MOSES AND ANTHROPOLOGY:
A NEW VIEW OF THE EXODUS

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European historiography has developed several views of the exodus. Pedersen in 1934 and Noth in 1958 took the view that Exodus 1-15 was a "passover festival legend, holding that it came into being over the course of centuries."[1] Taking an opposite view, Mowinckel in *Le Décalogue* in 1927 viewed the first fifteen chapters as a description of a cultic festival or covenant renewal festival. Others tried to associate different parts of the exodus experience with different groups of Israelites. But some, like Osswald and Schmid, viewed the book of Exodus as "the product of accumulated tradition" without reference to Moses.

The most clever view was that of Freud. His *Moses and Monotheism,* following Seller's work of 1922, was an attempt at applying his psychology to Near Eastern historiography. Freud's thesis was that religion is a neurosis, a view not dissimilar to that of Karl Marx. Taking his cue from the evolution-of-religion school of historiography, Freud maintained that primal sexual latency erupted in Atenism. One of Akhenaten's disciples, Moses, following the demise of Atenism, converted Asiatics to the pharaonic faith and united them with Midian, only to be murdered. Freud also postulated two men named Moses. Later, under the prophets, Atenism was re-established as Judaic monotheism.[2]

H. L. Philp criticized Freud for his methodology.[3] Freud ignored the facts and misunderstood Akhenaten and his reforms. Furthermore Israel was little affected by Egyptian religion, according to T. J. Meek.[4] Freud's chronology is questionable, although in fairness it must be said that recent finds in the Gaza Strip evidence a continuation of Amarna art styles into the reign of Seti I (1302-1290 B.C.), according to Israeli archaeologist Trude Dothan in a 1981 illustrated lecture at UCLA. Freud treats the primary source, Exodus, as a nose of wax. Freud selected his facts to fit his theory, ignoring those that were contrary. Nor can the exodus or historical monotheism be explained in terms of any supposed historical evolution from polytheism.[5] Neither is there any evidence for two per-

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[1] G. Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) 68.

[2] S. W. Baron, *"Moses and Monotheism* by Sigmund Freud—A Book Review," *American Journal of Sociology* 45/3 (November 1939) 471-477, in R. J. Christen and H. E. Hazelton, *Monotheism and Moses* (Lexington: Heath, 1969) 39-43.

[3] H. L. Philp, "A Question of Method," in Christen and Hazelton, *Monotheism* 43-53.

[4] T. J. Meek, *Hebrew Origins* (New York: Harper, 1960).

[5] H. H. Rowley, *From Moses to Qumran* (1963), in Christen and Hazelton, *Monotheism* 79-88. Anthropologists have found that in many cases monotheism devolves into polytheism, often out of need for an intermediary between sinful man and a holy God.

sons named Moses as Freud believed. Fohrer describes Moses as

> first and foremost a recipient of revelation, founder of a cult, and inspired leader of a nomadic (or semi-nomadic) group that achieved solidarity on the basis of its *new* religion and sought to realize the promise of territorial possession. The escape from Egypt took place under the aegis of this *new* religion.[6]

Israelite conquest of Canaan promoted Yahwism to the status of a world religion, Fohrer believed. This last point is not historically tenable. It can be better argued that the triumph of Christianity or the fall of Jerusalem and the dispersion under Rome made Judaism a world religion.

For the late William F. Albright, dean of American "Biblical archaeologists," Moses was the founder of Israel's religion and commonwealth. Deliverance from Egypt was the anvil upon which Israel's nationhood and faith were forged.[7]

Current Anglo-American historiography focuses on the route and date of the exodus,[8] the nature of Israel's monotheism, and the role of the covenant. The latter is seen as the basis for the legal structure of the Mosaic code.[9] Anglo-American historiography sees Moses, the exodus, and Mosaic ethical monotheism as basic to Israelite nationhood, life and culture.[10] The exodus marked "the

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[6]Fohrer, *History* 72 (italics mine).

[7]Cf. W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (2d ed.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1957) 258. Cf., however, R. J. Grenald, "The Philistines: An Historiographic Analysis" (unpublished master's thesis; Cal-State University at Fullerton, 1969), for the thesis that the Israelite state came into being in conflict with the Philistines.

[8]There are two generally accepted dates for the exodus: 1445 B.C. (cf. 1 Kgs 6:1) and 1290 B.C. (cf. Exod 1:11). Goedicke dates the exodus to 1477 B.C., and Bimson dates it to 1470 B.C. on the basis of bichrome ware and 1 Kgs 6:1. For a convenient summary see R. Youngblood, "A New Look at an Old Problem: The Date of the Exodus," *Christianity Today* 26/20 (December 17, 1982) 58, 60 for details. See also J. Bright, *History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959) 111-115, 139-140 (1981: 122-123, 159-160); J. D. Douglas, ed., *New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 402-403; K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1966) 57-75; L. T. Wood, "Date of the Exodus," in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament* (ed. J. B. Payne; Waco: Word, 1970) 66-87; H. Shanks, "The Exodus and the Crossing of the Red Sea According to Hans Goedicke," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 7/5 (September-October 1981) 42-50; C. R. Krahmalkov, "A Critique of Professor Goedicke's Exodus Theories," 7/5 (September-October 1981) 51-54; E. O. Oren, "How Not to Create a History of the Exodus—A Critique of Professor Goedicke's Theories," 7/6 (November-December 1981) 46-53; H. Shanks, "In Defense of Hans Goedicke," 8/3 (May-June 1982) 48-52; Y. T. Radday, "A Biblical Scholar Looks at *BAR*'s Coverage of the Exodus," 8/6 (November-December 1982) 68-71 (Radday finds it lacking in terms of Near East literary convention). Goedicke identifies the pharaoh of the exodus with Hatshepsut, a queen; Krahmalkov has a few hundred Hebrews cross to Sinai on a ship from a port; Oren notes that excavations do not support Goedicke, who has two exoduses; none of them agree on a crossing site. Letters to the editor imply that a number of scholars are beginning to view the account in Exodus as a summary of several migrations. Goedicke's Thera was anticipated by others. Freedman's dating of Abraham (Genesis 14) to the third millennium on the basis of the Ebla tablets' names for deity (now suspect) and the kings of Genesis 14 (denied by the Italians), supported to a degree by excavations of Dead Sea sites, must also be considered in light of Exod 12:40; 1 Kgs 6:1 (cf. D. N. Freedman, "The Tell Mardikh Excavations, the Ebla Tablets, and Their Significance for Biblical Studies," *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin* NS 13 [1979] 5-36). See also C. F. Aling, "The Biblical City of Ramses," *JETS* 25/2 (June 1982) 129-137. My paper accepts the integrity of the exodus account in Exodus.

[9]G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Presbyterian Board of Colportage of Western Pennsylvania, 1955) 24-49.

[10]Cf. J. K. Eakins, "Moses," *RevExp* 74/4 (Fall 1977) 461-472, for a summary of interpretations of Moses as prophet, deliverer, guide, covenant mediator, lawgiver and "midwife."

beginning of the Hebrews as a nation."[11]

But did Israelite faith begin with Moses and the exodus? Surely Moses did not introduce a new religion to Israel. A more accurate view can be had by applying the insights of the anthropology of religion to a study of the exodus. Such an approach takes Moses, the exodus event, and the text of Exodus on their own terms, maintaining the integrity of all three. The insights of revitalization anthropology when applied to the exodus provide the historian and theologian with new insights, a new genre and motif.

Ralph Linton as early as 1943 defined a nativist movement as "any conscious organized attempt on the part of a society's members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture."[12] "Its crux lies," he went on to note, "in the phrase 'conscious organized effort.'" That consciousness arises when a people become aware of other cultural alternatives that threaten their cultural integrity. "Nativist movements concern particular elements of culture, even with cultures as a whole," in an attempt to revive the past or to perpetuate certain aspects of their present culture. Both perpetuative and revivalistic nativism oppose assimilation into alien societies.

The movements can either oppose or accommodate a new order of culture, society or politics.[13] Linton believes that such "movements are unlikely . . . where both societies are satisfied with their current relationship, or where societies . . . can see that their position is improving."[14] Discrimination can spark a movement in the absence of dominance.[15] But "a dominated group which considers itself superior" will develop a nativist movement.[16]

In light of this, Linton identifies three classes of nativist movements:[17] (1) magical nativist movements, which are comparable to messianic movements because they are led by a prophet and lean heavily on the supernatural; (2) rational revivalistic nativistic movements, which are reactions to frustration and attempts to uphold the past as a hope for the maintenance of self-respect; and (3) rational perpetuative nativistic movements, which seek to maintain social solidarity by emphasizing the group's unique knowledge and experience.

Rarely do these exist in pure form, since any given movement is usually a combination of the above. Rational movements can become mechanisms for ag-

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[11]C. T. Francisco, "The History of Israel," in *The Broadman Commentary* (rev. ed.; ed. C. J. Allen; Nashville: Broadman, 1973) 58. "In the Exodus the latent power of Israel's faith received a thrust that would never be denied. Later Israel would look back to the deliverance from Egypt to keep its faith alive" (p. 59). The discovery of the books of the Law sparked Josiah's reforms (cf. Mendenhall, *Law* 47-50).

[12]R. Linton, "Nativistic Movements," *American Anthropologist* NS 45/2 (April-June 1943) 230.

[13]R. F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Salvation and the Savage* (New York: Atheneum, 1965) preface.

[14]Linton, "Nativistic" 234.

[15]Ibid., p. 236.

[16]Ibid., p. 238.

[17]Ibid., pp. 232-233.

gression, whereas magical movements can be troublesome to governing officials by attempting to reconstruct the past in order to modify the present.

What Linton terms "nativist movements" Anthony F. C. Wallace calls "revitalization movements." Other designations include reform movements, cargo cults, religious revivals, messianic movements, utopian community sect formations, mass movements, social movement revolutions, and charismatic movements (nonglossolalic).[18] These cultural-system innovations are characterized by a process that Wallace calls "revitalization." Wallace classifies Atenism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Methodism as revitalization movements.[19] He distinguishes them from vitalistic movements. To Wallace revitalization movements reduce social stress by revitalizing a people's social, cultural or self- image.[20]

Wallace develops six types of revitalization movements: (1) nativistic, which seeks to eliminate alien persons, values, customs or things; (2) revivalistic, which seeks to revive the past; (3) cargo cults, which focus on cultural revitalization through the importation of alien goods, values and customs by transport vessels such as ships or planes (World War II produced a number of such cults in New Guinea); (4) vitalistic, which is the same as (3) but without vessels; (5) millenarian, which involves the supernatural in an apocalyptic age; and (6) messianic, in which an incarnate divine savior transforms society.[21]

Like Linton's, these are not mutually exclusive categories. Any combination can occur. Wallace interprets religious history as a series of revitalization movements.[22] The degree of dominance and the nature of the relationship between different peoples determines the kind of movement that occurs.[23]

It is significant that Wallace omits Moses and the exodus from his list of historical movements. It is the thesis of this article that the Mosaic exodus was a revitalization movement. Wallace's application of Linton's theories to folk history and legend lies at the heart of this new interpretation of Israel's deliverance from Egypt.[24] Certainly the Hebrews in Egypt were exposed to alien cultural

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[18]A. F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements: Some Theoretical Considerations for Their Comparative Study," *American Anthropologist* 58/3 (April 1956) 264.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid., pp. 266-267.

[21]Ibid., p. 267.

[22]Ibid., pp. 268-269.

[23]Ibid., pp. 275-276. Wallace, an evolutionist, uses dream analysis in this 1956 article. Therefore he has been selectively utilized in this paper in light of his belief that prophets were mentally ill (cf. pp. 272-274).

[24]E.g., in "The Dekanawideh Myth Analysed as a Record of a Revitalization Movement," *Ethnohistory* 5/2 (Spring 1958) 118-130, Wallace attempts to reconstruct an historical event out of its legendary matrix. Beginning with an outline of the legend of Hiawatha, Wallace develops an Iroquois culture history in which the decline of the social order is the result of instability due to increased population and blood feuds. The lack of social stability and the presence of blood feuds showed the need for revitalization. Hiawatha's preaching against blood feuds led to social stability (c. A.D. 1400-1600, esp. the latter). (Longfellow's poem "Hiawatha" is fiction.)

alternatives that threatened their cultural integrity. Failing to accommodate, they found themselves in opposition to the pharaoh. The exodus was a conservative attempt to recapture the past in order to modify the present.

How successful a revitalization movement is depends upon how much its leader comes to realize the extent to which his culture has already changed due to foreign elements. "Nativistic movements succeed, to the extent that they create a point of crystallization for people stripped of their unity and identity under acculturation."[25] The OT, especially the book of Exodus, is the record of a successful revitalization movement under the leadership of Moses. The exodus satisfies all of Linton's criteria.

The technique that Wallace uses requires several versions of the same legend, preferably from different periods of time.[26] Wallace sees the prophet as an innovator. Other prophetic movements, however, show that a prophet's message is often conservative, telling how to conserve the old ways. OT prophets called for radical changes that were to return Israel to the original covenant relationship with God that had begun with the patriarchs. Although Wallace's approach does not fit all the revitalization movements, it does fit many. It is a tool that the historian can use to open new windows on the past. This paper applies Wallace's technique to the accounts of the Hebrew exodus.

For Wallace the process of revitalization consists of five stages: steady state, individual stress, cultural distortion, revitalization, and new steady state. The fourth period, revitalization, Wallace further subdivides into six stages: revelation, communication, organization, adaptation, cultural transformation, and routinization.

Wallace notes that the process begins with a vision in which a deity outlines society's problems and their solution. The solution often consists of a code of behavior, belief, ritual, and social and/or economic practices. The prophet is challenged with communicating the message and gathering disciples. "If all goes well, the code is finally institutionalized by the society as part of its culture." Thus the prophet is called and given his mission to transform society. It is the contention of this writer that in the book of Exodus all of Wallace's stages are present.

Wallace notes that the Iroquois' original steady state was interrupted by increased interaction brought about by population increase. We read the same of the Hebrews in Exod 1:11-12: "Therefore they (the Egyptians) did set over them (the Hebrews) taskmasters to afflict them. . . . But the more they afflicted them, the more they (the Hebrews) multiplied and grew." Moses' period of personal stress is recorded in Exod 2:11-22, the episode in which he kills an Egyptian and then flees into the desert.

The most likely equivalent of Wallace's period of cultural distortion is Exod 1:14, 22. Having been invited to Egypt by an earlier pharaoh, now under one who "knew not Joseph" they are forced into corvee labor and experience acute demo-

[25]L. Krader, "A Nativistic Movement in Western Siberia," *American Anthropologist* 58/2 (April 1956) 291. Not all movements succeed. (The implications, positive and negative, for Christian missions are beyond the scope of this paper but are worth exploring.)

[26]For the exodus this involves the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, plus Psalms 105; 106; 136. The exodus is not a legend.

graphic change. A general lack of social cohesion may also be implied in the people's reaction to Moses' first bid for leadership: "Who made you a prince and a judge over us?" (2:14).

In Exodus 3 the parallels with Wallace's revitalization period are clear. Exodus 3 and 4, the episode of the burning bush, is the point of revelation when the prophet Moses is called and given his message. God speaks from a burning bush and tells Moses to go to his people, rally them around the standard of patriarchal faith, and lead them out of Egypt.

Wallace's communication and organization stages within the period of revitalization are seen in Exod 4:29-11:9, in which Moses has the task of convincing the pharaoh and the Hebrews to obey the Lord. The pharaoh had to be convinced to let the Hebrews go, and the Hebrews had to be convinced to leave. Like Mohammed, Moses' first converts—his first disciples—were members of his own family. Later the elders of Israel came to believe in the possibility and the necessity of deliverance (4:29). Finally the people sided with him.

Wallace's stage of adaptation ("strategic innovation") is seen in the Passover supper (Exodus 12). Israel found unity of faith and practice in this new institution. But cultural transformation and revitalization proper took place en route, in the exodus itself. Most of the book of Exodus details the changes wrought under Moses' theocratic leadership, changes that prepared the Hebrews for life in the land of promise. Just as Hiawatha's rule against blood feuds "effectively transform(ed) the Iroquois ethnic confederacy into a political confederacy,"[27] so the Passover, selection of judges and priests, the Law of Sinai, and the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 18—31), the major events of the exodus, galvanized Israel into a theocratic nation. Israel's religious change resulted in social change. Renewal of the divine covenant revitalized Israel.

In the wilderness and in Canaan, Israel's new steady state developed. Interrupted as it was by the Philistines, it was no less steady than that of the Iroquois, whose steady state was interrupted by Europeans. In both cases the political machinery established allowed the Iroquois and Hebrew nations to become established and to grow. Only in Israel's case was a true nation-state eventually established under David.[28]

The exodus was an event with many dimensions. It was a political challenge to the Egyptian establishment. Religiously it was a power encounter between the gods of Egypt and the God of Israel. Sociologically it was a movement that created a nation. To view the exodus as purely a socio-political phenomenon is to limit one's understanding of the event because revitalization movements are born out of the encounter of the natural and the supernatural, dialectic become synthesis.[29]

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[27]Wallace (1958), reprinted in *American Indian History: A Reader in Early Culture Contact 1492—1760* (ed. K. M. Morrison; Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, 1979) n.p.

[28]Under Hiawatha the Iroquois established the Confederation (League) of the Five (later Six) Nations, centered around the Great Lakes. Not all Iroquois-speaking peoples were in the League (e.g. the Cherokees). The League may be likened to early Italian and Greek leagues or perhaps the Philistine and Hebrew tribal confederations. The latter are discussed in B. D. Rahtjen, "The Philistine Amphictyony" (unpublished doctoral dissertation; Madison, NJ: Drew University, 1964).

[29]A. F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1966) 38.

Neither historiography nor exegesis can ignore the multiple dimensions that contextualized the exodus. It is possible, thanks to Linton and Wallace, to identify a new literary category: revitalization genre.

In the history of Israel Moses was the Hebrews' Hiawatha, leading Israel through a period of stress into a state of social and religious revitalization. Moses did not introduce a new faith to Israel. Like the later prophetic movements in Israel, the exodus was a conscious, deliberate, organized effort to produce a more satisfying culture via religion. The exodus revitalized the culture and faith of the Hebrews. Because of what the exodus did it may be defined as a revitalization movement, perhaps the earliest known to history.