

CHAPTER 1. CATEGORIES OF PRESENCE.

1A. EXPLORING SOME OF THE SCHOLARLY DISCUSSIONS ON OUR CURRENT TOPIC

“THE APPLICATION OF THE EXODUS DIVINE-PRESENCE NARRATIVES AS A BIBLICAL SOCIO-ETHICAL PARADIGM FOR THE CONTEMPORARY REDEEMED”.

A search on the University of Pretoria’s database, under Catalogue and Sabinet, has shown that there is no completed or current research on the above topic as a whole.

ON THE TOPIC OF DIVINE PRESENCE.

On the topic of divine presence, however, there is much done. These works have greatly influenced the discussions herein.

- In the discussion on Pentateuchal concepts of the presence of God, Clements (1978) shows that God is present for his people and for his people alone. That presence is an indication of their blessedness and success among the nations. That presence was also indicative of the relationship of Israel with a holy God. God’s ineffable presence is linked with the tokens of light and fire. These at the same time affect the salvation for God’s people through the cloud and the fire of his presence. Later that presence is depicted by the *shikinah* in the sanctuary of the tabernacle. God’s presence is an indication of his approval of those to whom he appears. The presence was sought in order to worship acceptably.

- Eichrodt (1967) observed that the appearances of God are beneficent in its nature. The different forms of God’s self-revelation, or manifestation, or disclosure, have mainly a two-fold purpose; namely, its beneficence to God’s

people or its magnificence in the show of his glory. He deals in fair depth with the aspects of theophany, *kabod*, and the Name Yahweh. For him all these we are to understand, as expressions of God's presence, and those, especially the last-mentioned two, are expressions of his relationship with his people, which demanded a moral identity unique to Israel.

- Zimmerli (1976:3-13) skillfully shows the “double beginning” in relation to the main appearances of God, first to Abram, and then to Moses. The first beginning of Israel as God's People was marked by his appearance to Abram, and the second beginning by his appearance to Moses introducing himself as Yahweh. For him these appearances held significance, not only for these two men as individuals, but God showed himself as the author of the nation Israel, who bears his Name. The Name has great significance in a relationship marked by God's presence. God is also the God of Sinai, the place that gave Israel its Covenant relationship with God. Sinai is a place of God's personal presence; at which instructions for later depictions of God's presence (Tabernacle and Ark) are given. These were central to Israel's cultic and ethical response.

- Westermann (1978) focuses on the difference between epiphany and theophany as modes of Old Testament revelation of God. The former, for him, is an expression of God acting, while the latter is an expression of God speaking. These are the two main forms of God's presence expressed in the Old Testament and can be demonstrated throughout. He is however correct to show that God's speaking, especially to individuals, is not restricted to theophany. He may speak without appearance (which does not preclude God's presence in such cases) in many different ways, e.g. “God spoke to Abraham”, or through a dream as in the case of Jacob (Gen. 28.10ff) when he recognized that God was there.

- Though Brueggemann (2002) uses as his departure the text of 1Sam. 4-6, he explores the ark narratives to derive a theology of the ark. He shows a theology

of God's sovereignty in allowing himself to be "captured". This story is superimposed on the Pentateuchal understanding of the ark of the Lord. The ark of the Lord speaks of God's presence, even in the face of perceived absence. The point he makes is that God is present and working even when he is silent. God is really fighting for both his glory and for Israel's identity as his possession. This identity has to be validated, among others also, by Israel's ethical conduct.

- Terrien's (1978) work has, in the present writer's opinion, been by far the most informative on the subject of God's presence. We cannot here enumerate all the issues discussed, but we shall show some of the salient points of the book, demonstrating how it developed our own understanding.

In the cultural milieu, the Hebrews developed a unique theology of presence. They worshipped a God whose disclosure or proximity always had a certain quality of elusiveness. God was shown to be both a self-revealing and a self-concealing God. The motif of divine presence constitutes an element of religious homogeneity, which respects historical complexity without ignoring coherence and specificity. Simply said, presence explains things like covenant-importance, and not the other way around. The theology of presence is primary and other relational expressions are secondary.

The theology is often expressed in the cultus and faith of Israel. These, for the most, were translated into moral and ethical expression (the holiness code). Also, the cultus and faith of Israel provides the points of continuity into the New Testament. We shall further explore in this research the possibility of the extended continuity into our current situation. The rite and the ideology of covenant are dependant upon the prior reality of presence. The goal of Hebraic worship is to remember and to anticipate the time of divine encounter. The essence of cultic and faith categories is to celebrate the moment, either past or future, of the divine manifestation or proximity and to express their holy identity.

The divine nearness in the Old Testament was often linked to a few elite individuals. What sort of access did the average Israelite have to the presence of God? He believed in the real presence of God at the shrine during the celebrations of the cultic feasts and he expected the final epiphany of history when Yahweh will at last bring creation to fulfillment. Here, the author speaks of a cultic presence. The Deuteronomic law opened with a cultic rehearsal of those memories, in which the motif of covenant is subordinated to the story of theophanic presence (Deut.5.2-4). Having said this, we must not forget about the redemptive presence (the pillar of cloud and fire) experienced by the whole people.

The author then demonstrates aspects of theophany, the disclosure of Glory, divine speech, epiphanic visitation, Sinai and other disclosures, and the importance of hearing in the formation of the People of God. Presence is that which creates a People. Presence is the reality to which man attunes himself if he is to live. The Hebraic notion of “people-hood” is represented in their history of the divine presence.

God’s presence is defined in terms of the theologoumenon of the Name and of God’s goodness, not of the Glory. Presence is the begetter of theology (which includes ethics), but theology defines that presence. This is demonstrated in the story where Moses expresses a desire “to know” God. The ways of God are the signs of his purpose and represent his creative will. What Moses really wants to know, are God’s ways. In this manner the divine presence is linked with knowledge about God. God in fact does not promise absolute knowledge, but rather his presence (Ex. 33.14). The people-hood of Israel was in this unique relationship. Without the divine presence, this relationship does not exist.

- Fretheim (1984) brings out the idea of “intensification” of the presence. That God promises to be with the recipient beyond the time and place of his appearance to them (e.g. Gen.26.24, Gen.18.15, etc.). That is why we have the concepts of “forsakenness”, “departure”, etc. in the Old Testament. God’s presence in the

created order of time and space is concurrent with these intensifications. These intensifications are experienced relationally as God's "nearness" or "distance". There are three forms of intensifications, namely:

Theophany – God's accompanying presence with his people in their journeying expressed in the Name, cloud/fire, his face and messengers.

Cultus – God's tabernacle-ing presence as he dwells among his people. The ark of the Lord is included in this understanding of presence.

Glory – This is God's unapproachable presence. The people cannot approach God's presence and therefore need the representation of Moses.

This whole idea of intensification is demonstrated by the different understanding of God's transcendence and his immanence.

- Reflecting on the Sinai pericope (Ex.19 – Num.10.10), Schmidt (1983) notes that Sinai is presented as the mountain of God. Here God is presented as both transcendent (Elohism) and as immanent (Yahwism). The different names for the mountain depict origin – "Sinai" (J,P), the "mount of God" (E), and "Horeb" (D). For the people the relationship with God is mainly audible and not visible. That relationship of the people with God carries on through the prophets ultimately to the incarnation of the Word.
- The central idea of Zimmerli's (1982) work is that Revelation is the voice of none other than God. The self-presentation of God does not depend upon, or is derived from any religious property or historical circumstance, but on the disclosure of his personal Name, Yahweh. Yahweh has no other disclosure to make other than his own person, and his person in its hidden-ness is disclosed to his people only as he chooses to disclose it. So do we come to an understanding of God that is appropriate to Yahweh and distinctive to Israel. The disclosure of Yahweh's personal Name, a name containing full richness and honor of the One naming himself. In the self-disclosures, God refers to himself in two ways: the long form, "I am Yahweh your God" and the short form, "I am Yahweh", where the

paraenetic statements seem to prefer the longer form. Our particular interest in terms of ethical importance lies here. The shorter form is normally enriched by the addition of a divine deed in the past.

1B. THE CATEGORIES OF DIVINE PRESENCE – IN GENERAL.

The presence of God is expressed in many ways in the Old Testament in general, and in the Book of Exodus in particular. We have to briefly discuss the general Old Testament understanding of divine presence before we look specifically at Exodus, as this understanding was reflected in Israel's theology of presence, and in turn this theology influenced the New Testament's theology, where the Trinitarian God came in personal form. The Old Testament expresses the presence of God in many different ways, such as theophany, epiphany, divine speech, visions, dreams, emblems or symbols and other manifestations. Theophany seems to include most of these anyway. This is perhaps the best place for us to start.

1C. THE CATEGORIES EXPLORED.

The Book of Exodus is unique in some ways. Here we have the appearances of God happening in "public" as it were. Not only Moses was privy to the presence of God, but the Israelites and the Egyptians were witnesses of the appearances of God. While on the one hand the Egyptians did not quite acknowledge God's presence they finally gave in to it by acknowledging that it served the benefit of the Israelites. The Israelites on the other hand were constantly aware of that terrorizing presence. With fear and wonder mingled they acknowledged it as a saving presence. They alone seemed to have benefited from it. Fretheim (1984:60) speaks of the divine presence as "there-ness". God was continuously present, but with various intensifications.

Moses seemed to have special access to the presence of God. There were times when only he could go before God. When the elders and Aaron were invited into

the presence, they never went without Moses. There were times when Yahweh invited an audience with Moses, and there were times when Moses seemed to have entered God's presence "at will" as mediator of the people (*cf.* Ex.5:22-6:12). Whenever Moses entered the presence, he was visually aware of the presence, but he perceived no fixed shape or form. Whoever entered the presence knew that it could not be entered flippantly because the presence was actually dangerous to life. There came a time when the Israelites, for fear, refused to go into the presence of God. They rather wanted to have Moses as their representative before God (Ex.20:18-19).

The presence of God in Exodus always did three things, namely, i) it authenticated the identity and commands of Yahweh as their God, ii) it authenticated Yahweh's representative, Moses, as his servant, and iii) it authenticated the present program of Yahweh with respect to his people, Israel. The people had to know that Yahweh was their God and that they were his people. This was the essence of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. That knowledge, together with the Covenant made for an ethical response to the presence of God. The text reminds us that God is willing and yearning to be present, but that presence requires a community of faith and obedience (Breuggemann 1994:685). It was the presence that created peoplehood.

The ineffable presence of God conveys the essential concept about the being of God. Light and fire play an important role in demonstrating something of the power and transcendence of God (Clements 1978:56). His glory is characterized simply as gleaming light. The glory of God is the expression of his holiness, power and transcendence. From the point of view of revelation the glory of God, however, is always 'veiled' and thus never a depiction of its full extent. From the point of human perception the divine majesty can only be imperfectly grasped by human sense and therefore descriptions of his glorious appearances will always be lacking (Eichrodt 1967:19).

The destiny of the Book and of the people is depicted in the ending of Exodus, with the construction of the tabernacle and God's descent to dwell among the people.

The journey of God in Exodus is also notable. God is hardly present at the beginning of the book, but at the end God has moved down from his distant abode at the top of the mountain to become an intense presence in the very midst of the community of faith, even though they are a persistently disloyal people (Fretheim 2003:249-254).

1C.1. Theophany.

Theophany is derived from Greek words that mean the *appearance of God* or the manifestation of deity. It literally 'was seen' or 'showed itself' (Terrien 1978:107f.) Significant events in the life of Israel have been marked by the appearances of God. While the other ancient peoples created statues and other representations of their deities, Israel were strictly forbidden to represent Yahweh in any physical form (Ex.20:4). Theophanies were acts of God. There were no theophanies unless God was willing to appear in whatever form he chose. Rooker (2003:859) calls it God's self-disclosure. These are temporary manifestations of God. Ryken (1998:857) reminds us that the Hebrews valued even more the verbal descriptions of the encounters with their God they found in their Scriptures. When God appears in theophanies he limits himself to specific and particular forms within the context of the creation he has made.

The Old Testament describes a number of theophanic incidents. We cannot always tell the form of the divine appearance as in some cases God simply appears in relationship to man. In Genesis for example God appears to man in the Garden of Eden. God appears in that way to Abram and Jacob too. Sometimes God is personified in the forces of nature (e.g. Ps.18:13-14; Hab.3:9-12). Loud divine speech is an indication of God's presence. Earthquakes, fire, lightning, storm, wind, smoke and cloud often mark these descriptions of God (Ryken 1998:857).

Some theologians exclude the category of dreams from the list of theophanies. According to Rooker (2003:860), theophanies broadly include (1) a direct message, (2) a message in a dream, (3) a message in a vision, (4) a message by

an angel, (5) a message by an angel in a dream. It includes any manner in which God chooses to reveal himself. He continues to say that the heightened forms of natural phenomena, like the pillars of cloud and fire were understood to be sense-perceptible representations of God's presence. The variety of ways in which God reveals himself is an indication of his freedom. Westermann (1978:25) distinguishes between theophany and epiphany as follows: A theophany belongs to God's speaking. Epiphany belongs to God acting. Epiphany has the same meaning as coming, and God could also come for judgment.

The more dramatic appearances of God are associated with Moses, Job, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and Ezekiel. They experienced these dramatic appearances of God. Theophanies are often associated with the calling or commissioning of individuals. Isaiah, for example, describes his commissioning in such terms (Is. 6:1-9). The verbal content that goes with these appearances is what is important and the appearance itself only serves to validate the commission.

Fretheim (1984:82) remarks that the appearances of God are for the most spontaneous and effective. God may appear in any place and at any time. He is never manipulated to appear. This is so because of the freedom of God. Humans on the other hand may have perceived it as regularized and expected (e.g. Lev.9:4-6). The appearance of God in any case made a difference – whether to quell fear, to evoke worship, or to improve relationship – by increasing knowledge about God's worth, will, words and works.

There are instances where the purpose of theophany is to depict the glory of God. That glory often expresses selected attributes of the One appearing. These include the show of his power; or his inapproachability; or his uniqueness. It always indicates the fundamental truth; that God is supernatural in every sense, and the language used describes him in such terms. We must not forget that the language used to describe God, even in theophanic terms, is often clothed with anthropomorphisms. While theophanic language in Israel was reserved for Yahweh, it was fairly common for the surrounding nations to use such language for favored monarchs.

By his holiness God is different and distinct from his creation, but is not limited by the distinction. Rooker (2003:860) mentions the important fact, that the non-occurrence of God's appearing in the form of an animal in the Old Testament is related to the avoidance of any association of Israelite worship with paganism. This absolute bar on the idea of God becoming visible in animal form was further supported by the fact that divinization of the animal world exerted no influence on the relation conceived to exist between Yahweh and nature (Eichrodt 1967:23). This distinction is also in part related to Israel's call to be holy, distinct from the world and the surrounding nations.

The different Old Testament writers portray the appearances of God in various and yet remarkably similar ways. Sometimes God appeared as a man, sometimes as or in the person of 'the angel of the Lord'. The angel of the Lord almost always appears as a beneficent power for the people. He was Yahweh's provision for guidance and protection. This and other appearances, though they reveal God, have to conceal him also. A theophany is God's way of appearing in a somewhat concealed way. The theophany is always less than who he really is. There is a danger for the one who gazes on God's appearance; therefore theophanies are really veiled appearances for man's benefit. Concealment is related to the idea of God's holiness. Rooker calls this the *survival motif* (2003:861). In Exodus such concealment often took the form of a thick dark cloud.

The prevalent characteristic of all theophanies is that they are initiated by God himself. They exist to reveal God's plan/s. Another common characteristic is that they are always temporary. They are always transient manifestations related to their purpose. Another characteristic is that God imparted holiness to the location of the theophany for the duration of its appearance. The Lord's presence makes the place holy but that holiness departs when God departs from the designated place. The place is holy for as long as God is there. God appeared at locations in the natural environment such as springs, rivers, trees, but predominantly at mountains. The speech of God is often accompanied with sounds such as the

thunderous “voice” or trumpet blasts and earth-shaking disturbances. (Rooker 2003:862).

Humans always responded with fear and terror to theophanies. The terrorizing appearances of God explain why God was often cloaked in a cloud in the theophanic appearance: the full revelation of his glory would totally overwhelm and could in fact destroy the human onlooker (Rooker 2003:863). We therefore disagree with Erickson (1991:268) when he alludes to the spirituality of God in order to spiritualize theophanies. We believe they were also physical realities as is indicated by the attending sounds and disturbances referred to earlier. We can agree with Schmidt (1983:42) with some modification when he says: “In theophany ... God is not visible, but only audible and traceable in the effects of his appearance”, if the traceability refers to the form of the appearance of God. In other words, it is not really God who was seen, but only a form in which he chose to show himself. One can in any case not deny the personal and immediate presence of God.

We must now turn our concern to theophany in the Book of Exodus. The first occurrence is *the burning bush* with the call of Moses at ‘the mountain of God’ (Ex.3:1-4:17). God speaks from the midst of the burning bush. The theophany is called “the angel of the Lord” (3:2). In verse 4 it is God himself present in the midst of the bush. The location was made holy by the presence and Moses hid his face. When God’s presence departed, that space once again became common ground (Hartley 2003:421). Yes, finally Moses communed with God ‘face to face’ and had to cover his face to hide the transferred glory that shone from his face (Ex. 34:29ff.). If one thinks of theophany as happening in two parts, a visible element and a speech element, then the former functioned in this instance as something to get Moses’ attention (Breuggemann 1994:712).

Terrien (1978:120) posits that the heart of the Book of Exodus (Ex.19:1-24:18) represents the only story of “theophany” in the strict sense of the word. There is firstly the nature in tumult, and secondly the participation of the people stands as a witness to the solitary man of God. It insists on hearing sounds and depicting the

presence in terms of visibility. Israel could not become a priestly realm and a holy nation without hearing God's words. Presence is the root of people-hood.

The *pillars of cloud and fire* (Ex. 14, etc.) were theophanic manifestations. God led his people in these pillars. These were two different pillars when it led the people. The pillar of cloud led the people during the day and the pillar of fire led them during the night. When God defended his people these pillars seemed to have become one, a pillar of cloud and fire standing between the camp of the Israelites and the camp of the Egyptians. The side of the pillar facing the Egyptians brought darkness to that camp, while the side that faced the Israelites brought light, so that the Israelites could travel by day and night. The holy God often manifested his presence as a glowing brightness comparable to a fire (Hartley 2003:421). Out of the pillar God viewed the happenings (Ex.14:24) and spoke (Ex.16:10-12). The pillar was present with the Israelites to the end of the Book of Exodus when finally it sanctified the tabernacle.

At Sinai God descended on the mount in a majestic display. There was *lightning* and *thunder* and the *blast of a horn* as a *thick cloud* hung over the mountain (Ex.19:6ff.). There was fire, and smoke ascended from the mountain. Here the image of God's presence in theophany is portrayed together with the veiling (the thick cloud) for the protection of the people from God's consuming holiness. So the people were filled with both terror and fascination before a spectacular revelation of God's holiness (Hartley 2003:422). What differentiates the Ten Commandments from other forms of the Law is that they were given directly by God. They were uniquely written on two stone tablets by 'the finger of God' (Ex.31:18), and the lawgiving was accompanied by a dramatic theophany (Selman 2003:501). An example is found in that the mountain shook with the presence of God. It was actually these attending disturbances that evoked fear in the people. They understood the holiness of God and its effects through these disturbances.

There is often reference made to *the glory* in the Book of Exodus (e.g. Ex.40:34-35). The glory must include an element of appearance, of that which catches the eye. Glory (*kabod*) is the radiance which proceeds from Yahweh whenever he

appears. It is depicted as a glory of great intensity. The glory was too great for the people. On a few occasions the glory was so powerfully present that the people were overwhelmed. “The appearance of the glory of Yahweh was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the sons of Israel” (Ex.24:17).

Moses’ request for a vision of the glory (Ex.33:18-22) was an expression of his quest to secure his relationship with Yahweh. There is an indirect refusal since he is only allowed to see the goodness, which anticipated the grace of Yahweh. The immediate glory will be seen, but veiled, by the showing of his back rather than his face. (Terrien 1978:143). This too was in anticipation of grace. After Moses anointed the tabernacle, the glory descended with such power that not even Moses could enter the tent of meeting. Yet, on one occasion Moses was permitted to behold God’s glory, albeit that that glory had to be ‘veiled’ in some way (Ex.33:18-23). It was impossible for any human to look directly at God and live. This powerful manifestation of God’s glory communicated to the Israelites the power, dignity and splendor of God’s holiness (Hartley 2003:422).

So far we have seen that theophany is the main descriptor of the presence of God. It consists of the visible part; and it is accompanied by a verbal part. The verbal part is properly called divine speech. This speech functions in different ways in the Book of Exodus.

1C.2 Divine Speech.

Divine speech is when God speaks. It is also called theologoumena. God is not silent, nor severed from his people. He “heard”, he “remembered”, he “saw” and he “knew”. The groans of his people he took as addressed to him. His hearing caused the remembrance of his covenant, which in turn made him look upon their suffering. God finally “comes down” and communicates that he knows their situation and tells them his plans for them according to the covenant. Divine speech is a form of revelation. Poythress (1986:252) puts it that all of God’s

speech is referential in character. In all of what God says, he is bringing us to know him and his world.

In the call narrative, the speech of God contains three elements. i) There is the sovereign summons which requires the response of those addressed. Divine speech addresses real people and real situations. ii) There is the commanding voice that asserts an awesome limit, caused by the fact of his holiness. The elusiveness of God's presence is such because it has to be veiled for the hearers' benefit. God does not want to destroy them. iii) There is the self-identification of the speaker. God makes himself known to his people. Zimmerli (1982:xv) expresses our understanding well: Yahweh has no other disclosure to make other than his own person, and his person in its hidden-ness is disclosed only as he chooses to disclose it. He also makes his plans known to them.

Divine speech has *creative* ability. Besides the fact that all creation came into being by divine speech, divine speech is also able to create *relationship* between God and man. God gave *his name* by means of divine speech. He reiterates his *covenant* with Israel by divine speech. He *recounts his deeds* on Israel's behalf by divine speech. He makes his *promises* and gives *assurances* by divine speech. He makes his *pronouncements* and *judgments* by divine speech. He enters into *dialogue* with man. His *discourse* reveals his person and his plans.

Divine speech happens both in private and in "public". There were times when God spoke to Moses alone. There were times when he spoke in the congregation's hearing. An occasion when God spoke directly to the people was when he proclaimed to them the Ten Commandments (Ex.19:16-17 and 20:1ff.) They begged that Moses rather speaks to them (Ex.20:19). It was the visible part of the theophany that terrified the people. Westermann (1978:25) makes the remark that theophany belongs to God's speaking. Theophany always introduces divine speech. There are texts where nothing is said about an appearance. God often spoke without a visible form.

In the patriarchal stories there are a multiplicity of places, like Shechem, Mamre, Beersheba, Moriah, Bethel and Penuel, where God appears and speaks. In the Exodus narratives God speaks at a single place, *the mountain of God and its immediate vicinity*. The patriarchs erected shrines where God spoke to them. In Exodus *no shrines* were erected anywhere. There are no wonders that accompany God's appearance to the patriarchs. In Exodus there were often *wonders* that went with it (Terrien 1978:107). Hebraic theophany was *more heard than seen*. There is a desire for the presence, but not for visibility. Sight is submitted to hearing (Terrien 1978:110). Eichrodt (1967:21) reminds us that Israel heard the voice of God at Horeb without seeing any form (Dt.4:12-18).

We may talk of dialogical speech, where God is in *dialogue* with man. When God revealed his Name, it was within a context of dialogue. Moses asked Yahweh what he should answer when they asked who sent him. The answer was the disclosure of the divine name. Dialogue was true only for Moses. Only he spoke to God and often does so as the mediator of the people.

Here we are not thinking of divine speech in a way we think of the inspiration of Scripture. The people and Moses literally heard the words of Yahweh. The hearing of the divine will is stressed in the Sinai theophany. They heard in 'grammar and syntax' language. They are sometimes directly compared with speech from one human being to another (Ex.20:19), and in terms of what they already know about God and his purposes (Ex.20:2, 11), but the people are listening to God (Poythress 1986:250). It was not some transcendental communication. Yet, there are times when the divine speech within a narrative "fills the gap" with the word about faith (e.g. Num.20:12), giving the story a sense far larger than that of its own immediate concern (Sailhamer 1991:259). This kind of direct speech was recorded in a form understood as "thus says the Lord".

Moses met and spoke regularly with God at the Tent of Meeting (Ex.29:42). This took place in such a dramatic form that all who saw it recognized the holiness of the experience and responded in worship (Ex.33:9). Moses could hear the voice of God from "between the cherubim" (Num.7:89) (Merrill 1998:109). Moses was

tasked with the duty of passing on this heavenly word to the people (Dt.5:5). The speech of God was always meant to have an effect beyond the messenger, and in this instance, Moses.

Merrill (1998:109) goes on to say: When Moses was given the task of passing on the word, the divine speech was understood as *a corpus of “commands”, “decrees” and “laws”* designed to guide the nation in its task of being a priestly kingdom and holy nation (Dt.6:1). Moses is God’s prophet, to speak on his behalf to the people; but also the people’s priest, to represent them before God. Whether as prophet or as priest, Moses had the privilege of direct communion with God.

1C.3 Symbols – Tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant.

Presence created people-hood and God desired to be present with Israel. Their identity as God’s people was demonstrated by the fact that God was present with them. That presence showed God’s favor on them and was reciprocated by their being holy unto the Lord. Yahweh’s presence while they journeyed was particularly associated with two cultic objects, namely the Tabernacle and the Ark (Zimmerli 1978:48). The people’s holiness was possible only through their cultic expression. Their cultic expression was inextricably bound to the symbols of presence which in turn confirmed their people-hood. The symbols of presence are preeminently vested in the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark and the Tabernacle result from an act of generosity and concern by a holy God, vehicles by which he not only meets his people but also reveals himself to them. All divine revelation by nature accommodates the Creator to a form less than himself (Fleming 2003:679). Terrien (1978:26) reminds us that Hebraic worship is to remember and anticipate the time of the divine encounter. These two objects functioned exactly in that way during their worship of the present God.

The Tabernacle.

When Israel was in Egypt, God saw their plight and “came down” (Ex.3:8) to bring about their deliverance. God came down to identify with his people. His presence was with his people during their time of suffering, and it was there when he rescued them. His presence overcame their enemies. His presence was with them in their travel towards the land of promise. At Sinai the people experienced the formalization of their relationship with Yahweh and by that became a nation that was covenanted to Yahweh. The single most important fact in the experience of this new nation of Israel was that God came to “tabernacle” or dwell in their midst (Kaiser 1978:119). The tabernacle sanctuary was the Lord’s tented dwelling in the midst of Israel. Now the triad of God’s intention was complete; Yahweh was their God, they were his people, and his dwelling was among them.

For almost one year the people stayed at Sinai and constructed the tabernacle in accordance with the Lord’s instructions (Ex.25-40). On the day the tabernacle was completed and erected, Yahweh promptly occupied the tabernacle in his glory (Ex.40) and from that point forward had his continuous presence among the people. It was manifested as a guiding and protecting presence in the form of a cloud by day with fire in it by night over the tabernacle (Averbeck 2003a:807). We are able to observe that the God who was scarcely present in the beginning of the story drew nearer during the unfolding until he was resident at the end.

The dwelling of Yahweh among his people was known by three terms, namely, “tabernacle”, “sanctuary” and “tent of meeting”. The word for tabernacle (*miškān*) has the idea of “dwelling place” and speaks about the immanence of God. He now dwells among his people. The Lord’s transcendence is only really understood when it is held in relationship to the immanence, and vice versa (Averbeck 2003a:809). As the sanctuary (*miqdāš*) it had the idea of holiness. It has the graded concept of holiness in that there is the ‘holy place’ and ‘the most holy’ place (holy of holies). The whole tabernacle was called the “sanctuary”, while the most holy place was referred to as the “inner sanctuary” (Unger 1985:1060). Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the sanctuary after consecrating himself in the prescribed way.

The tent of meeting (*ōhel mō'ēd*) emphasizes the tabernacle's function as the place of "meeting" between God and his people. This is the exclusive name used in the section Ex.27:20 – 33:7 and the focus is on cultic function. The tent of meeting would become the place of God's glory.

The tabernacle was meant to be *moveable* from the start. Like with the Israelite dwellings, this was a moveable dwelling place for Yahweh in his travels with his people on their way to the Promised Land. Israel's religion was not attached to any sacred place, such as Sinai or Jerusalem. The sanctuary existed for life on the move. All the key artifacts of the tabernacle shrine were portable in all its practical terms. Also, a formal staff was appointed for its service and rites. This was surprising as such appointments existed in their contemporary setting only for fixed temples and shrines. With Israel, God does not visit their neighborhoods, but he joins them in search for a whole new home (Fleming 2003:674f).

The staff that was appointed and dedicated to the tabernacle was from the tribe of Levi. They were generally referred to as the priests. In the hierarchy of priesthood there were those who were appointed to the moving of the shrine. There were those who were appointed for cultic services. Then there was the High Priest appointed from the family of Aaron to serve cultic-ly in the Holy of Holies. Those set aside to be priests were placed in a special state of holiness that allowed them access to the "dwelling" of God (Duke 2003:652). Moses passed on the priestly function to Aaron so that there would be a separation between the leadership of the people and the leadership of worship. Fleming (2003:675) states that Israel's religious life with the tabernacle excludes the political ruler to a remarkable degree.

The sanctification of the tabernacle and priests was necessary if they were to accommodate the presence of God. In a special ceremony Moses anointed the tabernacle, its furnishings and the priests. After the anointing, the divine glory descended on the tabernacle, confirming the anointing (Ex.40:34-35; Lev.8) and showing that God's presence was there making the tabernacle tent of meeting a holy place and the priesthood holy.

There was another “tent of meeting” pitched outside the camp. It is first mentioned in Ex.33:7-11. This is where Moses received oracular revelations before and after the Tabernacle was completed. The tabernacle would however serve as both a cultic and an oracular tent. The Lord would meet at the tabernacle not only with Moses but with all the Israelites (Ex.29:42f). So also with the tent outside the camp; the Lord would go there (Ex.33:7-9). Averbek (2003a:811) comments that it was not entirely clear how the oracular functions of the two tents varied, but it can be said that there were no regular cultic functions performed at the outside tent. There was nevertheless a continuing manifestation of the Lord’s personal presence at the outside tent of meeting (Ex.33). The outside tent did not provide a “permanent” residence for the Lord. On the other hand we are told that the congregation assembled at the entrance of the tabernacle tent of meeting to witness the consecration procedures for the priests.

The tabernacle and its furnishings and utensils were constructed strictly according to God’s instructions. We shall not here look at the details with respect to the dimensions and furnishings / utensils. We shall only consider aspects as they pertain to the facilitation of the divine presence. We know of the Outer Court, of the Holy Place and of the Most Holy Place. The actual tabernacle consisted only of the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The presence of God was chiefly linked with the Holy of Holies (most holy place).

A curtain between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies separated the two compartments. This curtain is spoken of as a “veil” (*pārōket*) (Ex.26:31-35). Behind the veil was the Most Holy Place, a cubicle with the length, width and height of equal dimensions (10 cubits; approx. 15 feet or 4,6 meters). The Ark of the Covenant (also called *The Ark of the Testimony* – Ex.25:10-16) was placed in the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest could enter behind the veil once a year on the Day of Atonement. The presence of God was behind the veil. We cannot help but again notice the *survival motif* related to the presence.

The Holy Place functioned as the place for daily offerings. Of particular note in this area was the Table of Presence and the Lampstand (Ex.25:23-40). These two

furnishings were a constant impression of the daily presence of God. The former contained the Bread of Presence (12 loaves) with frankincense which were changed every Sabbath Day. The lampstand not only shed light in the Holy Place, but was lit every day. The combination of the daily lighting of the lampstand and associated burning of incense plus the bread constantly on the table impresses one with the fact that the Lord had truly taken up residence in the tabernacle (Averbeck 2003a:815).

The cultic activities in the tabernacle were opportunities for divine encounter, and the essence of the ancient feasts was to celebrate the moment of the divine manifestation and proximity. To use Terrien's (1978:26) words, here "... there was the recollection and the hope of the presence mediated to the rank and file of the people and transmitted to the posterity from generation to generation". They believed in the real presence of Yahweh at the shrine during the celebrations of the feasts. This was the cultic mode of presence.

God provided for the people's need of his presence by entering both space and time to be with them there in the varying intensities of their experience and to meet their need for the specific, the tangible, the personal and the articulate (Fretheim 1984:62). Israel's life of worship could not afford to be careless of times and places. Provisions were made for those moments and places of worship within their culture. With the tabernacle this presence and cultus were focused to a particular place in their midst; a place that God chose. It also showed that God's presence among his people was an act of grace.

The dual idea of transcendence and immanence is brought together in the tabernacle. God has promised his presence and accessibility to his people, but they cannot make that presence their possession; the tabernacle told the Israelites that God is available and his presence is real. "I will dwell among the people of Israel, and will be their God" (Ex.29:45). God's Name was present at the sanctuary (Dt.12:5f) demonstrating the covenant relationship at its highest realization.

The Lord would be present with Moses and Israel all the way from Egypt to Mount Sinai, and from Sinai to the Promised Land. From Sinai to the Promised Land the presence would reside in the Tabernacle. The tabernacle was therefore, a sort of moveable Sinai. The purpose for building the tabernacle was to provide a place for the Lord to dwell among them, even after they left Sinai (Averbeck 2003a:824). In Exodus the continuity in the symbolism of that presence is to be found in the pillar of cloud. In this way the glory was constantly with them and was meant to instill the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord did not last long, for less than two months later they had already severely violated the Lord's presence and his other basic commands in the golden calf debacle (Ex.32) (Averbeck 2003a:823).

The Ark of the Covenant.

Motyer (1985:168) is correct in saying that at the very center of this whole divinely dedicated religion was the Ark. Everything pointed to it. The Ark was one of the furnishings of the Tabernacle. It was to be placed in the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle. Of all the furnishings, this was the most important and most holy. In it were deposited the two stone tablets upon which "the finger of God" wrote his Ten Words. The Ten Commandments were the terms of God's covenant with the people of Israel. Besides it being called the 'Ark of the Covenant' (Num.10:33; Dt.31:26), it is also called the 'Ark of the Testimony' (Ex.25:16, 22) and the 'Ark of God' (1Sa.3:3, 4:11). It is often understood as the throne of the divine presence (Unger 1985:88). It was a symbol of the Lord's presence.

The Ark of the Testimony compares with the roughly contemporary shrine and funerary furniture of King Tutankhamun (c. 1350 B.C.) which has been used to guide the graphic interpretation of the biblical text (Barker 1985:126). From Exodus 25 we know that it was a chest made of acacia wood with approximate dimensions of 1,1meters long and 0,7meters wide and high. It was overlaid with pure gold, both inside and out. It had a lid of pure gold which had two cherubim facing each other and looking down and with their wings spread. The Ark had to be carried by the priests with two poles that were put through four gold rings fixed to the Ark.

The lid covering the Ark, especially the space between the two cherubim, is traditionally known as the “mercy seat” or as the “atonement seat” (*kappōret*). It was believed to mark the place of the Lord’s “enthronement” in his earthly kingdom (e.g. 2Sa.6:2; Ps.99:1). This also is the place that the Lord appointed to meet with his people (Ex.25:22). It is the place where the sacrificial blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement.

According to Leviticus 16:2, the Lord said to Moses, “I will appear in the cloud over the atonement seat”, so he was to make clear to Aaron that the High Priest must not enter there except once a year on the Day of Atonement. With regards to Moses, however, the Lord would “meet” with Moses there and “speak” to him all the commandments so that he could deliver them to the Israelites (Ex.25:22). Kaiser remarks that the Ark of the Covenant of God with its mercy seat, or place of atonement, overspread by the two cherubim was the most intimate of all the expressions of God’s nearness to his people (1978:120).

Terrien (1978:163f) tells us that in the Mosaic times the Ark was a military emblem, symbol, or token of the nearness of Yahweh in battle. It belonged originally to the idea of holy war. Theophanies never lasted long and the prohibition of images created a problem for the worshippers of Yahweh. The people did not fully grasp the concepts of nearness and of omnipresence that the Ark became the object to hold on to in the face of existential crises such as warfare. The Ark was a concrete center for those who did not experience the nearness in the same way as Moses did. It cannot be said that the Ark was understood by the Hebrews as the permanent container or shelter of the divine presence. It was rather a pedestal or stool from which Yahweh ascended before battle or to which he descended after victory (*c.f.* Num.10:33ff). The popular mind would easily tend to look at the Ark as the bearer of real presence at all times, but fragments of the tradition which have been preserved insist on the transitory character of this presence, since it was limited to periods of migration and times of battle.

In spite of the believed presence of God, victory in war was not guaranteed. This is clearly seen from the story in 1 Samuel 4-6 when Israel was defeated by the Philistines and the Ark taken captive. To be sure, the Ark speaks of the presence of God, but this particular Ark narrative speaks of God's glory. His glory is never devoid of his sovereignty. Breuggemann (2002) in his book shows that God allowed himself to be "captured" by being present with the Ark in order to show he is victorious over other gods. So, while Israel may suffer defeat, Yahweh always comes out victorious because his presence is also his glory.

It is interesting that Deuteronomy speaks of the Ark but it never speaks of the tabernacle. In later narratives prior to the Temple we always hear about the movement of the Ark alone. Fleming observes that these stories mention the Ark as if it had long been detached from the tabernacle. In the history from Joshua through Kings, the Ark plays an active role only in the stories of its movement into God's new home, first in its approach to the land as a whole (Jos.3 – 4:6) and then through the events that dislodge it from Shiloh and lead it to Jerusalem (1Sa.4 – 6; 2Sa.6). The tabernacle is never mentioned in connection with any of these events. (2003:676). With respect to the presence then, it must follow that the Ark was of greater importance than the tabernacle, and that the presence was a reality in the tabernacle because it housed the Ark. Put differently, the tabernacle found its significance in housing the Ark. The tabernacle, however, was necessary for cultic practices; at least, until the temple became the center of worship.

Fleming (2003:678) raises another important truth, namely that ...

... Although the Ark is not a direct part of the Decalogue, it offers a concrete expression on the ban on images of God found there, and by this it gives us some idea of what that ban really involved. On one hand, the Ark maintains the standard ancient Near Eastern framework for intimate encounter with deity, where the god makes himself or herself present in a single point, in order to enter active communion with those who serve the deity. The normal form for the physical vehicle of revelation and exchange is an image, whether human or of some other symbol. ... The Ark commanded through Moses is also new to Israel, likewise replacing among other things the simple stones of the type used by Jacob at Bethel (Gen.28:18-22). On the other hand, instead of illuminating God by an image, the Ark does so by a frame without a picture. The cherubim are heavenly beings, protective spirits often portrayed with mixed forms, such as the "living things" of

Ezekiel 1:5. In the Near East these beings would have been classed as divine, and the cherubim offer one hint that God still keeps company in heaven, though that company is not to be worshiped

Finally, the cherubim on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant had their wings stretched out towards the center of the Ark, overshadowing it. Their faces turned downward toward the lid itself, probably to avoid facing God, who was present above them (Ex.25:22). In this worshipful pose the cherubim provided a place above which God would be present to speak with Moses. (Steinmann 2003:113). It would appear that the cherubim were associated with God's presence. They adorned his throne above and the tabernacle where he dwelt among the Israelites.

All these truths above have to be applied to our texts in Exodus.

1D. THE RATIONALE OF CHOOSING THE DIVINE-PRESENCE NARRATIVE PERICOPES IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS.

The presence narrative pericopes in Exodus are those which narrate incidents when people were able to move into or experience, what the biblical author describes as the presence of Yahweh. They also include those pericopes where Yahweh personally presents himself to human beings. There are many such passages, but we will limit ourselves to what we call the primary presence pericopes.

These so-called primary presence pericopes are derived from sections in Exodus that we broadly classify under redemption (chapters 3 – 18), covenant (chapters 19 – 31) and national-identity (chapters 31 – 40) narratives. We have identified ten such narrative pericopes, but we will only consider those from the redemption section in the book. These are the ones we have selected to look at in greater detail. These are what we will translate from the Hebrew text, and then comment on having done an exegesis using the canonical approach and a socio-rhetorical hermeneutic method of interpretation. Thereafter, we hope to derive paraenetic and ethical aspects from these narratives, in order to demonstrate the importance

of the Exodus presence narratives for a biblical socio-ethical theology for our contemporary context.

We believe that God wanted to do among his people what only he could do. This would entrench in their minds the recognition that he alone is God. It would bring glory to him. On their part, they were expected to do what demonstrated this recognition, namely to obey God. God's action and their obedience were mediated and motivated by the presence of God. The presence encouraged willing obedience; and willing obedience positioned their ethical paradigm, which was to be expressed within the community.

Biblical theology must rest on the biblical text. It is for this reason that much space will be dedicated to the task of exegesis. The Exodus primary presence pericopes are:

A. The Exodus Narratives of Presence and Redemption.

1. Ex. 3:1–4:17;
2. Ex. 5:22–6:13;
3. Ex. 13:17–14:31;
4. Ex. 19:1–25.

B. The Exodus Narratives of Presence and Covenant.

1. Ex. 20:1–20:21;
2. Ex. 24:1–18;
3. Ex. 29:42–46;

C. The Exodus Narratives of Presence and Identity.

1. Ex. 32:1-16;
2. Ex. 32:30-34:11a;
3. Ex. 34:27-35;
4. Ex. 40:34-38.

We shall only consider the Exodus narratives of Presence and Redemption in our endeavour to propose a socio-ethical understanding for the redeemed community as it applies to their society.