THE THEOLOGY OF EXODUS

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The book of Exodus stands at the heart (though not the midpoint) of the Pentateuch or Torah. As such it encapsulates the problem of the theology of the Pentateuch as a whole. Two widespread ways of defining the theological character of the Pentateuch were compared by James Barr in an essay published in 1973.[1] There, as part of a wider investigation of salvation in the Old Testament, he finds fault with the idea that the Pentateuch presents a religion of salvation and prefers apparently to say that it presents a religion of law.[2] It is ironic that Barr should have reached this conclusion just at the time when liberation theology was elevating the Exodus paradigm into a central pillar of its thought and doing so on the basis of a serious engagement with recent Old Testament scholarship.[3] Barr's remarks are based largely on the absence of 'salvation' vocabulary from the Pentateuch (most of the examples that he does give of such vocabulary—and some that he discounts or does not mention—come, significantly, from Exodus) and on the fact that the 'saving' events of the Pentateuch do not involve any change in the relationship between those affected by them and God.

There is perhaps rather more to be said than Barr allows for seeing the theology of the Pentateuch as a theology of salvation. It is not altogether clear why the general notion of salvation should have to include a 'change in relationship' with God (such an idea looks like an import

1. 'An Aspect of Salvation in the Old Testament', in E.J. Sharpe and J.R. Hinnells (eds.), *Man and his Salvation: Studies in Memory of S.G.F. Brandon* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), pp. 39-52; see especially pp. 41-46.

2. Barr, 'An Aspect', pp. 45-46.

3. Cf. G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (ET; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), pp. 155-59; J.S. Croatto, *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom* (ET; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981). The first edition of Croatto's study was published in the early 1970s.

from Christian theologies of salvation) and it is questionable whether the Hebrew words that belong to the semantic field of 'salvation' regularly carry this implication. Moreover, in relation to Barr's first argument, it is surprising to find the author of *The Semantics of Biblical Language* attaching so much significance to lexical statistics in a discussion of biblical theology. The distribution of 'salvation' words in the Old Testament (with, as Barr notes, a heavy concentration in the Psalms and the Latter Prophets) is a separate question (and an interesting one) from the identification of the leading theological themes of different 'blocks' of Old Testament literature.

At all events, a good case can be made for both alternatives, a religion (or theology) of salvation or law, in relation to the book of Exodus in particular, depending on whether more emphasis is placed on the Exodus narrative itself in chs. 1–15 or on the Sinai narrative from ch. 19 (18?) onwards. It might seem that Christians have tended more towards the former alternative, perhaps because of the typological understanding of Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea, for example, as foreshadowings of aspects of salvation in Christian theology, whereas Jews have given greater weight to the legal texts, as seen in the amount of legal commentary on them. But, as often, such a simplified view would be misleading, on both sides: for within the Christian church and Western culture more generally the best known and most widely displayed passage of Exodus is surely the Decalogue in 20.1-17, while the annual celebration of Passover in the Jewish home brings to mind the story of the Exodus as one of past, present and future salvation. One long-favoured way of bringing the two approaches together, both in the Pentateuch as a whole and in the book of Exodus, is the notion of covenant, with its twin foci of election and law, and Exodus 24 and 34 do indeed contain accounts of the making (or remaking) of a covenant.[4]

Each of the approaches so far mentioned, however, is in danger of passing by a major theological theme of the book of Exodus, which has a strong claim to be its central theological theme, not least because it is an important component of each of the themes of salvation, covenant and law and so can serve to link them together. To discuss it here is unusually appropriate, since it is a topic which was treated in some of

4. For a review see E.W. Nicholson, *God and his People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

Ronald Clements's earliest work[5] and, although it is not one which I have discussed in any detail before, it has been explored further in various ways by some of my own doctoral students,[6] like (till now) an inherited characteristic which 'jumps a generation'. It is a pleasure to be able to dedicate this essay to the honour of one who has over the nearly 30 years since he took me on as a research student been a stimulating and innovative teacher, and later a dear colleague and friend.

In what follows I shall in the first place be concerned with the book of Exodus 'as it stands'. I remain fully convinced of the importance and value of the various kinds of historical criticism,[7] but I also recognize the usefulness of attempting a more synthetic account of Old Testament books, particularly at the theological level, and there can be value in doing this before (or as if before) the historical questions are raised. The wide-angle lens is a useful part of the photographer's equipment as well as the telephoto. A good example of how such study can actually contribute to historical criticism is in E. Blum's attempt to isolate the main contours of the Exodus narrative, which leads him on to identify a major 'composition-layer' which is the subject of his subsequent analytical studies.[8] Similarly, some of those who have been involved in recent research on the unity of the book of Isaiah have left questions of dating and authorship on one side and looked for connecting links in the text as it stands, so as to be able to trace the dominant theological strands of the book as a whole and say something about the distinctive way(s) in which they are handled there. Their findings will be useful to those who tackle the historical questions in the future. There is a very practical

5. See *God and Temple: The Idea of the Divine Presence in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) and, for its relevance to Exodus, *Exodus* (Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), especially pp. 210-17, 239-43.

6. See the references in subsequent footnotes to the work of R.W.L. Moberly, P.P. Jenson and D.L. Adams.

7. See my essays 'The Wilderness Itineraries and the Composition of the Pentateuch', *VT* 33 (1983), pp. 1-13; 'The Composition of the Book of Exodus: Reflections on the Theses of E. Blum', in M. Fox (ed.), *Texts, Temples and Tradition: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 71-85; 'KD in Exodus: An Assessment of E. Blum's Proposal', in M. Vervenne and J. Lust (eds.), *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Literature: C. Brekelmans Festschrift* (BETL, 133; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), pp. 407-20.

8. E. Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW, 189; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1990), pp. 9-17, 45-72.

reason for approaching Exodus in such a way at the present time. Until fairly recently, most scholars accepted the source-analysis of Exodus (and the rest of the Pentateuch) into the four independent documents identified in the second half of the nineteenth century as having originated in the order J, E, D and P.[9]Over the past 25 years a different view of the composition of the Pentateuch has been developing, according to which early accounts covering only a part of the story of Israel's origins were edited into a larger whole and reinterpreted by two or more authors or redactors, one closely related in outlook to Deuteronomy and one with a major interest in the origin of priesthood and sacrifice. The scholarly world is still divided over the validity of such ideas and I myself, while I believe that they are flawed at some points, do not feel able to discount them altogether at present. An approach which tries to focus on the overall shape of the book of Exodus and its theology therefore has a certain pragmatic attraction at the moment. And, as Blum's example shows, it may even be that such an approach will provide useful material for a future evaluation of the historical issues.

I propose, again for pragmatic reasons, to begin my investigation of the theology of Exodus at the end of the book, in ch. 40. Endings can be as enlightening as beginnings for discerning the meaning of a text, and in some sense at least Exodus 40 constitutes an ending, exhibits closure (cf. vv. 33-35), even though in other ways it looks forward to a continuing narrative (cf. vv. 36-38), an important point to which I shall need to return later. Most of this chapter is about the erection of 'the tabernacle of the tent of meeting' (v. 2) and the installation of its furnishings within and without. It brings to an end the long section of the book beginning in ch. 25 which first prescribes how the tabernacle is to be built and then, after the interruption of chs. 32–34 (of which more later), describes how it was built, in practically the same words. The tabernacle, and more precisely the altar of burnt offering outside it, was of course a place of sacrificial *worship*, the regulations for which fill much of the following book of Leviticus. But it was more than this, as several considerations indicate. First, the Hebrew word for 'tabernacle' is *miškān*, which properly means 'dwelling-place' (lest I be accused of 'etymologizing' I refer, for example, to the occurrences in Num. 16.24-27), and Exod. 25.8 makes it clear at the outset that it is to be a 'dwelling-place' for Yahweh himself: 'Have them make me a sanctuary,

9. This analysis is taken for granted in Clements, *Exodus*, pp. 2-5.

so that I may dwell among them' (*wᵉšākantî bᵉtôkām*). This is language that is also used of Yahweh's 'dwelling' in the temple in Jerusalem (Isa. 8.18; Ps. 135.21). The *miškān* is also described repeatedly as the *'ōhel mô'ēd*, now generally and probably rightly rendered in English as 'the tent of meeting', that is, the place where Yahweh will 'meet' with his people Israel: compare 25.22, 'There I will meet with you' (*wᵉnô 'adtî lᵉkā šām*, the niphal of *yā'ad*), referring specifically to the ark in the 'most holy place'.[10] At the end of ch. 40, when all is complete, we are told that 'the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle' (vv. 34-35): 'This represents God's very presence dwelling with Israel in accordance with the promise given in 25:22; 29:45-6'.[11] The 'glory', that is, was the *visible manifestation* of the divine presence, not a substitute for it.[12] So the tabernacle is a place of divine *presence* and divine *encounter*. No doubt precisely because of this it is also a *holy place*: this is clearly implied in the term 'sanctuary' (*miqdāš*) in 25.8, but it is repeatedly underlined by countless occurrences of the derivatives of the root *q-d-š* throughout chs. 25–40: over eighty in all, with the highest concentration being in chs. 28–30. P.P. Jenson entitled his work on the theology of the Priestly Document *Graded Holiness*, to give expression to the distinctions made in the text between different degrees of holiness in various dimensions of the ritual system.[13] One of these dimensions, perhaps the easiest to relate to the concept of grading, is

10. Also 29.42-43; 30.6, 36. The Septuagint (*tou marturiou*) and Vulgate (*testimonii*), however, saw the tablets of the law (Heb. *'ēdût*, e.g. in 25.16, which is derived by these translators [and many others, including BDB] from *'ûd* and not *yā'ad*) as the basis of the designation. Some passages later in the Pentateuch where *'ōhel* or *miškān* is qualified by *'ēdût* (e.g. Exod. 38.21; Num. 9.15) may have contributed to the confusion. Clements interestingly commented on the imprecise rendering of *'ōhel mô'ēd* by the NEB as 'the Tent of the Presence': 'The N.E.B. footnote follows earlier versions in reading "Tent of Meeting". The Hebrew "Tent of *mo'ed*" may simply mean "Festival Tent", since *mo'ed* is regularly used for "season" and the religious festivals which accompanied them (cf. Gen. 1.14)' (*Exodus*, p. 176).

11. Clements, *Exodus*, p. 242.

12. It is in line with this conception that the Septuagint renders *wᵉšākantî bᵉtôkām* in 25.8 by *kai ophthēsomai en humin*, a point brought to my attention by C.T.R. Hayward in a paper read to the Society for Old Testament Study in January 1998.

13. P.P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup, 106; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

the spatial dimension, that is, the degree of holiness of place increased as one moved (if permitted!) from the outside to the inside. Jenson points out that the plan of the tabernacle distinguished a series of zones, separated by clear physical boundaries and variations in the materials used in their construction. The camp of the Israelites (mentioned in the tabernacle chapters only in 29.14 and 36.6) is not holy at all, but 'clean'; the court surrounding the tabernacle has a certain degree of holiness, but it is the tent itself which is properly called 'the holy place' (*haqqōdeš*) and the innermost chamber behind the veil is the holiest place of all (*qōdeš haqqᵒdāšîm*).

That it is the related ideas of worship, divine presence, encounter with God and holiness which are central to the tabernacle chapters in Exodus can scarcely be doubted. Two further points emerge especially strongly from ch. 40. The first is that the tabernacle is built according to the precise command of God through Moses (v. 19 and repeatedly; summarized in v. 16); the second is that the tabernacle is designed to be a movable shrine, displaying God's presence visibly to the Israelites throughout their journeyings through the wilderness (vv. 36-38): so it looks to the future. In fact it is generally agreed that it does so in a much stronger sense, being a kind of prototype of the Temple in Jerusalem itself.

The points that I have made so far are mostly not new, and their importance lies rather in the fact that they tend to be ignored when the theology of the book of Exodus is being studied, perhaps partly because the tabernacle chapters belong to what is generally thought to be the latest of the Pentateuchal sources, but also because of the frequent tendency to sideline the theology of the cult in accounts of Old Testament theology. I want now to try to justify the claim that these linked themes of worship, divine presence, encounter with God and holiness (especially the holy place) are also central to the theology of most of the remainder of Exodus.[14] First, I propose to look at chs. 32–34, whose

14. A similar case, with an important distinction between the 'accompanying' and the 'abiding' presence of God, has recently been argued by D.L. Adams for Gen. 12–50 in his thesis '*Deus Praesens*: The Present God in the Patriarchal Narratives' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1996). The arguments of those, such as S. Mowinckel, J. Pedersen and W. Beyerlin, who claimed that the traditions that lie behind narrative sections of Exodus originated or were transmitted in a cultic *Sitz im Leben* could in some cases serve to reinforce the position being argued for here, but such investigations into the earlier history of the

setting in the midst of the tabernacle chapters suggests that the redactor responsible may have been sensitive to some theological relationship between them and their context.[15] My attention was drawn to the key thematic role of worship in these chapters by R.W.L. Moberly's doctoral work which was subsequently published as a book.[16] Not that he himself makes very much of this theme: indeed the drift of his argument in one chapter (Chapter 3, 'Exodus 32–34 as a Cult Legend') is very much to distance this section of Exodus from a cultic *Sitz im Leben*. But it was he who drew my attention to these chapters and to the possibility of reading them as a coherent whole, and when one does that it seems to me that a *theological* concern with worship (whatever the *Sitz* [or *Sitze*] *im Leben* behind the text may have been) is high on the agenda of whoever compiled this variegated material together into its present form. After all, the narrative begins by identifying alien worship, the worship of the golden calf, as the sin which threatens to bring to an end Israel's relationship to Yahweh; and one way in which this sin is dealt with is by the action of the Levites, the priestly tribe, who are said, by this display of loyalty to Yahweh, to have 'ordained themselves for the service of the Lord' (32.29: a combination of two technical priestly formulae). But these are only the first of a succession of passages in Exod. 32–34 which have a relationship to worship and associated themes. Thus 33.7-11 speaks of another 'Tent of Meeting' (*'ōhel mô'ēd*) where Moses would meet with God and hear his voice, and 34.29-35 is a rather similar passage focussing on Moses' veil. It begins by referring to a specific encounter between Moses and God on Mt Sinai (v. 29), but it concludes with references to 'going in' and 'coming out' which imply something like a tent again, and the iterative imperfects and consecutive perfects in vv. 34-35 also recall 33.7-11. The theme of Yahweh's 'accompanying' presence is taken up in 33.12-23 (cf. also 32.34; 33.3, 5), but in terms of Yahweh's *pānîm*, variously translated as 'presence' (vv. 14-15) and 'face' (vv. 20, 23). The normal

traditions lie for the most part outside the scope of the present study. For a partial exception to this limitation, see the remarks on Exod. 15.1-21 below.

15. A specific point of contact is of course 33.7-11, which uses the very term *'ōhel mô'ēd*, though without any direct indication that anything as elaborate as the Tabernacle is in mind; and the explanation of its origin and its location in v. 7, among other things, clearly distinguish it from the Tabernacle.

16. R.W.L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34* (JSOTSup, 22; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983).

way in Israelite thinking to find the *panîm* of Yahweh and even to 'see' it (something from which Moses is here debarred) was to visit a temple or shrine (e.g. Deut. 31.11; Pss. 24.6; 27.8; 42.3; Isa. 1.12).[17] The implication is that the real theme of the dialogue is the transfer of Yahweh's cultic presence from Sinai to the land to which Israel was going, that is, the land of Canaan (cf. 33.1-3, which are linked with vv. 12 and 15 by the verb *'ālāh*).[18] In ch. 34 the proclamation of Yahweh's attributes (vv. 6-7), which leads to Moses' response of worship (v. 8), has often been noticed to have close parallels in the psalms (e.g. Ps. 86.15). Finally, when the covenant is renewed in 34.10-28, it is with Israel specifically as a worshipping community: the conditions of the covenant are almost entirely of a cultic character, which led an earlier generation of scholars to see here a 'cultic decalogue' parallel to the 'ethical decalogue' (but see below) of ch. 20. In view of all this it seems justified to see Exodus 32–34 both as a warning against false (idolatrous) worship and as a charter for true worship in the land of Canaan, providing it with a priesthood (ch. 32), a validation (ch. 33), and a pattern (ch. 34).

One step further back in the narrative, in the main Sinai-narrative of chs. 19–24, it is again not difficult to find pointers to the importance of the worship theme. The holiness of Mt Sinai as the place of God's appearance is strongly emphasized and protected by the consecration of the people (19.10, 14, 22) and the mountain itself (19.23). The Decalogue in ch. 20 begins with commandments about worship and the Book of the Covenant both begins and ends likewise (20.23-26 on images and altars; 23.12-19 on festivals, closely parallel to 34.17 and 34.18-26 respectively, though the order in the latter passage is different). In ch. 24 a group of the leaders of Israel are invited to worship (*hištaḥ^{a}wāh*) on the mountain (v. 1) and vv. 9-11 briefly describe this as including 'seeing the God of Israel'. In between the covenant is sealed, not just by words but by sacrifices and blood rites (vv. 3-8).

17. In Deut. 31.11; Ps. 42.3; Isa. 1.12 the Masoretic Text has the niphal of *rā'āh* with *pānîm*, implying the translation 'appear before'. The use of the passive of *horaō* in the Septuagint at these points shows that this is an ancient reading tradition. But the passive interpretation is clearly contrary to the syntagmatic structures in these passages and today the verbs are generally thought to have been originally in the qal, for which a verbatim translation would be 'see the face'.

18. Moberly several times refers to the cultic background of the language of vv. 12-23: *At the Mountain*, pp. 68, 74, 81.

Even in the Exodus narrative itself (chs. 3–15) the worship theme is prominent. Moses' call by God in chs. 3–4 takes place at the mountain of God, which is 'holy ground' (3.5) and the sign promised by God to him is that 'you shall worship God on this mountain' (v. 12).[19] This is taken up in the stratagem (or is it more than that?) which is meant to induce Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt: 'Let us now go a three days' journey into the wilderness, so that we may *sacrifice* to the Lord our God' (3.18: and repeatedly in the ensuing narrative, 5.3, 8, 17; 8.4, 21-25; 10.25). As a result Pharaoh's refusal is presented as opposition to the worship of Yahweh, and when he finally relents he uses language which, while ambiguous, probably has its primary reference to the worship of Yahweh: *ûl^{e}kû 'ib^{e}dû et yhwh k^{e}dabber^{e}kem* (12.31). The triumph is not simply one of liberation from bondage, but freedom of worship. Further, as the very moment of departure from Egypt is reached, the narrative is delayed by a long series of instructions about the celebration of Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread and the dedication of the firstborn to God. All these observances are linked to adjacent aspects of the Exodus narrative, and their declared purpose is to provide a means for the people of Yahweh to remember their great deliverance from Egypt: Exodus faith is to find its expression in ritual and worship. A little further on the same idea is expressed in another way, in the hymn (or rather, hymns) contained in ch. 15: the Song of Moses (vv. 1-18), and the Song of Miriam (v. 21) which corresponds closely to the first verse of the former. These hymns celebrate the specific episode of the deliverance at the (Red) Sea described in narrative form in ch. 14, but that represents the final decisive act of the liberation from Egypt: 'The Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again' (14.13). The Song of Miriam is limited in its scope to this:

> Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
> horse and rider he has thrown into the sea!

The Song of Moses is much more complex. After the introductory v. 1, which summarizes the first part of the poem as far as v. 12, there are two verses of general praise, then a poetic narrative of the defeat of the

19. The importance of the revelation of the divine name itself for Israel's worship should also not be overlooked, as it had a focal role in both praise and lament. The use of *zēker* in parallel to *šēm* in v. 15 may strengthen the likelihood that worship is specifically in mind, in view of the use of *hizkîr* in liturgical contexts, several times with *šēm* as its object (Isa. 26.13; 48.1; 62.6; Ps. 20.8).

Egyptians at the sea, which provides the expected specific reason for praise (vv. 4-10), and then an exclamation about the incomparability of Yahweh backed up by a further brief reference to the deliverance (vv. 11-12). Then the poetic narrative continues on to new ground: the main points are the following. First, 'You [i.e. Yahweh] guided them by your strength to your holy abode (*nᵉwēh qodšekā*)' (v. 13)—language of holiness and divine dwelling again. Then come three verses describing the fear of the inhabitants of Canaan and Transjordan at the arrival of the Israelites—most obviously a reference to the later part of the wilderness journey and the conquest/settlement of Canaan. The natural conclusion to draw from these verses (and even more from v. 17—see below) is that this hymn was not composed or sung by Moses just after the deliverance at the sea, but originated at a time after the Israelites had entered the land of Canaan, perhaps a considerable time afterwards. Some pre-critical commentators, finding such an idea unthinkable, translated some or all of vv. 13-17 in the future tense, presumably regarding them as a prophecy.[20] Linguistically this is not a serious possibility. But in a way those commentators were right, because we must assume that the redactor who placed the poem here did so with an awareness of its contents, and presumably he wished to anticipate at this point a later part of the whole story of Israel's beginnings which he believed to be important for the full understanding and celebration of the Exodus events. The settlement of Canaan is in view throughout the earlier part of the book of Exodus (and already of course in Gen. 12–50) as the ultimate destination of the people (3.8, 17; 6.4, 8; 12.25; 13.5, 11), and other references to it are to follow (16.35; 20.12; 23.10, 20, 23-33; 32.13, 34; 33.1-3; 34.11-16, 24). In the light of this a closer look at vv. 17-18 is needed. The narrative continues, first, to include the entry into the land of Canaan and the settlement, specifically on 'the mountain of your own [sc. Yahweh's] possession' (*bᵉhar naḥᵃlātᵉkā*),[21]

20. Not all, however, took this view throughout the passage: the Septuagint and Vulgate both use past tenses in vv. 13-15. It seems to have been Calvin and the Geneva Bible which were responsible for introducing the consistently future interpretation of these verses, which is followed, for the most part, by the AV: see my paper 'Some Points of Interest in 16th-century Translations of Exodus 15', in W. Horbury (ed.), *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda* (Proceedings of the British Association of Jewish Studies, 1996 [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999], pp. 247-55).

21. The existence of a closely parallel Ugaritic phrase (*bġr nḥlty*), referring to

and then speaks of 'the place, O Lord, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established'. Given the context in the poem and the language used, this is most likely to refer to a temple in Canaan. For my present purpose, which is a purely theological one, it is not necessary to decide whether Jerusalem or some other place was originally meant: all that matters is that the first climax of this hymn is Israel's arrival at a 'dwelling-place' of Yahweh where we may assume that worship would be offered to him, no doubt (inter alia) precisely in the words of this hymn.[22] The final climax, of course, is the celebration of Yahweh's eternal kingship, a frequent theme of the cultic psalms (e.g. 29.10; 93.1-2, 5). But what about the reference to Yahweh's 'holy abode' in v. 13? One possibility is that it refers, like v. 17, to a sanctuary in Canaan: we have seen in the first part of the poem the use of the 'introductory summary' which goes straight to the main climactic point of a narrative. In the same way, v. 13 may summarize in advance what is to be said in vv. 14-17. Alternatively, if the order of events in vv. 13-17 is taken to represent a chronological succession, then the natural interpretation is to refer v. 13 to something that came between the deliverance at the Sea and the arrival in Canaan. In the familiar (and only firmly attested) version of the story this could only be Mt Sinai.[23] Some support for this interpretation might be sought in the Hebrew phrase *nᵉwēh qodšekā*, as *nāweh* seems basically to mean a place out in the open for a shepherd or sheep. However, metaphorical uses of this term (such as in 2 Sam. 15.25, referring to the tent-shrine in Jerusalem) show that it is not a decisive argument. The precise identification does not matter for my purpose here: the key point is that from their deliverance Yahweh is said to have led his people on to the holy

Baal's sacred mountain (*CTA* 3.3.27; 3.4.64), has often been noted.

22. There is a recent discussion of this issue in M.S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus* (JSOTSup, 239; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 223-26, which concludes from a comparison with Ps. 78 that Shiloh may have been the place originally referred to, even if the terminology was subsequently transferred to Jerusalem. The latter concession weakens the case (especially when Ps. 68 is brought into the argument), but the suggestion remains attractive. I shall consider later in this study whether Smith is correct in his contention that the intention of the (Priestly) redactor who inserted the hymn into the narrative was to identify the sanctuary with Mt Sinai.

23. A reference to Kadesh-barnea might be considered possible, in view of its importance in the wilderness narratives, but evidence is lacking that it was thought of in the way implied by the terms used here.

place (or places) where he would dwell and, we may understand, be worshipped by them. For those who worship him so, the God of the Exodus is still present in their midst and the God who is present in their midst is the God of the Exodus, no less.

From this review of the textual evidence it is clear that, to a much greater extent than might have been expected, the related themes of divine presence and encounter, holiness and worship, are quite central to the book of Exodus, often being the main theme in long sections of the book and also appearing at important transitional points. The need to give a more central place to such matters in the presentation of Old Testament theology has received greater recognition in the past twenty years, perhaps most strikingly in Samuel Terrien's *The Elusive Presence*.

> The reality of divine presence proved to be the constant element of distinctiveness throughout the centuries of biblical times... Israel maintained her historical existence as a people only in so far as she remembered and expected the manifestation of divine presence. It was the presence that created peoplehood.
>
> Because it refuses to accept a separation between cultus and faith and carries at the same time the seed of corporate continuity in history, the biblical theology of presence may provide a prolegomenon to a new biblical theology that in its turn may play a central part in the birth of an authentically ecumenical theology.[24]

Of course it cannot be denied that liberation and law, and also the fulfilment of Yahweh's oath to the patriarchs (6.8; 13.11; 32.13; 33.1) and his covenant with them (2.24; 6.4-5), are vitally important theological themes of the book of Exodus too. But they are inseparable from the focus on worship and divine presence.[25] This is an important cor-

24. S.L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (Religious Perspectives, 26; New York: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 42, 43. See also R.E. Clements, *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1978), pp. 40-46, 66-72.

25. The importance of these themes, especially the presence of God, for the theology of Exodus has been noted above all (in addition to Clements's works) by G. Henton Davies, *Exodus* (Torch Bible Commentary; London: SCM Press, 1967), and by J.I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), pp. xxi-xxiv and *passim*. Compare also Davies's wider-ranging earlier essay, 'The Presence of God in Israel', in E.A. Payne (ed.), *Studies in History and Religion: H. Wheeler Robinson Festschrift* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1942), pp. 11-29.

rective in two ways: to the tendency to give a purely political slant to the theology of Exodus, as in extreme versions of liberation theology; and to an undue focus on ethics alone, which might arise from an exclusive concentration on the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant. At the risk of over-simplification, one could say that the theology of Exodus is a theology of liberation for worship as well as order in society and, specifically in chs. 32–34, a theology of restoration for worship as well as order in society. Or, to put it more dynamically, the book of Exodus tells the story of the people of God as they pass from persecution and slavery through liberation, revelation and rebellion to the establishment of a place for true worship in the presence of their God. And (although this is not the primary focus of this essay) it will not be difficult to see, for those who are familiar with the discussion of the composition of the Pentateuch, that this theology is not restricted to only one level of the text but goes back as far as we can discern the history of the tradition.

In a recent study M.S. Smith has suggested that the motif of 'pilgrimage' is determinative for the literary structure of Exodus as it stands.[26] If this were true, it would strengthen the case for a central focus of the theology of Exodus being of the kind suggested here. According to Smith the 'pilgrimage pattern' in Exodus appears twice in the form of the 'journey to Sinai', first in chs. 1–15 (strictly speaking concluding at 15.21) and then again from 15.22 to the end of the book. Traces of a pilgrimage motif have occasionally been found in the Pentateuch before. Thus M. Noth argued that many of the names in the itinerary in Numbers 33 come from a list of stopping-places on a pilgrim-route which he believed he could trace into north-west Arabia;[27] and the verb *ḥāgag* and the noun *ḥag*, which are commonly taken to be technical terms for pilgrimage-feasts, are used in Exod. 5.1 and 10.9. Smith's argument, however, has a much broader base than this and his book includes valuable discussions of approaches to Old Testament theology, pilgrimage in ancient Israel generally (especially to Jerusalem), recent research on the composition of Exodus and the literary structure of the present form of the text, with much of which I am in full agreement.

Nevertheless, I believe that there are a number of reasons for doubting whether it is correct to speak of a 'pilgrimage pattern' in Exodus.[28]

26. See Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*.
27. 'Der Wallfahrtsweg zum Sinai', *Palästinajahrbuch* 36 (1940), pp. 5-28.
28. I do not dispute the presence of a pilgrimage *motif* at certain points in both

An important consideration is whether it is legitimate to isolate Exodus as a 'work of literature' from the books which surround it in the Pentateuch. Smith's argument relies on Sinai being the goal of the journey(s) in Exodus. For several reasons this cannot be so. First, whether one is considering the present form of the text, the intentions of the final ('priestly') redactor or the older sources as various scholars have reconstructed them, the story of Exodus and Sinai is not complete in itself. The story goes on, to reach the land promised to the patriarchs. To attempt to interpret a part of that story as if the continuation did not exist is bound to distort the meaning that is seen in it. While Exodus 40 does exhibit an element of 'closure', as noted above, it is in no sense the end of the story. Secondly, there are numerous indications in the text of Exodus itself that the real goal of the story it tells is the land of Canaan (see the references given above). From the programmatic commissionings of Moses in chs. 3 and 6 onwards it is clear that this is constantly in view. Thirdly, there is no indication in the account of the journey itself that it is modelled on a pilgrimage. Such indications as there are suggest, rather, that it is thought of as a military campaign. The Israelites leave Egypt *'al ṣib'ōtām*, 'in their tribal divisions' (6.26; 12.51; cf. 7.4; 12.17, 41), a phrase with strong military overtones, and *ḥ^{a}mūšîm* (13.18), which probably means 'in battle array' (cf. Josh. 1.14; 4.12 [as explained in v. 13]; Judg. 7.11). On the formal level, the itinerary-chain (Exod. 12.37a, etc.) belongs, as I have argued elsewhere, to a genre which biblical, ancient Near Eastern and classical evidence shows to belong primarily in accounts of military campaigns.[29] Fourthly, the proposal that Sinai is viewed as the goal of a pilgrimage in Exodus weakens both the role of Sinai as a place of legislation and covenant-making and the indications in the text that its main concern is with a sanctuary in Canaan. The former point is too obvious to need elaboration; the latter is particularly evident in the role of the tabernacle as a prototypical temple, in the concern in ch. 33 for the transfer of Yahweh's cultic presence to the land of Canaan, and in the first climax of the hymn in Exod. 15.1-18. Smith seeks, in line with traditional Jewish exegesis, to relate Exod. 15.17 in its present context to an arrival at

the narrative and the laws, but that is not the same as a *pattern* in the book as a whole.

29. 'The Wilderness Itineraries: A Comparative Study', *TynBul* 25 (1974), pp. 46-81.

Sinai.[30] But, as already noted, the preceding verses do not support this at all and point rather to a sanctuary in the land of Canaan. Smith himself recognizes that this is probably what was intended by the original form of the hymn, and there is no good reason to suppose that it was applied in a different sense by the 'priestly redactor'. The more so (and this is very interesting in the light of Smith's argument [see n. 22 above] that the verse may originally have had Shiloh in mind) because in the book of Joshua the Tent of Meeting is set up on the soil of Canaan, at Shiloh, in passages with an undeniably Priestly style and ideology (Josh. 18.1; 19.51; cf. 22.19, 29).[31] Once this is seen, it undercuts Smith's claim that there is a first 'arrival at Sinai' in 15.17 and on the contrary encourages the reader once more to seek the goal of the journey not at Sinai but in the land of Canaan. In so far as elements of a pilgrimage to Sinai are present in Exodus (e.g. 3.12), they are a relatively minor motif, not the 'pattern' of the whole book.

These conclusions have importance for the lasting theological significance of the book of Exodus, a significance which can be real for Christians as well as for Jews, if they recall the Passover symbolism which is rooted in the very historical setting of the events of Christ's death and resurrection and, perhaps, recover the liturgical use of the Song of Moses in Exodus 15, which was once a central part of the Easter celebrations. Just as the Israelites made their journey to a holy place in the desert, so the people of God at all times have a point of encounter and orientation which lies 'outside' and 'beyond'. But this is not to be, according to the book of Exodus (and still more the larger narrative of which it forms a part), their final goal: it is rather a place from which they must move on and enter again the here and now. Nevertheless they do not, according to the 'pattern' in Exodus, leave the holy, the presence of God, behind them, but by his mercy take it with them as they go to the tasks which lie ahead of them. For, if the first part of Exodus places the emphasis on what God has done and how he has made

30. *Pilgrimage Pattern*, pp. 214-18.

31. The Priestly provenance of the references to Shiloh in Joshua has recently been defended and their interpretation expounded by D.G. Schley, *Shiloh: A Biblical City in Tradition and History* (JSOTSup, 63; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), pp. 101-26; cf. J. Blenkinsopp, 'The Structure of P', *CBQ* 38 (1978), pp. 275-92, on whom Schley depends at several points. Schley's claim that the Priestly references go back to an early north Israelite, anti-Jerusalem, tradition is most improbable.

himself known to his people (Exod. 1–20), the second part (chs. 21–40) sets out what, in response to that action and revelation, they must seek to accomplish, both in the ordering of society according to justice and in the ordering of worship according to holiness.