

## THE EXODUS IN THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE: THE CASE FOR “FIGURAL” READING

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*[Many Christians find the Christian Bible, comprised of the Old and New Testament, diffuse, lacking unity, and therefore difficult to use in systematic theology. Yet the Bible itself uses a powerful organizing principle that spans both testaments and unites them, namely the Exodus in its dual aspects of liberation and formation. There are three Exodus moments. Exodus I is the thirteenth-century B.C.E. foundational event. Exodus II is its sixth-century renewal. Exodus III is the first-century C.E. climactic renewal of Israel by Jesus.]*

THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE, reckoned as Old and New Testament taken as a whole, does not play a formative role in a good deal of Roman Catholic theology. The main reason for the neglect is the Old Testament. Its world is alien, seemingly without a thread or a center, and its dominant genres of narrative, law, and “wisdom literature” do not fit easily into the discursive mode and traditional topics of systematic theology. Its links to the New Testament historically have been effected by procedures that today can appear arbitrary and supersessionist. In this article I propose a paradigmatic use of the Exodus in both testaments which biblical authors themselves employed to show ongoing divine action. My attempt is not to find the “center” of the Bible, for the Exodus is clearly not a central theme in important parts of Hebrew Bible, notably the wisdom literature (apart from Wisdom of Solomon).

The Exodus theme occurs largely in three principal clusters or “moments”: (1) the thirteenth-century Exodus in the Book of Exodus and some pre-exilic psalm and prophetic texts (Exodus I); (2) the sixth-century return from exile, interpreted by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah 40–55 as a new Exodus (Exodus II); and (3) the work of Jesus in the first century C.E., interpreted by New Testament writers as a new Exodus (Exodus III). Exodus I in the Book of Exodus has two components which show up in

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later uses as well—the *liberation* of the people from Pharaoh’s lordship in Egypt (chaps. 1–15) and their *formation* into a people under Yahweh’s lordship at Sinai (proleptic of Canaan, chaps. 16–40).

That the Exodus is a central theme in the Bible no one denies.<sup>1</sup> But it is not common to assert its pan-biblical organizing function.<sup>2</sup> Demonstrating the thesis, therefore, will require some explanation of why so much scholarship does not regard the Exodus as a unifying theme.

### EXODUS I

The basic text of Exodus I is the Book of Exodus, which narrates the Exodus from Egypt as a chapter in the chain of events from the creation of the world (Genesis) to Israel’s arrival at the threshold of Canaan (Deuteronomy). Though its origins are complex, the Book of Exodus tells a coherent story. “[The book] gives the appearance of a (to be sure, secondary) literary entity unto itself,” writes Moshe Greenberg.<sup>3</sup> A précis of the plot proves Greenberg right. After enjoying security in Egypt won for them by Joseph, the people fall under the power of a new and oppressive Pharaoh. He attempts to make himself their “god,” interfering with the dual blessing of land and progeny given to the ancestors in Genesis (see Genesis 1:28 and 12:1–3). In Exodus 1, Pharaoh keeps them from taking their own land (v. 10, “Come let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase . . . and *escape from the land*”) and limits their progeny by imposing dispiriting labor and killing their male children.

Moses tries to free his people but is unsuccessful and has to flee Egypt. While pasturing flocks at Sinai, he encounters Yahweh, thus prefiguring in his life the people’s later flight from Egypt and encounter with God at Sinai. In ten plagues Pharaoh and Yahweh battle over lordship of the Hebrews. Each “god” has his earthly lieutenants: Yahweh has Moses and Aaron, and Pharaoh has his magicians. In the tenth plague, Yahweh is victorious, taking Pharaoh’s firstborn which in that culture was the ultimate homage to a deity. Having acquired the Hebrews as his people, Yahweh

<sup>1</sup> For the theme, see Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1960) 153–66, and, in more detail, “Exodus,” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1969) 7.22–44; Roger Le Déaut and Joseph Lécuyer, “Exode,” *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1961) 4.1960–73; Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 1.40–138.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard W. Anderson anticipated some of my points in his *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988): the formation, reformation, and transformation of God’s people (15). Anderson’s book came to my attention after my ideas were formed.

<sup>3</sup> “Exodus, Book of,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1970) 1050.

brings them out of Pharaoh's territory into his own, Mount Sinai. Yahweh asks the newly freed people: "Will you be my people?" Israel says yes and enters into a covenant (chaps. 19–24). In a surprising turn, Israel violates the first commandment, but is forgiven after strenuous intercession by Moses (chaps. 32–34). Chaps. 25–40 describes the building of the Tabernacle and Yahweh's glory entering it. The book that opened in Egypt with the 70 "children of Israel" (= the patriarch Jacob) ends in Sinai with the "children of Israel" (= the people) dwelling before the Lord at Sinai. A nation has come into being.

That some modern Westerners read Exodus with more sensitivity to its literary sources than to its plot and characters is more the result of the scholarly presuppositions of the last two centuries than of the demands of the book itself. The ground-breaking research on the Pentateuch carried out in the 19th and early-20th centuries generally had a historical rather than a literary goal—to reconstruct the religious history of Israel. The Pentateuch was regarded by leading Christian scholars as a quarry of datable strata, J, E, D, P (or variants thereof) to serve the purposes of the historian of Israelite religion. The scholarly methods of form-criticism and tradition-criticism tended to divide the Exodus story into discrete themes on the assumption that each theme arose in a separate group. As the groups, each with its own story, came together in a confederation, so the theory runs, their stories were incorporated into the grand story of the present Pentateuch. Martin Noth, for example, posited five major themes that were eventually united into one narrative: guidance out of Egypt, guidance into the arable land, promise to the patriarchs, guidance in the wilderness, and revelation at Sinai.<sup>4</sup> Gerard von Rad postulated different origins for the legal traditions of Sinai (the sanctuary at Shechem) and the narrative of taking the land (the sanctuary of Gilgal)<sup>5</sup> which led him to make a sharp distinction between legal and narrative material. Implicit in these judgments is a kind of "sectarian assumption"—that a society is made up of discrete groups each with its own *mythos*. The assumption is unlikely, however, for stories are normally part of longer narrative traditions. What have been regarded as "themes" are really chapters of a story. The best proof that the story line in the Pentateuch is original is that historical psalms such as Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135 have the same plot as the Pentateuch.<sup>6</sup> The Exodus in the Book of Exodus is a comprehensive event,

<sup>4</sup> *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972; German ed. 1948).

<sup>5</sup> "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 1–78.

<sup>6</sup> The plot is not identical, however, for the Psalms end their story with Israel in Canaan rather than, like the Pentateuch, at the threshold of Canaan. The difference is accounted for by exilic editing of the Pentateuch.

embracing the defeat of Pharaoh, the leading out of the people from Egypt, the journey in the wilderness, the giving of the Law, and the taking of Canaan (symbolized by Sinai). And it was so read by readers in early Judaism and Christianity and beyond.

### **The Language and Perspective of the Biblical Exodus Accounts**

Before examining how Exodus I was interpreted by later writers, we must examine the language used of it. In the Pentateuch, the language used of the Exodus (apart from Exodus 15:1–18) is by and large “historical,” that is, its concern is with human agents such as Moses, Pharaoh, and the people. The perspective is earthly. There was, however, another way of describing the Exodus—as an act of creation. Some psalms and Isaiah 40–55 so view it and describe it in mythic language.

Here a problem must be faced. How can the Exodus, a historic event, be regarded as an act of creation in the Bible? If creation were defined in modern terms (the emergence of the earthly and astral universe), it could not be called an act of creation. The Bible (and the Ancient Near East), however, conceives creation differently than does the modern West. The major differences between ancient and modern conceptions are three: the product of creation, the process of creation, and the manner of reporting.<sup>7</sup>

The product of creation in antiquity was a populated universe, a society, not (as is customary today) the earth and planetary world as such. Because what emerged from the act of creation was a people (typically with kingship, marriage customs, temple, etc.), the emergence of the people Israel could be interpreted as creation. The use of the category would be impossible if one were to use a modern definition of creation, but very possible if one uses the ancient definition.

The process of creation in antiquity was imagined on the model of human activity or a process in nature. Often creation involved wills in conflict, typically a battle. Victory resulted in a new or restored world. Exodus 15 is a good example of cosmogonic language applied to the Exodus. It depicts the Exodus in the language similar to that used of Baal’s victory over Sea in the pre-1200 B.C.E. Ugaritic texts: “You sent forth your fury, / It consumed them like stubble. / At the blast of your nostrils / the waters were heaped up. . . / You brought them, you planted them / in the mount of your heritage, / the dais of your throne, which you made, Yahweh, / the sanc-

<sup>7</sup> For an introduction to creation in the Ancient Near East and the Bible, see Richard J. Clifford, “The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation,” *Theological Studies* 46 (1985) 507–23, and *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 26 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1994) 1–10.

tuary, Yahweh, / which your hands created.”<sup>8</sup> Yahweh is here portrayed with the traits of Baal the storm god, stirring up Sea with his mighty breath, leading the people to his own holy mountain dwelling. Second Isaiah is sometimes credited with being the first to use creation language (“myth”) for God’s “redemptive” work (“history”), but the tendency is much earlier, for Exodus 15 is one of the most ancient poems in the Bible. Because “historical” and “mythic” language can describe one and the same event, the dichotomous distinction often drawn between myth and history is increasingly recognized to be misleading.<sup>9</sup>

The Exodus can thus be rendered either in the language of “history” and the language of “creation.” It can be rendered as Yahweh’s victory over Sea as in Psalm 89:6–12 or as Yahweh’s defeat of Pharaoh as in Exodus 1–15. The perspectives can also be combined into one composition as in Psalm 77:15–21.

### Exodus I in the Psalter

I have shown that historical and mythic language can be used to describe the Exodus because both kinds of language are used of it in the Psalter.<sup>10</sup> The psalm genre that sheds the most light on the Exodus is the communal lament, for it “remembers” before God the glorious past in order to ask for divine help in the distressful present; the “past” is often the Exodus. Remembering in the psalms can mean narrating a past event to make it present in liturgical time. Remembrance is tailored to the petition of the lament. Nearly all the national laments remember the same event—the creation of Israel as Yahweh’s people. Sometimes the entire event is narrated, at other times one or two aspects stand for the whole. The creation

<sup>8</sup> See further Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1973) 112–44, trans. at 128 and 131. Though some scholars speak of “broken” or “historicized” myth regarding this and similar poems on the grounds that Yahweh here battles the Egyptian army at the Sea rather than Sea itself, the poem nonetheless interprets a historical event in mythic terms.

<sup>9</sup> See J. J. M. Roberts, “Myth Versus History,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38 (1976) 1–13; Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), and the pioneering treatment of Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and in Israel* (Lund: Gleerup, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> For recent treatments, see Susan Gillingham, “The Exodus Tradition and Israelite Psalmody,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 52 (1999) 19–46, and Clark Hyde, “The Remembrance of the Exodus in the Psalms,” *Worship* 62 (1988) 405–14.

can be described in different ways, for example, the transplanting of a vine from Egypt to Canaan (Psalm 80), the defeat of chaotic Waters and installation of the king (Psalm 89). Most frequently, however, creation is the Exodus-land taking, either from the “mythic” perspective of the defeat of Sea or from the “historic” perspective with Moses leading the people. The following passages in communal laments “remember” the Exodus as the founding event: Psalms 44:7–14; 74:12–17; 77:12–21; 80:9–12; 83:10–13; 89:2–38.<sup>11</sup>

The communal laments ask God to renew the Exodus. They assume that the Exodus is an act that requires activation; it can, it seems, lose its force, “go out.” In Psalm 77:9, the psalmist asks “Will the Lord reject us forever?” and answers the question by reciting how God formed the people by defeating Sea and leading the people through it by the agency of Moses and Aaron (vv. 12–21). Aware that the people are on the brink of extinction, the psalmist tells the founding story in the hope that God will renew that event. The Exodus is regarded as the core event that can be renewed.

#### Exodus I in Pre-exilic Prophets

The Exodus is prominent in the pre-exilic prophets Amos, Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The prophets, of course, are not modern historians recounting an event “as it actually happened,” but preachers confronting their hearers with the claims the Exodus makes upon them. Amos in the eighth century mentions the Exodus from Egypt in 2:9–16, 3:1–2, and 9:7 as the basis for Yahweh’s claims upon the people brought up from Egypt (2:10; 3:1; 9:7) and alone favored more than all the families of the earth (3:2). As Michael Barré points out, the whole Exodus is implicit in the term: “Although Amos never refers directly to the Sinai covenant, this concept lies at the heart of his message of judgment. Yahweh had acknowledged Israel as his covenant people (3:1–2), but they had abused this privilege.”<sup>12</sup> Amos includes several incidents in the single event—clearing the land of Amorites, journey in the wilderness, and instituting prophets and Nazirites (2:9–11).

The eighth-century prophet Hosea alludes to the Sinai covenant in 6:7 and 8:1, and in 1:9 he cites the covenant formula “I will be your God and you will be my people” (see Exodus 6:7). References to Egyptian servitude

<sup>11</sup> Though not in the Psalter, Isaiah 63:7–14 also remembers a specific event. See Richard J. Clifford, “Narrative and Lament in Isaiah 63:7–64:11,” in *To Touch the Text: Biblical and Related Studies in Honor of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.*, ed. Maurya P. Horgan and Paul J. Kobelski (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 93–102.

<sup>12</sup> “Amos,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond Brown et al. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990) 210.

are found in 11:1; 12:9, 14; 13:4.<sup>13</sup> Hosea 2:16–17 (English vv. 14–15) is the earliest statement in the prophets about a new Exodus: “So I will now allure her; I will lead her into the desert, and speak to her heart. . . . She shall respond there as in the days of her youth, when she came up from the land of Egypt.” To Hosea, the only way for Israel to renew itself is to go through the Exodus again.

Jeremiah in the late-seventh century marks a turning point in the prophetic use of the Exodus theme. On the one hand, he follows Amos and Hosea in using the Exodus to indict the people, and, on the other, he points to the Exodus as an event in the future; for there will be a new Exodus (31:31–34 and 23:7–8). With the mention of the new Exodus we now come to the second section.<sup>14</sup>

## EXODUS II

### Exodus II in Exilic and Postexilic Prophets

The basic texts of Exodus II are exilic and postexilic prophets. Jeremiah’s Book of Consolation (chaps. 30–31) concern the blessed future. It may well have been originally addressed to the North during the early part of Jeremiah’s ministry and updated to the period after 587 B.C.E., “self-extended” in William Holladay’s phrase.<sup>15</sup> The richest passage is 31:31–34, which views the future as a new covenant:

It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

The prophet envisions the blessed future as a renewal of the event (the Exodus) by which Israel originally became the people of Yahweh. Jeremiah focuses on only one component, the covenant. Troubled throughout his book by the human heart (the organ of decision making) and its inability to respond to God, Jeremiah expresses the hope that God will change Israelite hearts to make them receptive to the Torah. His statement of the new Exodus will later be borrowed by New Testament passages

<sup>13</sup> Micah too in 6:1–8 and 7:15 makes the Exodus the basis for his indictment, in the manner of Amos 2. Micah 7:15 asks for a redoing of the Exodus, “As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, show us marvelous things.”

<sup>14</sup> Walther Zimmerli, “Der ‘neue Exodus’ in der Verkündigung der beiden grossen Exilspropheten,” in *Gottes Offenbarung*, Theologische Bücherei 19 (Munich: Kaiser, 1963) 192–204.

<sup>15</sup> *Isaiah: Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 59–60.

(Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6).

Ezekiel interprets the Exodus as a purifying judgment in the wilderness:

I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, and with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out; and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face (20:34–35).

Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel singles out one element that stands for the whole Exodus. For him, it is the testing in the wilderness by which Israel learns to trust and obey God. The new testing will create a responsive people. God will renew the founding event, bringing the people to Zion, not from Egypt this time, but from the nations where they have been scattered.

Second Isaiah is the great prophet of the new Exodus.<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 43:16–21 expresses his new Exodus, especially v. 11, “Recall no more the former things, the ancient events bring no longer to mind.”<sup>17</sup> “Former things” and “ancient events” refer to Exodus I. In his reformulation, “the way in the wilderness” (v. 19) replaces “the way in the sea.” The new Exodus goes from Babylon to Zion rather than from Egypt to Canaan. The desert (rather than the sea) is tamed by roads over which Yahweh will lead his people (40:3–5). Isaiah 41:17–20 and 42:13–16 use mythic language to describe the taming of the desert. Isaiah 48:20–21 and 52:11–12 urge the people to flee Babylon like Egypt of old. The Deutero-Isaian servant in 49:1–6 has traits of Moses. In Isaiah 49 the servant leads the people in the wilderness and apportions the land (vv. 8–12) like Moses in the Pentateuch.

In the dramatic scenario used by these exilic prophets, the people had fallen back into the situation of the ancestors in Egypt; they were not on holy ground, they were under foreign gods. The prophets nonetheless discerned the beginnings of a restoration and interpreted it as a new Exodus.

### Exodus II in Early Judaism

The interpretation of exile and restoration (Exodus II) that took place in early Judaism was decisive for the New Testament use of the Exodus.

<sup>16</sup> See Bernard W. Anderson, “Exodus and Covenant in Second Isaiah and Prophetic Tradition,” in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God*, G. Ernest Wright vol., ed. Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976) 339–60; Horacio Simian-Yofre, “Esodo in Deuteroisaias,” *Biblica* 61 (1980) 530–53; Richard J. Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading: An Interpretation of Second Isaiah* (New York: Paulist, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> The statement is an example of the Hebrew figure “dialectic negation,” i.e., exaggeration in the negative member to emphasize the opposite. In this case, the first Exodus is not dropped from liturgical use, but rather includes a new component. An example is Joseph’s “So it was not really you but God who had me come here” (Genesis 45:8), which does not mean the brothers did not sell Joseph into Egypt, only that God had a controlling hand in the process.

Despite the prophets' announcement that a new Exodus was happening or about to happen, many Jews did not think the exile was brought to its proper conclusion, even as late as the period between the Maccabean Revolt and the Bar-Kochba rebellion (mid-second century B.C.E. to 135 C.E.). Their attitude is not surprising.<sup>18</sup> Israel believed itself to be the people of the one God yet was still suffering; it did not even rule its own land of Palestine, let alone the whole world. The glorious prophetic promises that the Lord would return triumphant to the holy city had not been fulfilled. There were many such texts: "foreigners shall rebuild your walls, and their kings will be your attendants" (Isaiah 60:10) and "Lo, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth. . . . For I will create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight" (Isaiah 65:17–18). Ezekiel 38–48 predicts a decisive victory over the nations of the world and the building of a splendid city of God. In the third-century Book of Tobit, Tobit prays: "He scourged you for your iniquities, but will again have mercy on you all. He will gather you from all the Gentiles and among whom you have been scattered" (13:5; see also Baruch 3:6–8; 2 Maccabees 1:27–29; 1 Enoch 85–90). A second-century lament (Daniel 9) presumes that divine wrath is still operative and prays to the Lord "who led your people out of the land of Egypt" (v. 15).

The Qumran community at the Dead Sea regarded the exile as continuing up to the founding of the community: As the *Damascus Document* says:

For when they were unfaithful in forsaking him, he hid his face from Israel and from his sanctuary and delivered them up to the sword. But when he remembered the covenant with the forefathers, he saved a remnant for Israel and did not deliver them up to destruction. And at the period of wrath, three hundred and ninety years after having delivered them up into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, kind of Babylon, he visited them and caused to sprout from Israel and from Aaron a shoot of the planting, in order to possess his land and become fat with the good things of his soil. And they realized their iniquity. . . . And God appraised their deeds, because they sought him with an undivided heart, and raised up for them a Teacher of Righteousness.<sup>19</sup>

The exile will end definitively when the Qumran community attains its goals. These citations show that for many the exile continued long after the sixth-century return.

### EXODUS III

The widespread view at least in Palestinian Judaism in the first century B.C.E. that Jews were still in exile meant that early Jewish-Christians

<sup>18</sup> The following paragraphs owe much to N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) esp. 268–71.

<sup>19</sup> CD-A *Damascus Document*, 1:3–11, in Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 1.551.

would use the Exodus as a paradigm for explaining the significance of Jesus as liberator and founder. But, as was the case with Exodus I, many scholars underestimate its importance. The entries on Exodus in such standard resources as the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* and *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (3rd ed.) do not regard it as a major theme. One must therefore explain why many New Testament scholars disregard it.

There are three reasons: (1) the Exodus is regarded as a cluster of motifs rather than paradigmatic narrative; (2) the typologizing tendencies of New Testament writers are underrated; and (3) restoration from exile is not reckoned as an exilic theme.

Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn in the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* notes that “reference to the actual event of salvation [the Exodus theme] plays an astonishingly small role in the New Testament when one considers its importance for Jewish theology.”<sup>20</sup> He catalogues the few allusions to the Exodus that he finds: (1) an occasional model of Christian salvation actualized in baptism and the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 10); (2) a motive for courage during the end time in Revelation 12, and for the coming eschatological salvation in Hebrews 3; and (3) a paranetic use, warning Christians in view of the failure of Israel in the desert (1 Corinthians 10; Hebrews 3; Jude 5). Kuhn notes that though Paul puts God’s deeds toward Israel on an equal footing with Christ’s, Hebrews and John underscore the differences. Kuhn asks: “One must consider theologically why such an apparently suitable model on the way between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of salvation in Christ was not more enthusiastically adopted in the New Testament?” His answer: “Clearly the Exodus model with its special understanding of liberation, path, and goal could describe only inadequately the salvation appearing in Christ viewed holistically. Not by chance did Jesus manifestly avoid the Exodus motif.”<sup>21</sup>

Kuhn’s minimalist conclusions come from his excessively narrow definition of the Exodus and his neglect of the typologizing characteristic of Qumran interpretation. Following many Old Testament form-critics and redaction-critics, he does not consider that the Sinai covenant and Law were originally part of the Exodus from Egypt on the grounds the legal material had a different *Sitz im Leben*. Though excluding Sinai (Law and covenant) from his article on Exodus, he concedes that the New Testament writers themselves regarded Sinai as part of the Exodus. Kuhn also excludes the return of sixth-century exiles to Zion as an Exodus theme because it is not connected in New Testament texts with the actual Exodus.<sup>22</sup>

Kuhn’s minimal definition of the Exodus is untenable. First, the modern

<sup>20</sup> Kuhn measures its importance in Jewish theology by its centrality in the Passover ritual. In *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (*TRE*) 10.741–45.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 10.745 (italics mine).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 10.741.

separation of the legal traditions of Sinai and the Exodus-from-Egypt on the basis of their allegedly different origins (e.g., Shechem and Gilgal) is much debated and not the consensus position today. Quite apart from the merits of the debate, however, it is illogical to impose upon New Testament authors a distinction they were unaware of. New Testament authors clearly regarded the whole story in the Book of Exodus—liberation from Pharaoh and formation as Israel—as the Exodus.<sup>23</sup> By and large, they shared the Jewish belief that the exile had not ended and believed that Jesus was initiating the restoration. Furthermore, they did not normally distinguish Exodus I and II

A more satisfactory, though still incomplete, dictionary treatment of the Exodus theme is in the Roman Catholic *Dictionnaire biblique universel* (1984).<sup>24</sup> In the remainder of this paragraph I provide a précis of that presentation. In the Gospels the Exodus appears in the voice of John the Baptist crying in the wilderness and the theme of the Way of the Lord. Matthew and Luke interpret the temptations of Jesus in the light of the Exodus: 40 days in the desert recalls Israel's 40 years; as Israel was guided by the column of fire so Jesus is guided by the spirit; Jesus unlike Israel does not succumb to temptation; Israel rebelled over food, Jesus subordinates food to the word of God; Israel demanded signs, Jesus refuses to tempt God; rather than worshiping a thing (the golden calf) Jesus declares God alone worthy of adoration. He is the perfect realization of Israel. Paul considers Jesus as the paschal victim immolated for us (1 Corinthians 5:7); in the wonders of the Exodus, he discovers the spiritual realities represented by Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1–6). 1 Peter uses images from the Exodus to explain the Church: the blood of the lamb, the call of Christians, light, the pagan life that one must abandon as Israel left idolatrous Egypt, a new people, the law of holiness, submission to God, new worship, the procession toward the homeland. The Gospel of John is a reinterpretation of the Exodus: the paschal lamb, the bread from heaven, water flowing from Christ, the healing of those who look upon the crucified one, the “passage” toward the Father, the Pasch. The Book of Revelation underlines the parallel between the sufferings of the Church and the sufferings of Israel; Christians are heading toward a new Jerusalem.

This article in the French biblical dictionary is comprehensive and sensitive to the variety of allusions to the Exodus. What is chiefly lacking in its

<sup>23</sup> Among those who argue strongly that law is part of the Exodus legacy in Paul and in Matthew is W. D. Davies, “Paul and the New Exodus,” in *The Quest for Context and Meaning*, James A. Sanders vol., ed. Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 443–63. Davies provides a large bibliography.

<sup>24</sup> Anon., “Exode (Thème de l’),” *Dictionnaire biblique universel*, ed. Louis Morloubou and François Michel Du Buit (Brussels: Desclée, 1984) 250–51.

account is explicit recognition of the typological exegesis employed in the New Testament period in which Exodus is a paradigm and a chapter in a story. The texts cited below will give some idea of the typological approach of Qumran, which has enabled us to appreciate the same basic approach in the New Testament. The excerpt from the Qumran *Rule of the Community* (1QS 8.12–16) shows the community awaiting God’s judgment-intervention that will renew Israel.

And when these [the candidates] have a community in Israel in compliance with these arrangements they are to be segregated from within the dwelling of the men of sin to walk to the desert in order to open there His path. As it is written (*Isa 40:3*): “In the desert, prepare the way of . . . , straighten in the steppe a roadway for our God.” This is the study of the law wh[i]ch he commanded through the hand of Moses, in order to act in compliance with all that has been revealed from age to age, and according to what the prophets have revealed through his holy spirit.<sup>25</sup>

The group went to the desert because it rejected religious and governmental leadership. It interprets the situation in Exodus terms, waiting in the wilderness until the time arrives when it will take possession of the land. In the meantime, it ponders the Sinai law like Israel of old prior to the conquest of Canaan.

Similar is the *War Scroll* (1QM 1:2–3), “The sons of Levi, the sons of Judah, and the sons of Benjamin, the exiled of the desert, will wage war against them [. . .] against all their bands, when the exiled sons of light return from the desert of the nations to camp in the desert of Jerusalem. . . .”<sup>26</sup> Other texts of the period report groups repairing to the wilderness to avoid contaminating themselves (e.g., 1 Maccabees 2:29–38) and to find a staging area from which to wage war against enemies (e.g., 1 Maccabees 5:24–28; 9:33, 62).<sup>27</sup>

Frank Moore Cross was one of the first Qumran specialists to point out the covenanters’ use of typology: “Their [covenanters] retreat [to the desert], however, is to be understood, not in a framework of nature-spirit dualism of Greek type, but in the ethical or ‘spirit-spirit’ dualism of apocalypticism. They go into the desert for a season, to be born again as the New Israel, to enter into the New Covenant of the last days. They await in the desert the Second Exodus (or Conquest), ‘preparing the way of the Lord,’

<sup>25</sup> García Martínez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* 1.89–90.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 1.113.

<sup>27</sup> See also Josephus, *Jewish War* 2:259: under the governor Felix, “deceivers and impostors, under the pretense of divine inspiration fostering revolutionary changes, they persuaded the multitude to act like madmen, and led them out into the desert under the belief that God would give them tokens of deliverance.” See George L. Brooke, “Isaiah 40:3 and the Wilderness Community,” in *New Qumran Texts and Studies*, ed. G. J. Brooke et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 129–30.

disciplining themselves by the rule of the ancient Wars of Yahweh / to be ready to fight the final war of God.”<sup>28</sup> The members of the community choose the site of Qumran not only because it was remote, but also because it represented the wilderness out of which they would come in a new Exodus-conquest.

John the Baptist preached in the same desert area, and his preaching displayed by expectations similar to those in Qumran.<sup>29</sup> Jesus, a one-time disciple of John, shifted attention to the other dimension of the judgment proclaimed by John—the reign of God that was ushered in by the judgment. The reign of God introduced by divine judgment could be interpreted as a new Exodus, as in the Qumran *Community Rule* cited above. Jesus interpreted the imminent judgment of God as a refounding of Israel, as is shown by his choosing of the Twelve, the new covenant and repetition of Exodus wonders, and the ascriptions of Mosaic traits to him, among other indications.

For New Testament authors, the Exodus retains the two aspects it has in Exodus I, namely liberation and formation. If one looks at the Gospel of Mark, for example, one finds a demon-filled universe (e.g., Mark 1:32, 34; 3:22; 5:15; 9:38; 16:18) from whose power Jesus liberates his people through healing. In contrast, Old Testament portrayals of society tend to regard evil as embodied in human beings such as the “wicked” in the Psalms or oppressing nations in the historical and prophetic books. For Paul and the Pauline school, liberation consists in dethroning powers thought to be ruling the world, the “powers and principalities” spoken of in Romans 8:38; Ephesians 3:10; 6:12; and Colossians 2:15.

The New Testament also accepts the Old Testament description of the sixth-century exile and restoration as a new Exodus. Luke and Paul develop their understanding of covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25) from the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 rather than directly from Exodus 19–24. They view the Exodus not only as a movement from Egypt to Canaan but also from Babylon to Zion. Jesus was seen as bringing the journey to its proper conclusion.

It is easy to miss the importance of the Exodus in the New Testament because of the subtlety of its references to it. An example of such subtlety is the opening quotation in Mark 1:2–3 from “Isaiah the prophet”: “Behold I am sending my messenger before your face who will prepare your way; a voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, straight make his paths.” Elements of Exodus 23:23, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3

<sup>28</sup> *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies*, 3rd. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 69–70.

<sup>29</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 1: *Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 43–44, and all of chap. 12.

are “written in the prophet Isaiah” and are intended to explicate “the beginning of the gospel” in Mark 1:1. Mark interprets Isaiah 40:1–5 according to the Jewish exegesis of his time: as referring to the return of the exiles at the end of days, accompanied by spiritual renewal and indeed renewal of the cosmos itself. Joel Marcus correctly assesses the wilderness motif in Mark (Mark 6:31–32, 35; see Exodus 18:21; Numbers 27:17) as allusions to the exilic hope of a second Exodus at the end of days. Mark mixes historical and mythological language to portray Jesus: “the divine warrior’s triumphant march through the wilderness is also the historical return of Israel to Zion.”<sup>30</sup> “The way of the Lord” has a Deutero-Isaian meaning: “the highway along which God himself moves as the invisible but powerfully present comforter of the afflicted, liberator of captives, and enlightener of the blind.”<sup>31</sup> Even in the earliest Gospel, Exodus is an important paradigm.

#### THE EXODUS AS HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLE

The observations that I have sketched above show that the Christian Bible, at least a significant part of it, organizes itself with regard to the Exodus as three successive crystallizing moments, each moment incorporating the previous one. The Exodus became an analogy for interpretation as Israel went through crises of diminishment and of restoration, or, to use biblical language, endured divine judgment and renewal. The organizing function, though surely the most important, is only one of several grand instances of organizing of traditions in the Bible. The Pentateuch was edited to demonstrate how the Lord created the world and chose Israel as his special people with a sacred law and land, and brought them to the holy land. The Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy to Kings) arranged traditions of various date and provenance to demonstrate God’s justice in history and the special role of the Davidic king. A prophetic composition of great subtlety and imagination is Isaiah 1–66. The instructions and speeches of Proverbs 1–9 provide a profound setting for the generally much older aphorisms of Proverbs 10–31. Biblical editing of this scale does not usually involve total rewriting, but is rather rearrangement of diverse material through introductions, cross references of words and images, and inserted speeches. There is a powerful synthetic impulse in ancient narrative literature that is easily overlooked by scholars more interested in the

<sup>30</sup> *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992) 27. Marcus also points out the distorted picture of Exodus traditions in the New Testament if one only regards the first Exodus (23–26).

<sup>31</sup> Marcus, *The Way of the Lord* 45.

original composition than in the edited text.<sup>32</sup> This observation is not meant as an attack on the historical-critical method but as a plea to appreciate the ability of ancient writers to reorganize inherited writings.

A recent official Roman Catholic document approaches the relationship of the Testaments in traditional language yet comes to conclusions compatible with the one offered above. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, published in 1993 by the Pontifical Biblical Commission with the approval of Pope John Paul II,<sup>33</sup> maintains the traditional distinction between the literal sense (“that which has been expressed directly by the inspired human authors” II.B.1) and the spiritual sense (“the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it.” II.B.2). According to *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, the literal sense is the spiritual sense “regularly” in the New Testament, and consequently, “It follows that it is most often in dealing with the Old Testament that Christian exegesis speaks of the spiritual sense” (II.B.2). Staying with the traditional language, I suggest that the perspective proposed in this essay enables one to interpret all the Exodus moments in the Old Testament in “the spiritual sense,” for they all belong to “the context of the paschal mystery of Christ.” The Christian Bible reads the two earlier Exodus events in the light of the Exodus in the New Testament (= “Paschal mystery”). Such a reading does not diminish the significance of each event in its own right (the literal meaning), but rather sets it within the ongoing drama directed by God.

Following the example of the New Testament (Adam is a type of Christ in Romans 5:14), early Christians found foreshadowings of the Christian dispensation in the events and persons of the Old Testament. Examples are Jonah who symbolized the Resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 12:40), the crossing of the Red Sea as a type of baptism (1 Corinthians 10:1–6), and

<sup>32</sup> The same impulse is evident in some non-biblical Ancient Near Eastern literature, such as the evolution of the Gilgamesh epic through fifteen centuries and the combat myth as represented by Lugal-e, Anzu, and *Enuma elish*. Jeffrey Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1982) details the process by which third-millennium Sumerian adventure tales became the Old Babylonian epic of a hero’s battle against mortality and then the Standard Version in which the king becomes a teacher and model of wisdom.

<sup>33</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Boston: St. Paul Books, 1993). The English text is also found in *Origins* 23 (January 6, 1994) 497–524. See Lewis Ayres and Stephen E. Fowl, “(Mis)reading the Face of God: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*,” *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 513–28 and the response of Roland E. Murphy, “Is the Paschal Mystery Really the Primary Hermeneutical Principle?” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000) 139–46.

Melchizedek as the foreshadowing of Christ (Hebrews). Typology, much employed in the early Church especially by the Alexandrians, has lost its appeal for many moderns, for whom it can smack of arbitrariness and of anti-Judaism in that it seems to make the Old Testament a book of promises fulfilled in Christ. Such criticisms misunderstand typology, however. Its purpose is to point out how persons and events are related to each other *throughout* the Christian Bible in order to show that it is God who is moving the story forward. One does not dispose of the type once the anti-type has been located. In fact, types are much more common within the Old Testament than between the Old and New Testaments. Given the misunderstanding surrounding “typological,” “figural” may be a better term for the phenomenon, for it carries no supersessionist overtones and better underscores the cross-referencing *within* each testament. Words, deeds, symbols, point forward and backward constantly throughout the Bible. To mention only a few examples: “ark” is used only of Noah’s ark in Genesis 6–9 and of the box that saved the infant Moses in Exodus 2:5, for in both instances a people was saved by a boat surviving the dangerous deep; Abraham’s journey into Egypt because of famine in Genesis 12:1–10 prefigures what his descendants will later undergo—danger and then departure with enrichment; Abraham also prefigures David who also is associated with Jerusalem (Genesis 14:18) and, like David, is given a promissory covenant; Joseph, who left his own people for another country to become a savior, is a figure of Moses;<sup>34</sup> the apostasy around the golden calf that nearly destroys Israel in Exodus 32:4 (“These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”) prefigures the similarly destructive apostasy in 1 Kings 12:28 (“Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt”). Examples could be multiplied almost without limit.

What is the purpose of “figural” or typological writing? I suggest that it meant to assist the reader to see what the human actors in the biblical drama do not see: each actor plays his or her part in the ongoing drama directed by God without seeing the larger story that is visible only to the reader (and to God!). A reader seeing Moses fleeing Egypt, marrying a priest’s daughter, and becoming an agent of salvation for Israel, cannot

<sup>34</sup> Jon Levenson speaks of the “remarkable parallels in the lives of the two shepherds-turned-rulers: both are separated from their families early on, both survive conspiracies to murder them, both endure exile, both marry the daughters of foreign priests, both have two sons, and the two leaders, one dead and one alive, leave Egypt together (Exodus 13:9). But most important, both of them are commissioned by God to lead and provision an unruly people with a pronounced proclivity to reject their leaders” (*The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* [New Haven: Yale University, 1993] 144).

help but reflect that God's commitment to Israel continues unabated and will negate the vast power of Pharaoh and his murderous designs on the people. God's earlier commitment to Israel likewise negated the brothers' murderous designs against their brother Joseph. The reader (or hearer) of the Bible is invited to see a story in which he or she also has a part to play.

The thesis that Exodus repeats itself is compatible with the observations of literary critics such as Gabriel Josipovici<sup>35</sup> that a continuous story unfolds in the Bible. Josipovici points out that the Bible establishes a rhythm in the opening verse of Genesis and maintains it down to Revelation, the last book of the Bible. The rhythm is God's and is discovered not in nature but in human beings, especially in their breaches of law. The divine rhythm is visible only in the long run. In the short run, human beings struggle without knowledge and their lives are rich in ironies.

<sup>35</sup> *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven: Yale, 1988).