

OLD TESTAMENT EQUIVOCATION ON ENDOGAMY REVEALING CONTEXTUAL PRESSURES BEHIND SCRIBAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

The saying attributed to Jesus Christ that “The law is made for man, not man for the law” (Mk. 2:27) is even more true in the Old Testament doctrinal and theological positions. Modern practitioners of religion lay claims to religious laws to heap yokes of bondage on unsuspecting religious adherents. Some of the laws used for such sinister motives are drawn from the Old Testament. However, a close look at the Old Testament reveals that the laws are made rather flexible to accommodate the varying pressures arising from a multitude of socio-cultural and econo-political contexts. This paper uses the illustration of the Old Testament equivocation on endogamy to demonstrate the varying contextual pressures that determine the flexibility of the doctrinal and theological positions of the scribes on the Old Testament laws and regulations. Using context hermeneutical principles, the paper shows that the scribes who are the authors and editors of the Old Testament books, rather than adopting strict and stiff positions, are always sensitive to prevailing societal pressures while composing their works which they use as theological instruments to shape the people’s response to their environments. The paper advocates that such flexibility in the presentation and interpretation of religious laws will help the human society achieve more effectively its developmental objectives in the fast-changing human socio-economic and ethno-political environments.

Keywords: Equivocation, Prevarication, Flexibility, Endogamy, Contexts, Environments, Pluralism.

Introduction

The objective of every discipline of human endeavour is primarily the betterment of human life on earth. The practice of religion is not excluded from this objective. The values of the various disciplines of human endeavour are measured on the basis of the extent to which they are fulfilling their set objectives, with minimum negative side effects. It is for this reason that researches are undertaken in all areas of human endeavour, to discover the challenges facing mankind, and how these challenges can be brought under control. These researches, particularly in the last fifty years, in all the areas of human engagement, have yielded a lot of dividends.

In the case of religious practice, the objectives are two-fold. The first phase is largely existential. This phase of the objectives deals with the ethical modulation or moderation of character and behaviour in order, not just to promote better interpersonal relationship, but on the overall, to make for greater cohabitation of the earth space for more productive engagements. Thus, Gaiya (2004) affirms that;

The goal of religion, therefore, is to maintain those relationships that protect and preserve life. For, it is the harmony and stability provided by the relationships, both spiritually and materially, that create conditions for wellbeing and wholeness. (p. 33).

Holloway (1999) further asserts that;

A permanent aspect of the human moral struggle seems to be the need to praise and to blame, to single out certain types of conduct for condemnation and others for laudation. The obvious way to account for this side of things is to see it as a reinforcement technique, a well-known way of inculcating good practice by praise, and averting bad practice by blame. (p. 23)..

The second phase of the objective of religious practice, which is also connected to the first, is largely eschatological, and deals with how behaviour in this sphere of existence makes for better life’s experience beyond the present life. In a way, this eschatological objective also promotes the existential, in that as people aspire to the good life beyond, they also adopt a good life at present and promote greater interpersonal relations. However, what tends to happen, more often than not, is that the practitioners of religion, intent on promoting the eschatological objectives over the existential, end up

amassing heavy burdens and yokes upon the adherents, making the practice of religion existentially oppressive and thus, inimical to humanity at large. That religious practice is the greatest threat to the survival of the human race remains the biggest and most objective criticism of religion in our time. Uzuegbunam (2021), has pointed out that;

At the base of all the insurgence and terrorism in the world, and particularly in Nigeria, today, is the fact that these instigations and violence contained in the sacred books aggregate into a philosophy of dominance, total annihilation and control of non-conformists, an ideal that has its origin in the evil Machiavellian attitudes of the primitive ages in which growth and expansion even of religious groups were achieved through callous conquests, displacements and dispossession. (p. 157).

Hermeneutists and exegetes, therefore, have a responsibility to respond to this criticism through an organised systematic hermeneutical reshaping of the frames of mind of both the leaders and adherents of religion in our contemporary world.

Endogamy in the Old Testament

Endogamy, according to Hornby (2010), is “the custom of marrying only people from (one’s) local community”. (p. 483). It is the social practice of marrying or entering into a romantic relationship with someone within one’s social group, tribe, caste or community. This can include:

1. Family ties: Marrying within the extended family or clan.
2. Caste or social class: Marrying within the same caste or social system.
3. Ethnic or cultural group: Marrying within one’s ethnic or cultural community.
4. Religious group: Marrying within the same religious denomination or sect.
5. Geographical location: Marrying someone from the same village, town or region.

Levi-Strauss (1949) has discussed endogamy in the context of kinship systems, and argued that endogamy is a fundamental aspect of kinship systems which regulate marriage and alliance between groups; adding that endogamy maintains social cohesion and group identity.

Endogamy appears early in the religious traditions of the patriarchs of the Israelite faith, and became adopted as a vital component of the faith. Clifford and Murphy (1990) affirm that;

Famine forces Abraham and Sarah to leave the promised land temporarily (“sojourn” in v.10) for Egypt. Their going to Egypt and encounter with Pharaoh foreshadow their descendant experience in Egypt, suggesting constant divine protection in which Israel must learn to trust. The story of the ancestors in danger is told again in Gen. 20 in its E version, with Abimelech of Gerar replacing Pharaoh, and in 26:1-11 (J), with Isaac and Rebecca instead of Abraham and Sarah. Repetitions of similar events are not unusual in ancient oriental literature. Abraham is aware that Sarah, though 65 (10 years younger than Abraham, 17:17), is so beautiful that she will be taken as a wife by Pharaoh. Abraham must remain alive to fulfil the promise made to him in 12:2-3. He lies, to prevent his immediate death, but does not foresee that Pharaoh’s great power will take matters completely out of his hands. (p. 20).

But this is where the crux of the matter actually lies, the ambivalence, or equivocation as a literary device in the Old Testament. The claim of Abraham that Sarah was his sister was both true and false, more true than false, a literary emphatic note to highlight the significance of the endogamous practice. The repetition of that narrative involving different personnel adds to the emphatic note of the patriarchal endogamy; Abraham-Sarah, Isaac-Rebecca. In the case of Jacob, we see a command to Jacob from his mother to undertake a life-saving journey to the domain of his mother’s relations, a journey which brought him into the household of Laban, his mother’s brother, from where also Jacob took his wives. A number of gains have been explored in patriarchal endogamy, which include preserving of family wealth, protection of family honour, maintenance of cultural identity, and kinship solidarity. With time, endogamy among the patriarchs expanded, with the inauguration of the cult of Yahweh in Israel, into marriage within the covenant family. Although not specifically commanded in the decalogue, endogamy, this time, not as marriage within the bloodline, but as marriage within the covenant family, became a specific demand. In fact, from the Deuteronomy, the collection of Mosaic speeches, endogamy became a specific Mosaic command from Yahweh;

When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hast cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou, and when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them. Neither shall thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. (Deut. 7:1-4).

Two facts emerge in this text. First, it became the explicit command in the Mosaic traditions against exogamy. Not just in relation to the nations specifically mentioned in this text, but unto all the other nations the world over, this became a universal law against marriage outside the covenant family of Yahweh. Endogamy here is defined, not in relation to specific bloodline, but in relation to the commonwealth family of Yahweh. Secondly, we notice here also that for the first time, a religious objective is raised for the command to endogamy. "For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods". So the borderline definition for endogamy justifiably shifts here from biological to religious, though the issues of bloodline or ethnicity are not completely jettisoned. Menezes (2009) associates this endogamous legislation with a theological perspective of exclusivism, which he attributes to the Deuteronomist redactors. He asserts that:

The Deuteronomic legislator seems to be advocating a society which is very closed indeed. Israel should sedulously avoid all contact with the surrounding nations. Israelites should carefully observe the practice of endogamy, i.e. to marry only within the Israelite community. He seems to be afraid the surrounding nations might pollute Israel. They could be a subtle and invisible trap (מוקש) for Israel (cf. Exod. 23:32-33; 34:12; Deut. 7:16). But most astounding of all, even the Deuteronomic legislator has no problem if Israelite soldiers take pagan captive women as wives with full rights and duties (cf. Deut. 21:10-14). This goes contrary to what we find in the Book of Exodus, in a text which forbids inter-marriage with the pagan nations and is normally attributed to the Deuteronomist. (pp. 61-62).

Moses' Exogamous Marriage Highlighted and Approved

As already indicated, the scribes who were the authors and editors of the Old Testament books were a group of theologians who composed the Old Testament books as theological documents for the purpose of shaping the theological opinions of the Israelites, in the light of prevailing socio-cultural and economic challenges surrounding them. In some cases, they would compose a narrative at a much later time, prompted by a prevailing situation, but they may retroject the narrative to a much earlier time in order to invoke certain vital authorities necessary for according due theological credence to such compositions. That is exactly how the narrative in Numbers 12 may be interpreted. In that narrative, Miriam and Aaron, Moses' siblings and co-leaders of the community, had murmured against the fact that Moses, while decrying any association between the Israelites and foreigners, was himself married to a Midianite woman. Thereupon, according to the narrative, Yahweh thundered from on high, pronouncing judgement against Aaron and Miriam, as a result of which Miriam became leprous. L'Heureux (1990) writes concerning that narrative;

Vv. 1 and 10-15 deal with the opposition of Moses for marrying a Cushite woman, an episode that originally involved only Miriam. God punished her by inflicting a skin disease. In vv. 2-8, however, Aaron and Miriam make a rather different claim: they should have equal authority with Moses. The issue is settled by a decree from God which informs the uniqueness and superiority of Moses as a mediator of revelation. Both elements may derive from J, though some scholars assign at least part of the chapter (especially the material dealing with prophecy) to E...Cush refers to Ethiopia... The meekness or humility of Moses contrasts with the self-assertion of Aaron and Miriam, who would push themselves forward into positions of power. (p. 85).

Because the matter of endogamy was one that remained a nagging issue throughout the Israelite history, the scribes found it necessary to address the seeming contradiction of Moses' marital status of exogamy, while advancing the central command of endogamy for the community of faith. The point which the scribes advanced here to establish their position, is the point of sovereignty or over-riding supremacy of Yahweh, and the exclusive prerogative of Moses as the singular servant of Yahweh and mediator, or transmitter of the revelations of Yahweh. But this point goes far in advancing the flexibility of the scribes as far as the doctrines and theology of the Old Testament are concerned. The critical point which the Scribes have sought to advance here is that Yahweh gives the law and enforces it by his exclusive might. However, having stated that, Yahweh is also sovereign and supreme, and reserves unto himself the exclusive prerogative of judgement, and as such, anyone who tries to execute judgement on Yahweh's behalf may be putting his or her life to severe risk; more so, when the one apparently being brought to judgment is Yahweh's exclusive servant, Moses, with whom Yahweh speaks face-to-face (Hebrew, פָּנִים וּפָנִים literally, face(s) and face(s)).

Aberrations in the Monarchical Era

Scholars are united, at least reasonably so, that many of the monarchical warnings against the failures of the monarchy are post-exilic compositions written with the hindsight of the monarchical failures that resulted in the prolonged captivity. For instance, the reasons given by Samuel in 1 Samuel 8 for his reluctance in granting the request of the elders of Israel to consecrate a king for them, were written with post-exilic hindsight. Similarly, even the Mosaic Deuteronomic warnings against the exogamy, (such as Deut. 7:1-4) could have been a post-exilic redaction. It is at least known that redactional work in the Pentateuch, the collection often credited to Moses, continued even in the post-exilic period. For instance, Genesis 1:1-2: 4a, a later version of the creation narrative, contains features that bear strong resemblance to the Persian myths, and is therefore quite evidently post-exilic.

At no time in Israelite history were there such colossal aberrations of the norms of endogamy as in the monarchical era. The climax of this is witnessed in the reign of Solomon where the observation matches the one in Deuteronomic collection for which the law against exogamy was given in the first instance;

But King Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites, of the nations concerning which the Lord had said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come unto you, for surely they will turn away your heart after other gods; Solomon clave unto them in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned away his heart. (1 Kings 11:1-3).

Well, here again, we appreciate the scribal work of redaction which places some narratives at some positions in the text where they appear pre-emptive, whereas indeed they are historical, written with benefit of hindsight. Comparing the 1Kings text above with the Deuteronomic injunction (Deut. 7: 1-4), it is easy to see that the earlier text was written with benefit of hindsight from the seemingly later development in the later text. This is the point which Blenkinsopp (1990) has so carefully outlined in his commentary on the Deuteronomic so-called farewell speeches of Moses;

Moreover, it is the Deut. that speaks consistently for the first time, not of laws but the Law, and it is this Law which is generally referred to in the historical corpora (e.g. 2 Kings 14:6 quoting Deut. 24:16). The appearance of the law book therefore marks an important stage in the formation of the Canon. At some point in the post-exilic period, the book (Deuteronomy) was incorporated into the P narrative by means of the date at 1:3, of a type not attested elsewhere in the book but common in P (especially Num. 33:38, the death of Aaron), and the account of the death of Moses preceded by the commissioning of Joshua (32:48-52; 34:1, 7-9). Comparison with Num. 27:12-23, an earlier parallel P narrative, suggests that the death of Moses was transferred to its present position after Deut. had been incorporated into the narrative structure. By this means, the entire Pentateuch was rounded off at Moses' death and the history of founding events was thus restricted to the period up to but not excluding the occupation of the land. (pp. 94,95).

Two vital points are noteworthy here. The first is the contribution of the post-exilic scribes to Deuteronomy and Numbers commonly ascribed to Moses, even if the entire works cannot be credited

to P, in the same way that 1 and 2 Chronicles and the Ezra –Nehemiah corpus are credited to P, a clearly post-exilic source. Secondly, the placement of materials in the Old Testament does not in any way reflect the order of composition. In relation to the issue in discussion, what appears like warning in Deuteronomy, in advance of the actual occurrence in the Kings, is actually a much later reflection. From Blenkinsopp's comment above, Deuteronomy is in fact a much finer synthesis of the Law, complete with warnings given as hindsight after the punishment of captivity, the Exile, had been fully consummated.

As touching marriage outside the covenant family in the monarchical era, it is important to realise that hardly was any of the kings exempted from it. The reference to Solomon only shows the height of inexplicable profligacy, a situation in which the king, at the full expense of the State still struggling with settlement challenges, married and maintained seven hundred wives who were to be fully accommodated in a State palace built with a heavy burden of tax on the peasants. In fact, it became necessary for the scribes to capture the daily consumption in Solomon's household;

And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour and three score measures of meal; ten fat oxen and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and hundred sheep, besides harts, and roebucks and fallow deers and fatted fowls. (1 Kings 4:22-23).

For a man who had neither industries for manufacture of goods to create wealth, nor had a robust export programme but simply passed on the heavy burden as taxes to the poor peasants in the country, this was, to say the least, callous. This burden, borne out of unbridled profligacy, was in actuality largely responsible for, and set in motion a chain of irreversible processes that culminated in the eventual collapse of the monarchy, with the attendant punishment of the captivity.

Endogamy as Primary Basis for the Post-Exilic National Reconstruction

That Ezra, in the national post-exilic reconstruction project, identified marriage outside the covenant family of Israel as the major provocation against Yahweh that led to the seventy-year captivity is readily captured in the primary condition he put forward for the national reconstruction process. Ezra had ordered that all the foreign wives married to the Israelites, as well as children born through them, be put away. This must have constituted a large demographic crisis as a result of the estimated population of the women and their children suddenly rendered homeless. Regarding this development, North (1990) observes that;

Natural law obligations of justice and decency towards spouses in good faith and utterly innocent children seem never to have entered into the heads of these reformers, excited by a kind of mob psychosis for which Ezra cannot escape blame, especially if Shecaniah's spontaneity is rigged, as seems to be the case since in verse 26, he is not one of those involved in a mixed marriage. The dangerous and casual claim that "God's rights outweigh all human considerations" can only be called fanaticism. Still less does "maximum enforceableness for existing religious authorities" take precedence over profoundly human obligations of commutative justice. On the other hand, the need of safeguarding religious truth and duty is also a natural law obligation, but the fact that the conduct of those influenced by Ezra is presented in the Bible as praiseworthy and normative does not mean that it is impeccable and inerrant. (p. 391).

North's rather emotional outburst here is an attempt to capture the inestimable volume, not just of the demographic crisis created by the incident, but much more, of the ethical misdemeanour that it represents, both on the foreign wives who had been lured out of the safe havens of parental comfort to their present homes, and the children, products of such marriages, who in any case, never exercised any prerogative of choice regarding where they would be born.

Ezra's post-exilic national reconstruction and reform hinged entirely on endogamy marked the point of total permanent separation between the Jews and the Samaritans (a large number of whom had mixed marriages). At their point of physical and political separation from the remnants of the refurbished Jewish nation, the Samaritans also instituted a spiritual separation from the Jews. It was also at this

point that the Samaritans adopted their own document of faith, called the Samaritan Pentateuch which preceded the canons of the Old Testament.

For the avoidance of doubt, the deductions of the post-exilic Priestly scribes, as developed in 1 and 2 Chronicles and the Ezra-Nehemiah corpus can be summed up as follows:

1. That the sin of the Israelites which attracted the most virulent indignation of Yahweh is exogamy, that is, instituting marital relationship outside the commonwealth of Yahweh.
2. That monarchy was the will of the Israelite people which they imposed on the prophetic party, much against the wishes of Yahweh whose over-riding will was that He would remain the ruler over his people Israel: (יהוה יְמִשֵּׁל בָּכֶם , Judges 8: 23).

For these reasons, post-exilic national reconstruction and reform were based on:

1. The concerted eviction of all the foreign wives of the Israelites as well as the expulsion of the corrupted, mixed blood of the products of such exogamous marriages.
2. The return of the people back to Yahweh their perpetual king (Hebrew, מְלִכָּה). And Ezra had the responsibility of mediating this post-exilic reform, in a sense, rediscovering the תּוֹרָה and reinstating the cult of Yahweh which Moses had earlier instituted upon Mount Sinai.

The Sudden Detour of the Post- Priestly Scribes on Endogamy

Two books of the Old Testament, written about two hundred years after Ezra's post-exilic national reform, go back to interrogate the fundamental basis of Ezra's post-exilic reform, which was hinged on the restoration of the command on endogamy. The two books are Esther and Ruth. Two other non-canonical (or Deutero-canonical, depending on which tradition one favours) books further addressed the issue, namely, Tobit and Judith. Many scholars (Boadt (1984), Menezes (2003)) agree that these books were composed specifically as a result of the socio-religious development which arose from the fallouts of Ezra's post-exilic reforms. The emphasis on endogamy from Ezra's reform led to a major exclusivist posture among the Jews in which they retracted unto themselves, in essence implying that the Jewish blood was too pure to permit any corruption in marriage with their neighbours. This situation attracted heavy Anti-Semitic persecution reactions against the Jews about 2nd Century BC. Here again, the scribes who are basically theologians, sensitive and responsive to the socio-political atmosphere, and whose duty it was to shape the theological opinions of the Jews in the light of the socio-political developments, composed the books, Ruth, Esther, Tobit, Judith, to explore the gains of exogamous marriage and thus make the Jews open up their hearts to more permissive relations with their neighbouring nations. Thus, in the second century AD, promoted by the persecution which arose against the Jews as a result of the exclusivist posture introduced by Ezra in the endogamous reform, the scribes made a sudden turn to prepare the hearts of the Jews to receive the indigenes of their neighbouring nations as people who could be of immense benefit to them.

According to Menezes (2003), the Book of Esther "reflects the widespread anti-Semitism of the times which gave rise to Jewish apologetics and polemics" (p. 109). He goes ahead to classify the Book of Esther in the category he calls "Theological Midrashim" (p. 101), further explaining that;

There are two types of midrash in Rabbinic exegesis. The first is midrash *haggada*, that is, exegesis of a biblical text by means of a narrative, whether historical or fictional. In other words, midrash is ahistorical. The other is midrash *halaka*, which applies to legal matters that govern our way of life. Here, Jewish exegetes quote the opinions of different Rabbis to solve a given problem. (p. 101).

This implies that the value of the Book of Esther does not necessarily lie in its historicity, as much as it lies in its significance as a theological treatise directed at solving a problem, in this case, exploring the gains of exogamy for the survival of the Hebrew race, in the face of a gruesome threat of total extinction occasioned by the exclusive orientation which Ezra's endogamy-based post-exilic national reform had created.

Nowell and Dumm (1990) writing, on the socio-political situation that necessitated the composition of the Book of Esther state that;

Like most writings of the post-exilic period, Esther is concerned with the painful and urgent problem of how to be a faithful Jew in a foreign environment. One common solution to this

problem was the creation of Jewish enclaves where the faithful could be insulated against the pagan world and fervently nourish a very explicit piety. Esther has a different emphasis: The Jews must participate in the affairs of state; they must appreciate the good elements in non-Jewish society and cooperate wherever possible; they must assume responsibility and not wait for God to provide some miraculous solution. To highlight this theme of personal responsibility, God is represented as a hidden deity while the personal courage and resourcefulness of Mordecai and Esther are given full play. (p. 576).

In other words, these post-Ezraic books not only interrogated Ezra's endogamous advocacy, but, in the face of Anti-Semitic pressures, began to explore the gains in marital relationships between the "holy blood" of the Jews and the "unholy blood" of their neighbours. This detour on the part of the scribes, in the face of a pronounced socio-political pressure gives deeper insight into the real attitude of the scribes in the presentation of their firm doctrinal and theological positions.

Doctrinal and Theological Flexibility in Response to Societal Pressures: The Pluralist Perspective

Pluralism is the situation in the world in which the human environment is inhabited by persons of diverse socio-religious and cultural convictions and persuasions. The circumstances of life in the modern 21st century society has created a situation in which people are compelled to share living and working environments with other persons of differing religious persuasions, and convictions. To make this coexistence possible at all, mankind must adopt such attitude to these peculiar convictions that make room for the validity, on equal premise, of other people's persuasions and convictions. One vital feature which enables this coexistence to be possible in the first instance, is a flexible orientation in the propagation of the doctrines which does not present them as moral absolutes, but as peculiar, valid perspectives, without prejudice to the validity of differing perspectives. Religion, like every other discipline of human endeavour, exists primarily for the survival and betterment of humans, and the ultimate upliftment of human conditions on earth. Religious doctrines exist to govern and direct human behaviour in such ways as promote the wellbeing of human beings in this life and beyond. It becomes problematic then when, sometimes, rudimentary religious doctrines are pursued in such manners as create for humans deliberately enslaving conditions that become inimical to the wellbeing of human beings on earth. Details of rudimentary doctrinal regulations are sometimes pursued to such finite levels that create inter-sectorial or inter-religious conflicts that end up exterminating human lives. That "the law is made for man, not man for the law" (Mk. 2:27), is one of the greatest truths ever uttered on the religious platform. The scribes who are authors of the Old Testament books have always approached religious doctrines with this understanding in view. Being the ones responsible for shaping the religious opinions of the people in relation to the socio-political environments, they have had the vital issues of their socio-political environments at the back of their minds while they composed the religious books. In the light of a new situation that demanded a reappraisal of an earlier position, they have not hesitated in inserting new narratives into the texts to reflect the demand of the later development.

In other words, the scribes were always mindful of the doctrines they meant to convey, which they held in the highest esteem. However, they did not lose sight of the present socio-political environments to which they must adapt the people's fundamental orientation, in order to enable them to profit from the emerging situations and circumstances. This is in obvious recognition of the fact that the survival of the human race is of utmost importance, and that, in any case, doctrines become possible at all only for the survived human race. In this era of inter-religious conflicts borne out of extreme fundamentalist doctrinal perfectionism, threatening to utterly annihilate of the human race in unceasing conflicts and violence, the flexible position of the Old Testament scribes in relation to doctrinal perspectives remains a worthwhile lesson for all humanity for the survival of the human race in the 21st century world facing threats of calamitous armed conflicts.

Conclusion

The prevarication of the Old Testament on theological and doctrinal positions reveals the flexible response of the scribes, authors of the Old Testament books, to the prevailing socio-political environments. This situation is clearly exemplified in the perspective regulations on endogamy. Theological flexibility, sometimes appearing as equivocation in the Old Testament, is a very vital requirement for our religious world today being torn asunder by extremist doctrinal pontification. While

doctrines are good for the preservation of the sanctity of religion, insistence on scrupulous doctrinal details that serve to unnecessarily escalate inter-sectoral conflicts rather threaten the survival of the human race, and defeat the very purpose of religion which is to preserve human life and well-being in the present life, and in the life to come.

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