WHO IS TO BLAME: THE PHARAOH, YAHWEH OR CIRCUMSTANCE?

On human responsibility, and divine ordinance
in Exodus 1-14

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ABSTRACT

Each of the three (major) layers of Exodus 1-14 (J, Dtr and P) is built around a particular theme and displays a particular theology, each thereby giving a different 'answer' to the question of the relationship between human responsibility and divine ordinance. According to J Yahweh can be known from events in nature and everybody has the responsibility and freedom to respond to Yahweh's self-revelation. The Deuteronomistic layer views Yahweh's revelation as something that happened generations ago. Yahweh's prophets point to that history and issue warnings to all people. If people consistently refuse to listen to his prophets Yahweh hardens their hearts, thereby taking from them their freedom of choice, and then uses their history of failure and ruin as a warning to those who still have to choose. In P Yahweh reveals himself only to his covenant people through his dealings with those outside of the covenant. He dictates history and in his presence even the covenant people should obey his laws to the minutest detail in order to prevent the defiling of Yahweh's honour and to escape his consequent wrath. These three views are then rephrased in question form and related to the South African crisis of the day.

A. THEME AND PRESUPPOSITIONS

The problem of human responsibility and divine ordinance presents itself in the story of the exodus from Egypt. According to Childs (1974:174) the motif of the hardening of pharaoh's heart 'has been constantly over-interpreted by supposing that it arose from a profoundly theological reflection and seeing it as a problem of free will and predestination ....' It may be true that the story arose from a different kind of theological reflection and that one should not treat the text as if the question of the relationship between human responsibility and divine ordinance formed the basis upon which the story had been constructed. But it is also true that there is a difference between pharaoh hardening his own heart and Yahweh hardening the pharaoh's heart for him. The problem of human responsibility and divine ordination thus lies in the text and calls for an answer. It does not solve the problem if one says the
authors did not consciously reflect on this problem, or to say,

What is obviously all-important is not the instrument of God's election, but the end purpose of God's elective act .... If the hardening had not taken place, then Israel would not have come out of Egypt 'with mighty signs and wonders ....' These signs were of missionary value.

(Knight 1976:71)

Such - in my view - scholastic or sophistic explanations do not address the basic problem presented by the text to (at least) a modern reader.

I thought it might be of some value to try and reconstruct the process of growth through which the present story went in order to 'locate' the kind of theology that created this problem. I shall thus be dealing with the story from a text-historical point of view, that is, I shall, from a literary-critical and redaction-historical point of view, try to reconstruct the theological arguments in connection with pharaoh's hardening of the heart.

Now that I have stated my goals and procedure in such a bold fashion I should perhaps tone them down somewhat. A historical-critical encounter with Exodus 1-14 leads to an experience similar to that of the British philosopher Arthur Koestler in his encounter with nature. He said,

In my twenties I regarded the universe (read: the Pentateuch) as an open book full of mathematical formulae (read: J,E,D,P; v Zaab, etc). And now I regard it as an invisible piece of writing in which we can now and then decipher a letter of a word and then its gone again.

(Green 1982:1)

Perhaps Von Rad (1973:190) was correct when he observed with reference to Exodus 1-14,

So wie sich uns die Dinge heute darstellen, sieht es überhaupt nicht darnach aus, als ob wir je wieder zu einer Quellenanalyse kommen, in der wir die ganze Stoffmasse einigermassen befriedigend auf die Quellenschriften verteilen können .... Wir müssen vom kritisch gesicherten Minimum ausgehen.
Whether Fuss (1972) and especially Resenhofft (1983) have really succeeded in achieving an exact source analysis, which Von Rad here held for improbable, I doubt. At least Resenhofft's four J and four E strata, two P strata and two redactions neatly separated from one another seem to me to go far beyond what can with some measure of confidence be deduced from the text through pure literary-critical means. Although Fuss, to my mind, relied too heavily on the criterion of vocabulary for his redaction-historical analysis of the story, I think he has convincingly argued for a large portion of the text to be the product of Deuteronomistic reworking of earlier material.

What seems clear, after the priestly material has been taken away, is that at least the Yahwist and Deuteronomistic editors had a hand in the story. A redaction-critical analysis of the text indeed seems to suggest that the 'Yahwist' as well as the 'Deuteronomistic' additions to it could have been the end result of more than one reworking of earlier existing materials (Greenberg 1971:245-248; Weimar 1973:156-166; Dummermuth 1964; Otto 1976), but it also seems to invite so much speculation (to isolate such earlier existing material from the present text) that it would be advisable to treat the material as of 'Yahwistic', 'Deuteronomistic' and 'priestly' origin, and thus to ascribe certain portions of the text to a Yahwist 'family', others to a Deuteronomistic 'family' and others to a priestly 'family' of authors-editors. Such a procedure seems to be adequate, especially if one is not after the precise history of the text, but after certain 'modes' of theologising peculiar to particular 'families' such as J^1, J and J^R; E, D and Dtr or P^3, P and P^R (McCarthy 1965:337, 340).

To date these different layers in the text is, however, quite a different problem. Although I am of late inclined towards a post-Deuteronomistic dating of J, this text seems to resist such an order and to rather favour the prior existence of J, which was then reworked and supplemented by Deuteronomistic editors. I shall thus treat the text's component layers in the order J, Dtr and P, each of which reflects exilic to post-exilic (theological) thinking. More than this I am not ready to suggest. Time and space do not
allow a detailed presentation of my analysis, I shall have to trust that the following discussion will confirm the relative acceptability of the presupposed analysis.

B. THE J FAMILY’S ACCOUNT OF THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN YAHWEH AND THE PHARAOH

The story runs more or less like this: Yahweh sees the plight of the Israelites and decides to rescue them from Egypt (3:7-8,17). Moses is called to bring over the message to the elders (4:29). Then starts a series of seven encounters between Yahweh and the pharaoh, encounters which show up the following elements (relevant to the present theme):

Encounter 1 (5:1b-2)
1. Command to pharaoh: Let my people go!
3. Pharaoh: I shall not let the people go.

Encounter 2 (7:14a,15a,16a,*17-18,20a,21a,23a,24-25)
1. Command to pharaoh: Let my people go!
2. By this you will know that I am Yahweh: I shall strike the Nile...
3. Yahweh strikes the Nile, the fish die.
4. Pharaoh takes no notice.

Encounter 3 (7:*26,27b,28a,29; 8:*4-5,8a,9b,10-11)
1. Command to pharaoh: Let my people go!
2. I shall cause frogs to cover the whole country.
3. Pharaoh asks for intercession.
4. You will know that there is no one like Yahweh.
5. Pharaoh hardens his heart.

Encounter 4 (8:*16,*17,*18,*20,*21,*24,26,*27,28)
1. Command to pharaoh: Let my people go!
2. I shall send flies in all homes.
3. Pharaoh asks for intercession.
4. Pharaoh agrees to let people go, but not too far.
5. Pharaoh hardens his heart.

Encounter 5 (9:*13,18,22b,25,*27a,28,*29,31-*33,*34)
1. Command to pharaoh: Let my people go!
2. I shall bring a hail storm unheard of.
3. Pharaoh asks for intercession.
4. Pharaoh agrees to let the people go forthwith.
5. You shall know that the earth belongs to Yahweh.
6. Pharaoh hardens his heart.

**Encounter 6**


1. Command to pharaoh: Let my people go!
2. I shall bring locusts in numbers unheard of.
3. Pharaoh agrees to let grown-up males go.
4. Yahweh brings the locusts.
5. Pharaoh asks for intercession.
6. Pharaoh agrees to release the people, but not the animals.
7. Pharaoh terminates negotiations.

**Encounter 7**


1. I shall pass through Egypt: all the first born will die.
2. Pharaoh finds the first born dead.
3. Pharaoh begs Israel to leave and to bless him.
4. Pharaoh changes his mind and chases after Israel.
5. Yahweh protects Israel.
6. The Egyptians accept Yahweh's superior power and flee.
7. The Egyptians are defeated and the Israelites set free.

The question addressed and solved by this story, reminding of the theology of Deutero-Isaiah (Wildberger 1977), seems to be: Is Yahweh's power such that he can go against a powerful foreign king? The answer is contained in the theme: Even foreign rulers should and will in the end come to acknowledge Yahweh's power:

**Encounter 1:** (a) Who is Yahweh?
   (b) I shall not let the people go.

**Encounter 2:** You shall know that I am Yahweh.

**Encounter 3:** There is no one like Yahweh.

**Encounter 5:** The earth belongs to Yahweh.

**Encounter 7:** (a) Pharaoh releases Israel and asks to be blessed by them.
   (b) The Egyptians acknowledge Yahweh's power.
   (c) Egypt is defeated and Israel set free.

Within this framework the question of human responsibility and divine ordinance could have been answered along the following lines: Seeing that the pharaoh did not know Yahweh, how was he to
come to know him? By just looking to, or rather through, the things that happened around him in nature: in the world of fish, frogs, flies, locusts, the weather conditions, et cetera. Yahweh is present in all these things and his presence can be inferred from such natural events if one perceives them with open eyes and not with a 'heavy heart', that is, with an insensitive mind (Wilson 1979:26). Even foreigners are able to 'see' Yahweh in his actions through ordinary events (Reventlow 1977), if they are willing to see these ordinary events as miracles or divine deeds. 'Miracle,' said Buber (1956:76), 'is simply what happened .... [T]he normal and ordinary can also undergo a transfiguration into miracle in the light of the suitable hour.' Although the pharaoh is told time and again that Yahweh is about to do this or that, it is the narrator who informs us that it was indeed Yahweh who performed these miracles while the pharaoh remained insensitive to what was happening. It is because the pharaoh remains insensitive to Yahweh's presence in the everyday world of fish and frogs and flies and consciously shuts his heart that he perishes. It is important to note, as Childs (1974:71) has already pointed out, that the J narrator's remark on the pharaoh's hardening of his heart consistently follows on the different events: he is constantly reacting to Yahweh's acts of self-revelation.

Had the pharaoh followed his urge to be blessed by Yahweh and had he not changed his mind again he would have received the blessing he asked for. Up to the very last moment the pharaoh remains free to choose between being blessed or cursed. At the same time it becomes clear that, if one has once made the decision to acknowledge Yahweh as Lord - as the Israelites did (4:31) - he takes care of life. Therefore Moses could, without hesitation, assure the people that there was no need to fear, since Yahweh was on their side (14:13-14). Man is responsible, and solely responsible, to acknowledge Yahweh, and so is also responsible for the direction of (his) history, and for whether it will be directed towards salvation or towards doom.

C. THE DEUTERONOMIC 'FAMILY'S' CONTRIBUTION TO THE STORY

Exodus 1-14 reflects a thorough reworking and supplementing of the
J-narrative by a family of Deuteronomistic redactors. The traditional 'E-fragments' possibly supplied some of the supplementary material included in this redaction/these redactions. It seems unlikely that one could still disentangle the history of growth of the Deuteronomistic material. One can, however, detect a distinct prophetic-Deuteronomistic tendency in the material as a whole.

1. The prophetic tendency

First of all one is struck by the reworking of the calling of Moses, a reworking that resembles the calling of Samuel and, in certain instances, also those of prophets and other (religious) functionaries. Compare

**Exodus 3:4b**

![Scriptural text](image)

**1 Samuel 3:4,10**

![Scriptural text](image)

Secondly, there is the typical (Deuteronomistic?) unwillingness of the called to perform the task entrusted to him, followed by Yahweh's reassurance that he will be with the called (Kaiser 1985: 48). Compare

**Exodus 3:9-12**

![Scriptural text](image)

**Judges 6:14-17**

![Scriptural text](image)
Exodus 4:10-12

The 'signs' Yahweh gives to Moses to convince his people of his divine mission (4:1-9, 17, 20b-21, 27-28, 30-31) involve his staff and his hand, both of which play a role in this redaction of the story (7:15b, 17b, 9:22a, 23-24, 10:12-13a, 21-22a). And like (Elijah), Elisha and Jeremiah, Moses gets an 'assistant' in the person of Aaron. (Consequently the name of Aaron was inserted in many J-passages and the J-grammar adapted to 'accommodate' plural subjects or predicates where Moses and Aaron are involved.)

Thirdly, this redaction stresses the mediatory role of Yahweh's prophet: Yahweh speaks through him and grants his requests, while the prophet warns the people of the consequences of their deeds and is not very popular with his audience. Compare

(a) Yahweh works through Moses (and not, as in J, by himself): 4:21; 7:17b (cf 7:25); 9:22a, 23-24 (cf 9:18); 10:12-13a (cf 10:13b-14a); 10:21-22a.

(b) Yahweh grants Moses' requests (in prayer): 8:9, 27a.

(c) The prophet warns people beforehand and tells them exactly what the consequences of their disobedience will be and then announces Yahweh's punitive actions: 7:16c; 8:17a; 9:2-3a, 5-6; 9:14-16; 9:17, 19-21, 35; 10:2, 4; 11:8.

4:17-18; 14:11-12,31b.

Fourthly, Yahweh first informs his prophet about the future and only then does he start to do these things (cf Am 3:7 and Noth 1962:41,47): 3:19-22 (cf 12:33-36; 11:3); 5:15b (cf 12:33); 4:8-9, 21-23 (cf 12:35-36); 7:14b; 10:1b. Given this literary context of announcement-fulfillment there seems to be no need for Sutcliffe's (1954:321-322) explanation of the 'hardening of pharaoh's heart' passages (e.g., 4:21) in terms of an otherwise poorly attested 'effect as purpose' idiom. We shall return to the meaning of the hardening of the pharaoh's heart in this context later.

Finally, that the Deuteronomistic redactors did indeed perceive Moses as a real prophet is clear from passages such as Hosea 12:4 ('By a prophet Yahweh led Israel out of Egypt') and Deuteronomy 34:10 ('And like Moses there never stood up a prophet in Israel') (see Suber 1956:62-63).

2. Yahweh's work in history

In this redaction's view Yahweh does not work directly and visibly through ordinary events (as in 'J'), but through a mediator (3:2a; 14:19) and through 'signs and wonders' - the 'incarnations of his words' (Buber 1956:63). It is perhaps precisely because he is not immediately accessible and knowable through ordinary events that he needs a prophet as interpreter and spokesman (3:20; 4:8-9,17,21,28, 30; 8:19; 10:1b,2; 13:9) and why Yahweh is said to act through a מַעֲרֵחות דוֹר (3:19; 6:1; 13:9; 14:8). Rather than a God who reveals himself through everyday events, Yahweh, is a God who revealed himself to past generations and therefore through past history. Buber (1956:63) is right when he states, 'What happens in this picture is not myth-making or stylisation, but the flesh and blood of history.' The exodus story is not, as in J, told as 'happening', but as something that happened long ago, as a story about past events from which the revelation of God (and the consequent responsibility of man) have to be deduced, as it were (Seeligmann 1977:420-423). This conception of God as a God of history explains the admonishing, explanatory and parenetic portions of the Deuteronomistic re-
daction. Telling the story of the exodus means carrying the past with you (13:19) and looking back on past revelation (see 13:5) from which the nature of God and the responsibility of man have to be inferred (10:1b-2). The past reveals the rationale of present faith content and religious practice (cf 12:24-27a; 13:3-6,8-10, 11-16). The responsibility of man is expressed by the term עבד: Whereas the Yahwist has it that Israel should celebrate a feast (ןַח/נַח) for Yahweh (which might have included sacrifices - 5:1b; 10:9,25; cf 8:21-23), the Deuteronomists use the term (cf 7:16b,26b; 10:7,26, etc), 7 which is a much more general term for religious conduct.

According to this version of the exodus story Yahweh has revealed himself as one who differentiates sharply between belief and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. Those who react by obeying his commands are blessed, but those who reject them are punished. Even the Egyptians who, at the time of the hail storm, obeyed God's instructions and brought their animals to safety did not suffer any loss of property (1:15-21; 2:4,7-10,15a; 8:18a,19-20; 9:2-7,19-20, 26; 10:6b; 11:3,7; 13:43-49(?)).

Although Yahweh knows beforehand what the outcome of history will be (4:19,20b-21,8 - cf Is 6:8ff) this foreknowledge does not seem to imply foreordination (Raisanen 1976:56). Even when Yahweh sees that the pharaoh is stubborn (7:14a) he still presents him with a clear choice of acceding to or rejecting his command (8:17a: כי אם כן אתה לשלח את בני ישראל; 9:2: ואני משלח את בני ישראל) and warns him several times through Moses that he is acting foolishly (7:16:楽 שמעת על רע עיניך; 10:3a: רואד מטהו כל מלך כלאים שלם; cf Dt 4:30-31). It is only after a history of constant disobedience and stubbornness that Yahweh is said to have hardened the pharaoh's heart (10:20; 11:27; 14:8). It is perhaps to preclude the idea that Yahweh rejects people in advance that the reaction of the pharaoh to Moses' first request to let the people go is pictured at length in this redaction (5:4-18).

But does the pharaoh then not explicitly confess his sin and ask for forgiveness in this redaction (9:27; 10:16b,17a)? Yes, he does,
good, just as he did when the death of the heart of unrepentant sinners is that people will eventually come to fear him and believe his prophets (see Dt 29:21-28). In a very near the centre of the Deuteronomistic redaction of the text of the Deuteronomistic History (compare, however Dt 2:30 and Raisanen 1979:57): Punishment follows unbelief and disobedience, and Yahweh is able to turn the evil done by man into obedience, and: Yahweh is able to turn the evil done by man into obedience, and:

The theme of human responsibility and divine ordination seems to be

the salvation of the Philistines? Was the pharaoh's ruin then not the cause of their own lives by sending Yahweh's ark back to Israel (1 Sm 6:6, a place: 

Real obedience to Yahweh - like the obedience of those that followed David's counting of the Israelites lead to the buying of the stand for the future temple (2 Sm 24 - cf Raisanen 1979:119).

Was it not another foreign nation (the Philistines) that could learn a lesson from the pharaoh's history and in that way save themselves? Yahweh's purpose in his action in history - and in the hardening of people with such hardened hearts may be under the impression that they are still resisting the word of Yahweh out of their own free will... But these confessions are mere lip service and do not come forth from a pure heart of the Lord (30:6). Hear obedience to Yahweh - take the obedience of...
D. THE PRIESTLY 'FAMILY'S' VERSION OF THE STORY


If one examines these portions of text from the perspective of the relationship between divine ordinance and human responsibility, the result contradicts J's perspective on this matter. Seeing that major P-sections deal with genealogies and regulations for the celebration of the Passover - which do not concern us here - it is clear that, as in the Deuteronomistic sections, the story as story was not P's concern. The priestly editors were more concerned with the motivation for the Passover festival and the correct way of celebrating this feast (Weimar 1973:43,15). The reason supplied for the exact administration of every detailed stipulation is simply: אָדַם יְהוָה. This expression occurs no fewer than nine times in the relatively short P-section.

The whole narrative focuses on Yahweh and Yahweh alone: Israel is rescued from Egypt because, when Yahweh heard the cries of the slaves, he was reminded of his covenant with the patriarchs (3:24; 6:4-6) and of his oath to them (6:8), a covenant and oath that he was obliged to honour by entering into a (re)new(ed) agreement with Israel (6:7 - Zimmerli 1963:212). Four times in the 'covenant and oath' passage (6:2-10) the phrase הַעֲלוֹת אֵצְמוֹ occurs (cf Zimmerli 1963:21; Weimar 1973:43,87-95).

The manner in which Yahweh was to honour his oath was through תִּצְוָה הַיָּד (6:6; 7:4), נַעֲשָׁה and דָּבָר (7:4), and an 'outstretched arm' (6:4-6). Moses and Aaron are no longer Yahweh's messengers to the pharaoh, but merely his instruments to perform these miracles (7:5,10,20; 11:10; 12:28; 13:50; 14:4). No longer are the signs of the rod becoming a snake and the water turning into blood intended to convince the Israelites, but they serve as signs to the pharaoh (7:19-*20,*21,22). As a matter of fact, the pharaoh is not warned at all. Rather Yahweh promises to harden his heart from the outset,
and does not only 'foresee' the outcome of history. And he keeps this promise consistently (7:3-4,13,22; 8:11b,15; 9:12; 11:9-10; 14:4,17). Even in those passages where the grammar might have created the impression that the pharaoh himself could have had something to do with the hardening of his heart it is made quite clear that the hardening of his heart is the result of Yahweh's initial promise (7:13,22; 8:11b,15; 9:12). And while the pharaoh of the J-strand is prepared to negotiate and the 'Deuteronomistic' pharaoh confesses his sin and asks for intercession, P's pharaoh remains completely silent (8:15).

P sees the whole episode as a contest between Yahweh (and his representatives) and the Egyptian gods/pharaoh (and their representatives, the magicians): 7:11,22; 8:3; 9:11 (Von Rad 1973:184; Weimar 1973:208; Eakin 1977:467). While the magicians succeed in changing water into blood and in creating new frogs — although one wonders where they could still find water to change into blood after all the water had been changed already (7:19,20b,21b) and where the magicians' frogs could find a place for themselves after the whole country had already been covered with frogs (8:3) — they cannot create more flies (8:14), are themselves affected by the boils (9:11) and are, like the gods, affected by the last miracle (12:12). The whole contest is intended to give Yahweh the opportunity to perform his great deeds (11:9) and to glorify himself through the destruction of Egypt (14:7 — of Weimar 1973:214-215; Childs 1974:172-173). In this way Egypt will come to know that he is Yahweh (14:18, the climax of the P-narrative — Ska 1979:28-29; cf Ps 105:25,38). To obtain this end Yahweh is even willing to bring the pharaoh under the false impression that the Israelites have lost their way in the desert (14:1-3), so that he, with his hardened heart, charges after them to meet his destruction (14:4). This passage, so it seems to me, refutes Childs's remark (1974:14) that no idea of divine causality or predestination can be deduced from P's conception of the hardening of the pharaoh's heart. Whether the P-authors consciously reflected on this issue is, of course, a different question. The fact is, however, that the consequences of this narrative logic lead directly to the idea of pre:
destination - a Biblical reference that, for some or other reason, escaped the attention of the compilers of the Canons of Dordt.

Given this picture of Yahweh, so the priestly layer also seems to suggest, one ought to obey the prescriptions for the Passover festival to the minutest detail. People who do not comply should therefore be eradicated from the community (12:15,19), while people who are not part of the covenant community through circumcision should not even be considered as partakers in the ceremony (12:45, 48-49 - cf Von Rad 1973:166). Every custom pertaining to the festival is linked to Yahweh's deeds during the night of the exodus. Even the eating of unleavened bread, explained by the Yahwist with reference to the mere haste in which the people left Egypt (12:39), is reformulated into an inflexible law, the transgression of which carries the death penalty (12:15).

The whole narrative context in which P speaks of the hardening of the pharaoh's heart makes it difficult to accept many of the efforts to get around the problem of predestination in P. If one has to take פֶּרֶא and חֲפָר to have had a positive meaning, such as 'Yahweh caused the pharaoh to be encouraged' - as Schmidt (1945:10f), Hermann (1961:96-106) and others suggest - it does not really change the fact that, whatever it is that Yahweh does, it is intended to lead the pharaoh to a destination of ruin. If one admits with Weimar (1973:212) and Steingrimsson (1979:63) that 'hardening of the heart' should not be equated with 'sin' the theological problem is rather deepened, since an innocent man is then foreordained for destruction. If one follows Knight (1976:69f) in arguing that the Israelites did not think in terms of individualistic categories but corporatively and focused more on the purpose of an action than on its cause, the problem is also intensified, since the hardening of the pharaoh's heart would then not only have caused the destruction of the whole Egypt but the text would then still present people thinking along lines of cause rather than of purpose with an enormous problem. The way P represents the relationship between Yahweh and the pharaoh suggests a rigid idea of predestination, an idea that is constantly reinforced by the recurrent phrase כיון הָאָדָם כָּפַר, a phrase that really creates the impression of Yahweh
'toying' with the pharaoh, as Räisänen (1976:56) puts it. That Yahweh is in fact pictured as the author of the pharaoh's reactions is most clearly illustrated by the literary devices of parallel and chiastic arrangement of divine speeches and human actions, as Ska (1979:26-27) has shown. Note, for instance, 7:2-4:

Compare the chiasmus

which stresses the contemporaneity or simultaneousness of the action of 'hardening of the heart' and 'not listening' and 'blends' the two actions into one (Andersen 1974:120-121), with the mere parallelism in 4:21 (Dtr). The pharaoh has no choice in all this, as he has in the J-sections and the Deuteronomistic version of the story.

There are, to my mind, a few ways out (?) of this theological dilemma. The first is a literary one. If one views P, not as a separate document, but as a redactor it would be unfair to read the P-sections in isolation from J and the Deuteronomistic editors. Then one has to read every successive edition of the story as presupposing the previously existing story and as laying new stresses on particular aspects of the story. In this case J's free-willed pharaoh would be 'countered' by P's predestinating God, so that the 'centre of the road' theology of the Deuteronomistic editors would then form the middle position and carry the 'real' message of the story on this level. One could perhaps solve the problem this way,
but the question can also be put whether such a procedure would be fair to P. The P-sections present us with a fairly coherent story and stress the predestinate character of Yahweh’s actions to such an extent that one gets the impression that this was exactly what they were intended to communicate.

One may also follow Greenberg’s idea, namely that the P narrative should not be read as ‘description’ but rather as ‘edification’ and ‘celebration’ (Greenberg 1969:193). This would also be a literary argument, which may be rephrased as follows: The text uses the genre of description but functions didactically within a context of celebration. The statements in the text should then not be read as referring to Yahweh and his nature, but as creating an atmosphere of celebration and as instructing the audience how to celebrate. This does, to some extent, alleviate the problem under discussion, since dogmatic issues are then very much on the periphery of the communicative intention of this story and therefore nearly—if not altogether—negligible. But viewed from an ideology-critical—or deconstruction—perspective such casual or coincidental information says a great deal about the symbolic universe of the relevant discourse. In this case the dogmatic implications of the narrative fall outside the sharp focus zone of the authors and precisely for that reason constitute the subconscious backdrop of the act of communication. We would then still be confronted with a theological framework operating with a strong inclination towards predestination, which becomes more than a mere inclination if one adds to that that the correct administration of a custom becomes more important than people.

A third possible solution to the problem may be to take up a suggestion by Räisänen (1976:42) which, to some extent, links up with the idea of Tsevat on this issue, namely that we have here, as in Islam’s conception of predestination, a theoretical theology which is not intended to or does not draw the practical consequences for everyday life, so that the question of human responsibility and divine ordinance in relation to everyday life is not even addressed. Practical religion follows its own logic ‘from below’, while theoretical theology follows its ‘from above’. This
sounds fairly plausible, but it would constitute a sort of theology that would not be very easy to 'sell' in any modern society, since the life-likeness and practicability of theoretical constructs are highly valued today - even in government circles.

There are thus a couple of hermeneutic clues for the understanding of P's construct (e.g., literary, philosophical and cultural clues). But none of these seems to solve the problem of P's predestination theology for a modern reader. 'Verstehen,' I read somewhere, 'ist noch lange nicht billigen.' It is also not my intention to suggest any such modern solutions to the problem. I would, rather, like to 'apply' this enigmatic problem to our own situation. In order to do so, I shall first briefly recapitulate the three perspectives on our problem contained in Exodus 1-14.

E. CONCLUSION

Although the idea of the superior power and uniqueness of Yahweh is present in all three of the major layers of the exodus story and could even be the thread binding the final text together, it is worked out for different purposes and along different lines, resulting in different theological views on the question of the relationship between human responsibility and divine ordinance.

In the J-narrative everybody, even the non-Israelite, is supposed to 'see' Yahweh in the events of everyday life, since Yahweh acts visibly in and through ordinary phenomena such as fish, frogs, flies and hail. If man does not pay attention to these acts and remains insensitive to Yahweh's presence he is digging his own grave. Yahweh cannot be blamed if human beings do not acknowledge him, thereby causing their own ruin.

In the Deuteronomistic redaction the theology seems to be more complex. Yahweh is not 'inducable' from natural events, at least not any more. He revealed himself in the past and one needs a prophetic interpreter to understand Yahweh's ways in history. Yahweh makes a clear distinction between the wise and the foolish, the obedient and the disobedient, and sends out his prophets to warn everybody, including non-Israelites, to repent of their wrong ways. But repen-
tance without a radical change in life-style is worth nothing. How one acts from day to day is the token of the sincerity of repentance. If a person remains unrepentant and does not change their way of life Yahweh will in the end harden such a person's heart. In such a case one heads directly for disaster. But even then Yahweh remains in charge of the situation: He uses such a life as an example of the end of a stubborn life. Again Yahweh is not to be blamed for the disaster, although he can be said to be responsible for deciding when to finally harden a person's heart. We thus find here some kind of correlation between human responsibility and divine ordinance with the emphasis on the former, since the onus remains on humans to listen to Yahweh's prophets.

The priestly authors followed a different line of approach. In their zeal for the enforcement of the strict observation of every detail of the relevant religious ceremony they created a picture of Yahweh that is hard to really accept. Whether they were, in writing their passover story, aware of the theological implications of this picture or whether it reflects their practical views on the problem under discussion, is not clear. The fact is, however, that their text presents us with a God who is only interested in his covenant people, a God who acts so as to honour his oath and who, in his zeal to do so, will even consciously plan the downfall and ruin of human beings without giving them the slightest opportunity to decide their own destination or to rehabilitate their way of life. The ruin of the pharaoh is, in this version of the story, the work of Yahweh and no one else, a vision of God that would, in later wisdom theology, be at the centre of debate.

Why did I choose this subject for our meeting? Because the question of human responsibility for the ever intensifying crisis in our country is interpreted differently by different groups of people. Some say the White people, the pharaoh's of our day, should confess their sins of the past and radically change their conduct. The Yahwist, and especially the Deuteronomists, would agree. The Yahwist would urge us to see God's hand and God's presence in every event and to recognise him as the Lord of the whole earth. The Deuteronomists would urge us not to pay mere lip service to confe-
sions of transgression against the will of God but to change our daily lives in a radical way before the unknown and unknowable time arrives when God decides to harden our hearts and to lead us directly to our ruin.

Other people say we have nothing to confess or change, since we are victims of historical processes that have occurred throughout history and that have repeated themselves many times in the history of the world and our continent. These historical processes (which is the secularised term for predestination) will follow their own course. The priestly authors would agree, but they would at the same time say, 'Therefore you can do nothing to change the course of your history, which is heading towards ruin'.

The question thus seems to be: What role do we ascribe to human responsibility in the course of history? The answer to this question will not only determine the kind of theology we opt for but will also have an influence on our faith in God and on our relationship with him, and will decide the way our history goes.

ENDNOTES

1. Encounters rather than 'plagues', as is commonly accepted. The 'plague' of darkness seems to be a creation of Dtr based upon J's reference to the 'darkness' caused by the locust swarms (10:15). This 'plague' may very well have been suggested by the curses contained in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 as Van Seters (1986) suggests. It may, however, also be that Exodus 9:1-7 contains fragments of a seventh 'plague narrative' of the J-layer, which has been 'severely' reworked by Dtr. If this is indeed the case, J might have contained seven 'plague' narratives. I would rather suggest that 9:7 is an imitation of J's style and that 9:1-7 does not contain enough evidence of an earlier J narrative.

2. On 9:1-7 see note 1 above.

3. The regular 'formulaic language' used by J to introduce another encounter between Yahweh and the pharaoh seems to have been edited out by the Deuteronomistic editors, for these 'formulas' would not have served the Dtr editors' purpose here.

4. It is very difficult to decide whether this or that (irregular) phrase belongs to this or that layer. So the phrase 'and he turned and went away from the pharaoh' (10:6b) may be assigned to either J or Dtr, since it does not occur in any regular fashion in either of the two layers. For the purpose of this paper it does not make that much difference. However, seeing that Moses is addressed
by the pharaoh immediately afterwards (10:8b), it seems logical to assign this phrase to Dtr. The speech of the pharaoh's servants seems to belong to Dtr, and in order to fit this in, Moses (and Aaron) first had to be removed from the scene. The singular form of the verbs in 10:6b seem, on the other hand, to argue in favour of J, where Moses is the sole 'agent' between Yahweh and the pharaoh.

5. The remarks that one would not be able to see the earth (10:5a) and that it became dark in all Egypt (10:15a), seem to have inspired the plague of darkness related in Dtr (10:12-13a,21-23). The seven encounters of J were changed thereby into seven plagues. See further note 1 above.

6. This trait in the story tallies with other instances in the J-narrative where Israel is depicted as a 'medium' of Yahweh's blessing on the whole earth. In this text I can not, however, find any evidence for dating this theological trend post-Deuteronomistically.

7. It is interesting to note Moses' refusal to sacrifice in a 'heathen' country - albeit very politely (8:22-23). This might be an indication of the circumstances under which the editors lived, circumstances under which obedience to Yahweh's prophets would have been more important than sacrifice (see Steingrimsson 1979:20 and the literature cited by him).

8. אֶתָּנָה the verbs in 10:6b seem, on the other hand, to argue in favour of Dtr, and in order to fit this in, Moses (and Aaron) first had to be removed from the scene. The singular form of the verbs in 10:6b seem, on the other hand, to argue in favour of J, where Moses is the sole 'agent' between Yahweh and the pharaoh.

9. I assign this verse to Dtr because of the Deuteronomistic 'king of Egypt' occurring in it. It is, however, also possible to include it under the P-sections, as did Weimar (1973:212), since P sometimes did 'imitate' or take over formulations from earlier layers.

10. Exodus 14:1-3 is commonly assigned to P^g, that is, in the context of this paper, to the P 'family'. Whether this motif of hardening someone's heart so as to lead him to destruction really is so typically Deuteronomistic as Van Seters (1983:329) suggests, may be an open question. A comparison of Joshua 11:20 with Exodus 14:4 may suggest a common motif, but not only does the P-narrative in Exodus 1-14 repeatedly link up the hardening of the pharaoh's heart with Yahweh's explicit prediction to that effect (cf Ezk 14:9; 20:25) but in Dtr literature such a hardening or deception also normally occurs as a form of punishment (cf 1 Sm 16:14; 1 Ki 22:19-23; 2 Sm 24:1; 1 Sm 2:12,25 and Gn 15:16) - although one has to concede that the deception motif is also present in Exodus 1-14_Dtr (cf 5:3; 8:23, etc., and 14:5a,6a). One could thus perhaps say that the deception motif also occurs in Dtr, but that it is rare in Dtr to find Yahweh hardening a person's heart right from the outset in order to show his superior power, as this motif has been worked out in P. In Dtr the hardening of the heart normally follows a history of disobedience - much as in the Deuteronomistic Isaiah 6:9-10 (Kaiser 1981:122-123).
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