

Modern Commentaries on the Book of Exodus And their Appropriateness in Africa

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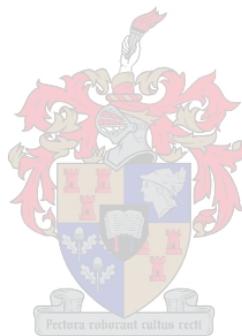
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the work contained in this thesis is my original work and has not previously, entirely or in part, been submitted at any University for a degree.

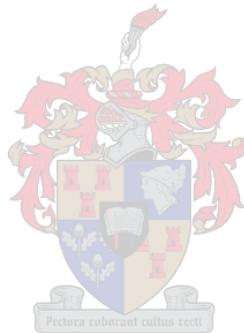
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my eldest brother, John Yandev Weor for his maximum support towards my studies in South Africa, my beloved wife, Atese Rebecca Seumbur Weor, and my loving daughter, Miss Favour Umburse Weor for their love, support, continued prayers, and patience during my long period of absence from them for my studies in South Africa.



ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore the trends that are found in commentaries on the book of Exodus and their appropriateness in the African context. The study also seeks to move from a socio-political understanding of Exodus as liberation theology to the cultural understanding of Exodus as African theology. The following three trends are found in modern commentaries on Exodus as explored by this thesis:

- Historical-critical approach – dealing with the world behind the text or author centred criticism. Commentaries found under this group include those of M Noth (1962), TE Fretheim (1990), N Sarna (1991), B S Childs (1977) and WHC Propp (1999).
- Literary-critical approach – this deals with the text itself or it is text centred. Commentaries found in this category include: W Brueggemann (1994), J G Janzen (1997) and C Houtman (1993).
- Theological-critical approach – deals with the world in front of the text. Commentaries of GV Pixley (1987), J Durham (1987) and G Ashby (1998) are good examples of the latter named approach.

Exploration into the study of the above listed three trends and their corresponding modern commentaries show that the commentaries are not fully appropriate in the context of Africa (except Ashby). This is so because the above modern commentaries have not directly addressed the ongoing issues of poverty, political, economic, oppression, marginalization, HIV / AIDS, cultural and social issues, famine, racial and sex discrimination, religious crises, and other epidemics and natural disasters prominently found in Africa - particularly among the third world countries. The modern commentaries mentioned above are indirectly relevant for Africa since the topics which they address, resonate with the readers and interpreters of Exodus in Africa. This resonance is possible if readers and interpreters of Exodus in Africa find similarities between modern commentaries and their own current context. The study also shows that the three trends found in modern commentaries on Exodus are dependent on one another to bring forth a meaningful interpretation. Based on this working relationship between the three trends mentioned above, it is suggested that the three trends should be considered in close connection with one another. Biblical interpretation in Africa must do justice to the literary, historical and theological aspects of the Bible to be meaningful and appropriate in Africa.

OPSOMMING

Die doel van die tesis is om ondersoek in te stel na die tendense wat in kommentare op die boek Eksodus gevind kan word en om te vra na die toepaslikheid daarvan in Afrikakontekste. Hierdie studie poog om vanaf 'n sosio-politieke interpretasie van Eksodus as bevrydingsteologie te ontwikkel in die rigting van 'n kulturele verstaan van Eksodus as Afrika-teologie.

Daar word drie belangrike tendense in moderne kommentare op Eksodus blootgelê:

(a) 'n Histories-kritiese benadering: Dit benadruk die wêreld-agter-die teks en fokus op die skrywer(s) van Eksodus. Kommentare wat in die groep tuishoort is M Noth (1962), BS Childs (1977), TE Fretheim (1990), N Sarna (1991) en WHC Propp (1999).

(b) 'n Literêr-kritiese benadering: Hier val die klem op die teks self. Belangrike kommentare in die groep is deur W Brueggemann (1994), JG Janzen (1997) en C Houtman (1993).

(c) 'n Teologies-kritiese benadering. Die wêreld-voor-die teks val hier onder die soeklig. Voorbeelde wat in die verband bespreek word is kommentare deur GV Pixley (1987), J Durham (1987) en G Ashby (1998).

Hierdie navorsing ten opsigte van die drie tendense in Eksoduskommentare het verder aangetoon dat die meeste van die Eksoduskommentare nie ten volle van toepassing binne 'n Afrikakonteks is nie. So 'n gevolgtrekking word gemaak na aanleiding van die gebrek aan enige verwysing in die Eksoduskommentare na die voortslepende probleme in Afrika soos armoede, politieke en ekonomiese onderdrukking, marginalisering, HIV / VIGS, droogte, rasse- en geslagsdiskriminasie ens.

Die moderne kommentare waarna verwys word is wel van indirekte belang vir Afrika aangesien die temas wat dit aanspreek met die lesers en interpreteerders van Eksodus in Afrika resoneer. Hierdie resonansie is slegs moontlik wanneer die lesers en intepreterders ooreenkomste bepaal tussen die konteks van Eksodus toe en die omstandighede waarbinne die kommentaar nou geskryf word.

Hierdie tesis voer ook aan dat die drie tendense wat in die moderne Eksoduskommentare gevind word, ten nouste bymekaar moet aansluit. Daarom moet Bybelinterpretasie in Afrika reg laat geskied aan die literêre, historiese en teologiese aspekte van die Bybel ten einde betekenisvol en toepaslik in Afrika te wees.

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Rev J I Atsor, Mr & Mrs Iorkyaa Mwaraan, NKST Church Ahwa, NKST Akaajime, NKST Nor, R.T.S.Women School Mkar, Late Mtagher Takema, Rev F Orffer, Mrs Han Ierprine, Miss Kellerman, Mr & Mrs David Botha, Dr JG Botha, Erica De Lange, Mr & Mrs S B S Tsung, Weidenhof brethren, Mrs Felicity Grove, Susanne Botha, Annemarie Eagleton, Theresa Jooste, and all the library Staff of University of Stellenbosch.

Finally, I would like to crown this acknowledgement with my beloved and enduring wife, Atese Rebecca Seumbur Weor, my daughter, Miss Favour Umburse Weor, my aged parents, Mr Abraham Weor Akombo and Mrs Rachel Kwaghze Weor, Mrs Lydia Ayima A-akaa, and the rest of my family members and friends for their continued prayers for my studies in South Africa.

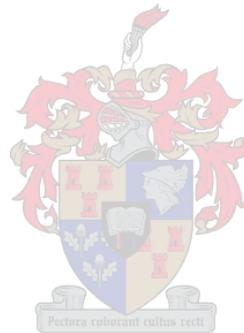


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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Exodus as a book of the Old Testament is not an exception to the phenomenon of non-uniformity in its interpretation and/or exegetical analysis. It has undergone several stages of interpretation by different exegetes and/or interpreters. The Exodus tradition, as Mc Conville (1997:601-604) argues, is the heart of the faith of the Old Testament. It is the supreme example of Yahweh's saving activity on behalf of Israel, His chosen people, and as such it becomes a paradigm for all acts of salvation.

Exodus, whose Latin rendering entails *going out* – from the Greek word *Exodos*, meaning *an exit* – according to Mc Conville (1997:601), means more than a mere going out, but embraces also considerations of purpose, destination and a relationship between Yahweh and Israel. It is more than merely a history, as many interpreters and readers have pointed in the past and present. Von Rad (1962) discussed by Mc Conville (1997:601) for example, made salvation history his decisive organising principle in Old Testament theology, with the theology of Exodus playing a central role. As a result of the non-uniformity in the interpretation of Exodus, several approaches and frames of reference have been applied to its interpretation by different interpreters in their respective commentaries.

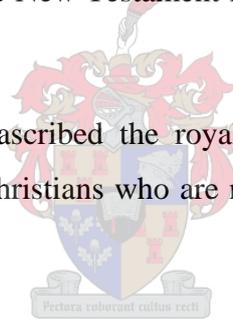
Hahn (1999:364-367) presents several stages and interpretations of Exodus in previous centuries. The extra-canonical writings of the Hebrew Bible and the contemporary literature both bear witness to the existence and interpretation of Exodus. The memories of Exodus acquired a central significance in Hellenistic Roman Judaism (1 Macc. 4:9). The conflict between Yahweh and Nebuchadnezzar in Judith has the same structure of events as that between Yahweh and Pharaoh in Exodus 15:1ff. The Mosaic traditions in (Ex. 3-14) are depicted as the struggle between Satan (*Mastema*) and the angel of God (Jubilees 46-49).

The non-Jewish historians such as Manetho (3rd cent. BCE), Chaeremon (1st cent. CE), Lysimachos (C. 361-281 BCE), Apion (1st cent. CE) and Tacitus (b. 55 CE) interpreted the

Exodus events as a case of lepers who had earlier oppressed the Egyptians with the help of the Hyksos. Philo of Alexandria in his commentary on Exodus (*Quaestiones in Exodum*) allegorically depicted the Sinai event as a supra-dimensional mystery; the wanderings of the Israelites in the Sinai desert became a transposition into a divine locale, a growing of the soul out of and beyond the world of materiality, the senses, and suffering.

Christocentric interpretations on the other hand present the story of the massacre of the innocent children in Bethlehem in favour of Herod the king of Israel (Matt 2:16) as corresponding to the death of Pharaoh, probably Thutmose III and others who were seeking to kill Moses (Ex 4:19). The return of Moses from Midian back to Egypt (Ex 4:19-20) on the other hand correspond to the return of Joseph and Mary with Jesus their son to Nazareth after the death of Herod the King of Israel in 4 B.C. who was after the life of Jesus (Matt 2:19-20). The last supper of Jesus with his disciples on the one hand is said to be a Passover meal (Matt 26:17; cf. Ex 12: 14-20). Jesus in the New Testament is pictured as the Passover lamb (John 19:36; cf. Ex 12:36).

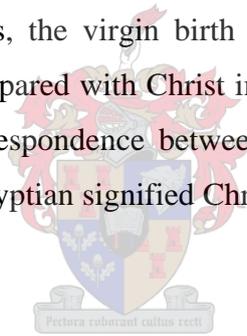
The Ecclesiological interpretation ascribed the royal priesthood and the holiness of the Exodus people in Exodus 19:16 to Christians who are now the royal priesthood and the holy people of God (1Pet 2:9).



Paul, one of the apostles of Jesus, uses a *haggadic Midrash* on the Exodus and wilderness wanderings based on sacramental and paraenetic modes to demonstrate to the Corinthians that one's salvation is never ultimately secured. The Apostle Paul, set the event at the Red sea as a parallel to the present day baptism with water. Manna in Exodus 16: 4, 5, 13-16 is related to the communion bread as well as the rock and Christ (Ex 17:6). The warning against unbelief recorded in Hebrews 3:7-19 juxtaposes the behaviour of Christians with that of the Israelites in the wilderness. Anti-Jewish polemics depicted Moses as a type of Christ who is rejected by the people even though God has sent him as a liberator (Acts 7:35). The paraenetic interpretation of the early Church considered the manna story to be a precursor to the Eucharist and a preparation for Christian martyrdom (Childs 1974:279).

In the early Church, Exodus was usually expounded in the Pentateuch commentaries or in sermons. The typological interpretation of people, events and instructions from Exodus took on considerable significance, and these features expressed the events of the Christian truth and salvation history. Works here include that of Origen (*selecta et homiliae* in Exodus), Diodore of Tarsus (*Fragmenta* in Exodus), Jerome (*Liber Exodi*), Augustine (*Quaestiones et locutions in Exodum*), Cyril of Alexandria (*Glaphyri in Exodus*) and Gregory the Great (*exposition sup, Exodum*), to mention but a few.

Christocentric interpretation in the early church, unlike non-Jewish historians, had taken several features to signify the incarnation of God, for example, the transformation of Moses' staff into a serpent (Ex 4:3; Augustine sermon 6:104-108) and the miracle of manna (Ex 16; Origen's Homily on Ex 7:5). The manna and quails, according to other interpretations, refer to the coming of Christ for judgment (Hilary *Tract Myst* 1.40); the description of the paschal lamb represents Christ's sinlessness, the virgin birth and the single year of his effective ministry. Moses was frequently compared with Christ in terms of the threatening situation at their respective births and the correspondence between Pharaoh and Herod (Hilary *Tract Myst* 1.28). Moses' killing of the Egyptian signified Christ's killing of the devil (Hilary *Tract Myst* 1.29).



Jerome's ecclesiological and sacramental interpretation of Exodus presents the wandering of the people of Israel through the desert as the wandering of the church through history (Epist 78), during which the church was not destroyed despite persecution. The manna was said to be the spiritual feeding of the church during its own Exodus here on earth (1 Cor10). The receiving of the law at Sinai foreshadowed the reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Ex 19; cf. Acts 2; Jerome *Epist* 78).

Monastic and spiritual mystical interpretations of Exodus presented the liberation of Israel as an example of the call to the monastic life (Cassian [C 360- after 430]). The elders in (Ex.18:21) were seen to be the senior Monks who were installed over ten monks (Cassian *Inst* 4.7) and the fasting of Moses was considered to be related to monastic asceticism (Cassian *Cont* 221.28). Individual episodes were given novel interpretations in the rabbinic

interpretation of Exodus. The sojourn of Moses in Midian became his testing time (Ex 2:1ff); the burning bush (Ex 3:1ff) symbolized Israel's needs and God's compassion (*Tan Shem* 14; *MHG Shem* 3.2). According to the Babylonian Talmud, every Jew in every age was obligated to imagine that he or she personally had come up out of Egypt (*Pes* 10:5; b *Pes* 116b).

The *Quran* (Islamic interpretation) presents the Israelites as a minority who are finally saved along with Moses, while the great mass of Egyptians fall victim to divine judgment (*Sura* 51:38-40). Moses as a typical representative of God begins with the task of converting unbelievers such as Pharaoh and his people.

The Middle Ages on the other hand explain the wonders of the Exodus history rationally. For example: The dry seabed (Ex 14:16, 22) was attributed to freezing and the miracle of the manna (Ex 16:14-15) to clouds that could hold manna seeds just as they could contain hail (*Pseudo-Augustine De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae*).

The exegesis in the high and late Middle Ages followed the typological-allegorical, the ecclesiological and the moral interpretations of the earlier exegetical traditions, but at the same time provided some characteristically novel interpretations. Commentaries belonging to this period include: *Rupert of Deutz (in Exodum)* and *Bruno of Segni* (exposition in Exodus). Bruno in particular considered the instructions of Exodus primarily as instructions for the contemporary church, particularly with respect to bishops and priests. Medieval Jewish exegesis was prevalently literary in character and had numerous commentaries on Exodus, including that of Ibn Ezra.

Luther of the Reformation era viewed Exodus as an example of how God held faithfully to his promises, that the grace and the goodness of God were still valid for distressed, afflicted and frightened Christians, and that God's wrath was directed towards obstinate people. Luther used allegory throughout his interpretive work. For example, he said the burning bush refers to Christ, Israel under Pharaoh (Ex 1) represents Christians living under the affliction of the Pope; Christ is the paschal lamb; and the waters of Mara (Ex 15:22-26) refer to the law of God. Calvin and Zwingli's interpretation of Exodus focused more on its historicity. They

used a typological approach similar to others that viewed Christ as the paschal lamb (Ex 12 [*Annotationes Zu Exodus* [1527])). Zwingli emphasised the historical-grammatical approach.

The period from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century was important for biblical criticism. Biblical commentaries emphasising philological clarification of difficult passages were prevalent. Christian, Jewish, ancient exegetes and other sources were collected together, compared and evaluated in order to interpret individual verses. Most of the commentaries however were written in French. These include: Tostado (1528), Pellican (1532), Stephanus (1541), Lippomann (1550), N des Gallars (1560), Osiander (1573), Ystella (1609), Calmet (1789) and Rosenmuller (1828).

Hahn (1999:361-371) presents an overview of the earliest exegetical periods and/or works on Exodus, followed by modern exegetical works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to him, modern historical-critical research began in the first half of the nineteenth century after a series of monographs, commentaries and individual contributions concerning questions pertaining to the interpretation of books emerged. Historical, literary-critical, tradition-historical and religion-historical lines of inquiry form the basis of these works. Commentaries include: Bush (Eng 1841), Kalisch (Eng 1855), Lange (THBW Ger 1874), Dilimann (KEH Ger 1880), Chadwick (Eng 1894), and Moulton (Eng 1896).¹ The above mentioned exegetical periods and or types do not mean that the Bible was not examined for its religious values any longer, or viewed as a revelatory document. Rather, attempts were made to reconstruct the history and religion of Israel and the early church and also to utilize its religious values and theological insights for the day. The hermeneutical task therefore was to discern and transfer meaning from one place and time to another.

¹ Von Hummelauer (*CSS* Lat 1897); Macgregor (Eng 1898); Holzinger (*KHC* Ger 1900); Baentsch (*HK* Ger 1903); Benneth (*CeB* Eng 1906); A. Mc Neil (*WC*, Eng 1908); Eerdmans (Ger 1910); Weiss (*Ger* 1911); Conell (*NBC*, Eng 1912); Harford (*PCB* Eng 1919); Gresmann (*SAT* Ger 1921); Grimmelsmann (Eng 1927); Bohl (*TeU*, Dutch 1928); Heinisch (*HSAT* Ger 1934); Hertz (Ger 1937); Beer and Galling (*HAT*, Ger 1939); Kalt (*HBK*, Ger 1948); Rylaarsdam (*IntB*, Eng 1952); Frey (*BAT*, Ger 1953); Schneider (*EB*, Ger 1955); Clamer (Fr 1956); Junker (*EB* Ger 1958); Noth (*ATD*, Ger 1959); Auzou (Fr 1961); Stalker (*PCB* Eng 1962); Napier (*LCB* Eng 1965); te Stroete (*BOT*, Dutch, 1966); Davies (*TBC* Eng 1967); Couroyer (*SB*, Fr 1968); Greenberg (*HB I* Eng 1969); Fensham (Dutch 1970); Hyatt (*NCeB* Eng 1971); Munk (Fr 1972); Cole (*TOTC*, Eng 1973); Michaeli (*CAT* Fr 1974); Childs (*OTL* Eng 1974); Knight (Eng 1976); Boschi (Ital 1978); Huey (Eng 1980); Ellison (Eng 1982); Meyer (Eng 1983); Sarna (Eng 1991)

The literary-critical approach

Modern interpretation of Exodus began with the literary-critical study of the Pentateuch as far back as the eighteenth century with emphasis on the **J** and **E** materials. In the nineteenth century, however, the literary-critical isolation of the **J** and **E** was developed. The divine name criterion was no longer used reliably.

Tradition- historical approaches

This kind of investigation had a decisive influence on the historical interpretation of Exodus. According to Von Rad (1938/1972) the work of Hahn (1999: 361-371) appeared recognizing the isolation of the Sinai tradition. Von Rad referred to the absence of the Sinai tradition in the confession (Deut 26:5-10), localizing both Exodus and Sinai as two variant themes that had in the history of tradition existed separately before coming together in the Pentateuch.

The religion-historical approach

The study of the canonical religion brought to light a new understanding of calf images such as the golden calf, (Ex 32:1ff) derived from the Egyptian gods Apis and Mnevis, and/or from the territory of Canaan where the originally nomadic Israelites had found a new homeland. The study of Babylonian culture and religion also revealed the relationship between the book of the covenant (Ex 20:22-23:33) and the code of Hammurabi. The peculiarities and connections of the Israelite religion became manifest.

Systematic-Theological and philosophical exegesis

This period according to Hahn (1999:370), had no special role ascribed to the Exodus traditions in the systematic theology of the Twentieth Century apart from the ethical interpretation of the Decalogue. Vischer (1936) discussed by Hahn (1999:370) introduced traditional allegorical interpretations of the historical church. The child Moses in his little ark of reeds was taken to be the child in the stall in Bethlehem, the Passover symbolised the last supper of Jesus, and the trek through the sea symbolised Christian baptism. Karl Barth in his Church Dogmatic on the other hand saw Exodus as the history of God's covenant of grace and the realisation and completion of God's love (Hahn 1999:370).

Latin American interpreters, G V Pixley and C Boff (1991) discussed in Hahn (1999:370) on the other hand consider the liberation of the Hebrew people as important for the entire oppressed world. C Moon (1991) discussed by Hahn (1999:371) accordingly aligns the history of Korean Minjung with the history of the Hebrews in Exodus. Ela (1991) in Hahn (1999:371) on the other hand, suggests an African reading of this text requiring the interpreter to enter into solidarity with the marginalised. Using the interpretive means of liberation theology for Exodus has been criticised by post-colonial and feminist biblical interpretation as being a theology of liberation for selected people and oppression for the rest.

Mosala (1989; 1993) and Weems (1992) in Hahn (1999:371) noticed that this same liberating message has been used to exploit and dominate other groups. They call instead for ideological criticism which takes into account issues of gender, race and class when reading Exodus. An Asian group (1991) discussed in Hahn (1999:371) represented by Feminist interpreters, however, seek to interpret Exodus as a book that is real and manifest through the roles played by women in the Bible, such as Miriam, Pharaoh's daughter, Moses' mother and the midwives. This non-uniformity in biblical exegesis and of Exodus in particular makes it difficult to know which commentary and approach is correct for the interpretation of, and/or exegetical work on, Exodus, especially in Africa. Biblical interpretation has passed through the period of non-uniformity in its interpretation right from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is true because in every period as stated above, the interpretation of the Bible, and Exodus in particular, was executed in the interest and choice of the people concerned leaving aside the need of uniformity of interpretation. Although some continuity seems to exist among most of the interpreters in the area of Exodus as a history of a liberated people of God and in the allegorical and typological usage commonly found among the earliest interpreters in their commentaries, discontinuity is more pronounced than continuity in interpretations of Exodus and the Bible in general (Hahn 1999:361-371; Mc Conville 1997: 601-604).

1.1. Statement of the problem

Since the Book of Exodus played an important role amongst believing communities throughout the ages, a great diversity of interpretations can be found. Biblical scholarship has

been dominated by research done within Europe and North America and little research on the Book of Exodus has been done that keeps African contexts in mind.

Therefore the following questions will determine the present research:

1. What trends are there in recent commentaries on Exodus?
2. Are recent commentaries on Exodus relevant and appropriate in or for African contexts?

1.2. Hypothesis

This research presumes a development from a socio-political understanding of Exodus as liberation theology to the cultural understanding of Exodus as African theology. Possible answers to the research questions above (1.1) are as follows:

1. The following trends might be discerned in modern commentaries on Exodus:
 - Historical-critical approach (author centred or the behind the text approach).
 - Literary-critical approach (Text centred approach).
 - Theological approach (reader response/or in front of the text approach).
2. Current commentaries are probably written for a non-African context.

1.3. Aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to establish the trends or approaches that are found in modern commentaries on the book of Exodus. It also intends to re-examine the commentaries written by the selected authors on the book of Exodus so as to determine whether they are appropriate in African contexts or not. The above aims and objectives can be achieved through a discussion of a selected number of commentaries on Exodus by different authors with particular attention paid to the type of approach used by such commentators. The appropriateness of such commentaries and methods used by the authors of such commentaries will also be determined.

1.4. Methodology

This research is a literature study of commentaries on Exodus that entails conceptual, hermeneutical and Theological analysis, rather than an exegetical study. (The researcher, if given the chance to continue his research, will do a contextual exegesis of the book of Exodus related to the African context).

1.5. Delimitation of the research and definition of terms used

The researcher has left out the exegetical aspect of the work due to the limitations of a mini-thesis, and focused instead on the literature study. This research has been limited to commentaries by specific scholars on Exodus and a few African theologians who wrote on Bible and Exodus in an African context. What such commentaries and interpreters said about Exodus and how relevant it is to Africa form the boundaries of this work.

The most important terms used in this research are briefly defined in the following few paragraphs.

Historical-critical approach

According to Holladay (1982: 130-132), historical-critical approach deals with the historical circumstances in which a text was written. It is an attempt to reconstruct the historical situation out of which a text arose and how it came to be written. Determining the history of a text has to do with its date of composition, place of composition of such a written text, authorship, including his/her method of composition, identity, and source.

Historical criticism is defined narrowly within the domains of Biblical interpretation as a term that seeks to understand the ancient text in the light of its historical origins. The task of historical criticism is to discover the time and place in which a text was written – its sources, the events surrounding it, dates, persons, places and customs, to mention but a few, implied or mentioned in the text (R N Soulen and R K Soulen 2001:79).

Literary criticism

According to Holladay (1982: 130-132), literary criticism has to do with the final form of a text. It does not concern itself much with the history of the text. Rather, literary criticism focused on the text itself. The text according to the above approach constitutes a world in its own right and serves as an object of investigation in all its aspects. The study of the language of the text deals with words of the text and their meanings, the arrangement of words and their meanings, literary style, arrangement of words (syntax) and how the word form changes.

Canonical criticism

Canonical criticism is a recent type of biblical criticism that builds on the results of earlier methods (Holladay 1982:130-132). It places greater emphasis on the final form of the canonical text. It is less concerned with the literary or historical, but considers the Bible as a collection of canonical writings regarded as sacred and normative in two communities of faith, Israel and the Church.

Literal meaning

According to Young (1990:401), literal meaning is concerned with taking certain written words at their face value or concentrating on the *letter* rather than the context, which usually distorts meaning. Furthermore, if the literal meaning refers to precisely what the words state, then all figurative language – metaphor, parable and irony above all – will be misunderstood.

Exegesis

This according to Davies (1990:220-222) is a Greek word that has two meanings in classical Greek namely, “Statement, narrative”, and “explanation, interpretation, and commentary”. It also means the “exposition of scripture”.

Relevance / Appropriateness

The term “relevance” has two renderings. Firstly, it refers to something that is valuable and useful to people in their lives and work. Secondly, it refers to something that is closely connected with the subject one is discussing or the situation one is thinking about. As applied to this thesis, it refers to those modern commentaries on Exodus that are closely connected with the context of biblical interpretation in Africa (Hornby 2000:989). One can also refer to “relevance theory” in this regard. The central claim of this theory is that human communication crucially creates an expectation of optimal relevance. That is, an expectation on the part of the hearer that the attempt at interpretation will yield adequate communication that will require minimal additional processing (Wendland 1996: 127 - 131). Therefore I presume that commentaries on Exodus will be relevant and appropriate in Africa when the readers in Africa are not required to process the commentaries to make it appropriate in their context. It is only when readers and interpreters of the above mentioned commentaries on Exodus in Africa would find some immediate context resonance with the commentaries that

relevance and appropriateness would be achieved. For the purposes of this thesis “relevance” and “appropriateness” will be considered to be closely linked concepts.

Commentary

Hornby (2000:223) argues that the word has various renderings in English. However, the most applicable one for this thesis is a criticism or discussion of something that could be religious, social, cultural or political put down in written form. As used in the context of this work, it refers to criticism and/or discussion of the interpretation of Exodus as put down in written form by various commentators.

Africa

“Africa” usually designates the African continent but this can be highly problematic if one does not keep in mind that “Africa” entails a bewildering diversity of contexts. This diversity is made up of variables such as culture, language, religion, political dispensation, and economic systems etc. Appropriateness and relevance in Africa necessitate first-hand knowledge of this diversity.

During the past two decades scholarly research has turned its attention to Biblical views of Africa. Besides attention given to the fact that Egypt forms part of the African continent, Cush (Ethiopia and Sudan) has also received its fair share of scholarly scrutiny. Adamo (1992) discussed in Holter (2000:571-580) argues that the Old Testament portrayal of Cush echoes aspects of Africa and Africans that go beyond the geographical and cultural borders of Egypt. African Americans too have focused strongly on Cush as a representative for Africa. Adamo also says that everywhere the word Cush is used with clear-cut identification, it refers to Africa (Adamo 1992:51; Hays 1996:396-409) discussed in Holter (2000:571-580). The Old Testament Cush, according to Adamo, ought to be rendered Africa in modern translations since the use of Cush and Ethiopia in the extra-biblical sources refer quite broadly to black Africa (Adamo 1992:51-64 and Holter 1997: 331-336) in Holter 2000: 571-580).

1.6. Motivation and contribution of the study

This thesis will help researchers and other biblical interpreters of the Bible in Africa to be more exposed to recent commentaries or exegetical works on Exodus. In each case the question will be posed whether the commentary concerned is relevant within the African context or not. Relevance is determined by the degree of processing required by the reader or interpreter. Both readers and interpreters of Exodus in Africa using the major commentaries discussed in this thesis stand a better chance of determining their relevance in Africa as they interact with such commentaries in their own context, interpretation, and understanding. This work should motivate researchers to read and interpret the book of Exodus in such a way that it is relevant to Africa, as well as maintaining communication with Biblical scholarship in general.

1.7. Layout of chapters

Chapter 1

This is an introductory section stating the research problem, hypothesis, aims and objectives, methodology, definition of terms, motivation and contribution of the research.

Chapter 2

This chapter will deal with the historical-critical commentaries by **M Noth** (1962), **B S Childs** (1977) **T E Fretheim** (1990), **N Sarna** (1991), and **W H C Propp** (1999). The aim of this chapter will be to present recent trends in the exegesis of the Bible, particularly of Exodus, represented by these commentators, the relevance of their work for Africa as well as the differences and similarities in their approaches.

Chapter 3

This chapter will consider the literary-critical commentaries by **C Houtman** (1993), **W Brueggemann** (1994) and **J G Janzen** (1997), paying specific attention to the literary presentation of their exegetical work on Exodus. A conclusion will then be drawn, bearing in mind the continuity and discontinuity between the authors.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, theological-critical commentaries will be discussed, particularly those by **J J Durham** (1987), **G V Pixley** (1987) and **G Ashby** (1998). Their approaches to the interpretation of Exodus will be taken note of, particularly with reference to Africa.

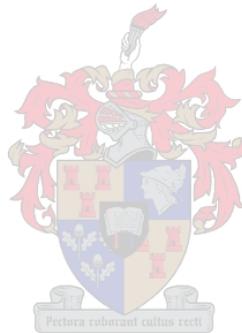
Chapter 5

This chapter will make some suggestions about trends and commentaries discussed earlier on in the previous chapters above as regards their relevance and appropriateness in African context.

Chapter 6

The researcher in this concluding chapter summarises the research, make suggestions, and draw his own conclusion based on his findings in chapters 1 to 5.

Bibliography



Chapter Two: Historical-critical commentaries

Introduction

This chapter deals with the historical-critical commentaries on Exodus and the trends or exegetical approaches that are found in such commentaries. The relevance of such commentaries in the context of Africa will be noted. How they agree and differ in their exegetical approaches on Exodus will also be discussed.

Historical criticism is defined narrowly as an approach that seeks to understand the ancient text in the light of its historical origins, limiting it to the domain of biblical interpretation. That is to say the task of historical criticism is to discover the time and place in which a text was written – its sources, the events surrounding it, dates, persons, places and customs, to mention but a few, implied or mentioned in the text (RN Soulen and RK Soulen 2001:79).

The historical-critical approach, as Holladay (1985:130-132) argues, deals with the historical context in which a text was written. It is an attempt to reconstruct the historical situation out of which a written document arose, and one of its main tasks is to establish how it came to be written. Determining the history of a text has to do with its date of composition, place of composition or provenance of writing and authorship, including the author's identity, method of composition, and source. Krentz (1975:2, 33-35), on the other hand, suggests the following steps that should be followed in the historical-critical approach: the determination of the text; the literary form of the passage; the historical situation; the *Sitz im Leben*; the meaning which the words had for the original author and hearer/reader; and the understanding of the passage in the light of the context and background from which it emerged. Krentz (1975:33-35) further argues that the historical-critical method of contemporary biblical scholarship arose out of the great re-orientation of the human mind that came from the scientific revolution of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the development of historical method in the nineteenth century. It produces history in a modern sense for it consciously and critically investigates biblical documents to write a narrative that reflects events in a sequence roughly chronological. Biblical scholarship, he argues, is critical because it uses the powers of the mind on the sources with which it deals and it is positive since it appreciates what it finds.

Having done the survey of the concept of historical critical approach above, the commentaries below will be re-reviewed under the above named chapter and heading.

M Noth (1962) *Exodus: A commentary (Old Testament Library)*

TE Fretheim (1990) *Exodus: Interpretation*

N Sarna (1991) *Exodus (JPS Torah commentary)*

BS Childs (1977) *Exodus: A commentary (Old Testament Library)*

WHC Propp (1999) *Exodus 1-18: A new translation with introduction and commentary (Anchor Bible)*

2.1. M Noth (1962) Exodus: A commentary (Old Testament Library)

Noth is one of the most important German critical scholars of the twentieth century. He concentrates on historical and literary issues from a critical perspective. This commentary by Noth is important but will be of little help to laypersons or pastors (Longman III 2003:38-39). Longman in my own view is right by saying that the commentary by Noth will be of a little value to laypersons and pastors. This is so because the commentary has concentrated on the history of literary sources which to a layperson may seem to be of academic importance. That notwithstanding, the commentary of Noth appreciates the rich narrative in Exodus. The first part of the book of Exodus, as stated by Noth (1962:6-18), is a narration of the historical events regarding Israel, God's chosen people. Exodus from its beginning deals with Israel as a collective entity. Israel is treated as a whole despite the names of the sons of Israel (sons of Jacob) being related once again in (Ex. 1.1ff) to form a link with the patriarchal history that has gone before. The wonders at the sea form the core of Exodus history and the climax of its divine action though other events like the plagues, Passover, birth, youth and call of Moses are also considered as being the beginning of Exodus narratives. In my view, Noth has given a true picture of what Exodus meant and of its relevance in the history of the people of Israel and their covenant relationship with God, their redeemer.

The theophany and the making of the covenant on Sinai form the second part of the division of Exodus. This is connected with the law which in its varied forms plays a most important part in the narrative of the theophany and making of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Exodus, according to Noth (1962:6-18), must be understood as part of a larger whole

based on its relationship to other books of the Pentateuch and the break caused by the transition from one theme to another in its relationship to Genesis. Noth (1962:6-18) took as traditional history that which was orally conveyed before being documented in written form.

The Exodus tradition was enshrined in cultic confession of faith through which, on most occasions, the mighty acts of God in pre-history and early history were celebrated and made manifest, thus forming part of the themes of Exodus the transmitted text. Exodus as a book deals with central events of the Pentateuchal traditions preserved in oral traditions before written documents were made manifest. Exodus is part of the Pentateuch tradition that revolved around the Sinai theme.

The literary composition of Exodus

According to Noth (1962:6-18), the final form of the book is found to be the result of a complicated process involving the evolution of traditions as well as literary development. The results of the intensive work on the Pentateuch carried out for many generations show that Moses was not the sole author of all the books of the Pentateuch, as has previously been attributed to him. The Pentateuch when viewed as a whole document is seen to be more consistent in its authoritarian and literary character than when it is viewed in terms of separate sections in which different concepts and styles contradict one another. The present Pentateuch is the result of originally independent written sources, each of which in a separate literary work had fixed the material of the Pentateuch tradition in writing. Exodus has the written sources of **Jahwist (J)**, **Elohist (E)**, and the **Priestly writer (P)**, with the first two being the older sources and the priestly writer being the later source. The content of Exodus makes its literary relationship more complicated than Genesis. The first part of Exodus, which tells of the exodus from Egypt and the beginning of the wandering of Israel in the wilderness, shares the same interchange between the contributions of the different sources as in Genesis.

The belief that the Old Testament laws are built on the Sinai covenant made other laws that seem to have existed outside the Sinai covenant source and literary development to be inserted into the original covenanted laws. This is true for the books of the covenant and the (ethical) Decalogue, excluding the so-called cultic Decalogue of Exodus 34, which is

established in the context of the **J** narrative. The insertion of different passages with different frameworks into the structure of the three narrative sources identified above considerably disturbed it. We can then say that the central events of the theophany, the making of the covenant and the giving of the law have attracted so many additions, which make the literary situation of Exodus more complicated. The priestly source, on the other hand, has provided a summary survey of history as its framework, highlighting in detail only important individual events crucial to its theology. For example, the creation, the flood and covenant with Noah, and the covenant with Abraham.

The literary development of Exodus must therefore be reconstructed on the basis of the unstable or non-uniformity in literary source developments existing in the Pentateuch. The summaries of the fundamental acts of God in the pre-history and early history of Israel, including the Sinai theme, help much in construction and arrangements of the whole within the framework of the general Pentateuch tradition. The narrative material, especially the orally handed-down tradition, also serves as a descriptive source of the concrete and living form that help one to determine the state of things with certainty at the pre-literary stage. The **Jahwist**, which is the anonymous author of this particular narrative structure in the Pentateuch, is probably to be dated in the times of David and Solomon. He is the major representative of the older source since he belongs to the beginning of the transformation of the Pentateuch tradition into literature (Noth 1962:14).

The work of this anonymous author, which spans the whole of the Pentateuchal narrative material from creation to conquest, has two basic characteristics. One, the author preserved the older narrative material, which had either come to him in the already-existing framework pattern or had been preserved fresh and alive and often with its grandeur of conception, and he in return gave it a definitive form using his great narrative skill. Two, the author presented the great compilation of traditions which had been produced in this way in the light of a salvation-history theology whose programme is formulated following Genesis 3:1-3, the story of the fall of man. By so doing, he did not throw out the cultic origin of the traditional themes and many of the individual items, but rather let it fade very much into the background. The older traditions are spiritualised and rationalised in most cases, for example, the description of the making of the covenant (Ex 34:1-28).

There is no cultic element here, but the decisive action consists of a revelation of the divine will similar to that of Genesis 12:1-3. For the **Jahwist**, the whole history is the province of divine action and not merely cultic actions. The foreign policy in David's time did not influence the **Jahwist** theology, but the necessary conditions there rather provided a situation for the Pentateuch tradition to be made into literature. The **Elohist** tradition can also be distinguished in Exodus, although no vivid account of it is given, as is the case in Genesis. It seems to be a continuous work that runs parallel to the **Jahwist**, but is independent on its own. The **Elohist** is the less ancient tradition after **J**, but stands nearer to the pre-literary stage of the Pentateuch tradition than **J**.²

Summary:

The above commentary by Noth (1962) has paid more attention to the historical character of the text, especially the source and theological traditions. He argues that historical development of the text should be considered in the interpretation of Exodus. Noth emphasizes that the book of Exodus should be considered as a theological whole. The theological themes, such as the Exodus from Egypt, the theophany and the making of the covenant on Sinai, and law are put down in this commentary. The above commentary by M. Noth is indirectly relevant to readers in Africa since the commentary does not specifically address issues in Africa, such as political and economic issues, oppression at various levels, poverty, social and cultural matters.

² The **E** narrative of the making of the covenant in Ex 24:9-11 with its marked cultic presentation, for example, definitely belongs to an earlier stage of the history of tradition than the **J** corresponding narrative mentioned earlier. **E** is assumed to have had a special affinity with the prophecy. The priestly writing **P** nevertheless borrowed from **J** and **E** traditions since it has no firsthand information in the narrative tradition. The **P** devoted his time to divine ordinances and instructions, which for him had eternal validity. Although **P** says God acts in history as described by **J** and **E**, the stress of the events lies on these ordinances and instructions in themselves, and consent once given, they do not depend on history any more. For example, **P** describes the call of Moses, his negotiations with Pharaoh and the plagues of Egypt after a few remarks that serve as transition (Ex.6-11).

P believes that everything is done according to God's divine plan. Thus even in the events he fails to describe the step-by-step history of what happened after each episode on Pharaoh's side, the Passover, which is a divine ordinance, is given a detailed report by **P** after the last plague in Ex 14, followed by the story of manna (Ex 16). The Sinai event is important for **P** since Israel received the all-embracing ordinance by which they were to live on wherever they might be. However, **P** mentions those events of overwhelming encounter between Israel and God.

2.2. T E Fretheim (1990) Exodus (Interpretation)

Fretheim (1990:1-22) in his recent historical commentary and exegetical work on Exodus recognizes Exodus as a Christian book and respects its pre-Christian roots in the Hebrew Bible. He considers Exodus as a book that relates the beginning of Israel as God's people. Exodus is a book that has been given extraordinary confessional attention by the believing community who considered it and the acts of God in it to have shaped their lives and that of their society. This commentary by Fretheim reviews issues of faith and history, the critical and theological task of a commentary, and other theological concerns. Fretheim gives special attention to the significance of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, the relationship between law and narrative, and the shaping of the literature by liturgy. The theology of creation is also highlighted in a unique way in this commentary. The commentary also presents the integrated result of historical and theological work with the Biblical text. That is to say it has demonstrated how the historical critical approach, literary critical approach, and theological approach depend on one another for a meaningful interpretation. In my view, Fretheim has presented a very stimulating commentary, which will be helpful to all people particularly the community of faith and preachers. This statement is based on the fact that the commentary has opened up more theological discussions on the book of Exodus than mere academic issues.

The commentary by Fretheim creates an understanding of what the text says in dialogue with the critical questions and problems of life and faith, then and now. His interpretation of Exodus seriously considers hermeneutical responsibilities for historical and contemporary meaning and significance of the biblical text. An interpretation in its full sense, as Fretheim (1990) suggests, involves a text in its historical context, an interpreter, and someone for whom the interpretation is made now. The text is what is written in the Bible in its full identity, beginning with the prophets and priests down to the apostolic era. It provides literature to read, to inform, inspire, and guide the life of faith. The interpreters, on the other hand, according to Fretheim, are scholars who seek to create an interpretation that is both faithful to the text and useful to the church. He has stressed the literary criticism rather than the literary history that is part of his aims of writing this commentary. Fretheim's aim for writing this commentary is to integrate the biblical text as historical document with theological interpretation which is the message brought out from this history for the

community of faith who are the hearers and recipients of the interpreted message cutting across varying dimensions of their life situations.

The commentator wrote this commentary from the background of an exegete and theologian, bearing in mind the needs and questions arising in the use of the Bible as Holy Scripture. His task as an exegete in this commentary is to deal with what the text says and to discern its meaning for faith and life. Exodus is considered to describe a shift a shift from slavery to worship, Israel's bondage to Pharaoh to its bonding to Yahweh. It moves from building for Pharaoh to a glad and obedient offering of people for a building meant for the worship of God. Exodus, as Fretheim argues, moves from an oppressive situation where God's presence is hardly felt by the oppressed to God's filling the gap or scene at the completion of the tabernacle. As a historical document, it presents a series of events or activities ranging from plagues in Egypt to the sea crossing, then to wandering in the wilderness, to Mount Sinai and the worship of the golden calf. The people of Israel are the central figures in all these events, while God acts through the events so as to have his name declared throughout the world (Ex. 9:16).

Exodus as a pre-Christian and a Christian book

Fretheim in his commentary presents the Old Testament as the word of God for the Christian Church, a means by which God speaks words of grace and judgment to the community of faith. It helps to define what the Christian was and still is, and it also assists in shaping the Christian life in the world. The Old Testament has served more than a preparatory function for centuries in both writings, prophesy, and law. It has spoken to Christians as God's live words in various forms such as: calling, warning, exhorting, judging, redeeming, comforting and forgiving. The Church having experienced the Old Testament as God's words acting in such ways mentioned recently above, had its liturgies, its preaching and its catechetic filled with Old Testament stories, psalms, wisdom and prophecies.

This means that the Old Testament is God's spoken words to humanity in history (Fretheim 1990). Exodus as a book of the Old Testament also participated in this Christian experience. Young Christians are raised on the stories of Exodus, beginning with that of the baby Moses set adrift on the Nile, the miraculous crossing of the sea by the Israelites on dry ground, and

the providence of water and manna by God in the wilderness. Liturgies had built into their very centre the themes of Passover and unleavened bread (Ex 15). The song of the sea has been selected as a text for Easter celebration and theologies of various kinds have drawn on the Exodus text in areas like atonement, divine matters, and liberation which is most common in this contemporary community that knows what oppression is all about. Christians have come to know in their own being the meaning of “let my people go”, and make their confession of faith in terms of the Exodus-shaped language of redemption. Exodus has made manifest who Christians are as God’s saved people. In my own view, Fretheim is right in presenting Exodus as a spoken word of God in the past and present.

The Christian Gospel has been decisively shaped by the salvation experiences of Exodus. Jesus, like Israel, is called out of Egypt (Matt 2:15), which is a fulfilment of the prophecy of (Hosea 11:1), originally referred to as God’s call of the nation of Israel out of Egypt in the time of Moses. Matthew, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, applies it also to Jesus where he sees the history of Israel (God’s children) recapitulated in the life of Jesus (God’s unique son). Just as Israel, an infant nation went down into Egypt, so the child Jesus went there with his earthly parents. And as Israel was led by God out of Egypt, so was Jesus. Jesus like Israel, according to Fretheim (1990:2-3), was tempted in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11), celebrated the Passover (Mk 14:12-25; Matt 26:28) and, in radical theological extension, is himself said to be the Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7; 11:25) and the spiritual rock that accompanied the Israelites in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:4). Jesus assumed the role of a new Moses teaching his disciples on the mountain (Matt 5-7) as the instructing God of Exodus (20:1 ff) and, most remarkably, being Israel’s God’s tabernacles in his very person, according to John 1:14: “The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the father, full of grace and truth (NIV Bible).”

We can clearly see from the above New Testament references that they have drawn virtually every available interpretive means from Exodus texts that serve as a vehicle for interpreting and proclaiming God’s acts in Jesus. Exodus also presumes a continuity existing between Israel and the Church as God’s people and not only as applied to Jesus. For example, the texts are written down for the instruction of the Christian community (1 Cor 10:11), they can be

used as warning (1 Cor 10:6-11), apologia (Acts 7:17-44), instruction (1 Cor 9:8-12; 2 Cor 8:14, 15), specifications of what love requires (Rom 13:8-10; Matt 19:16-22), examples of human faithfulness (Heb 11:23-29), reminder of the missiological purpose of the community (1 Pet 2:9-10; Rev 1:5-6; 5:10), or resources for an eschatology (Rev 8:6-9, 21; 15:1-5; 21:3; 22:4).

The above quotations show how the Old Testament can find its parallel usage in the New Testament without losing its character as an Old Testament document. The Exodus God is our God in recent times. The victory of the Israelites at the shore of the Red Sea is our victory, together with the song of victory Exodus 15. The pre-Christian knowledge of Exodus therefore is that which existed between God's salvation acts in history with Israel, while the Christian knowledge is what is manifest in its newness to us through Jesus Christ. In order to do justice to Exodus, both in our knowledge of pre-Christian roots and our experience of hearing it as a genuine word one has to follow the historical, descriptive and objective means of interpretation and reading Exodus. With the historical material of Exodus in hand, one can then move through the New Testament to a contemporary application. In this regard, the text will apply itself as God's spoken word bypassing all other application steps, but following the interpretation procedure at hand (Fretheim 1990:3-4). This, according to Fretheim (1990), happens often in the course of interpretation where no specific application steps are undertaken. The text in this case applies itself immediately by virtue of rhetorical allusions (i.e. Psalms 23:1ff; cf Exodus 20:1-2).

Fretheim (1990) says texts that are less immediate to contemporary experience for a variety of reasons, such as trans-cultural differences, should be explained in more plain terms before the focus of such texts and the reader's goal will be achieved. According to Fretheim, this can be achieved through talking about the text itself in a language that respects the realities of the pre-Christian world (avoid anachronistic terminology), but at the same time enable the text to appear true to common Christian experience so as to strike a balance between the two worlds. No specific point of application is made in this commentary, but rather an attempt to merge into a single story the experiences of the people in the text and the contemporary experience of God's people. The approach used in the commentary is testimonial in character owing to the historical nature of Exodus as a book full of a re-telling of stories of God's acts with

people and Christian experiences from generations to generations. In the interpretation of Exodus in modern times, the text should be placed as a direct address and hence congruent with its original function for the faith community. The text should not be forced to be relevant to today's challenges, but should intersect with present life situations to come up with new meanings. The text, the interpreter and the hearers in their situations as people of God have to illumine one another. Here too I agree with the views of Fretheim on how the readings and interpretations of Exodus ought to be.

The new literary approach

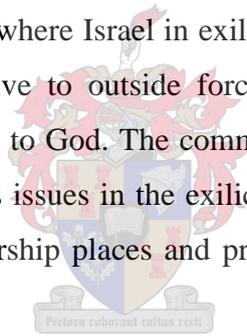
On the literary aspect, Fretheim (1990:1-6) argues that emphasis should be placed on literary criticism without forgetting its literary history. A literary text is considered to have a life of its own, with which exegetes have to come to terms. That is not to dispute the fact that Exodus as a text is not written with a particular people in mind. It is written with a people in mind but since reconstruction of such audience is difficult to discern, interpreters/ or exegetes has to focus on its text instead. An examination of the variety of a text's literary features, such as repetition and point of view, is the central task in recent exegetical approaches to Exodus. Treatment of ironies is given much attention in this commentary on Exodus by Fretheim. Structural characteristics marking the movement of the book of Exodus has to be considered by the exegete. Here the exegete has to cite the rhythm of lament, deliverance, praise, the interconnections between liturgy and narrative, as well as law and narrative, to create an easy understanding of the text.

Another common structure considered in this exegetical work is the way in which, through verbal and thematic links, certain narrative aspects are made to pre-figure later ones, for example, the actions of Pharaoh's daughter on behalf of Moses prefigure later divine activities on behalf of Israel (Ex 2:1). The activities of Moses foreshadow later actions by both God and Israel (Ex 2:11-22). The encounter of Moses with God anticipates the Passover (Ex 4:24-26). The plagues prefigure disastrous aspects of the Passover and sea crossing. Events in the wilderness have aspects that foreshadow Sinai. Each story reflects aspects of another which bind them together more closely, thus providing an internal hermeneutic.

History and faith in the book of Exodus

According to Fretheim (1990:7), the book of Exodus is not a historical narrative, at least in the modern sense of the phrase. Its primary concern is with issues that are theological and *kerygmatic*, that is to say, those who were responsible for the material at various compositional stages were persons of faith who were concerned with speaking the word of God to other people of faith, who in turn would have heard them as God's spoken words. This task, in my view, is simply proclamation of God's words from person to person. According to Fretheim (1990:7), Exodus is not historical in narrative but historical in purpose. The book was written with the problems and possibilities of a particular audience in view and shaped to address that setting.

The authors of Exodus, according to Fretheim (1990:7), did not write for everybody in general or for nobody in particular. The audience is difficult to discern in Exodus since at various stages of redaction different audiences were in view. The present book of Exodus seems to have an exilic provenance where Israel in exile finds itself in two major respects to its forebears; first, they were captive to outside forces and second, suffering under just judgment because of their disloyalty to God. The community of faith stands in need of both deliverance and forgiveness. Exodus issues in the exilic setting relate to law and obedience, divine presence and appropriate worship places and practices were things of importance in this setting.



Texts in Exodus are presented in a form that is flexible enough to fit many comparable situations in the life of the people of God. The word of God addressed back in Israel's story was recalled and put to use in case of any correspondence of life situations. Exodus seems to be more interested in telling the story of a people in which God was actively involved, rather than reconstruction of earlier history. In modern times, however, as Fretheim (1990:9) point out, scholars are concerned with what really happened. Exodus contains a very mixed set of materials from a historiographical perspective. Nevertheless, every event that happened in Exodus is crucial for faith.

Exodus and the theological task

According to Fretheim (1990:7) it is more difficult to figure out the relationship between theology and narrative in Exodus than to present Exodus as a book that is filled with matters of theological interest. The extent to which God is the subject of the speaking and the acting that occur need to be taken note of. More so, Exodus is not a systematic treatise, presenting an ordered reflection on theological issues. Fretheim 1990:7 in his commentary presents five observations under the heading above that are worth considering.

First, he presents the fundamental purpose of Exodus as being the *kerygmatic*; that is to say, Exodus seeks to confront the reader with the word of God rather than a constructive theological statement. The theology of Exodus, Fretheim says, is in the service of its message. Specific theological statements have been formulated in relationship to concrete situations faced by the audience. The word spoken is a *timely* word, but in case its *timeliness* cuts across generations, it has the ability to become comparably timely in another time and place, as can be seen in most theological work in this commentary.

Second, the word spoken may also be a *timeless* word; that is, it may convey a universal truth or an aspect of the divine nature, while the particular formulation is context related and hence potentially inadequate or even unsuitable for any or all subsequent generations. For instance, the claim that Yahweh is a man of war (Ex 15:3) may convey an important truth in the context of its formulation, but its specific formulation may no longer be adequate for other times and places. In this case, both those who seek to describe the text's theology and those who are concerned with the issue of continuing relevance must struggle with its implications. That is to say Biblical text were set in various context therefore, interpretation of such text in our present time and context should first recognise the previous context of such text before a meaningful interpretation different from the previous one will be employed.

Third, the narrator does not clearly state his opinion on theological positions to iron out all tensions. For example, it is not always clear what is meant in the move from Ex 23:21 to Ex 34:7 which talks about punishing the rebellious without forgiveness, while in the next instance it talks of God being slow to anger, but punishing the rebellious. A similar feature is found from Ex 24:9-11 to Ex 33:11, 20. It could be that differing views in the inherited

traditions may have been allowed to stand alongside one another, or that the narrator sought to mediate among competing points of view in subtle ways, or there is a theological development in the narrative itself, or the tension is inherent in the theological position of the narrator. Fretheim (1990:11) utilised all the views mentioned in this paragraph based on his assumption that a basic theological coherence is available in the text.

Fourth, theology in Exodus is carried by certain types of literature, namely, a story that has to be retold, law that has to be reformulated, and liturgy that has to be re-celebrated for a better hearing of its theological views as one re-conveys them in literary forms closely related to those of the text itself. Any theological work with the text of Exodus must consider the genre in and through which theological statements are made.

Fifth, the text itself may invite and indeed provide a warrant for more general theological reflection. The liturgical material attracts questions about the meaning of texts (Ex 12:26; 13:14; cf. Ex 13:8; 10:2). The legal material is explicitly grounded in generalised statements about God, such as “I am compassionate” (Ex 22:27). Theological generalisations are introduced into the narratives, giving some internal direction as to who the God of the story is. Claims of truth are made concerning this God and the divine relationship to the world that both conveys certain convictions and delimits the possibilities of meaning. Story and generalisation do not oppose each other, but are integrated (Ex 34:6-7); for example, explicit statements are made about the nature of God who is engaged in Israel’s history as being gracious, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Although the above considerations both limit and open up possible theological approaches to the text, the main approach of this commentary is to draw out the theology inherent within each text that is considered, not neglecting the type of literature and the concern of the text to address the word of God to its audience. Fretheim (1990:12) made a distinction between the theology in the present form of the text and that of the sources that the redactor may have used, a distinction with which I concur.

Important theological issues

According to Fretheim (1990:12), recognition of the special theological interests of the narrator will provide some keys to the interpretation of the book. Some of the theological issues treated under this heading include the following:

i. Theology of creation

The theme of creation in Exodus is often ignored or noticed occasionally in text like those of the tabernacle. The theme that is focused on in Exodus, especially in the past, is that of redemption where the redeemer is also the God of his redeemed people. The book of Exodus is however shaped in a decisive way by a creation theology in recent times recognised through the verbal, thematic and structural concerns of the book. God's work in creation generally provides the basic categories and interpretive clues for what has happened in redemption and related divine activity. It is the creator whose work in creation has been shown to be life giving, life preserving and life blessing (Ex. 1:7, 12, 20) that redeemed Israel from Egypt. The work of God as the creator has informed the understanding and/or proper interpretation of Exodus. Without creation, there would be no one to redeem. What God does in redemption is in the service of the endangered divine goals in and for creation (Fretheim 1990:12).

Creation theology according to Fretheim (1990:12) provides the cosmic purpose behind God's redemptive activity on behalf of Israel. Liberation, on the other hand, is the focus of God's activity and not the ultimate purpose. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt is ultimately for the sake of all creation (Ex. 9:16). God redeemed Israel so that his name will be declared to the entire earth and not just in Israel. God's mission to the world is the basic thing since the earth is all his (9:29; 19:5). God's redemptive activity is set in terms of a creational need. The fulfilment of God's creational purpose in the growth of Israel's population was endangered by Pharaoh's attempted anti-life subversion. Thus, God had to act in order to actualise the promise of creation (Ex 1:7-14). Israel's crossing of the sea on dry ground constitutes God's efforts at re-creation, returning creation to a point where his mission can once again be held in high esteem.

According to Fretheim (1990: 14), God's redemptive activity in Exodus is cosmic in its effects and not just a mere local or historical phenomenon (Ex 15). The lord of heaven and earth is active throughout Exodus, from acts of blessing to the use of the non-human creation in the plagues, crossing of the sea, the wilderness wanderings and the Sinai theophany. The defeat of the powers of chaos by God results not just in Israel's liberation, but also in the reign of God over the entire world (Ex 15:18). God's calling of Israel gave creation a wide scope built on the already existing theme that *all the earth is God's* (Ex 19:4-6), which is a divine invitation to Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Israel is called out from among other nations and commissioned to a task on behalf of God's earth to function among the nation as a priest functions in a religious community. Israel's witness to God's redemption and obedience of the law are geared towards universal mission (Ex 18:8-12). The redemptive deeds of God are not an end in themselves, but those events rather propel the people out into various creational spheres of life. Redemption in itself, as Fretheim (1990:14) argues, is for the purpose of creation, a new life within the larger creation, a return to the world as God intends it to be.

Creation theology in Exodus is also built into the structure of the book, seen in the parallels between Exodus and Genesis 1-9. First, a creational setting (cf. Ex 1:7 with Gen 1:28): God in Gen 1:28 blessed creation to multiply and fill the earth, while in Ex. 1:7, Israel, God's blessed creation, now multiplies greatly and dominates the land of Egypt, which was the fulfilment of God's creation promise in Genesis. Second, anti-creational activity (cf. Ex 1-2, 5 with Gen. 3-6) in this parallel is evident in the oppression of Israel under Egypt due to its multiplication in number above Egypt which was the fulfilment God's promise and blessings on them as His chosen ones (Ex 1:ff). Moses was born at the time when Pharaoh asked for the elimination of all the Hebrew male children but God in His divine plan saved Moses life. Moses was later sent by God to appear before Pharaoh to deliver Israel from bondage (Ex 5). Moses presented a request before Pharaoh, but his request increased the suffering of God's people in the hands of Pharaoh who did not want them to live and serve as slaves.

Adam and Eve began to multiply, beginning with their first seedlings Cain and Abel Genesis chapter 4. In Gen 5, the family multiplied exceedingly and in Gen 6, the people began to do evil due to their greatness in number and were destroyed by the flood as a mark of God

reshaping creation. Noah and Moses in Ex 2:1 and 33:12 are God's creation, placed as leaders over God's people. Third, the flood and the plagues are considered as ecological disasters Gen 7:8 and Ex 7:8. Fourth, death and deliverance in and through water with cosmic implications (Ex 15:1): Israel, God's chosen nation, was saved through water, while the Egyptians were destroyed in the same water. Fifth, focus on God's covenant with Noah and Abraham at Sinai with commitment and signs (Gen 24:1; Ex 31:17), and sixth, the restatement of the covenant (Gen 34:9).

According to Fretheim (1990:14), chapters 25 to 40 of Exodus may be viewed in terms of a creation, fall and re-creation structure. These elements are well explored in Fretheim's commentary on Exodus. The preceding discussion does not locate Exodus within the liberation or redemption theme only, but as creation first before liberation and redemption, which are God's acts of purpose for creation.

ii. Theology of the knowledge of God in Exodus

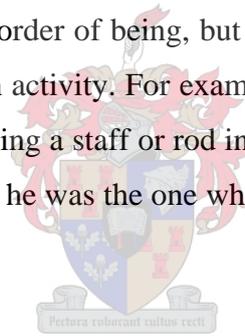
The book of Exodus, according to Fretheim (1990:14), is greatly concerned with the knowledge of Yahweh. Pharaoh ironically asked: who is this Yahweh (Ex 5:2) and God reacted to Pharaoh's question instantly, saying that you may know that I am Yahweh (Ex 7:17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 11:7; 14:4). Here God acted miraculously to prove to Pharaoh that he was mighty God. Israel also was involved in this quest to establish who Yahweh was (Ex 10:2; 29:46). God's concern for self-disclosure is not confined to Israel, but includes the whole world (Ex 18:8-12). The Exodus events, together with the opening words of Exodus, testify to God's identity as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex 3:6, 13-16; 4:5; 6:3-8).

The author of Exodus, despite the historical foundation of the book, claims that the electing and promising activities of God form an important element in the identity of Yahweh. Yahweh also defines himself in other speeches to Israel and Moses (Ex 20:2). The profound self-identification in (Ex 34:6-7) is reviewed in a personal way in the wake of Israel's apostasy. Based on this, Fretheim (1990:15) suggests the following typology for an understanding of revelation in Exodus: the faith heritage of the community; God's specific disclosure to and interaction with Moses; the experience of the event itself; and Moses'

interpretation of the event to Israel and to others (Ex 18:8). God's interaction with the characters and his actions that no other person could do serve as proof of his divine identity.

iii. Theology of images for God

Exodus, according to Fretheim (1990:16), presents God as one who is highly engaged in the events that speak of him. Images of sovereignty are certainly prominent in Exodus. God as lord is evident in the proclamation of the law and the call to obedience. God as judge is experienced by both Egyptians and Israel. God's kingship is explicitly affirmed in (Ex 15:18). God as warrior is professed at the Red Sea (Ex 15:3), and God as ruler of heaven and earth is manifest in all of his activity in the non-human order. All these images speak of God's physical nature although he is divine. The divine sovereignty of God seems to be differently conceived depending on whether the non-human or human order is in view. God can work in non-human creatures without any resistance. He at the same time does not act in nature independently of the created order of being, but works congruently with nature's way of being in coordination with human activity. For example, in (Ex 7:8), God used Moses and Aaron to perform the miracle of turning a staff or rod into a snake to prove to Pharaoh that he was with Moses and Aaron, and that he was the one who sent them to deliver his people from slavery.



The book of Exodus, as Fretheim (1990:16) suggests, is enclosed by speeches of divine self-portrayal. This is evident in God's divine initiative, the setting of the agenda, the will to deliver Israel and the announced ability to accomplish the initiative. It is a divine sovereignty qualified by divine suffering, by a divine move of compassion, which enters deeply into the sufferings of the people (Ex 3:7-10; 34:6-7; cf. 2:23-25). Any definition of divine sovereignty, as Fretheim (1990:17) points out, must take into account the fact that God does not act alone in displaying his sovereignty through events. Rather, he made use of people to set the divine mode in place, as in the case of five lowly women whom he used to carry out the divine purpose. These women prove to be highly effective against ruthless forms of power, but choosing such a human vehicle means that God works in unobtrusive, unlikely and vulnerable ways.

God used Moses in the same way as in the case of the lowly women. In fact, both God and Moses is the subject of the Exodus (Ex 3:8; cf. 6:13, 26, 27; 32:7). God, according to Fretheim (1990:17), depends on Moses in carrying out the tasks involved and hence must work in and through Moses' frailties as well as strengths. God had the power to work alone, but he chose to give up control of the ensuing events to men and stood the risk of resistance and failure. God was always finding possibilities that can keep his close relationship with the Israelites in time of their disloyalty to him as a result of sin rather than overpowering them. For instance, God in his anger over Moses' resistance chose Aaron as a co-leader (Ex 4:14). The contrast drawn between the sovereignty of Yahweh and Pharaoh in the narrative (cf. Ex 3:7-10 with 5:5-18) prove Yahweh's sovereignty, which is qualified by suffering images, while Pharaoh's sovereignty has no proof. Pharaoh can be named as the unmoved mover since he takes pleasure in intensifying Israel's suffering rather than identifying with those who suffer. The God of Israel, on the other hand, is a suffering sovereign.

The meaning of liberation and Exodus as paradigm

Exodus for centuries has functioned as a paradigm especially for those who are marginalized, victimized, the poor and the sufferers from all forms of oppression in life. In recent times too, those who suffer and are oppressed and poor consider God to be their liberator from the pharaohs of this world. As God in the past liberated the Israelites from Egypt, he is in the present expected to liberate people from all forms of oppression. The Negros, South America, and black theologians and other liberation theologians have also considered Exodus as a paradigm for their reflections on the experience of oppression (Fretheim, 1990:18). Exodus, however, is not believed to stand alone as a biblical foundation for such a theological perspective, but it is the generative event. A number of texts from both the Old and New Testament are understood to stand in this tradition, from prophets, psalms and the gospels (1 Sam 2:1-10; Lk. 1:46-55). The liberating activity of God based on this perspective is often believed to be explicitly political. God's salvation activity is directed not just towards internal change, but also towards societal change and the external conditions of life. Salvation therefore is considered holistically as God's work effecting change in all aspects of life, religious, political, social and individual.

Exodus above all is seen to be the sign of hope that poverty and oppression are not insurmountable since God is at work on behalf of his people in a different future full of hopes. Interpreters of Exodus, as Fretheim (1990:18) suggests, must pay attention to interpretations from the underside of life, regardless of their view on liberation theology. In his commentary, Fretheim has drawn from the reflections on oppression and liberation in (Ex 1 and 5). He also states that the way in which Israel's liberation has been interpreted pose at least three difficulties with many such interpretations having gone contested, as discussed below.

First, it has been objected that Israel did not engage in military or violent revolutionary activity to initiate their escape, even though they were armed and could have done so (Ex 13:18). Although the earlier stages of the final stages of the tradition had them doing battle, even if they did so, the final stage of the redaction set it aside. Israel was forbidden to battle for its salvation; it had to watch and see the salvation of the Lord which he is to work for you *today*. God alone does the fighting, as recognised by both Israelites and Egyptians (Ex 14:13-14, 25; 15: 3-12). All the violence comes from God working in and through various aspects of the non-human order, thus producing the end result which was not a takeover of Egypt, but a withdrawal to another land, as the word exodus implies (go out, exit, way out).

Exodus as a journey begins at home but ends outside of home. It may be cited by some people that Moses engaged in deception (Ex 3:18; 5:1-3) and is bluntly confrontational in his approach to the authorities; his killing of the Egyptian (Ex 2:11) and the civil disobedience of the midwives and Moses' mother may also be cited (Ex 1:15; 2:1). Such actions may certainly be said to be subversive, and they do prepare the way for what God does, but God's activity serves as a paradigm. The exodus from Egypt serve as a powerful symbol that nothing is impossible with God. With God, change and newness are lively possibilities. Israel's own typological use of God's actions in Exodus can help show the way (Isaiah 41:17; 43:14-21; 52:11-12). The interpreter, as Fretheim (1990:19) suggests, must take care not to lose sight of the fact that God's actions in Exodus are on behalf of a very particular elect people, the Israelites, God's chosen people.

Second, political interpretations have often ignored other dimensions of the event of the holistic salvation in Exodus. The identity of the anti-God forces in the narrative, for example, is considered less important in political interpretation. God's activity, as the text of Exodus presents is directed against the Egyptian gods (Ex 12:12; 15:11; 18:11). Pharaoh is seen to be both human and an embodiment of cosmic forces working against God's creational designs. Redemption is thus both mystical and historically conceived and universal in scope.

The historical redemption is real and constitutive in character because it participates in a cosmic victory. To interpret salvation in socio-political terms primarily, as Fretheim (1990:21) suggests, scales down the effect and import of what happened at the Red Sea (Ex 15:1-21). The Exodus redemption finds its closest parallels in the victory announced by the second Isaiah and in the cross and resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament. Looking at these instances concerning the image of God in the redemptive work of his people, one may be moved to ask whether the image of God as a warrior has never been transmuted to such an extent that socio-political violence is now problematic in talk about the redemption that God works.

Third, it must be remembered that the book of Exodus insists that one cannot speak of liberation as a freeing from all restraints in life. It is not a declaration of independence. It moves from one kind of slavery to another, from bondage to Pharaoh to service of Yahweh. One cannot bypass Sinai nor escape the desert wanderings to the Promised Land. This means that Exodus is not the right paradigm for liberation but it is a representation of God's acts.

Israel's worship and Yahweh's presence

Worship is a central theme in Exodus. The entire movement of the book is from slavery to worship. Worship themes are placed in the liturgical character embracing both the Passover and song of the sea. The liturgy and the narrative are interconnected (Ex 12:1) and praise centralized in Ex. 15 has been closely tied to the lament character of earlier chapters. The rhythm of lament, deliverance and praise is shown by the psalms to be a common liturgical rhythm in Israel's worship, thus suggesting a liturgical character for (Ex 1 to 15) whose interpretation, according to Fretheim (1990:21), cannot be separated from the meaning given to these events in the life of worship. Exodus 25 - 40 is obvious in the explicit worship focus,

centring mostly on the planning and construction of the tabernacle, the worship centres of the community.

Between the planning and building period of the tabernacle comes chapters 32 to 34 of Exodus, presenting the event of the golden calf whose aftermath was the proper worship of Yahweh. The question of Exodus thus becomes not only whom to worship, but how the worship of Yahweh has to be done. Proper worship of Yahweh has to be both sacrificial and sacramental in dimension. The sacrificial aspect requires Israel to bring public honour to its God through praise, thanksgiving and other expressions of faithfulness (Ex 15:1), while the sacramental entails God acting in faithfulness on behalf of those who worship him (Ex 12:1). Following the incident of the golden calf in Ex. 33:1-3, the divine presence of God with Israel became doubtful, but when the tabernacle was planned and built, God in divine glory dwells among the people (Ex 40:35). God was faithful all the time in his dealing with Israel, but they were always driving him away from them because of their disloyalty. Interpretation of Exodus in terms of worship and God's presence among Israel should take into consideration that Israel's faithfulness in worship is seen to be central to its life as the chosen people of God and not as independent faith keepers.

Law, covenant and Israel's identity

Israel's identity as a chosen people of God is emphasised in Exodus, both in negative and positive terms. Exodus, unlike Genesis, has to deal with Israel's identity as a people in collective terms and not with the family of Jacob. This shift in identity from a family to a covenanted people made with Abraham is established in the opening verses and in God's first speech when he addresses them as my people (Ex 3, 7). The promise and covenant made with Abraham is theirs also (Ex 2:24). Fretheim (1990:22) outlines the order of the central events in the book of Exodus that are of great importance theologically, as follows:

(i) *The redemptive work of God on behalf of the people*

This has grounded their existence in the deliverance from both historical and cosmic enemies which God accomplishes on their behalf.

(ii) *The gift of law to an already redeemed community*

The elected people after redemption are given the law at Sinai, which serves as a gift to an already redeemed community. The law, however, is not the means by which God's relationship with the chosen people is established. God redeems quite apart from human obedience for it is out of the disobedient, disloyal and faithless state of a people that God usually bring redemption to qualify such forgiven sinners to remain heirs of His kingdom. That means that if it were based on obedience to God, Israel would not have been kept by God as his chosen ones. The choice was not based on merit, but was solely based on God's grace towards them, shown in his miraculous acts throughout history. They were called out of an adulterous life and made usable by God. Even after their call, they remained unfaithful to God who was faithful in his deeds to them.

(iii) *Faithfulness to God is another central issue in Exodus*

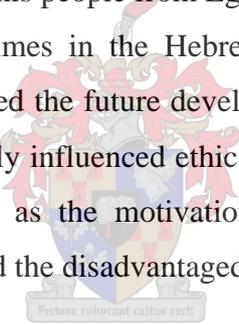
This is manifest in Israel's act of worship in both sacramental and sacrificial aspects. This faithfulness has to manifest itself in Israel's proper worship of Yahweh and observance of other forms of obedience, certainly in Israel's own interest, particularly for the best life possible (Deut 4:40). Israel, as Fretheim (1990:22) points out, is called beyond itself to a vocational covenant within Abrahamic covenant (Ex 19:1; 24:1), thus Israel's obedience is ultimately for the sake of being a kingdom of priests among the other people of the world (Ex 19:4-6). The episode of the golden calf proves Israel's unfaithful relationship with God. This means that a new future for Israel can only be guaranteed by God's gracious act of forgiveness (Ex 34:9-10). The importance of obedience on the side of Israel is not put aside, but remains central for the sake of witness and mission to the world. The presence of God's tabernacle on the journey with Israel symbolises God's presence with them.

In summary: Fretheim and Noth have similar views in their works on Exodus. Both acknowledge that Exodus is a canonical book and that it is the word of God. They also acknowledge that the book of Exodus was written with a particular people in mind and that it contains the historical events of such people. These commentaries hold that the Exodus text should be interpreted in the context of the readers and or the audience. The two commentaries above differ slightly on the issue of the historical nature of the book. Noth is more concerned with the narrative and tradition history of the book, tracing it from its historical roots to

discover the sources of its composition. Fretheim, on the other hand, is concerned with the history of the book and its ongoing relevance. He holds that the book is for all generations and it will continue to address issues of humanity in centuries to come. The commentary by Fretheim, unlike those of his fellow commentators discussed in this work, is not specifically directed to Africa thus has not treated matters in African context in any direct sense either. However, the commentary is indirectly useful in Africa since what was said to the people of Israel in the past still find some similarities and a place in the life and context of African readers of the book of Exodus.

2.3. NM Sarna (1991) Exodus: (JPS Torah commentary)

Sarna is one of the masters of commentary writing on the Torah. The series is brief and lacks the vitality displayed in other commentaries (Longman III 2003:39). Sarna in this commentary has devoted himself to the study of the text and its history. His approach of Exodus is historical because he reads the book of Exodus as narrative whose interpretation is centred on God's past redemption of his people from Egyptian bondage. This is mentioned no less than one-hundred-and-twenty times in the Hebrew Bible in various contexts. These events of Exodus informed and shaped the future development of the culture and religion of Israel. Remarkably, it even profoundly influenced ethical and social consciousness, so that it is frequently invoked in the Torah as the motivation for protecting and promoting the interests and rights of the stranger and the disadvantaged of society (Sarna 1991:1-20).


Pectus roburant cultus recti

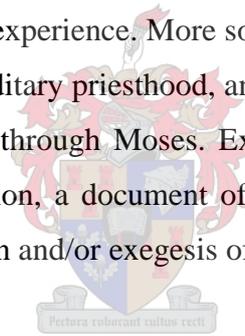
According to Sarna (1991:1-20), the drama of the Exodus is not limited to the period of the Bible itself. It continued throughout history down to the present time, and in recent years, it has been a source of inspiration to the theologies of liberation movements. Exodus is a document of faith and not a dispassionate, secular report of the freeing of an oppressed people. It displays a character and must be understood on its own terms. Moreover, a close examination of Exodus shows that it does not have a sequential narrative, but only episodic accounts. Nevertheless, it spares details relating to the period of the oppression of Israel.

The book of Exodus has a high degree of selectivity, which placed it in the category of *historiosophy*, the knowledge about history, rather than *historiography*, the study about history. Many events in the history of Israel are unknown. For example, the duration of their

suffering, their inner life and community existence are not fully revealed. The events narrated in the book of Exodus seem to have covered only two years.

Sarna (1991:1-20) like other interpreters of the book of Exodus in recent times, pictures the entire narrative as a God-centred one where he acted on behalf of his chosen people in times of oppression, in the act of liberation and in the course of the wilderness wanderings. The different aspects of the divine personality as revealed in Exodus show that there is but a single deity who demands exclusive service and fidelity, creator of all that exists, independent of his creatures and beyond the constraints of the world of nature, which is irresistibly under his governance. The burning bush, plagues and the miracle of the Red Sea-crossing testify to this.

Looking at the events of Exodus, one can say that God was deeply involved in human affairs even though he is divine and placed higher than his creatures. The religious calendar of Israel became transformed by the Exodus experience. More so, the organisation of the cult around a central place of worship with a hereditary priesthood, and the prophetic office for the national history, has their origin in Exodus through Moses. Exodus as a biblical narrative must be considered as a theological exposition, a document of faith, and not as a historiographical record. This means that interpretation and/or exegesis of Exodus is necessary, not just reading it as a mere history.



The commentary serves as a methodological tool that explores the biblical text in a way that could never have been. It also serves to present the new world knowledge as seen through the eyes of contemporary Jewish scholars and utilising at the same time the insights of over twenty centuries of traditional Jewish exegesis. The Hebrew text used in this commentary is that of the *Leningrad codex B19*, the oldest dated manuscript of the complete Hebrew Bible. It is copied from a text written by the distinguished masoretic scholar Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, who lived in the first half of the Tenth century CE. The manuscript was completed in 1009 CE and arranged in this edition of the commentary according to the weekly synagogue Torah reading. The format has been adjusted to correspond to that adopted by the *TANAKH*, the new translation of the Hebrew Bible published by the Jewish publication society.

Sarna (1991: x) in his commentary presents the Hebrew title for Exodus as *shemot*, shortened from the opening word *ve' elleh shemot* (Hebrew) meaning *these are the names of*. This name character of the title for Exodus follows an ancient and widespread Near Eastern practice of naming a literary work by its initial word or words. The full title of the book of Exodus as found in Genesis is *sefer' elleh shemot*, meaning *the book of these are the names*. This Hebrew name was transliterated in Greek as *oualesmoth* and was used in Latin Bibles in the form of *Hebraica ve' elleh semoth*.

Another ancient Hebrew name was *sefer yetsi' at mitsrayim*, “the book of the departure from Egypt”, expressing its central theme. The Jews in Alexandria, Egypt, in pre-Christian times rendered this title in Greek as *Exodos Aigyptou*, abbreviated simply as *Exodos* as it appears in the Septuagint, the Jewish translation of Torah into Greek. This was adopted for use in the old Latin version of the Bible (pre-fourth century C.E.) in the form of Exodus and so passed into the vulgate and through it into numerous European languages. The Greek rendering of the Hebrew title was *Exagoge*, meaning *the leading out or the departure* [from Egypt].

The Torah readings of Exodus

Exodus, as Sarna (1991: x) suggests, is divided in the present day editions into forty chapters based on the borrowed culture from the Christian Bible outside Jewish tradition. The Jews in the middle Ages were forced by the church to engage in disputations which usually focused upon the interpretation of scriptural passages. A common standardised system of reference was then formulated, thus ushering in the Christian chapter and verse numberings introduced into the Hebrew manuscript bibles by Rabbi Solomon ben Ishmael (Ca 1330). Exodus, as Sarna (1991: x) argues, was at first divided into 29 or 33 such *sedarim*, as the weekly Sabbath readings were called. Thereafter, the Babylonian practice of completing the entire Torah in the course of a single year became universal. The book of Exodus at this stage was divided into eleven sections, each known as *parashah* (pl. *parashot* or *parshiyot*) or *sidra* (pl *sedarot*). This commentary provides a short etymology of the word Exodus. It is however not centred on Africa, and thus, in the direct sense of it, not appropriate to Africa.

The contents and character of Exodus

Based on the geographical location criterion, Sarna (1991:1-20) divides Exodus into three main parts. Chapters 1:1 to 15:21 describe the oppression of Israel as well as the struggle for liberation and its final attainment, with the setting obviously in Egypt. Exodus 15:22 to 18:27 describe the events on the road from the sea to Sinai, and chapters 19 to 40 describe the Sinai events. These events do not have a sequential nor comprehensive narrative, but is an episodic account. The events however, are historical in nature and necessary in Biblical exegesis, particularly Exodus.

2.4. B S Childs (1977) Exodus: A commentary (Old Testament commentary)

Childs' commentary, as Longman III (2003:36) argues, is one of the best on Exodus. Childs divides his commentary into different sections, including textual criticism and philology critical methods, Old Testament context, New Testament context and history of interpretation. Childs' work is good for evangelical ministers. He identifies and understands Exodus as a canonical book for the Christian church. He thus argues that it must be separated from the descriptive and constructive elements of exegesis for a better theological understanding. Childs seeks to interpret Exodus as canonical scripture within the theological discipline of the Christian church. He does not share the hermeneutical position of those who hold that biblical exegesis is an objective and descriptive enterprise controlled solely by scientific criticism to which the Christian theologian can at best add a few homiletic reflections for piety's sake. He thus calls for interpretation and/or theological reflections by the Christian theologian to have an upper hand in the interpretation of the Bible as owners of the document and not just contributors and shareholders. The historical development behind the final form of the biblical text is treated in considerable detail with regard to both oral and literary aspects. I agree with Childs' view that Christian theologians should take an upper hand in the interpretation of the Bible. I also side him on the issue of going behind the text in the interpretation of Exodus since most of the background information needed for any meaningful interpretation can be derived from behind of text which is historical and author centred in character.

Childs (1977:1-4) also employs form-critical and tradition-historical analysis in the interpretation of Exodus in order to bring to light those forces at work in shaping its oral tradition. The text in its final form forms the basis of his exegetical work on Exodus, not forgetting the historical forces at work in producing such a text. The text, according to him, has to be dealt with in its canonical shape by interpreters using commentaries. The pre-history can only be useful in exegesis in illuminating the final text. The New Testament treatment of the Old has been employed also as a conscious attempt to take seriously the Church's confession that its Scripture consists of an Old and New Testament. The New Testament reading of the Old Testament as included in the historical interpretation of Exodus functions as the voice of the apostles, which the Church hears together with that of the prophets.

In exegesis the New Testament treatment of the Old Testament has to share the Hellenistic environment in both form and content, reflecting often the ongoing exegetical traditions of Judaism, which are more developed than those of the Old Testament. Both the pre-history and history of a text are significant in the exegetical task of interpreting the canonical text. Historical exegesis illuminates the text by showing how questions asked in the present day interpretation of the Bible influenced the answers they received. It also offers some historical controls to how the present generation is influenced by the exegetical traditions which are presently in use by modern exegetes. This commentary by Childs according to my own understanding has paid much attention to history, which of course would have rendered it much appropriate for the readers in Africa who have so many stories of past and present life experiences. Nonetheless, since the commentary has not directly discussed the issues that hinged on Africa or addressed in their own context directly, it is still not appropriate in African context in its direct sense.

2.5. WHC Propp (1999) Exodus 1-18: A new translation with introduction and commentary (Anchor Bible)

Propp's approach to the Bible is generally anthropological, while his goal is to understand Israel's social institutions and perceptions of reality. He uses folktale analysis in his interpretation of *pesah-massot* as a rite of purification and riddance (comments to Ex. 12:1 to 13:16). He is also interested in how aspects of the Bible and Israelite culture relate to the

Ancient Near Eastern milieu from and against which they arose. He however approaches the book of Exodus historically, but includes some literary elements as well. According to Propp, Exodus is the heart of the Hebrew Bible, the defining moment in Israel's birth as a people, the dramatic triumph of their God. Yahweh, Moses, Aaron, the Hebrew slaves, the plagues and the Red Sea capture the imagination of everyone, from biblical scholars to movie makers. The meaning and significance, the beauty and nuance of this captivating biblical book will be lost unless excellent scriptural scholars open their eyes to its riches. That is to say, an exegesis and interpretation of the book are needed to review the historic events of the Israel's' captivity and to bring to light the power of God in their deliverance and its ongoing significance.

Propp, unlike Noth and Fretheim, opens with a description of the book of Exodus. Exodus, the second book of the Torah in Hebrew, is called *elleh shemot*, meaning *these are the names of*. While the Greek rendering *Exodos* means *road out, exit*. Propp continues by saying Exodus recounts the further fortunes of Jacob's sons and daughters, settled in Egypt as Pharaoh's honoured guest (Gen 45-50). He relates misfortune of Israel in Egypt under the new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph. He also discusses the story of the miraculous birth of Moses, his killing of the Egyptian, his call by God through the burning bush and empowerment by God to bring the Israelites out of slavery. The story of their desert wandering, the providence of manna and quails by God, their judiciary being established by Moses' father-in-law, and their victory over the Amalekites through the divine power of God, the ungodliness of Israel manifested in the worship of the golden calf, Moses' reaction by breaking the tablets of the law and receiving the new tablet, are all enumerated by Propp in his commentary.

Exodus as a narrative

Exodus has three heroes, Moses, Israel and Yahweh while other independent tale-types intrude into the narrative, making it difficult to classify it under a plot type, such as the heroic adventure story or fairytale, except when it is taken as a whole. Propp however, highlighted the following events in his commentary: One, the initial situation which has to do with the genealogy in Exodus 1:1-5 where the enumeration of family members is done. Two, the absence of a family member: which has to do with a change of genealogy that concern

Joseph's generation is seeing (Ex 1:6). Three, a villain harms a family member by depriving him of liberty. This refers to Israel's enslavement in Egypt (Ex 1:11-14). In between are several other extraneous tales interrupting the flow of the story-sequence. The midwives story (Ex. 1:15-21), Moses' birth (Ex 1:22-2:10), his excursion outside the palace (Ex 2:11-15a) and his Midianite sojourn (Ex 2:15b-22) are independent tales that interrupt the narrative sequence as set by Propp. Four, the misfortune is made known and responded to by Yahweh who took note of Israel's oppression and resolves to act in their favour (Ex 2:23b-25). Five, the hero is interrogated and given a task by the donor, referring to the helper whom he encountered accidentally in the story of the burning bush (Ex 3-4). Six, the hero is granted a magic agent. This refers to Moses and the divine rod, and the various miracles performed (Ex 4:17). Seven, the hero is relocated to the vicinity of the sought-for person referring to Moses' return to Egypt at God's command to rescue Israel (Ex 4:18-23).

Other events are also mentioned like: Eight, the hero is branded, that is given a protective mark by a princess. This refers to the bloody bridegroom episode (Ex 4:24-26). Nine, the hero and the villain fight, sometimes repeatedly.

This refers to the contest of wills between Moses and Pharaoh, and in particular by the plagues (Ex 5:1-12:42). Ten, the hero is branded. Near the battle's end, the Israelites' homes received the protecting paschal blood, another symbolic wound (Ex 12:1-28). Eleven, the villain is defeated, referring to Pharaoh's defeat with the death of the first-born (Ex 12:29-30). Twelve, the initial misfortune is removed when the captive, Israel, is freed (Ex 12:31-42). Thirteen, the hero return back home: which refers to Moses and Israel leaving Egypt (Ex 12:30-42; 13:17-22). Fourteen, the hero is pursued referring to Pharaoh mustering his army to recapture Israel (Ex 14:2-10). And fifteen, the hero is rescued. This is the sea event (Ex 14:15-15:21). The storyline is changed after Israel's return back home. They were married to Yahweh, joined in a permanent union with God through the covenant, and were transfigured into a priestly kingdom (Ex 19:6). Thus, we can see how the storyline in Exodus does not follow a sequential order but assist the reader to grasp the headlines of the events.

Exodus and the Canaanite myth

Exodus, as Propp (1999:34) argues, is presented as a battle between Yahweh and Pharaoh. The victor shall possess Israel. The tradition in Exodus is a specific example of the Canaanite myth of the storm-god Balu, Biblical Baal, which has been compared to a fairytale by Propp.

Balu lacks a permanent abode, just like Yahweh and Israel lack a permanent abode. A rival deity, Prince Sea, dispatched two envoys demanding the god's submission and the delivery of Balu as hostage. Balu, with the help of two magic clubs provided by the divine artisan Kotaru, defeats and dries up Prince Sea and is acclaimed king. Kotaru build a mountain-top palace where Balu hosts a banquet and thunder to rout his enemies (*KTU* 1.1-4; *ANET* 129-135). This myth resembles the Exodus story in the sense that Yahweh and Israel lack a permanent abode. Yahweh sends two messengers to demand that Pharaoh hand over Israel. God defeats Pharaoh through two magic rods, drying the sea, and he leads Israel to his mountain abode where the elders dine before him, and God thunders to proclaim his eternal kingship. Propp's comparison shows how the stories of Exodus are historical and he finds parallels and/or similarities with non-Biblical stories representing the experiences of the people concerned.

One can agree with Propp's statement that an interpreter can understand a Biblical text better when he or she finds similarities there in that relates to his or her own context which serves as his or her first text full of experiences. In this case, understanding Exodus is easier for people whose stories are similar to the ones in Exodus. This commentary by Propp would have yielded much fruits in Africa if he had drawn it closer to their context using living examples of both political, social economic, religious, culture, oppression, and liberation struggles going own concurrently in Africa. Failure for Propp to set his commentary in a context known to Africa, bars it from being directly appropriate in Africa. Indirectly however, Propp's commentary is appropriate since much of the experiences found in it can allude to African context and enable a contextual interpretation of Exodus.

Exodus and initiation

Propp (1999:35) observes that the story of Israel in Exodus resembles a rite of passage, which is a ritual in some ways. That is Israel's migration from Egypt to Canaan (Talmon, 1966:50-54; Hendel 1989:375; Cohn 1981:7-23). Israel performed a blood ritual, the *pesah*, and left Egypt. The night of the Passover feast marks the Hebrews' change of social status from slavery to freedom and from Egypt to the desert. During their wandering period in the desert, they entered into a covenant binding the tribes and their common ancestral deity to one another. After their wandering period the Israelites matured metaphorically and literally as

the old generation was replaced by a new one. They experienced a symbolic rebirth in the crossing of the Jordan River, followed by a paschal rite (Josh 5:10-12), the *paschal* (blood ritual) is replaced by circumcision, a typical initiatory mutilation. The analogies given under this subheading show that the Exodus wandering and conquest tradition somehow grew out of actual rites of passage and Exodus as a book evolved out of or alongside the ritual. The unique difference in Israel's rite of passage is that they did not turn back to Egypt, but proceeded to the new home Canaan, contrary to the secular initiation procedures. Propp therefore had to consider the historical information of the Exodus tradition to be on safe ground in his exegetical work on Exodus.

Themes in Exodus

Several themes and words recur, unifying the book of Exodus. Fire, for example, is used as a medium in which Yahweh appears on the terrestrial plane: the burning bush (Ex 3:2), in the pillar of the cloud and fire (Ex 13:21-22; 14:24), on Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18; 24:17), and upon the tabernacle (Ex 40:38). Greenberg (1969:16-17, in Propp 1999:36) collectively tags the above as the movement of the fiery manifestation of the divine presence. The word *kbd* is prominently used in Exodus, connoting heaviness, glory, wealth and firmness (cf. Fox, 1986:77, in Propp 1999:36). Moses suffered from a heavy mouth and arms (Ex 4:10; 17:12). Pharaoh's firmness of heart makes Israel's labour heavy (Ex 7:14; 8:11, 28; 9:7, 34; 10:1; 5:9). Yahweh in response sends heavy plagues so that he may be glorified over against Pharaoh ((Ex 8:20; 9:3, 18, 24; 14:4, 17, 18). Yahweh's *kabod* (glory), described as a heavy cloud, came upon Sinai and later upon the tabernacle (Ex 19:16; 24:16-17; 33:18, 22; 40:34-38). Exodus 3:1-15:1ff has the song of the sea as its major theme. Nouns like *Yad* (hand/arm) represents power, mighty acts and a visible memorial are used to describe the limbs of Pharaoh, Egypt, Moses, Aaron and God (Ex 15:1-18). Moses' rod on the other hand, symbolises the divine arm of God. The culmination of this theme is: Israel saw the great arm that Yahweh revealed/showed in Egypt, and the people feared Yahweh and trusted in Yahweh and in Moses his slave (Ex 14:31)

The theme of Yahweh's name (*sem*) connotes his fame, posterity, memorial, concept and essence (Ex 313, 15; 5:23; 6:3; 6:3; 9:16). His name is manifest in the plagues, burning bush and drowning of Pharaoh's host as he reveal himself in Ex. 6:2, *I am Yahweh*. The climax of

this theme is found in Ex 33:12, 17, 19; 34:5-7 where Moses received the fullest revelation of God's name and qualities that man may bear (Ex 5:2). The theme of *yada*, a verb in Hebrew connoting knowledge, love, experience, and duty is also found in the commentary on Exodus by Propp in the discussion above (Fretheim 1997a:14-15). For example; Yahweh knows Israel and their suffering (Ex 3:7; 32:22); Egypt, Jethro and all Israel learn to know Yahweh and his name (Ex 2:25; 6:3,7; 7:5,17; 9:14,29; 16:6,12). The theme of work, worship, serves, and make are all from the verb *abed*, whose derived nouns are *ebed* for slave and *aboda* for labour and worship. For example, Pharaoh forced Israel to work as slaves (Ex. 1:13, 14; 5:9, 11) and Israel begged for leave to go and worship Yahweh (Ex 4:23; 8:15, 16). Israel eventually built the tabernacle, site of Yahweh's worship (Ex 27:19; 35:21, 24; 36:1, 3, 5). Israel, Moses and Aaron were Yahweh's slaves (Ex 14:31; 32:13). The book of Exodus, as Propp (1999:37) argues, moves from slavery to worship ...from the enforced construction of building for Pharaoh to the construction of buildings for the worship of Yahweh.

2.6 Conclusion

The study of the above commentaries by Noth, Fretheim, Sarna, and Childs reveals that they accept the book of Exodus as a canonical book and that in a certain sense it is historical in nature. They also agree that it should be interpreted with the view in mind that God is the centre of the book and acted throughout the book in redeeming his chosen ones from bondage. They acknowledge the theological framework of the book. Their descriptions of events in the book are similar, and they acknowledge Israel as the people of the book or as major characters of the stories of Exodus. Most of the commentaries touch on the literary aspect of the book and the etymology of the word "Exodus".

The commentaries also differ in their approaches to the interpretation of Exodus. Propp focuses on both the historical and literary aspects in his work. He focuses on themes in Exodus and on keywords that unify it as a text. He also rejects descriptive and constructive elements of exegesis on Exodus, but accepts the historical development that lay behind the final form of the text.

Childs, on the other hand, employs form-critical and tradition-historical analysis in his interpretation of Exodus, but does not dwell much on the pre-history of the text. He employs

the New Testament in the historical interpretation of Exodus in a way which is different from the rest.

Sarna, in his interpretation, takes to theological interpretation and considers the book of Exodus to be a narrative and God-centred in character. This enables him to interpret Exodus in such a way that it can be appropriated by both Jewish and Christian readers – a unique characteristic of this particular commentary.

Noth in his commentary considers oral composition as an initial stage in the development of Exodus as a text. He touches on sources of composition of the book as well as its literary history and he consistently emphasises the context in his interpretation.

Fretheim takes an historical approach like the rest, but is not concerned with the reconstruction of the past. However, he emphasises the present acts of God. He considers literary aspects when he treats ironies and repetitions. He eventually also considers theological perspectives in the text.

Thus the commentaries share some common views and differences. On the whole, they have indirectly provided readers and interpreters of the book of Exodus with background information needed in Africa for the understanding of the book in its historical context. The fact that these commentaries have not directly addressed issues in Africa using African paradigms has diminished their direct appropriateness and relevance in Africa. These commentaries still require significant processing to make them relevant in Africa.

Chapter Three: Literary-critical commentaries

3.1. Introduction

Literary criticism has three different renderings according to its usage in three different periods: nineteenth century, early and mid-twentieth century, and contemporary usage. In the nineteenth century, literary criticism was referred to as an approach to the historical study of scripture presently practiced and known as source criticism. In the early and mid-twentieth century, literary criticism was used to refer to attempts to explicate a biblical author's intention and achievements through analysis of the text's rhetorical elements and literary structures. In the contemporary usage, literary criticism denotes an approach to scripture that is often historical in interest and method (R N Soulen and R K Soulen 2001:105).

Literary criticism, according to Holladay and Hays (1982:130-132) studies the final stage of the text. It does not concern itself with the way a text originated or the contents of the text. The text constitutes a world in its own right and serves as an object of investigation in all its aspects. The study of the language of the text, which includes looking at the words of the text and their meanings, the arrangement of words in the text and their meanings, the literary style reflected, the arrangements of words (syntax) and how the word form changes, are all things to consider under literary criticism. In this chapter, we shall consider commentaries that deal with the issue(s) of literary-critical approaches as their core task. Such commentaries include those of Houtman (1993), Brueggemann (1994) and Janzen (1997).

3.2. C Houtman (1993) Exodus (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament)

Houtman (1993) devotes explicit attention to the history of interpretation of biblical tradition in all its stages, both within and without the Hebrew canon. Nevertheless, for information about Israel's arrival in Egypt, living there and its departure from Egypt, the author states that the only source we have is the Bible (Bosman 2002:1490). This, according to my understanding, is a clear indication that Houtman is not interested in the reconstruction of Israel's history. However, his commentary is not only intended for Old Testament scholarship, but also for ministers and other interested parties. Each section of his commentary is preceded by a new translation and a section called *essentials and perspective*

in which the author summarises the results of the exegesis in non-technical language. The primate in this commentary is assigned to the final stage of the text, while the approach used in the commentary is that of modern critical scholarship.

According to Houtman (1993:1), Exodus as a book of the Pentateuch does not stand on its own. It connects to the previous book of Genesis and to the subsequent books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These books have been regarded collectively by the Jewish tradition as a separate division of the Bible since ancient times. The name given to these books (as a separate division of the Bible) is Torah, while in the Christian tradition *Pentateuch* has become the prevalent term by which this five-part work is known. Moses has been regarded as the author of the five parts called the Pentateuch by Jews, Samaritans and Christians, although it has been surrounded by diverging theories since the advent of historical Bible scholarship.

Houtman (1993:1) despite the diverging theories on Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch still maintain that Exodus constitutes part of a comprehensive historical work encompassing all the books from Genesis to Second Kings, and thus has to be understood as a part of a larger work. The connection between Exodus and Genesis must be borne in mind in an attempt to understand Exodus well. The moment one is acquainted with Genesis, the following questions arise: How will God realise the promises to the patriarchs (Gen 12:2ff; 15:7; 17:2, 8; 26:4; 28:13ff.)? Will Jacob's sons multiply into a vast people? Will they live in a land of their own? The books of Exodus provide answers to the latter questions to after indicating in short order that the promise of abundant progeny has been fulfilled (Ex 1:7).

The theme that links the material in the books of Exodus to Joshua is the description of the realisation of the Promised Land. Exodus narrates the election of Israel from among the nations for service to **YHWH** in the Promised Land, the settlement of the people in the land and their unfaithfulness to **YHWH**, which results in the exile of the people. The calling of the people of Israel dominates the book, thus giving a clear answer to why the catastrophe of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Judah (586 BC) came about. A continual summons to repentance, faithfulness to **YHWH** and to his commandments as the only means through

which restoration of one's relationship to **YHWH** can be achieved is also prominent in the book of Exodus.

The point of departure for exegesis in this commentary, as Houtman (1993:1-2) suggests, is the text as we have it, the product of its final editing. A careful exegete and/or exegesis of the book must recognise the results of literary-critical studies, while to be familiar with the text of Exodus requires an explanation that has to do with the complex history of its compilation. Houtman (1993:2) call for both literary and historical interpretation of Exodus and/or a combination of the two in his interpretation of Exodus but inclined more to literary critical interpretation. He draws a clear line of demarcation between the two approaches in terms of their function and needs. According to Houtman (1993:2), it is, however, not really the task of the exegete to reconstruct the history of the compilation of Exodus as a book, but to deal more extensively with the tensions and the unevenness found in its text. One can differ a little bit with Houtman on this issue because the tensions and the unevenness he is calling for in his approach can best be treated when the full history of the text of Exodus is taken into consideration.

Houtman's commentary pays much attention to the explanation of terms used in the book of Exodus to aid a thorough understanding of the text and to justify the translation given. For instance, the subtleties which characterise the verb are echoed in the use of *dabar* as a substantive noun (*OTCa* 1440×; Exod 62×; sing 39×; pl. 23×), request; wish (Ex 8:6, 9, 27; 33:17); order (Ex 12:35, 32:28); precepts, ordinances (Ex 19:6,7; 20:1; 24:3[2×], 28[2×]; 35:1); also the *hiphil yatsa* has a causative meaning: present (Ex 4:6ff), produce; generate (Ex 8:14), bring someone/something out of Egypt (Ex 3:10-12; 14:11; Deut. 9:12 by Moses); (Ex 6:13, 26, 27 [cf. Ex 16:3 and 1 Sam. 12:8 by Moses and Aaron); Ex 6:6, 7; 7:4,5; 32:11, 12 by **YHWH**). *Yatsa* is the verb most employed in Exodus with regards to the going out. Also used recurrently in this regard is the verb *alah*. Whether *hiphil, yatsa* and *hiphil alah* have approximately the same sense, or whether each has a specific connotation is a matter for discussion.

Houtman (1993:33) for instance states that *hiphil yatsa* initially referred to the decisive act of salvation, the destruction of the Egyptians at the *yam suph* (Red Sea), while *hiphil alah*

referred to the exodus from Egypt, wanderings in the desert and the entry into the land of Canaan. As used in the present context, *yatsa* puts the going out and the temporal scope of the departure at the centre; the entire complex of events and not just the destruction of the Egyptians surrounding the exodus (Ex 6:6, 7:4, 5; 13:3,9) is referred to as a rule (Ex 12:17, 42, 51); *alah* focuses attention more on the journey and the destruction which is repeatedly mentioned in so many words (Ex 3:8, 17).

Alah as *Qal* is often used in Exodus with Moses as the subject (Aaron in Ex. 19:24; + Aaron and others in Ex 24:1, 9) for climbing up to God/ **YHWH** (on Mount Sinai) / climbing Mount Sinai (Ex 19:3, 20, 24; 24:1ff; 32:30; 34:2-4; cf 19:12ff; 24:2). The climbing assumes entering into personal relationship to **YHWH** (cf 34:24). *Alah* is also used with respect to the exodus from Egypt (Ex 1:10; 12:38; 13:18) and with respect to leaving the desert to enter Canaan (Ex 33:1, 3, 5). Egypt is explicitly mentioned as the point of departure in (Ex 13; 18). This is also true of the use of *hiphil alah* with **YHWH** (Ex 3:8, 17; the destination is also mentioned), Moses (Ex 17:3; 32:1, 7, and 23) and the golden calf (Ex 32:4, 8) as the subject (*hiphil alah* is used ca 40× in the Old Testament with respect to the exodus); Exodus 13:19 (cf Josh 24:32; 2 Sam 21:13).

Houtman (1993:172), however, offers three recent concepts of Israel's history in Egypt: One that dates from the history of Egypt is derived from *Grundzuge der Agyptischen Geschichte* written by Hornung (1978) discussed in Houtman (1993:172). Establishing the chronology is not without problems. Two, one always meets the term Hyksos, which goes back to the Egyptian hekan-chasut, rulers of foreign lands. It refers to the non-Egyptian rulers in the so-called second intermediate period (Ca 1650-1540 BCE) in Egypt's history. There are many questions about them such as: Were they Hurrians who seized the power or Amorites, West-Semites who entered the country peacefully? Were they forced out? It has been surmised that there must be a link between the history of Israel's ancestors and the Hyksos, which is already the case in Josephus (Ca I, 73ff and 228ff). Three, another frequent term found is *Apiru*, mentioned in Egyptian texts and in the Akkadian El-Amarna letters. In these letters, the correspondence between Pharaoh Amenophis III (1402-1364) and Amenophis IV (1364-1347) and their vassals in Syria and Palestine about the threat of the Apiru who endangered the political stability is quite prominent. The question whether there is a connection between

the Apiru and the Hebrews is important for the understanding of Israel's early history. Four, the date of Israel's exodus is another important item for discussion. Houtman (1993:173) pointed out two major views that the Exodus occurred either in the eighteenth dynasty (Ca. 1450) or during the nineteenth dynasty (Ca 1250).

Israel in Egypt – three concepts of the history

An eighteenth dynasty date for the exodus is defended by Bimson, who proposes the following picture of Israel's history. The Pharaoh of Exodus was Thutmose III (1490-1436), a powerful ruler. He had many buildings constructed in Memphis and in Heliopolis (cf 1:11 LXX). From labour camps in those cities, Moses visited the Pharaoh. The birth of Moses coincides with the expulsion of the Hyksos (Ca 1550). Due to their expulsion, the hardships for the Semitic Israelites became much more severe (cf 1:22). Moses fled from Thutmose II (1494-1479) (Ex 2:15) and returned after his death (2:23; 4:19). Israel by the time they left Egypt already had something of national identity and was made up of 72 000 persons, 18 000 of whom were valiant men. The figures are based on an interpretation of Ex. 12:37. Their descendants took possession of Canaan (Ca 1430). Some of the Israelites may have been part of the exploits of the Apiru. At any rate, nothing in the Amarna letters argues against a dating of the exodus in the Amarna period.

According to Houtman (1993:173-176), the Exodus happened at the time of the nineteenth dynasty and is therefore in agreement with S. Hermann. Ramesses II (1290-1224) was the pharaoh of the oppression and likely the pharaoh of the exodus (it could also have been Merneptah [1224-1204]). In Exodus, Pharaoh is pictured as a complete stereotype without any individual characteristics. Hermann does not chronologically separate the history of the patriarch and that recorded in Exodus. In his view, the patriarchal narratives reflect what happened to the Aramaic groups who settled in Palestine and others in the Nile-delta respectively, and were conscripted to the building of cities (Ex 1:11).

Houtman (1993:174) concurs with R. DE Vaux and makes a distinction between the time of the patriarchs (nineteenth to eighteenth dynasty) and that of the Exodus (thirteenth dynasty).

He holds that in the intervening time, groups repeatedly entered Egypt from where the later Israel was formed. This, he says, happened for the first time just before or at the beginning of the rule of the Hyksos (Ca. 1650), and for the last time shortly before the oppression by Rameses II (I, 301ff.). Houtman (1993:174) detects two traditions in Exodus: the exodus as a flight and exodus as the result of expulsion.

Length of the stay in Egypt and the date of the exodus

Proponents of an early date for the exodus appeal to the biblical chronology. In 1 Kings 6:1, it is reported that Solomon built the temple in the fourth year of his reign (Ca 965 BC), 480 years after Israel's exodus out of Egypt. This figure and that of 300 years (Judges 11:26) by Jephthah in relation to the period of the conquest are regarded by Bimson as a rough and fairly reliable guide for the dating of the exodus.³ It is clear that there existed variant chronological systems with an artificial character. We can then conclude by saying that the issue of dating the exodus remains uncertain despite archaeological knowledge gained from excavations of Palestine.

The exegete can hardly avoid the conclusion that Exodus contains legendary and folkloric material in which divergent literary motifs have been interwoven. It is likewise important to know that the narratives in Exodus do not acquaint us with the faith, experiences and views of Israel that was in Egypt and left from there. They reflect the faith and the experiences and views of the later Israel. Any understanding of the book of Exodus in relation to the Egyptian state and structure is therefore meaningless. Information about compulsory labour of Israel in Egypt can not be fully understood. This, however, does not mean that one will have to live with the knowledge that a more or less historically accurate picture of what happened in

4. Exodus 12:40 ff state that the period the Israelites lived in Egypt was 430 years. Those in favour of this late date usually hold to the view that the figures of biblical chronology are theological and symbolical thus is not meant for constructing a historical chronology (e.g. Hermann and De Vaux). There are several other views held by people as regards the issue of the biblical figures in the matter of dating the events. However, according to Houtman (1993:176), a conclusion has to be drawn. Referring to Ex. 12:40 and LXX it is clear that the LXX reading of 1 Kings 6:1 has the figure of 480. Paul puts the period of the exodus at the beginning of the reign of David at 40+450 (7×70) years (Acts 13:17, 22); Josephus puts the period between the exodus and the building of the temple alternately at 612 years (AJ, XX, 230; CA, I I, 19) and at 592 years (AJ, VIII, 61; cf. VII, 68; X, 147). The LXX often has a different chronology than the masoretic text, particularly in Gen. 1-11.

Egypt at the time of the exodus and in the wilderness cannot be given. It can, but as Houtman (1993:189) clearly states with reference to the Old Testament, Israel's earthly history was the subject of constant interpretation and actualisation.⁴

Houtman is quite adamant that it is not the task of the exegete of Exodus to suggest historical reconstructions of Israel's past, but to explain and clarify the picture that the author aims to give (Bosman 2002:1490). However, I would like to argue that no meaningful interpretation of a text could be achieved without employing the use of history. Thus, if Houtman is calling for an interpretation of Exodus based on the text only, then one must add that such an interpretation will not be fully meaningful since the text does not exist in isolation from history. Neither can the text's voice be heard without the reader response approach. On the issue of dating, however, he has not presented any widely acceptable date, even though he has considered many views by other scholars on the subject and he himself had suggested the eighteenth dynasty (Ca 1450) or nineteenth dynasty (Ca 1250). Houtman (1993) accepts that the source critical approach assures the Torah to be an edited composition, but refrains from the **J E P D** source analysis. The author of this commentary notes cases of compositional unevenness, complexity, and tensions as they arise without presuming to erect a grand unified theology of Torah. He presents a clear outline of Exodus as: Pharaoh's resistance to the fulfilment of the promises to the patriarchs (Ex 1:1-22,); the birth of Israel's deliverer (Ex 2:1-10); the deliverer rejected by his people (Ex 2:11-22); the call of the deliverer (Ex 2:23-4:19); the return of the deliverer to Egypt (Ex 4:20-31); first confrontation with Pharaoh (Ex 5:1-21); the deliverer again in discussion with **YHWH**, second confrontation (Ex 5:22-7:13).

The above outline has shown a kind of chronological order, but has not led the people of God into the Promised Land. This is because the author has dealt with the rest of the events in his second volume, which is not used in this work. In direct terms the commentary by Houtman

⁴ The nature of the narratives in Exodus makes it virtually impossible to establish a connection between the data in Exodus and the extra-biblical data from the second half of the second millennium, the period in which the stories in Exodus might have happened. Accepting the stories of Exodus from God's revelation of himself to Moses down to deliverance of the people from Egypt all depends on faith and not on historical narratives or data collection. Houtman (1993:190) therefore, concludes that: it is not the task of the exegete of the book of Exodus to offer a reconstruction of Israel's early history. The exegete should rather shoulder the responsibility of explaining and clarifying the picture that the author of Exodus aims to give.

is also not addressed to African people and their context. Nevertheless, the message of the commentary by Houtman can indirectly influenced African readers as they read the commentary in other people's context but try to draw the message closer to themselves as if it were addressed to them.

3.3. W Brueggemann (1994) Exodus (New Interpreter's Bible)

Brueggemann has identified the book of Exodus according to tradition to be the second book of Moses, which is the second book of the Pentateuch. The traditional formula refers not to Mosaic authorship, but to the foundational character of the literature in relation to the unrivalled authority of Moses. That is to say, the history of Exodus as literature bears the authority of Moses definitely but no certainty is established as regards his authorship of the book.

Relationships within the Pentateuch pertinent to the book of Exodus

We may identify three relationships within the Pentateuch that are pertinent to the book of Exodus, as Brueggemann (1994:677-678) notes. One, the relationship between the books of Genesis and the exodus is important but difficult. On critical grounds, it is clear that the exodus has no direct historical connection to the ancestors of Genesis. Nonetheless, the text itself gives considerable attention to that connection, which is theologically crucial. On the one hand, the God known in Genesis is only made fully known by name in Exodus (Ex 3:14; 6:2). On the other hand, the text is insistent that the old promises made at creation in Genesis are still operative in Exodus promises (Gen 1:28; Ex. 1:7), and promises of land to the ancestors (Gen 12:1). Indeed, those promises are the driving force that causes God to be engaged on behalf of the slaves (Ex 2:24; 3:16-17; 6:8). The connection between the two literary writing is thus theological rather than historical. Two, the relationship of the book of Exodus to the books of Leviticus and Numbers is very different. Insofar as these latter books are the extended proclamation of the Torah, they simply continue the work of Moses at Sinai. They fully belong within the orbit of Moses' authorised work without any new theme different from those found in Moses' work.

Three, the relationship of Exodus to Deuteronomy also differs. Deuteronomy consists of a restatement of the Ten Commandments (Deut 5:6-21), which then received a full and belated exposition that is placed in the mouth of Moses. There is enormous interpretive freedom in

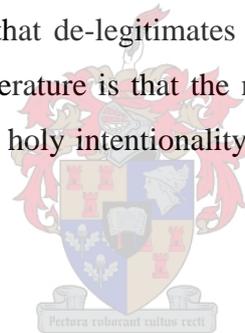
Deuteronomy, so that what we are given is what Moses could have said in later, very different circumstances. Brueggemann (1994:677-678) suggests that the book of Exodus reaches in three quite different directions to gather together the main threads and themes of Israel's faith. As the focal point of all this literature, it is the force of the book of Exodus that makes the Torah a profoundly Mosaic book, relying primarily upon his authority.

Major theological themes in Exodus

Brueggemann (1994:678-680) identifies four major theological themes that order the book of Exodus and provide focal points for its interpretation. These include liberation, law, covenant and presence.

Liberation

The theme of the narrative of liberation (Ex 1-15) is basically concerned with the transformation of social situations from oppression to freedom. This liberation is indeed a socio-political-economic operation that de-legitimizes and overthrows the throne of Egypt. The odd version or claim of this literature is that the new God whose name is only known through his wondrous deeds use his holy intentionality to cause the social transformation to happen.



Law

The meeting at Sinai, which continues through Num 10:10, is the announcement of God's will for all aspects of Israel's personal and public life. The God who liberates refuses to be limited with reference only to religion. This liberation is noted in three aspects: First, the giving of the law is situated in a frightening theophany, whereby the holy God intimidates and threatens Israel (Ex 19:16-25). The purpose of the theophany as far as the canonical form of literature is concerned is to ground law in holy authority beyond any human agent or construct since the law is God's law. Second, the Ten Commandments, and only them, come directly from God's own mouth. This is an extraordinary phenomenon, an act of sovereignty that orders the world, and an act of graciousness whereby Israel need not guess about God's intention for them or for the world. Third, the rest of the laws in Ex 20:22-26; 21:1-23:19; 34:11-26 are given by Moses, who is the designated and accepted mediator (Ex 20:18-21).

That is to say, Israel has devised a stable human arrangement whereby God's will and purposes continue to be available.

Covenant

The proclamation of the law has as its purpose the making of a covenant, a binding relation, whereby Yahweh and Israel are intimately, profoundly and non-negotiable committed to each other. In this act, a social novelty is introduced into the world, a community founded on nothing other than an act of faith and loyalty. God promised to be with Israel always to protect them if only they would remain loyal to him. God on his part has been loyal to Israel, but Israel was not always loyal to God, but most of the time indulged in sinful living.

Moreover, as Brueggemann (1994:679) notes, the present form of Ex. 32 to 34 is now positioned as a new or renewed covenant, after the nullification of the covenant of Ex. 19-24. The relation between (Ex 19 to 24 and 32 to 34) suggests that the covenant is an absolute commitment. It is endlessly impinged upon by the contingencies of history, so that the covenant rooted in fidelity must struggle with the reality of infidelity. This dynamic, on the one hand, permits the savage warning of the pre-exilic prophets that the relation will end because Israel persists in disobedience. On the other hand, this same dynamic of fidelity in the face of infidelity permits the daring assertion in the exile that: the God who plucks up and tears down will also plant and build a new covenant people (Jer 1:10; 31:27-28). Thus, the theme of covenant permits the terrible tension of judgment and hope already anticipated in (Ex 34:6-7) and asserted in the pre-exilic prophets (e.g. Hosea), but worked out in the great prophets of the exile, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel as recorded in Isa 40-55.

Presence

The book of Exodus is concerned not only with an event of liberation, but with a structure that will ensure in a concrete institutional form the continued presence of God in the midst of Israel. This God, however, is not casually or easily available to Israel, and the emerging problem is to find a viable way in which to host the holy God. The second part of the book, as Brueggemann (1994:680) suggests, is preoccupied with this problem and this possibility (Ex. 25:1-40:38). Israel devises, through daring theological imagination, a structure (tabernacle) that depict/symbolise glory, both as abiding presence and as travelling assurance (Ex. 40:34-

38). These four themes of liberation, law, covenant and presence converged to make the poignant claim that Israel is a profound novum in human history. It is a community like none that had yet been; the recipient of God's liberating power, practitioner of God's sovereign law, partner in God's ongoing covenant and host of God's awesome presence. This astonishingly odd community, according to Brueggemann (1994:680), is of course made possible only by this incomparable God who dares to impinge upon the human process in extravagant and unprecedented ways (Ex 33:16).

The locus of Exodus

The book of Exodus, based on current scholarship, has reached its present, final form during the Sixth Century exile or soon thereafter, with the final shaping of the priestly tradition. This judgment provides a chronological reference point for the literature. More importantly, as Brueggemann (1994:680) argues, this critical judgment however also suggests a context in which the pastoral intention and interpretive issues at work in the literature as it comes to us can be understood. The book of Exodus thus has to be understood as a literary, pastoral, liturgical and theological response to an acute crisis. It is therefore considered to be an exilic document where the exilic community had to practice its faith in a context where Jerusalem was destroyed and the foreign powers (Babylon) governed.

This judgment that Exodus is an exilic document does two things, according to the author of this commentary. On the one hand, it requires a reading of the main themes of the book. Thus, liberation now concerns a counter-ethic in an imperial context of a Babylonian or Persian pharaoh. Law concerns a counter-ethic in an empire that wants to pre-empt and commandeer all of life. Covenant is a membership alternative to accommodation to the empire. And presence is a sense of energy, courage and divine accompaniment in an empire that wants to empty life of such resources. In that imperial context, the book of Exodus becomes a counter-document that voices and legitimates the odd identity of this community in the face of an empire that wants to crush such oddity. On the other hand, the identity of the book of Exodus as an exilic document suggests the interpretive vitality that belongs inherently to this text. Our own interpretive work, according to Brueggemann (1994:680), is then not to reflect on an ancient history lesson about Egypt or a cult, but to see how this text

in new, demanding and dangerous circumstances continues to offer subversive possibilities for our future.

Method

This commentary by Brueggemann (1994) is written in a context of great methodological ferment. It seeks to make use of three emerging methods that are more congenial to the intellectual epistemological context at the turn of the century, and to the context of Jewish and Christian faith communities in a post-modern context. The three emerging methods are literary criticism, social criticism and canonical criticism.

Literary criticism

The newer literary criticism is no longer preoccupied with the history of hypothetical sources and documents, but seeks to focus on the internal, rhetorical workings of the text, assuming that the text itself enacts a world in which the reader may participate. Focus is not on external references, but on what is happening in the transaction of the text itself. This approach devotes great attention to the details, dramatic tensions and rhetorical claims of the text itself. Such an approach requires great discipline to stay inside the world of the text, and great patience in noticing the subtle nuances of the text. From a theological perspective, as Brueggemann (1994:681) suggests, the approach operates with a high view of the text, suggesting that the world inside the text may be more real, more compelling and more authoritative than other worlds construed behind or beyond the text. In these chapters, the demanding, insistent role of Moses over against God is noteworthy. Such a role requires that God should also be considered a character who can be impinged upon by action in the text, and who is placed at risk by the rhetoric and transactions of the text. The decision of (Ex 34:10) that God will grant a new covenant to Israel results from Moses' insistent petition in (Ex 34:9), which in turn results from God's statement of available options in (Ex 34:6-7). Moreover, in (Ex 32:10), Yahweh seems almost to be seeking Moses' consent or permission to burn hot and consume Israel. Such a dramatic treatment of God in the text does not serve the interests of either conventional historicism or conventional orthodoxy. It does however let the text become a field of imagination in which the listening community catches a glimpse of an alternative world that lives in and through the text.

Social criticism

This, according to the author of this commentary, sees the text itself as a practice of discourse that is loaded with ideological power and interest. Noth (1962) in his commentary on Exodus argue that texts are not innocent or disinterested in social ideologies but are always acts of advocacy. And especially, textual material about God is never mere religion but is discourse in which God is a party to social conflict and social interest. There are many such voices of interest and advocacy in Exodus. In the narrative of liberation (Ex 1-15), the dominant voice of the text is that of revolutionary criticism, which mounts a vigorous assault on every Pharaonic establishment of abusive power. The work of such revolutionary discourse is to expose the power of pharaoh as invalid, and to assert that other social possibilities are available, if not enacted with freedom, courage and faith. Conversely, in Ex 25 -37; 35- 40 and more specifically in Ex 28 – 29; 39, the centrality of the Aaronide priesthood is established.

These texts are no doubt ideologically invested in establishing the pre-eminence and monopoly of the Aaronide priesthood. A text about presence is a form of political discourse about power. In a similar vein, theological terms and social forces are always intimately connected. The ideological force of liberation in Ex 1-15 and the monopolising programme of the Aaronides (Ex 25- 40) are in profound tension with each other, one being revolutionary and the other consolidating, if not reactionary. The priest of presence therefore is derivative from the authority of the greater liberator as can be seen from Ex 25 – 31; 35 - 40; 32 – 34 where Aaron is passive and dependent on Moses, who takes all the initiatives and only pass them onto Aaron to take action.

Canonical criticism

This, as Brueggemann (1994:682) argues, is based on the insistence that one must seek to read the text in its final and canonical form, taking the joints and seams in the text as clues to the intention of the text, other than probing into the prehistory. The final form of the book of Exodus follows a definite sequence from liberation to covenantal law to abiding presence. That is to say, the purpose of liberation is to live in covenantal obedience in communion with

God's glory. As Yahweh gets glory over Pharaoh (Ex 14: 4, 17), the book of Exodus intends to wean Israel from the glory of Pharaoh to an alternative glory encountered on the mountain of covenantal law. That alternative and a greater glory to Christians is found in Jesus (2 Cor 3:10-11). Going by this sequence from liberation through covenantal encounter to assured presence, it is clear that the distinct political and religious themes of liberation, covenant and presence cannot be kept separated. Reading Exodus from liberation to glory helps one to attend to the deep ideological tensions present in Exodus. A canonical reading of Exodus, according to Brueggemann (1994:683), must take seriously a socio-critical reading. The canonical reading does not nullify the socio-critical dimension of the text, but rather makes a second level intentional use of them. In this way, the final form of the text is genuinely post-critical.

Interpretive issues in Exodus

Questions about the recurring contemporary nature of the text and our present contemporary context are asked based on the fact that the old memory also serves a later exilic community in a pastoral and liturgical way. Israel's authorising text right from the very beginning must always be re-read and interpreted. The text, as Brueggemann (1994:683) suggests, is dynamic and open to a fresh hearing through the liturgical mode used in public worship, where texts are always and inevitably heard with enormously liberated imagination. In worship, one does not ask questions about the historicity of the text, but usually agrees to a willing suspension of disbelief, giving oneself to the voice of the text. The Exodus text itself shows Israel practicing that kind of imaginative freedom where the report of the exodus eventuates in the festival of remembrance, whereby new generations enter into the memory and possibility of liberation (Ex 12-13). It is true that the core claim of the book of Exodus is covenantal liberation but as Brueggemann (1994:683) rightly observed, the present generation on hearing about the old structures and happenings in Exodus, imagined it within their hearts and tried to form the image of such things as if they are real so as to draw a meaning from them. For example, this present generation on hearing about the pattern of tabernacle, imagined it, constructed it and at least for a moment saw its glory in the heart as if it is real in their time.

Exodus deliverance and liberation

The entire recital of Moses' deliverance becomes the centrepiece and primary material of Stephen's great sermon where he pictured the story of Moses to be the model for the work of the Holy Spirit and for the persecution of the prophets (Acts 7:17-44; Heb 11:23-29). The covenant at Sinai is clearly definitional for Christians. Paul in his own generation of Jewish and Judaism community who rejected Jesus as the messiah, use the new covenant in relation to Moses and Sinai (1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Rom 9-11). The argument of Heb 7-10 depends completely on the Levitical-Aaronide theory of priesthood and presence in Ex 25 – 40, with reference to the contrast made by the priestly work of Jesus.

In summary, Brueggemann (1994) uses a literary approach, but a theological frame of reference in identifying Exodus as a canonical book. He attributes the authorship of Exodus to Moses according to tradition. He recognises the relationship Exodus has with other Pentateuch books. In the dating of the book of Exodus, he however follows the present view of scholarship that links it to the Babylonian exile (6th century BC) or soon thereafter. He is not interested in the source history of the **J E P D**, but in the interpretation of the final form of the text with attention to the internal rhetorical working of the text and the dramatic tensions. He explores the usage of Exodus in the New Testament. He has liberation, law, covenant and presence as his theological themes. His outline of the book is: the narrative of liberation (Ex 1:1-15:21); is the Lord among us or not? (Ex 15:22-18:27); the character of a holy nation (Ex 19:1-24:18); the pattern of the tabernacle (Ex 25:1-31: 18); sin and restoration (Ex 32:1-34:35) and Israel's obedient work (Ex 35:1-40:38).

3.4. JG Janzen (1997) Exodus (Westminster Bible Commentary)

Janzen (1997:1-8) in this commentary on Exodus has taken both literary and historical-critical approaches into consideration. He understands and identifies the book of Exodus as a literary story about *goings out*. This then touches on something all of us as God's creatures have in common. The author says that, no matter who we are, where we live, or what our occupations and our circumstances, our lives are marked by all kinds of going out and coming in, together with the *goings on* that happen in between. These verbs, Janzen says, can be used of an individual day (Ps 104:22-23), or of the beginning and the end of any undertaking (Deut 28:6; Josh 14:11). The verbs can even be applied to the whole of one's life

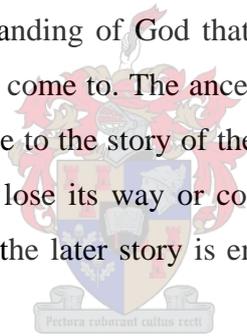
as a going out and a coming in that God will keep, as shown by the use of Psalms 121 at funerals.

The above verbs can again act in between the ordinariness of daily life and the momentousness of a total lifespan as they can also describe going out in battle and returning victoriously (Num 15:17; 1 Sam 18: 16). The verbs can describe a flight from danger, an interim period filled with the unknown and concern for re-entry in safety, as in the case of Jacob (Gen 28:10, 15, 20-21). The human concern that Jacob expresses and the reassurance that God gives him forms a summary in one of the most encompassing sentences in the Bible: for from him and through him and to him are all things (Rom 11:36). Based on these explanations about the goings out, goings in and goings on, embracing all aspects of human lives, it is clear that Exodus is a story about events in human lives. The Bible, in its capacity to touch us and to move us in life-changing ways arise in great measure filled with all kinds of stories of going out , risky going on, and finally coming in successfully or at least receiving one's promise of hope.

According to Janzen, in between the goings out and comings in lies a hopeless end. The most dramatic out-through-in story in the Old Testament takes its beginning in the book of Exodus. The exodus from Egypt starts a storyline whose continuation and completion later helps Israel to interpret other out-through-in stages of its life. The New Testament also bears witness to the Exodus happenings where the first followers of Jesus frequently draw on the images and themes of the book of Exodus to understand who Jesus is and to interpret their own experiences. This out-through-in story stretches from Exodus to Joshua and is summarised in a number of places as though its basic lesson cannot be repeated too often. Deuteronomy 6:20-25, for example, has its movement from Egypt and its oppressive laws to a land where Israel is given laws for their good. In Joshua, the movement is from serving other gods to the Promised Land where Joshua call the Israelites to order and asked them to choose for themselves the God or god they would like to serve... (Josh 24:15). These two instances show how the one basic story of out-through-in deal with a variety of issues, such as the need for food, just laws, and the impulse to worship whatever is considered to be the divine source of all human needs.

Another prominent part of the book of Exodus presupposed by the summaries above is the covenant making at Mount Sinai (Ex 19-40). The laws in Deut 6:20-25 are those given at Mount Sinai and re-interpreted in Deuteronomy. The feast of first fruits in Deut 26:5-11 is first mandated in Ex 23:19; 34:22, 26. Joshua's call to turn from other gods and worship Yahweh, who is a *jealous God*, presupposes the Mount Sinai covenant (Ex 20:3-6; 23:23-33; 34:12-16). Thus, while the book of Exodus often points forward to the *going in* (Ex 3:8, 17; 23:23-33; 34:12-16), it concentrates primarily on the two themes of going out from Egypt and going through the wilderness to Mount Sinai. The theme of ancestors, which is so crucial to the story of Exodus, is told in Gen 12 – 50. This theme runs through Exodus and also appears in Deuteronomy.

The theme of ancestors is important in Exodus because it emphasises how the story of the exodus through to entry into the land occurs in fulfilment of God's promise to the ancestors (Ex 6:3-8). In addition, the theme of ancestors in Exodus is vital because it focuses on how this story brings with it the understanding of God that is new and yet continuous with the understanding that the ancestors had come to. The ancestral stories in Genesis are, as Janzen (1997:2) suggests, not just a prologue to the story of the Exodus, but are foundational in that when the exodus story threatens to lose its way or come to a dead end, it is by appeal to God's relation to the ancestors that the later story is enabled to continue until it reaches its goal.



Janzen (1997:3) says that the exodus story is of interest to all people in all times and places. However, reading the story of Exodus has to be justified by the fact that it is a story of a particular people chosen by God and that it is a revelation of God's concern for the liberation and redemption of all people. The author of this commentary notes also that God's promise to the ancestors includes the prospects and intention that through these ancestors all families shall be blessed (Gen 12:3ff; 18:18; 22:18; Ps 47:8-9, following NRSV footnotes). The descendants of Abraham, to be sure of this promise when they arrive at Sinai, made a covenant with God to become a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Ex. 19:3-6) and as such become distinct ... from every people on the face of the earth (Ex. 33:16).

Levenson (1993) says that he is not in agreement with the particularity of Exodus to one nation. He disputes the notion conceived in modern times that exodus from Egypt is rooted in God's principled opposition to slavery, because there is no opposition to this in the Hebrew Bible nor in the New Testament, and the motivation for the exodus actually lies in the special relationship of Israel to God, but not the special status of Israel. What motivates God is not His identification with the oppressed neither is it His passion for justice, but it is the covenant with the patriarchs, a central feature of which was the grant of the land of Canaan (Janzen 1997:3). He contrasts the figures of Moses and Hagar (Gen 12; 16) where YHWH's revelation to Moses, who fleeing injustice has escaped to the desert, stands in marked contrast to his (God) unfeeling order to Hagar in very similar circumstances: "Go back to your mistress and submit to her harsh treatment" (Gen. 16:19).

Janzen (1997:3-4), however, argues in reaction to Levenson's view on the particularity of the Exodus story that any story about a people should be read first in terms of their own particularity and only afterwards in terms of how it may relate to the story of our lives. In other words, he accepts that particularity exists in Exodus since the Jews are at its centre. Janzen (1997:3-4) further observes Levenson's example of Hagar and God's order to her as mentioned earlier in the previous paragraph that the order was backed up with God's naming of her son Ishmael, meaning that God has heard her cry. Hagar in addition to the naming of her son received a promise that echoes the wording of God's promise to the ancestors (Gen 16:10; 17:20; compare Ex 15:1-5). She was assured that her son would be a free man (Gen 16:11-14). God again in Gen 16:20 rescues Hagar twice from death by providing water in the wilderness, similar to how God keeps Israel in the wilderness trek from Egypt to Canaan. All that one has to establish in the heart on reading Exodus as a book is that God is with his people in all moments of their lives, and he would surely listen to their cries and act in their favour accordingly.

Reading Exodus as a story

Janzen (1997:6) says that in reading Exodus the choice of the right words and consideration of the Hebrew words that underlie our English text is important because it may help us to explore more fully how the choice of words contributes to what the story means. In addition, we must remember that lengthy narratives build up their accumulated meanings and knit their

various parts together by repetition, echo and allusion. We therefore have to be sensitive to the recurrence of terms and images, or of whole scenes, and we should feel free to let such connections play back and forth unhurriedly as we read and re-read the Exodus story. The book of Exodus at the level of repetition should be considered as a book of people struggling with belief. Moses is a good example here where he raises a question at the burning bush: what if they do not believe me or listen to me (Ex 4:1). The Israelites of course believed Moses at first, but disbelieved him the second time when their suffering was intensified by Pharaoh (Ex 6:9).

The people also disbelieved God's saving promises when they saw the sea in front of them, with Pharaoh's army coming behind them (Ex 14:10-12). Quite a good number of images are repeated in the book of Exodus, for example God's reference to Israel as my firstborn son (Ex 4:22) and a portrayal of that relationship in the image of an eagle and its young (Ex 19:4). When one reads Ex 2:15-22, immediately one's expectations will arouse that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is about to act in favour of a suffering people to eliminate their sufferings. The structuring device that operates frequently in scripture involving the use of patterns of repetition has to be taken note of while reading Exodus. This helps in enjoying the artistic quality of the narrative and for a better understanding of what is being communicated to us, for example in the laws (Ex 20:22-23:33) where two elements of the text are simply repeated in the same pattern, A B A1 B1 forms can be identified (for example, Ps 27:1; 35:26). The second form which is common involves inverting an A B B1 A1 (for example, Proverbs 23:15-16 and in prose, Exodus 14:13-14).

Exodus as a story in two acts

Looking at the shape of the book of Exodus as a whole, one may wonder why the content of Ex 25 – 31 is repeated so fully in Ex 35-40. It is possible that the above chapters are an instance of BB1, inviting us to read Ex 1 – 24; 32-34 as less obvious instance of AAI. The two long narratives, when studied together, tell two closely related stories of evil, plight and deliverance. The way the two stories are interrelated in Exodus suggests that the church needs to hold together the two aspects of the core of its gospel. Janzen (1993:9) outlined the book of Exodus in two main sections (Ex 1-31; 32-40), each with two subsections (A and B; A1 and B1) with their analysis as follows: A, (Ex 1-24), oppression, redemption, covenant; B, (Ex

25-31), planning a place for presence; A1, (Ex 32-34), sin, redemption, covenant; B1, (Ex 35-40), preparing a place for presence.

The above outline indicates the movement of the book of Exodus towards a place (B B1) in which God and his people may reunite again. This place is depicted as a new world or new creation, with the tabernacle as the architectural symbol and first expression. To arrive at this mutual presence, God acts (A A1) to deliver the people from the evil under which they suffer and to draw them into a covenant relationship. In A, that evil takes the form of Israel's oppression under Egypt. In A1, it takes the form of Israel's sin in making and using the golden calf in worship. According to Janzen (1997:11), redemption is a process involving confession and repentance on our part, and the provision of atonement and forgiveness on God's part. Gustav Aulen, in his book *Christus Victor*, responds to what Janzen considered redemption to be by saying that the New Testament and early Christian tradition identify the human plight primarily as oppression by and bondage under the personified powers of sin, death and hell. God's redemption comes through the power of Christ to conquer these evil powers and to set us free from their captivity.

A good deal of liberation theology, according to Janzen (1997:11), is based on the biblical traditions that held that evil and redemption are not primarily issues of individual falling short and setting right through God's atoning forgiveness. Rather, evil is primarily a social structure of power by which the powerful and privileged oppress and marginalise the powerless and the lowly. The question one may ask here will be how this understanding of evil and redemption by the author applies to personal and individual sins of people? Can we say such sins committed by such people are as a result of the powerful oppressing the powerless? Janzen (1993:12) argues that Exodus has lessons that are both encouraging and sobering. Encouraging because they hold out hope for all who are oppressed by forces over which they have no control, and sobering because they caution communities of the liberated not to perpetuate the very evils under which they had been suffering.

In summary, we can say that Janzen has provided a good and hopeful commentary for both the believing communities and others under all circumstances of life, offering redemption from God to the oppressed under powers beyond their control. His interpretation in this

commentary, as T B Dozeman (2002: 137-138) in his review paper on the above commentary argues, is broadly confessional in the evangelical tradition, directed toward contemporary religious practice, worship and belief. The hermeneutical approach used is to the plain sense of scripture, using archaeological and historical tools to illuminate meaning. His methodology is that of a canonical-literary approach to the interpretation of Exodus. His focus, like Childs, is on the final form of the text. He considers issues of authorship, the history of composition, social background and tradition-history to have played a subordinate role in interpretation. The commentary is meant for readers who use the book of Exodus as a resource for worship and spiritual reflection. Janzen proposes a unique structure for the book of Exodus arising from the role of the Midianites in the story. Jethro is host twice in the book to Moses in (Ex 2:16-22) and to the Israelites in (Ex 18:1-27), followed in each case by a theophany to Moses in (Ex 3:1-4:17) and to the Israelites in (Ex 19:1-20). The repetition indicates thematic development in divine action from the commission of Moses to the commission of the Israelites, yielding two theological themes from Exodus, namely anticipation (Ex 1:1-7:7), which talks of the salvation of Moses (Ex 1:1-2:25) and Moses' commission (3:1-7:7); and realisation (Ex 7:8-40:38), talking of the salvation of the Israelites (Ex 7:8-18:27) and Israel's commission (Ex 19:1-40:38). The salvation of Moses and the Israelites, as Dozeman (2000) argues in his review of this commentary, is not deliverance from slavery to freedom, but a change of masters from Pharaoh to Yahweh. Moses was commissioned to lead the Israelites from Egypt, while the Israelites are commissioned to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. Keywords in this commentary are explained in their historical context, interpretations are enriched with examples from Janzen's personal experiences and his career in teaching the literature. He does not refer to the issue of the dating of the book of Exodus and Mosaic authorship as Houtman and Brueggemann did in their commentaries on Exodus. This commentary, as H L Bosman (2002:1491) argues, is theologically stimulating and creative, and can inform ministers in preaching and performing other pastoral activities. The author of the commentary is, however, silent about historical questions and the influence archaeology has in such historical matters. The commentary explains the biblical book of Exodus in its original historical context and explores its significance for faithful living today. The commentary is ideal for the individual study and for Bible study classes and groups.

3.5 Conclusion

Having reviewed the commentaries of Houtman (1993), Brueggemann (1994) and Janzen (1997), a conclusion can be drawn that they took the literary approach in their interpretive work on Exodus. They identify the book of Exodus as being a canonical document. The above three commentaries also recognize the connection Exodus has with Genesis and other Pentateuch books. They are not interested in the reconstruction of Israel's history in Egypt, but emphasise the final form of the book, explanations of terms and verbs used, treatment of tensions and unevenness in the text, and the issue of liberation of a suffering people, particularity Israel. The three commentaries however differ in their opinions on certain issues, such as authorship. Here none of them has openly and confidently affirmed Mosaic authorship, but only attributed it to Moses based on the Jewish and Christian tradition. Janzen does not speak on the subject, but Houtman and Brueggemann do. It seems clear that they are not concerned with the history of the book, but only the literary aspects. The literary aspects and final form of the book, which they emphasise in their commentaries, are made manifest through history. The interpretation of Exodus, using any approach, cannot detach itself from the historical circumstances surrounding the book, which serve as a bedrock of its manifestation. The three commentaries also differ on the issue of the composition of the book of Exodus. Houtman accepts the J E P D source analysis as assuring the Torah to be an edited composition, but refrains from its detailed history. Houtman in his outline of Exodus starts with Pharaoh's resistance to the fulfilment of the promises to the patriarchs (Ex 1:1-22). This reminds us of the covenant of progeny God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that had to be fulfilled at any time and anywhere the descendants of these patriarchs were present. Houtman then describes Moses' birth (Ex 2:1-10), his call (Ex 2:23-4:19), his first confrontation with Pharaoh (5:1- 21) and Moses' second dialogue with Pharaoh (Ex 5:22-7:13). Houtman is systematic in his outline but keeps his readers in suspense due to the incompleteness of his work in one volume.

Janzen, on the other hand presents a unique outline that follows a form or pattern linking the events to each other. He starts with oppression, redemption and covenant (A – Ex 1-24), which can be placed side by side with (A1 – Ex 32-34), sin, redemption, and covenant. Planning a place for presence (B – Ex. 25-31) can be aligned with preparing a place for presence (B1 – Ex. 35-40). The rest of the authors in this category have not followed this

pattern. Brueggemann, on the other hand, begins with the narrative of liberation (Ex 1:1-15:21), is the Lord among us or not? (Ex 15:22-18:27), the charter of a holy nation (19:1-24:18), the pattern of the tabernacle (Ex 25:1-31:18), sin and restoration (Ex 32:1-34:35), and Israel's obedient work (35:1-40:38). He explores the usage of Exodus in the New Testament under the subheadings of deliverance and liberation, the covenant at Sinai and the presence.

On the issue of the theological themes of the book of Exodus, the above three commentaries also differ. For example, Houtman only talks about Yahweh's second confrontation with Pharaoh, and deals more with the unevenness and tensions in Exodus and explanation of terms used in the book. Janzen has (a) anticipation (Ex 1:1-7:7), salvation of Moses (Ex 1:1-2:25), Moses' commission (Ex 3:1-7:7) and (b) realisation (Ex 7:8-40:38), salvation of the Israelites (Ex 7:8-18:27) and Israel's commission (Ex 19:1-40:38). Brueggemann has the theological themes of liberation, law, covenant and presence of God among Israel. Houtman focuses on internal rhetorical workings of the text and dramatic tensions. The text alone should act and not history. However, the text is the product of history and cannot be separated from it.

Janzen also has an evangelical approach and emphasises the use of the text but in its context. Repetitions, allusions and good choice of words are Janzen's concern, partially different from the other two commentators. These commentaries though they have done justice to their work using various illustrations, have still failed to treat the book of Exodus in the context of Africa. Stories of migrations, origin, wars, deliverance, and worship of idols, oppression, marginalisation and poverty are prevalent in Africa. The failure of the commentaries to consider such experiences in their setting can best be talk of been indirectly appropriate in Africa. African readers would have embraced these commentaries better if they were written in their context using African circumstances as paradigm. That not withstanding, the commentaries are still relevant and appropriate since African readers can still be informed of issues treated in them and apply such messages to themselves and context.

Chapter Four: Theological-critical commentaries

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the theological-critical commentaries will be treated, particularly those by Durham (1987), Pixley (1987) and Ashby (1998). How they have approached the interpretation of Exodus in recent times will be discussed, their continuity and discontinuity in argument will be noted, and a conclusion will be drawn at the end of the chapter about the relevance of these commentaries for Africa.

Theological interpretation refers to any approach to understanding the Bible whose central concern is knowledge of and communion with God. Theological interpretation, like other interpretive approaches, is characterised by distinctive prepositions and aims. The distinguishing presupposition in the Jewish and Christian tradition is that the Bible is a sacred scripture with its origin, subject matter and purpose in God. It also holds that the Bible is both a source and a norm for the community's life and knowledge of God. The key aim of theological interpretation is to understand sacred scripture as sacred scripture in a manner that is attentive to its origin and subject matter in God. It seeks critically to advance knowledge of and communion with God both in the interpreter and in the wider community of interpretation. (R K Soulen and R N Soulen 2001:192-193).

The theological-critical approach or interpretation is a reader-centred approach to meaning (theological ethics or world in front of text). Under this method, the reader brings to the text a vast world of experience, presuppositions, methodologies, interests and competences (Tate 1991: xix). Meaning under this approach is produced by the interaction between the text and the reader. The text, according to this approach, is re-contextualised through the multi-coloured lenses of the reader, because the reader can invent meaning as he/she collaborates with the text rather than with the intention of the author (Mc Knight 1985:178). Theological-critical commentaries pay more attention to the theological themes they consider pivotal to the book of Exodus. They acknowledge the traditions and context in which the book was written, but do not focus on it as much as on the final form of the text. Theological-critical commentaries identify Exodus events to be an ongoing process that began with God's chosen people in the past, continue into the present time with the suffering masses, and will continue to future generations. The presence of God dwells with all people in their various affairs. The

liberation theme is found in their commentaries and they represent it with living testimonies of such suffering group(s). For example, Pixley uses Latin America as his paradigm, while Ashby presents the case of oppression and liberation in South Africa.

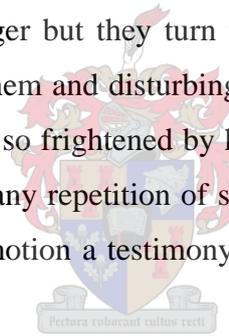
4.2. J J Durham (1987) Exodus (World Biblical Commentary)

Durham considers the book of Exodus as being theological in concept, arrangement, content and implication. It is a book of faith, about faith and directed primarily to those with faith. Interpretation of the book of Exodus, according to Durham, has to be achieved only through faith. Exodus is a piece of theological literature put into the form in which we have it now. Although the book Exodus contains history, tradition, instruction, sociology, folk wisdom and story, the central unity of the entire book in its canonical form is theological. The deliverance experienced in Exodus is made real through God. The events and persons referred to in Exodus, even though historical in nature, have no specific historical proof in Exodus to make it a history, and Durham prefers to speak of such events in history and not as history (Bosman 2002:1490; Durham 1987: xvi).

Durham (1987: xvi), in dealing with Exodus as a theological narrative, aims at hearing the ancient voice of a living faith speaking in such a narrative. The theology of Exodus in fact gives directives on where the book should go. For example, the revelation of God to Moses (Ex 3-4) that established Yahweh's presence with Moses (Ex 3:6, 12), pointing backward to his presence with Israel in Egypt (Ex 3:7-10) and forward to the proof of his presence to Israel and to Pharaoh (Ex 3:17, 19-22) are all theological examples of God's dealings with humanity. Israel's needs in the wilderness, how they live in covenant relationship with God, application of God's given principles to them in times of need and trouble, the promise of guidance, protection and success in settlements (Ex 15: 22-27; 20:1-18, 22-23: 20-33) are all manifest through God's presence with Israel, which is also a theological motif. This, in my understanding of Durham's treatment of Exodus, is centred on context and audience in the past and at present (then and now). That is to say, God's dealings with the Israelites in the past point to his dealings with the present generation and look forward towards his dealings with future generations.

The book of Exodus as a whole

Durham considers the book of Exodus as the first book of the Bible. Since in Exodus the ancient stories of Moses at Sinai, Israel in Egypt and Israel leaving Egypt, Israel in the wilderness and Israel with Moses at Sinai are more beginnings for faith than the historical beginning of family names as the beginnings of books. In the book of Exodus, God gave Israel his special name, deliverance, guidance, covenant, worship, mercy, and his special description of himself. The birth of Israel as a nation, Torah and the Bible, the theology of presence and response to presence, priesthood and cults in ancient Israel, laying the ancient foundations of Temple, synagogue and church are all born. The book of Exodus according to Durham presents Israel's celebration of a chosen people of God. Israel's complain to God, their promise of obedience to Yahweh first is followed by their first disobedience to Yahweh. In the absence of Moses (God's representative), Israel disregarded the powerful proving presence of Yahweh by turning into worship of an idol god. Manna is offered to Israel in response to their complaint of hunger but they turn to criticize this special offer of God's providence that it is too much for them and disturbing to their teeth. Israel who was curious and eager to know Yahweh became so frightened by his appearance that they fell face down and asked God to spare them from any repetition of such an experience. Exodus marked the beginning of Passover and sets in motion a testimony to a living faith that continues to this day.



In my view, Durham's emphasis of the events marking the beginning of things or actions in Exodus is correct. However, I disagree with his view that the book of Exodus is the first book of the Bible. Those events mentioned in Exodus have their beginning in Genesis and Exodus is a continuation of God's covenant relationship with the patriarch promised in Genesis. Disobedience, the genealogy that gave birth to Israel, judgment, and redemption, to mention but a few, all began in Genesis (Gen 3; 4:17-5:32; 7:11-8:19). A good theology of the book of Exodus must, in my view, build on the Genesis foundation.

The book of Exodus, according to Durham, contains history and tradition, instructions, sociology, folk wisdom, story, perpetual and occasional requirement, geography, genealogy, anti-Egyptian sentiment, folk song and hymnody, desert lore, the foundation of Western

jurisprudence and Judeo-Christian religious practices, amongst others. Nevertheless, the basic task and/or central focus of Exodus, despite the strands of narrative, legal and sacerdotal source material clearly visible in its forty chapters and the fact that it is a compilation whose layers are still partly visible and to a degree recoverable, the book of Exodus must be read and considered as a complete unit of theological literature, quite deliberately put into the form in which we have it for specific purposes.

According to Durham, the undoubted and considerable advantages of source-criticism, form-criticism, tradition-criticism and rhetorical and structural analysis have helped us to understand Exodus, and then hindered us in understanding it by directing our attention away from the finished product which we have at hand to things which are distant from us. The process by which the book of Exodus came to its canonical form began as early as the time of Moses and continued at least into the third century BC.

Durham's acknowledgment of the relevance of source criticism and other forms of historical-critical elements as being helpful in the understanding of Exodus are noteworthy. I however disagree with his view that source-criticism, form-tradition, and rhetorical-criticism have diverted our attention away from the finished product, because the final form of the text that his theology is based on has emanated from history. A good interpretation of the book of Exodus thus has to consider the historical circumstances surrounding the text, which help to provide information about the text on which theology can be built. No Biblical text in my own view has existed in isolation from history and literary competency. The book of Exodus, according to Durham, is an assemblage of pieces of narrative and sequences of laws, strands of stories and a carefully ordered system of religious symbols. Both the compilers and early users of the book did not pay any attention to the discrepancies and inconsistencies we identify as a result of shifts from the whole book with theology as its different parts (form, allusions, source, literary and history), which is the concern for modern users of Exodus. Durham therefore calls for an interpretive means of Exodus that focuses on the theological aspects and nothing more. I wish to differ from Durham by saying that the focus of the Bible in its canonical form is theological, but this theology cannot surface without a careful selection of methods to be used in the interpretation of the biblical text. Exodus is one of the canonical books of the Bible, but it has to make use of source criticism, historical-criticism,

form-criticism, and literary-criticism for its interpretation to highlight its real meaning(s) for the reader, interpreter, and audience.

The theology of Yahweh's presence with and in the midst of his people Israel, according to Durham, forms the centrepiece of the unity of Exodus. The theme of Yahweh's presence with his people Israel is constantly evident throughout the book of Exodus in its canonical form. This theme also serves as the compass indicating the directions in which the book of Exodus is to go. I would like to add that considering other aspects like historical-criticism, form-criticism, literary-criticism, and source-criticism in the course of interpretation of Exodus alongside its theological focus is necessary for a better understanding of the theology that is contained in Exodus. This helps in bringing more light to the interpretation of biblical texts, which in turn creates greater awareness or understanding of God. Leaving out such elements previously mentioned above to focus on theological critical approach only in biblical interpretation become meaningless. The book of Exodus, according to Durham, can be seen as a series of interlocking concentric circles spreading outwards from the narratives of the coming of Yahweh to Moses in (Ex 3 – 4), to all Israel in (Ex 19- 20; 24), and to Moses representing Israel in chapters (Ex 32 -34).

The presence of Yahweh guides the people in the proper route of Exodus (Ex 13:3, 17-18, 21-22), interposes a protective screen between fleeing Israel and the pursuing Egyptians (Ex 14:19-20), cleaves the sea to enable Israel to cross on dry ground, then brings the waters rushing in upon the Egyptians (Ex 14:19-20). The great hymn celebrating the event at the Red Sea and the conquest and settlement of Canaan also ends with a celebration of Yahweh's presence in his mountain sanctuary that sounds very much like a hymn of Zion (Ex 15:11-18). The presence of Yahweh provides for Israel's need in the wilderness (Ex 15:22-27; 17:4-7). The presence of Yahweh gives the principles by which Israel is to live in covenant relationship with Yahweh (Ex 20:1-18) and the application of those principles to the needs and problems of daily living (Ex. 20:22-23:33). The presence of Yahweh promises guidance, protection and success in the settlement of the Promised Land (Ex 23:20-33). The presence of Yahweh solemnises the covenant, both with Israel (Ex 24:5-8, 18) and with Israel's leaders (Ex 24:9-17). The presence of Yahweh is at the centre of the elaborate instructions for the media of worship in Ex 25- 31, and the account of their construction and consecration in Ex

35- 40. Yahweh's presence settled onto and into the tabernacle after its construction (Ex 40:34-38), an indication that the work was properly done and that Yahweh had at last a permanent residence among his people. In addition to the representative themes of presence, Durham, added the themes of deliverance, or salvation, or rescue and the theme of covenant, which is the provision of the means of response to deliverance. God's presence in the midst of Israel witnesses the need for deliverance and brings it about. God's presence in Israel's midst guides them both in reaction of gratitude and in a continuing acknowledgement of the reality of God's nearness.

In my view, the commentary is a good and true presentation of God's presence with his chosen people Israel. The people of Israel, having felt the presence of God in so many areas of life, were committed by God into a covenant relationship or bond where they took vows of obedience or loyalty to God in response to God's gracious acts shown to them. Even though God remained faithful and loving to Israel, they were often disloyal through their evil deeds, but God still kept his promises to them, which he had made to their patriarchs.

Brueggemann in his commentary on Exodus also shares Durham's view on this issue of the theological themes of presence, covenant and liberation or deliverance. Regarding the issue of covenant Brueggemann (1994:678-680) says that: it was meant to serve the purpose of a binding relationship whereby Yahweh and Israel are intimately, profoundly and non-negotiable committed to each other. The covenant was binding on Israel's loyalty to God, which they failed in most cases (Ex. 32-34). On the issue of presence, Brueggemann notes that it was not only associated with an event of liberation but with a structure that will ensure in some concrete institutional form the continued presence of God in the midst of Israel. To maintain this continued presence of God among Israel, they devised through daring theological imagination, a structure (tabernacle) that makes possible God's glory as an abiding presence among them (Ex. 40:34-38). On the issue of deliverance, Brueggemann (1994:678-680) argues that it is concerned with the transformation of social situations from oppression to freedom. Janzen (1997) also talks about planning a place for freedom (Ex. 25-31) and preparing a place for freedom (Ex 35-40), related to God's presence among Israel that made him save them from their oppression or bondage in Egypt and renewed his covenant with them which he (God) had made with their forefathers (Ex 1-24; 32-34).

The first part of the book of Exodus has the theme of rescue while the second part of the book has the response, but everything is derived from Yahweh's presence, which serves as the binding force of both response and rescue. Exodus is about God's presence with his people at all times and in all circumstances. Exodus, according to Durham, is theologically single-minded and thus has a great impact on the Old Testament and the Bible as a whole. The special role of God's revelation of his presence to a nation, Israel, and relating himself to them in covenant, according to Durham, weave the book of Exodus completely into the canonical fabric beginning with Genesis and ending with revelation.

I would like to add to the argument above that God's presence in Exodus is for individuals and groups, for all people created by God and not only for Israel. God can bless, punish, forgive, protect and provide for deserving groups or individuals. It is also interesting to note that Durham, even though he has not fully engaged himself in historical studies of the book of Exodus, has identified the book to be full of ancient historical memories expressed throughout the Old Testament virtually in every period of Israel's existence in a recurrent language referred to as theological rhetoric. The author also chooses to talk of Exodus in history that is to say Exodus contain the knowledge of history rather than as history which has to do with historical studies or reconstruction since it lacks specific historical proof of the events places, and people referred to in Exodus as a book.

Williamson (2000:187) in his review of Durham's commentary on Exodus affirms Durham's view of Exodus in history rather than as history. He adds that Durham accepts the usual analysis into sources even though he is cautious about the detailed allocation of materials on which there is a difference of opinion. He maintains Durham's dating of Exodus from the time of Moses to the third century BC. Determination of any exact historical context for events mentioned in Exodus remains impossible. However, as Williamson pointed out above, Durham accepts the most convincing case namely the nineteenth dynasty of Egypt. The only unity that is of any importance in the book of Exodus is theological, as Williamson affirms in his review of Durham's commentary. On the whole as Williamson argues, readers will find this commentary well informed, cautious and helpful.

Burns (1989:43) in her review of Durham's commentary suggests that the commentary is designed for a broad spectrum of readers, from beginning students to ministers to professionals in the field of biblical studies. She argues that the commentary is shaped by two choices on Durham's part. First, the author has assigned primary importance to the final text, the text that has come down to us. Durham is convinced that the ancient compilers had a single unified and unifying theme in mind when they wove together various traditions. To the extent that scholarly studies (Source, form and tradition criticism, rhetorical and structural analysis, investigations of historicity) distract readers from the overarching theme in the final text, they may be set aside. One may ask whether those scholarly studies mentioned above really distract readers from the main theme of the book or help them by bringing them to a complete understanding of the theme of the book. In my opinion, the book of Exodus does not exist in isolation from history and it must be considered in the interpretation and understanding of the book. The second position shaping Durham's commentary, according to Burns (1989:43), is his conviction that the pervasive theological theme of Exodus is God's presence. According to this view, Israel's meeting with God at Sinai (Yahweh's advent and Yahweh's ten words) forms the centre and goal of the entire Exodus account. Durham, according to Burns, views deliverance and covenant as sub-themes that have been put into the service of the overarching theme of God's presence.

Durham has assigned highest priority to the translation of the original text. The extensive notes that accompany his translation indicate that he has thoroughly researched the Masoretic text and its variants, as well as the Septuagint, the Vulgate, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Targum. He is particularly successful in tapping the nuances of Hebrew vocabulary and syntax. The result is a dynamic translation written in commonly spoken English. Durham pays special attention to the use of the narrative **wav** in the Hebrew text (1:15; 3:16; 1:19). He sticks to the theme of divine presence especially in the narratives about Israel's exodus from Egypt where he pays little attention to the meaning and relevance of divine involvement in the struggle for human liberation from oppression. Generally in my own judgment, Durham's work is successful in meeting the needs of a diverse readership. He has prepared notes to his translation and presents a wealth of scholarship in the subsection called form/structure/setting.

As regards the outline of the book of Exodus, Durham presents a very simple one owing to the complexity of the book's content. The book is divided into the following three major parts on the basis of the location of the people of Israel in the narrative sequence: part one – Israel in Egypt (Ex 1:1-13:16); part two – Israel in the wilderness (Ex 13:17-18:27); part three – Israel at Sinai (Ex 19:1-40:38). Durham's outline of Exodus is similar to that of B S Childs, who also argues that there is no obvious way to divide Exodus into its parts to consider it as a whole.

In summary, we can say that Durham has provided a document that is theologically centred. He has approached the interpretation of Exodus from an evangelical point of view, where theology is presented as the unifying force of the book of Exodus with more attention given to the divine nature. Durham, like many other commentators on Exodus, pays more attention to the final form of text as we have it rather than to the history of the book. The history of composition of the book of Exodus, Durham argues, lacks reliable or verifying facts and thus little attention is given to it. Issues of liberation are also mentioned in this commentary, but with little attention given to them. Durham, even though not much concerned with the reconstruction of the book of Exodus, has traced the history of the compilation of the book of Exodus from Moses, but has not attributed the authorship to Moses.

Durham's commentary, according to my own understanding is indirectly relevant to Africa because it discusses matters of God's presence in a way relevant to all people under all circumstances and in all places which includes Africa. He focused on the issue of God's redemption of all people in which case Africans are also included as God's creatures seeking redemption from their numerous problems politically, religiously, and socio-culturally. In addition Africans can read Durham's commentary and draw the experiences found in it closer to their own context by way of allusions so as to get some encouragements from its contents. The above commentary is not written with the context of Africa in mind since it does not directly address the ongoing issues in Africa or use Africa as his paradigm. Commentaries for Africa will always address the ongoing issues of poverty, culture, social and religious life of Africans, political and economic struggles, oppressive acts which include that of racism and gender segregation and the outbreak of epidemic diseases like the HIV/AIDS.

4.3. G V Pixley (1987) On Exodus: A Liberation perspective

The story of Exodus, the liberation of the Hebrews enslaved in Egypt, has come to be seen by many as the pivotal episode in the Old Testament. In his enlightening exegesis, Pixley provides a thorough treatment of historical and contemporary meanings of the liberation of Exodus, well-grounded in modern Old Testament scholarship and in the experiences of the people of Latin America. This commentary by Pixley provides a vision of the biblical epic of liberation as seen through the eyes of those who are engaged in their own struggle against injustice and oppression. The author's critical biblical scholarship takes the socio-political contexts of both the original Exodus people and the suffering masses in Latin America seriously. This commentary is essential for all those who seek the liberation of the oppressed (Roberts in Pixley, 1987: vi).

Pixley (1987: vi) has chosen the evangelical frame of reference in his work on Exodus. "Evangelical" as used in Pixley's context means that God has good news for everyone well beyond our various ecclesiastical traditions. This good news has to be accessible wherever the text of Exodus is read by anyone sensitive to what God wants to do today in the liberation of oppressed individuals or groups of people. Exodus has been accorded a privileged place, first in academic circles in the first world, and then in biblical readings at the popular level in the dependent countries of the third world, particularly in Latin America. Oppressed urban and rural Christians gradually came to appropriate Exodus as a sacred book of our faith in the absence of theologically trained ministers. The oppressed and the non-scientific readers of the Bible accorded Exodus a privileged place because they have discovered in it that the true God of their faith is the God who accompanies them in their struggle for liberation from the modern tyrants who oppress and repress them as the Pharaoh of Egypt did to the Hebrews.

I agree with Pixley who, unlike Durham, claims Exodus as relevant for everyone in trying times or in the struggle for liberation. People from third world countries have many stories of oppression to tell and if Exodus readings and interpretations are drawn more closely to them in their contexts and experiences, they would understand it better, especially those who are not theologically trained. It is commendable that the author has focused on a particular struggling people in Latin America who may stand a better chance to understand his

interpretation of Exodus since he knows their background and presents the book of Exodus to them in their context.

If the same approach of Pixley in his commentary in the context of Latin America is made available to Africans, such a commentary will be accorded a high place in Africa. African readers need to read works of people that are written with sensitivity for the African context that is characterized by political, economic, religious, and oppressive and liberation struggles. It is high time for Africa to also have books that are directly focused on their subject matter rather than reading about other people's contexts all the time. Though Pixley has given an elaborate account of the suffering people of Latin America and has created some sort of hope for them in God, the commentary is still not directly appropriate to Africa. This however, is not to say that the commentary by Pixley is totally out of place in Africa. Its contents can still be of comfort and encouragement to African readers if they can relate their lives to the contexts in Latin America presupposed by Pixley.

Pixley's (1987) commentary is based on both scientific reasons and his own experience in popular liberation struggles, taking it as a fact that Exodus is the basic account of the Old Testament. He says he has taken the advantage of the scientific discovery of what is fundamental in the book of Exodus, placing it at the disposal of Latin American people. He says his commentary is not a scientific document that aims to propose theoretical novelties for the nation. The key addressees of this commentary are people who have identified themselves with the oppressed in their urgent longing for liberation. Pixley, however, seeks to offer a scientifically reliable tool for pastors, priests, religion teachers, and theological students in their pastoral work. That is to say he has used the scientific procedures of identifying a problem and finding useful means of tackling such a problem.

On the issue of literary-critical analysis, Pixley (1987:xvi) argues that Exodus is not the work of a single author or school of authors owing to the broad consensus held among exegetes today that the text of the Pentateuch is the result of an amalgamation of three major narrative traditions, **J E P**. Pixley in his commentary accepts the consensus which held that originally there were three more or less independent versions of the principal event narrated in the Pentateuch, namely, the exploits of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the exodus; the journey

through the desert; and the revelation on Mount Sinai, which were then spliced into a single text by an anonymous redactors of the postexilic period. Pixley does not always point out where one textual tradition leaves off and another begins because he is concerned with the text of the book of Exodus as we have it and not its pre-history. Pixley argues that, where the historical analysis is required to explain the text in its final form, he will enter into source analysis. The task of the commentator, according to Pixley, is to offer an aid to the reading of a text in its current form, and this aid should provide for the recognition of whether the current form of a passage is due to a merging of sources that do not interlock perfectly. Pixley (1987: xvii) argues that it is not the task of his commentary to resolve problems of composition, but only to explain the text as we have it today.

I would like to differ slightly from Pixley on this issue because the text as we have it is made manifest through history, especially that of Exodus. The text even if it is placed in the centre of interpretation, can only produce meaning when it is read and heard by the audience. This on the other hand can only be made possible through the working relationship of historical, theological, and literary critical approaches. Focusing on the text only can not yield a meaningful interpretation that is contextual and ideal in Africa. The pre-history of a text is important in reading and interpretation of Exodus because it provides useful information about the setting of the text and author, because no text in its final form exists without a compiler, circumstances surrounding the text and recipients, all of which should be taken into account if proper exegesis of Exodus as a historical book is to be achieved.

Pixley (1987:xviii) has identified the account of a struggle with a pharaoh, a flight from Egypt and the beginning of a journey through the wilderness to a land flowing with milk and honey to be the historical events and not just any event, but the founding event of the people of Israel. The author has identified four levels in the text of Exodus corresponding to the reproduction of the account in four different socio-political contexts. They include the original account produced by the group of persons who actually experienced the liberation from Egypt; the reproduction of the original account at the hands of the tribes known as Israel in the land of Canaan; the establishment of a monarchy by Israel; and the account of Exodus as we have it today, which makes the liberation event an act of Yahweh to demonstrate Yahweh's indisputable divinity. These four levels of composition of the text of Exodus are

necessary for a better understanding of the text, according to Pixley, even though each corresponds to its own socio-political context. Here too I can affirm the necessity of history in the interpretation of Exodus as I have earlier mentioned in this thesis. The final form of the text can best be interpreted with consideration of the historical circumstance that made it real. Even if an exegete is concerned with new criticism that has only the reader and text in mind, or canon criticism that has only the text in mind, or structuralism, historical sources that make the text manifest should be considered.

In summary, Pixley has combined both theological and biblical sciences together in his interpretation of Exodus and has discussed God's acts of liberation on behalf of his people in the past and at present. The author, coming from an evangelical perspective, presents Exodus as good news for all people. He uses Latin America as a paradigm because of his familiarity with the oppressive rule by their oppressors. He has less regard for a detailed history of the book of Exodus, like Durham. He traces the dating of Exodus from the time of Moses down to the third Century BC, and chooses the nineteenth dynasty for the history of Israel from Egypt. He has not attributed the authorship to Moses. His outline is in the following parts: part one – oppression: project of death (Ex 1:1-2:22); part two – liberation: project of life (Ex 2:23-13:16); part three – perils of the passage to the Promised Land: first counter-revolutionary threats (Ex 13:17-18:27); part four – foundations for a new society (Ex 19:1-40:38). His commentary is more of a literal interpretation and not just a spiritualising of the book of Exodus based on the South American revolutions. His focus is however on Latin America and not on Africa generally particularly the third world continents, even though he acknowledges the reading of Exodus as being useful to Africa.

4.4. G Ashby (1998) Exodus (International Theological Commentary)

According to Ashby (1998: xi) the book of Exodus is often seen by many as a historical text. As such, it seems largely irrelevant to most of the modern Western world. Ashby, in his short but insightful commentary, therefore starts with its theology and not with its historicity (Bosman 2002:1491). Ashby (1998: xi) does not aim at providing a technical and critical explanation of the text and its formation, but rather to show the crucial importance of the events described and their meaning for the Old Testament gospel, and to explain why the Exodus event is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ashby also aims to present the

relevance of Exodus to the liberation struggle throughout the third world countries and particularly in South Africa. The author sets forth a theology of liberation from the Exodus story which is focused on God's fulfilment of his promises of redemption and the continued worship of God by the redeemed people (Ex 3:7-12).

According to Ashby (1998: xi-xiii), interpretation of Exodus has to balance between hardship experienced by a people and the freedom granted to them. The author identifies the origin of Exodus as collections of ancient traditions that were written down long after the events they described. Interpretation of Exodus by modern exegetes must take into consideration that, whatever they may make of the book, the Hebrews saw the book as their history. Modern exegetes have to investigate the actual details of this history because Exodus proclaims God to be in control of all history.

Ashby (1998:xiii-xiv) concentrates on what Exodus meant to the Israelites in their day and what it should mean for us today, rather than dealing at any length with literary and other critical issues. Ashby in his public ministry has been preaching the Bible message to people in their distress through the oppression and injustice of apartheid. He had the opportunity to preach the biblical message to South Africa and also to other parts of the African continent, speaking about the God who had encountered Moses at the burning bush, God who heard the cry of an oppressed rabble of slaves, God who saw their suffering, God who knew and who would come down to deliver them. These words, Ashby says, brought hope and encouragements to the South African people who eventually threw off the shackles of racist domination, crossed their Red Sea and set out on the wilderness journey of transformation from repression to freedom to enter their Promised Land of a non-racist and non-sexist democracy.

This commentary by Ashby brings Exodus very close to life as having a continuing relevance for our daily living. The commentary also shows the book of Exodus to depict a God who forever takes the initiative on behalf of those who do not deserve it. In this commentary, it is clearly shown that God's deliverance to the undeserving people goes always before and the law is given after the great act of deliverance. This shows that the serving act of God to Israel was not based on their observance of the laws, but God's gracious acts to them. The law was

given to Israel after their deliverance in order to express their gratitude for what God has already done for them. The laws were not meant to be a heavy yoke to the saved people, but to structure their lives to thank God for what he had graciously done for them. Ashby, in his masterly commentary, reminds us of this mysterious God who acts on our behalf, enlisting all of creation on our behalf and always being there. This Immanuel goes before us as a pillar of fire and a cloud to lead his people from all kinds of bondage, whether political, economic, social and spiritual, to the glorious freedom of his kingdom of grace.

According to Ashby (1998:1), Exodus is history clothed in faith. The exodus from Egypt still speaks to many people who seek an answer to their own oppression. The teachings of the prophets, the hopes for the future and other subsequent events all flow from Exodus to Sinai, for it was at Sinai that God covenanted with the Hebrews who accepted him and the liberation he offered to them. Jesus' life, works and teaching are built on the exodus to Sinai. Jesus set people free from captivity and called them back to God. Exodus is concerned with the Hebrews exclusively. Nevertheless, it has a connection with Genesis in aspect of creation of the whole cosmos. The commentary, however, concentrates on the living tradition that produced the book of Exodus and not on literal and source traditions.

Interpretation of Exodus, according to Ashby (1998: 1-4), should embrace all aspects of liberation of one from his or her life problems and not just on issues of socio-political and economic circumstances. Liberation from sin, a high trauma, hunger, to mention just but a few should all be considered as one reads and interpret Exodus as a liberation book. Exodus proclaims God to be in control of all history. The giving of the law at Sinai was the beginning of the community whose seeds were sown with the choice of Moses. All the history or traditions and different documentary sources that may be found in Exodus at whichever level is woven together into one theology, one faith history. Ashby has presented a detailed outline of Exodus that is different from the rest of the commentaries discussed in this work. The outline is as follows: Oppression (Ex 1:1-2:25); I have heard (Ex 3:1-6:1); Liberation (Ex 6:2-27); Contest (Ex 6:28-11:10); Passover (12:1-13:16); Escape (Ex 13:17-15:21); On trek (Ex 15:22-18:27); Sinai (Ex 19:1-20:21); The alternative society (Ex 23:22-23:19); The covenant ratified (Ex 23:20-24:18); Worship (Ex 25:1-31:18); The covenant broken and renewed (Ex 32:1-34:35); God's forgiven people (Ex 35:1-40:38).

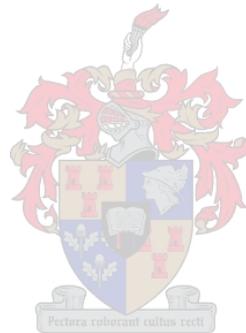
Thus the commentary by Ashby in my own understanding is centred on Africa and has used a living testimony of South Africa as its standpoint. The author, having himself witnessed the oppressive acts on the people of South Africa, has placed Exodus as a voice of consolation, hope, encouragement and redemption of the oppressed. Of all the commentaries studied in this work, Ashby's work is the most appropriate one for Africa. This is so because his commentary is focused on the ongoing problems of oppression and liberation in Africa which hinges on political and economic struggles as well. Ashby speaks about the African context which is well known to him and can bear witness to it as well. He uses the South African apartheid problem as a living example of God's redemptive acts to the oppressed which creates hope and healing to Africa as a whole. The relevance of the commentary by Ashby is rooted in the fact that it requires almost no further processing to make the sense to an African reader.

4.5 Conclusion

Having discussed the commentaries above, it can be concluded that the three commentators have theological frames of reference. Theological interpretation seeks to advance knowledge of God and communion with God, both in the interpreter and in the wider community of interpretation. Theological interpretation, like other interpretive approaches, is characterised by distinctive presuppositions and aims. Its distinguishing presupposition in the Jewish and Christian tradition is that the Bible is a sacred scripture with its origin, subject matter and purpose in God. It also holds that the Bible is both a source and a norm for the community's life and knowledge of God. Theological interpretation in modern time is tied up with the emergence of historical criticism and related methods that constitute modern biblical criticism. That is to say, historical criticism is an extension of theological interpretation's interest in the literal sense of scripture (R N Soulen & R K Soulen, 2001:192-193).

The three commentaries and commentators have no interest in a detailed history of the book, and they do not agree on the dating of the book. All three mention the liberation of people by God in their hard times. Durham and Pixley focus on the theology of the text and have a casual attitude to the historicity of the text. This I see as their weakness, because no text exists without history and no meaningful interpretation of the text can be achieved without its

history of compilation which holds all the background information needed for the interpretation and understanding of such a text. Ashby focuses on the explanation of events other than the text, which is also not adequate since the events from history are made manifest through the text. Ashby's commentary is focused on Africa and identifies the heart of the book of Exodus as hardship and freedom, or oppression and liberation, which he has critically dealt with using South Africa as his paradigm. Durham, on the one hand, has the presence of God with his people as his main theological theme, which he fails to discuss from the context of Africa. Pixley has oppression and rescue as the theological theme of the book of Exodus, which he discusses in detail, but in the context of Latin America and not Africa. On the whole, the three commentaries above made mention of Israel's historical account from Egypt to Sinai at least in their discussion on Exodus if not in the outline. Durham and Pixley approach the book from an evangelical point of view, while Ashby approaches it from a liberation theological position. Both commentaries are good for scholarly and pastoral work, and for people who are not theologically trained.



CHAPTER FIVE: APPROPRIATE COMMENTARIES FOR AFRICA

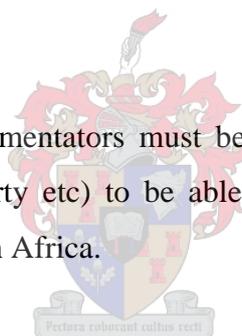
5.1 Introduction

This chapter is an evaluative chapter which takes into consideration all the previous chapters. Before identifying which of the commentaries discussed above will be directly appropriate to Africa, the following concepts will be re-established as guidelines (see also Chapter 1):

Relevance and appropriateness

These two terms are considered to be synonymous. They share the presupposition that when a text is processed with a minimal amount of effort by the receivers of the text, it can indeed be depicted as being relevant or appropriate (Wendland 1996: 126-137). In this case the African reader would read commentaries on Exodus and grasp its message quickly without putting in much interpretive effort. In such a case the commentary will be relevant or appropriate to its African reader.

In this thesis it is argued that commentators must be aware of the contextual realities in Africa (HIV / Aids, endemic poverty etc) to be able to write a commentary that is both appropriate and relevant to readers in Africa.



It is also important to distinguish between direct and indirect relevance and appropriateness. Most commentaries interpret Exodus in such a way that it communicates with readers in a generalizing way. It refrains from relating their interpretation to specific contexts now and expects the readers to apply it within their respective contexts.

In discussing the relevance of the modern commentaries and exegesis for Africa, a hermeneutical dilemma will occur respecting the issue of identity. The contemporary African readers of the Old Testament would draw lines between their own identity and the Old Testament portrayal of Africa. Traditionally, the Euro-centric interpretation of the Old Testament has generally marginalised the African presence in the Old Testament. An Afro-centric interpretation of the Bible is now needed to re-appraise the ancient Old Testament traditions that are related to Africa, and to expose the contemporary Old Testament readers to

the pre-Western concept of Africa reflected in such traditions (Holter 2000:579). It must be pointed out that despite the above dilemma, this work would rather side with the view that the concept “Africa” refers to a nation in the global sense, the Old Testament tradition and geographical coverage where Cush is given the priority.

5.2. Relevant modern commentaries on Exodus for Africa

In chapter one it was stated that modern commentaries on the book of Exodus are not directly relevant to Africa, except the one written by Ashby. Nevertheless, we have to remind ourselves once more of the exegetical approaches of all these sets of commentaries that form the core of this study in order to re-affirm the earlier hypothetical statement: not all modern commentaries on Exodus are directly relevant in Africa, apart from the commentary by Ashby.

The first set of modern commentaries on Exodus previously discussed in this work under chapter two includes those of Noth (1962), Fretheim (1990), Sarna (1991), Childs (1977) and Propp (1990) which are grouped under historical criticism. Historical criticism is defined narrowly, limiting it to the domain of biblical interpretation as a term that seeks to understand the ancient text in the light of its historical origins. That is to say, the task of historical criticism is to discover the time and place in which a text was written, its sources, the event surrounding it, dates, persons, places, and customs, to mention but a few implied or mentioned in the text (R N Soulen & R K Soulen, 2001:79). The goals of historical-criticism are to ascertain the text’s primitive or original meaning in its original historical context (its literal sense), to reconstruct the historical situation of the author and recipients of the text, and reconstructing the true nature of the events described by the text. It has over the centuries been refined into various partially overlapping sub-disciplines or methodologies, which include source-criticism, form-criticism, redaction-criticism and tradition-criticism. All these methodologies attempt to get to the world behind the text (Soulen & Soulen 2001:79).

Looking at the description of historical criticism given above, we can say that it is an author-centred approach which holds that meaning lies in the author’s intention formulated in terms of the social, political, cultural and ideological matrix of the author. Deriving any useful and

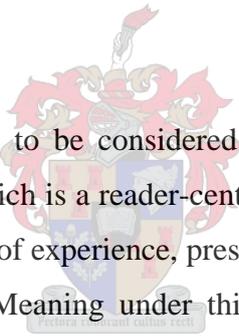
plausible meaning of a text, one has to become immersed into the world of the author, which has prompted the reality of the text (Tate 1991: xvi). Source-redaction and form-criticism associated with the historical-critical method hold also that the meaning of a text lies or rests in the original text and its setting in life. Source-criticism seeks to discover the sources upon which the present text rests while form-criticism returns to the oral phase of a particular literary form with the assumption that the original meaning lies in the original oral form and not in the final written form. Historical method therefore focuses exclusively on the world behind the text, thus neglecting the world between and in front of the text (Tate 1991: xvii).

However, the author's world can be made known when it is read and interpreted to the outside world, which can only be made manifest through the world of the text and reader response (world-in-front of the text or theological interpretation). The commentaries under this method of approach are author-centred, that is to say, they trace to know the history behind a text which provides useful information that can inform literary and theological interpretation. However, since the commentaries are not written in the context of Africa, they are still not directly appropriate or relevant in Africa as the one written by Ashby. This is not to say that they are completely out of place in Africa. The world of the author can only be known through reading and interpretation, which has to do with the context of people that varies from time to time, place to place, and with people to people. The book of Exodus will be meaningful to Africa when they read it in their own situation and interpret it also in their circumstances, rather than dwelling on old traditions.

The second group of modern commentaries to be considered are those that were treated under the literary-critical approach or criticism; they include those of Houtman (1993), Brueggemann (1994) and Janzen (1997). Literary-criticism has three different renderings according to its usage in three different periods: nineteenth century, early and mid twentieth century, and contemporary usage. In the nineteenth century, literary criticism was referred to as an approach to the historical study of the scripture, presently practiced and known as source criticism. In the early and mid-twentieth century, literary criticism was used to refer to attempts to explicate a biblical author's intention and achievements through analysis of the text's rhetorical elements and literary structures. In contemporary usage, literary criticism

denotes an approach to scripture that is often historical in interest and method (R K Soulen and R N Soulen 2001:105).

The category of commentaries under literary criticism are text-centred; they are not interested in either the world of the author behind the text, which is historical in nature, nor in the world of the reader, which is theological and/ or in front of the text. Attention here is drawn only to the artistry aspect of the text dealing with analysis of text's final form. This approach holds that the meaning of a text is located in the literary conventions and not in the intention of the author (Tate 1991: xix). The meaning of a text will not become clear without knowledge of the world behind the text, which asks questions of authorship, setting, recipients, and time of composition, place, and circumstances surrounding a particular text. These questions help to throw more light on texts thus influencing interpretation of Biblical texts and book of Exodus in particular. However, the literary-critical approach has to work in tandem with both the historical and theological critical approach to come up with a meaningful interpretation of Exodus for Africa.



The third category of commentaries to be considered represents those of the theological-critical approach or interpretation which is a reader-centred approach. Under this method, the reader brings to the text a vast world of experience, presuppositions, methodologies, interests, and competence (Tate 1991: xix). Meaning under this approach is produced through the interaction of the reader with the text. The text is re-contextualised through the multi-coloured lenses of the reader. This means that the reader can invent meaning as he/she collaborates with the text rather than the intention of the author (Mc Knight 1985:178). Commentaries under the theological critical approach include those of Ashby (1998), Pixley (1987) and Durham (1987). Theological interpretation seeks to advance knowledge of God and communion with God both in the interpreter and in the wider community of interpretation. Theological interpretation, like other interpretive approaches, is characterised by distinctive presuppositions and aims. Its distinguishing presupposition in the Jewish and Christian tradition is that the Bible is a sacred scripture with its origin, subject matter and purpose in God. It also holds that the Bible is both a source and a norm for the community's life and knowledge of God. Theological interpretation in modern times is tied up with the emergence of historical criticism and the related methods that constitute modern Biblical

criticism. That is to say, historical criticism presupposes a kind of theological interpretative interest in the literal sense of scripture (R N Soulen & R K Soulen 2001:192-193).

Why then is Ashby's commentary seen to be the only one relevant for Africa when he shares similar ideas in his work with others in the theological-critical approach? The answer is he presents his work in the context of Africa bearing in mind their sufferings and/or circumstances in which case they see God acting in their favour. His commentary is the appropriate one for African cultural hermeneutics. The commentary represents an approach to biblical interpretation that makes the African social cultural context the subject of interpretation. He addresses a particular context, which is liberation at a time that it was needed so as to make the Exodus real and meaningful in the lives of the suffering African (Adamo 2005:8-10). According to Adamo (2005:10-11), Ashby has met most of the conditions necessary for a successful African hermeneutics.⁵ This however does not mean that the rest of the commentaries re-reviewed in this work have nothing to offer to African readers; they are useful but not as relevant as that of Ashby which is focused on Africa and is written in the context and true witness of Africa's life.

Mosala (1989:16-17), on this issue of relevant commentaries for Africa, argues that only those commentaries that develop their hermeneutics in consideration to the cultural, historical and social contexts of Black Africa are relevant for Africa. Tate (1991: xix), however, looking at the variations of the three approaches on the interpretation of Exodus portrayed in the commentaries re-reviewed above proposes an integration of the three approaches to arrive at a meaningful interpretation. According to Tate (1991: xix), the meaning results from a conversation between the world of the text and the world of the reader, informed by the world of the author. Interpretation, according to Tate (1991: xix), will be rendered useless when any world is given pre-eminence at the expense of neglecting the other two worlds. Interplay

⁵ In order to do African cultural hermeneutics successfully, interpreters/exegetes must observed the following conditions (Adamo 2005:10-11).

- a. The interpreter must be an insider. That is to say, he/she must either be an African or live and experience all aspects of African life in Africa.
- b. The interpreter has to be knowledgeable of the biblical contents, believing its stories and events as a life of faith.
- c. The interpreter of African cultural hermeneutics should be one who understands African indigenous culture, which is very important in understanding the biblical cultures.
- d. The interpreter of African hermeneutics should have faith in the living and powerful God.
- e. Ability to read and memorise the words of the Bible is also important.

between the world of author, world of text, and world of reader must be reached before the meaning of a text in any interpretation can be reached.

Longman III (1987:18) argues that the literary schools of thought exist differently; they link to one another at the centre where the text lies. He says a literary text in this case may be seen as a message addressed by an author to a reader. The communication itself takes place in a certain social and temporal context, which may be called the universe. This means the author-centred approach, the text-centred and the reader-centred approach must work in harmony with one another before a meaning of a text will be achieved.

I agree with Adamo and Mosala who emphasise African cultural hermeneutics with particularity to the Black or third world continents, and with Tate and Longman who call for an integrative interpretation. Based on these views, we can conclude by saying that all the commentaries above apart from Ashby are not directly focused on Africa and its context thus they may be termed as not being appropriate in Africa based on the previously stated fact above.

5.3. Relevant exegetical approach on Exodus for Africa

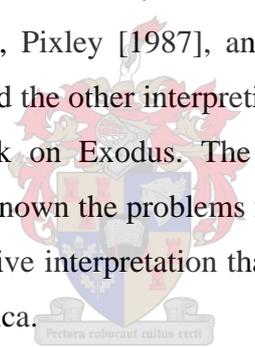
This section presumes its discussion from the previously concluded subsection on the relevant modern commentaries on Exodus for Africa. In this section however, emphasis will be on the relevant exegetical approach on Exodus for Africa. In our previous discussion above, it has been concluded that modern commentaries on Exodus are not relevant for Africa except the one written by Ashby. Commentaries relevant for Africa must be inter-relational in character, depending on each other for the generation of meaning of biblical texts.

Previous studies on modern commentaries on Exodus relevant for Africa brought to light three different but inter-related exegetical approaches to the book of Exodus in Africa. They include the historical-critical approach of Noth (1962), Childs (1977), Fretheim (1990), Sarna (1991), and Propp (1990). The commentators of these commentaries pay more attention to the tradition history of the source and little emphasis is placed on literary and theological-critical approaches. Such commentators in their commentaries have done a thorough treatment of the historical interpretation of Exodus, but are not relevant for Africa since their

exegeses are one-sided and ignore the text and the reader-response approaches that would engage African readers with the book of Exodus.

The next exegetical approach is the literary-critical approach, which offers an interpretation and/or exegesis that is text-centred and pays less attention to both historical-critical and theological-critical approaches/ or interpretations. Examples include Houtman (1993), Brueggemann (1994) and Janzen (1997). The exegetical character of the exegetes here, unlike those of the historical-criticism, is biased too because they choose only one exegetical approach that is text-centred, but ignore the historical approach that has information about the composition of the text. The reader-response or theological exegesis that would have liaised with the historical to produce a meaningful interpretation relevant in the African context is also ignored, thus making the interpretation not relevant for Africa.

Theological-critical exegetes, on the other hand, centre on the world in front which is reader-centred approach of (Ashby [1998], Pixley [1987], and Durham [1987]). These exegetes, particularly Ashby, have incorporated the other interpretive elements of historical and literary criticism into their exegetical work on Exodus. The commentators have gone into the suffering world of Africa and have known the problems faced by the underdeveloped African continent before offering an interactive interpretation that is relevant for Africa, for example Ashby whose paradigm is South Africa.



Africa in this context refers to the Old Testament reference to Cush, which has to do with the Black people of the third world countries and not just the global Africa. Exegesis, on the other hand, in its broadest sense refers to the careful methodologically self-aware study of a text undertaken in order to produce an accurate and useful interpretation thereof. The term exegesis in a narrow sense denote, the effort to establish the philological and historical sense of a biblical text (what it meant) in contrast to its applicative sense (what it means). The task of exegesis involves examining a passage as carefully as possible from as many angles as possible, with the result that a sharp distinction between exegesis and exposition can be maintained only with a certain degree of artificiality (R N Soulen and R K Soulen, 2001:57). Mosala (1989:16-17) offers the suggestion that the relevant exegesis based upon the relevant commentary for Africa should be that which is both culturally and historically oriented to the

Black context so as to aid them to read the Bible through a history of their past experiences. Mosala has developed a distinctive biblical hermeneutics of liberation for Black people. This kind of theology, he says, will become an effective weapon of struggle for Black liberation. Mosala (1989: 16-17) has included cultural, racial, and gender relationships as part of the material relationship that the historical materialist method undertakes to analyse.

The exegetical starting point of Black Theology according to Mosala (1989: 16:17) is made manifest in the notion that the Bible is the revealed word of God. The task of the Black theologian, as Mosala (1989: 16-17) argues, is to reveal God's words to those who are oppressed and humiliated in this world. The word of God constitutes the main pole of the biblical hermeneutics of Black theology, while Black experiences constitute the other. Black experiences of oppression and exploitation provide the epistemological lens through which the God of the Bible is or can be perceived as the God of liberation.

The relevant base for Black theology is in the historical, cultural and ideological struggles of the Black people. The struggles of Black Africans at various levels of history should be taken as an interpretive means/or approach. The nature of these struggles has to be probed behind and beneath the text, in passages, and in the lines, and the vocabulary of the text. It is made possible through reading where readers engaged the text by reading it and the struggle that the completed text represents. This means that Mosala (1989:16-17) has considered the historical-critical, text-criticism or literary-criticism, and Theological approach to function together to produce meaning for suffering Africans in times of oppression and marginalisation. The people of Africa will then discover the answer in the biblical text if such a text is understood within the framework of their history and culture.

Owing to the diverse nature of Africa, ethically, culturally, economically, religiously, historical and politically, the best exegesis relevant in Africa is that which is contextual in nature. That is an all-embracing approach that will consider all the diversities experienced in Africa (Ukpong 2002:34-36). The best exegetical approach relevant in Africa should be one which is conscious of accountability and responsibility challenges. These challenges can be met when we bear in mind that our lives as readers and interpreters of the Bible and the lives of those people listening to our interpretation all depend on the Bible. This, when considered in interpretation, will help interpreters to examine the ideology, identity and social self-

constructions that we (interpreters) bring into our readings of the Bible and Exodus in particular (Ukpong 2002:42-45).

Interpreters of the Bible should note also that they are accountable to the basic human and biblical principles of love and justice in their reading and interpretation of the Bible. Therefore, they should never forget that they are accountable to the community of God's people that constitute the church, people whose daily lives are shaped by reading the Bible. The experiences of the ordinary people today that share similar existential conditions and experiences of those reflected in the Bible must be considered in biblical interpretation in Africa. Beginning from the previous knowledge of African readers which is like a first text full of known experiences will enhance more relevance and appropriateness of interpretation and approaches in Africa. (Ukpong 2002: 42-45).

Patte (1995:1-7), contributing on this issue of accountability and responsibility, says that critical exegetes must assume responsibility for the effect of their work upon people, especially negative effects. To assume this responsibility in our exegesis, we must acknowledge that we fail to be ethically responsible so long as we practice critical biblical exegesis in a traditional manner despite our good intentions. By critical interpretation, the author means an act that is intrinsically ethical because, from its starting point to its concluding point, it is structured by concern for others. Critical exegetes have to follow a scientific and methodological way of identifying a problem, analysing it, formulating a hypothesis of addressing it and proposing a solution for it. This will help interpreters to assume more responsibility for their interpretation of the Bible.

West (1991:87-110) in his *Biblical hermeneutics of Liberation* stresses the need to carry the ordinary reader of the Bible along in biblical interpretation. The ordinary reader in his context refers to untrained biblical readers, the illiterates, the poor and the marginalised people. He says the ordinary reader in Africa can understand the Bible better through their own experiences (1991:87-110; 1992:35-49; 1999a:64-65). West further argues that, owing to the unstable nature of the ordinary reader based on his/her tropical situation commonly found among Black people in Africa, the best method of biblical interpretation for such an ordinary reader should be the behind the text reading of scripture, which is a historical or author-centred in approach. The behind the text method, according to West (1999a:64-65), has to do

with both the historical and sociological reading of the Bible, which helps to recover the unstable memories of the ordinary reader of the Bible. West has argued consistently for an equal place to be given to literary modes of reading, a world of text or text-centred approach, which he says are more egalitarian and empowering than the socio-historical approaches, especially when reading with the ordinary reader of the Bible (West 2004:128). He emphasises that he would not want to grant any privilege to historical modes of reading (West 2004:131). This shows that he has moved from his earlier position that stressed historical modes of reading the Bible.

Nevertheless, my discussion of West will focus on his initial view of the socio-historical interpretation of the Bible, which is built on the experiences of the ordinary readers of the book of Exodus and/or the Bible in general. The historical interpretation is relevant especially to ordinary readers of the Bible in Africa whose lives are full of stories and experiences of various kinds. When interpretation of the Bible or Exodus in Africa in particular is based on such experiences first, any other interpretive approach will build its ideals on it, thus producing a clearer meaning. In my opinion, both socio-historical and literary approaches should be used harmoniously, rather than counting one and leaving out the other, since the true meaning lies between the two approaches.

McKnight (1988:4-5) stated that the Bible grew out of the real experiences of real people and that the various parts of the Bible could be set in particular historical contexts as well. History, according to him, can be seen as the movement of the divine spirit itself and of events viewed in terms of universal historical progress. Historical criticism based on McKnight's view will enable a believing African critic to note the witness of the divine spirit in historical witness of the scripture. That is to say, what the ordinary reader has known in the past will serve as bedrock on which the new biblical readings and interpretation will be built.

Efird (1984:10-11) argues that a historical approach is the keystone of modern academic study of the Bible. The task of this approach is to discover as best one can answer to *who? what? where? when? why? to whom?* questions. The strength of this approach, according to him, rests in its emphasis on uncovering and discovering the original setting and meaning of these documents. The meaning of a text according to Efird (1984:10-11) can best be

understood when that text is presented in its own historical setting. He further says though modern academic communities who have become detached from the text and have failed to understand the biblical books as products for and of a faith community criticise the historical critical approach as been bankrupt, it remains the best method of biblical interpretation particularly for ordinary readers of the Bible (Efir1984:10-11).

Ukpong (1999:18) observes the role of socio-cultural values in biblical interpretation for the ordinary readers in Africa by saying that culture plays an important role in the understanding of the Bible, particularly for ordinary readers. He therefore calls for enculturation hermeneutics as a method of biblical interpretation for any community of ordinary people. He defines enculturation hermeneutics as a contextual hermeneutics methodology that seek to make any community of ordinary people and their socio-cultural context the subject of interpretation of the Bible. This method has the task of appraising the cultural human dimensions of the Bible in respect to its attitude to and evaluation of other people and cultures.

According to Ukpong (1999:18), the Bible is not culturally and ideologically innocent as a text. It is the word of God in human language, culture, ideology, world-view, perspective, values and devalues all inter-twined with the word of God. The ordinary readers of the Bible when placed in the centre of biblical interpretation with due consideration to their worldview and or cultural values will understand it better. Applying this method may however require ethical reading, since consideration of other people and cultures is involved as a means of penetrating into biblical values of love, respect for others, justice, peace and unity. Larkin Jr. (1988:192-193), contributing to the same issue of the roles of culture in the interpretation of the Bible to the ordinary readers in Africa, says culture was ordained at creation by God with specific tasks.⁶

To disassociate an ordinary reader of the Bible from his/her cultural background information, which serves as a text and mirror to him/her in any Biblical interpretation, makes understanding complex for such a reader.

⁶ Like filling, subduing, ruling the earth (Gen. 1:28), working and taking care of God's physical creation (Gen. 2:15). There were also values and behaviour patterns such as obedience to God under threat of punishment (Gen. 2:16-17) and structures, including the family social order (Larkin Jr 1988:192-193).

Masenya (1999:238), on the other hand, argues that one's reading is shaped by his/her experience and that the experience of the reader will always play a role in a reader's encounter with the Bible. The authority and authenticity of the biblical contents are in the past experiences of his/her life and the apparent similarities of his/her origin to that of the Biblical Exodus. Placing the Bible for ordinary readers side by side with their past experiences that are social, cultural, religious and historical in nature will enable them to come up with a new meaning and understanding. Gitay (2005) also suggests that an inter-textual allusion has to be used in the interpretation of the Bible, particularly Exodus, for ordinary readers where the biblical events will find their similarities in the past experiences of the ordinary reader for a better understanding.

5.4 Conclusion

Having explored studies that deal with relevant commentaries and exegeses for Africa, one can conclude that an integrated exegetical approach to the book of Exodus is needed. This approach should bring historical, literary, and Theological critical approaches into a working relationship to produce a meaningful interpretation. This means that none of the exegetical approaches mentioned above can function independently. The historical-critical approach provides information about the dating, authorship, theological traditions (J E P D), time, events or circumstances surrounding a text and context of the first audience. The literary approach is concerned with literary-critical and form-critical, final form and semantic character that play an important role in understanding a biblical text. A theological approach, on the other hand, deals with theological topics prevalent during the production and the reception of the text. Literary and Theological approaches cannot function in any meaningful interpretation without being informed by the historical-critical approach. Based on the intertwined nature of these exegetical approaches, a co-operative interpretation of the book of Exodus is called for in Africa that is similar to a multi-dimensional approach based on literary, historical and theological questions posed to text and context.

Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusion

Stating the problem dealt with in this thesis, the following questions were asked:

- What trends are there in recent commentaries on Exodus?
- Are recent commentaries on Exodus relevant and appropriate in or for African contexts?

This thesis presumes that three basic trends can be distinguished in recent major commentaries on the Book of Exodus and that most of them are of indirect relevance for believing communities in Africa.

The following three trends can be discerned in modern commentaries on Exodus:

6.1. The historical-critical approach

This deals with the history surrounding a biblical text. The goals of this method are to:

- (i) Ascertain the text's meaning in its initial historical context(s).
- (ii.) Reconstruct the historical situation of the author(s) and recipients of the text.
- (iii.) Reconstruct the events described by the text.

Historical-critical approaches have over the centuries been refined into various partially overlapping sub-disciplines or methodologies, which include source-criticism, form criticism, redaction-criticism, and tradition-criticism. All these methodologies attempt to reach and describe the world behind the text (R N Soulen & R K Soulen 2001:79).

The question "who?", as used by the historical-critical approach above, refers to the author or compiler of Exodus, in which case Moses, based on the Jewish and Christian traditions, has been accorded the authorship (Noth 1962). The **J E P D**, source traditions found under the historical-critical approach are also of theological value. For example, **J** prefers to use Yahweh as the name of God (Ex. 3:1ff). The pre-Israelites in Genesis referred to him as **God our father**. They addressed God as **El** as they settled in Canaan and after the Canaanite settlement Yahweh was identified as God of the Exodus and tribal confederation (Dearman 1992). The **D**, source, on the one hand, deals with the Ten Commandments and the covenant code given to Israel at Sinai (Ex 20:1-17). The **P** source focuses on the holiness of God

symbolised by the tabernacle, which also signifies God's presence with his people (Ex 35-40).

The question "whom?" refers to the audience or recipients of the book of Exodus. In the case of Exodus, the ancient Israelites are believed to have been the first audience. It is possible that Exodus was written in different contexts, starting with initial oral transmissions and gradually becoming written texts before and during the Babylonian exile. "What?" refers to the type of text – for example: Exodus can be read as biography of Moses or as an etiological narrative that explains the origin of Israel as a nation. "When?" refers to the time of composition or dating of Exodus as a text. Fretheim (1990) has suggested the thirteenth century BC for the composition of Exodus. Other possible dates for the Exodus are considered, ranging from the fifteenth to the sixth century BC. This shows that consensus about the dating of Exodus as an event and as a book has not yet been reached.

Looking at all the useful information found under the historical-critical approach above, we can say that this approach is relevant in everyday interpretation and reading of the book of Exodus. The historical-critical commentaries of Noth (1962), Fretheim (1990), Sarna (1991), Childs (1997) and Propp (1999) are indirectly relevant in Africa, because they do not directly address issues of concern to Africa. I therefore prove the hypothesis to be partially right by generalising that the historical-critical approach has not yet produced commentaries on Exodus that are of direct relevance for Africa. It is relevant but in an indirect way(s) where the information provided about the Israelites in their suffering times can inform the reading and understanding of the suffering people in Africa. On the one hand, it would have been more relevant if it directly addressed the ongoing issues in Africa in a contextual way.

6.2 Literary- critical approach

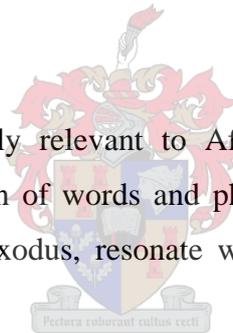
These categories of commentaries ask questions in connection with the type of text used in Exodus. Is it an etiological narrative text that deals with the story of a people or is it a legal text dealing with laws and commandments? Literary critical approaches deal with the interpretation of the final form of the text and the semantic and syntactical character of Exodus. This enables sensitivity for the unevenness and tensions in the book of Exodus and

explanation of the terms used in Exodus are taken care of by this method of interpretation (Houtman 1993:1).

The choice of words, repetitions, allusions and the use of text in its context, internal rhetorical workings of the text and the dramatic tensions that are to be resolved while reading and interpreting Exodus are emphasised as part of the literary critical approach (Janzen 1997).

A careful look at the characteristics of the literary critical approach reveals that it cannot function meaningfully in isolation of the historical-critical approach. Both the historical-critical approach and literary critical approach must function together to come up with a meaningful interpretation of Exodus. All the repetitions found in the book of Exodus can not be dealt with in isolation to the historical-critical approach, which has to supply information about why such sayings have repeated themselves. The background information found under historical criticism will then inform the interpretation of the literary workings of a text, thus both have to function together.

Literary commentaries are indirectly relevant to Africa. To mention one example: the rhetorical technique of the repetition of words and phrases, like the description of the ten plagues and of the tabernacle in Exodus, resonate with the role of repetition in the oral traditions of Africa.



6.3 Theological - critical approach

Commentaries considered here include that of Durham (1987), Pixley (1987), Brueggemann (1996) and Ashby (1998). Theological interpretation, like other interpretive approaches, is characterised by distinctive presuppositions and aims. Its distinguishing presupposition in the Jewish and Christian tradition is that the Bible is a sacred scripture with its origin, subject matter and purpose in God. Theological approaches based on the presupposition above hold that the Bible is both a source and a norm for the community's life and knowledge of God. This approach seeks to advance knowledge of God and communion with God, both in the individual interpreter and in the wider community of interpretation.

Theological interpretation in this modern time is tied up with the emergence of historical criticism and the related methods that constitute modern biblical criticism. That is to say, a

theological approach is made manifest through the historical criticism which provides the historical background information of the text that can be placed parallel with the reader's experiences, based on his/her own context for a meaningful interpretation (Soulén & Soulén 2001:192-193).

Theological approaches deal with the theological themes in Exodus linked with both historical criticism and literary criticism. The close relationship between literary, historical and theological methodologies is well illustrated in the course of the interpretation of Exodus. A theme such as the Passover (Ex 12: 1-28) provides a good example of how the integration of methodologies can enhance interpretation. The preparation and final celebration of the Passover is linked with the death of the firstborn of Egypt, which facilitates the liberation of God's chosen people from Egypt (Ex 12: 21-28; cf. 12:29-32).

This theological theme is indirectly useful to African readers of Exodus. In recent times most of the countries in Africa has to face both political and religious crises and these crises may stimulate them to search their lives individually and as a community. One may well ask: Where does the liberation of African people come from? Is it through the barrel of a gun or through alliances with superpowers that are primarily interested in the natural resources of the African continent and who care little about the well-being of Africans?

According to Brueggemann (1994:680), Exodus as a book has to be understood as a literary, pastoral, liturgical and theological response to an acute crisis. Although Exodus as a book is closely connected to the people of Israel, it has the potential to be relevant to many categories of people in Africa, in whatever context they may choose to read it. For example: Narratives concerning the origin of nations are found all over Africa and will assist the African reader to appropriate the Exodus story in a relevant way.

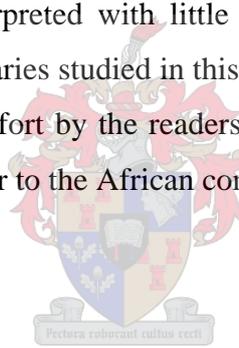
Commentaries based on a theological approach too are not directly written in the context of Africa as the first audience, except the one by Ashby which focused on the oppression in South Africa before 1994. Indirectly, the experiences gathered from the rest of the commentaries under this subheading have jointly informed a meaningful reading of the book of Exodus in Africa in our context. In this case, the examples of other suffering people

mentioned in the Bible then encourage us to come to God our liberator who has in the past been the God of the oppressed.

6.4 Appropriate modern commentaries on Exodus in Africa

The thesis concludes that the modern commentaries on Exodus are predominantly written for non-African contexts (except the one written by Ashby). Africa has many stories of origin, migration, poverty, land crises, political and religious crises, oppressions of various kinds ranging from sex, race and class and wars. The above commentaries would have been more appropriate in Africa if they had addressed the important issues relevant in different African contexts.

The word “appropriateness” as used in this thesis refers to something that is suitable, acceptable or correct for the particular circumstances (Hornby 2000:47). Commentaries that are relevant to Africa will be interpreted with little or no effort due to their contextual appropriateness. Since the commentaries studied in this thesis are not presented in the context of Africa, they require maximum effort by the readers and interpreters in order to draw the message of such commentaries closer to the African context.



6.5 Conclusion

The conclusion of the thesis is at least three different trends (historical-critical, literary critical and theological interpretation) may be found in recent commentaries on Exodus in Africa.

On the issue of relevance and appropriateness, it is also concluded that most major modern commentaries on Exodus discussed in this thesis are of indirect relevance to Africa. The responsibility for modern commentaries to be indirectly relevant and appropriate to Africa does not rest on the commentators only but some effort on the part of the readers and interpreters in Africa is also required. This effort is related to the expectations such readers and interpreters have about the book of Exodus, that is how they read, interpret, and understand Exodus in their own context. African readers and interpreters of Exodus will only perceive the relevance and appropriateness of the major modern commentaries in their

context if they are able to make imaginative comparisons between their contexts and the text of Exodus.

Direct relevance is the responsibility of the commentator and not that of the reader or interpreter. The commentator who has first-hand knowledge about African contexts will be in a position to write a commentary that is relevant in terms of international scholarship and appropriate with regards to being written in the context of Africa where African readers and interpreters would embrace it as a relevant document to them. It is clear that the commentaries under discussion are not appropriate in Africa. The exception is the commentary by Ashby that directly deals with issues of oppression, poverty, religious and political crises found in Southern Africa in particular and in Africa in general. Further research on the same subject matter may probably come up with a contextual approach that is more suitable in Africa and will make sense to readers living in different African contexts.

It is suggested that the three trends identified in modern commentaries on Exodus, must all be kept in mind when embarking on a meaningful interpretation of Exodus in Africa. Although we are still a long way from developing appropriate commentaries on Exodus for Africa, we can attempt to relate our frame of reference with the existing problems on the African continent. Moreover, appropriateness can also be achieved by relating aspects of African culture with similar events and concepts prevalent in the Book of Exodus. To read with Africans will also facilitate becoming more appropriate for Africa!

A final word has to be said about the close link between a commentary and the Bible translation it is based upon. The initial definition of relevance and appropriateness emphasized the importance of functional equivalence that enables minimum effort in the processing of texts. Future research can investigate how the recent trend towards functional equivalence in translation theory will stimulate functional equivalent Bible translations. This is the type of translation that might trigger more relevant and appropriate commentaries on Exodus that resonates with believing communities all over Africa.

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