

Justice and Exodus

IN THE LAST DECADE, church interest and participation in “justice” activities appear to have intensified among many branches of North American Christianity. A spate of recent books and conferences attests to the heightened popularity of the intersection of church and justice, particularly in relationship to issues of poverty.¹ For Catholic Americans the inauguration of Pope Francis signaled a renewed commitment to social justice, a concern of a majority of American Catholics according to a 2012 poll.² A 2013 survey conducted by LifeWay Research reports that “there is a growing awareness of and involvement in social justice ministries among Protestant churches in the United States, aimed at caring for the forgotten, disenfranchised, and oppressed.” Pastors in this survey identified poverty as the most important matter facing the nation.³ This trend emphasizing the Christian task of working toward justice, with specific emphasis on the poor, though by no means a new phenomenon in American Christianity,⁴ is particularly pronounced among many evangelical churches not

1. A small sampling of books from across the spectrum: Rebecca Todd Peters and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, eds., *To Do Justice: A Guide for Progressive Christians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Mae Elise Cannon, *Social Justice Handbook: Small Steps for a Better World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009); Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016). One can now acquire a justice-themed Bible, e.g., *The Poverty and Justice Bible* (New York: American Bible Society, 2009); *God's Justice: The Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016). Christian conferences addressing the issues of justice and poverty abound, but see especially the annual meetings hosted by the Christian Community Development Association, the “Justice Conference” (initiated in 2011), and “Love Does” conference (initiated 2012).

2. Tom Roberts, “Study: Majority of Catholics Say Church Should Emphasize Social Justice, the Poor,” <http://ncronline.org/news/politics/study-majority-catholics-say-church-should-emphasize-social-justice-poor> (October 22, 2012).

3. Ed Stetzer, “The World as God Intends,” *Sojourners*, September–October 2013, <http://sojo.net/magazine/2013/09/world-god-intends>.

4. For a readable account of this history, see Gary Dorrien, *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995).

typically known for social justice activity.⁵ One could speculate about the many causes behind this religio-cultural shift—such as globalization, urbanization, the increasing technological connectivity of the world—but the upshot is that it is tougher for many American churchgoers, whose Scriptures proclaim a God who “secures the claim of the oppressed and justice of the needy” (Ps 140:12), to remain impervious to injustice and poverty.⁶

Nonetheless, the belief in the biblical call for justice does not mean concerned North American Christian communities are of one mind on what exactly counts as “doing justice.” In fact, inter-Christian debate about the meaning of justice or social justice has featured prominently in national headlines over the last decade. Two episodes occurring at either side of the decade illustrate the dispute. First, Fox News pundit Glenn Beck stirred controversy in 2010 when he pleaded on his popular news program for Christians to flee churches that pursue “social justice.”⁷ According to Beck, “social justice” is coded language for socialistic politics. The public reaction was swift. A host of Christian respondents across the spectrum of progressive and conservative circles sought to correct (and a few defend) Beck’s salvo. Second, in 2018 a small group of prominent, conservative Evangelicals sparked disagreement by issuing the “Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel.” The statement, which warns against the “nebulous rubric of concern for social justice” being confused with the gospel, was both commended and castigated by various Christian camps.⁸ At the very least, these episodes illuminate that church participation in justice/social justice activity continues as a contested arena that trades on a fuzzy, disputed, even suspect idea of what, in fact, the biblical call to do justice means for the Christian in society.⁹

Debate among Christians about justice or social justice suggests there is room (and good reason) for theological reflection on justice in Scripture. The search to understand the meaning of justice, especially for the vulnerable in society, and

5. At least over the course of the last century; see Philip Goff and Brian Steensland, eds., *The New Evangelical Social Engagement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

6. Here and throughout all translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

7. A Google search of “Glenn Beck and social justice” will lead to numerous articles on the exchange and aftermath. On his television program, Beck held up a swastika and a hammer and sickle when explaining the outcomes of “social justice.”

8. See <https://statementonsocialjustice.com/>. Again, one need only perform an online search on the statement to see the varying responses, but see especially the Twitter response from Union Theological Seminary at <https://twitter.com/unionseminary/status/1037346404216320000?lang=en>.

9. For a reader-friendly survey of different philosophical theories of justice, see Vic McCracken, ed., *Christian Faith and Social Justice: Five Views* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014). On the suspect provenance of the term “social justice” in the Christian tradition, see Daniel M. Bell Jr., *Liberation Theology After the End of History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 99–123. I hasten to add that it is not just Christians who appear muddled over the meaning of justice. *Merriam-Webster* identified “justice” as the 2018 “word of the year” based on the number of times users looked up the definition on its website—no doubt a reflex in part of the events swirling around the Trump presidency.

how it concords with the church's mission has fueled much of my faith journey. I was raised in a conservative Christian tradition that, for various reasons, has been suspicious of Christian engagement with the kinds of activities historically associated with "justice ministry." Justice was not a prominent topic of conversation in my congregation in my youth. Nonetheless, my spiritual pilgrimage involved an awakening to Scripture's ubiquitous attentiveness to matters of justice for the poor. A pivotal moment came when I discovered during my college years the deep reservoir of YHWH's special concern for the marginalized in the Old Testament.¹⁰ I ascertained then, and I still believe now, that a neglect of issues of justice in my ecclesial tradition is, at least in part, a consequence of a shallow reading, ignorance, and/or neglect of the Old Testament. And as a result, my academic pursuits have gravitated toward exploring YHWH's justice as revealed in Israel's Scriptures. I learned early on that central to any investigation into Israel's ethic is the exodus experience. This work is something of an attempt to parse what Israel's exodus experience, as remembered in the book of Exodus, contributes to a biblical theology of justice, especially justice for the poor.¹¹

Centrality of the Exodus

The exodus is arguably the foundational event for Israel in the Hebrew Bible.¹² As a book, Exodus narrates YHWH's "definitive deliverance" and seminal revelation to Israel.¹³ So important are the exodus traditions that they crop up no less than 120 times elsewhere in the canon in a variety of genres.¹⁴ Overt references to the story appear in legal literature, song, historical narration, poetry, prayer, and prophecy.¹⁵ No less impressive are the numerous places where scholars contend

10. Throughout this work I use "YHWH" even in quotations of others who spell out the Name with vowels.

11. Throughout I attempt to refer to the event of Israel's redemption from Egypt with the lowercase "exodus." When I make reference to the canonical book by the same name, I use capitalized "Exodus." Nonetheless, the distinction is not in every case clear-cut.

12. I say "arguably" because some might object that creation is more fundamental. My argument will attempt to illustrate that the book of Exodus reflects and carries forward themes in Genesis's creation narrative.

13. Northrop Frye, "Exodus—the Definitive Deliverance," in *Exodus*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 75.

14. See Nahum Sarna, "Exodus, Book of," *ABD* 2:698, who gets the number from Yair Hoffmann, *The Doctrine of the Exodus in the Bible* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: TAU School of Jewish Studies and University Publishing Projects, 1983), 11.

15. Because this ground has been extensively plowed in the following treatments, I will not detail biblical references here. Some of the more important and/or comprehensive works are as follows: David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963); Yair Zakovitch, "And You Shall Tell Your Sons . . .": *The Concept of the Exodus in the Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991); Samuel E. Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, trans. Baruch J.

the exodus memory palpitates covertly but formatively under the surface of the text.¹⁶ Based on the sheer frequency of its “encore” appearances, the memory of the exodus exercises an inescapable dominance in Israel’s Scriptures.¹⁷ Moreover, New Testament scholarship continues to demonstrate the pivotal influence the narrative plays in much of New Testament literature.¹⁸ The watershed exodus experience bequeaths a significant “grammar of faith” to Israel by which Israel’s leaders, prophets, and tradents perpetually reimagined the people’s relationship to YHWH.¹⁹ In short, Israel’s life with YHWH pulsates to the rhythm of the exodus.

The generative pervasiveness of the exodus story has led biblical scholars to characterize the book of Exodus as Israel’s “paradigmatic” narrative.²⁰ YHWH’s dealings with Israel recorded in Exodus epitomize the “structuring principle” by which Israel interpreted the bulk of historical experience and Scripture.²¹ This story “stands out in imposing its presuppositions and categories on all others.”²²

Schwartz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992); Friedbert Ninow, *Indicators of Typology Within the Old Testament: The Exodus Motif* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001); Frank Sabine, *Das Exodusmotiv des Alten Testaments: Religionsgeschichtliche, exegetische sowie systematisch-theologische Grundlagen und fachdidaktische Entfaltungen* (Münster: LIT, 2004); Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018). The significant exception is the wisdom literature, but see Peter Enns, *Exodus Retold: Ancient Exegesis of the Departure from Egypt in Wis 10:15–21 and 19:1–9*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 57 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

16. I borrow the language of “covert” from Zakovitch, “*And You Shall Tell Your Son*,” esp. 46–98.

17. On historical grounds, Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 40–94, has cogently argued that the exodus experience was the historical starting point for Israelite religion; cf. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 351. For more on this, see the exchange between Karel van der Toorn, “The Exodus as Charter Myth,” Albertz, “Exodus: Liberation History Against Charter Myth,” and John J. Collins, “The Development of the Exodus Tradition,” in *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition: Papers Read at a NOSTER Conference in Soesterberg, January 4–6, 1999*, ed. Jan Willem van Henten and Anton Houtepen, Studies in Theology and Religion 3 (Assen, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2001), 114–55.

18. For an overview, see R. Michael Fox, ed., *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 94–186; cf. the criticism of Daniel L. Smith, “The Uses of ‘New Exodus’ in New Testament Scholarship: Preparing a Way Through the Wilderness,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 14 (2016): 207–43.

19. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 178, speaks about “the Exodus grammar of YHWH.” For a list of recurring phrases associated with the exodus that appear throughout the canon, see Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, 29–30.

20. I am unsure of the provenance of describing the exodus as “paradigmatic,” but it seems to have been popularized by Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: NY: Orbis, 1988), 90.

21. Rubem Alves, “El pueblo de Dio y la liberación del hombre,” *Fichas de ISAL* 3 (1970): 9, as cited in Thomas D. Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression*, trans. James C. Dekker (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 6.

22. Daube, *The Exodus Pattern*, 11.

Michael Fishbane has creatively dubbed it the “archetypal armature” of Israel’s historical renewal.²³ To switch metaphors, in the story of Exodus are found all the ingredients that are basic to YHWH’s recipe for Israel’s salvation—broadly categorized in the formative sequence of distress, redemption, and formation.²⁴ Though there is fluidity in the way the story is remembered in different traditions (it is a layered, complex memory), this first, kerygmatic recipe, narrated in the book of Exodus, is Israel’s guide for understanding how YHWH “cooks up” salvation in the future. Matthew Boulton describes it nicely: “For ancient Israel, this is how deliverance happens. It happens typologically, because God is a typological poet. Indeed, if a new or anticipated deliverance were described in terms entirely disconnected from what Fishbane calls ‘the paradigm of historical renewal’ outlined in Israel’s exodus from Egypt, such novelty would appear suspect and unpersuasive. The divine signature of authenticity, we might say, is correspondence with the exodus motif.”²⁵ Hence, Israel would heartily agree with an aphorism attributed to Mark Twain: “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it does rhyme.” Not only is the exodus the rhythm of Israel’s life, but it is also its rhyme.

The paradigmatic power of the Exodus account, though, is by no means limited to Scripture.²⁶ Michael Goldberg describes Exodus as the Jewish “master story”—the key narrative that has given the Jewish people their basic orientation to the world.²⁷ Christians as well live in the shadow of the exodus. For, as David Tracy claims, “Christianity is most itself when it is an Exodus religion” because the exodus is the “proper context” for capturing the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.²⁸ Aside from the unsurprising influence Exodus exerts on Jewish and Christian communities, there is arguably no other story that has left a

23. Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 125.

24. Cf. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 77–93.

25. Michael Myer Boulton, “Supercession or Subsession? Exodus Typology, the Christian Eucharist, and the Jewish Passover Meal,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66 (2013): 25.

26. It would be hard to find a stronger statement than that of Jan Assmann, “Exodus and Memory,” in *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, ed. Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider, and William H. C. Propp (New York: Springer, 2015), 3: “The Biblical story of the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt is THE story, the story of stories, arguably the greatest, in any event the most consequential story. . . . It is a story that in its endless tellings and retellings, variations, and transformations changed and formed the human world in which we are living.”

27. Michael Goldberg, *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Straight: The Exodus and the Passion Resurrection*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991). W. David Nelson and Pamela Barmash, eds., *Exodus in the Jewish Experience: Echoes and Reverberations* (New York: Lexington Books, 2015), contend that Exodus “has functioned as the primary hermeneutical model from which Jews have created theological meaning and historical self-understanding” (vii).

28. David Tracy, “Exodus: Theological Reflection,” in *Exodus—A Lasting Paradigm*, ed. Bas Van Iersel et al., Concilium 189 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 118–24. See n. 19 above.

deeper imprint on Western civilization as a whole. Lord Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, writes that the “book of Exodus is the West’s meta-narrative of hope.”²⁹ He draws on the programmatic use of the exodus in the history of the Puritan revolution, the founding of America, and the era of civil rights to support his momentous claim. In a similar vein, John Coffey impressively documents the persistent adoption of the rhetoric of the exodus in English-speaking political culture.³⁰ After a survey of Protestant history from the Reformation to modern-day America, Coffey concludes: “Readers did not merely cite the Exodus; they inhabited it. . . . The sheer range of [Exodus’s] use testifies to [its] imaginative force.”³¹ These studies focus on the Anglo world, but Exodus has likewise proved the quintessential reference point in the twentieth-century flowering of liberation politics and theology in Latin America.³² The reception history of the story in Jewish, Christian, and Western civilization illustrates that “the protean exodus symbol refuses to be ‘laid to rest.’”³³

But why does this narrative reverberate with such weighty influence? One answer, probably the preeminent reason, lies in what Exodus says about justice, especially justice for the disenfranchised. Readers of all sorts, searching for inspiration, have returned repeatedly to Exodus’s politically potent portrayal of the clash of God against oppressive forces. The plot’s pointed critique of imperial villainy has functioned throughout history as a “typological map to reconnoiter the moral terrain,”³⁴ typically redrawing the boundaries for the marginalized in more just, pleasant places. According to Sacks, “No story has been more influential in shaping the inner landscape of liberty, teaching successive generations that oppression is not inevitable, that it is not written into the fabric of history.”³⁵ But if the story has been deployed in the struggle against perceived

29. Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible; Exodus: The Book of Redemption* (New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2010), 1.

30. John Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation: Deliverance Politics from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). For a broader survey of the reception history of Exodus, see Scott Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

31. Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 217.

32. Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 15–17; see also Enrique Dussel, “Exodus as a Paradigm in Liberation Theology,” in Van Iersel et al., *Exodus—A Lasting Paradigm*, 83–92.

33. Norman Gottwald, “The Exodus and Event and Process: A Test Case in the Biblical Grounding of Liberation Theology,” in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez*, ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 258.

34. Albert Raboteau, “African Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel,” in *Religion and American Culture: A Reader*, ed. David Hackett (New York: Routledge, 1995), 81; cited by Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 217.

35. Sacks, *Exodus*, 2. Cf. Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 3–17.

injustice, then it is, unfortunately, no less the case that Exodus has been wielded by oppressors to maintain tyrannical power arrangements. The discrepant use of the book is vividly illustrated in the ironic, contradictory appeal to the story by enslaved African Americans, abolitionists, and *slaveholders* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁶ As John Coffey observes, “The story was contested so fiercely because readers needed it on their side.”³⁷ The history of the book’s interpretation demonstrates that understanding its vision of justice for the vulnerable is no innocuous endeavor—Exodus is not an innocent, or unambiguous, text.³⁸ As Scott Langston says, “The thin line between good and evil becomes evident in the use of Exodus, and the power of its ideas makes it a potentially dangerous book. It can bring about great good, but it can also create great evil.”³⁹

In sum, then, my investigation assumes, in the good company of those just surveyed, that Exodus is a paradigmatic text, one ultimately with universal significance. The reception history of Exodus, both within the Bible and through the centuries, confirms the promise of exploring the book’s theology of justice even as it warns of the risk of the enterprise. And though we cannot deny that Exodus has “worked” in struggles for justice, nonetheless, this is not a sufficient justification for carelessly understanding, much less adopting, its claims about justice.⁴⁰ For, as Coffey cautions, the history of exegesis of Exodus reveals an eisegetical “nose of wax in the hands of interpreters.”⁴¹ To avoid a facile grasp of its theology we must take seriously, then, that this is Israel’s story—a doggedly particular narrative—which demands a close reading in order to hear Israel’s distinct rendering of the theme of justice.

Purpose of This Study

In this work I trace the theme of justice through the entire narrative of Exodus. The book of Exodus tells how $\Upsilon\text{H}\text{W}\text{H}$ brings the people out of Egyptian

36. See the dialogue between John Coffey and Mark Noll, “*Exodus and Liberation: An Exchange*,” *Holiness* 2 (2016): 211–24; cf. Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries*, 163–67.

37. Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 218; cf. the exchange between Van der Toorn, Albertz, and Collins in Van Henten and Houtepen, *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition* for a parallel illustration of this point within the biblical tradition.

38. Tracy, “Exodus,” 119. This is true for the use of the exodus motif even within the canon of Scripture, as argued by Pamela Barmash, “Out of the Mists of History: The Exaltation of Exodus in the Bible,” in *Exodus in the Jewish Experience: Echoes and Reverberations*, ed. David Nelson and Pamela Barmash (New York: Lexington Books, 2015), 1–22.

39. Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries*, 6–7.

40. Cf. Walter Brueggemann, “Pharaoh as Vassal: A Study of a Political Metaphor,” *CBQ* 57 (1995): 27: “Perhaps the most convincing warrant for such usage is the undeniable fact that it is so used, that its adherents find it to ‘work.’”

41. Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 215.

bondage and comes to tabernacle among them at Sinai. Near the beginning of the story, Pharaoh forces Israel, YHWH's firstborn (Exod 4:22), into Egyptian servitude. The chaos of Egypt threatens to undo Israel's promised role as descendants of Abraham set forth by YHWH in the story of Genesis. In order to reinitiate YHWH's creational agenda begun in Genesis, YHWH rescues Israel from Egypt. At the outset of this spectacular transition, YHWH makes clear the divine intent is to reclaim Israel's service out from under Pharaoh's oppressive slavery (e.g., Exod 3:12; 4:23). But YHWH's salvation of Israel extends beyond the exodus from Egypt. YHWH's reclamation project, from the beginning to the end of Exodus, works to reorder Israel's identity and vocation so that Israel can carry forward YHWH's just agenda in the world. Exodus is as much about Israel's entrance into the way of YHWH as it is about Israel's exit from Egypt.

My goal is to explicate how YHWH's reclamation of Israel for worship-service as narrated in Exodus reveals a distinct theological ethic of justice that is grounded in YHWH's character and Israel's calling within YHWH's creational agenda. In my exposition I pay particular attention to two other overlapping motifs in Exodus that help illuminate the theme of justice. First, I consider throughout the importance of Israel's creation traditions for grounding Exodus's theology of justice. I will show that the ethical disposition of justice imprinted on Israel in the events of Exodus is built on and is an application of YHWH's creational agenda of justice. This becomes evident when Exodus is understood against the backdrop of creation theology and as a continuation of the plot of Genesis, a reading that Exodus itself invites. Second, because the book of Exodus functions as a pedagogical narrative—that is, a persuasive story that is meant to form readers in normative, paradigmatic ways (more on this below)—I highlight how an educational agenda is woven throughout the text. I will argue that the narrative gives heightened attention to the way YHWH catechizes Israel in what it means to be the particular beneficiary and creational emissary of YHWH's justice. The interpretative lenses of creation theology and pedagogy will furthermore help in explaining why Israel's salvation and shaping, in turn, embodies a programmatic applicability of YHWH's desires for the wider world. It is prudent at this point to turn to what others have said in recent discussion about the motif of justice in Exodus.

Recent Discussion on the Justice of Exodus

Just as in more popular discourse, the theme of justice, particularly as it relates to poverty, has generated a recent surge of scholarly attention in biblical studies. Creation theology, though perhaps not as conspicuous to those outside the academic discipline, has also witnessed an unprecedented degree of interest in

the past few decades.⁴² My work is situated in the overlap of these categories in the book of Exodus, a fertile junction that I contend has a good deal more yet to yield. However, biblical scholarship coalescing around these themes reveals several areas of interrelated tension if not outright disagreement. In the following I describe three interrelated areas where tension is felt most acutely in order to set the stage for my own discussion. Furthermore, I adumbrate how my study can carry the conversation forward through these arenas of disagreement.

Universal or Particular Justice in Exodus

The first significant tension unfolds in two recent publications on justice in the Bible by Walter Houston.⁴³ Building on the work of Rolf Knierim, Houston contends that the theology of justice emerging out of Exodus conflicts with the theology of justice rooted in Israel's creation traditions. Texts in the latter category of creation traditions speak of justice based on a cosmic order ruled by YHWH. Multiple psalms bring out this dimension of God's right ordering of the world, as do various passages in the wisdom literature and Prophets.⁴⁴ In contrast, Houston argues that Exodus, though including features that cohere with a cosmic justice theology, presents a view of justice not principally derived from YHWH's role as creator and world ruler. The governing theology of the justice of Exodus, instead, originates in God's patronage of Israel. God's motivation is not primarily presented in terms of redressing universal injustice but is rooted rather in being faithful to the ancestral promises (e.g., Exod 3:6). According to Houston, the overarching concept of justice enacted in Exodus is unapologetically partial and nonuniversal, and results in the unjust, "collateral" damage of other, innocent parties, such as the firstborn of the maid at the mill (Exod 11:5).⁴⁵ Thus the partisan conception of justice (understood as fairness) offered in the Exodus narrative clashes with God's role as impartial judge of all creation.⁴⁶

42. A good starting point is Walter Brueggemann, "The Loss and Recovery of Creation in Old Testament Theology," *ThTo* 53 (1997): 177–90. More than anyone else, Terence Fretheim has fueled the ongoing interest in creation traditions. For a bibliography, see Michael J. Chan and Brent A. Strawn, eds., *What Kind of God? Collected Essays of Terence Fretheim*, Siphrut 14 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 392–99.

43. Walter Houston, *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 204–19; Houston, *Justice: The Biblical Challenge, Biblical Challenges in the Contemporary World* (London: Equinox, 2010), 36–61. Houston works with the conclusions of Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method, and Cases* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 89–121.

44. E.g., Pss 65, 72, 89, 93–99; Prov 14:31; 17:5; 21:13; Job 20; Amos 9:7; Isa 1–5; 11:1–9.

45. Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 208: "Are we to suppose that the slave who grinds corn is implicated in the oppression of Israel rather than being herself a victim of oppression?"

46. Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 219: "An absolute polarization of universal and particular justice is unnecessary. Nevertheless . . . concepts of divine justice associated both with patronage

My reading will show that the theology of justice emerging in Exodus coheres with creation in a more harmonious relationship than Houston's (and Knierim's) schema permits.⁴⁷ The friction that Houston and Knierim discern in Exodus between justice as cosmic order and justice as faithfulness substantially dissipates when God's actions are viewed through a creational (and by extension, pedagogical) lens. Without a diligent accounting of the creational underpinnings of Exodus, Israel's story remains open to the charge that it amounts only to a particularistic narrative that serves a narrow-minded, jingoistic platform.⁴⁸ By couching Israel's origins in creational categories and reading these categories as an outworking of the Genesis narrative, however, the narrator intimates that YHWH's election and salvation of Israel strategically serve the larger telos—YHWH's wider salvific agenda for creation. Therefore, YHWH's faithfulness to the children of Israel memorialized in Exodus is in service to, not opposed to, YHWH's universal order of justice and righteousness.

Exodus, Creation Theology, and Hegemony

Second, Walter Brueggemann perceives a tension from another, though related, angle. Few scholars have written more eloquently, voluminously, and influentially on the theme of justice in Scripture than Brueggemann. His work in this regard, however, harbors a suspicion of Israel's creation theology. He charges that Israel's creation traditions too easily and too often function to legitimate systems of conservative, and habitually unjust, royal power.⁴⁹ Israel's creation tra-

and with kingship are entertained in the Old Testament and combined, *but not without significant tension*, to form the picture of YHWH's justice" (emphasis added). Though he does not speak specifically in terms of justice, David J. Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 170–75, parallels Houston and Knierim's concerns. Houston (*Contending for Justice*, 210) does express disagreement with Knierim at a key point: whereas Knierim downgrades Israel's partisan justice in favor of universal justice (*The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 131–37), Houston upholds each as equally valid.

47. Houston, *Justice*, 60, admits the narrative muddles these two opposing conceptions: "The difficulty in the story of the exodus as it is told . . . arises from a confusion of YHWH's two roles as world ruler and protector of Israel." So, though the two are distinct, their confluence in Exodus understandably leads to confusion. Nevertheless, the way these two models become entangled in the Exodus narrative reflects a confusion that Houston thinks is ethically insightful. For more on this, see his "The Character of YHWH and the Ethics of the Old Testament: Is *Imitatio Dei* Appropriate?," *JTS* 58 (April 2007): 25.

48. I readily concede that one can read the Exodus account through foci other than creation theology and avoid the charge of jingoism. One recent example is representative: in his Exodus commentary Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks eloquently presents Exodus's justice talk through the filter of covenant. I contend that an appreciation of creation theology not only debunks the charge of jingoism directly but contributes to a much richer theology (and underappreciated aspect) of Israel's understanding of justice.

49. See J. Richard Middleton, "Is Creation Theology Inherently Conservative? A Dialogue with Walter Brueggemann," *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 257–77, and Brueggemann's

ditions, he believes, are largely distinct from and averse to the Mosaic-prophetic traditions that characteristically emphasize justice for the marginalized. Though he has conceded that some of his earlier reservations with creation theology were overdrawn, he admits an ongoing worry that the recent revival of interest in creation theology cannot adequately generate or support revolutionary social praxis—the kind on display preeminently in the story of Exodus.⁵⁰ In other words, creation theology, because of its propensity to prop up an elitist status quo, does not contain the requisite capacity to stimulate social transformation. According to Brueggemann, such capacity is at the heart of the biblical witness in the exodus, which is the heart of the Mosaic-prophetic tradition. Too heavy an emphasis on creation theology—especially as the horizon of biblical faith—dulls this subversive edge.⁵¹

In response to this legitimate worry, I think Brueggemann's concern not to obscure the liberationist potential of Exodus, far from being threatened by creation theology, actually requires the creational and pedagogical categories that underlie the Exodus narrative. Brueggemann (inadvertently?⁵²) continues an older trend in scholarship that emphasizes the distinction between creation and redemption traditions rather than exploring their thick interrelationship in Israel's memory of historical salvation.⁵³ My work will investigate this interrelationship, particularly as it pertains to the issue of justice. Exodus tells of

reply, "Response to J. Richard Middleton," *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 279–89. It is true, as Middleton notes (263), that ancient Near Eastern cultures legitimated their social and political orders with creation theology, and that creation theology so used could and often did function in oppressive ways. On this point, see Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and the Bible*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 26 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994); J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 147–84; Kevin Mellish, "Creation as Social and Political Order in Ancient Thought and the Hebrew Bible," *Wesley Theological Journal* 44 (2009): 157–79; and Joshua A. Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18–49.

50. Brueggemann, "Response," 283.

51. Hans Heinrich Schmid has been especially influential in making the case that creation is a horizon of biblical theology. See Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968); Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation: 'Creation Theology' as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson, IRT 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 102–17. Also see Hermann Spieckermann, "Schöpfung, Gerechtigkeit und Heil als Horizont Alttestamentlicher Theologie," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 100 (2003): 399–419.

52. I say "inadvertent" because Brueggemann's article "The Loss and Recovery of Creation" traces the historical fall and rise of this doctrine in Old Testament scholarship. He diagnoses the problems with the bifurcation (and privileging) of redemption from creation in the twentieth century. In an admirable example of scholarly humility, he confesses his struggle to integrate the paradigm of creation in his own theological reflections (186–87n37).

53. Cf. George M. Landes, "Creation and Liberation," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson, IRT 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 135–51.

the beginnings of the Israelite nation, but the story is deliberately composed in such a way as to show that Israel's "definitive deliverance" actualizes YHWH's creational justice agenda. Furthermore, when read as a continuation of Genesis's creation trajectory, the story of Exodus takes on cosmic, pedagogical import.⁵⁴ In direct contrast to Brueggemann's caution, I will argue that the worldwide (liberating) implications of Israel's story come through most fully and potently in the way in which Exodus narrates Israel's redemption and reorientation within the horizon of creation traditions.

Exodus, Deliverance, and Election

A third area of interrelated tension arises from the universal implications of YHWH's deliverance of Israel in Exodus. Especially in the last half of the twentieth century, liberation scholars have brought heightened awareness to this theme by enlisting the Exodus story in support of social revolutions.⁵⁵ Liberation theologians emphasize that the heart of the narrative is the political emancipation of the victimized poor who then work to establish more just social arrangements. Exodus, consequently, reveals YHWH's liberative desires for all oppressed humanity. Liberationists herald the text's overarching purpose as the revolutionary establishment of "social justice" in human society in whatever age.

This view has received significant pushback by some in the biblical guild. Jewish scholar Jon Levenson, foremost among others, has aptly criticized liberationists' interpretations of Exodus for the way many characteristically ignore the unmistakable role of Israel's special election in the narrative. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt, Levenson avers, must be appreciated within the context of the chosenness of Israel. Moreover, the redemption of Israel out of Egypt should not be read apart from the people's entrance into covenant at Sinai. Levenson charges that the predilection toward the universal application of the exodus threatens to swallow up the particularism of Israel's redemption and consequent formation at Sinai.⁵⁶ As a result, the biblical doctrine of elec-

54. I owe something of the stimulus of my argument to the insights of Gordon McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 30–73. McConville discerns a political theology in Genesis-Kings. He argues that Genesis presents justice-righteousness as a guiding concept YHWH stamps on creation. In YHWH's creational strategy of redemption, YHWH elects the line of Abraham to demonstrate justice-righteousness before the nations. The exodus furthers this creational intent by judging Pharaoh's (sub)version of justice-righteousness and establishing Israel's vocation originating in Abraham.

55. For an introduction, see Paulo Nogueira, "Exodus in Latin America," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, ed. Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, and Jonathan Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 447–59.

56. See the exchange among Jon D. Levenson, "Liberation Theology and the Exodus," 215–30; Jorge V. Pixley, "History and Particularity in Reading the Hebrew Bible: A Response to Jon D.

tion percolating throughout the narrative does not fit easily into a sociopolitical account of Exodus.

Levenson's appraisal discloses perturbing questions about the relationship between election and universalism—and Israel's salvation and vocation—that have persistently haunted biblical scholarship.⁵⁷ Conversation along these lines makes it evident, if discomfiting, that these issues matter for any textually faithful proposal that wishes to reappropriate Exodus for what it says about justice. How, then, can Exodus's narrative be applied universally while satisfactorily taking into account the particularity of the story? Is it even possible? Or, to state it differently, in what way is the Exodus narrative paradigmatic for a theological ethic of justice? Answering this question has proven controversial. For example, liberation scholar Jorge Pixley suggests Exodus contains two, interwoven perspectives: liberation and immigration. He contends liberationists emphasize the former and Jewish interpreters underscore the latter, each according to their respective social contexts. Both are present and equally valid: one's social location is the trump card for deciding which interpretation rules the day.⁵⁸ Brueggemann gives a different accounting. He believes the narrative is awash in profound tension between a revolutionary discourse (chs. 1–15) and constitutive, monopolizing discourse (chs. 25–40).⁵⁹ He suggests that the final form of the text intentionally juxtaposes the two, but he hints that the narrative itself wishes to show the triumph of the former over the latter. Some recent interpreters even dispute the ethical potential of the “revolutionary discourse” of Exodus.⁶⁰ David Pleins is representative of this more suspicious view of the justice of Exodus: “The exodus story . . . [is] liberating to the extent that one finds elite-based

Levenson,” 231–38; Levenson, “The Perils of Engaged Scholarship: A Rejoinder to Jorge Pixley,” 239–46; John J. Collins, “The Exodus and Biblical Theology,” 247–62; Levenson, “The Exodus and Biblical Theology: A Rejoinder to John J. Collins,” 263–75, in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky SBL SymS 8 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2000), 215–75.

57. See, e.g., the review of scholarship in the first half of Joel N. Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen: Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation*, Siphut 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009).

58. Pixley, “Liberation Criticism,” in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, *Methods in Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 147–48. In the end, I do not see how Pixley's response answers Levenson's trenchant critique, which, among other points, reckons that Pixley's historical reconstruction underplays the chooseness of Israel as a *kin-group* in the text.

59. Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1, ed. Katherine D. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 682–84.

60. This counter-reading of Exodus is shared by many from a variety of hermeneutical perspectives. Cf. Pleins, *The Social Visions*, 156–78; Brian R. McCarthy, “The Characterization of $\Upsilon\text{H}\text{W}\text{H}$, the God of Israel, in Exodus 1–15,” in *God's World for Our World*, vol. 1, *Biblical Studies in Honor of Simon John De Vries*, ed. J. Harold Ellens et al., JSOTSup 388 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 6–20; Gale A. Yee, “Postcolonial Biblical Criticism,” in Dozeman, *Methods for Exodus*, 193–234.

nationalist movements liberating.”⁶¹ For Pleins the Exodus narrative is anything but emancipating for the poor. In its canonical form, it is thoroughly tainted by ancient Israel’s imperialist agenda.⁶² Levenson is not as pessimistic as either Brueggemann or Pleins: Exodus can justify a more universal justice agenda, but only secondarily. He believes there will be inevitable tension between (what he comes to call) the “social-ethical” and “familial-national” dimensions of the Exodus. These must be read together, not played off each other.

One implication of my argument brings out how an interpretation of Exodus attuned to creational and pedagogical themes eases (though does not completely resolve) the tension identified by Levenson’s two poles. I wish to intimate how, from an exploration of the theme of justice in ΥHWH ’s redemption of Israel in Exodus, a creational-pedagogical perspective provides a frame large enough to hold together election and universalism. To consider the matter from a different angle, the friction that some commentators discern in Exodus on the subject of justice substantially dissipates when one situates the concerns of Exodus creationally and canonically—namely, as a continuation of ΥHWH ’s creational project initiated in Genesis. The upshot of my study is that ΥHWH ’s pedagogical goals for Israel throughout Exodus—which are a reflex of Israel’s chosenness—extend beyond Israel. ΥHWH ’s educative desires related in the book of Exodus dignify Israel as the divinely authorized exegete of justice before and for the nations.

The Justice of Exodus for the Church

Finally, and on a more personal and pastoral note, in this work I hope to contribute to a theological reading of Exodus that exhibits its riches to the North American church with which I am most familiar. I was raised in the Stone-Campbell Restoration tradition in the South (the Churches of Christ). Though my church tradition—to which I remain committed—has cherished a high regard for Scripture, my experience in our churches has shown me that the Old Testament, for the most part, is quite often relegated to shallow, history-like summaries or pilfered for vacation Bible school stories. I believe an anemic theological ethic

61. Pleins, *The Social Visions*, 173. He states that “the text of Exodus offers a nationalistic, monarchic, hierarchal agenda” (172).

62. McCarthy, “The Characterization of ΥHWH ,” 18–20, is starkest in his judgment: “The conclusion seems unavoidable that, despite its appearance of being an ethical tale promoting ethical values, this way of evaluating it needs to be abandoned. It should be seen instead as having a certain integrity as a tale of power and towering willfulness. . . . This god would not qualify as the ‘Judge of all the world’ of Gen 18:25, who must act justly and make distinction between the righteous and the wicked. This god only cares to make a ‘tribal’ distinction between one people and another. This god cannot be the prototypical liberator, the hope of all oppressed peoples everywhere. He is not intolerant of oppression, but liberates one people by oppressing another.”

of justice for the poor is but one profound consequence of this neglect. Thus by demonstrating how a robust theology of justice can emerge from a reading of the book of Exodus, I wish to contribute to the church's reclamation of YHWH's passion for a holistic, creation-wide salvation that is especially concerned with the marginalized. Toward this end my study further plows the ground for an understanding of how the ministry of Jesus and his church is an outgrowth of Israel's theological vision fired in the iron furnace of Egypt (Deut 4:20; 1 Kgs 8:51; Jer 11:4). Of course, my vantage point is influenced by my identity as a Christian, white, privileged, American, heterosexual man. I wish to encourage the faithful and responsible Christian work of justice, but I recognize and lament that I cannot help but be a participant in the institutional machinery that still grinds many down. Inasmuch as people who have my similar background have been the cause of much injustice in this world, I hope my work can help as a conduit for reading the text in liberating ways and inspiring people like me (and not like me) to work toward the kingdom of justice and righteousness.⁶³

To summarize, my project enters into contested waters over the interpretation of justice in Exodus. The disagreements swirl around whether Exodus presents a theology of justice that is larger than Israel itself, and if so, how. I think a more rigorous appreciation of Exodus's use of creational and pedagogical categories and its canonical placement as a sequel to Genesis can contribute some calm to these seas of dispute, though by no measure do I believe this work can resolve all of the issues I noted above. Now I offer a bit more discussion about my methodological approach for navigating these waters.

A Reading Strategy for Exodus

For most of the last two centuries, the historical-critical method dominated Exodus scholarship.⁶⁴ The bulk of academic research proceeded against the

63. Additionally, I suggest my work impinges on the recent interest in the missional interpretation of Scripture. Though there is no consensus yet on what a missional interpretation is, many build on Christopher Wright's seminal *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006). The centerpiece of Wright's proposal is that Scripture has a missional basis, so that the *missio Dei* is the hermeneutical key for biblical interpretation. More recently, W. Ross Blackburn's, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 28 (Leicester: Apollos: InterVarsity Press, 2012), contends that mission is the "governing theme" of Exodus. Both authors advocate that God's actions in Exodus are guided by and point to a larger, missional goal. My own reading of Scripture is sympathetic to their convictions concerning a strong missional thread throughout the canon and in Exodus. I intend to hone this insight by highlighting how the category of creation in Exodus helps deepen an understanding of YHWH's "missional" predilection for justice.

64. On the following paragraph and for a survey of Exodus scholarship up to the end of the last century, see Helmut Utzschneider, "Überlegungen zu Hermeneutik und Geschichte der Forschung"

backdrop of Pentateuchal criticism and pivoted around issues concerned with the reconstruction of the sources, authors, and events originating in the prehistory of the text. Brevard Childs's 1974 commentary on Exodus marked a turning point in studies on the book.⁶⁵ While by no means jettisoning previous investigations of the prehistory of the text, Childs concentrated his commentary on the theological interpretation of the canonical form of Exodus as Christian Scripture. His effort signaled a larger shift taking place in biblical interpretation away from source, form, and redaction critical approaches toward more synchronic, "text immanent" methodologies.⁶⁶ Since the appearance of Childs's commentary, literary, canonical, and theological studies on Exodus have flourished. These focus more on the world presented *in* the text rather than *behind* the text, though more traditional historical-critical analyses have by no means abated.

I locate my hermeneutical approach within the more recent stream of "text immanent" methodologies. My methodology will be principally literary, concentrating on a constructive, close reading of the text in order to develop a theological interpretation of the text. Yet I will also draw occasionally on more historically oriented observations to the extent that these shed light on the text for my theological purposes. I also find in the category of "cultural memory"—a voguish concept gaining traction in Old Testament scholarship—a helpful way to think about the relationship between the oft-opposed poles of synchronic and diachronic approaches to the text. Of course, my investigation gravitates heavily toward the synchronic end, and my argument is not especially date-sensitive. Nonetheless, I offer below some thoughts on how cultural memory helps reframe the thorny, historical issues behind the book of Exodus. I will argue, moreover, that the upshot of cultural memory for my project is the way in which it helps gain purchase on the pedagogical function of Exodus as Scripture.

A Text Immanent Approach

I will approach the book of Exodus as an internally unified, theologically oriented, literary composition. My exegesis assumes the received form as

ZAW 106 (1994): 197–223; Marc Vervenne, "Current Tendencies and Developments in the Study of the Book of Exodus" in *Studies in the Book of Exodus. Redaction-Reception-Interpretation*, ed. Marc Vervenne, BETL 126 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 21–55; Mark S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, JSOTSup 239 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 144–79.

65. Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974).

66. I borrow the term "text immanent" from John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, rev. and exp. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 2. He defines "text-immanent exegesis" as biblical interpretation that "looks for the meaning of biblical texts as we now meet them in our Bibles instead of trying to get behind the finished form of the text to earlier stages."

represented by the Masoretic Text (MT).⁶⁷ I also assume Exodus offers a cohesive narrative unity. Such an approach does not rule out the presence of sources or editorial activity.⁶⁸ Yet the impulse of methodologies that search for the fractures in the text can tend to shortchange the holistic interpretation of the received text. My interpretative stance lies with those who presuppose a basic, coherent structure and meaning of the received form of the text, whatever its process of accretion. The text as it currently exists is worthy of attention in its own right.⁶⁹ While appreciative of genuine tensions (and ambiguities) in the text, the burden for a literary-theological interpretation of Scripture remains to show how perceived rifts in the text might illuminate the final, unified shape of the narrative.

Concomitant with the desire to read the book as a well-integrated whole is the commitment to interpret Exodus as a literary work.⁷⁰ Literary criticism encompasses a broad spectrum of hermeneutical approaches. I invoke the rubric to emphasize a constructive, synchronic approach that gives close attention to literary conventions (such as repetition, themes, point of view, plot, characterization, gaps, irony, allusion, genre, pattern, polysemy) and literary contexts.⁷¹ The book of Exodus, regardless of sources or redactions, has been artfully fashioned into a narrative whole wherein internal literary aesthetics—or the poetics—of the text are vehicles for the theological message. Thus we want not only to observe the poetics of the text but also to inquire about their overriding communicative function as a part of the text. Additionally, in the past few decades critical

67. More specifically, I follow the MT tradition as set out in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. On the text of Exodus, see John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary 3 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), xxvi–xxix; William H. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 41–47.

68. This commitment is not meant to deny the value of methodologies that explore the historical contexts or layers ostensibly present behind the text. Nonetheless, given the great divergence (some would say collapse) of current Pentateuchal source and redactional criticism—and a wider suspicion of classic historical-critical assumptions—interpretations that rely heavily on theories of the text’s origins and divisions are provisional at best and at worst in danger of missing what Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 131–54, usefully calls the narrative’s “composite artistry.”

69. Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, 1969), 5.

70. For a recent, lucid defense of Exodus as a unified, literary work from the vantage point of rhetorical-critical analysis, see Stefan Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus: The Characters God, Moses, and Israel in the Rhetoric of the Book of Exodus*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013). For a review of theories on the organization and structure of Exodus, along with a cogent case for the literary coherence of the book as unified whole, see Arie C. Leder, “An Iconography of Order: Kingship in Exodus; A Study of the Structure of Exodus” (ThD diss., University of Toronto, 1992); Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Literary Unity of the Exodus Narrative,” in “*Did I Not Bring Israel Out of Egypt?*” *Biblical, Archaeological, and Egyptological Perspectives on the Exodus Narratives*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier, Alan R. Millard, and Gary A. Rendsburg, Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 13 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 113–32.

71. This task concentrates on the dynamic narrative qualities of the text summarized by Dennis Olson, “Literary and Rhetorical Criticism,” in Dozeman, *Methods for Exodus*, 13–54, esp. 16–19.

scholars have fruitfully engaged the compositional contours of Exodus in the context of the Pentateuch, that is, as the second part of a five-part book.⁷² I also will take seriously the canonical dimension of Exodus as part of a larger literary whole of the Pentateuch—a dimension that invites a reading across biblical books.⁷³ My constructive literary hermeneutic, then, not only highlights the literary artfulness and persuasiveness within the book itself, but also leverages the pertinent links between Genesis and Exodus (and to a lesser extent connections between Exodus and the wider canon) for interpretation. One prominent literary convention, “inner-biblical exegesis,” which I employ to exploit these theological linkages, needs some further explanation.

“Intertextuality” has garnered considerable attention in the rise of literary methodologies. It has become a catchall term to describe a range of relationships that can be discerned between texts. Unfortunately, no consensus definition for the concept exists, and that ambiguity is borne out by scholars who apply the term to disparate, even conflicting, approaches to the text. In a helpful survey of intertextuality in Old Testament scholarship, Geoffrey Miller delineates two major streams of intertextual approaches in scholarship.⁷⁴ The first approach places the emphasis on the reader’s role in creating the interaction, links, and subsequent meaning of juxtaposed texts.⁷⁵ The second, more traditional approach, and the one I will draw on, does not discount the role of the reader but gives comparatively greater emphasis to the world within the text as a delimiting factor in the determination of intertextual relationships.⁷⁶ For the

72. For a summary and relevant bibliography, see V. J. Steiner, “Literary Structure of the Pentateuch,” *DOTPentateuch* 544–56.

73. My approach will illustrate that the concern of justice is better understood in Exodus when read as a literary outworking of Genesis. The importance of the canonical sequence is emphasized well by, among others, Terence Fretheim, “The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus,” *Int* 45 (1991): 354–65. This avenue of interpretation is distinct from some recent interpreters who have stressed the independent and competing traditions of Israel’s origins in Genesis and Exodus. For an entrée into this debate, see the discussion between Joel Baden, “The Continuity of the Non-Priestly Narrative from Genesis to Exodus,” and Konrad Schmid, “Genesis and Exodus as Two Formerly Independent Traditions of Origins for Ancient Israel,” *Bib* 93 (2012): 161–208.

74. Geoffrey Miller, “Intertextuality in Old Testament Research,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 9 (2010): 283–309. The two approaches are less sealed categories as poles of a spectrum.

75. The reader-oriented approach is indebted to poststructuralist thought. It is particularly associated with the work of Julia Kristeva, *Σημειωτική [Séméiotiké]: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), who coined the term “intertextuality.” She develops the notion that any text emerges in relationship to a network of other texts, regardless of cultural milieu, from which it derives meaning. The act of reading, not any kind of diachronic criteria, establishes the relationships between texts. Thus meaning is always dependent on the nexus of texts determined by the reader and thereby is potentially endless.

76. This is in contrast to the first approach, which ascribes intertextual connections principally to the reader’s horizon. The second approach is exemplified by scholars such as Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), and Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66*, *Contraversions: Jews and Other*

sake of the present discussion, I use the term “inner-biblical exegesis” to designate this second approach.⁷⁷ Inner-biblical exegesis describes a phenomenon frequent in Scripture in which one biblical text alludes to, comments on, and/or reuses other biblical texts. One text elicits another text in order to signal some correspondence between the two. Inner-biblical exegesis hinges on some level of connection conditioned by the text itself and recognized by the reader. The reader’s role is irreducible to the production of meaning in inner-biblical exegesis, but “in a way which does not bypass the text, but rather completes it.”⁷⁸

What textual criteria, then, help to identify inner-biblical connections between texts? Miller’s survey demonstrates that, on the whole, scholars adopting an inner-biblical model discern linkages based largely on the presence of shared lexical features.⁷⁹ Lexical similarities such as the following (in order of significance) serve as the primary evidence of connections between texts: the presence of corresponding (1) language (e.g., similar vocabulary and/or phraseology, explicit citation, and allusion); (2) content (e.g., thematic connections, plot, characterization); and (3) form or structural function. These elements invite the reading of texts together. Naturally, the cumulative convergence of several elements increases the “persuasiveness” of an inner-biblical connection. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate in the book of Exodus, the dramatic literary placement and density of inner-biblical phenomena—in our case, links particularly with Genesis and/or echoes of creation traditions—at pivotal points within the story encourage the reader to look for subtler echoes peppered throughout. Nonetheless, these criteria are not beyond dispute in any one text, and they are weighed differently by scholars. In the end, as Benjamin Sommer befittingly suggests, the process of determining inner-biblical relationships is more art than science.⁸⁰

The purport of inner-biblical exegesis also relies to a significant extent on the interpreter’s overarching educated and artistic judgment. On the one hand, some

Differences (Stanford: Stanford University Press); also see Richard Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 34–45. By my use of the “author,” “editor,” “redactor,” “tradent,” etc., I do not mean to deny the long, complex process of tradition that resulted in the present form of Exodus. The only access one has to the “author” of any text is the text itself—there is no “de-textualized” author. Yet authors/editors are historical persons in historical contexts, so that any text immanent approach is not complete without at least posing the question of the historicity behind the text. More on this below.

77. Throughout my study, however, I alternate between the terms “intertextual” and “inner-biblical” when describing the phenomenon. I will also use the terms “allusion,” “resonance,” and “echo” as synonyms to refer to the same phenomenon.

78. Mark R. Stead, *The Intertextuality of Zechariah 1–8*, LHBOTS 506 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 28.

79. Miller, “Intertextuality in Old Testament Research,” 294–98. The degree of specificity between intertexts exists on a spectrum (see Stead, *The Intertextuality of Zechariah*, 21–22).

80. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 35.

commentators use an inner-biblical approach to discern diachronic relationships between texts. They then explain the meaning of the texts based largely on these historical judgments. In this way inner-biblical allusions act as evidence for source-critical and redactional verdicts.⁸¹ My aim is not to probe the question of compositional history (e.g., the diachronic direction of influence), though I do not mean to reject the conversation by definition.⁸² Rather, I attend to Exodus's inner-biblical phenomena as an avenue into the literary and theological significance of the narrative. My exegesis will focus on discerning the "cross-referencing" of texts and how this hermeneutical maneuver modifies the theological interpretation of Exodus by putting it into explicit conversation with other texts. Most especially, I will examine the inner-biblical juxtaposition of creation traditions within the text of Exodus. To this end, I take seriously the canon as a crucial theological category for interpretation. Such a commitment means, first, that I will give due regard to the theological-canonical sequence of Genesis to Exodus. I consider the presence of inner-biblical exegesis in Exodus, in other words, as a means by which the book of Exodus theologically interprets and/or expands canonically earlier texts and themes encountered in Genesis. Second, but to a lesser extent, I intend to reflect on how Exodus (re)casts other creation texts and categories from outside the Pentateuch for its theological ends.

A Cultural Memory Approach

Though my focus falls squarely on the theological world within the text, interpretation cannot ultimately avoid wrestling with the question of the particular historical setting(s) of the text—that is, the world behind the text. It is no surprise, given the ubiquity and centrality of the exodus tradition in Scripture, that Western scholarship in the past two centuries has expended enormous energy in attempts to answer historical questions raised by the book of Exodus. Both knowledge of the events that gave rise to the story and an awareness of the production, recension, and reception of the book of Exodus would ostensibly contribute to a more robust interpretation. On both fronts there has been no

81. E.g., Konrad Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus: Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 81 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999); Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. James Nogalski, Siphrut 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

82. Hence, my language throughout of an Exodus text "echoing," "recalling," "recasting," etc. is not an argument for a diachronic direction of influence but rather a way to reference the canonical sequence.

shortage of proposals and dispute.⁸³ Suffice it to say, there is little consensus on the antiquity of the exodus tradition, the degree of historicity behind the text of Exodus, and the social situation(s) which gave rise to its literary production, (continual) usage, or textual stabilization.

One avenue that holds promise for charting a way through (or perhaps better stated, around) the current historiographical disarray involves the study of the Hebrew Bible as “cultural memory,” rather than history, as a category with which to understand the character of the biblical texts.⁸⁴ Though study of cultural memory encompasses a wide range of disciplines, in the following I note a few of its most salient features pertaining to its application in biblical scholarship.⁸⁵

Cultural memory is largely traced to the pioneering work of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the early twentieth century.⁸⁶ Halbwachs’s generative insight was the necessary social conditioning of memory.⁸⁷ He maintained that individual memory, contrary to popular perception, is not possible outside of an existing social framework of interpretation. He contended the social framework of memory means that memory is not merely a storehouse of artifacts about the past but is the mechanism that distills the past in conversation with and in

83. The best and most recent example is Levy et al., *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective*. The various articles display the remarkable degree of divergence of opinion concerning the historicity of the events behind the book of Exodus.

84. The descriptor terms “cultural,” “collective,” and “social” are often used interchangeably in the literature, as I will do here. Note the hesitation regarding complete confluence among terms in Dietrich Harth, “The Invention of Cultural Memory,” in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 87.

85. On the development and broad acceptance of collective memory among social-scientific disciplines, see Jeffrey K. Olick et al., “Introduction,” in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–62; Harth, “The Invention of Cultural Memory,” 85–96. Though “memory” was a theme explored by Brevard Childs, *Memory and Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1962) and Willy Schottroff, *Gedenken im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament: Die Wurzel zakar im semitischen Sprachkreis* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967) more than half a century ago, the development of memory in wider disciplines proceeded largely unnoticed until the work of Jan Assmann (see below). This absence of memory studies in biblical scholarship until the last two decades is due in part to the strong influence of a form-critical understanding of tradition, a heavy emphasis on historiography, the lack of an agreed-on methodology, and the persistence of understanding memory as an individual phenomenon; see Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, “Jesus Tradition as Social Memory,” in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, ed. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, SBL Semeia Studies 52 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2005), 25–41. For a succinct overview of collective memory within biblical scholarship, see Ritva Williams, “Social Memory,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 41 (2011): 189–200.

86. A user-friendly distillation of Maurice Halbwachs’s work is found in *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

87. Not only is memory socially conditioned, but Olick et al., “Introduction,” 20, contend that subsequent work on collective memory “has demonstrated that there are long-term structures to what societies remember or commemorate that are stubbornly impervious to the efforts of individuals to escape them.”

service to present concerns. Memory, as humans' basic relationship to the past, entails a recall of a past that is active; in other words, memory mediates the past for the present. Hence, Halbwachs argued that memory works as the connective glue for a social group. Groups rely on memory to establish a shared identity among individuals through a common template of self-understanding. He believed this was characteristically the case for religious groups, whose emphasis on tradition perpetuated collective memory generationally.⁸⁸

Although the theory of cultural memory has percolated for some time and has found general acceptance (with debate and development) across the humanities and social sciences, it has only recently entered into the grammar of Old Testament scholarship, principally through the writings of Egyptologist Jan Assmann.⁸⁹ Using Halbwachs's work as a starting point, Assmann contends memory of the past works as a "cultural creation" that is socially constructed, organized, and negotiated to address the present and future.⁹⁰ He distinguishes two modes of collective memory—communicative memory and cultural memory.⁹¹ On the one hand, communicative memory describes "biographical" memories that individuals informally share with contemporaries. These consist of personal memories of the recent, lived past. Communicative memory survives at most eighty to one hundred years. Eventually, it gives way to cultural memory, with the effect that a collective memory is transmitted generationally.

Cultural memory, on the other hand, distills and extends memory. It unites, condenses, and brings coherence to what may have originated as a potpourri of disjointed memories. Of course, not everything is remembered, but what is remembered (and what is also forgotten) serves to perpetuate social identity in both its unity and particularity. Assmann argues that cultural memory is largely preserved by "institutionalized mnemotechnics" (semiotic systems such as dress, language, myths, rituals, calendric phenomena, and sacred texts), or organized and often ceremonially practiced patterns of culture making. Cultural memory is comprised of "that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals

88. See Maurice Halbwachs, "Religious Collective Memory," in Coser, *On Collective Memory*, 84–119.

89. Assmann's most influential work in biblical scholarship is *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. 1–54; see also Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125–33; Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, *Culture Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Assmann's watershed work, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992) is available in English as *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

90. Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 28.

91. On the following paragraphs, see Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 126–33; Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 36–41.

specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image.”⁹² Through such means individual identities are connected and calibrated to the group’s collective identity. The group’s social identity and its continuity with its past endure through the reflexive reappropriation of its memory in light of evolving, present needs.⁹³ According to Assmann, then, cultural memory names the “cultural sphere that combines tradition, awareness of history, myth in action, and self-definition, and that—a crucial point—is subject to the vast range of historically conditioned changes.”⁹⁴

What can be gained by seeing the book of Exodus within the category of collective, or cultural, memory? The continual appearance of the exodus tradition throughout Scripture illustrates its overwhelming potency as the central collective memory in Israel’s theological imagination. Of course, the fact that the narrative was written down itself reveals a will to remember.⁹⁵ But even more, Exodus is explicitly a story about remembering. Assmann states: “Egypt must be remembered in order to know what lies in the past, and what must not be allowed to come back. The theme of remembering is therefore central to the Exodus myth and to the constellation of Egypt and Israel. This is not only a myth to be remembered but a myth about remembering, a myth about past and future. It remembers the past in order to win the future.”⁹⁶ Accordingly, in more than one place in the Exodus narrative itself, the author of Exodus appeals to Israel’s task of remembering the events:

And for this reason you will recount in the ears of your son and your grandson how I made a mockery of Egypt and about my signs which I displayed there so that they will know that I am YHWH. (10:2)

When your son asks you in the future, “What is this about?” you tell him, “With a strong hand YHWH brought us out from Egypt, from the house of slavery.” (13:14; cf. 12:26; 13:18)

YHWH said to Moses, “Write this commemorative text in the book and put it in the ears of Joshua, namely, that I will wipe out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” (17:14)

92. Assmann, “Collective Memory,” 132.

93. On the similarities and differences between the understanding of the process of actualization, *Vergegenwärtigung*, as developed in biblical scholarship, see A. J. Culp, “The Memoir of Moses: Deuteronomy and the Shaping of Israel’s Memory” (PhD diss., University of Bristol, 2012), 6–9, 84–87, 224.

94. Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 10.

95. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 102.

96. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 8.

And, obviously, the prescription of the annual ritual of the Passover (Exod 12) assures bodily, mnemonic practice of the story perennially in Israelite homes.⁹⁷ The perpetuation of the exodus memory is made explicit in the narrative, not least because, as Laura Feldt argues, “The Israelites are presented as forgetful and in constant need of new fantastic events, ever more miracles. No matter how often they are presented with miracles, wonders, violent killings, and other extreme events . . . they do not have lasting effect, because the Israelites forget them almost immediately and doubt the supernatural agent that performed them.”⁹⁸ The perpetuation of the exodus memory, through recital and ritual, becomes the *sine qua non* of Israel’s cultural identity and survival.

For the most part, biblical scholars who have drawn on the study of cultural memory have done so in order to elucidate the world behind the text. The focus has rested on what Assmann calls “mnemohistory,” that is, uncovering the historical process of the production of memory—or how the perception of the past developed historically.⁹⁹ For example, in applications of cultural memory specific to Exodus, Ronald Hendel, Nadav Na’aman, and Andrew Mayes independently attempt to uncover the particular historical context(s) in which the tradition of the exodus emerged as the master narrative.¹⁰⁰ All three take for granted the exodus tradition as the fundamental story of Israel’s Scriptures (though each has a different opinion about the historicity behind the exodus event). Yet their goal is to establish historical circumstances in Israel’s history that explain how the exodus memory came to exercise its prominence in Israel’s scriptural imagination. In other words, “for the Exodus story to take root in early Israel it was necessary for it to pertain to the remembered past of settlers who did

97. See Assmann, “Exodus and Memory,” 9–14.

98. Laura Feldt, “Fantastic Re-Collection: Cultural vs. Autobiographical Memory in the Exodus Narrative,” in *Religious Narrative, Cognition, and Culture: Image and Word in the Mind of Narrative*, ed. Armin W. Geertz and Jeppe Sinding Jensen (Sheffield: Equinox, 2010), 203.

99. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 8–9: “Unlike history proper, mnemohistory is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered. It surveys the story-lines of tradition, the webs of intertextuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past. Mnemohistory is not the opposite of history, but rather is one of its branches or subdisciplines. . . . Mnemohistory is reception theory applied to history.”

100. Ronald Hendel, “The Exodus in Biblical Memory,” *JBL* 120 (2001): 601–22; Hendel, “The Exodus as Cultural Memory: Egyptian Bondage and the Song of the Sea,” in Levy et al., *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective*, 65–77; Nadav Na’aman, “The Exodus Story: Between Historical Memory and Historiographical Composition,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 11 (2011): 39–69; Na’aman, “Out of Egypt or Out of Canaan? The Exodus Story Between Memory and Historical Reality,” in Levy et al., *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective*, 527–33; Andrew D. H. Mayes, “Pharaoh’s Shishak’s Invasion of Palestine,” in *Between Evidence and Ideology: Essays on the History of Ancient Israel Read at the Joint Meeting of the Society of Old Testament Study and the Old Testamentisch Werkgezelschap Lincold, July 2009*, ed. Bob Becking and Lester Grabbe, *Old Testamentary Studies* 59 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 129–44.

not immigrate from Egypt.”¹⁰¹ Each proposes a plausible set of historical factors that they suggest explains the relevance and endurance of the exodus memory throughout Israelite history.

These kinds of investigations demonstrate feasible reasons why the exodus tradition continued to have a transformational influence in Israel. Furthermore, they supply historical evidence that can be used to elucidate the presence of various components and layers within the book of Exodus. And yet, the category of cultural memory cautions against locating the historical silver bullet that conclusively explains the story as we now have it. A singular context cannot sufficiently accommodate the rich, textured complexity of Exodus. Aren Maeir diagnoses the problem with a creative assortment of analogies:

This tradition, or matrix of cultural memories, was woven together and altered over a long period (perhaps, periodically unwoven as well—*Penelope’s shroud* perhaps serving as an analogy), containing “snippets of yarns of memory” from many sources. This explains why this “amazing technicolor dreamcoat” does not dovetail with any specific, limited set of events; in fact, by definition it cannot fit into a restricted historical horizon! We are not looking for the “tree” that will provide the “ultimate” definition of the “forest”—but rather we must realize that this “forest” comprises many trees—each reflecting another “snippet” of collective memory.¹⁰²

The Exodus narrative as collective memory was somewhat fluid—a bricolaged “chain of memories”—negotiating numerous periods and events.¹⁰³ To be sure, the presence and apparent weight attached to the exodus tradition in early biblical consciousness suggests the antiquity of a historical nucleus, notwithstanding recent efforts to depict the story as a late fiction.¹⁰⁴ Yet con-

101. Hendel, “Exodus in Biblical Memory,” 604; cf. Na’aman, “Exodus Story,” 60–63.

102. Aren M. Maeir, “Exodus as a Mnemo-Narrative: An Archaeological Perspective,” in Levy et al., *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective*, 414. Abraham Malamat, “The Exodus: Egyptian Analogies,” in *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence*, ed. Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard H. Lesko (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 16, shows that an exodus of Canaanite slaves from Egypt was a “durative” event happening over a long period of time in the waning years of Egyptian hegemony over Canaan (nineteenth–twentieth dynasties). Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), 39–40, maintains that memory often acts as an adhesive, transforming an assemblage of disconnected points in time into “seemingly unbroken historical continua.”

103. “Chain of memory” I borrow from Daniele Hervieu-Leger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000). The variety among presentations of the exodus tradition throughout different genres in the canon demonstrates the elasticity of the tradition.

104. The rise of critical historiography and advances in archaeology have substantially withered positivistic confidence in the historicity of the Exodus narrative. Nonetheless, there is biblical

temporary source, tradition, and redaction criticism analyses demonstrate that the text was remembered and re-remembered over shifting historical horizons. We could debate to what degree this or that element, layer, or tradition stems from this or that historical setting. The category of cultural memory, however, curbs the tendency to argue for the primacy of one historical period, and moreover, moderates the impulse to explain the text in light of a strict chronology of historical developments. Such attempts might use the category of cultural memory as a tool for modern historiography (such attempts are valuable).¹⁰⁵ To my mind, though, the more persuasive contribution cultural memory makes to historiographical questions lies in its emphasis not on the historical but the *social* dimension of the memory—namely, why this particular narrative embedded itself within the collective consciousness of ancient Israel through the centuries. So, for example, I find reasonable Hendel’s suggestion that the memory of a pervasive and oppressive presence of Egypt in the land of Canaan just before and during the early Iron Age naturally “greased the wheels,” so to speak, for a widespread embrace of the exodus story by an indigenous population in Canaan.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, cultural memory is a different mode of inquiry into the past than modern historiography. Yael Zerubavel describes a distinguishing quality of the former: “The power of collective memory does not lie in its accurate, systematic, or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images

evidence that makes better sense with a historic exodus-like event taking place on Egyptian soil than without. For a sensible sifting of the evidence, see Graham Davies, “Was There an Exodus?,” in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 23–40; and various articles in Levy et al., *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective*. For a thorough defense of the *plausibility* of the historicity of the exodus, see James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

105. Barbara Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Philadelphia: McGraw-Hill International, 2003), 99–108, offers a succinct sketch of the contested relationship between history and memory in scholarship. Also note the cogent criticisms of using cultural memory as an approach to serve historical reconstruction by Jens Bruun Kofoed, “The Old Testament as Cultural Memory,” in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 303–23.

106. Hendel, “The Exodus as Cultural Memory;” Na’aman, “Out of Egypt or Out of Canaan?” Cf. Maeir, “Exodus as a Mnemo-Narrative,” 413–15. This of course presumes in accordance with most recent scholarship that the majority who came to identify themselves as Israel emerged from within the land; see William G. Dever, *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 119–258. Interestingly, Manfred Bietak, “On the Historicity of the Exodus: What Egyptology Today Can Contribute to Assessing the Biblical Account of the Sojourn in Egypt,” in Levy et al., *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective*, 17–37, reviews evidence that the collective memory of suffering by Canaanites in Canaan on account of Egypt could have reasonably merged with memories of Canaanites suffering in Egypt.

that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance.”¹⁰⁷ Collective memory becomes a meaningful category not based primarily on the past reality of the events but rather based on the memory’s significance for collective identity. A group recognizes the memory as definitive for perpetuating identity—regardless of the extent to which various group members (or their ancestors) were involved in the actual historical experience.¹⁰⁸ Thus cultural memory navigates a way through the historiographical quandaries of Exodus by, on the one hand, pointing to the larger social and political rhythms as a backdrop to this epic story and, on the other hand, bringing into focus the story’s socio-ethical qualities as *educative* memory.¹⁰⁹ To say it again, if on the one hand collective memory brings new awareness to how the broader patterns of Israelite history shaped (and was shaped by) the memories of the exodus tradition, then it also (and more significantly for this study) recognizes that the text is a long-term, negotiated stabilization of these accumulating “rememberings,” which function as Israel’s formative and normative narrative.¹¹⁰ The category of cultural memory thus pushes us to examine this bricolage of memories as a storied constellation of abiding truth that oriented and continues to orient theological imagination. Cultural memory facilitates the shift of emphasis from the modern historiographical “where” and “what” of the narrative to the metahistorical “why.” It is “the actuality rather than factuality of the past” that is at issue.¹¹¹

Here again, Assmann’s work helpfully describes the purposes cultural memory can serve in perpetuating the “actuality” of the narrative. He contends cultural memory mediates and condenses the past by transforming it into foundational memory, or “myth.” Foundational myths articulate salient moments that have shaped an identity of a group. In so doing, they embody fundamental group values that supply the frame(s) of reference to propel the group for action in the present.¹¹² Assmann designates this aspect a “mythomotic” function of

107. Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 8.

108. Cf. R. W. L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 93

109. The classic work on Jewish cultural memory is Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor, Jewish History, and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982). He advances the notion that the biblical/Jewish view of the past is fundamentally didactic and not historical.

110. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 38, distinguishes between normative and formative in the following way: “Normative texts . . . answer the question ‘What shall we do?’ They help us to make judgments, arrive at legal findings, and make decisions. They transmit practical knowledge and point the way to right action. . . . Formative texts . . . answer the question ‘Who are we?’ They help to define ourselves and establish our identity. They transmit identity-confirming knowledge by narrating stories that are shared.”

111. Carol Meyers, *Exodus*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11.

112. Assmann insists that the relationship between the past and the present is not unidirectional but dialectical. Memory shapes the present, but the present also shapes memory of the past;

foundational memory.¹¹³ He makes clear his choice of the term “myth” is not aimed at stripping memory’s content of its truth value or necessarily denying the historical reality of the events. Rather, foundational memory as “myth” points to the remembered history’s formative and normative significance for a community’s identity.¹¹⁴ Cultural memory lays the emphasis on the myth’s “future ‘binding’ qualities as something that must not under any circumstances be forgotten.”¹¹⁵ Foundational memory, then, offers a hermeneutic for ethical activity in the future—it articulates an abiding, symbolic world laden with constitutive values that legitimizes and mobilizes certain patterns of social behavior. The past, as a didactic, orienting, and mobilizing memory, is woven into the present for the sake of the future.¹¹⁶ In a word, the memory inscribed in the narrative is pedagogical.

see especially Jan Assmann, “Guilt and Remembrance: On the Theologization of History in the Ancient Near East,” *Memory and History* 2 (1990): 5–33; and examples in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds., *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2006). The “presentist” nature of collective memory is somewhat disputed—namely, to what degree do present concerns impose themselves on the construction of memory? Indeed, some collective memory theorists (and not a few biblical scholars) have gone so far as to say that the present, hegemonic forces dictate the construction of the past, such that cultural memory is a veiled manipulation or even fabrication of the past for solely ideological ends. The term “invention of tradition” can tend to be used in this direction (e.g., Van der Toorn, “The Exodus as Charter Myth,” 13–27), although it need not be understood in such a radical constructivist way (see Paul Post, “The Creation of Tradition: Rereading and Reading Beyond Hobsbawm,” in Van Henten and Housten, *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition*, 41–59). Without denying ideological interests are at work in the formation of memory, several scholars have shown that this *Tendenz* is an extreme to be resisted; see, e.g., Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1386–1403; Mitztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, 56–73; Alan Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory,” and Barry Schwartz, “Christian Origins: Historical Truth and Social Memory,” in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, ed. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, SBL Semeia Studies 52 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2005), 10–17, and 43–56, respectively; Frank H. Polak, “Afterword: Perspectives in Retrospect,” in *Performing Memory in Biblical Narrative and Beyond*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Frank H. Polak, *Bible in the Modern World* 25 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2009), 296–99. Memory is an elastic framework that mediates and makes the past relevant to present concerns, but it is more accurate to cast memory as a negotiation between past and present, rather than a reflex of present power holders. See Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory,” 15: “It is true that present identity is the perspective from which individuals—and groups—view and shape the past. But present identity configurations are always emerging from the variegated experiences of ever-deepening pasts.”

113. Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 63.

114. Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 38. Cf. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 8.

115. Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 61.

116. Does qualifying the exodus tradition in this way make it historically untrue? I do not want to remain apathetic regarding the historical background of the story. Indeed, in my exegesis of the text I will draw on the ancient Near Eastern backdrop and Israelite history. Nonetheless, I do remain agnostic about nailing down precise historical details concerning the originating events or the literary compilation of the narrative. I have here defended my approach to the text as cultural memory as a warrant for my agnosticism regarding precise answers for modern historiographical questions. Apart from this, I take the current widespread divergence on historical questions as another reason

In addition to its foundational function, Assmann highlights another mythomotoric function of cultural memory: contra-present.¹¹⁷ If foundational memory conjures up the past in order to shape the present into something meaningful, then memory can also serve to critique the present experience as inconsistent with a community's identity as rooted in memory. It furnishes the measuring stick of what is wrong with the present in light of the past. The act of remembering, if it exposes incongruity, can become a contra-present act of resistance. Foundational memory functions in contra-present ways in contexts in which the present experience might lack sufficient, daily reminders that confirm the reality of the memory.¹¹⁸ Especially in situations of oppression, Assmann notes, foundational memories become contra-present memories that form frames of reference for empowering cultural change, even revolution.

What we have in the book of Exodus is the evolved and elevated foundational memory that has endured in contra-present ways.¹¹⁹ So what does all of this have to do with this project? I will not focus on Exodus's mnemohistorical character—the memory's historical development. Rather, I will concentrate on the literary emplotment of the memory, specifically as it relates to the theme of justice. The overall presentation of this theme in the story, as foundational memory, transcends any single time period. The category of cultural memory underlines the foundational, even “decontextualized,”¹²⁰ quality of the narrative, and highlights its pedagogical role for generations to come.¹²¹ In other words, didacticism is part of the fabric and function of the narrative.¹²² What is more, we will see that the story itself gives sustained attention to the importance of pedagogy specifically *in and for justice*. My reading will demonstrate that Exodus means not just to depict the contours of YHWH's justice but also to underline the importance of learning and growing into YHWH's justice. That is, the nature of the text is pedagogical (per cultural memory); and tutelage in justice is an overriding concern of its pedagogical impetus. Hence, my exploration of the theme of justice in Exodus will show the significance of formation and maturation with regard to justice.

for a healthy skepticism toward any particular reconstruction (despite scholars who employ cultural memory for this very activity). I wish to lay emphasis on the orienting function of the book of Exodus as highlighted by Assmann.

117. Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 62–69.

118. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 16–17.

119. Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 67.

120. James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory*, New Perspectives on the Past (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 71–74, provide insight into the ways epic narratives are unmoored from specific external historical contexts. The memory subsequently survives and is reinforced through a concretization of the internal context—i.e., the world within the text—which does not depend heavily on external contexts.

121. On this, see especially Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 1–26, and *passim*.

122. Cf. Kåre Berge, “Didacticism in Exodus? Elements of Didactic Genre in Exodus 1–15,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 22 (2008): 3–28.

On a final note, I think the well-attested creational imagery pushes in a complementary, pedagogical direction. It was generally the case that cosmogonic myths in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt functioned in foundational ways. These myths related stories of origin that served as archetypes to legitimate the ethics of human society. Exodus fulfilled these same roles for Israel with an important distinction: it located the myth in human history.¹²³ Yet, as I will argue, the book of Exodus is in explicit conversation with the cosmogonic narrative at the beginning of Israel's canon, Genesis 1–11, and other creational themes. Exodus weaves its historical narrative with creational (“mythic”) categories. This is not to be understood as a disruption, deposition, or demotion of Genesis's creation narrative, but rather its ethical demonstration in the memory of the chosen people of God. Hence, the canonical book of Exodus is not a foundational story in disharmony with the beginnings of the world. If Exodus is paradigmatic for Israel's understanding of justice, then Genesis's creation account is the “preemptive” metanarrative for understanding Exodus.¹²⁴ To say it differently, creation provides the perduring anchor that secures Exodus as programmatic.

Overview of This Study

This study investigates the paradigmatic, moral vision of justice presented in the book of Exodus. I adopt a synchronic, “text immanent” interpretative strategy that takes specific note of canonical and inner-biblical connections, especially as they point toward creational categories in the narrative. My foregoing discussion of cultural memory gives good reason also to attend to the pedagogical nature of the text. Thus the complementary lenses of creation and pedagogy will work in tandem to sharpen my close, constructive reading of the justice of Exodus. The following briefly outlines the content of each chapter. At the end of each chapter, I summarize at greater length my exegetical conclusions.

Chapter 1, “Defining Justice: Justice in the Ancient Near East and Israel,” discusses the ancients' understanding of “justice” and “righteousness” as principles

123. Since Bertil Albrektson's monograph *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1967), it is understood that the gods of ancient Near Eastern religion also were involved in historical affairs. Yet their involvement in history does not come close to matching Israel's conception of the divine action in history. See Albertz, “Exodus,” 133–37; Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 6–9.

124. In one sense, Exodus is the cultural memory that makes “available the moral and symbolic resources for making sense of the present through ‘keying’ present experiences and predicaments to archetypal images and narrative representations of the commemorated past” (Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory,” 16). But, in another sense, Exodus as a whole is “keyed” to creation. I borrow the language of “pre-emptive” from Kirk's discussion of Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past*.

ingrained in creation and at work in every sphere of society. Justice in this frame of reference names an ethical norm and goal, rooted in a divinely mandated social order, that embodies relational harmony and restorative compassion toward the vulnerable.¹²⁵ Israel's Scriptures testify to YHWH's imprint of justice on and within creation. Humans and especially the king were meant to act justly—behavior that conformed to YHWH's creational order. Genesis provides an essential prelude to investigating the theme of YHWH's justice in Exodus.¹²⁶

Chapter 2, "Justice Under Threat: Exodus 1–4," outlines how the beginning of Exodus casts Israel's situation in terms of a breakdown of YHWH's creational trajectory of justice-righteousness launched in Genesis. Pharaoh's oppression stymies YHWH's creational goals for Israel on behalf of the wider world. Within this creational framework, Israel's experience in Egypt is marked by "poverty" (i.e., vulnerability and oppression). The episodes of Moses's early life pivot around the issue of justice, and YHWH's call and commission of Moses bespeak YHWH's faithfulness to the covenant and attentiveness to the cry of injustice. Exodus 1–4 sets the stage for YHWH's deliverance, by which YHWH will educate Israel (and Egypt) on the divine creational agenda that showcases a key concern for justice.

Chapter 3, "Justice Championed: Exodus 5–15," explains how with signs and wonders YHWH unmasks Pharaoh's order as an anticreational affront to true justice. YHWH wants Pharaoh to concede to sending the people out to serve YHWH. YHWH preserves Pharaoh's ability to do so by "hardening" his heart. Yet Pharaoh will not yield, ultimately driving Egypt to bear the brunt of his injustice against the elect. The plagues, the exodus of a "mixed multitude," and the dramatic sea crossing all serve YHWH's reclamation of creational intentions for Israel and, by extension, for the world. YHWH's extrication of Israel from Egypt educates all involved in YHWH's way of justice.

Chapter 4, "Summoned to Justice: Exodus 15–24," demonstrates that deliverance from Egypt is by no means all that Exodus offers on the theme of justice. In the exit from Egypt Israel transitions from service under Pharaoh to service under their new king, YHWH. This transition necessarily expands the theology of the justice of Exodus. In the trek through the wilderness, YHWH aims to heal Israel of the "diseases of Egypt" by training the people in a different regimen

125. As such, it is a concept not adequately captured by modern notions of "retribution," "fairness," or "equity."

126. Admittedly, the standard vocabulary for justice—*mišpāṭ* and *šedāqā/šedeq*—is rare in the book of Exodus. The former occurs three times (15:25; 23:6; 26:30), the latter not at all (but note three occurrences of the related lexeme *šaddiq* in 9:27; 23:7, 8). Despite the paucity of vocabulary, I will detail in my exegesis of Exodus how the moral categories operative in the language of "justice and righteousness" (the burden of ch. 2) are assumed by and are pervasive in the book. Thus I will demonstrate that the motif of justice has cogent, explanatory power for interpreting the narrative.

of justice. At the mountain the implications of YHWH's kingship continue to unfold. Israel is summoned into covenant with YHWH, who positions Israel as the divinely appointed exegete of YHWH's justice. Through following the law, Israel is to emerge from Sinai as a reordered community that embodies and mediates God's creational justice for all the earth.

Chapter 5, "Building for Justice: Exodus 25–40," defines the tabernacle as the meeting point between heaven and earth, symbolically reflecting in its structure YHWH's creational order. It is to be for Israel the orienting center for the practice of YHWH's justice. However, the people's building of the golden calf places everything in jeopardy. The great sin becomes the occasion to learn of the relationship between mercy and judgment as constitutive of YHWH's justice. The book ends with the construction of the tabernacle, which itself models the way to build for justice.

I close with a brief conclusion. One last note: throughout my exegetical treatment in these chapters I address ethically troublesome passages on justice (e.g., Pharaoh's hard heart, the "plundering" of the Egyptians, the death of the firstborn, Amalek, Levitical slaughter) as they appear in the sequence of the narrative. These passages surely deserve more thorough attention than I provide here; but I aim to show (at the least) how the larger narrative helps one probe these (alleged) morally problematic passages on the text's own terms. Now I begin my investigation into the justice of Exodus.