Congruent ethos in the Second Temple literature of the Old Testament

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Proposing the term 'congruent ethos' for studying Old Testament ethics, this article indicates (in line with existing research) that opposing ethical viewpoints are found in the Old Testament. The modus operandi followed was firstly to compare the penitential prayer in Daniel 9:4–19 with those in Ezra 9:6–15 and Nehemiah 9:6–37. This comparison shows that the phenomenon of conflicting ethics was present in Yehud during the Second Temple period. Whilst the Daniel text reflects a more universal attitude, the penitential prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah propose a nationalist view of God and an exclusivist identity for Israel. Although Daniel can be dated later than Ezra-Nehemiah, the tendency to juxtapose an exclusivist viewpoint with an inclusivist one was already present in the earlier period of the Second Temple. This is evidenced by the literature of Isaiah 56–66, Ruth, Jonah, Esther, Tobit, Judith and even Joshua.

Introduction

Ethics and ethos

The disciplines of Old Testament Ethics and Old Testament Theology are related to each other. The perception about the identity of the faithful in the Old Testament was, what they did or were supposed to do, and the way they acted, was dependent on their view of the identity of the God of the Bible in terms of what he did and what they conjectured he expected from those who belong to him. When dealing with the Old Testament two questions are traditionally asked: 'Who is God?' and 'Who are we'?

Even more important, the type of Old Testament ethics we pursue is also directly linked to the type of Old Testament Theology we cultivate. A doctrinal approach to the Bible working with abstract conceptions ipso facto leads to a rigid set of ethical rules and regulations for human behaviour. In this case, Old Testament ethics consists of drawing up and abstracting timeless principles for the life of the faithful[1]. In opposition to this prescriptive type of approach, a descriptive method[2] can be exploited. In this regard the distinction between 'ethics' and 'ethos' is helpful. 'Ethos' indicates practical morality whilst 'ethics' is the formal reflection on that behaviour identifying permanent values and norms that may become prescriptive[3].

Steering away from the problem of the applicability of morals and norms that can be identified in Old Testament ethics for the present reader, this article will rather descriptively deal with the issue of descriptive ethos and the trends in moral behaviour reflected in the literature from the Second Temple period in the Old Testament. Starting out from the biblical text, keeping in mind the pluriformity[4] and diversity of the Old Testament material with concern for its variety of

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1. The *imitatio Dei* approach is related to this approach, but does not really fall into this discursive category found in traditional Old Testament theologies. It aims, however, to deduct ethics for Israel from God's self-revelation and his great primeval acts. The *imitatio Dei* approach was pursued by scholars like W. Eichrodt, O. Hempel, E. Otto, Eryl W. Davies, W. Houston, J. Barton and Cyril Rodd. Davies, Barton and Wright pointed to the motivational clauses in Old Testament laws. These motivational clauses often pick out especially YHWH's character as compassionate and just, and his historical action in liberating Israel from oppression in Egypt. The viability of this approach was investigated by Walter Houston and John Barton. 'Both argued that the imitation of God is a concept that could shed some light on certain biblical texts, but the concept is by no means the centre around which one could construct an Old Testament ethics' (Meyer 2009:373).

2. The problem still remains how Old Testament ethics can be retained for the present day. Rodd (2001:301–329) discusses this problem in chapter 20 of his study *Glimpses of a strange land*. He reminds his readers of the gap between the biblical world and that of our own. He comes to the conclusion that 'The value of the Old Testament for our own ethical quest resides in the fact that it does *not* provide rules which can be applied directly to the modern world to tell us what we are to do. It is able to render help in that quest only through opening our eyes to completely different assumptions and presuppositions, motives and aims' (Rodd 2001:328–329).

3. Cf. Trillhaas's article on morality (no year, page 2 on CD Rom *sub verbo* Sittlichkeit, Band 12, Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart) which states: 'S. ist nicht ohne weiteres mit Ethik gleichzusetzen; denn die Ethik ist erst die Wissenschaft oder doch jedenfalls die Reflexion über die S., wiewohl alle Aussagen der bewußten Reflexion über die S. alsbald zu »ethischen« Sätzen werden'. Smit also differentiates between ethos (the way things are done, habitually, socio-culturally, reflexively) and ethics (the way things ought to be done, evaluated principally and appraised reflectively). Cf. Smit (1992:303–317); Smit (1994:287). Lombaard (2009) opts for a phenomenologically descriptive reading of ethos. Rodd (2001:4) distinguished between different layers of ethics: 'actual practice in ancient Israel, the norms and values of the Israelites, and the morality and ethics revealed in the biblical texts, both in their final form and possible earlier stages of development'.

4. Cyril S. Rodd (2001:3) accuses Waldemar Janzen of not 'giving place to the diversity of the material within the Old Testament' in his *Ethics*. Rodd (2001:3) states that 'the presentation of the ethics within a systematic frame distorts the ethics themselves. All ethics ...

linguistic forms and socio-historical backgrounds, the ethos of Israel (descriptive) rather than its supposed ethics (prescriptive) will be studied.

Parallel to the shift in theology in general and specifically in Old Testament theology[5], a shift also occurred in Old Testament ethic studies to the pluriformity of the Israelite community of faith and their variety of morality paradigms. Efforts were made to find a central concern[6] in all of these paradigms. Janzen (1994:2) aimed to grasp 'the Old Testament's ethical message in a comprehensive way'. Although the pluriformity of the Old Testament material is recognised, he still attempted to identify one central issue.

Others used a single construct of interrelated terms to delineate the ethics of the Old Testament. Janzen (1994:178) for example, investigated the priestly, sapiential, royal and prophetic paradigms in the Old Testament. He used a 'familial paradigm' consisting of the triad of 'life', 'land' and 'hospitality' as the single focal issue in the texts he studied. In his publications Wright (1983 and 2004) also used a triad, consisting of 'God', 'Israel' and 'the land' being the central ethical thrust of the Old Testament. These concepts are the 'three pillars of Israel's worldview, the primary factors of their theology and ethics' (Wright 2004:19). In her study of biblical morality, Mary Mills (2001) used a triangular structure of 'cosmos', 'community' and 'person' to indicate a subtle interweaving of meaning in the Old Testament texts. Although much can be said in favour of such multi dimensional approaches using interrelated concepts, the flaw in all of them is that all of them keep to the idea of one central issue (even in triadic form) running all through the pluriform Old Testament.

Another strategy will have to be followed to describe the pluriform ethos found in the Old Testament. This article suggests that the term 'congruent ethos' can be used, borrowing this term from trigonometry. Moral positions are found in the Old Testament, especially in those sections from the Second Temple period, which seem to be in direct conflict with each other. Especially on the issue of religious identity, very often conflicting viewpoints are held. However, these conflicting viewpoints are found in the one canon of the church. As more than one position is represented in the same canonical collection, we will have to find a way to accommodate a multiplicity of conflicting

(Footnote 4 cont...)
contain inconsistencies, illogical inferences, variations, and differences of emphasis and application'. Rodd (2001:3–4) therefore deliberately 'rejected an overall scheme, model, paradigm, dominant principle, or any other attempt to discover a unifying motif by means of which the ethics can be packaged'.

5. Cf. the title of Goldingay's publication of 1986: *Theological diversity and canonical authority: an examination of how diverse viewpoints in the Old Testament may be acknowledged, interrelated and allowed to function theologically.* Brueggemann (1997:xv) refers to a new interpretive situation with its 'multilayered pluralism that is newly insistent in the discipline of Old Testament studies'. That pluralism may be recognised as (1) a pluralism of faith affirmations, (2) a pluralism of methods and (3) a pluralism of interpretive communities. The 'texts themselves witness to a plurality of testimonies concerning God and Israel's life with God' (Brueggemann 1997:710).

6. Rodd (2001:313) remarks that there is no 'whole thrust' in the Old Testament. He rejects the idea of the 'whole thrust' of the biblical revelation of God's will, taking a single concept as the heart of the Old Testament. Inconsistencies and compromises abound in all societies. 'It is this which allows the selectivity which marks almost all studies of Old Testament ethics' (Rodd 2001:313).

ethical viewpoints in describing the Old Testament ethics. One possible approach is to understand the apparent contradiction of different viewpoints in terms of congruent angles or of Hebrew poetry. It is typical of Semitic reasoning to put two opposite positions in an antithetical juxtaposition to express one central truth. In this polyphony of dictions more than one viewpoint is put in dialogical relationship to express an idea that is larger than any of the single parts used in the composition. In that sense, we can speak not only of conflicting ethos, but in the context of the biblical canon of 'congruent ethos'.

History of the concept of conflicting ethics or congruent ethos

Robert R. Wilson in his *Ethics in Conflict* of 1990 already used the idea of conflicting ethics. He identified 'conflicting ethical agendas within Israelite society' (quoted in Wright 2004:427).

Otto indicated the problems of formulating an all-encompassing Old Testament ethics in his essay on the design of an Old Testament ethics during 1991. Otto (1991:12) indicates '*Gegentendenzen*' [counter tendencies] in Judaism. Otto (1991:13) referred to Isaiah 56–66, the books of Ruth and Jonah as contradicting '*dem legalistischen Partikularismus*' [legal particularism] in contemporary Judaism. The book of Job confronts the employment of ethical laws regulating relationships. Otto (1991:24) indicated that any systematic presentation can only conceptualise with severe difficulties '*die strittig-dialogische Vielfalt der ethischen Vorstellung Israels*' [the controversial dialogic multiplicity of Israel's ethical presentation].

Birch (1991:42) remarked in his study of Old Testament ethics that the 'diverse witnesses of the Old Testament can be affirmed as enriching our perspectives on the biblical experience of God'. He warns that this diversity 'should not be allowed to degenerate into a settling for pluralistic viewpoints as ends in themselves' (Birch 1991:42). The 'multiple witnesses in the same Hebrew canon invites us to contemplate them in relation to one another and in witness to the same God' (Birch 1991:42). All of these perspectives are multiple images of the one God. They originated in a community of faith with a variety of experiences in their relation to God. They 'are not mutually exclusive, or standing in intolerable tension' (Birch 1991:42). They are intended to be read in dialogue with one another. This dialogue often occurred between positions being juxtaposed to each other.

Norman Habel also indicated conflicting ideologies in Israel in his 1995 monograph *The Land Is Mine*. In Wright's (2004:433) opinion:

> Habel sees conflicting ideologies in what others might regard as complementary perspectives. With this viewpoint Habel anticipated the work of David Pleins. In his monograph Habel identified 'six discrete land ideologies found in the Hebrew Scriptures.
>
> (Habel 1995:xii)

These ideologies do not represent historical movements in Israel, but rather 'positions that are promoted in the texts chosen for analysis' (Habel 1995:xii). Regarding the plurality of these 'positions' Habel (1995:xii) points out that it 'is no longer possible to cite the position of the Bible on land as if that position were singular and obvious. There are many competing positions from which to choose'. The six positions he pointed out are only some of the possibilities. These and other positions influenced readers of the texts over the centuries. This remark by Habel on different and parallel positions can be extended to all other subjects in the Old Testament. There is not one single subject on which only one position exists. There are similarities but also differences.

According to Habel (1995:146) the six positions he studied, calling them 'land ideologies'[7], 'are generally written from the perspective of landowners or would-be landowners, whether they be monarchs, priests, peasant farmers, or heads of ancestral families'. There is no 'monolithic concept of land in the Hebrew Scriptures … rather a spectrum of land ideologies with diverse images and doctrines of land' (Habel 1995:148). All of them are related to particular social groups with different interests. From different perspectives, a given ideology was advanced to get hold of the land. Different social positions are therefore reflected in the texts representing different but sometimes even conflicting interests.

Mary E. Mills (1998:1) studied 'the many faces of God' in the Old Testament. In her book *Images of God in the Old Testament* holding the 'concepts of unity and diversity … in tension with another' (Mills 1998: Preface s.p.), she listed a variety of images and metaphors for God. She pointed out 'their often conflicting and competing messages about the identity of God' (Wright 2004:435). Mills' (1998:1) study 'reflects a plurality of theologies' that places the diverse aspects of the presentation of the deity side by side 'to allow each to offer comment on the other' (Mills 1998:1).

In 'providing a tapestry of pictures of the divine' Mills (1998:135) states that 'biblical theology establishes some foundations for anthropology' (Mills 1998:138). There is a direct link between theology and ethics. Even more than that, human identity is not only derived from knowledge of God, but the other way round; God is identified through knowledge of the human condition. According to Mills (1998) the images of God as *inter alia* creator, judge and redeemer have human experience as their source:

> The story of God in the OT is the human story of God; it is the deity as seen by human experience expressed in order to give meaning to that same experience.
>
> (Mills 1998:139)

The depiction of a universal deity to human readers happens in human language structures.

The religious ideas regarding the divine in the Old Testament texts being shaped by human experience implies the use of language as expression of culture and ideology. Ideology is not only 'the kind of spectacles which the human being puts on to read the text, the lenses through which a reader views the OT' (Mills 1998:142), but also the spectacles through which the authors of the Bible experienced their reality. This ideology, or rather 'positions' as Habel (1995:xii) called them, does not have a single content, as each reader or author brings his or her personal ideology to the task of searching for a text's meaning or for expressing his or her message (cf. Mills 1998:142).

Referring to the debate between P.R. Davies and F. Watson on whether 'there is a systematic treatment of a single deity in the OT' (Mills 1998:143), or whether there is a single global Old Testament religion, or not, Mills sides with Davies' stress on 'the value of pluralism, of allowing different ideologies to co-exist within the academy' (Mills 1998:144). The hint Mills (1998:142) offers in her monograph 'is that any reading must be individual-text based while acknowledging the importance of the topic of God to the original writer'[8]. In the case of Mills' (1998:146) study, this stance leads to the idea that the concept of 'God' is 'an umbrella term for many separate and often opposing interpretations of the relevance of the divine for human beings'. The biblical authors used metaphorical language (sometimes employing mythological imagery) when they spoke about God, picking up and discarding metaphors of God. On scrutiny, these metaphors 'may be contradictory' (Mills 1998:146). This causes the task of Old Testament theology and Old Testament ethics to be problematic:

> metaphor and image are more difficult to align with the concept of contradiction than are logical statements and propositions and so evade attempts to pin them down to single meanings.
>
> (Mills 1998:146)

In his monograph *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible. A Theological Introduction*, Pleins (2001:16–23) used a 'social-scientific' approach. According to him (Pleins 2001:18), '… no serious modern study of biblical ethics can succeed without attempting to blend sociological; archaeological and comparative Near Eastern approaches to the biblical text …'. Sociological analysis, however, does not only give a refined picture of the structures of the ancient world, but also shows 'that the Hebrew Bible's diversity of theological and social thought, its rhetoric, is inextricably linked to the conflictual character of the concrete political institutions and social structures that shaped ancient Israelite society' (Pleins 2001:23). Conflicting texts are related to conflicting social contexts. The Old Testament's diversity of social positions should be studied in a context of historical and social conflict. Wright (2004:438–439) repeats his critique on Habel here: '… he is inclined to detect *ideological conflict and textual contradiction* where one might more charitably posit complementary perspectives'.

Pleins examined each main section of the Hebrew canon: law, narrative, prophets, poetry and wisdom. In these, he

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7.Habel understands ideology as 'a wider complex of images and ideas, which may employ theological doctrines, traditions, or symbols to justify and promote the social, economic and political interest of a group within society' (Habel 1995:ix).

8.Mills (1998:144), however, underlines Watson's view that a systematic Christian ideology 'cannot be abandoned for a shapeless pluralism of a supposedly neutral character'.

found a complexity and diversity of viewpoints. According to Pleins (2001):

> The road of ancient Israel's historical experience is loaded with far too many obstacles, wrong turns, detours, and cul-de-sacs to yield a singular 'grand narrative' that can speak to successive political epochs, whether theirs or our own.
>
> (Pleins 2001:viii)

The polyvalent biblical texts cannot be abstracted from their social and political contexts and do not allow 'a bland systemization of the biblical record' (Pleins 2001:24). They bedevil any effort to 'bring the Bible under a uniform ideological umbrella' (Pleins 2001:28). There is rather an ideological conflict and textual contradiction between the contents of these corpuses. He, however, evaluated this polyvalent nature positively. According to Pleins (2001):

> we can see in the various sources vibrant theologies and social-ethical discussions that give evidence of a vigorous debate in ancient Israel concerning the nature of society, the place of ritual in the construction of a just people, and the relation of the divine to these very human projects.
>
> (Pleins 2001:28)

This offers a range of 'checks and balances in biblical ethics' (Wright 2004:438).

Pleins' (2001:28) standpoint is that the 'biblical age was an era in which universalist views of God and nationalist views of God stood in competition, sometimes even within the same book of the Bible'. There is a need to rediscover 'the biblical diversity that shatters contemporary effort to make the sacred text conform to narrowly constructed political programs and agendas built on flawed views of ancient Israel and its writings' (Pleins 2001:28). The Old Testament world was one of ethical discourse where different materials from different authors all vied 'for attention, offering differing and at times radically conflicting approaches to the social questions of their day' (Pleins 2001:29). In Pleins' mind, 'these elements of dialogue, debate, and diversity are the ground for a vital contemporary biblical social ethics' (2001:29).

The aim for Pleins' (2001:4) investigation was to search 'for ways to place the ethical perspective of the Hebrew Bible into an intelligible social context …' Reading:

> biblical texts within their social matrices … will produce insights into biblical social thought that can only enhance current discussions regarding how the Bible can be engaged when seeking to develop a contemporary theological ethic.
>
> (Pleins 2001:7)

In chapter 5 of his publication Pleins (2001:179–209) deals with building a just society. Unfortunately, a drastic shift in his methodology takes place in this chapter. Initially he studied the Old Testament's diversity of social positions in a context of historical and social conflict. He linked the Hebrew Bible's diversity of social thought to the 'conflictual character of the concrete political institutions and social structures that shaped ancient Israelite society' (Pleins 2001:23). For this purpose, he blended sociological, archaeological and comparative Near Eastern approaches to the biblical text. In this chapter, however, a study of the elements of dialogue,

debate and diversity is changed into a study of a unifying 'national ethic' (Pleins 2001:179). In this section, he deals with the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ruth and Daniel. According to Pleins, these documents do not only share a formal link, being tales and novellas of the Persian-Hellenistic age, but also show a unity of theological purpose. All of them offer stories of heroic figures who defy great odds to keep alive the Jewish community and its traditions. Pleins (2001) remarked that all of:

> these works exhibit marked attitudes toward political power and a decisive commitment to a national ethic that must have been rhetorically persuasive to those who came to identify their struggles with the rather idealized portraits of Nehemiah, Ezra, Esther, Ruth, and Daniel.
>
> (Pleins 2001:179)

What is of importance for Pleins in these documents is that there is a unity of theological purpose. All of these books 'continue to speak to the reforms and struggles that are integral to the construction of a more just society' (Pleins 2001:204). It becomes, however, more than a shared theological purpose. It becomes an overriding timeless 'national ethic, mutual ethical guidelines, a collective conviction regarding moral life' (Pleins 2001:204).

Investigating conflicting ethics

Pleins focused on the theological unity between the books he studied in his chapter 5, but in the process grossly neglected the diversity in these documents he stated in the earlier chapters. Although all of them can be dated in the Second Temple period, there are vast differences in the identities of the communities they addressed. Against Pleins' view of a single central national ethics, Boccaccini points in his study of the Second Temple period to an age of large ideological and ethical diversity between groups.

Boccaccini (2002:08) sees:

> Second Temple Judaism as a dynamic age of Jewish diversity'. He therefore concentrates on the 'diversity of ancient Jewish thought, as well as of the complex intellectual and social interactions among different 'currents'or movements.
>
> (Boccaccini 2002:26–27)

These movements were in competition, 'diachronically influencing each other by means of dialogue or opposition, having their own distinct identity yet sharing a common sense of membership to the same religious community' (Boccaccini 2002:36). As documents are 'ideological records of competing forms of Judaism' (Boccaccini 2002:29), all of the writings from the Second Temple period can be related to different movements. Naming these parallel movements 'Judaisms' (plural) Boccaccini indicates that 'Zadokite Judaism' (responsible for Ezra, Nehemiah, the Priestly writing and Chronicles) was opposed by 'Enochic Judaism' (the source of Ethiopian Enoch) and 'Sapiental Judaism' (the origin of Ahiqar, Proverbs, Job and Jonah). However, Boccacini did not give any attention in his 2002 publication to the books of Esther and Ruth to identify their place in these parallel streams of movements. Boccaccini's view, however,

provides a correction to Pleins' unrefined theological link of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ruth and Daniel.

The aim of Pleins' (2001:4) investigation was to search 'for ways to place the ethical perspective of the Hebrew Bible into an intelligible social context'. We can fully agree with his viewpoint that different ethical approaches reflecting different social backgrounds competed with each other. This approach can be used for describing the congruent ethos represented in the Old Testament. When Pleins started focusing on the theological unity in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ruth and Daniel an epistemological shift took place. We already critisised Pleins for suddenly disregarding the diversity found in these documents. We would propose studying these books that Pleins linked as representatives of one national ethic (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ruth and Daniel) rather from a viewpoint of ethical conflict than from a viewpoint of theological unity. This will bring about a better understanding of the ethical contents of these books. Especially Pleins' (2001:28) remark that universalist and nationalist views of God stood in competition, 'sometimes even within the same book of the Bible', will be beneficial for our investigation.

In his study of ethics in Daniel Barton (2001:661–670) stated that the prayer in Daniel 9:4–19 mirrors the same set of ethical standards as the prayers in Ezra 9:6–15 and Nehemiah 9:6–37. As all three of them are typical penitential prayers, the obvious way to go about is to compare these prayers with regard to their ethical meaning. A conflict between the universal orientation of Daniel and the nationalistic view of Ezra and Nehemiah can be indicated. Similar conflict in ethical positions can be found by comparing Ezra-Nehemiah with other books from the Second Temple period, like Trito Isaiah, Ruth, Esther, Jonah, Tobit, Judith and Joshua.

Contending viewpoints in Daniel 9:1–27

Daniel 9 consists of a narrative framework (Dn 9:1–4, 20–27) and a penitential prayer (Dn 9:4–19). The penitential prayer presents a theology of history in typical Deuteronomistic fashion. In the narrative part, a deterministic theology of history is presented, conceptualised in typical apocalyptic terms (cf. Venter 2007:41). This juxtapositioning of apocalyptic determinism and conditional covenant theology in one chapter is attributed by Rodney A. Werline (2007) to the work of the so called *maskilim* [sages].

Werline (2007:31) said that the sages had to work with two traditions and social visions simultaneously: apocalyptic and covenantal. The function of the apocalyptic tradition was to establish the identity of the group and to distinguish it from other groups. The covenantal traditions on the other hand, relate the group to a broader stream of older Jewish tradition and temple practice. The *maskilim* needed both the apocalyptic traditions to be loyal to one another in the group and the covenantal traditions to be loyal to an older, broader tradition. They must hold to both of these viewpoints and

enact both. To lose the apocalyptic aspect of their faith would be a loss of identity. '[To] lose the covenantal aspect of their faith would, for them, separate them from what they have received as part of the heart of the tradition' (Werline 2007:31).

Using the typical Jewish poetical technique of putting two propositions in juxtaposition to each other to express both sides of a central truth, the composition with its opposing traditions forms a semantic frame for a new meaning that is 'beyond the sum of the independent meanings' (Brawley 1992:422). With this move the author(s) not only gave an apocalyptic context to the prayer but at the same time enriched his or their apocalyptic theology with the Deuteronomistic penitential contents of the prayer (cf. Venter 2007:44).

As penitential prayers 'are complicated and complex cultural practices' (Werline 2007:18), they present 'a dynamic social performance that takes place within a web of social relationships and power structures' (Werline 2007:32). It enables people to engage in an enacted culture. With all its dissonance, Daniel 9 brings together prophetic, Deuteronomic, priestly and apocalyptic traditions. This new synthesis is used to relate the hearers 'to the current religio-political struggle in the second century B.C.E.' (Werline 2007:31).

The identity of those addressed by Daniel 9 seems to be depicted by the combination of two different traditions, not in direct opposition to each other, but definitely not identical. The specific set of circumstances of their time asked for a combination of older and newer traditions enabling them to cope with their second century BCE conditions. Although this cannot be described as fully fledged conflicting ethics, a synthesis of two different positions is presented here. We can at least speak of dualistic ethics or of congruent ethos. This tendency to bring together different and sometimes opposing traditions can also be found in the rest of the book of Daniel.

Daniel 9 in the context of the book of Daniel

Investigating the theological ethics in the book of Daniel, Barton (2001) remarked that the moral standards implied in Tobit and in Daniel do not have sect-like qualities, but are typical of Judaism in all its different forms. Referring to 'the great lament or confession in Dan 9:4–19', Barton (2001) stated that:

> there is nothing here that suggests any different set of ethical standards from those that apply to all Jews, and the prayer is in fact strikingly similar to those uttered by Ezra in Ezra 9:6–15 and Neh 9:6–37.[9]

> (Barton 2001:663)

According to Pleins' (2001:196) view, the book of Daniel depicts, in agreement with Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther,

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9.Although Barton (2001:663) referred to 'Judaism in all its different *forms*', he did not distinguish between these different forms, but follows the older unifying principle used in Old Testament theologies looking for a coherent *Mitte* and deducted from this a unified ethical system in the Bible. This approach is not sensitive to differences in the socio historic background of the biblical writings.

Jews in the diaspora 'exerting political power and religious influence far beyond the imaginings of pre-exilic Israelites'. Picking up the fact of dispersion (Deuteronomistic History) and reconstruction (1 & 2 Chr) Daniel prepared the post-exilic theology of the Maccabean era. He:

> charts a post imperial political vision, one in which a person of integrity might support foreign rulers when they act justly, but does not shy from acts of resistance when the commonwealth's fundamental values and institutions come under foreign fire.
>
> (Pleins 2001:204)

Although, on a different level, Pleins also finds a common ethics between Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and even Esther. In all of them, there is 'a unity of theological purpose, a national ethic, mutual ethical guidelines, a collective conviction regarding moral life' (Pleins 2001:204).

I beg to differ form both Barton and Pleins in this regard. In my analysis of Daniel 9, I indicated an ethos marked by tension between apocalyptic determinism and conditional covenant theology. The same type of tension also exists between Daniel 9 and the rest of the book[10]. This tension can be studied on two levels. Firstly, it is seen when Daniel 9 is read within the broader context of the whole book of Daniel. Secondly, it becomes obvious when we compare the penitential prayer in Daniel 9:4–19 with the prayers in Ezra 9:6–15 and Nehemiah 9:6–37. There is a marked difference between the ethos described in the Daniel text and the ethos proposed in the Ezra-Nehemiah texts.

We firstly address the tensions found in the book of Daniel itself. Goldingay (2001:640) referred to the psalm-like prayer in Daniel 9 as the place, secondly only to the Psalter, where 'the densest concentration of theological expression in the Bible' can be found[11]. The systematic nature of the description of God in Daniel's prayer:

> constitutes by far the most comprehensive theological statement in the book in its affirmation of YHWH's greatness, faithfulness, rightness, compassion, speaking and acting in the life of the people, deliverance of the people from Egypt, and anger.
>
> (Goldingay 2001:648)

This explicit assertion, however, stands in contrast to chapter 8 and the final grand vision in Daniel 10–12, where no explicit reference is made to God's activity. Although God's sovereignty is asserted in the stories in the rest of Daniel, a growing restrained description is presented of God's exercising that sovereignty and of God's speaking. The initiative in history lies with human beings, but within the constraint of what God will allow.

Within this restraint the human endeavour in the book of Daniel is to acknowledge where true power, true learning

and true religion are to be found. Goldingay (2001:653) maintains that 'this is the note on which each of the stories ends'. According to Mills (2001), the concept of a contest for world sovereignty between world powers and the God of Israel is evident in the book of Daniel. Morality involves choosing between good and evil at the cosmic level. Mills (2001) said that:

> these choices form the foundation for ethical behaviour, which can be regarded as a sub-set of morality here, since it entails discerning what a moral choice would look like at the practical level.
>
> (Mills 2001:16)

This morality, however, is marked by tension on several levels. The motifs running through the whole book are the three realities of power, learning and religion. These three 'are the pervasive realities which characterize what it means to be "us", to be human, in this book' (Goldingay 2001:650). The theological and ethical question is therefore what the place of these elemental realities should be in people's lives. There are two conflicting possibilities depicted in the form of two opposing groups in the book:

- a group consisting of Babylonian, Persian and Greek leaders, ministers of state, advisers, theologians and experts
- Jewish leaders, nobles, theologians and experts.

They differ in the way they execute religion, learning and power. The prudent ones are those who can live within the tension of God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

This tension is also reflected in the dual character of the narratives in Daniel[12]. The narratives in the book are ambiguous. They attribute violent acts to God, but the faithful are not to use any violence at all. The stories employ violent images and language, but discourage any physical violence by the faithful. This contradiction is confusing. An *imitatio Dei* approach for identifying ethical behaviour is clearly not feasible in this case. In other cases like the Law, the readers are to identify themselves with the protagonist and believe in a God of violence. This would have implied that they were to become violent themselves. This is not the case here. They are rather to identify with the non-violent and passive Daniel and his fellowmen. According to Booth's (1988) theory, narratives move readers into identifying with the characters in the narrative. According to Goldingay's (1987) 'narrative politics' these stories:

> invite us to set Daniel's experience and testimony alongside the stories which emerge from our political experience and to see what happens. They may help us to see what praxis we need to be committed to.
>
> (Goldingay's 1987:115)

Both these approaches heighten the tension for the addressees between activism and passivism.

What we find in these narratives is a cosmic and mythological reorientation of the older Divine Warrior motive[13]. A holy war

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10. Cf. Boccaccini's (2002:182–184) rejection of W. Sibley Towner's and J.J. Collins' idea that Daniel 9 is 'no more than a literary topos' that do not represent the theology of the book of Daniel. Boccaccini accepts Norman W. Porteous' and Martin McNamara's opinion that Daniel as a whole 'would lack any internal logic' without Daniel 9.

11. Goldingay's remark on Daniel's experience of revelation is interesting. Goldingay (2001:655) said 'Daniel talks more about revelation than any other Old Testament book, but not in such a way as to impact Old Testament Theologies; its implicit understanding of matters such as history, election, and covenant -- which have also been central in discussion of Old Testament theology -- looks different from ones which appear in the Theologies'.

12. Davies (1985:119) refers to the contradiction that the 'righteous sovereignty of God [stands] in a context where the individual Jew could not expect complete freedom from persecution'.

13. For this argument and the following see Venter, P.M., 2001, 'Violence and non-violence in Daniel', *Old Testament Essays* 14(2), 311–329.

tradition is used here with its roots in the ancient Near Eastern combat myth where divine warriors lead the assembly of the gods like an army in the battle against the forces of chaos (cf. Collins 1996:199). God is depicted as one who fights for and through his people Israel. In post-exilic prophecy, this tradition was applied on a universal and cosmic level. God is seen as the universal divine warrior in supreme command of all of world history. When expectations did not realise, holy war image was used to '… point to the divine warrior's rule over history as creator and destroyer of empires and as a solace for the powerless who trusted in him' (Gottwald 1968:944).This tendency was continued in apocalyptic literature with its dualistic and deterministic cosmological viewpoint. Their suffering at the hand of unbeatable world forces asked for a God for Israel who could fight the enemy on a cosmic level on their behalf. He will act as the divine warrior who vindicates on behalf of his helpless faithful.

Two trends can be indicated in this cosmic reorientation of the older divine warrior tradition. Firstly, Yahweh's singular power is emphasised and credit for victory is ascribed to Yahweh alone. God will use violence against the violence of his enemies, but in a restricted and a secretive way. Violence is executed differently by the human kings and by God and his heavenly entourage. The kings' violence is depicted as extensive and explicit, whilst the description of God's violence and those of his helpers is vague and often concealed. The violence of the kings is bloody and drawn out, but always futile. The violence of God and his helpers is always short and final.

Secondly, the tradition that emphasised Yahweh's singular power simultaneously 'stressed human powerlessness' (Ollenburger 1991:28). The faithful of God do not play any role in events and never revert to any violence. Lind (1980:30) remarked that all the studies of holy wars which he surveyed '… agree that the present biblical narratives for the most part credit Yahweh with fighting the battle and discredit human fighting'. In their use of the older war traditions, the apocalyptic authors reverted to the motif of *menschliche Ohnmacht* [human powerlessness]. A movement can be observed here from violent God (theology) and violent people (ethics), to violent God (cosmology) and non-violent people (anthropology). This can be attributed to a large degree to the belief that the divine warrior operating on a cosmic level is also the God of righteousness and mercy. He also uses his power to create a society in which justice will be found.

This reorientation of the old divine warrior tradition also caused a change in the orientation of Israelite anthropology. It was now placed on a universal level. Israel is addressed in terms of a collective unity of faithful people rather than a national entity. This is the tension Pleins (2001:28) referred to as the competition between universalist and nationalist views of God.

An anthropology was also beginning to develop which propagated a non-violent stance. In opposition to activist factions in the Israelite society who were ready for military action, like those represented in the books of the Maccabees,

the group responsible for the Daniel narratives decided upon a strategy of non-violence. They were neither willing to compromise by exercising *Realpolitik*, nor did they see any sense in the Maccabean revolt. This was not per definition pacifism, but rather a stance of no-cooperation. It was a matter of 'patient pacifism' (Rowland 1982:42). They opted for an 'apocalyptic modification of ascesis' (Venter 1997:90).

Conflicting ethics can be illustrated on another level as well. Boccaccini (2002:26–27) reads Daniel 9 not only within the context of the rest of the book, but also within the context of 'interactions among different "currents" or movements'. He is of opinion that Daniel 9 is not only the nucleus of the second section of the book (Dn 8–12) (Boccaccini 2002:181), but is part of the original composition. In that original composition it played a structural and theological role (cf. Boccaccini 2002:188). Both Daniel's prayer and the angel's interpretation in chapter 9 refer to Leviticus 26 as the 'foundational text of the Zadokite tradition and a foundational concept of Zadokite covenantal theology' (Boccaccini 2002:188). In contrast to Zadokite covenantal Judaism, however, Daniel 'accepts the Enochic idea that history is condemned to inexorable degeneration' (Boccaccini 2002:183). These two 'Judaisms' or rather streams of Judaistic thinking, also differ on the issue of the superhuman origin of evil. In apocalyptic thinking, it is the evil of this world and the transgression of humankind that caused the degeneration of evil. Between the Zadokite idea of covenant and the Enochic theory of the degeneration of history, Daniel presents his own message concerning the meaning of time. Conflict in ethical thinking is evident within the wider context of Jewish society, as will be indicated by our comparison to the penitential prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah.

The penitential prayers in Ezra 9:6–15 and Nehemiah 9:5b–37

The ethos reflected by the older penitential prayers in Ezra 9:6–15 and Nehemiah 9:5b–37 differs radically from the ethos attested in the penitential prayer of Daniel 9:4–19. Against the universalist view in Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah propose a nationalist view of God as well as an exclusivist identity (cf. again Pleins 2001:28).

The penitential prayer in Ezra 9:6–15 is 'the theological high point of the book that bears his name' (Throntveit 1992:52). This prayer did not only have 'cultic significance', (Holmgreen 1987:67) aimed at confession in a cultic situation, but was intended to eventually dictate the *identity* of those who returned from the *golah* [exile]. In this regard, it also had ethical implications.

The confession takes the form of contradicting God's righteousness with the guilt of his people. They were not only unfaithful in the past but are still disobedient to the will of God. Their guilt is depicted as intermarriage with the 'people of the land'. Not only is the blame put 'squarely at the door of the inhabitants of the land with whom Israel should never had mixed' (Grabbe 1998:32), but especially the priests and

the Levites bear the guilt for transgressing the Lord's laws. They did not separate themselves from these other people.

What Ezra intended was a programme to find unique identity in terms of his prayer. He pointed out the dangers of intermarriage with these people who do not belong to his temple community. They would defile those identifying with Ezra and lead them astray. Contextualising the theological contents of the prayer and applying it to his contemporary situation, Ezra wanted to persuade his people to develop an exclusive identity by *inter alia* marrying only with those who were part of the in-group, that is, those dedicated to following the laws of God regarding purity[14].

In the case of Nehemiah his prayer (Neh 9:5b–37) was also intended to guide the community of faith in forming a unique identity. Between the two interactive poles of God's faithful love of his people and their scrutinising awareness of their disobedience in the past, the prayer encouraged the returned people to follow a programme of transformation.

This programme was one of both continuity as well as discontinuity. The intention of the prayer was '... to represent the pattern of Israel's traditional story as that of the restoration community ...' (Throntveit 1992:100). As restoration community they were to identify themselves with Israel of old, but to respond in a way that was lacking in the past (cf. Throntveit 1992:106). An old ethos was to be restored and activated under new circumstances of political dependency. It was a matter of '... seeing in the continuous character of ancient tradition a link with the past and a way of life for the present' (Ackroyd 1991:85).

This tradition focused on reading and expounding the law. It was particularly shown in the binding agreement signed by the leaders, Levites and priests to follow the law of God (Neh 10:1). They promised to uphold purity, commemorate the prescribed festivals and maintain the cult. Six promises were made:

- not to allow marriages with the people surrounding them (Neh10:30)
- to keep the Sabbath (Neh 10:31)
- keep the Sabbath year (Neh 10:31)
- pay temple tax (Neh 10:32–33)
- supply wood for the altar (Neh 10:34)
- bring contributions for the temple (Neh 10:35–39).

These acts will express their identity as law-abiding community.

According to Pleins (2001:182), Ezra and Nehemiah 'shared, if not a common set of ethical guidelines, at least the collective conviction that the moral life of the community was determinative for a successful reconstruction process'. Both have perspectives that are connected with political and social movements. Moreover, these perspectives 'transcend

14.For this argument see Venter, P.M., 1999, 'Bybelse teologie en skuldbelydenis', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 55, 533–562 and Venter, P.M., 2005, 'Die skuldgebed in Esra 9:6–15', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 61(1&2), 545–563.

the precise historical moment to which we would date either Nehemiah or Ezra' (Pleins 2001:182). They reflect a common 'national ethic' (Pleins 2001:204) that is shared even with other literature of the same period like Esther, Ruth and Daniel [*sic*!]. According to Pleins (2001:186), the Ezra layer was intruded into the book of Nehemiah replacing monarchic aspirations (also present in the books of Haggai and Zechariah) with priestly interests putting priestly rather than native royal authority at the heart of the reconstruction movement. Ezra 1–6 links to Nehemiah 9 and reshape the past for the reader in terms of priestly interests. This vision of the Ezra text, however, is:

> consonant with the ritual reformist layer of Nehemiah, betraying the hand of the same redactor and indicating that the conflict over leadership and over questions of identity had not subsided well into the Hellenistic period ...
>
> (Pleins 2001:190)

Some differences, however, can be indicated between Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra has a priestly ideology focusing on the reinstatement of the cult and the temple. Nehemiah concentrates rather on restoring the community and includes the temple as only one section of a larger programme. In Ezra's prayer the restoration of the temple is attributed to the favourable attitude of the Persian king (cf. Ezr 7:6, 27–28, 9:9; cf. also Williamson 1987:88–89). Nehemiah 9:36–37 refers in his prayer to Israel being slaves in the land God gave them presenting their harvests to capricious kings who do with them what they please. Ezra refers to intermarriages as a sign of their disobedience (Ezr 9:12) and causes the exiles to send away the foreign women they married (Ezr 10:1–44), whilst Nehemiah only rebuked those who married foreign women as part of a larger programme of reform (Neh 13:23–31). A probable explanation for these differences can be that they represent different stages in the return of exiles. What is clear, however, is that both Ezra and Nehemiah include the issue of intermarriages in their reform programmes. Both propagate an exclusivist community drawing sharp borders between the in-group and the out-group.

Inclusivism and exclusivism in Ezra-Nehemiah

This idea of exclusive identity is corroborated by the study of Thiessen (2009). He challenged the view of scholars who find strategies of inclusivism in Ezra-Nehemiah. These scholars refer especially to Ezra 6:19–21 and Nehemiah 10:29–30, understanding these two passages as envisioning the incorporation of outsiders into the returning exile group (cf. Thiessen 2009:63). According to Thiessen, genealogical exclusion of non-Israelites is evidenced all through Ezra-Nehemiah. In both books, an exclusivist definition of Israel is presented: 'The belief that there is an ontological (or genealogical) distinction between Israel and the other nations' (Thiessen 2009:64) can be seen in several passages. Thiessen refers to the genealogies of those who returned to Judah from the exile in Ezra 2, Nehemiah 7 and Ezra 4:1–3 where 'proper genealogical descent was constitutive of Israelite identity' (Thiessen 2009:66). He also refers to the mass divorce found

in Ezra 9–10 and Nehemia 13:23–30 and the holy race imagery in Ezra 9.2 signifying 'the ontological distinction between Israel (holy seed) and the nations (common or profane seed)' (Thiessen 2009:68).

Thiessen challenges the view that Ezra 6:19–21 'presents evidence of a greater openness to Gentiles than is found elsewhere in Ezra-Nehemiah' (Thiessen 2009:70). This view differs radically with the central ideological concern of the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah regarding who belongs to the community of Israel and who not. He reads the Hebrew letter *waw* at the start of the phrase in verse 21 [15] ('and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land', King James Version; Hebrew: וכל הנבדל מטמאת גויי־הארץ) 'as a *waw explicativum* or epexegetical *waw* ' (Thiessen 2009:72). Thiessen (2009:73) therefore translates the phrase as follow: 'and all the sons of Israel who had returned from exile, *that is*, those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land …'. The phrase would therefore mean that we do not have a reference here to other people like proselytes, but rather an explication of the returning exiles as those who separated themselves form the impurity of the peoples of the land. This argument of Thiessen is persuasive as it fits into the rest of the book of Ezra.

The same phrase is used in verse 28 of the passage in Nehemiah 10.28–29: 'and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the land' (King James Version; Hebrew: וכל הנבדל מעמי_הארצות). Linking this phrase to the similar phrase in Ezra 6:21 Thiessen (2009:78) says 'the phrase should again be seen as a description of the returnees, not as a reference to a different group'. Thiessen's argument is not as persuasive here as in the case of Ezra 6:21. The elaboration of 'the rest of the people' as priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants, however, stands in contrast with the second use of עם in the construction עַמֵּי הארצות where 'people' refers to 'the peoples of the lands'. The phrase 'and all they that had separated themselves' refers to those who were not serving in an official capacity, but who were included in the *golah* community.

Thiessen (2009:78) is quite correct to state that 'Ezra-Nehemiah evidences strong genealogical exclusionary thinking, in which Israel is distinguished from all other nations'. Israelite identity in Ezra-Nehemiah is primarily genealogical. The boundaries that separate them were impermeable. Any attempt to incorporate someone who is not from the holy seed would endanger the Israelite community and defile their identity. Identity is without any doubt exclusivistic in the case of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Inclusivist trends in Israel during the Second Temple period

In opposition to this exclusivist trend found in Ezra-Nehemiah (also in the priestly writings, in Ezekiel and in the books of Chronicles), an inclusivist trend was found during the same and following period of the Second Temple. 'A continuing voice of universalism' (Park 2003:14) was articulated in books like Ruth, Jonah, Job, Qohelet[16], Esther and 'apocryphal' books like Judith and Tobit. In all probability, the book of Daniel later followed this trend in his apocalyptic view.

In the struggle for supremacy between the exiles who returned to Judah and those who remained in the land, it was the returning Zadokites who 'imposed their hegemony over the remainees, the peoples of the land and their leaders – the Tobiads of Ammon and the Sanballats of Samaria' (Boccaccini 2002:204). The Persian and later the Hellenistic Ptolemean and Seleucid authorities assisted them. Using the survival strategies they learned during the exile they were successful in becoming the dominant power in the Judaean community (cf. Boccaccini 2002:82). These Zadokites 'saw themselves as the faithful keepers of God's creative order, established through a coherent system of graded purity and maintained under God's omnipotent and unchallenged control' (Boccaccini 2002:204). They followed a 'particularist policy' (Park 2003:13) managing *inter alia* marriage regulations with a 'noticeable socio-political motivation' (Park 2003:14). They propagated a new type of identity referring to themselves as בְּנֵי הגולה (the sons of the captivity – Ezr 4:1; 6:19–21; 8:35) introducing a new dispensation as depicted in Ezr-Nehemiah. The עם־הארץ (the people of the land – Ezr 4:4–5; 6:21) and people from non-Jewish origin like the Samaritans, were excluded from the cultic society and from taking part in the rebuilding of the temple. These Zadokites who 'unceasingly and persistently defined the boundaries of cosmic and social structure, rules and regulations, were enforced to restrict or control interaction and avoid trespassing' (Boccaccini 2002:73).

Several other groups like the Samaritans and the Tobiads opposed this exclusivist ruling party. There were also internal minor groups who opposed their viewpoint like the sapiential and Enochic movements. Some of them advanced an inclusivist point of view. The sapiential movement, for instance:

> would rather emphasize God's unlimited freedom and omnipotence to act for the supreme good of the universe and not only to react to human behavior under the constraints of the covenant.

> (Boccacinni 2002:205)

This stance can be detected in different books from the time of the Second Temple.

In the early Second Temple period, Isaiah 56–66 (Trito Isaiah) and the book of Ruth 'testify to the vitality of the prophetic movement faithful to the heritage of the Davidic monarchy, and to their opposition against Zadokite exclusiveness' (Boccaccini 2002:88). In the prologue (Is 56:1–8) of Trito Isaiah (Is 56–66) God's righteousness is extended to all who

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15.The New International Version translates this phrase as 'together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors'.

16.Job and Qohelet do not really belong to this category. Wisdom books like these 'provide instruction that is both theologically charged and morally pragmatic' (Brown 2000:12). Qohelet with its 'inseparable bond between cosmos and corpus' (Brown 2000:16) operates with non-nationalistic and non-historic categories that are universal, generally anthropologic and creation oriented.

keep the Sabbath, even the foreigners and eunuchs who were formerly forbidden to come to the temple. God will bring all of them to his holy mountain and give them joy in his house of prayer (cf. Is 56:7). The metaphor of a light for the gentiles in Deutero Isaiah (cf. Is 42:6, 49:6) is now used as an extension of the Zion theology and becomes a symbol for universalism. Building upon Deutero Isaiah (Is 40–55) the text of Trito Isaiah (Is 56–66) begins to make room for those who were traditionally excluded, to now join themselves to God's people. Trito Isaiah calls upon 'an ethic of righteousness and faithfulness' (Grant-Henderson 2002:140) to include all who bind themselves to the Lord (Is 56:6). Although the Law as propagated by Ezekiel and Ezra-Nehemiah might have condemned them, 'if people lived instead under the righteousness of God and followed that principle, then foreigners and eunuchs were to be treated in the same way as Israelites in the community' (Grant-Henderson 2002:140).

In direct confrontation with the exclusivist viewpoint found in Ezekiel and Ezra-Nehemiah with its genealogical idea of purity excluding all who were not from 'the people of the land', the inclusivist idea is propagated here in Trito Isaiah that even foreigners can become part of God's people. The person or group responsible for this standpoint 'not only contends with the strong words of Ezekiel and Nehemiah, but also has the Torah against them (Lv 26:14–45; Dt 23:1–8)' (Grant-Henderson 2002:31). This was indeed 'the beginning of the tension between particularism and universalism in the history of Jewish thought' (Park 2003:13).

The story of Ruth uses concrete, specific situations[17] to illuminate human behaviour on the level of interaction between individuals. Pleins (2001:194) is of the opinion that although this is not a 'social ethics work', the narrative of Ruth is 'replete with overtones that reinforce specific values and modes of conduct adumbrated more dryly in the legal portions of the Pentateuch'. Here *aggadah* nourishes *halakhah*. The narrative 'plays off the distinction between law as such and law guided by a communal commitment to a sense of shared justice' (Pleins 2001:195). One of the major theological emphases in the narrative therefore is the ethical indication that the reader should emulate the words and deeds of its protagonists (cf. Bush 1998). It emphasises *hesed* [faithful relationship] as constituting interpersonal and family obligations. It focuses on the element of the imitable: the reader should go and do likewise.

Another aspect here is the foreignness of the character of Ruth. The story of Ruth deals with a Moabite woman. Although Deuteronomy 23:3 decrees that no Ammonite or Moabite should be admitted to the assembly of the Lord, the story of Ruth is related to Israelite history both at the

beginning and at the end of the narrative. Whether the date and provenance of the story is seen as early, dealing with the genealogy of David, or later in the post-exilic time, the inclusion of a Moabite woman in the Israelite bloodline is conspicuous. Collins remarks:

> The viewpoint of Ruth is entirely different from that of Ezra, and the difference could not have gone unnoticed in the postexilic era, but it does not necessarily follow that Ruth was composed as a polemic against Ezra.
>
> (Collins 2004:533)

Concerning the orientation of the story Bush (1998) points out that it has been argued since the middle of the 19th century that the book advocates a spirit of universalism and tolerance of foreigners and mixed marriages, as Ruth is a Moabites and is nonetheless accepted into Israelite society and marries Boaz, a righteous Israelite of substance and standing. Therefore, it is argued, the book is a product of the party favouring such a view and in opposition to the rigorist and exclusivist policies of Ezra and Nehemiah. In this regard, Bush refers to the publications of Bewer, Oesterley and Robinson, Weiser and Lacocque.

The main character in the book of Jonah is 'a caricature of a Jewish particularist' (Park 2003:14) a ridiculing of the ancient figure of the prophet (cf. Boccaccini 2002:110). Like Ezekiel (Ezek 3:5–6) Jonah is sent to people who can be responsive: 'In both Jonah and Ezekiel, however, the supposed responsiveness of the pagan people serves to highlight the stubbornness of Israel' (Collins 2004:535). No allusion or explicit reference to the exclusivism of Ezra-Nehemiah can be found in Jonah, but the message of the book of Jonah 'confronts the actions proclaimed against foreigners in Ezra/Nehemiah' (Grant-Henderson 2002:106)[18]. The message of the book is universalistic, making 'little if any distinction between Jew and Gentile' (Collins 2004:536). According to Park (2003:16), 'there were wisdom teachers whose horizon was more international and universalistic'. They opposed the exclusivist and particularistic ethos that tried to reconstruct the Jewish nation with the temple as its centre and the Torah as its constitution. The Zadokite covenantal theology is not entirely denied in Jonah, but the emphasis is shifted to 'God's freedom to use unexpectedly the covenant as God likes' (Boccaccini 2002:110). God's justice can even include the Ninevites and the pagan sailors who fear God. God is not bound by any pronouncement or traditional covenant: 'At any moment God has the power, the right, and the freedom to deviate from the established terms of God's relationship with humans' (Boccaccini 2002:111).

Esther is a *diaspora* novel acted out in a foreign court resembling the stories of Joseph, Daniel and the apocryphal book of 3 Maccabees (cf. Collins 2004:536). It can also be classified as a 'festal legend' (Collins 2004:540). The narrative aims at regulating and coordinating the calendric differences found in the population with regard to the festival of the Purim (cf. Pleins 2001:194). The emphasis on the Purim indicates that 'community, cult, and conduct are one' (Pleins

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17. Bush (1998) points out the difference between *the narrative domains of Ruth and Esther. Whilst that of* Ruth is rural and agricultural and its major characters are common people, every scene in Esther takes place in the royal court of Persia. The narrative of Esther is completely set in the domain of power controlling and dominating its world. This difference is important as it indicates a difference between a narrative in which Judah is at centre accommodating foreigners and a narrative in which a foreign power is in command accommodating Judeans. The conceptualising of what inclusivism means will totally differ between these two situations.

18. According to Reiterer in Herders Neues Bibellexikon (2008:388) 'Das Jonabuch ist als Gegenrede zum Buch Joël lesbar. Beide Bücher verweisen (Jona 4,2; Joël 2,13) auf die sog. *Gnadenformel* aus Ex 34,6 f. Im Jonabuch bleibt die Möglichkeit der gnädigen Zuwendung Gottes jedoch nicht auf Israel beschränkt.'

2001:194). Like the Priestly source, Esther does not divorce cult and ethics.

The casual way in which the Purim is linked to the narrative only in the final stage (Es 10:26), however, indicates that the focus lies somewhere else[19]. Pleins (2001:192) remarked that the book wrestles with the issues of 'national identity, political powerlessness, and heroic resistance'. At the centre of the stage stands the problem of identity: upholding unique national identity in the diaspora being subjected to foreign rule and threatened by extermination. Pleins, however, is wrong when he puts the search for identity in Esther on exactly the same level as those of Nehemiah, Ezra, Ruth and Daniel. He does not keep in mind his remark (Pleins 2001:28) that there was a conflict between universalist views of God and nationalist views in the Second Temple period.

The story does focus on the Jewish people and their interests. In Esther, they are not in their own land, do not have a temple, do not desire independence and do not question the sovereignty of the foreign ruler[20]. Nationality is bound to be totally reconceptualised here. According to Bush (1998) there are three aspects of the theme of the book of Esther. Firstly, a viable life for Jews in the diaspora with all its sumptuousness, excess, uncertainty, and evil is possible thanks to the loyalty of a Mordecai to the Jewish people and the king. Secondly, it is made possible because of the courage, shrewdness, and sagacity of Esther. Thirdly, it depends on the reliable providence of God who delivered the diaspora Jewish community from the terrible threat of annihilation. This message in Esther 1:1–9:5; 10:1–3 [21]is linked in the *dénouement of Esther 9:6–32* to the annual celebration of the Purim festival. Jewish identity is depicted as viable in the diaspora even in the context of foreign rule.

The book of Tobit (not included in the Hebrew Bible) is related to the diaspora narratives mentioned earlier. It reflects 'the piety of Second Temple Judaism' (Collins 2004:545) during the exile. Tobit is commended for his pious actions (cf. VanderKam 2001:70). Committed to the Law of Moses, Tobit refuses to eat gentile food. He insists that his son must not marry a gentile woman. Tobit's Jewish identity also

accommodated faith in angels and demons, the use of magical cures and burying the dead. Using folkloristic elements the author used this 'entertaining romance as an occasion for conventional moral instruction' (Collins 2004:546).

Some glimpses of an inclusive attitude are also found in the book. In Tobit's final instructions to his son Tobias (Tobit 14:4–11) he predicted not only Israel's return from the exile and the rebuilding of the temple (14:5), but also the conversion of all the people of the whole earth (14:6) and the gathering of all the Israelites who were spared in Jerusalem. However, there will be a division, not along national lines, but along the line of obedience: those who sincerely love God will rejoice, whilst those who commit sin and vileness will disappear from the earth.

The book of Judith, also not included in the Hebrew Bible, reflects the tendencies during the Second Temple period. The book 'is blatantly nationalistic' (Collins 2004:548). Like First Maccabees, it celebrates 'militant Jewish nationalism' (Collins 2004:548). Resembling Esther, the heroine Judith frees the inhabitants of the beleaguered Bethulia by killing the Assyrian leader Holofernes in a deceitful way. Judith is depicted as a widow of exemplary character, observing the dietary rules of Israel and living in prayerful communion with God. The narrative of Judith can be:

> seen as a novel meant to extol the value of obedience to and trust in the one true God who is powerful to save in whatever way he chooses and against any foe.
>
> (VanderKam 2001:73)

Another aspect of importance in the book of Judith, however, is the role of the Ammonite Achior. His role is contrasted but simultaneously paralleled with that of Judith. Initially he acted as adviser to Holofernes against Israel, but in the end he was circumcised and joined the house of Israel. Deuteronomy 23:3 forbids any Ammonite to enter the assembly of the Lord. Achior's entry into the religious community therefore seems to be 'contrary to the policies of leaders such as Ezra and Nehemiah' (VanderKam 2001:75). VanderKam (2001:75) concludes that 'the book of Judith seems to represent a dissenting opinion'.

In his dissertation on Joshua, Lindeque (2001) concluded that even the book of Joshua served in its final form as contra narrative to the exclusivist view of the post-exilic theology of the Zadokites. Those responsible for the final form of Joshua 'were in all probability a marginalized, post-exilic prophetic group who were in conflict with the religious elite of the Jerusalem temple' (my translation of Lindeque 2001:117). With regard to Joshua 22, Butler (1998) refers in his commentary on Joshua to 'yet another schism within the people of God. Ezra and Nehemiah reflect the growing tension between the people of the north around Samaria and the people of Jerusalem'.

Conclusion

A comparison of the penitential prayers in Daniel 9:4–19, Ezra 9:6–15 and Nehemiah 9:6–37 indicates that the

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19.Bush (1998) distinguishes between the theme and purpose of Esther. There is 'a marked incongruity between the "problem-resolution" discourse elements (Est 1:1–9:5; 10:1–3.) and the "dénouement" (Est 9:6–32) that follows. The dénouement does not simply portray the consequences of the problem-based plot that precedes consequences of the "problem-resolution" sequence for the participants; rather it describes the dates, purposes, and character of the festival of Purim and seeks to obligate the Jewish community to its perpetual observance' (Bush 1998). The dénouement, however, depends upon the story as the etiology for the festival it prescribes.

20.Bush (1998) points out that the 'diaspora agenda' (term used by Levenson) of the Esther narrative differs dramatically from that of other Palestinian post-exilic literature. All of Nehemiah's concerns and actions are focused on the restoration of Jerusalem to which he returns (2:5). Although Daniel serves in the Persian court, but the concern of the book of Daniel is the future of the Judean community in Palestine: Daniel himself faces Jerusalem when he prays (Dn 6:10–11), is agonized over the seventy years prophesied for the devastation of Jerusalem and receives a prophecy of its future (Dn 9). 'When Zerubbabel, Darius' personal bodyguard, is promised whatever he wishes, he requests the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple, and the restoration of the temple vessels (1 Esdr 4:42–46)' (Bush 1998). In sharp contrast to these Esther and Mordecai never articulate any concerns about Jerusalem, the temple and its cult. The 'book of Esther is specifically and narrowly concerned with the life and concerns of Jews in the diaspora' (Bush 1998).

21.Cf. Bush, F., 1998, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 9: Ruth, Esther*, Word Books, Dallas, Texas.

phenomenon of conflicting ethics was present in Israel during the Second Temple period. Following the indications of such a phenomenon in the publications of Wilson (1990), Otto (1991), Birch (1991), Habel (1995), Mills (1998) and Pleins (2001), these penitential prayers were investigated in their literary and social context.

The prayer in Daniel 9 not only shows the juxtapositioning of apocalyptic determinism and conditional covenant theology in one composition, but also some tension with the ideas in the rest of the book of Daniel. Regarding the meaning of power, learning and religion for morality, contradiction was indicated between the Jewish leaders and those of Babylonia, Persia and Greece. The narratives in the book are ambiguous as they attribute violent acts to God but stress human powerlessness and persuade the readers to be non-violent and passive. This also leads to a change in Israelite anthropology changing them from a national entity into a universal collective group. This is in direct conflict to the identity propagated in the two prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah.

The penitential prayers in Ezra and Nehemiah propose a nationalist view of God and an exclusivist identity for Israel. Both encouraged those who returned from the *golah* to cultivate a unique identity by following the law of God, uphold purity, commemorate the prescribed holy festivals and maintain the cult. Although some differences can be indicated between Ezra and Nehemiah, both evidence genealogical exclusionary thinking in which Israel is distinguished from all other nations.

In opposition and reaction to this stance a contradicting ethos of inclusivism is found in Isaiah 56–66, the story of Ruth, Jonah, Esther, Tobit, Judith and even Joshua. During the Second Temple period smaller groups showing an inclusivist trend in a variety of different forms opposed the exclusivist voice of the Zadokites. In Trito Isaiah God's righteousness is extended to those foreigners and eunuchs who were formerly excluded from the Israelite community. Although Deuteronomy 23:3 explicitly excludes Ammonites and Moabites from the Israelite community, the Moabite woman Ruth is accepted into Israelite society and became part of David's family tree. In the book of Jonah an exclusivist and particularistic ethos is ridiculed by the tale of a typical Israelite prophet who experienced that God can extend his justice to even include the heathen Ninevites. Also dealing with the issue of the boundaries of Israelite identity, the apocryphal book of Judith does not only narrate the way in which Judith killed Holofernes, the enemy of her people, but also how the Ammonite Achior joined the religious community. Both Esther and Tobit deal with the diaspora situation. Esther deals with the issue of being faithful to God upholding unique national identity whilst living in a foreign land – the same theme also found in Daniel. Nationality is reconceptualised here in terms of vindication of identity under foreign rule. Tobit also depicts a faithful Jew living away from Jerusalem expecting a return back to Jerusalem, but including even non-Jews who are obedient to God.

During the time of the Second Temple, an exclusivist ethos existed alongside an inclusivist ethos. Both are presented in the books of the Hebrew Bible as well as in some non-canonical books reflecting the period of the late Second Temple. This conflicting ethos can be indicated in the context of the canon as congruent ethos presenting more than just one simple nationalistic ethos during the Second Temple period. Old Testament ethics will have to deal with this conflicting or rather congruent ethos when studying the morality of the Israelites.

Acknowledgement

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