unqualified translations relating to sorcery and witchcraft were retained and further ones stressed. Thus prejudicial attitudes were encouraged and superstitious beliefs hardened. This was particularly true of the apparent instructions of Exodus 22:18.

The Hebrew construction of the verse, and its immediate context, raise a number of questions which have not been adequately answered. Some authorities think it is an interpolation and not originally part of this group of texts.[6] Martin Noth[7] comments: 'the literary analysis of the Sinai

[1] Exodus 22:17 in Hebrew script.

[2] See Pennethorne Hughes, *Witchcraft* (London: Pelican/Penguin Books, 1969), 177.

[3] *The Journal of the Revd John Wesley*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, Vol. V, p. 265, entry Wednesday 25 May 1768. Here Wesley expresses his belief in the dangers of Witchcraft and asserts the authority of Scripture which would, by implication, include Exodus 22:18.

[4] Brian P. Levack, *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 1987), 104.

[5] Doreen Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft, Past and Present* (London: R. Hale & Co, 1964), 41.

[6] Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel I*, trans. David Smith (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), 283.

[7] Martin Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Essays*, trans. Ap-Thomas (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 39.

narrative of Exodus xix–xxiv is throughout difficult, and the definitive unravelling of the original strands of narrative which have been brought together in this section appears to be almost impossible'. In a footnote he adds: 'it appears virtually impossible to tell whether and how far they have been inserted into any particular narrative cycle from its beginning; or, if not, when they were incorporated into an existing narrative'. Further, according to Ronald Clements,[8] 'These laws show no uniformity of subject matter' and A. McNeile,[9] with focus on verses 18–23, says they have no uniform shape and are 'fragments culled from a number of sources'. Likewise Alan Cole,[10] considering verses 18–27, concludes: 'These have no common subject, and may be grouped together purely because of their form.' Such statements throw doubt upon the veracity of the whole context and interpretation of Exodus 22:18 and its possible place in the ancient Law.

Exodus 22:18 is 'in an unusual form'[11] coming, as it does, immediately after a law relating to the sexual seduction of an unmarried virgin, and followed by two laws (verses 19 and 20) referring to bestiality and idolatry. In the two latter verses, the penalties are clearly stated. In verse 19, the man guilty of unnatural connection with a beast will 'surely die' (*mot yumat*), that is, be put to death. Further, verse 20, relating to idolatry, states that whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord, will be subject to the *cherem*, the sacred ban, and utterly destroyed.

A number of different expressions for capital punishment are used in the Covenant Code but, as Brevard S. Childs[12] indicates, 'Other ordinances relating to the death penalty not only differ, but also do not use the terms employed in Exodus 22:18. It seems to have no actual parallel.' Instead we have the peculiar 'not suffer to live'. In Deuteronomy 20:16, in terms of the holy war, we have: 'you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them', but it is not a parallel; it rests within the context of the sacred ban (the *cherem*), which is the total destruction of the enemy. It is the particular situation which qualifies it and gives it penal force. In 1 Samuel 27:9 we are told: 'for David smote the land and left neither man nor woman alive'. His aim was to leave no survivors after his raids by applying the remorseless *cherem*, the sacred ban. Although, in verses 19 and 20, the nature of the punishment is also made absolutely clear, no such context applies with regard to Exodus 22:18. It stands alone, an open textual fragment, without a specific injunction to kill unless it is linked with *mot yumat* in the following verse.

As Martin Noth[13] also points out, 'a more positive formulation may have been more appropriate'. In fact, 'we should have expected "a sorceress will surely be put to death"',[14] and the omission of *mot yumat* is specifically noted in the Ramban Commentary on the Torah.[15] This negative injunction may have been a warning against resorting to the sorceress and thus enabling her to make a living! Or it may mean banishment, that is, not allowed to live in the land: expelled as Saul expelled those who possessed necromantic fetishes. They were to be 'cut off', separated from the people and banished, but not destroyed. The phrase 'not suffer to live' is such a weak negative that to suggest it gives authority to carry out the penalty of death undermines the positive nature of the other direct ethical and moral statutes of the Covenant Code.

Inevitably this raises the question of the traditional translation of a verse which embraces such a bizarre charge. Logically, we can allow someone to live and we can allow someone to die, but we cannot make them 'not live' unless we, specifically and clearly, are commanded to commit some form of capital punishment. Otherwise we are left with a nebulous order which stretches the meaning and use of language to the limit. It was the unqualified nature of the statute, as interpreted, which later enabled it to be so distorted as to become a powerful weapon in the pursuit of those unfortunates accused of witchcraft.

[8] Ronald E. Clements, *Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 145.

[9] A. McNeile, *The Book of Exodus,* Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen, 1917), 135.

[10] Alan Cole, *Exodus*, Tyndale OT Commentaries (London: Tyndale Press, 1973), 173.

[11] J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and the Haphtorahs*, Exodus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 257.

[12] Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus*, OT Library (London: SCM Press, 1974), 447–48.

[13] *Exodus*, OT Library, trans. J. S. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1962), 185–86.

[14] Ibid., J. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and the Haphtorahs,* 257.

[15] *The Ramban Commentary on the Torah*, trans. and annotated by Charles B. Chaval (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1973), 389.

In Exodus 22:18, the Hebrew word *chayyah* (חיה) 'to live', is used with the negative *lo* (לא) in order to produce 'not live', but it hardly carries the more explicit 'kill'. *Chayyah* always has a positive, dynamic role in Scripture, from the creative act of God in *giving life* (as in Genesis), to the activity of the Spirit in the preservation of life and restoration *to* life. Using it as a negation of life is a distortion of its use and meaning.

Motive and Meaning

In recognition of the problems involved, the verse is generally regarded as 'apodictic', that is, a negative, stern and total directive command 'thou shalt … thou shalt not'. Although claimed by some to be characteristic of this type of apodictic law, the command 'not suffer to live' lacks the clarity and directness of other such laws. As Brevard S. Childs[16] perceptively calls to mind, the proper term for the death penalty is 'surely die' (*mot yumat*) and 'not as in Exodus 22:18'.

Bearing in mind such comments, the verse can hardly be regarded as a characteristic prohibition. It has been strongly contended that the Hebrew feminine term[17] used in the full text of the Exodus passage and usually translated 'sorceress', means either a mixer of drugs or a cutter up of poisons. The root verbal term also signifies 'to mutter', and consequently 'to mutter charms' whilst cutting up herbs or drugs in order to produce a magic brew; a process which may just as well refer to healing potions as well as to harmful concoctions. In terms of mood, tense and gender, it can also quite simply and effectively be translated 'a woman practising magic'.

The Greek (Septuagint) version of the Old Testament translates the passage *pharmakous ou peripoiesete*. The term *pharmakon* referred to a drug or medicine, and the verb *pharmakeuo* meant (1) 'to administer a drug or remedy' or (2) 'to use enchantments' and a *pharmakeus* was one who administered or dealt in potions, a term which could be applied to a doctor or a pharmacist. Our word *pharmacy*, the practice or art of preparing and dispensing drugs for medicinal purposes, is clearly related to it, although there are those who think its Biblical use means 'poisoning by conjuration'. In the Septuagint version, the term *peripoieo* (περιποιέω) means 'to protect', 'to preserve', 'to save'. Even with the negative it cannot reasonably be extended to urge drastic punishment by death, although it may be thought to enforce the charge *not* to keep safe, protect or even harbour a drug-dispenser, potion-enchantress, sorceress or poisoner, but not an injunction to kill.

The verse therefore, as traditionally translated, lacks the decisive directions of the legislative imperatives of the Decalogue and other sections of the Covenant Code. It is weak, inconclusive, and hardly justifies the awful penalties it has been claimed to warrant. To assume that 'not suffer to live' must necessarily give a licence to kill, is stretching the Hebrew and Greek scripts to the limit by fortuitously changing the negative into a positive and imposing certain preconceptions on to an already confusing text.

The translation of the Scriptures into Latin[18] may have had a decisive influence on the eventual interpretation of Exodus 22:18. This, in particular, centres on the insertion into the text of the word *maleficos* and its associated terms which, by the time of the Reformation, came to imply all kinds of depraved and abominable practices.

A *maleficus* was simply an 'evil-doer' and the verb meant 'to harm', 'to practise mischief'. Furthermore, the term *maleficos* used in the Latin text, should not be translated 'sorcerer' or 'witch', unless remotely by implication, as it is not generally part of Classical usage. It would seem, therefore, that the term was usurped, or extended in Biblical Latin to cover the worst forms of wickedness related to magic and sorcery. Likewise, *maleficium*, which formerly had meant any kind of crime now came, in Ecclesiastical circles, to denote witchcraft in particular. Jeffrey Burton Russell[19] says 'Malevolent magic was subsumed under the term *maleficium*'. It represented the damage achieved by the witch, through occult means, in the service of Satan

This use echoed the Latin translations of the Old Testament[20] and implied the same perversions. Consequently, the translators of the Scriptures had to

[16] Brevard S. Childs, ibid, *Exodus,* 477.
[17] *Mekashephah*: full text – *mekashephah lo thechayyeh*.
[18] *Maleficos non patieris vivere*.
[19] *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (London: Cornell University Press, 1972), 13.
[20] Deuteronomy 18:10 *maleficus*; 2 Chronicles 33:6 *maleficis*; Jeremiah 27:9 *maleficos*; Micah 5:12 *maleficia*; Nahum 3:4 *maleficia* and *maleficiis*; Isaiah 47:9, 12 *maleficiorum*; Exodus 17:11 *maleficos*; Daniel 2:2 *malefici*; etc.

hand a set of associated terms which already carried malevolent undertones; and which the Latin had come to identify with the vilest kinds of sorcery. It was consequently no big step to link witchcraft, in popular thought, with the worship of the Devil.

Various edicts had already been issued by the Church over the years, and in 1486 came the publication of *The Hammer of the Witches*, a powerful treatise on the identification and punishment of witches which undoubtedly affected the scholars in their rendering of various Biblical passages. In 1623, Pope Gregory XV ordered that persons compacting with the Devil and practising *maleficium*, should be tried in secular courts and sentenced to death. It is not surprising, therefore, that the New Catholic Encyclopaedia still defines witchcraft as '*magia*, *maleficium* and *incantatio*', all terms indicating sorcery, the weaving of evil spells, witchcraft and Satanism.

Thus *maleficos*, with the further Latin injunction, *non patieris vivere*, 'not suffer to live' almost inevitably led to the assumption that it meant all convicted witches should be destroyed. As a consequence, 'All over Europe ordinary people were eager to denounce their female neighbours as witches in the belief that they caused *maleficium*'.[21]

It may be noted that in modem translations of Scripture the terms 'medium' and 'spiritist' have crept into places where sorcerers, witches and necromancers are mentioned; an indication of the perils of freely applied presumptions which can alter the whole meaning of a word or passage, including the dangerous paraphrase of the Good News Bible: 'Put to death any woman who practises magic!' Furthermore, as Geoffrey Parrinder[22] indicates, the references to 'witch' used on the page and chapter-headings of the Authorized Version, 'are not part of the original text, they are mere interpretations of King James' translators'.

Taking the Hebrew *order* of the words in the text, we are faced with a peculiar and difficult sentence, because verbally, in the translation 'you shall not suffer (cause) to live', the person verbally addressed in '*you* shall not …' is regarded as the *subject* of the sentence, although coming last in the Hebrew script. The woman is therefore treated as the *object*, the person one must not suffer to live. This is a situation which involves some verbal contortions in attempting a valid translation without the more acceptable *mot yumat*. However, the most important person in the sentence, the cause of the prohibition, mentioned first, is 'the woman practising magic'.[23] She should be the *subject* of the sentence, the person actively engaged in nefarious practices. There does not seem to be a great grammatical problem in making the woman the subject when the verb can be feminine as well as masculine, so 'the woman practising magic, *she* …'[24] It should be noted that in the final clause of Ecclesiastes 7:12 'Wisdom gives life to those who possess it', the order of words in the text is exactly the same, with 'wisdom' (*chokmah* (fem))[25] as the subject, followed by the identical feminine verbal form (*thechayyeh*), 'gives life'.

Some scholars, aware of the difficulty of reaching an appropriate rendering of the traditional interpretation of the passage, suggest it is related to a number of legal proclamations which open with the active participle and close with the phrase 'shall be put to death', but *mot yumat*, as we have noted is not included in Exodus 22:18. Moreover, as Anthony Phillips[26] says, it is a difficult text which was designed to bring women within the scope of criminal law. However, such practitioners were to be 'cut off', 'banished', but not destroyed (Micah 5:11). Moreover, it has to be emphasized that in Exodus 22:18 no specific form of death, execution or punishment is indicated. It is left nebulous, open and unspecified.

Matters of Life and Death

It is therefore possible, following exactly the same Hebrew order and terminology of Exodus 22:18, to produce *an alternative translation*. The verb,

[21] *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1757.

[22] *Witchcraft, European & African* (London: Faber, 1963), 118–19.

[23] Piel Feminine Participle Singular (causative) from the verb *kashaph* 'to mutter magic words', 'practise magic', 'cut up'; using the participle as a substantive.

[24] Piel Future 2nd Pers. Sing. masculine *or* feminine. But it can be 'she shall not cause to live'.

[25] חכמה, Chokmah, see *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1980), Hebrew and Chaldee Section, 7, No. 2451. We have exactly the same Hebrew terms: Piel Future 3rd Pers. Sing. feminine תחיה (*thechayyeh*) so החכמה תחיה 'Wisdom gives life . . .'

[26] *Ancient Israel's Criminal Law* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 57.

chayyah, 'to live', 'to revive', to bring to life again',[27] with the negative (*lo*) can be regarded as *either* masculine *or* feminine, and using the woman as the subject, we have

mekashephah	*lo*	*thechayyeh*
'a woman practising magic	(she) shall not	cause to live'

So it can also be legitimately construed:

> 'A woman practising magic must not restore to life (the dead)'

which represents a specific ban on necromantic practices employed in attempts to revive and communicate with the dead to obtain information. As George Mendenhall[28] affirms of Exodus 22:18, it 'very probably had to do with necromancy'.

According to the great Lexicon of Brown/Driver/Briggs, *chayyah* carries the meaning 'give life', 'restore to life (the dead)' (1 Samuel 26; Deuteronomy 32:39).[29] It is, further, as already mentioned, used metaphorically of Wisdom in Ecclesiastes 7:12 (using exactly the same Hebrew term as in Exodus 22:18).

> 'Wisdom gives life to those who possess it'[30]
>
> ('give life', 'cause to live', *thechayyeh*)

Although often used metaphorically to express the healing and restoring power of Yahweh, or His deliverance from trouble, likened to being brought back from the dead and given new life, there are passages in which the allusion is so positively applied as to imply some form of revitalization of the persons involved. Various Hebrew forms of the verb *chayyah* are used in the latter sense to indicate a dramatic restoration to life from death, as illustrated in all the following passages:

1 Kings 17:22: The story of Elijah restoring the dead son of the widow at Zarephath; 'and the breath of life (*nephesh*) returned to him and *he came to life*'.

1 Kings 17:23: 'Look, *your son lives*'.

2 Kings 8:1: It is similarly employed to indicate the restoration to life of the widow's son – 'Elisha said to the woman *whose son he had restored to life*'.

2 Kings 8:5: 'he was describing to the king how he had *restored a dead body to life*'.

2 Kings 8:5 (cont): 'the very woman whose son Elisha had *brought back to life*'.

2 Kings 8:5 (cont): 'and Gehazi said "this is her son whom Elisha *brought back to life*" '.

There can be little doubt that in emphasizing the miraculous powers displayed by both Elijah and Elisha, it was assumed the children were truly deceased, or there would have been no point in relating the stories.

The narratives of 1 and 2 Kings, even if partially legendary in character, quite specifically imply death in each case.

1 Kings 17:17: The illness of the child was so severe that '*at last his breathing ceased*'.

2 Kings 4:20: 'the child sat on his mother's knee until noon, '*and then he died*'.

2 Kings 4:32: When eventually Elisha entered the house, '*the child was* dead *and laid on the bed*'.

Nor is this use of *chayyah*, in terms of restoration to life from death, limited to 1 and 2 Kings. In describing the situation of the Nation as like a death-condition (such as slavery, suffering or defeat), the prophetic terminology employed is that of an actual restoration to life from death. Such language would have no place in prophetic utterances unless it conveyed the conviction that Yahweh and Yahweh alone could, in fact, accomplish such a deed.

In the powerful imagery of Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones, Israel, lying lifeless, will be raised from the dead by the mighty act of Yahweh. The Nation will live again when God breathes into it the breath of life. The bones will rise up, sinew upon sinew, flesh upon flesh (Ezekiel 37:7–10) and become a mighty army.

[27] "to live". But *thechayyeh* (תחיה) in the Piel 'to make alive again', 'cause to live', *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the OT* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 311; Hosea 6:2. 'To bring to life', 'to call into being', Gorg Fohrer, *Hebrew & Aramaic Dictionary of the OT* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), 79.

[28] *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 30.

[29] 1 Samuel 2:6: Piel Part. Sing. Masc. 'and brings to life'; Deuteronomy 32:39: Piel Fut. 1st Pers. Sing. 'and make alive'.

[30] Ecclesiastes 7:12; Piel 3rd Pers. Sing. fem. 'Wisdom' here is the subject.

The Prophet develops this theme in great detail as he sees the scattered remains revivified and given new life:

> 'You shall know that I am the Lord when
> I open your graves and bring you up
> from them, O my people …
> Then I will breathe my spirit into you
> *And you shall live* …'
>
> (Ezekiel 37:13, 14)

It can be argued that this is a re-birth, a re-creative act, as in Genesis, and not some kind of revivification of dead bodies. Allegorical or otherwise, Ezekiel vividly depicts Yahweh opening their tombs and the resuscitated hosts of Israel dramatically rising up out of their graves. For the vision to have any meaning, it was essential for Ezekiel to convey to Israel that God was able, if necessary, even to raise up the fallen dead in a body of the flesh. The whole promise is described in psycho-physical terms of the Divine Breath quickening to life their bodily flesh and bone into the re-born, recreated, re-animated, re-vitalized and raised up people of God (vv. 7, 8, 9, 10):

> 'breathe upon these slain,
> *that they may live* …
> and *they came to life*
> and stood upon their feet,
> a mighty army'.

These and other passages, where *chayyah* is employed in a particular way, either symbolically or literally of individuals or the Nation, emphasize the conviction that Yahweh could raise the 'dead' up again and give them life (cf. Hosea 6:2; Isaiah 26:19).

Biblical scholars may argue about the theological intention of these passages, but our present concern is the use of *chayyah* in relation to the renewal or restoration of life. This has to be understood against the background of the pervading paganism of surrounding nations in which necromantic rites (the attempt to raise up the dead in order to obtain information), were known and practised. Necromancy was regarded in Israel as a heinous form of idolatry and apostasy: the attempt to usurp the power of Yahweh over the dead.

Necromancy represented the reverse side of communication with God and a negation of the Covenant relationship. Its realm was the grave, its form putrefying flesh, and its aim, an attempted fleeting, breathless gasp of existence for the sake of a few whispered messages. It was, in the words of S. G. F. Brandon,[31] a 'mortuary cult', the abomination of Israel.

Pagan and Israelitish Necromancy

The word necromancy comes from the Greek and is a combination of the two words *nekros* 'dead', 'dead body', 'corpse' and *manteia*, 'prophecy', 'oracle'. Consequently we have 'corpse-oracle', 'corpse-prophecy', the attempted conjuring up of the dead by occult means in order to obtain information hidden from the living. Keith Thomas[32] calls it 'magic with the aid of a dead person' and Montague Summers[33] says: 'That necromancy can seemingly endow a dead body with life, speech and action is not to be disputed.' S. Lods[34] uncompromisingly asserts: 'the object of this widespread practice was to restore life to the dead' for, in the words of Leslie Price: 'Necromancy is done with corpses, not spirits.'[35]

These comments must be understood in terms of persistent primitive belief and custom. Necromantic practices were almost universal amongst ancient people. The legends of Gilgamesh, Ishtar, Tammuz, Osiris and the grim mortuary rituals of ancient Egypt, are all related to concepts of the dead being revived or resuscitated by various occult or magical arts. In Homer, even when the departed were brought up from Hades, they had to be revived by draughts of fresh blood (cf. *The Odyssey* xi). This is an indication of the continuing strength of older notions and beliefs which interpenetrated subsequent rites.

The hideous realities of traditional necromantic practices, often presented in great detail by Classical writers, show that such cults were active and known in the Graeco-Roman world, including the fearsome Canidia of Horace prowling the graveyards of the dead: the dreaded Erichto of Lucan reconstructing a body from the decimated corpses of dead soldiers, and the deeds of the Egyptian necromancer Zachlas, as described in the 'Golden Ass' by Apuleius.

[31] *Religion in Ancient History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955), 71.
[32] *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1971), 274.
[33] *Witchcraft and Black Magic* (London: Arrow, 1974), 239.
[34] *Israel*, trans. Hooke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1932), 104/105.
[35] *The Christian Parapsychologist*, 104–105, March 1976, Vol. I, No. 3, 39.

It is also evident that necromancy was known and practised in Israel. S. G. F. Brandon[36] indicates that the graphic detail with which the raising of Samuel is described at En-Dor (1 Samuel 28), 'suggests that the writer was well acquainted with necromancy, and expected his readers to be also'. The so-called 'witch' was a necromancer and the author clearly believed it was really Samuel himself who appeared.

There was no actual term in Hebrew to describe the activity of the necromant: the specification, therefore, had to be descriptive. In Deuteronomy 18:11, the necromancer is described as 'one who consults an *'ob* or a *yiddeoni* and enquires of the dead'.[37]

Elsewhere[38] I have argued that the *'ob* (*'oboth*) and the *yiddeoni(m)* were fetishes, cult objects, used in necromantic practices. They included, as well as the remains of the newly deceased, the preserved bones, skulls, and remnants of dead creatures and revered ancestors. The 'Woman of En-Dor' (she is not described as a 'witch' in the biblical text), is called 'a woman who possesses an *'ob*' (1 Samuel 28:7, 8), the descriptive term for a necromancer.

The aim of this study is to show that Exodus 22:18 represented a ban on the practice of necromancy. Witches, in general, were not associated with necromancy, which involved secret, intricate rites known to but a few. Witchcraft was concerned with magical practices, good or bad, which removed blight and brought good fortune, or delivered from disaster and death: but it was not specifically necromancy. It is true that magic, in certain circumstances, may turn to the 'Left Hand Path' of the occult and become involved in the horrors of the Cult of the Dead. The verse in Exodus stands as a solemn warning against the perils of such a dangerous transference.

The Jewish fear and hatred of witchcraft in all its forms led to the long-standing assumption on the part of later translators that the verse in question, despite its peculiarities of style and language, represented the imposition of the death penalty on such offenders. Oft-quoted, in common usage, and taken without further question even on the part of biblical scholars, the verse has stood as a general condemnation of anyone suspected of 'dabbling' in the esoteric or the occult. This is a course which has led to much misunderstanding and cruelty. Further, although witchcraft is condemned in the New Testament, and 'in spite of the practice of the Church in the Middle Ages, there is no hint in the New Testament that mediums or witches should be put to death'.[39]

It is, therefore, important to summarize the basic thesis of this paper:

1. The Hebrew *mekashephah* indicates 'a woman practising magic'.
2. The Greek *pharmakos* refers either to drug and medicine preparation, or possibly to poisoning by occult means: this may or may not involve sorcery.
3. It was the imposition of the Latin *maleficos* with its powerful Satanic associations which, in the Middle Ages, supported the assumption that the verse in Exodus 22:18 referred to sorcery and witchcraft.
4. The Hebrew text of the above passage could, alternatively, be seen as a straightforward injunction to women engaged in magic not to attempt to practise necromancy. No death penalty is mentioned, a factor which opens up the further possibility that verses 18 and 19 may have become separated, but initially belonged together. This would lead to a more positive injunction which would include the missing *mot yumat* clause in verse 18.

Alt, Noth, Cassuto, and others, all refer to deficiencies in verses 18, 19, 20 which are difficult to unravel, and they have made various attempts to reconstruct the Hebrew text. Despite the tentative suggestion that the three prohibitions relating to necromany, bestiality, and idolatry are somewhat fragmentary and distorted, it would not require a massive task to reconstruct the Hebrew. The following emendation is offered here only as a possibility and in no way should affect the main theme of this present thesis.

Verse 19 reads: 'Anyone lying down with a beast shall be put to death.' There was an ancient tradition that witches sometimes copulated with animals as well as with the Devil, and bestiality was considered a shameful perversion. The verb 'to lie down' was also

[36] 'Magic and the Black Art', *Modern Churchman*, Vol. XI, 1968/9, 78–79.

[37] 1 Samuel 28:7: Literally 'find me a woman who possesses an '*ob*': verse 8: 'divine for me by the '*ob*'.

[38] See my chapter in *Life Death and Psychical Research*, ed. J. D. Pearce-Higgins and G. S. Whitby (London: Rider, 1973), 101–25.

[39] Alan Cole, *Exodus*, Tyndale Commentary (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 173.

used at times in the Old Testament as a metaphor for death, indicating 'lying dead', 'lying down in death'.[40] Bringing the two verses together, including the *mot yumoth* of verse 19, the whole passage could read, with a slight alteration to the text:

> 'A woman practising magic must not restore to life any dead person or beast: she will surely be put to death',

a precise description of necromantic aims to raise the dead by occult means. It also completes the sense of both passages, including the oft suggested 'lost' *mot yumat* of verse 18. This is a subject demanding further study.

It was in the superstitious atmosphere of the Middle Ages that the concept of witchcraft was merged with Diabolism, thus encouraging the persecution and condemnation of witches as supposedly promulgated in Exodus 22:18. The time is more than ripe to redress this great wrong and to clarify the scriptural injunction by publicising the suggested alternative version as outlined in this treatise. Even without the addition of verse 19, it could read:

> 'A woman practising magic must not restore to life (the dead).'
>
> That is: 'A woman practising magic must not engage in necromancy.'

[40] *shakabh* 'to lie down', 'to sleep', 'to lie dead, Genesis 47:30; 1 Kings 1:21; Ezekiel 32:27–30; Job 14:12, etc.

Christian Vocation

IN *Vocation: Discerning our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. £16.99. pp. xiv + 190. ISBN 0–8028–0137–4), Prof. Douglas J. Schuurman defends and re-formulates the classic Protestant doctrine of vocation, a doctrine under assault by the forces of secularism and capitalism. Although drawing primarily from Lutheran and Calvinist traditions, the author adopts an ecumenically sensitive approach throughout. He argues that, in the Bible, every aspect of life is regarded as holy and thus the concept of vocation is relevant in the religious and secular domain. The New Testament teaches that the call of God is both general and specific, as it is initially an invitation to a personal relationship through Christ which is then purposely expressed in service to our neighbour. Such a call is normally discerned through 'the lens of faith', and fulfilled in the duties and opportunities where we are already located. A theology of vocation is applicable to paid and voluntary work in a secular or ecclesiastical context, to relationships at the work-place and with family and friends – in fact, to most areas of life, including civics, politics and the creative arts. The reality of human sin necessarily excludes certain occupations and activities, for a genuinely divine call could only be one which 'respects human dignity and contributes to the common good'.

The author has sought to make his material accessible to the general reader in addition to 'professional theologians and ethicists'. The non-academic may find the earlier chapters require careful study, but all readers will benefit from the subsequent section where theology is applied to such practical matters as the 'abuses and proper uses' of vocation, conflict and re-assessment of priorities, and the choice of work and service. The doctrine of vocation gives 'meaning and transformation' to trivial and mundane tasks, and to the way in which we respond to ethical issues such as human need, morality, economic policy and care of the environment. Because Christian belief and practice are so seriously threatened – not only in North America – 'there is a pressing need to re-emphasize Christian identity', not by coercion but by seeking to influence every aspect of political, economic, cultural and personal life. This book presents a timely challenge to (re)discover and practise a theology of vocation such that we may become 'agents through which God's care and love are expressed to the world'.

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