

“AMEN” IN OLD TESTAMENT LITURGICAL TEXTS:

**A STUDY OF ITS MEANING AND LATER DEVELOPMENT
AS A PLEA FOR ECUMENICAL UNDERSTANDING**

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SUMMARY

“AMEN” IN OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS: A STUDY OF ITS MEANING AND LATER DEVELOPMENT AS A PLEA FOR ECUMENICAL UNDERSTANDING

Amen is the Hebrew word best known and most widely used in world religions even today. Its importance as a meaningful expression throughout biblical texts is given thorough study as well as its transmission throughout religious history. It has been transliterated and integrated into the prayers and liturgy of about every Christian church.

In this thesis amen is traced down to its usage in Old Testament texts selected according to their liturgical setting. After examining the three sets of texts, progressive development stages have been produced. The first text of Deuteronomy 27 was basically a ceremony of civil nature for a Covenant commitment. All tribes of Israel were present and the amen response was **stipulated** to confirm their allegiance to Yahweh and to acknowledge the curses threatened. The second stage in the development of amen in Old Testament worship is an **expected**, not stipulated response to answer a doxology or a prayer. At this stage amen was pronounced by the worshipping congregation in cultic situations in general, particularly in the Psalms. A third and more developed liturgical response can be found in the **spontaneous** double amen spoken by the returnees from exile gathered for the reading of the Law session at Nehemiah's time. Amen had become a thriving force and a joyful outburst – not demanded, not simply expected, but spontaneous in the believers' response to Yahweh's guidance and love.

The New Testament and Christians of all times inherited and adopted the same Hebrew word and sound of amen as confirmation and praise. A proposal is made in this study to set amen as a causal connection with the One who loved mankind first. The proposed derivation of amen

from the Hiphil Imperative remits its origin to a causative plea, and persuades people to believe in what they have just heard or said, namely, that Jesus Christ is God's amen for the salvation of all mankind. Christians of all times and places should join in the praise of God through the same faith in His Amen. Thus amen becomes a binding concept for ecumenical understanding.

**KEY TERMS: amen - Old Testament - liturgy - doxology - Psalms -
Deuteronomy - Nehemiah - etymology - semantics - ecumenism**

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Amen is the Hebrew word best known and most widely used throughout the world, particularly in the religious realm. As the Hebrew Old Testament has been translated into well over a thousand languages, most of the translations have retained and are merely using the Hebrew transliteration of אָמֵן. In this way amen has entered the domain of more languages than any other single word in human speech.

The *Pater Noster* church in Jerusalem, Israel, is built on the site where Jesus supposedly taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer. It shows the interested viewer this same prayer engraved on its walls in over one hundred and twenty different languages. Almost all of them strikingly end with amen. This surely is an indication of the widespread doxological use of amen in most languages which adopted the Hebrew expression of confirmation for their prayers, pointing back to the Old Testament use of this word and to the common origins of Christian faith.

The root אָמֵן has a wide range of etymologically related terms, which constitute a broad semantic family, as they share the basic idea of their root, 'to be firm, steadfast' and as such they carry in them the basic idea of 'support' or 'confirmation'. To trace the ramification of this basic root is the task of **chapter 2**. Some of these derivatives are significant for the elucidation of the meaning of אָמֵן, so that special attention will be given to them. The

adverbial adjective אָמֵן, as a substitute for the participle of the intransitive verb is used to express strong affirmation or assent, usually of the words spoken by another person.

The connection of the root אָמֵן with its cognates in other Semitic languages will also be highlighted in order to determine the possible origin of its meaning in Hebrew. Controversial views as to the use of etymology and semantics will be investigated. There are strong voices of prominent scholars that oppose excessive etymologising. A certain measure of freedom to establish the connection of amen to relevant derivatives of the same root will be applied.

Chapter 3 is concerned with collecting and checking all occurrences of amen in the Old Testament text. This should help to establish the different meanings of the word in biblical usage. The overview of the use of amen as it is done in this chapter is intended to be a general introduction to the main study which follows, as it presents the different patterns in which amen developed and became a remarkable component of etymological semantics. The most influential feature of amen in the Old Testament texts and which projected the word to universal use was undoubtedly its use in prayer and worship. The liturgical aspect of the use of amen is, therefore, a major theological proposition to be explored in this chapter as a preparation for the next.

The main aim of **chapter 4** is tracing the development of the various uses of amen through different stages in selected Old Testament liturgical texts. A general introduction to the concept of 'liturgy' will have to be made in order to define what is meant with 'liturgical texts' and under which criteria they were selected. It is definitely a key term which needs defining because it is basic to this part of the study. A thorough investigation into the

category of *liturgical* texts will be done in order to establish the nature of the pericopes chosen and their effect on the audience in order to elicit the response of amen.

The hypothesis that is to be tested is that amen shows a sequence of stages in its development from a solemn response that is stipulated at a civil assembly to a stage in which people meet for social or religious functions in which amen is expected as a response; and a final and highly emotional stage in which a religious community is persuaded to spontaneously respond to what has been said or to what they experience emotionally and express with a cry of assent. If this proves true, then the causative element of the amen concept will be decisive in explaining its widely accepted use throughout the past and its ecumenical potential until this day.

A brief history of the development of the use of amen in later Judaism and in the Christian Church will be sketched in **chapter 5**, to establish its preservation in inter-testamental and New Testament times as a significant heritage from Israelite worship. The continued use of amen throughout the history of the Christian Church in liturgy and prayers must have had strong reasons, and this phenomenon will have to be investigated. Emphasis has been placed on the search for historical data that may show evidence of the strong impact the profession of amen, as it happens in the New Testament occurrences, had on the believers through the ages. The contemporary use of amen still carries the same biblical thrust, so that it makes worship services more participative, more vivid, more joyful, more spontaneous. These findings stand as a pointer to what comes next as far as the preservation of the biblical amen stands as a model for a more frequent use in and between differing church bodies, particularly of Christian denominations.

This leads to **chapter 6**, in which amen will be proposed as a binding concept for ecumenical understanding. This proposal will be based on the usage of the most significant derivatives of the root אָמַן alongside with amen, namely אֱמִינָה and הָאֱמִיץ, so that a causal connection between faith and assurance in the believer of all times, as he responds to the worship situation with amen, can be established. If this can be proved and the theory supported, the findings reach their most important practical results for a new approach to the issues of religious interaction. This type of interpretation broadens the world-view of the readers and worshippers, surpassing the intellectual realm to affect their behaviour in relationship to those of different conviction. To 'believe' (hemjin) is a matter not only of the intellect, but also of the emotions and actions in a coordinated process.

Though amen has become a universal religious expression, it was not normally recited in the temple ritual. There are, however, a few instances in the books of Psalms and Nehemiah, where it became a liturgical response during Israelite worship. Originally amen must have been a formal confirmation of a judicial or religious character. Semantic changes and a historical development might have led to the formula being adopted into liturgical settings of Old Testament worship. As time passed by, amen grew in importance, because an expected response and, indeed, a spontaneous outcry of joyous agreement with the liturgical proceedings took place. A thorough investigation of this process, which will help to explain the liturgical renewal movement, is long overdue.

A final critical evaluation of the possibilities of the use of amen as a binding concept that could result in a deeper understanding of the belief expressed by the worshipper is attempted

in the present study. This may lead to a better understanding of the Jewish-Christian heritage and to a stronger appreciation of the ecumenicity the expression of amen has attained.

The literature collected is analysed as to determine the most relevant sources, amongst which there are books and theological periodicals dealing with selected topics. Further research comes to light in the bibliographies (various books and articles), and appropriate reference techniques have been taken into account in the research procedures. It is interesting to notice that in the last two decades not much has been published on the topic, compared to previous years.

Some formal remarks: The spelling of the word amen intentionally makes use of the lower case initial letter, to prove its general acceptance as being a normal part of the English vocabulary. Exceptions should be considered when the word is presented as a reply of someone in the discourse, when it will have a capital initial. The present study is written in language that will be understood by scholars, clergy and laypersons alike, with the possible exception of Hebrew and Greek words spelt out in the original language.

The thesis is intended to deal with concrete texts in well-known liturgical settings. It aims at solving problems of biblical interpretation by moving words and concepts from 'then' to now. This should encourage readers to be reflective about the way they say amen in effective worship and to gain the ecumenical disposition to make of amen a vibrant confession of Christian faith and personal belief.

CHAPTER 2

THE ROOT אָמֵן , ITS DERIVATIVES, ETYMOLOGY AND SEMANTICS

It is an accepted fact that theological studies gain from adequate linguistic methodology. The concerns, the techniques and the tools of linguistics help the researcher to study biblical word meanings. Thus a student of the Hebrew language can more easily understand and explain words that are related and whose relationship has been correctly interpreted. The present study will begin by determining how the lexical items derived from the Hebrew root אָמֵן relate to each other and shelter under a vast umbrella of semantic interdependence. Like most languages, Hebrew also has a battery of prefixes, suffixes and infixes, by means of which a single word like amen may become the nucleus of a large number of related words. This study of the etymology of אָמֵן and its derived forms will, however, be restricted to their occurrence in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

At the beginning it will be necessary to determine the meaning of the root אָמֵן and the various derived forms obtained by modifying the given root, in order to obtain the needed new terms. In order to ascertain the meaning of several derivatives of the root אָמֵן, the present study will begin by trying to establish their relationship, if any, and to examine how the basic meaning of the root is presented in them.

The root אָמַן has experienced numerous and diverse modifications and developments. The thesis of the present work is that all these words can be directly related to the basic idea of ‘support’ or ‘confirmation’. The concepts of being ‘true and faithful’, the notion of ‘being sure and certain of oneself’ and ‘possessed of strength’, also belong to this basic idea.

1 אָמַן, אֱמִין, אֱמוּנָה

All three of the words above mean ‘faithfulness, fidelity’, as they are derived from the root אָמַן, which gives them this basic meaning of ‘firmness and steadfastness’. אֱמוּנָה applies both to Yahweh's firmness (Is 33:6: אֱמוּנַת עֲתִידֶךָ) and also to human physical steadfastness (Ex 17:12: Moses' hands reflect ‘steadiness’), and a person's psychological (Ps 37:3 - enjoy safe pasture) and spiritual state (Hab 2:4: אֱמוּנָתוֹ: ‘by his faithfulness, steadiness’). As a divine attribute, אֱמוּנָה stands for God's faithfulness in his works (Ps 33:4), his commands (Ps 119:86), his oaths (Ps 89:50), and is closely related to God's mercy (Ps 89:25).

The word also appears in another feminine form, אֱמִינָה, meaning ‘faith, support’. In fact, אֱמִינָה alludes to the Hebrew background of the term ‘faith’, namely the faithfulness of God towards man as well as the faith of man in God. This word occurs fifty three times in the Old Testament Hebrew text, not only as the subject but also as the object of the sentence. It has been stated that the book of Psalms implies that this Hebrew word denoting ‘steadfastness’ and ‘firmness’ in reality applies to God and not to man, who is repeatedly characterised as physically frail and morally unstable (Ps 36:1-4) (Barr 1961:162). Barr,

however, adds a further comment to this view by saying that ‘the psalmist is comparing God and man (or certain men) and expressing his opinion that God, unlike these men, is steadfast and faithful’.

The Septuagint translates אֱמוּנָה with *πίστις* and אָמֵן with *πιστεύειν*, giving a truly accurate picture of the qualitative importance of these stems in the Old Testament and their closely related meanings. The key to this relationship is Paul's translation in Romans 1:17 (*ἐκ πίστεως*) of the statement of Habakkuk 2:4 (בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ). This shows that in the New Testament a form was adopted which was essential and basic in relation to the Old Testament view of faith. At a later stage of this study this problem will be discussed again.

2 The Hiphil Form הִאֲמִין

The meaning of Hiphil is primarily the causative of Qal, but also ‘inwardly transitive or intensive’, and inchoative (‘the entering into a certain condition’). There also exists a considerable number of denominatives which express ‘the bringing out, the producing of a thing’ (Kautzsch 1963:145). The Hiphil form הִאֲמִין has, therefore, the causative meaning of אָמֵן, ‘to let something be firm and trustworthy’.

הִאֲמִין is originally the Hiphil Perfect of אָמֵן. It means literally ‘he believed’ or ‘he became firm by an inward conviction’. Since the English language has no one single word to render the causative, a translation of הִאֲמִין requires the phrase ‘to cause, to make, to become’. ‘To trust’ is the one-word translation which comes closest to the cause/effect idea

of ‘becoming firm’. There are several occurrences of **הָאָמֵן** in the Hebrew Old Testament which express this idea. In the Oxford Advanced Dictionary (1993:1374) gives the meaning of ‘trust’ as ‘belief or willingness to believe that one can rely on the ...strength... of somebody....’ Jepsen (1974:320) refers to Pedersen’s assertion on the issue: ‘To make a man true, **הָאָמֵן**, means the same as to rely on him. It implies in his having the will and power to maintain the claims of the covenant....’

There is a distinction to be made between **הָאָמֵן** used in the absolute, the occurrences with the prepositions **בְּ** or **לְ**, with the infinitive, or with a **כִּי** clause:

- **הָאָמֵן** appears in the absolute in: Ex 4:31; Is 7:9; 28:16; Hab 1:5; Ps 116:10; Job 29:24; 39:24.
- **הָאָמֵן** appears with **בְּ**, (‘in, on’) in: Gn 15:6; Ex 14:31; 19:9; Nm 14:11; 20:12; Dt 1:32; 28:66; 1 Sm 27:12; 2 Ki 17:14; Jr 12:6; Jnh 3:5; Mi 7:5; Ps 78:22.32; 106:12; 119:66; Pv 26:25; Job 4:18; 15:15,31; 24:22; 39:12; 2 Chr 20:20.
- **הָאָמֵן** appears with **לְ** (‘in’): Gn 45:26; Ex 4:1,8 (twice), 9; Dt 9:23; 1 Ki 10:7; 2 Chr 9:6; Is 43:10; 53:1; Jr 40:14; Ps 106:24; Pv 14:15; 2 Chr 32:15.
- **הָאָמֵן** appears with an infinitive in: Ps 27:13; Job 15:32.

- **הֶאֱמִין** appears with a **כִּי** clause: Ex 4:5; Job 9:16; 39:12; Lm 4:12. No conclusions can be drawn from the occurrence of **הֶאֱמִין** in the texts of Judges 11:20 and Isaiah 30:21, as they are not accepted by many text critics.

The classic example of the usage of **הֶאֱמִין** preceded by the personal prefix, meaning ‘to trust in’ or ‘believe in someone’ (Brown, Driver & Briggs 1962:52) is found in Genesis 15:6, as the usual form to express ‘believing in God’, which will be analysed at a later stage in this study. Followed by **כִּי**, the meaning is ‘to trust or believe that’ (Ex.4:5). There are several other instances where this verbal form is used.

The Hiphil Imperative of **אָמַן** is **הֶאֱמִן**, and means ‘believe!, trust!, stand firm!’, as the horse is told when the trumpet sounds (Job 39:24 – Brown, Driver & Briggs 1962:53). From the verbal pattern **הֶאֱמִן** in the Hiphil Imperative the adverb **אֲמִן** is derived. The long â sound is the identification mark of a common derivation and is linguistically intermingled, so that one comes to the conclusion that etymologically as well as conceptually these two derive from the common root **אָמַן**. According to Kautzsch (1963:145), **אָמַן** belongs to the stems which in their Hiphil form express the entering into a certain condition. Further on, the state of being in the same condition of ‘becoming firm, believing, trusting’ appears as an inwardly transitive or intensive and imperative mood.

Further evidence should concur towards a clear relationship between **הָאֱמִיץ** and **אֱמִץ**, and that will be brought forward in the sixth chapter of the present study, as to the causative ties between the believer and the divine cause of his/her beliefs.

3 The Niphal Form **נִאֲמַץ**

The Niphal of the root **אֱמִץ** appears thirty two times predominantly as a participle, while it is found in the perfect tense only five times, and eight times in the imperfect. The feminine form **נִאֲמַצְתִּי**, as in Psalm 89:29 is to be translated as ‘my covenant will be made firm, inflexible’. As such it appears more often in connection with the promise or covenant made concerning the Davidic dynasty. In this sense it stands for God’s promise being **נִאֲמַץ**, which has been suitably translated by Jepsen (1974:296) as ‘continuous, enduring, lasting’, the agent of the passive voice being God himself.

The Niphal form has been used a few times to express the relationship of an individual towards God. Thus Abraham is said in Nehemiah 9:8 to have been found **נִאֲמַץ**: ‘You found his heart *faithful* to you, and you made a covenant with him (**כָּרוּת עִמּוֹ הַבְּרִית**) to give to him the land....’ Surprisingly, another expression, **אֲנַחְנוּ כִּרְתִּים אִמְנָה** (‘we make a firm alliance’) is used in Nehemiah 10:1, at the end of the long prayer recorded in the previous chapter, to describe the covenant act which is there being celebrated. According to Holmgren (1992:250), the use of **אִמְנָה** for a ‘faithful alliance or covenant’ in connection with a **נִאֲמַץ** (‘faithful’) Abraham should be explained in the following terms: ‘Abraham’s faithfulness was the basis of God’s covenant with him which included

the promise of the land. If the exiles are to recover fully Abraham's land, then there must be a return to Abraham-faithfulness – a sincere return to Abraham's God'. The promise of the covenant, which is being renewed in the post-exilic reunion, is rediscovered in the light of the 'faithful' covenant which Yahweh made with Abraham at the beginning of Israel's history.

נֶאֱמָן may also be understood to mean 'reliable', as in the words applied to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:20: 'And all Israel ... recognised that Samuel was *attested* as a prophet of Yahweh'. In the plural form נֶאֱמָנִים, used in Nehemiah 13:13, the governor's helpers 'were *made responsible* for distributing the supplies to their brothers'.

4 אֱמָנָה

The form אֱמָנָה is closely connected to אֱמָנָה, and its meaning as a noun is 'nurturing, sustenance, nourishment' (Es 2:20); as a participial adverb (formed by the root אֱמָן with the addition of the suffix הַ) 'verily, truly, indeed' (Brown, Driver & Briggs 1962:53) (Gn 20:12; Jos 7:20). The actual adverbial form is אֱמָנָה (formed by the root אֱמָן together with the suffix הַ). This form, however, always appears in a question. As in the case of the previous derivative, this one also carries the basic meaning of אֱמָן, 'firm, steady, safe'.

5 אֱמֶת

As the **א** frequently vanishes from a word, changing the original word almost beyond recognition, it has been commonly accepted that the word אֱמֶת 'truth' is a nominal derivative of the root אָמַן . It occurs one hundred and twenty six times in the Old Testament, or one hundred and twenty one times, if we do not take the doublets into consideration (Jepsen 1974:309). According to Jepsen, the explanation for the Masoretic vocalisation of אֱמֶת is debatable. After attempting to explain his position about the phonetic development of the derivation, he concludes:

Thus, until strong evidence is produced to the contrary, it still seems best to maintain that אֱמֶת is to be derived from אָמַן, which is also suggested by the meaning of the two words, without being able to say anything conclusive about the form.... The word אֱמֶת is regularly translated into Greek as ἀλήθεια and ἀληθινός by the Septuagint. The basic meaning of the root אָמַן is probably associated with the meanings for אֱמֶת : 1. stability, reliability; 2. durability, permanence; 3. faithfulness; 4. truth.

(Jepsen 1974:310)

With reference to the semantic field of אֱמֶת , Barr (1961:191) adds the following: 'Thus the Hebrew *'emeth* is not only translated by ἀλήθεια but by πίστις and δικαιοσύνη '. He mentions that Aquila [Ponticus], a Jewish translator of the Old Testament into Greek, who 'often tried to mark words of common Hebrew etymology by Greek formations of common origin, used πίστις for *'emunah* and ἀλήθεια for *'emeth* with much consistency' (Barr 1961:200).

As for the rendering of אֱמֶת as the equivalent of *δικαιοσύνη*, the noun occurs six times in the Greek translation and the adjective *δίκαιος* four times. This may not be sufficient to prove the point, but it strongly supports the assumption that the translators of the Septuagint did consider *δικαιοσύνη* as belonging to the semantic field of אֱמֶת.

אֱמֶת was used of things or persons that needed to be proved as reliable. Above all, אֱמֶת relates to the nature of God. In Psalm 31:6[5] Yahweh is called אֱלֹהֵי אֱמֶת, 'God of truth' or 'faithful God'. In his closing remarks about this word, Jepsen (1974:316) says: '*Emeth* is God's reliability, which is given to man But continually there is uncertainty as to whether '*emeth* is in man 'Truth', 'faithfulness' and 'reliability' are God's, but man ignores these qualities; often he even rejects them'.

6 יָמִין

There is another form of the root אָמַן which is spelt יָמִין, due to the fact that אָ frequently alternates with יָ. The most common of these derivatives is יָמִין, 'the right hand', in the sense of the stronger hand (Horowitz 1960:26). From this root a number of derivatives are formed: יָמִין 'right', as an adjective; הִיָּמִין, the Hiphil form, meaning 'he went right' or 'towards the right', הַיָּמִין South, South wind, namely what is on the right hand as one faces the East. Another significant meaning of יָמִין is that of rising 'the right hand in confirming an oath' (Brown 1962:401). In its Hiphil form, the verb הִיָּמִין has the basic meaning of 'going to or choosing the right', 'using the right hand', as evidence of a

true, correct decision; in its figurative usage it means ‘taking or choosing the right course/path in life’, and is thus closely connected to the basic meaning of אָמַן.

7 Other Nouns Derived from אָמַן

There are several other nouns that are derived from the root אָמַן and all of them convey the basic idea of ‘support, firmness’ or ‘confirmation’.

אָמֵן or אָמִין is the word for a ‘foster father’, as one who supports and nourishes a family group, giving it stability and firmness. The feminine form אָמֵנָה stands for ‘foster mother’ and includes the idea of ‘nourishing’, ‘strengthening’.

אָמֵן denotes ‘a skilled workman’ and is now used in the sense of ‘artisan, craftsman’ (Horowitz 1960:26). The derivative אָמֵן has been used for ‘artist’, or for a master craftsman’s art work as in Can 7:1: ‘Your graceful legs are like jewels, the work of a craftsman’s hands’ in the sense of a certified gem like those used on the golden ephod of the high priest, in order to identify and confirm his position (Ex.28:11).

אָמֵן is a verbal form with characteristics of Piel, and means ‘trained’ in the sense of a result of intensive training, in order to become physically fit and skilled. From this one other forms are derived, such as the noun אָמֵן , ‘trainer’. It strongly implies the idea of ‘getting strong’ and is thus related to the basic meaning of אָמַן.

אָמֵן is a Piel derivative used adjectivally, and means ‘verified’, firm.

8 אָמֵן

After having examined the different derivations from the root אָמֵן, one is now confronted with the adverbial form אָמֵן, which is by far the best-known word derived from this root.

It has been transliterated into the Greek of the Septuagint and of the New Testament as *ἀμήν*. It occurs in Jewish rites expressing assent of the congregation to the content of a prayer. The Christian Church followed this example, keeping the Hebrew form as a vital part of its prayer language.

אָמֵן is the so-called ‘verbal adjective’ form, where the participle of the intransitive verb is replaced by an adjective (Kautzsch 1963:230), as in אָקֵן ‘old, an old man’; כָּבֵד ‘heavy’; thus אָמֵן, ‘firm’, a ‘firm conviction’.

Thus אָמֵן belongs to the category of nominal forms of the verb, being a derivative of the *qatil* type, which developed to אָמֵן, mostly with an intransitive meaning. (Kautzsch 1963:230) This meaning of the conditional form can easily be understood, since the certainty and firmness expressed here takes on the special nuance of ‘untouchable validity’ (‘untastbare Gültigkeit’, Pfeiffer 1958:131). The actual meaning of אָמֵן is ‘something firm, constant, valid’, ‘truth’, which developed into ‘truly, certainly’ in the way the Hebrew noun is used adverbially (Pfeiffer 1958:132). However, the way אָמֵן is used in the Old Testament wherever it occurs, suggests that one can only explain it as an ‘indeclinable or conversational particle’ (Pfeiffer:1958:132). Lande (1949:112) considers אָמֵן to be an

indeclinable particle which is used as confirmation of a very special situation, and not pertaining to everyday speech.

Hulst (1953:50) tries to accommodate the different views by stating: ‘The word *amen* does not belong to the words of constant daily use; it is kept for use in very special situations and besides that it seldom occurs’. It is as such – as a word used in very special situations, the cultic and liturgical – that *amen* will be followed up in the sequence of the present study.

9 The Root אָמַן in Related Semitic Languages

אָמַן is a root common to the main Semitic languages. Therefore an additional task will be to examine the extent to which this root is used in the other Semitic languages and the meaning they attach to it. Kautzsch (1963:2) points out that the better-known Semitic languages, divided into South Semitic (Arabic and Ethiopian), East Semitic (Accadian and Assyro-Babylonian) and North Semitic (Aramaic and Syriac), are a family of languages each of which ‘exhibit[s] numerous peculiarities which collectively constitute its distinctive character, although many of them, as to [their grammatical structure] are found singly in other languages’. The Hebrew of the Old Testament, together with Phoenician and Punic belongs to the Middle Semitic or Canaanitic branch, according to the same author (Kautzsch 1963:3).

The usage of the root *'aman* is common to these languages, as will become clear forthwith. The Arabic language is one of the most important languages of this group. In Arabic the root *amn* appears in the transitive form *amana* and in the two intransitive forms *amina* and *amuna*, which are related to the Hebrew form. The predominant meaning is ‘to be safe,

secure, not endangered', in German: 'ungefährdet' (Kautzsch 1963:2). The common element which points to the root in these two languages being equivalent, is the concept of certainty, the idea that one can be absolutely sure and that one's trust is unshaken.

A similar use of the root אָמַן is found in Ethiopian, a South Semitic language closely related to Arabic. Here the basic meaning is 'to be true, to trust, to believe', which, according to Pfeiffer (1958:130), expresses the same notion as does the Hebrew Hiphil mode.

In Accadian the stem *amn* appears only in derivations. According to Pfeiffer (1958:129) the nominal adjective *umnâmu* corresponds to the Hebrew *omnan*, 'craftsman, artist', in the sense of someone who is 'trained, skilled in the arts, experienced'. The use of this derivative meaning 'competence in some kind of performance, firm and tested in some activity' is an important contribution of the Accadian language in shedding light on the meaning of the stem אָמַן.

Syriac is a language that flourished between the third and seventh centuries AD, so that using it in comparative studies has its problems. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the stem *amn* in Syriac in its Peal form has the meaning of 'being steadfast, persistent, to hold out'. The meaning of the derived stem *Ethpeel* is 'to persevere, to stay firm', which is thus very close to the Hebrew Niphal אָמַן .

Pfeiffer (1958:130) refers to Proksch, who calls attention to Canaanitic, which is a Central Semitic language and therefore more closely related to Hebrew. This scholar states that the word family *aman* belongs to most members of the Semitic group of languages. The

meaning of the root goes beyond the literal and attains the figurative realm signifying ‘to support, back up’, and therefore ‘to make or become unshakeable, imperturbable’. The extent of the meaning in most Central Semitic languages supports the Hebrew diversified use of the root **אמן** in the Old Testament text.

10 The Question of Etymology in the Light of Recent Semantic Studies

A fierce debate has been under way among linguists during the last three or four decades concerning the exaggerated importance that used to be given to etymology. Main tendencies in this area were amongst others: the search for a *Grundbedeutung* (‘basic meaning’) for Hebrew roots; the analysis of words into component morphemes; the identification of adoptions from another language (Greenfield 1993:27ff). The present study is concerned amongst others with the debate mentioned above and will take into consideration the fact that the etymological issue in determining the meaning of amen has not been finalised. An attempt, therefore, will be made to investigate the occurrences of the word and its concept in liturgical texts of the Old Testament.

10.1 Barr, Albright, Nida

Barr is supposedly the first linguist who strongly opposed the exaggerated use of etymology, as he says that ‘excessive etymologizing is accompanied as so often [sic] by the “root fallacy”, and the essential linguistic procedure or independent semantic checking for each form and occurrence is correspondingly neglected’ (Barr 1961:163-164). He points to some difficulties that must be addressed when he says:

It seems desirable that modern semantic study should distinguish adequately between elements of meaning that were relevant to the

speakers and writers and elements that may be validly perceived through modern linguistic methods but that were probably unknown to the actual language users. Our etymological interests may reveal ways in which terms are related, ways that may be interesting to the modern reader, but these same ways may have been quite outwith the consciousness of native speakers and writers in ancient times.

(Barr 1993:13)

A linguist must be allowed a certain measure of freedom or even arbitrariness in the choices he makes in attempting to reach a certain goal. The present attempt should be put in the area of etymological semantics, which is a blend of etymology and a further semantic study of the development in the usage of *amen* in biblical times and thereafter. The diachronic changes in the usage of *amen* in different stages within the classical period of Hebrew will also be pointed out.

Albright (1949:31) takes a similar stance as **Barr**, as he considers the linguistic method of tracing the etymology and the original meaning of words as outdated. As opposed to the trend of Bible Manuals of the past, namely to enforce the predominance of etymology, which led to many untenable conclusions, he proposes that one should collect as many passages as possible in which the word occurs, in order to establish the variety and nuances of its meanings in context.

According to another view, that of **Nida**, ‘a common mistake has been to regard the presumed historical development of meaning as reflecting the “true meaning” of a word’ (Nida 1972:85). This view would apparently outdate and overthrow the study done so far on the root **אמן** and would invalidate the present attempt to determine that the root contains the key to the proper understanding of its various meanings and the development

thereof. In the present author's opinion, however, this is not the case, as Nida himself presents a more cautious position when arguing further:

Etymologies, whether arrived at by historical documentation or by comparative analysis, are all very interesting and may provide significant clues to meaning, but they are no guarantee whatsoever that the historical influence is a factor in the people's actual use of such linguistic units. Valid lexicography must depend in the ultimate analysis upon patterns of co-occurrence in actual discourse.

(Nida 1972: 85)

10.2 An Investigation into Louw's Theory of Words and their Meanings

In his book *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (1982), Louw defends the theory that semantics is concerned with much more than merely the 'meaning' of words, phrases, and paragraphs, and that meaning operates on different levels: that of words, sentences, paragraphs, even that of the total discourse (Louw 1982:viii). He points out that the study of the structure of meaning is a relatively new field, and that the subject of semantics had not until then been incorporated into a section of any one grammar. Louw initially directs attention to the traditional view that semantics has been concerned only with the meaning of words rather than with the 'structure' of meaning. Dictionaries tend to present the most popular translation equivalents with no specification as to how far they cover the same range of meaning as the original word.

In chapter 6 Louw goes on to assert that a word does not have a meaning without a context, and that in this case it only has possibilities of meaning. When used in a context, he says, the situation and the syntactic environment contribute to the choice between the several possibilities of meaning. And 'although a word has only one meaning each time it is used,

there are exceptions', as in the case of intentional ambiguities or when the author intended both meanings by a play on words (Louw 1982:40).

The main assertion that summarises Louw's view on the subject is that a semantic analysis must begin with the related meanings of different words rather than with the different meanings of the same word. He says: 'This means that linguistically it is important that we must analyse meanings and the word signifying them rather than words and the meanings they have' (Louw 1982:45). In other words, he doesn't want people to say that words have meanings, but that meanings have a set of relations for which a word, a verbal symbol is a sign. This is to say that one must start with meanings rather than with words.

In further chapters Louw strongly emphasises that semantics is more than the meaning of words and of sentences. All the things that contribute to meaning, all elements of language - morphemes, words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, even the total document or narrative - must be explored.

The studies of Louw as presented in the above mentioned book have become the subject of standard studies of New Testament Greek during the last two decades, setting the pace and tone of much that followed. The task of the present study is to analyse and apply, if possible, Louw's principles, which focus on texts and meanings of the New Testament, to the Old Testament and specifically to the meaning of amen in the context of everyday speech, in judicial terminology and above all in liturgical language.

Earlier in this chapter a relationship has been established between the various forms deriving from the root אָמֵן. Following Louw's steps, this study began its analysis with the related meanings of the different words that derive from אָמֵן. To pose the problem in the

light of Louw's explanation, different meanings have different verbal symbols as signs within the ambit of the same root. אָמֵן would, therefore, be a 'common component' (Louw 1982:33), binding the various meanings together and at the same time distinguishing them from one another.

A first kind of meaning that can be distinguished on the level of understanding is the 'cognitive' one. אָמֵן and אִמָּה, for instance, are of this kind and are referents to אָמֵן in practical, everyday speech. Cognitive meanings are often called referential meanings. The referential or cognitive meaning of אָמֵן in secular, non-biblical Hebrew is 'foster-father', which would be its encyclopaedic type of meaning. In its grammatical and linguistic form it is a Qal Participle of the root אָמֵן, meaning 'someone who is firm and supportive'. The word is found twice as a masculine in Biblical texts, in Numbers 11:12 and in Isaiah 49:23, and twice as feminine, in the sense of 'nurse'. One could wonder how the common component of אָמֵן, 'to be firm, faithful' would apply to the referent 'foster-father' or 'nurse'. The task of binding these meanings together and of giving a foster-father the strong image of someone who is supportive and cares is imperative at the beginning of every attempt to treat these meanings exegetically.

It seems that not all of the types of meaning presented by Louw are applicable to explain the relationship between words and their meanings, or meanings and words that are able to serve as verbal symbols to them. The referent אִמָּה, for instance, is explained in all dictionaries as 'truth'. It is debatable whether the grammatical and linguistic category of אִמָּה falls into the realm of the common component or root אָמֵן. One should be able to

detect that the ך has been dropped in the process of אמת becoming a verbal symbol, with the addition of the ך at the end. It seems that the letter ך, when it comes as the second letter of a syllable – not the first – is somewhat difficult to pronounce. It is therefore eliminated completely from the word or is changed (Horowitz 1960:32), which would explain the relationship of אמת, ‘truth’, to the basic meaning of אמן, ‘firm’ and ‘faithful’.

The cognitive kind of meaning of אמת takes up some figurative aspects, like ‘peace’ and ‘stability’ (שָׁלוֹם וְאֵמֶת in Is 39:8); or as another attribute of God (אֱלֹהִים אֵמֶת in Jr 10:10). The figurative element is based upon the cognitive meaning, yet constitutes a separate meaning usually belonging to a quite different semantic domain than that of the cognitive meaning. A good example for this in Old Testament Hebrew is Genesis 49:9, where in his farewell benediction the patriarch Jacob calls his son Judah a גִּבּוֹר אַרְיֵה יְהוּדָה (‘Judah is a lion’s cub’). The cognitive meaning of אַרְיֵה is the wild, strong king of the beasts. The metaphorical, or figurative, extension of the cognitive meaning is the strength and possibly the perseverance of a lion that in this context is applied to Judah as the heir of the Messianic promise, which follows in the next verse.

Louw also adduces an emotive kind of meaning, which can be attached to a word to give it an emotional value. Emotive meanings apply to ‘feelings’ associated with words or phrases and these may be highly individual, or they may apply to particular circumstances only (Louw 1982:56). The word or verbal symbol יָמִין is grammatically related to its root אמן.

In its **cognitive category** it stands for ‘right hand’ in the sense of the stronger hand, or

simply 'right' as an adjective. In another context the verbal symbol יָמִין may take a **figurative meaning** like 'south', in the sense of 'what is at your right hand when you face the rising sun or the east'. It is thus used many times in Old Testament texts (1 Sm 23:19, 24;). The same verbal symbol יָמִין may appear in some contexts in an **emotive meaning**, like that of Psalm 16:11: (בְּיָמֶיךָ נִצְחָה), 'at your right (hand) (there is) pleasure'; and in Isaiah 44:20 (שֶׁקֶר בְּיָמֵי), 'an untruth in my right hand', which means 'in my interior', as it appears in parallelism with 'a deluded heart' in the same verse. The whole section is made up of questions in which the prophet is carried away in anger over idolatrous procedures among his own people, so that the word as it is used in this context acquires an emotive overtone.

Louw also mentions the **grammatical meaning** of certain words. Depending on the grammatical grouping of a word, it can have different meanings. In Hebrew that is the case, among others, of the Hiphil form. A verb used in the Hiphil carries a load of meanings which must be correctly understood. Besides the causative meaning, Jepsen (1974:299) adduces six other possibilities of the Hiphil besides the causative: '*to declare* to be right'; '*to become* fat; *to act* foolishly; *to obtain* horns; *to break out* in rejoicing; and finally it is sometimes equal to Qal. The present task is not to solve the problem of the linguistic usage of the Hiphil, but to learn how the root אָמַן was used, and then perhaps one will be in position to determine the category to which the Hiphil form הִאֲמִין belongs. In any case, הִאֲמִין is the most striking example of the importance of examining the grammatical meaning as it is to be done in this study.

10.3 The Horowitz Graphic

In his book *How the Hebrew Language Grew*, Horowitz presents the story of the growth of the Hebrew language from a mere handful of words to its present rich state. He departs from the assumption that language is logical and that all of its phenomena have reasonable explanations. He very confidently states the following:

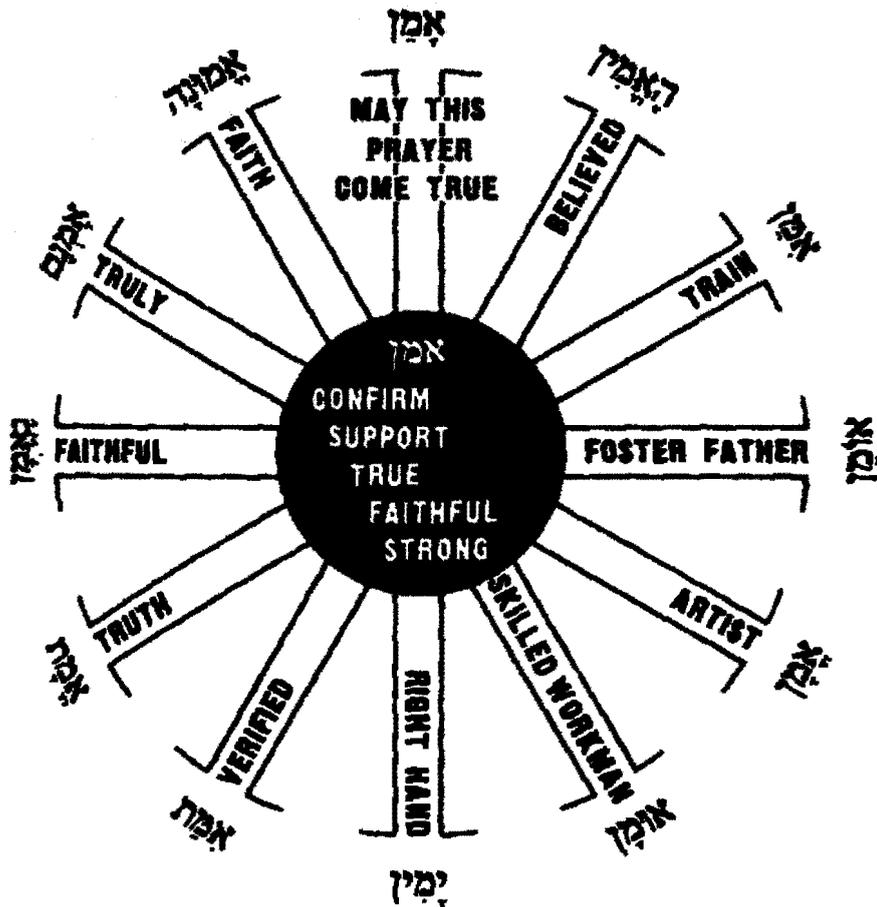
Every language has its machinery of prefixes, suffixes, and infixes by means of which a single word or root may become the center of a large number of words. We will trace all these family relationships between Hebrew words. You will see clearly how this very highly limited number of roots (probably less than two hundred) has produced literally tens of thousands of words. It will be, or should be, an intellectual adventure to note the existence of relationships where none has been noted or suspected before.... Words that are related and whose relationship is seen and understood are easier to master and retain.

(Horowitz 1960:xvii)

Horowitz's intention is to present in a systematic way the rational explanations for Hebrew linguistic phenomena, insofar as they touch on morphology. Then he comes to the point by saying: 'Etymology tells us where specific words come from and something of their history' (Horowitz 1960:xviii). Even though he admits that in the field of etymology there are wide differences of opinion among scholars, he nevertheless asserts that a 'word must carry in it something of the meaning of the root' (Horowitz 1960:22). This is, according to him, the irresistible logic of all word-building in Hebrew. It is by far the most important and most fundamental law of the Hebrew language. One should be able to arrive at the meaning of a word without too much intellectual exertion. One can do word building in Hebrew by using its vast, far-flung language structure. He then goes on to demonstrate its flexibility by ways in which the root can be changed about to create new words. It should be possible, according to Horowitz, to work out the basic meaning of a root, which would

lead easily and clearly to every word listed under it, as he does in the graphic below with the root אמת.

To prove his point Horowitz explains in chapter three of his book that ‘the Hebrew root has usually three consonants’ (Horowitz 1960:22), and by using אמת he illustrates the variety of words derived from one root, a line of thought that was taken up in the present chapter. The following graphic appears in Horowitz’s book in chapter 3, which is called: ‘The Hebrew root has three consonants – usually’. According to his explanation, practically all words in Hebrew go back to a root, and this root must normally have in it three consonants.



He further affirms: ‘You can do anything you want to the root: you can use it in any verb form or tense, you can turn it into any one of ten or twenty or more nouns. You can make it an adjective, adverb, preposition, or what you will.... No matter what you do you will always see staring you in the face the three consonants of the root. You can never escape them’ (Horowitz 1960:22).

Horowitz is evidently an etymologist and his arguments must be respected, even though he seems to take the etymological issue to its utmost consequences. As a long-time Hebrew teacher he bases his position on the fact that words that are related and whose relationship is seen and understood are easier to master and retain. By using אָמֵן he illustrates the variety of words derived from one root, taking as example a most loved Hebrew word. He says that by saying amen the Hebrew people ‘expressed their every hope that God would be merciful to them and grant them their heart’s desire’ (Horowitz 1960:25).

11 Summary and Methodological Remarks

The present study, as stated in this chapter, departs from etymological premises and takes into account the importance of the root אָמֵן and its history, as explained and defended by Horowitz. Even though this method might be challenged, it should be acknowledged that amen outgrows all normal projections by its widespread use and for having been alive in its effects on believers for centuries. From this point onward, therefore, this author will try to gain from positive elements contained in apparently contradicting views as referred to above: on the one hand the linguistic procedure suggested by Barr will be applied by checking semantically each occurrence of amen in the Hebrew Old Testament text; and on the other hand, as Albright suggests, all passages in which the amen occurs will be

collected, in order to establish the variety and nuances which its meaning underwent in specific liturgical contexts in which it is used. Nida's well-known scientific approach to translation and his principle referred to above of a word's co-occurrence in actual discourse will be very helpful in dealing with the different patterns of the usage of amen. And last but not least, Louw's findings in the area of the cognitive, grammatical and emotional meaning of words will be followed particularly in the development of amen as an emotional outcry from a believer's mouth.

Finally, it was in the form of a liturgical concept that the word amen was handed over to Christianity and passed on throughout the ages as an emotive plea for ecumenical understanding among Christians down to the present time.

CHAPTER 3

THE USAGE OF AMEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Amen occurs thirty times in the Hebrew Old Testament text. Basically it is used in four different meanings, not only in a religious, but also in a conversational context. In all these cases amen is the acknowledgement of a statement that is valid, and the validity of which is binding for the person or persons involved. These uses will be listed and explained under the four sub-titles of the present chapter.

1 Amen as Ratification of Somebody's Words

1.1 1 Kings 1:36

וַיֹּאמֶר אָמֵן בֶּן יֹאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ

And he answered, 'Amen! Yahweh, the God of my lord the king will say so, too!'

In one of the oldest texts of the Bible a ceremony is described during which king David makes arrangements about the successor to his throne. He tells his main warrior, Benaiah, who was soon to become the chief commander of Israel's army, to proceed with the ritual of announcing Solomon king. In what may be called an 'Initial Amen' (Hogg 1897:1), Benaiah confirms and accepts the king's command, replying: 'Amen! Yahweh, the God of my lord the king will say so, too!' This use of amen has also been called an 'interjectional use' (Seybold 1992:111). The warrior reacts to the command with a military-style, concise

reply which is equivalent to an emphatic 'yes!'. As Benaiah carries out his master's request immediately, his endorsement of the command by means of amen corroborates the emphatic aspect of the word usage.

1.2 Jeremiah 28:6

וַיֹּאמֶר יְרֵמְיָה הַנְּבִיא אָמֵן כִּן יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה

And the prophet Jeremiah said, 'Amen, Yahweh may do this!'

When the false prophet Hananiah foretold that Yahweh would bring the sacred vessels together with all the exiles back to Jerusalem within two years, Jeremiah replies: 'Amen, Yahweh may do so!' With this answer Jeremiah expresses his desire for the fulfilment of Hananiah's prophesy, in spite of the fact that he knew that it would not happen. The emphatic אָמֵן works even as a confirmation of something which is contrary to one's own convictions. Seybold (1992:112) agrees with this explanation: 'Bestätigung wider Willen ist knapp, formelhaft, fast zu knapp, und so mit hörbar skeptischem Unterton vorgebracht, und zeigt, daß Jeremias wünscht, die Worte des Hananja möchten sich bestätigen. Doch der Wunsch ist kein guter Zeuge'.

Hulst (1953:61) confirms this view: 'Laat me alleen mogen opmerken, dat ook hier in Jer. 28 het woord Amen kan worden opgevat als een uiting van een onwankelbare zekerheid, dat aan de macht van Babel's koning een einde zal komen en dat men dus aan Jeremia's woorden hier niet aanstonds en voetstoots het karakter van een wens behoeft te geven'.

In the two instances cited אָמֵן is also called a ‘conversational particle’, and stands by itself, prefixed to an exclamatory particle, expressing a wish, ‘So be it!’ (Hogg 1897:3).

1.3 Jeremiah 11:5

וַאֲעַן וְאָמַר אָמֵן יְהוָה

I answered and said, ‘Amen, Yahweh!’

When the word came from Yahweh to Jeremiah that the people of Judah were to keep his covenant and would be cursed if they did not, the prophet answered: ‘Amen, Yahweh!’. In this case God is addressed voluntarily by the prophet, as a natural reaction, without being told to do so or to use this formulation. Jeremiah endorses Yahweh's words of doom and of promise, and in this way expresses his agreement with the content of the Lord's words.

In Jeremiah 11:5 there is no cultic or ceremonial connotation. The prophet is told what to say to the people, and he spontaneously reacts with ‘Amen, Lord!’. In spite of the similarity of this use of amen to the next category to be considered, which will be of a prescribed or expected response to a curse or oath, here the prophet expresses his agreement in a natural way, without any constraint and without being forced to do so. This aspect of the amen response will be studied next.

2 Amen as Confirmation and Acceptance of a Curse or an Oath

2.1 Numbers 5:22

וְאָמְרָה הָאִשָּׁה אָמֵן אָמֵן

Then the woman will say, ‘Amen, amen!’

The dating of the Numbers 5 text and its ordeal ritual ('Ordalrituals') is not a matter of unanimity among critics. The commonly accepted view is that it belongs to the Priestly Code and the Deuteronomist. The formula assigned by the priestly writer to the woman suspected of adultery in the oath of purgation (Nm 5:22) is a double 'amen, amen', even though in the Targums it is in the singular (Hogg 1897:3). The woman does not repeat the entire oath verbatim, exactly as spoken, but she must confirm and endorse the wording of the curse by means of the double amen before she drinks the bitter water and presents the grain offering for jealousy. Seybold (1992:113) defines this ritual as a self-testimony ('Selbstbezeugung') beside the given meaning of acceptance of the divine curse: 'Die Formel fungiert hier anstelle des eigenen Sprechens der Selbstverfluchung - wovor man offenbar zurückschreckt - und drückt zugleich im Voraus die Anerkennung des ergehenden Gottesurteils aus. Die Wiederholung dient der Bestätigung der ersten Anerkennung und hat wohl den Sinn einer Selbstbezeugung'.

2.2 Deuteronomy 27:15-26

וַעֲנוּ כָּל־הָעָם וַאֲמָרוּ אָמֵן

Then all the people will say, 'Amen!'

The oldest collective response with amen is found in Deuteronomy.27:15-26. The Deuteronomist makes all the people say amen to each of the twelve curses threatened at Mount Ebal. All Israel has been gathered for the purpose of some kind of ritual, most probably that of a covenant ceremony. For the purposes of this study it is not necessary to consider against whom the curses are directed, since this is not clearly stated in the pericope. The first verse, however, reflects a basic requirement of the covenant, namely

that the people of Yahweh should serve him alone. The Levites, who are to direct the ceremony, are given a specific curse for anyone who fails to serve Yahweh alone, and all the people should consent by saying 'Amen!'

Even a superficial scrutiny of the series of indictments in Deuteronomy 27:15-26 makes it apparent that the curses are directed at individuals. Although Israel as a whole listens and responds to the curses, each sentence of doom is pronounced upon every individual member of the congregation. The keeping of the terms of the covenant is a personal responsibility, but the violation of a covenant rule by a member of the community also affects his relationship to the whole group. This leads to the conclusion that the people's answer and confirmation through a repeated amen was definitely part of a liturgical procedure that developed to express complete individual and group allegiance to the Lord of the covenant.

This pericope will be studied more extensively in the next chapter, but it should become clear at this stage already that the confirmation formula of Deuteronomy 27:15-26 for the first time assumes a 'confessional character in the mouth of a community, as it turns later into a steady use' (Seybold 1992:114).

2.3 Nehemiah 5:13

וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל-הַקְּהָל אָמֵן

Then the whole congregation said, 'Amen!'

In this passage amen embraces both the present and the following use of the word. It is used to confirm an oath and is at the same time a response expressed by a large meeting

(קָהָלָה גְרוּלָה v 7), gathered to listen to their leader, which ends with an expected positive response at the end of the discourse, as an agreement to it. To the governor's challenge the assembly of the people replied in consent: 'Amen!'

The setting of the passage is a civil one and not religious. Nehemiah was the governor and not a priest or any religious authority, and he therefore would not have been entitled to call a religious meeting. He called the people together to deal with the exacting land owners in what could be called a public hearing. It is also not religious matters that are on the agenda, even though the oppression of the people was a vital issue in the governor's and also in God's eyes. And even though the קָהָל was not of an essentially liturgical nature, the people present answered with amen and praised the Lord (v 13). The spoken promise is followed by redeeming their pledge.

One could conclude that the meeting ended in a religious or liturgical atmosphere, and that the amen here professed was at the same time a confirmation of an oath and a liturgical response, since the book of Nehemiah gives evidence of this reasoning in another distinct instance (8:6), which will be discussed next.

3 Amen as Approval at the Close of a Doxology

3.1 Nehemiah 8:6

וַיְבָרֶךְ עֲזָרָא אֶת־יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים הַגְּדוֹל וַיַּעֲנוּ כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן אָמֵן

בְּמַעַל יְדֵיהֶם וַיִּקְרְאוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ לַיהוָה אַפְסִים אֲרָצָה:

Then Ezra thanked Yahweh, the great God, and all the people responded, 'Amen, amen!' as they raised their hands and then bowed with their faces to the ground and worshipped Yahweh.

This passage depicts a definite religious setting as opposed to the previous one. Ezra enters the scene without prior introduction. As a scribe and priest, descendant of the Aaronic family (Ezr 7:5), he was told to bring out the *Book of the Law of Moses* (Ne 8:1) and to read it to the assembly called together for the purpose of renewing the people's allegiance to the Lord. The meeting evidently had a distinct liturgical nature, and the people lifted up their hands, showing their acceptance of what had been read, and then affirmed their assent by saying twice: 'Amen, amen!'.¹

In this late tome of the Old Testament we find amen uttered as a response of the gathering to a prayer as it has been said by Ezra on their behalf. This is a clear evidence pointing to a definite liturgical usage of amen in the believers' worship ritual, expressing their assent and approval as well as a doxology.

3.2 1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48

- 1 Chronicles 16:36:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן

Then all the people said, 'Amen!'

- Psalm 106:48:

וַאֲמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן הַלְלוּ־יָהּ

And all the people shall say, 'Amen, hallelujah!'

When David became king over all Israel and had made Jerusalem his capital city, he had the tabernacle set up in a place prepared for it on Mount Zion. With great solemnity and rejoicing the ark of the covenant was brought from Baalah and installed in the tabernacle. The scene depicts a detailed procession of highly liturgical form and content. The Chronicles, a relatively late writing of the Old Testament, renders David's psalm in 1 Chronicles 16. In verse 7 it is said that on that day David for the first time (בְּרֵאשִׁי) designated Asaph and his brothers to praise Yahweh with hymns.

The psalm in 1 Chronicles 16 is found in various versions in different parts of the Psalter: Ps 105:1-15,35,36; Ps 96:1-13,35,36; Ps 106:47,48. This last verse (Ps 106:48) is analogous to 1 Chronicles 16:36. Both verses are definitely part of the liturgical procedure in Israel's worship, where the final amen is uttered as a response of the קְהָל assembled to praise the Lord (הַלְלֵנוּ יְיָ), affirming their assent to a prayer said on their behalf. The difference between the two verses is the use of the verbal form, which in 1 Chronicles is 'the people said' (וַיֹּאמְרוּ) as compared with the Qal Perfect form (וַיֹּאמְרוּ) in Psalm 106:48, which translates 'the people shall say'. The variant ascribed to the Septuagint in the former instance shows the same Qal Perfect form as in the latter case, which equates these two texts and makes them equivalent to each other. This seems to the present author as an attempt towards simplification, which was done by the Greek translators in deterrence of the original differentiation of the verb in both passages.

These texts present what may be called a 'Final Amen' (Hogg 1897:4). The use of אָמֵן in these texts introduces what may be called a liturgical formula, which attains its most

solemn form as it becomes a double אָמֵן in the final verse of each of the sections or books of the Psalter. The Septuagint doubles the אָמֵן in Psalm 106:48, replacing the הַלְלֵיהָ by a second אָמֵן, thereby bringing about a similarity with the ending of the other books.

3.3 Psalm 41:14; 72:19; 89:53

- Psalm 41:14: בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִהַעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for ever and ever; amen and amen.

- Psalm 72:19: וּבְרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹדוֹ לְעוֹלָם וַיִּמְלֵא כְבוֹדוֹ אֶת-כָּל הָאָרֶץ

אָמֵן וְאָמֵן

Blessed be the name of his glory and the whole world may be filled with his glory; amen and amen.

- Psalm 89:53: בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן

Blessed be Yahweh for ever; amen and amen.

The above verses are found at the end of each of the first three books of the Psalms. They all end with the words: '*Blessed be the Lord for ever and ever; amen and amen*'. As an analogy to the five parts of the book of the Law (Torah), the Psalms were also divided into five books. The first four end in a similar way, the final one is the exception.

It is difficult to establish the age as well as the authorship of most of the psalms. About half of them are ascribed to king David, some of them to the sons of Korah or the

Korahites, a Levitical family in charge of the singing and music in the tabernacle. After the return from exile a group called the sons of Asaph (Neh 7:44) were in charge of the worship and liturgical songs. There is no consensus as to the criteria for the division of the Psalms into five books, a tradition that goes back to Jewish usage before the Christian era. However, the amen at the end of the first four books of the Psalter signifies a conclusion. Gevaryahu (1984:94) calls these amen *colophons*: ‘Expressions of amen and hallelujah in the book of Psalms belong in the category of colophons. They are not part of the original psalms, but rather additions of the later scribes who compiled the psalms. These compilers followed the practice of those who recited the psalms as part of public worship in the responses of amen and at times also hallelujah’.

Since no other psalms end in a similar way and some even close quite abruptly, it may be concluded that the doxological use of amen at the end of the above-mentioned psalms points to a definite liturgical practice, a theory which will be further developed at a later point in this study.

4 Amen Used as a Noun or an Attribute of God

Isaiah 65:16:

אֲשֶׁר הִמְתַּתְּרָךְ בְּאֶרֶץ יִתְבָּרַךְ בֵּאלֹהֵי אָמֵן

וְהִנְשַׁבַּע בְּאֶרֶץ יִשָּׁבַע בֵּאלֹהֵי אָמֵן

Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the God of truth; He who takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth.

Finally, a unique usage of amen is found in Isaiah 65:16: ‘Whosoever invokes a blessing in the land will also do so by the God of truth (in Hebrew: God of amen); he who takes an

oath in the land will swear by the God of truth' (also 'God of amen' in the Hebrew original). The masoretic text proposes that אֱמֵן should be read in both instances as אֱמֵן or אֱמֵן, the two variants meaning 'faithfulness' (Brown, Driver & Briggs 1962:53). The Septuagint translates these two 'God of amen' by τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἀληθινόν ('the God of truth'). Stylistically the structure of the two parts of the verse is that of parallelism, so that the translation should follow the same principle:

- 'Whoever asks a blessing in the land, will bless himself by the God of truth;
- whoever swears in the land, will swear by the God of truth.'

Amen as a noun and attribute of God in these verses, whatever the form of the root, is an assertion of the constancy and stability of God and of all those who place their trust in him because of his promises or vows.

5 Summary

The common use of amen in the Old Testament is that of adopting as one's own the words that have just been said and as a ratification of somebody's words. This answering sense is apparently the original one and means 'so it is' or 'so shall it be'. This expression involves a solemn atmosphere, many times of a religious nature. On human lips it is an expression of faith that God may make things come true. Amen is used elsewhere as a solemn formula by which an individual or a group confirm a curse or an oath, or the whole nation undertakes allegiance to the covenant or to some other kind of commitment, either civil or religious. Amen has also been used in the Old Testament as a noun or an attribute of God.

In later times amen became a liturgical formula by which the listeners join themselves to a doxology or to a prayer. At the time when the Psalter was completed and in Nehemiah's days the amen response had become a spontaneous approval at the end of some psalms, and to confirm the believer's prayers and doxologies.

CHAPTER 4

THE OLD TESTAMENT USE OF “AMEN” IN LITURGICAL SETTINGS

1 General and Specific Use of the Words ‘Liturgical’ and ‘Liturgy’

As one takes up the task of examining liturgical texts, it is appropriate to clearly define what is meant by the words ‘liturgical’ and ‘liturgy’. The word ‘liturgy’ is etymologically derived from the Greek words *λαός* (people) or *λείτος* (public) and *έργον* (work) (The Analytical Greek Lexicon 1973:250). Thus the immediate meaning of the compound word *λειτουργία* is ‘the work of people’, in the sense of public works or activities performed in public by a group of people. ‘Indirectly it also refers to the public office one undertakes. In the course of time, during the Hellenistic period, the word acquired a broader meaning to include the work done by slaves for their masters and even the small acts of service one did for one’s friend’ (Chupungco 1997:3).

1.1 Septuagint

In the Septuagint the word *λειτουργία* is used about hundred and seventy times, most of the times to designate the Levitic cult. It thus acquired a religious and cultic meaning, even though it is difficult to explain how a secular word came to be used for the sacred rites of Israel. ‘There are witnesses, at least late ones, to the use of the word in classical Greek, but the normal and technical meaning is that of public service: a function, whether

it be in the political, technical or religious sphere, exercised in the interest of all the people' (Martimort 1968:2).

1.2 New Testament

The word *λειτουργία* and its derivatives occur fifteen times in the New Testament. The priestly office of Zechariah is called *λειτουργία* (Lk 1:23); Christ became *λειτουργός* of the sanctuary in his sacrificial or priestly offering (Heb 8:2), and the cultic celebration of the Christians at Antioch is expressed by the verb *λειτουργεῖν*, 'making liturgy to, or worshipping the Lord' (Ac 13:2). The overall use of *λειτουργία* by the New Testament and early ecclesiastical writers tended to give it the meaning of worship, 'although they did not exclude less exact meanings such as spiritual sacrifice or charitable services' (Martimort 1968:2).

The idea of fellowship is prominent in the New Testament, where it basically appears under the term *κοινωνία*, particularly in the early chapters of the book of Acts of the Apostles (2:42, 44; 4:32); and in the Pauline epistles (Rm 15:26; 1 Cor 10:16; 2 Cor 6:14; Gl 2:9; Philp 3:10; et al). As a gathering of a popular assembly (*ἐν τῇ ἐννόμῳ ἐκκλησίᾳ* – Ac 19:32, 39, 41) as well as of worshipping people (1 Cor 14:4; et al) or of the local church (Rm 16:1; et al), the common New Testament term is *ἐκκλησία*. The use of *ἐκκλησία* is even more striking as it is set as the New Testament counterpart of the Israelite *קְהָל* or assembly in the desert (Ac 7:38), which is transferred to the Christian body of believers, the Church, of which the congregation of Israel was an adumbration or type. In a similar way the cultic ceremonies of the Old Testament are called by Paul a 'shadow of the things that were to come' (Col 2:17).

1.3 Churches of the East

For the Churches in the East, which have consistently kept this usage, *λειτουργία* means ‘the sacred rites in general and the eucharistic celebration in particular’ (Chupungco 1997:4). The present inquiry will concentrate on the former of these two meanings and examine in which ways *amen*, as it is used in sacred rites of the Old Testament, can be understood as a liturgical word in the meanings the word gained in Christian circles in the last two centuries.

1.4 Roman Catholic Church

In the Roman Catholic tradition the liturgy has always been the focal point of their worship services. In a more general sense, the word has been understood as everything that the priest does at and around the altar. Liturgy has also been understood as the Roman Catholic ritual by which Catholics mean the rules of worship procedures.

Schließlich ist es eine weitverbreitete Überzeugung, daß man nur den von der Gesamtkirche geregelt und in ihrer lateinischen Kultsprache gehaltenen Riten die Bezeichnung ‘Liturgie’ zuerkennen könne. Gegenüber solchen Verengungen hat die Encyklika *Mediator Dei* (1947) die ganze Fülle eines klassischen katholischen Lehrbegriffs herausgestellt.

(Rauch 1952:732)

The encyclical *Mediator Dei*, no. 25, issued by Pope Pius XII on 20 November 1947, defines liturgy as ‘the public worship which our Redeemer as head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its Founder, and through him to the heavenly Father. In short, it is the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its head and members’ (Chupungco 1997:4). There is in the encyclical apparently a predilection towards repudiating the false

notion that the sacred liturgy is only an external and outwardly perceptible part of divine worship, or a decorative ceremony.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1966), just a few years later, was to state that the essence of the liturgy is formed by the seven sacraments and is in its entirety a sacred 'sign', so that it becomes a *sacramentum* itself. As a sacred sign, the liturgy is situated in the plan of salvation, and as such, it is affirmed that it 'can only be carried out by the action of the Church's hierarchy, and that the Christian people are delegated, through baptism, to take an active part in this same liturgy' (Martimort 1968:5). According to this same author, the Roman Catholic Church is conscious of being the Israel of the last times and of fulfilling the promise of a new and definitive covenant announced by the prophets.

He further says that

insofar as it is an expression of the Covenant between God and his people, this worship is entirely sustained by the Word of God which assembles this people.... The whole liturgy of the Church will be only a vicarious and ministerial liturgy, which unites the assembly of the faithful to the worship which Christ continues to render to his Father in this Church which is his Body.

(Martimort 1968:191-192)

It is not in this almost supernatural sense that the term 'liturgy' will be understood in the present study. It should rather be connected with religious actions, such as 'rites', 'ceremonies' and 'proceedings', as it is also used in Roman Catholic as well as in Protestant realms. The Old Testament texts will be examined, considering to the highest possible degree the activities of those who are present and the nature of the gathering. Then a study will follow of the different actors, of the moments in succession, of the gestures and words. The existential aspect of the Catholic exposition of liturgy will be

considered: 'That is why it remains unintelligible to one who does not take part, why it can only be grasped to the degree that one is engaged by it' (Martimort 1968:6).

1.5 Churches of the Reformation

The churches which grew out of the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century opposed, among other issues, the form and content of the Roman Catholic liturgy, which centred on the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This sacrament had become 'a dramatic spectacle, culminating not in communion but in the miracle of transubstantiation, and marked by adoration, not unmixed with superstition, at the elevation, ... with ... only meagre opportunity for popular participation' (Maxwell 1965:72). This in itself was considered a mistaken development of the original meaning of liturgy as an act of public worship based on the attendants' participation.

The Reformation movement also revised other aspects of the liturgy:

The sermon had fallen into a grave decline, most parish priest being too illiterate to preach; and the place of the Scripture lections had been usurped on a great many days by passages from the lives and legends of the saints. The Scriptures were not fully accessible in the vernacular, and paid masses and indulgences were a source of simoniacal exploitation.

(Maxwell 1965:72)

Luther sharply attacked the medieval view of the sacrifice of the mass, which taught that the mass was a repetition of the sacrificial death of Christ. He was reluctant, however, to make any hasty changes in its text and ceremonies, 'though he encouraged the people to receive communion at every celebration and insisted that the Words of Institution be said audibly... and in a language that the people could understand' (Maxwell 1965:75). Central to Luther's conception of liturgy was the fellowship of Christians among

themselves and their partnership or participation in the body of Christ, his Church. For Luther, the Divine Service was God's way of giving his people his marvellous gifts through the Word and Sacraments and then offering his people the opportunity to respond to these gifts through praise and thanks. In the explanation of the Third Commandment in his Large Catechism he literally says: 'We keep holy days so that people may have time and opportunity, which otherwise would not be available, to participate in public worship, that is, that they may assemble to hear and discuss God's Word and then praise God with song and prayer' (Tappert 1959:376).

For the purpose of the present study it is not important to follow the history of liturgy in the churches of the Reformation era and thereafter. One further observation ought to be made, however, in order to obtain a clearer understanding of liturgy as it is used in recent times. The trend of liturgical renewal in the middle of the twentieth century was towards promoting popular participation in the liturgy.

1.6 In Recent Times

In more recent times, attempts have been made to present an 'interactional model' of liturgy, as it is called by Lardner (1980:26), 'where the preacher offers a brief reflection on the Scriptures, and then invites "feedback" from the congregation. The preacher or other listeners may then respond in turn to whatever comments are forthcoming. The message which the participants take with them is the result of the dialogue, and not simply the message which the preacher prepared.'

The Roman Catholic Church proposed a solution to promote popular participation in the liturgy by way of the *Missa Recitata*, according to which 'the congregation joined in

reciting the Latin texts which originally had been the people's parts' (Lardner 1980:27). To explain this form of participation, the term 'dialogue Mass' was used, which 'represented basically an interactional view, because it saw two separate entities (priest and congregation) responding to each other sequentially' (Lardner 1980:27).

Erickson points out to today's rich diversity of styles of liturgical participation, which should, however, transcend any tradition and denominational lines to assume an 'ecumenical perspective' (Erickson 1989:ix).

1.7 Summary

This is how far one needs to establish the diverse meanings under which to understand the terms 'liturgy' and 'liturgical' with reference to the present study. The task of establishing the different liturgical texts in which amen occurs is basically to identify the type of communication that goes on in the texts to be studied. To sum up, amen is to be described in texts involving people at the moment they respond to some kind of liturgical or worshipping address. The *responsive* element of liturgy is going to be taken into special consideration, since it shows in what respects Jewish influence has left its marks on early Christian forms of worship and came down the centuries to pave the way for the liturgies of today. Amen definitely plays a vital role in this process up to the present day, as it confirms the active participation of the worshippers in liturgical ceremonies.

To sum up the various understandings of 'liturgy' and 'liturgical texts' as they will be used in the present study, one could define a 'liturgical text' as the description of a **public performance of some sort of ritual** in general, and **the proceedings of a religious ceremony or worship service** in particular.

2 Liturgical Texts Containing Amen in the Old Testament

After examining the overall use of amen in the Old Testament as undertaken in the previous chapter, an attempt will be made to select and organise the occurrences of amen according to their liturgical value. The findings on the concepts of liturgy and its historical development (see chapter 4.1) will serve as a guide for this comparative study. The selection of the texts will follow the criteria of establishing their liturgical nature and the way in which amen was used to conclude a worship situation.

As will become clear, three major sets of texts were selected because they describe a public performance of some sort of ritual. The next step will be to determine whether and to what extent these texts present the proceedings of a religious ceremonial. The texts are the following: a) Deuteronomy 27:15-26; b) Amen in the Psalms; and c) the people's response in the post-exilic book of Nehemiah.

2.1 Deuteronomy 27:15-26

2.1.1 Text and Translation

15 אָרוּר הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה פֶסֶל וּמַסֵּכָה תּוֹעֵבֹת יְהוָה מֵעֵשֶׂה יְדֵי חָרָשׁ
וְשָׁם בְּסֵתֶר וְעָנוּ כָּל־הָעָם וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

Whoever has a carved or metal statue, anything disgusting Yahweh that was made by a craftsman, and sets it up in secret will be cursed. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

16 אָרוּר מִקְלָה אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Whoever dishonours his father or mother will be cursed. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

17 אָרוֹר מְסִיג גְּבוּל רֵעֵהוּ וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Whoever moves his neighbour's boundary marker will be cursed. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

18 אָרוֹר מְשָׁגָה עִוֵּר בְּדַרְכֵי וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Whoever leads blind people in the wrong direction will be cursed. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

19 אָרוֹר מְטֵה מִשְׁפַּט גֵּר־זָתוּם וְאַלְמָנָה וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Whoever deprives foreigners, orphans, or widows of justice will be cursed. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

20 אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם־אִשְׁתֹּ אָבִיו כִּי גָלָה כְּנָף אָבִיו וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Whoever has sexual intercourse with his father's wife will be cursed. He has disgraced his father. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

21 אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם־כָּל־בְּהֵמָה וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Whoever has sexual intercourse with any animal will be cursed. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

22 אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם־אָחִיתוֹ בֵּת־אָבִיו אוֹ בֵּת־אִמּוֹ וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Whoever has sexual intercourse with his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter will be cursed. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

23 אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם־חֲתָנָתוֹ וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Whoever has sexual intercourse with his mother-in-law will be cursed. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

24 אָרוֹר מִכָּה רַעְיוֹ בְּסִתֵּר וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Whoever kills another person secretly will be cursed. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

25 אָרוֹר לְקַח שֹׁחַד לְהַכּוֹת נַפְשׁ דָּם נָקִי וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Whoever accepts money to kill an innocent person will be cursed. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

26 אָרוֹר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִקְיָם אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה־הַזֹּאת לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם

וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Whoever does not obey every word of these teachings will be cursed. Then all the people shall say 'Amen'.

2.1.2 The Context of the Pericope

In the form the book of Deuteronomy appears in the Bibles of today, it resembles very closely the constitution of a modern nation. At the beginning it calls on the name of God (Dt 3:23: O Sovereign Lord!...). It states Israel's historical origin, then it lists the fundamental laws in the form of the Decalogue in chapter 5. The specific laws that follow, many of them as a repetition of the Sinaitic laws, could be compared to the different ministries of a modern government: The Ministry of Education, in chapter 6, regulates the learning of the *Shemah* and the transmission thereof to the children or students. In chapter 7 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sets out how to deal with other nations. The regulations of the Ministry of Health, in chapter 14, deal with clean and unclean food. The Ministry of Finances, in chapter 15, handles the cancellation of debts. The Ministry of Home Affairs is concerned with slavery in chapter 15:12-18. There are

clear regulations concerning going to war in chapter 20, which could be attributed to the Defence Ministry. The Ministry of Justice regulates murder, marriage violations and human rights in chapters 21 and 22. There are laws concerning first-fruits in what could be called a draft for the Ministry of Agriculture in chapter 26. The directions in 26:5-9 show a kind of *Credo* in which the individual confesses his faith, by tracing it back to the acts of God on behalf of the whole fellowship to which he belongs. There is even room for a Ministry of Religion in chapter 16, as it exists in the present State of Israel, prescribing how to celebrate the religious festivals and how to appoint the church officers and spiritual leaders. Sanctions to be applied in order to punish the transgressor of specific sins are the main thrust of chapter 27, and the people are called to heed and respond.

2.1.3 The Establishment of the Covenant

As the study of the context of Deuteronomy 27, in the previous section indicates, this text presents the singular situation of being a blend of a civil and religious ceremony. Israel was essentially a theocracy, but the means by which Yahweh directed the people through Moses and their leaders was of a civil nature. The Hebrew word for covenant is *berith*, and Brown, Driver and Briggs (1962:136) render the word to Latin as *constitutio*, the counterpart for the English word 'constitution'. Deuteronomy 27 describes a major assembly of the people for both purposes: to fulfil their civil as well as their religious duties. The problem that has to be solved first is that of the nature of this ceremony. For this reason the *covenant* concept and ceremonial should be examined at this point.

The National Assembly of the Constitutional Theocracy – as it could be called - was to meet at the foot of both mounts Gerizim and Ebal or at the locality of Shechem, which is situated between the two. The members of six tribes, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin, should stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people. The other six tribes, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali, should stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses (Dt 27:12,13). ‘The Levites should recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice’ (Dt 27:14) the words of the curses and all the people should say, ‘Amen!’ These are the people involved in the ceremony, in the positions given.

A hermeneutic difficulty about this passage is that the text reverts, after the conclusion of the law code in Deuteronomy 26, from the second to a third person prescription of actions to be carried out on entering the promised land. This has been interpreted by many as a literary discontinuity, and is used to argue that chapter 27 is unconnected to both chapters 26 and 28 (Mc Conville 1994:70). The literary-critical solutions to the roughness of this chapter, however, are beyond the scope of the present discussion.

When Moses introduced the directions to be followed at Gerizim and Ebal in Deuteronomy 27:9, he clearly called Israel’s attention to the fact that ‘now, on this day you have become the people of Yahweh your God’ (הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִהְיִיתָ לְעַם) (לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ). That opens a brand new phase in Israel’s history as a nation. Yahweh is making a ‘covenant’ (בְּרִית) with his chosen people.

The concept of covenant in the Old Testament has been interpreted in various ways. **Eichrodt** , for instance, points to the importance of the covenant, defining it in terms of

its theological meaning. He sees the covenant as the central theme of the Old Testament as a theological book. His view is presented in following terms:

The covenant concept implies that God's relation with Israel and consequently the religion of Israel must be historical. Eichrodt notes that the covenant also contains an expression of the will and desire of the principal partner and that this provided Israel with a knowledge of the divine will, a law, which guided its actions and gave it a feeling of confidence in a milieu in which the divine was usually felt to be very arbitrary.

(McCarthy 1965:219)

Von Rad (1979:129) develops his 'covenant theology' along the lines of this and of other texts, and according to him, covenant 'may designate the agreement itself, that is, its ceremonial, but it may also designate the relationship of communion between two partners inaugurated on its basis'.

Wellhausen uses the covenant concept as one argument on which to base his theory of an evolutionary development of the Old Testament religion. He takes the idea of a covenant as being ancient indeed, but of a lower order and thereby consistent with Israel's status of a typically primitive religion (Wellhausen 1957:417).

In his *Prolegomena*, Wellhausen asserts that the covenant involving the expression and acceptance of the moral will of God, denotes a later growth. Even though some aspects of Wellhausen's theory appear to be outdated, and in spite of the fact that one may not agree with his developmental theory, the ceremony prescribed in Deuteronomy 27 has much in common with the form of treaty as it was usual amongst a number of peoples and states in the second millennium BC.

Mendenhall refers to this fact when he says:

It is not surprising that international covenants had developed a specialised form of their own in Babylonia and Assyria, which do not have any direct relationship to the form known in ordinary business or private legal contracts. Probably by the accidents of transmission or excavation, we have adequate source material for studying international covenants only from the Hittite Empire, 1450-1200 BC. This material is invaluable for our purposes, since it is contemporary with the beginnings of the people of Israel.

(Mendenhall 1954:54)

In view of the above and of other biblical evidence it becomes clear to the present author that the covenant which Yahweh established with his people Israel or with individual persons of this people, like the one with Abraham at the beginning (Gn12:3) or with David and his messianic kingdom (2 Sm 7:8) is based on the supposition that he is God, and that he alone should be adored. This essential idea of the covenant becomes evident in the very first of the Ten Commandments of the Decalogue. The introductory words of Yahweh, 'I am the Lord your God' (Ex 20:2), are basic to the covenant and to the laws expressed therein. Luther says that 'the purpose of this commandment, therefore, is to require true faith and confidence of the heart, and these fly straight to the one true God and cling to him alone' (Tappert 1959:365).

The relationship between Israel and God in the form of a covenant has been contested many times, particularly by advocates of the historical critical method. Nevertheless, it can be demonstrated that the covenant-union between Yahweh and Israel is an original element in all sources, and especially so in the Deuteronomist, despite their being in part in very fragmentary form. Eichrodt (1961:36) very properly affirms: 'The safest starting-point for the critical examination of Israel's relationship with God is still the plain impression given by the Old Testament itself that Moses, taking over a concept of long standing in secular life, based the worship of Yahweh on a covenant agreement'.

This fact definitely attests the unity between secular and religious life in the Israelite theocracy.

2.1.4 The Nature of the Covenant

It should have become clear that the covenant agreement between Yahweh and his people was a basic element of Israel's worship. If this is assumed, one also has to attend to the question of the nature of this covenant, in order to establish the possible liturgical setting of Deuteronomy 27.

In ancient Near Eastern parallels there are examples of contracts between equals and non-equals, containing a historical prologue and stipulations. 'Contracts between equals usually are content with expressing a brief curse to protect the terms in general; those between non-equals frequently specify individual stipulations, whether or not these have been enumerated in the body of the text' (Flor 1966:23). It becomes clear from the very beginning of the pericope under discussion and from the curses expressed, that it deals with a covenant between non-equals. Yahweh is the more powerful party and Israel is the less powerful party. In this way he is entitled to require obedience and threaten with maledictions in case of transgression.

The procedures of Deuteronomy 27 are apparently imbedded in the context of a provisional ceremony to be repeatedly enacted after the conquest of Canaan, in the promised land. As to the nature of this ceremony, - and this is a basic question in the present inquiry - it has been strongly suggested that it is the so-called feast of the Covenant Renewal, even though this is not explicitly mentioned. Alt is one of the main supporters of this point of view, as he connects the ceremony with the renewal of the covenant commitment even at a regular basis and concludes:

Damit ist unsere Gebundenheit an eine regelmäßig wiederkehrende Situation und Aktion im israelitischen Volksleben, wie wir sie zum Verständnis des Aufkommens der Gattung postulieren mußten, in der Tat gegeben und die Berichtigung bewonnen, auch die Szene von Deut. 27 im gleichen Sinne auffassen, obwohl dort jede ausdrückliche Bezugnahme auf eine bestimmte Festzeit fehlt.

(Alt 1953:327)

What also binds the present author to the repetition of this celebration is the fact that the occasion of Deuteronomy 27 is supposedly the same that goes on in chapter 29. There the individuals present are not only part of the people, but they are in their totality regarded and addressed as God's covenant partners. The assembly is described in detail:

All of you are standing today in the presence of the Lord your God – your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, together with your children and your wives, and the aliens living in your camps who chop your wood and carry your water...in order to enter into a covenant with Yahweh your God, a covenant Yahweh is making with you this day and sealing with an oath. ...

(Dt 29:10-12)

The aforementioned covenant made on the plains of Moab was to be repeated or renewed at the given place at the bottom of Mounts Ebal and Gerizim or in the place later known as Shechem (Dt 27:12), probably the Nablus of today. This instruction was observed by Joshua, as he assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem after the conquest. The ritual of Joshua 8:30-35 is without any doubt a Covenant Renewal session, following the measures prescribed by Yahweh and fulfilling his instructions 'to bless the people of Israel' (Js 8:33). Joshua even seems to take some further steps as to copy the law of Moses on stones (Js 8:32). Jamieson describes the place where the ceremony happened at Joshua's time at the bottom of the mountains Gerizim and Ebal:

The valley enclosed by these two mountains is about three mile long, and from 250 to 300 paces wide. The articulations of the human voice are, from the purity of the atmosphere, hear distinctly on the opposite heights.... The slopes of the two mountains recede gradually, and afford room for hundreds of thousands to stand or sit conveniently to hear the words of the law. The people... therefore could at the proper time say an intelligent 'Amen'.

(Jamieson 1961:23)

Once more Joshua would gather the people at Shechem shortly before his death (Js 24).

The procedure is of a liturgical nature. He addresses all the people, he challenges them to choose whom they would serve, and he himself promises to serve Yahweh with his household (v 15). There is even a response of the people, only that it is not concluded with the 'Amen-formula'. Joshua 24 is, however, a prescribed counterpart to Deuteronomy 27, and likewise contains the main covenantal ingredients.

2.1.5 The Curses and their Setting

In the twelve verses of the Deuteronomy 27 pericope there are twelve threats of אָרַר and twelve times the people respond with amen. Even though the people are dispersed over both mountains to pronounce blessings and curses, only curses are given in the present setting. This distinguishes this text when comparing it with the following chapter (Dt 28). In the latter the blessings and curses are explicitly cited and, if one takes a closer look, there is an overwhelming predominance of curses and similar threats in case of disobedience (v 15-68), in contrast to far fewer blessings cited (v 1-13). Another way in which the Deuteronomy 27 pericope differs from other similar enactment, is the repeated response of the people after each curse. This confirmation makes the text particularly impressive as a covenant commitment by the party to which it is addressed.

The reason for paying attention to these curses is not to determine their content and meaning nor to divide them into different groups, but rather to find out from them what kind of gathering was called at Gerizim and Ebal, if cultic or secular; and what was the occasion; who were the persons involved; what it meant for the addressees to pronounce their amen, and whether their response was stipulated or spontaneous.

From the point of view of word order in the text, especially with reference to the destination of the curses, three grammatical uses stand out:

- a) the relative clause **אֲשֶׁר אָרוּר** is used to indicate the addressee of the curse in case that person transgresses the given rule (v 26);
- b) a definite noun as the subject of the passive participle is another way of defining the addressee: **אָרוּר הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר** (v 15);
- c) the participial use of the verb is noticeably often used in the text to indicate the person 'who does' the misdeed:

אָרוּר שֹׁכֵב / אָרוּר מְטֵה מְשַׁפֵּט / אָרוּר מְשַׁנֵּה / אָרוּר מְסִיג /

אָרוּר מְקַלֵּה / אָרוּר לֹקֵחַ שָׁחַד / אָרוּר מִפֶּה

The two occurrences under a) and b) above, i.e. verses 15 and 26 don't only differ from the other verses in the grammatical form of the verb. The major difference is also not only due to the fact that they are the opening and closing verses of the pericope. The real difference is that they are the only ones that contain cultic prescriptions or warnings about misdeeds in a specific religious realm: the prohibition of the use of cultic images by

carving a פֶּסֶל or casting a מִסֵּכָה (v 15) and the requirement to ‘uphold the words of this law by carrying them out’ (v 26).

Verse 26 refers to the whole pericope or even to the whole corpus of Deuteronomy by stressing the observing of אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת (‘every word of these teachings’).

It does not become clear as to what words, teachings or body of laws the prescription refers to. The two verses embrace the rest of the text, which deals with a row of ten prohibitions of social or sexually-related sins or misdeeds, enclosing them in a cultic sphere.

The ten curses listed from verses 16-25 do not follow any logical or formal order. The absence of a structured sequence in old Eastern as well as in Old Testament law texts is not uncommon. The possible ordering to gain completeness and integrity (‘Ganzheit und Geschlossenheit’) from the listed curses has been proposed by Gese (1967:129), who ordains the verses in pairs as follows:

- a) the familial and social realm (not to dishonour father and mother; not to move away the neighbour’s boundary stone);
- b) the human rights and charity realm (not to lead the blind astray; not to withhold justice from the underprivileged);
- c) two pairs of two verses have a socio-ethical concern (not to sleep, i e have sexual relations with mother, mother-in-law, sister, animal);
- d) the condemnation of lawlessness (not to kill or accept a bribe to kill an innocent person).

There is a striking preponderance of verbal forms used in the Hiphil, which marks the intention of the evildoer. The dishonouring of one's parents (v 16) is expressed by the Hiphil Participle **מִקְלָה**, or, as the footnote in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* suggests, **מִקְלָל** in the Piel. According to Elliger (1977:333), the difference lies in the fact that the former refers to a person who acts lightly towards father and mother, who 'looks down upon them', dishonours them, while the Piel variant, in the intensive use, refers to contempt which occurs already in the innermost thoughts of the transgressor, so that it should be considered a secret sin.

Other actions that occur in the Hiphil Participle, and are therefore to be viewed as having a causative impact of the transgressor on or against his or her objects, are the act of removing boundaries (**מִסִּיג**); to mislead a blind man on the road (**מִשְׁגָּה**); the perverting of justice (**מִטָּה מִשְׁפָּט**), which may not be easily detected; the act of killing secretly (**מִכָּה בְּסֵתֶר**) or to take a bribe to kill an innocent person. As these faults belong to the realm of attitude or frame of mind and are 'caused' by someone intentionally – that is how one should interpret the Hiphil usage – even though not detected by the public eye, they are threatened with a fate against which there is no appeal.

The passive form **אָרַר** involves the question of the agent of the curse who is not explicitly mentioned. There is no hint in the Old Testament that **אָרַר** is addressed to God as the object. Yahweh can, however, become the agent of the curse. The construction of the *Arur*-formula can only be explained by supposing that while using the passive form 'the speaker at the same time thinks of some author or authors of the action

in question, just as on the theory of the Arab grammarians a concealed agent is included in every passive' (Kautzsch 1963:388). 'In short, most of the cases of the Old Testament suggest the power of the curse as implicitly attributed to God. Therefore it is something that brings upon the transgressor a punishment that is certain, terrible, and imminent' (Flor 1966:18).

The characteristic feature of each of the curses in Deuteronomy 27 is the focus on the secret life of the individual person, even though the response is made collectively. It is apparent that the congregation or its leaders could not be aware of all the acts of every member, which makes it difficult to control and punish the transgressions as threatened. This is the twilight area between the secular and the religious and of situations in which only a superior, in this case Yahweh as God and Lord, could interfere and judge.

A closer look at the first of the curses, in verse 15, shows that it directs itself against the secret worship of an image. It mentions various aspects that are not contained in this form in any other code of the Pentateuch, like the secrecy of this cultic activity. The first verse is in accord with the following verses of the pericope in being levelled against a specific sin. It differs from them, however, in denouncing not a social transgression, but a ceremonial one. It launches a curse not against the national sin of using images in connection with the worship, but against the private use of a graven or carved image by an individual. Another particularity of verse 15 is the selective use of the expression **תועבת יהוה**, which Brown, Driver and Briggs (1962:1072) translate by 'abomination in a ritual sense', 'of physical repugnance' and 'idolatrous practice'. It is used in the same construct state referring to Yahweh a further eight times in Deuteronomy, which brands

the whole procedure of idolatry as an abomination to Yahweh. The use of the plural form **הַתּוֹעֲבוֹת הָאֵלֶּה** ('these detestable things') occurs five times in a somewhat parallel passage in Leviticus 18, in a harsh warning of Yahweh against the 'detestable things' and 'abominations' in the idolatrous practices of the nations living near Israel. Deuteronomy 27:15 furthermore uses the particular expression **מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי חָרָשׁ** ('made by hands of a craftsman'), which is unique in the Pentateuch. An idol-maker is described as a craftsman by Isaiah, Jeremiah and Hosea.

The comments made on verse 15 served the purpose of highlighting the only and exclusive curse that deals with a ceremonial issue. This is, therefore, the only part of the pericope linking it to a cultic situation and language. The major part of the passage deals with social and secular rather than with religious matters.

Summing up the references to verse 15 contained in other parts of the Pentateuch, it appears that the most unique description of idolatry is the clause "and set it up in secret". There are some similar expressions in the Covenant Code as well as in the so-called Holiness Code. The singular features of the verse, however, are either contained in Deuteronomy only or even unique to the passage mentioned.

(Flor 1966:38)

A noteworthy characteristic of the passage under consideration is the lack of information about the form in which the curses would be enforced, or in which effective way the person was to be checked with regard to his compliance. As pointed out before, the first and, only to some extent, the last one of the curses are related to the individual's behaviour towards Yahweh. This leads to the conclusion that the emphasis of about eighty percent of the pericope is on the secular law, even though it derives its validity from being a direct command of Yahweh.

Eichrodt (1961:74f) defines the distinct character of the Mosaic law as being not only a cultic law, but also a secular law, which ‘derives its validity from being a direct command of Yahweh; any breach of it is an outrage against Yahweh himself. The law thus acquires a majesty, which removes it from the sphere of human arbitrariness and relativism and bases it firmly on the metaphysical’. He further states in the same context that the so-called *mishpatim* are the fundamental commands of the civil law, while the cultic laws are usually called *debarim* and occupy a relatively small space in the total corpus of the Mosaic law. Luther thinks along the same lines as he states in his Large Catechism that the First Commandment, which is echoed in the first verse of the Deuteronomy 27 pericope, ‘is the chief source and fountainhead from which all the others proceed; again, to it they all return and upon it they depend, so that end and beginning are all linked and bound together’ (Tappert 1959:410).

From what has been analysed above, it is now possible to come to a few conclusions. It becomes clear that the disposition made in Deuteronomy 27 before the people entered the promised land, envisaged a great gathering which was supplied with some substantial information about its liturgical ordering. Liturgy should here be understood as ‘order or procedure’. No doubt that the prescribed assembly was of a predominantly secular and legal nature. Yahweh, the sovereign and king, has given his covenanted people, his vassals, an absolute command. The contract or covenant with their God had to be repeatedly renewed, even more so and at such intervals when Israel had gone astray from Yahweh’s path. The scene that is opened before the Israelite citizens is one of ceremonial procedure. Von Rad (1964:118) suggests that the pericope ‘should follow as a provision for future re-enactments of the same ritual’.

It has also become clear that the ceremony prescribed in Deuteronomy 27 was to be chaired by the Levites, who were to recite the curses on behalf of Yahweh. One could infer from this fact that, the Levites being the cultic officials of Israel, the whole setting was a liturgical and religious one. This conclusion may be correct, but one has to bear in mind that many other responsibilities were included in the priestly and Levitical duties, even non-religious ones, such as teaching, music making, tithe collecting and health control. A passage taken from 2 Chronicles 34:13 states this very clearly: 'The Levites – all who were skilled in playing musical instruments – had charge of the labourers and supervised all the workers from job to job. Some of the Levites were secretaries, scribes and doorkeepers'. 'The reference to shutting the temple gates in Malachi 1:10 might be read against the background of the Levites' role in guarding the gates mentioned in the books of Chronicles' (Smith 1991:262). The whole range of activities performed by the Levites covered both the religious and the civil spheres of life in Israel.

The presence of Levites as readers of the curses does not *per se* make of the ceremony under study a cultic ritual. It follows that there is not enough evidence for the meeting at Gerizim and Ebal to have been a cultic one. It would be more appropriate to conclude that the public gathering was of a civic nature with cultic elements involved. As to the characterisation of the type of liturgy involved, as envisaged in the first part of this chapter, the assembly at Shechem was one of a public performance of some sort of ritual in general, and not that of a religious ceremonial or worship service in particular. This proves that in this earlier stage of Israelite life, at the plains of Moab, the usage of amen had not yet become a liturgical one, even though there are elements of some sort of ritual already present.

2.1.6 The "Amen" Response

The people's response with amen is the focal point of analysing this pericope, even more so for the fact that the word under consideration occurs a record twelve times in a single chapter, more than one third of its occurrences in the whole Old Testament. Sufficient explanation has been given before in this study about the meaning of amen as a response to and as confirmation of somebody's word. This is even more important and solemn when a word from Yahweh, the God of Israel, is concerned. In this particular passage the people, who are to be taken as the assembly of the whole of Israel, are committed to bear the eventual consequences of the curses by answering with amen. This response is described by Wallis as follows:

Aus dieser Feststellung ergibt sich zweierlei: Einmal haben wir es in Dt 27,16-25 mit einer Eidesformel zu tun, und zum anderen ist ein zwischen dem den Fluch Vorsprechenden und dem diesen mit "Amen" Bekräftigenden ein Gemeinschaftsverhältnis oder zumindest eine Gemeinsamkeit vorauszusetzen, aus der der Rechtsbrecher ausgestoßen wird oder durch die Eigenwirksamkeit des Fluches ausgemerzt wird.

(Wallis 1974:51)

Wallis compares the ceremony in Deuteronomy 27 to a Hittite oath of allegiance to their king and country ('Fahneneid'), which was performed at a very special occasion and included binding commitments. On such serious occasions the response of the people involved was of fundamental importance, both for their social as well as for their spiritual welfare.

Für eine solche Grundsätzlichkeit spricht auf jeden Fall auch die bewußt gewählte Summe der zehn Fluchformeln und zehn Responsorien. Mag damit auch nicht alles über das Wesen dieser Gemeinschaft ausgesagt sein, oder mag die gewählte Zehnzahl auch zur Auffüllung durch weniger bedeutsame Verpflichtungen geführt

haben, auf jeden Fall muß alles das, was hier vorgetragen wird, für diese soziale Gemeinschaft von wesentlicher Bedeutung gewesen sein. Und damit ist es als aussagekräftig erwiesen.

(Wallis 1974:54)

Wallis (1974:52) takes his argument further by asserting that the amen in Deuteronomy 27 is a prescribed response of a community put under oath ('Vereidigung auf eine Gemeinschaft'), which is found in connection with the finalisation of a contract or covenant ('Bundes- oder Vertragsabschluß') as a customary practice among old Eastern cultures.

Basic to the development of the present study is the assertion that the amen response in the Deuteronomy 27 pericope is **clearly a stipulation**: Wallis calls the people's response an oath to confirm a social relationship: 'Hier soll vielmehr eine vorhandene soziale Gemeinschaft durch einen Schwur hergestellt, erneuert oder sichergestellt werden' (Wallis 1974:54). The form of the verbs **וְעָנָה** and **וְאָמְרוּ** in the Qal Perfect with waw-consecutive indicates a future action, as do all the other verses of the pericope by introducing the people's response with the verb in the Qal Perfect singular form **וְאָמַר**.

A textual variance is produced in the critical apparatus of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, putting the verb in the same plural form as in verse 15. Since the Imperative is simply a fraction or derivative of the Imperfect, the latter has been largely used also to express a command. In Israel today the Imperative is hardly used at all. It is felt that it is too curt and in its stead the future is used (Horowitz 1960:117). Brown, Driver and Briggs (1962:56) suggest that **אָמַר** as a verb, especially at a later stage, was also used in the sense of 'command'. As the setting for the ceremony is that of an imposing legal obligation, the Imperative meaning of the verb in its Imperfect form is to

be expected. This fact sets anyone who does not agree or who does not answer with amen in a condition of exclusion in relationship to the covenant or agreement that is being celebrated. This person would be excluded from the fellowship of Yahweh's congregation as well as from the citizenship of Israel.

2.1.7 Summary

At this point one may conclude that the assembly on the plains of Moab and to be repeated at Shechem, as described in Deuteronomy 27, had characteristics of a judicial as well as a liturgical nature, so that the amen response can not be said to have been solely a liturgical one. The people were gathered to celebrate a covenant agreement with Yahweh, at the same their king and God. The curses were spelled on them and the Amen-formula was clearly a prescribed response. It was to make sure everyone agrees to stand under oath after having heard and understood the importance of the ritual enacted, civil as well as religious.

The stipulated response as a covenant commitment to be spoken by all tribes of Israel in Deuteronomy 27 is a main factor that distinguishes this response from the following ones to be studied both in the Psalms and in Nehemiah. In Shechem, at an early stage of Israel's history and connected to an oath-taking ceremony, the people were told how to respond, so that **the amen does not flow spontaneously** from their mouths. It was prescribed to confirm the acceptance of the oath taken and was spoken under fear to do whatever was forbidden. Situations in which the response was expected or even spontaneous were still to develop at later stages, as will be seen next.

2.2 Amen in the Psalms

2.2.1 The Liturgical Nature of the Psalter

The book of Psalms is situated at the beginning of the *Ketubim* in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the Septuagint. This is the third major part of the Old Testament text. Because of the great variety in the type of Psalms, it is difficult not only to identify the authorship of many of them, but also to determine the probable time of their composition and the historical and liturgical setting for which they were composed. It is of course especially the latter which is of primal importance for the present study, namely to investigate the possible liturgical nature and historical setting of selected psalms.

During the last hundred and fifty years scholars have placed the composition of the psalms within a span of more than a thousand years, beginning with Moses and ending with Alexander Jannaeus, who died in 78 BC. With the rise of higher criticism and of text-critical activity among Biblical scholars of the last one and a half centuries, there was a general tendency to date only a few of the psalms as belonging to David and his times, while most were considered to be the product of post-exilic times. The explicit statements of the headings as well as the formulations which conclude some of the psalms were not considered authentic and therefore not substantial proof to determine the author, occasion or nature of its composition. There is a fair amount of agreement, nonetheless, that the Psalter was intended for the use in Israelite worship and as a book of songs and prayer.

As the Hebrew title **תְּהִלִּים** conveys, the name derives from **הִלֵּל**, to praise, and thus establishes the cultic character of the book, even though only one psalm has as its title the

actual name of the whole book, **תְּהִלָּה**, in the singular form (Ps 145). The same root **הלל** is inserted in the word hallelujah, which appears ten times at the beginning and thirteen times at the end of some psalms. Hallelujah is found at the beginning and end of Psalm 150, as if it should replace an expected amen as an editorial mark to signify the end of the fifth and last book of the Psalter, as all the previous four books end with the Amen-formula.

The liturgical variety of the Psalms becomes evident from the designation or superscript of many of them: fifty-seven psalms are called **מִזְמוֹר**, a song to be sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments; thirty are **שִׁיר** ('hymn'), and several of them are specifically called **שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת** ('a song to go up in procession'), as in the heading of Psalms 120-134. Although the most common explanation for the setting of these psalms was for them to be sung by the pilgrims on their way to the great feasts at Jerusalem, one tradition affirms 'that these psalms were sung by the Levites during an all-night feast of the first night of Feast of Tabernacles on the fifteen steps between the Court of Israel and the Court of the Women, while the Court of the Women was brilliantly illuminated with candelabra' (Nichol 1954:625). Five psalms (Ps 17, 86, 90, 102, 142) are called **תְּפִלָּה** ('prayer'), a designation which characterises the Psalter as an intimate part of the worship life of Israel.

Coppes builds his thesis on Gunkel's hypothesis that the psalmody of Israel had its inception in the cult. In order to prove this he goes as far back as the 'Song of Moses' passage in Exodus 15. He says: 'This passage, at the least, bears testimony that from the

most ancient times the great event surrounding the origin of the nation was celebrated with music and singing in cultic songs' (Coppes 1968:107f).

Gunkel is best known for his contribution to Old Testament theology in his *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, and particularly by dividing the psalms into *Gattungen*, that means, genres or categories. The first of Gunkel's *Gattungen* treated in the given work is that of *Hymns*, which he says is the most easy to recognise and in which at the same time the basic thoughts ('grundlegenden Gedanken') of pious poetry in general are expressed (Gunkel 1975:32). Throughout the different types of hymns and songs of praise, introductory pleas or doxologies he sees one thing that they have in common: a call to praise Yahweh.

He says:

Allen diesen Einführungen ist gemeinsam, daß sie in irgend einer Form eine Aufforderung zu Jahves Preise enthalten; viel seltener steht statt dessen eine Beschreibung des Jauchzens, die keinen so leidenschaft bewegten Eindruck wie die Aufforderungen macht, sondern einen ruhigeren, gelasseneren, gegebenenfalls zuversichtlichen, ja großartigen.

(Gunkel 1975:39)

It is significant to note that in contrast to hallelujah, which is used twenty-three times in the Psalter, amen is used on only four occasions (Ps 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48), the first three of them with a double 'amen and amen', so that it occurs only seven times altogether. Another distinctive fact is that the amen and to some extent hallelujah are used to mark the separation between the five books of the Psalms, a division supposedly made, as mentioned before, in analogy with the five books of the Law.

The use of amen and hallelujah in the Psalms is a clear indication of the fact that the Psalms were used for cultic activities in Israel. The individual worshipper as well as the

whole congregation take part in the prayers and hymns by answering the doxologies with their approval in the form of amen and hallelujah. Pfeiffer confirms this response of the believer, while adopting an inclusive attitude, as someone who is part of the worship:

Durch dieses 'aufnehmende' oder 'responsorische' Amen drückt der einzelne Betende aus, daß er in das gesprochene Lob Gottes oder das Gebet einstimmt und es damit zu seinem eigenen Anliegen macht. Er schließt sich damit in das Lob oder Gebet als solcher mit ein, der das Lob oder das Gebet selbst gebetet oder gesungen hat.

(Pfeiffer 1958:136)

About the double use of amen, Pfeiffer (1958:136) agrees to the proposal to call it a 'Distributive amen'. According to his explanation of the term, each one in the assembly would say amen, and the repetition would not be said by the entire congregation. Pfeiffer concludes at the same place that the double amen would most probably have come into liturgical use in later, post-exilic times. The passages of the book of Nehemiah and the later editors of the book of Psalms, probably the sons of Asaph at the returnees' time, would back up this conclusion.

Gevaryahu (1984:94) joins most modern Bible interpreters by including the expressions amen and hallelujah in the category of *colophons*. According to him, one must understand by colophon a voiced reaction of a group of people, stipulated or spontaneous, to any public expression or call. Colophons are a tailpiece in old books, often ornamental, giving information now placed on the title page. In this way, according to many commentators, the expressions given were not part of the original psalms, but rather additions of later scribes who compiled the Psalms. In the view of the same author, these compilers followed the practice of those who recited the Psalms as part of public worship in the responses of amen and at times also of hallelujah.

The vast range of material from which the Psalms are drawn was described by Robinson (1959:26-28) as being represented by great concentric circles traced from the centre, which was the individual's consciousness of God. These circles of materials are formed by different themes:

a) **nature**, where the Psalms pay attention to the majesty of the star-lit sky (Ps 8), to the sun in its daily journey through the heavens (Ps 19:1-6), to the might of God heard and seen in thunderstorm (Ps 29) or to the beneficial fertility brought by rain (Ps 115:9ff);

b) **history**, in particular the history of Israel, so wonderfully exhibited God's fulfilment of his promises to his people (Ps 105); the redemptive acts of the Exodus assumed a very prominent place, corresponding in some degree with the centrality of the cross in the Christian view of history (Ps 136); even the misfortunes of Israel were not overlooked (Ps 78; 106); and an eschatological view of history, pointing forward to the climax when Yahweh should in the sight of all nations ascend his heavenly throne and become מֶלֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ ('King of all the earth', Ps 47:8 [BHS]; Ps 96-100).

c) **human society** is depicted in the Psalms as the psalmists knew it, formed by small national groups in close proximity to each other within the diversity of their tribes. Within Israel itself society was exposed to the tension of opposing political and religious parties, to the tyranny of native and foreign rulers and to the continual friction of rich and poor (Ps 44; 50:16-23; 62; 109);

d) **the temple and its courts**, to which flowed an unceasing stream of pilgrims; passionate phrases describe the devotion excited and maintained by thoughts of the

temple; it is even said that to stand on the threshold of the temple is worth more than all life elsewhere (Ps 84:10; 92; 93);

e) **the individual believer's consciousness of Yahweh**, ebbing and flowing with the tides of life of the whole community, struggled with the maintenance of trust in God in spite of fighting without and of fears within. Being perplexed by the apparent prosperity of 'the wicked', the believer would sometimes try to rise above the limitations of a faith that regarded death as the end (Ps 6; 32; 36; 51; 102; 130; 143). These psalms have been labelled 'Penitential psalms', and Robinson (1959:27f) says that they 'show how deep a moral consciousness was developed in spite of the identification of forgiveness with the recovery of health and prosperity'.

All these circles make their contributions to the worship of the believer as it is represented in the Psalms; all of them help him in different ways to climb in faith and prayer to Him who is over all and through all and in all. They all help to enrich the idea of God, whose loving-kindness and righteousness, majesty and mystery, are the central theme of the Psalms

(Robinson 1959:28)

The Israelite worship was of a distinctive nature. The expression 'to serve Yahweh' occurs in some psalms in the Imperative form **עֲבֹדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה** (Ps 2:11; 100:2), and at a first glance the verb **עֲבֹד** there gives the impression of meaning a 'service' in a similar way in which the expression 'worship service' is used in modern English. However, **עֲבֹד** is a root with a whole range of secular meanings like 'to serve as a slave', 'to serve other gods' in an idolatrous way, 'to perform the temple duties', of which the Levites were particularly in charge. The Hebrew term that comes closer to the

meaning of 'service' in the temple is עֲבֹדָה . It occurs in Ezekiel 44:14 with reference to the 'duties of the temple and all the work that is to be done in it'. The service of Yahweh is not restricted to the limits of the cultic. That which is said to the cultic community of Israel in worship is also to be observed outside the sanctuary (Ps 50; 81). Kraus (1986:101) points to the fact that worship in Israel was not something non-political, far removed from history. Israel's worship is to result in 'justice' and 'righteousness' (Ps 37:28; 50:16-21; 82:3; 98:9; 99:4; 103:6; 119:5-7; 146:7; 147:19).

Worship according to the Psalms has had its direct influence upon both the Jewish and the Christian Church. The Psalms are permeated with the consciousness of the cult, even though they did not all originate in it. There are allegedly three reasons for the appeal of the book of Psalms and the catholicity of the response to it by believers of all times and ages:

- 'In the first place, the Psalms are themselves most comprehensive in the range of their material.
- In the second, their language is that of an intensive yet concrete simplicity.
- In the third, they unite in a remarkable way the needs of individual devotion with those of a worshipping community' (Robinson 1959:26).

In order to return to the issue described at the beginning of this section, it has become evident that the Psalter, in spite of the great range of contents and motifs taken from daily and secular life, was mainly of a **liturgical nature**. As such it relates to what God is accomplishing in the entire life of his people as individuals or as a nation. Yahweh alone is the one who is at work, who is present, and this divine presence should involve the

worshippers in the events. The Psalms are an explanation and a presentation of Israel's cultic life, which **preceded and induced the believer's response** to what has been proclaimed, a response that was expected in the emphatic exclamation of amen.

2.2.2 The Liturgy of the Covenant in the Psalms

If one examines the contents of the book of Psalms, it becomes evident that an outstanding theme is that of the history of Israel, which so wonderfully exhibits God's fulfilment of his promises to his people by way of the covenant concept. In the covenant the great redemptive acts performed from the time of the exodus until the arrival of the Israelites in the promised land naturally held a very prominent place. The covenant between Yahweh and Israel found its expression in the Psalter, or, conversely, the Psalter reflects the 'theology of the covenant' in several of its texts. It is supposed to be a sacred song book for the periodic sessions of re-reading the Law and for the festival of the Covenant Renewal.

Thus would the covenant festival have, in more than one way, been much more than a mere recalling of the past. It would have been the continual re-presentation of the saving actions of Yahweh by which Israel was made a people, supremely in the Exodus from Egypt, but also in succeeding events and generations. It would have been an ever new restatement of Yahweh's overlord claim on his people.

(Guthrie 1966:42)

Psalm 81 is one such important psalm that points to the formative period of Israel and to the Mosaic covenant. The standards of the covenant in Deuteronomy 27 provided a means by which Israel's actions had inevitably to be judged. **Psalm 81 best typifies the liturgical nature of the covenant** in the Psalms and its plea for the believer's commitment.

The psalm begins with a joyful summons to join in the worship of the festival (v 1-5), with the help of musical instruments like the tambourine, the melodious harp, the lyre and the sound of the ram's horn or *shophar*. The latter was to make a call for public announcements at festive occasions like the New Moon and Full Moon festivals and whatever feast is meant by לַיּוֹם הַזֶּה (v 4). Some think the Feast of Tabernacles is referred to. According to other commentators, the Passover is intended by the expression 'our solemn feast day', due to the prominent position of the Passover in the ritual calendar (Nichol 1954:822). The reading of Psalm 81 forms a traditional part of the Jewish liturgy. It is recited on the fifth day of the week under the heading 'Exult aloud unto God our strength' (v 1), as prescribed in the Mishnah, Tamid vii.4 (Oesterley 1965:74).

The given psalm seems to fit into the whole idea of the covenant as it is dealt with in Deuteronomy 27, presenting, as it does, the significance of the festival by reviewing God's relationship to Israel in the past and reminding the people of their allegiance to the covenant through clear reference to the חֻק , מִשְׁפָּט and עֲדוּת, three strong words for the 'laws', 'statutes' and 'ordinances' given to them by Yahweh. The prevention of the people from having a foreign god or from bowing down before an alien deity (v 9) is a basic requirement of the covenant and repeats the prohibition made in the first commandment, as registered in Exodus 20:4 and in Deuteronomy 5:8. The historical reference for this requirement comes next, which is the fact that Yahweh brought the people out of Egypt (v 10). The mention of the people's failure to attend to (שָׁמַע) and submit to the will of God is also there, followed by the wish that they would abide by

Yahweh's rules and the blessings that would follow (v 11-14, 16). Then in verse 15 the psalm issues the same kind of curse or condemnation as in Deuteronomy 27, stating that the transgressors' punishment would last forever. The classic themes of the covenant are stated, the requirements 'You shall have no foreign god among you', (v 9), the salvation 'I rescued you' (v 7), the rich but conditional promises (v 13-14).

Psalm 81 was ascribed to Asaph and was sung according to the גִּתִּיתָא or 'after the Gittite manner' or even 'according to a vintage melody' (Nichol 1954:629). It is clearly a hymn to celebrate harvest and therefore should be considered a liturgical psalm. It shows the original covenant community engaged in a joyous act of thanksgiving, with songs, music and prayer, while being admonished to hold on to their allegiance to the Lord of the covenant.

There are **several other liturgies presented in the book of Psalms**, as they occur in the Royal or Throne-ascension Psalms, to which genre Gunkel (1975:140) assigns Psalms 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144:1-11, and, to some extent, Psalm 89:47-52. He claims that the unity of this *Gattung* or genre resides in the fact that these psalms have a theme concerned with royalty and that they usually include prayers for the king and ruler. In his search for the *Sitz im Leben* of these psalms, the cultic aspect of the proceedings are stressed.

Da fällt unser Blick zunächst auf die mancherlei Feiern, die von den israelitischen Königen veranstaltet worden sind. Jeder Hof im Altertum und in der Gegenwart hält Feste ab, um die Pracht und Herrlichkeit des Königtums darzustellen (Esther 1,4) und um die Öde des Daseins so vieler müßiger Menschen, die sich vor dem Angesichte des Gebieters drängen, erträglicher zu gestalten.

(Gunkel 1975:141)

The *liturgy of the Torah* ('Toraliturgie') has been so named by Gunkel (1975:408) in a context directed to or performed by those who search for indoctrination in the law of Yahweh. As an example he gives the passage of Psalm 24:3,4 under the question/answer type of presentation: 'Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?' The question is followed by the answer: 'He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false....' A declaration of a blessing follows the questions and answers, to which procedure only the priest is entitled, so that a third performer comes into the picture, giving the liturgical psalm a high degree of solemnity in a variety of inputs right up to its end. He highlights his view with a concluding remark about this section of the given work:

Versuchen wir zum Schluß, in aller Kürze die Geschichte der Liturgie darzustellen. *Sie geht aus von dem Boden des Kultus* (italics by the present author). Bestimmte kultische Wechselhandlungen wie die Toraerteilung, die Orakelauskunft, die Klagefeier des Einzelnen und des Volkes bilden eine Voraussetzung ihrer Entstehung. Hinzu kommt der Gesang mit wechselnden Stimmen, der bei der Aufführung von Liedern reiner Gattung längst bekannt war. Solche Liturgien, die als Gesänge des Kultus wohl von Priestern verfaßt waren, begegnen uns schon in vorexilischer Zeit, wie Psalm 24 und 132 unmittelbar zeigen und es die Nachahmung durch Hosea und Micha erschließen läßt.

(Gunkel 1975:414-415)

Liturgical psalms, therefore, which are properly called so by Gunkel (1975:407), are defined as those psalms or sections thereof in which different parts of various categories are brought together to achieve a unified effect ('*einheitliche Wirkung*') **in a worship situation**, presented by different voices in a recitative or **responsive sequence**. The order in which these different inputs appear is not fixed, neither is it left to the subjective choice of the psalm writer, but depends on directions contained in the particular character of the **cultic procedure** ('*aus der Eigenart des zugehörigen kultischen Vorganges*').

To determine which text in the Psalms is liturgical and to which type of liturgy it belongs, the researcher must attain a clear picture of the historical as well as of the traditional background of the event which is to be celebrated, and examine possible parallel texts and situations in and around the Biblical context, which will then clarify the text and support the interpretation of the cultic procedure. Attempting to reach this goal will be the next task in the present study.

2.2.3 Doxological Formulations in the Psalter

After presenting the relationship between the covenant concept and Israelite worship, the next step is to examine the psalms which contain doxological formulations ending with amen.

Four of the five so-called 'books' which form the Psalter end with a single or repeated amen: Ps 41:14; 72:19; 89:53; 106:48. The occurrence of amen in the book of Psalms is therefore restricted to these seven times. Most commentators, though they attempt a deeper inquiry of these forms, only address the historic and literary questions about the development and final compilation of the Psalter. Jenni (1984:114) affirms that (according to him) it has been agreed upon that the liturgical doxologies at the end of the above mentioned psalms did not belong there originally, but that they served as a dividing mark to indicate the end of each one of the five books into which the Psalter has been divided. He tries to base his assertion on a 'redactional' theory:

Der genaue Hergang ist nicht mehr erkennbar (es können mehrere Stadien der Hinzufügung angenommen werden); auch die Datierung ist nicht exakt möglich. Viel seltener als diese literarkritischen Einleitungsprobleme kommen Fragen der Gattung oder gar des theologischen Inhalts zur Sprache. Man ... rangiert diese

responsorischen Formeln zusammen mit der Gemeindehymnik, etwa als deren Ableger in Buchkolophonen der frommen Schreiber.

(Jenni 1984:114)

More conservative students of the Psalms, however, don't agree with the 'redactional' theory of later additions to the endings of some psalms as well as to the headings in general. One of the most elaborate of these views is that of Nichol (1954:616), who, in the introduction to the book of Psalms, is inclined toward accepting the explicit statements of headings and endings as authentic. He bases his view on the fact that the antiquity of most of these psalms can be proved to go back to a time at least as early as the second century BC by their presence in the Septuagint version;

- because they have come down to Christian times as a part of the Hebrew text itself;
- because Hebrew lyrics from the earliest times had headings attached to them;
- and because these introductory and final parts provide helpful backgrounds for a fuller understanding of the meaning and message of these psalms.

Even though the present author is bound to agree with the latter view, due to a strong commitment to the authoritative principle of the revelation of the canon and due to a pledge to 'the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel' (Tappert 1959:503), it must be said that the former position referred to would even strengthen the thesis that amen as a liturgical response was a later development in the cultic tradition of Jewish worship. As to the psalms that contain the amen endings, it could well be that the addition was post-exilic, from a time in which the final compilation of the Psalter was made, as the division into five books suggests, when amen was already used in a mainly liturgical setting.

The psalm texts with a doxological ending are the following:

Psalm 41:14: בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִהָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן:

Praise be to Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and amen!

Psalm 72:19: וּבְרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹדוֹ לְעוֹלָם וַיִּמְלֵא כְבוֹדוֹ אֶת־כָּל הָאָרֶץ אָמֵן וְאָמֵן:

Praise be to his glorious name for ever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory.

Amen and amen!

Psalm 89:53: בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן

Praise be to Yahweh for ever. Amen and amen!

Psalm 106:48: בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם

וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן הַלְלוּ־יָהּ:

Praise be to Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. And all the people shall say, 'Amen, hallelujah'!

The doxological formulations used in the given psalms in which amen occurs are composed by what Jenni (1984:115) calls a *Baruk*-formula and an Amen-formula as basic to a doxology. They are used in sequence in all instances:

בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה ... לְעוֹלָם ... אָמֵן. This formulation is common to all four psalm

passages mentioned above. A variation occurs in the full naming of Yahweh as אֱלֹהִים

or אֱלֹהֵי ; in adding 'Israel' as an attribute to the name of Yahweh; in the completion

of the לעולם reference, which is duplicated twice (Ps 41:14; Ps 106:48); and in the repetition of amen, which does not occur in the last one (Ps 106:48). The simplest form of the doxology occurs in Psalm 89:53: ‘Praise be to Yahweh for ever! Amen and amen!’ Psalm 41:14 expands the *Baruk*-formula a little more: ‘Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and amen!’ A similar use is found in Psalm 106:48: ‘Praise be to Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Let all the people say: Amen, hallelujah!’ The Septuagint ends this psalm with the repeated ‘amen and amen’, most probably in analogy with the other three endings of a similar doxology. This is also the case in 1 Chronicles 16:36, on the occasion when king David and his subjects had finished the task of bringing the ark to Jerusalem and then praised Yahweh for confirming to them an everlasting covenant.

The longest of the doxologies mentioned above is that of Psalm 72:18,19:

18 בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲשֵׂה נִפְלְאוֹת לְבָדוֹ:

19 וּבְרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹדוֹ לְעוֹלָם וַיִּמְלֵא כְבוֹדוֹ אֶת־כָּל הָאָרֶץ אָמֵן וְאָמֵן:

Praise be to Yahweh God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvellous deeds. Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and amen!

The expansion or even duplication of the latter formulation is done with the addition of the hymnodic element וַיִּמְלֵא כְבוֹדוֹ אֶת־כָּל הָאָרֶץ . What follows in verse 20 is a concluding phrase to one of the oldest collections of Davidic psalms: ‘This concludes the

prayers of David, son of Jesse'. The authoritative comment of Jenni as to the intentions of the ending of Psalm 72 is as follows:

Die Ausgestaltung der doxologischen Grundelemente 'baruk Jhwh leolam' und 'amen' geschieht in zwei Richtungen, um die Aussage zu steigern: einerseits durch Verdoppelung (Apposition zu Jahwe, Doppelformel mit 'olam, zweimalige Baruk- und Amen-Formel), andererseits durch Aufnahme hymnischer Superlative ("alles Volk", "ganze Erde", "allein") und Aufforderungen (Hallelujah!).

Jenni (1984:115)

2.2.3.1 The *Baruk*-formula

A characteristic feature of the opening of a doxology is the use of בָּרַךְ , the Qal Participle passive form of the verb *barak* ('to bless, to praise'). Directed to God (*baruk Yahweh*), it occurs thirty four times in the Old Testament, mainly as a formula to introduce a blessing or doxology. The *Baruk*-formula can be found much earlier in everyday conversation, as it occurs in the answer given by David to Abigail when she prevented him from killing Nabal: '*Baruk Yahweh*, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me'! (1 Sm 25:32). This formula of praise is a spontaneous outburst of awe and admiration, which was usually spoken after the acknowledgement of divine help. It always mentions the concrete deed on which the praise is based.

Even though the *Baruk*-formula is not originally embedded in a cultic situation, it makes its way from daily common use into the liturgical language, as can be seen, for instance, when Solomon uses it in the dedication ceremony of the new temple: '*Baruk Yahweh*, who has given rest to his people just as he promised' (1 Ki 8:56). In Psalm 28:6,7 the prayer song of the individual turns from a lament to an expression of great vitality, when

the psalmist suddenly changes his tune: ‘*Baruk Yahweh*, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped’.

Above all else the praise-formulations in their main line take on the character of a confession, both in everyday language as well as in their liturgical application. They are directed at a human audience and not directly at God. In this way the experience of the praying individual or group is summarised in a formula of praise at the end of some psalms, as in Psalm 66:20: ‘*Baruk Elohim*’, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me’! Even though the psalm ends in the first person singular, the first part is directed at a group of people, and definitely all the addressees are meant and called upon in verse 8: **בְּרָכוּ עַמִּים אֱלֹהֵינוּ** All peoples should ‘let the sound of his praise be heard; he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping’ (Ps 66:8,9). Jenni (1984:116) properly concludes from such passages that from this usage **the praise formula developed into a final doxology**, as it stands at the conclusion of the different books in the Psalter.

The doxologies therefore express the highest possible degree of joy and jubilation as the **קְהַל יְהוָה** (‘congregation of Yahweh’), the **קְהַל רָב** (‘great congregation’) or the **קְהַל תְּסִירִים** (‘congregation of the saints’) come into the presence of Yahweh to honour and praise God. It is not a coincidence that this *crescendo* occurs in Psalm 89, one of the psalms containing amen, as the **מְשִׁבִּיל** of Ethan invites the gathered people to ‘sing of Yahweh’s great love forever’. Then he says: **אֲשִׁרֵי הָעַם** (the Ashre-formula) ‘who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, o Lord!’ (Ps 89:15). ‘In praise and adoration the cultic community is fully committed to Yahweh,

looks away from itself, and fulfils its destiny as the “people of Yahweh” (Kraus 1986:69).

We have thus stumbled upon one of the strongest propositions in the Old Testament’s doctrine of man. Praise is man’s most characteristic mode of existence: praising and not praising are opposed to each other like life and death; praise becomes the most elementary “token of being alive” that exists; from generation to generation the hymns of the thanksgiving community flow on (“bubble”!) (Ps 145:4ff). How one-sidedly praise had its home in life and in life alone can be seen in the fact that the people of God at praise regarded themselves as standing shoulder to shoulder with the community of the divine beings before the throne of Yahweh – to such an extent was it in antiphony with the community above that the command to strike up praise could even be issued to those above by those below. In this presumptuous order to praise, the community on earth appears as “the leader of the praising universe”.

(Von Rad 1979:369f)

Gunkel (1975:90), as referred to before, puts the hymns of the Psalter into a prominent Gattung or category. He says: ‘Darum hat Israel auch den Hymnus durch seine ganze Geschichte hindurch gesungen. Und auch die uns überlieferten Hymnen erstrecken sich über diesen gewaltigen Zeitraum’. Gunkel points to the wide span of time in which the Israelites voiced their praises. As early as in the song of Moses and Miriam, the Israelites sang their praises to Yahweh (Ex 15:2) and as late as in the book of Daniel the foreign king Nebuchadnezzar expresses his benediction (בְּרִיךְ) to the God of the three men of Israel delivered from the fiery furnace (Dn3:28).

The individual as well as the assembled congregation of Israel brought to Yahweh their songs of prayer and at the same time confirmed their praise and commitment by means of a doxology and the amen. Priests and singers were the ones who recited the petitions and songs of penitence. The prophet Joel says that praises and offerings are cut off from the

house of Yahweh, because 'the priests are in mourning, those who minister before Yahweh' (Jl 1:9). The scope of this cultic procedure would even spread to other peoples, as it is said: 'May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy...' (Ps 67:3,4a).

The universal and ecumenical extent of the Israelite praise to God is described by Kraus as follows:

The blessing for which Israel prays and which has been promised to the nation is not a power restricted to the boundaries of God's people and active only there, but it is a light shining on Israel which is to shine forth into the world of the nations and move all ends of the earth to fear Yahweh and to praise him. The religion of Israel is set within a universal framework, in its beginning, in all its festivals and observances, and in its conclusion. God's people never celebrate their own glorification, but understand it as the consequence of divine election, destiny, and mission in the world.

(Kraus 1986:100)

The Psalms and particularly the doxologies in and at the end of the Psalms are not bound by spatial limitations. 'Formed as liturgies rather than as markers, the Psalms express their call for public praise orally rather than visually and reveal a freedom to make artful use of words and ideas' (Hoglund 1987:291-292). In this way the Psalms and particularly their doxologies were used by the Jewish church and crossed the centuries to be used in the New Testament by Jesus (Mt 11:25-26), frequently by the apostle Paul (Rm 16:25-27 et al) and especially in the book of Revelation (1:6; 4:11; 7:12), beginning and/or ending with amen: 'Amen! Praise and glory ... be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!' (Rv 7:12). By means of a doxology and a final amen the worshipper since Old Testament times expresses and shares his experience of salvation with the 'great congregation', i.e. with the fellowship of believers.

2.2.3.2 The Amen-formula in the Conclusion of the Books of the Psalter

As the occurrence of the *Baruk*-formula characterises the doxological forms in various instances of the Psalter, the Amen-formula prominently marks the conclusion and highlights both the doxology at the end of the different books into which the Psalter has been divided, as well as the conclusion of the books themselves. As has been pointed out, the *Baruk*-formula did not have its origin in cultic language nor in Israel's hymnody, but comes from the realm of good wishes or blessings used in everyday life. The Amen-formula, as a plain confirmation of somebody else's wish or threat, can also be tracked back to everyday Israelite and Semitic life. Jenni (1984:117) adduces as a compelling example the solemn amen affirmation in the Yavneh-Yam ostrakon in an old Canaanite inscription found in 1960: 'Certainly I am innocent', says a land worker in his application to the governor.

The Amen-formula as it is found at the doxological endings of the various books of the Psalter is clearly the confident assertion of the worshipper's belief in what has been said or chanted. The debate about the later addition of these sections typifying them as simple separation marks of psalms and books of psalms, is an attempt to apply pragmatic standards to them and to admit that these sections did not have the meaning of a strong response. These attempts deny that these sections were intended to express a definite answer to the mighty words and deeds of God described in the given psalms. Jenni properly explains the theological meaning of these forms:

Theologisch bedeutet das nun: Es handelt sich nicht mehr um theologische Belehrung über Gott und sein Walten wie im Hymnus. Es geht also nicht so sehr um die Offenbarung und Belehrung, sondern um die Aufforderung, es gleichzutun und wie der "Doxologe" das

Gehörte zu akzeptieren, sich mit dem Vorangehenden zu identifizieren. Eine Predigt müsste also nicht über die Segensmacht Jahwes und was das alles bedeutet reden, sondern sollte die Reaktion des Menschen auf den Segen thematisieren.

Jenni (1984:118)

Linguists would examine these formulations from the point of view of their prepositional content and formal ingredients. The exegetical task, however, is to discover in the doxological endings and in the Amen-formula of the four psalms under consideration the cultic procedure that leads an entire worshipping community to firmly acknowledge in speech the correctness and accuracy of the preceding words. A later development attached to the formulation is a cultic expression by non-verbal language, like the nodding of the head, the lifting or clapping of hands to signify approval ('Kopfnicken und Beifallklatschen') and the kneeling or genuflecting and bowing, as it will become clear in the Nehemiah 8 pericope later on.

Once again the point in question is **whether the response of the congregation is prescribed or voluntary**. How else should a doxological psalm end, if its sequence of ideas is expressed in an uplifting tone and with the mood of people escalating as the psalm comes to its end and moreover closes with a doxology? Psalms are compositions that go beyond the normal and usual speech. They display special, artistic, intense poetic speech ('besondere, kunstvolle, poetisch gesteigerte Rede'), and as such one should expect various possible endings. Jenni (1984:119) proposes the following:

a) The closing word for a passage, text or section is named simply by the very term 'end'. This is a non-poetic device which is indeed used once, to mark the end of book II of the Psalter. The endnote says: 'This concludes (**כָּלֵל**) the prayers of David,

son of Jesse' (Ps 72:20). The verbal form כָּלָה is used in the Pual Perfect, with the meaning 'they are finished' or 'totally completed'. It corresponds to the well-known expression 'The End'.

b) The usage of a 'link and frame' technique ('Rahmenbildung') is a common poetic, artistic method, repeating sections of the hymn at the end. It is used for instance in Psalm 8, in which the final verse repeats the first: 'O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!' The occurrence of hallelujah both at the beginning and at the end of psalms 106; 113; 117; 135; 146-150, makes of the repetition of hallelujah the end mark of these psalms.

c) The final words or verses follow a *ritardando*-technique, in which the manifest end is delayed by the repetition of words and expressions. The Massoretes created various short and long vowels as well as graphic signs to mark the proper intonation of words and sentences and also to determine the middle and other sections of a biblical verse. In the same way the final verses of Psalm 72 solemnly repeat words and expressions like 'praise God' and 'amen', with the clear intention of attaining a grand finale and letting it resound like an echo and thus impressing it on the ears and minds of the congregation, which it then induces to join with their own amen.

d) Still another way of finishing up a psalmody hymn is the negation of the possibility of the hymn ending. The intention of the hymn writer is to convey that the praise should continue without end, forever (לְעוֹלָם - Ps 72:19; 89:53) and ever מִן־הָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם - Ps 41:14; 106:48). An analysis of these words, which

concern the Hebrew concept of time ('Zeitbegriff') is not intended here, and not in the least to formulate a concept of eternity. The single or double use of the word 'forever' has the practical function of finalising the doxology with the idea of praising Yahweh unceasingly.

Praise and thanksgiving in the Psalms were normally based on what in the Psalms themselves is called 'the mighty acts of God' with regard to the individual or to the whole nation. Some of the 'mighty acts of God' that are mentioned in the psalms under consideration in the present study and to which the assembly was expected to respond are the following:

- Psalms 89 and 106 celebrate Yahweh's faithfulness to the covenant;
- Psalm 72 is a Royal Psalm and celebrates Yahweh's promise of an everlasting kingdom;
- Psalm 41 celebrates the psalmist's individual deliverance in times of trouble.

The covenant motif is clearly expressed in **Psalm 89**. In verse 3 the psalmist is very much aware of the **קָרַנְתִּי בְרִית לְבַחֲרֵי** ('I made a covenant with my chosen one'), a basic fact in Israel's life and history, for which the individual and the people praise Yahweh forever. The word 'covenant' is repeated four times in the psalm (v 3, 28, 34, 39), duly described as being faithful, righteous, in kindness, forever. The psalm recalls the promise that David's throne was to be established forever. After a complaint of the psalmist in view of the apparent failure of God's promises (v 38-45), a plea for fulfilment of the promise and restoration of God's favour follows (v 46-51), closing with the doxology and the double amen.

The covenant idea is repeated in the last section of **Psalm 106**, emphasising in verse 45 the fact that Yahweh **וַיִּזְכֹּר לָהֶם בְּרִיתוֹ** ('remembered his covenant for their sake'), which is to be held up before the worshipping community and provoke their amen response; this follows three verses later. Yahweh's faithfulness and love connected with the covenant are celebrated throughout the psalm, mentioning major national deliverance acts like the crossing of the Red Sea and the victory over the enemies in spite of the people's constant unfaithfulness and transgression. In fact, the mighty acts of Yahweh are mentioned in contrast with the people's failures, a vast list of which is mentioned: they rebelled by the Red Sea (v 7), they put God to the test (v 14), they grew envious of Moses and of Aaron (v 16), they worshipped an idol cast from metal (v 19), they forgot the God who saved them (v 21) - and many more acts of disobedience are mentioned. All this did not imply that Yahweh had forgotten his covenant. Despite the long recital of Israel's stubbornness, rebellion and sin, the psalmist closes on a high note of thanksgiving for God's mercy and deliverance.

The congregation identified itself with the person officiating in prayer of thanksgiving with a clear and emphatic amen, said once or twice. There is a reference to the apparent mandatory reply in Psalm 106:48: 'Let all the people say, "Amen!"' In this enunciation, **וְאָמְרוּ** is translated as Jussive, which seems to twist or force the simple future meaning of the waw-consecutive used in connection with the Perfect tense. A better translation is: 'and all the people will respond, "Amen"'. This rendering keeps it in line with its parallel in 1 Chronicles 16:36, which is the actual *Sitz im Leben* of this psalm. Here one is told about the original enactment of the psalm in the Davidic praise after the ark had been

brought to Jerusalem. To the psalm of thanks offered by David, Asaph, his associates and all the people responded (וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל־הָעָם). with amen. The verb is clearly in the Qal Perfect form and must therefore be translated in the complete or past tense. There is no reference to any command or liturgical direction given to the people to respond with amen. One has the right to conclude that **no prescription** whatsoever was given to the people as to their response. Their reaction to the *Baruk*-formula was a vibrant one, **expected but spontaneous and free**. The amen in this context must be considered the pinnacle point and the *grand finale* of a **historical and unique ritual**, which was never afterwards repeated in the same context.

Robinson (1959:28-29) propounds the concept of 'corporate personality' that pervades the Psalms. In this way he tries to shed light on the dispute as to whether it is the worshipping individual or the whole personified community that pronounce the individual psalms. Even though some of these psalms are written down in the first person, the question remains as to whether the double amen was in fact an individual or a corporate response. Robinson says that the true answer to this question is: neither the one nor the other. The individual and the community are not seen as in opposition to each other. He explains:

Our modern sharp distinction between the individual and group to which he belongs did not exist in Israel; indeed, if we go back to even more primitive thought, we find what seems to us a strange confusion of personal identity with the whole group (so, for example, amongst Australian aborigines). We try to create a social consciousness by moral appeal to the individual; for the Hebrew prophets and psalmists it existed already, and enabled them to make startling and unexplained transitions from one to the other.

(Robinson 1959:29)

Psalm 72 is considered to be a Royal Psalm and more specifically a psalm chanted in honour of לְבֶן־מֶלֶךְ , probably referring to Solomon, as the title of the psalm indicates (לְשִׁלְמֹה) . The kings enthroned in Jerusalem, of which David was the very first and also the first one to be chosen, were to become the heirs of the promise given through Nathan (2 Sm 7), the promise of an everlasting kingdom that was made to David and his successors. This promise is reactivated in Psalm 72:17, where it is linked by a similar wording to the messianic promise first made to the patriarch Abraham in Genesis 12:3: יְהִי שְׁמוֹ לְעוֹלָם / וַיְתַבְּרְכוּ בוֹ כָּל־גּוֹיִם יִאֲשְׁרֻהוּ ('may his name endure for ever' / 'through him all nations will be blessed'). In the act of enthronement, which was supposed to be celebrated annually, the king was at the centre of the cultic event, and in Psalm 72 the tasks attributed to the son of the king are manifold: judge the people (v 2), defend the afflicted (v 4), take pity on the needy (v 13), bring prosperity to the people (v 7) and the like.

The main theme of the Royal Psalms, that of celebrating in song the person of the elected or anointed one, outlasted the age of the kings and took on new significance for God's people of Israel and for Judaism. 'The royal psalms were no longer applied to the earthly rulers but were understood as a prophecy and a promise of the messianic king of the end-time.... The identity of the activities of the king and those of God can be recognised only in terms of their intention, and that identity is obscured by humanity, decay, and poverty' (Kraus 1986:123).

According to its postscript, Psalm 72 'concludes the prayers of David, son of Jesse'. It is definitely a piece of highly elaborate liturgy for a festive occasion. The officiating person

would cry out: Long live the king! (v 15), and the final response of the people with the amen at the end confirms their approval and commitment to Yahweh and to the king as his representative amidst them.

A closer look at the text of **Psalm 41** consigns it to a time of heavy sickness in the life of the psalmist. The physical sickness (בְּחַלְיִי) and his stay in bed (עַל-עֲרֹשֶׁת דְּוָי - v 4) is worsened by the mental distress of realising that those who formerly were friends are now traitors. A דְּבַר-בְּלִיעַל , a thing of Belial or of worthlessness, has overcome the psalmist, by which moral evil is meant. The psalm opens, however, with the *Ashre*-formula ('blessed be') used in Psalm 1:1 and in many other passages as a statement of confidence, applied to those who minister to the needs of the sick and who search for solutions of such problems as poverty and disease. The psalm closes with a prayer of hope for restoration, and the *grand finale* ends up with the doxology extensively used in the Jewish worship even today: 'Baruk Yahweh elohem Israel, from everlasting to everlasting – amen and amen!' (Ps 41:13). This double amen has a special nuance of confidence and hope, as the repetition of words in general, and here in particular, marks intensity of feeling or the desire of the speaker to show his utmost conviction and agreement to what has been said.

2.2.4 Summary

As has been pointed out, the psalms ending with amen celebrate in a majestic *crescendo* many mighty acts of Yahweh, like the deliverance in times of trouble (Ps 41:1), preservation of life (Ps 41:2), protection against enemies (Ps 41:11), restoration of health

after personal illness (Ps 41:3), Yahweh's firm love and faithfulness (Ps 89:1), amongst others.

The Psalms had their original setting in the Jerusalem temple and were mostly composed for cultic situations in general. They nevertheless became an important part of worship in the synagogue. A commentary made by Rabbi Hirsch and repeated by Oesterley, says that in the synagogues psalms were chanted "antiphonally, the congregation repeating after every verse chanted by the precentor the first verse of the psalm in question.... At the conclusion of the psalm the *Makre* or Precentor added a doxology ending with: 'and say ye Amen'; whereupon the congregation replied: 'Amen, amen'." (Oesterley 1965:75)

This proves that the use of **amen grew in importance as time passed**, and in late Judaism the congregation was **expected to confirm its agreement responsively**, mainly through the liturgical form amen. The Talmudic saying, 'In prayer a man should always unite himself with the community' clearly expresses this procedure. (Robinson 1959: 29). Even though most psalms originated in an individual experience, yet they also generally tend to show the consciousness of a group, whether of the devout believers or of Israel as a people.

Though the book of Psalms as a whole is closely linked with the ritual of the temple, many of its elements lead to the inner temple of the devout spirit of the believer. This is represented also in non-liturgical prayers of the Old Testament. Moved by the power of the poetry and singing of the psalms and, of course, by the power of God's Spirit, the Old Testament believer was **expected** to react with the unique and meaningful word of confirmation of his belief: Amen!

2.3 Amen in Post-exilic Texts

Major historical changes took place in the eastern part of the Fertile Crescent during the sixth century BC. The conditions during the Babylonian exile were fairly tolerable, but the Jewish hope for a return to their home land became a reality when Cyrus, the Persian king from the Elamite city of Ashan overcame the Babylonians at the battle at Opis on the River Tigris in 539 BC (Anderson 1957:440). Cyrus chose to abandon the tactics of the Assyrians and Babylonians, who had destroyed cities and temples of the conquered territories, looted sacred treasuries, and transported idols and people into captivity. He adopted a policy according to which the subject peoples were permitted to resettle in their homelands, carry on their customs and worship their gods. Another feature of Cyrus' policy was to permit the Jewish nation to be restored to a limited degree.

To head up the whole Jewish return from exile, Cyrus appointed a man named Sheshbazzar. This was a particularly significant appointment. Admittedly, Sheshbazzar made no great mark on his age, for he was overshadowed by other leaders. But apparently he was a son of Jehoiachin, the exiled king whom many had regarded as the legitimate king of Judah. See 1 Chron. 3:18 where the Davidic line, after Jehoiachin, includes a certain Shenazzar, which may refer to Sheshbazzar. In effect, then, Cyrus handed over the leadership of the Jews to a prince of the Davidic line (Ezr 5:19).

(Anderson 1957:473)

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe at least three organised expeditions of exiles who returned from Persia to Judah after the permission given by Cyrus for them to go home. 'From a religious perspective the situation was far from ideal. The Babylonian Exile had robbed the ancient Israelite faith community of the most important guarantees of God's presence within their midst: the temple, the land, and the Davidic kingship' (Van Wijk-Bos 1998:6). As all these religious symbols had been toppled, the returnees

endeavoured to restore a sense of religious identity and stability to the community. The temple, the walls, and the city of Jerusalem were rebuilt in conditions of high tension between the returning exiles and the members of the community that had continued to live there after the Babylonian conquest. The next steps were to unite the troubled community and to restore worship of the true God.

A new temple and a rebuilt city would restore to the community a sense of itself and its relation to its God, and of God's presence with them. They were true restorations in the sense that old symbols and structures in this way found a new place and renewed significance for the people. At the same time, the priesthood rose to a place of importance it had not known before...

(Van Wijk-Bos 1998:6)

2.3.1 Nehemiah 5: The People's Response to Social Needs

In Nehemiah 5 the governor deals with troubles caused by outsiders and residents of Judah to the returnees from the Babylonian and Persian exiles. The Jews are presented as a fragile but united group bound together by family, cultural and religious ties and working hard in the midst of a famine. Many of them had to mortgage their fields, vineyards and homes in order to get grain during the famine (Ne 5:3). Others had to borrow money in order to be able to pay the king's taxes. Still others had to sell family members as slaves, and were powerless to resist the usury common among those who had stayed in the land. They were exacting exorbitantly high dues from their fellow countrymen. Nehemiah talks to the group he considers responsible for this situation. He upbraids them for their unjust treatment of members of their own community.

In order to formally deal with the oppressors, Nehemiah 'called together a large meeting' (Neh 5:7). The faults were secular and the meeting seems to have had a civil, not a

religious character, even though Nehemiah reprimanded the people for not having ‘walked in the fear of God’ (v 9). The term used for the convocation is קהלה גדולה, but even though the noun קהל is used for religious gatherings, this one could not have been of a religious nature, for it had been called by the governor and not by the priests or by any other religious leader. The nobles and officials were summoned to take an oath - to stop usury and to give the properties back to their owners. Nehemiah himself challenged the audience to take an oath by the symbolic gesture of shaking out the folds of his robe. Blenkinsopp (1988:260) calls this a ‘liturgical conclusion ... practically identical with the conclusion to the setting up of the ark in Jerusalem during David’s reign’. Even though there is a symbolic act involved, this does not allow the interpreter to jump to such a conclusion, which is, to say the least, presumptuous and with which one could not readily agree.

To Nehemiah’s challenge the whole assembly answered, ‘Amen!’ and praised the Lord. Wallis (1974:63) compares the formula of commitment found in Nehemiah 5 to that of Deuteronomy 27, insofar some of the misdeeds of a ruling elite coincide with the imprecation terms of the *Arur*-formula in the latter. Nehemiah is said to have gone a step further than only to threaten with doom, insofar as he gives an example by doing the right thing himself first. He assures a spontaneous response to his gesture through the Amen-formula. Wallis sums up Nehemiah’s example and the people’s response in the following terms:

Auf Grund seines Vorbildes bewegt er sie dann zu einem allgemeinen Schuldenerlaß und zur Rückgabe des eingezogenen Gutes. Darauf läßt er sie in Gegenwart von Priestern einen Eid leisten.... Eine sinnbildhafte Verfluchung und die Responson der Betroffenen durch

das "Amen" schließen die Vereidigung in aller Form ab. Nehemiah beeilt sich auch, zu berichten, daß dieser Eid dann getreulich gehalten worden ist.

(Wallis 1974:63)

At this meeting amen was simultaneously the confirmation of an oath and the people's answer, following the doxology expressed by Ezra to praise Yahweh. The double mention of amen at this stage of Israel's history shows how it had been preserved throughout the centuries both as an assertion of an oath, as well as an expression of a solemn commitment with a liturgical nature. In Nehemiah 5, however, the assembly cannot be taken as an assembly which had a religious or a cultic nature. In order to characterise this meeting as 'liturgical' one would have to adopt the broad concept of liturgy as the description of a public performance of some sort of ritual in general. This is, however, not the perspective of the present study, so that the people's response with amen in Nehemiah 5 cannot be counted among the liturgical responses in a worship situation. This pericope does, however, state the existence of the amen response as a practice in public gatherings in post-exilic times to express a spontaneous agreement to somebody's affirmation.

2.3.2 Nehemiah 8: The Reading of the Law Ceremony

The completion of the wall in Nehemiah 6 sets the stage for the renewal of worship. Yahweh's people finally had adequate physical and social protection, so that a spiritual rebuilding could be undertaken. It was an appropriate time for the returnees to have strong spiritual leadership again. After an unexplained absence of thirteen years, the priest Ezra reappears at the beginning of Nehemiah 8 to lead the people to the renewal of their commitment as God's covenant people.

The said reappearance of Ezra after his long absence and the withdrawal of Nehemiah to a secondary role are much debated issues. The account switches from the first to the third person and the figure of Ezra is reintroduced to lead the upcoming celebration of spiritual restoration. The events reported in this passage are best understood as having taken place soon after those of Ezra 7-8 and shortly before those of Ezra 9-10, because they mention people settling down in their land. In this case the facts in Nehemiah 8 would have taken place two months after Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem, when it is said that he 'had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel' (Ezr 7:10). Whether Ezra and Nehemiah were active at the same time is an arguable issue, but it is not significant for the present study.

A slightly different order of the whole context at this stage, based on the evidence presented by the apocryphal *First Book of Esdras* chapter 9, has been proposed. Myers (1965:152) states that in the given text the passage of Nehemiah 8 follows immediately upon the agreement of those who had married foreign wives that they would divorce them and it represents a ceremony confirming the law and disseminating its teaching among the people. It has, therefore, been suggested that the facts reported in Nehemiah 7:73 and continuing into chapter eight should follow immediately after Ezra 7 (Myers 1965:152). The sequence of Ezra's work among the people seems to confirm this view. The way in which he exerts his function of teaching the decrees and laws of Yahweh in the pericope which follows is a clear statement in favour of this sequence of events.

The law-reading ceremony in Nehemiah 8 intends to give to the restored community the ability to understand the law and to put it into practice. Ezra's guidance is as significant in relation to the religious ceremony as Nehemiah's work had been fundamental to the

rebuilding programs. This happened on the first day of the seventh month, immediately after the returning Israelites had settled in their towns. This day was probably *rosh hashana*, the New Year's Day of the Jewish civil calendar (Lv 23:23-25; Nm 29:1-6), celebrated also as the Feast of Trumpets with a solemn assembly (קָהַל) and cessation from labour.

The meeting was called by the people themselves and not by the priests and religious leaders. 'All the people were assembled (קָהַל is used in its Niphal form וַיִּקְהֹלוּ) as one person in the square before the Water Gate. The narrative begins in Nehemiah 7:73b, and does not indicate on whose initiative the assembly was called. However, as far as the participants are concerned, the expression כָּל־הָעָם כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד ('all the people as one person') elucidates the oneness of the meeting, which included men, women and even children who were already able to understand the explanation of the law.

The leaders and conductors of the event tell Ezra to 'have the Book of the Law brought' (Neh 8:1 - the causative form לְהַבְיִיא, Hiphil Infinitive Construct is used), and so he does (וַיַּבְיֵא - Neh 8:2 - also in the Hiphil, 'he makes it happen'), attending to the people's wish.

There are some striking ceremonial settings, proceedings, gestures and wordings that confirm the religious and liturgical nature of the meeting. Ezra read aloud and the people listened attentively, from daybreak till noon, in an instruction which must have lasted five or six hours. From verses 4-8 the procedure is detailed and one learns that the meeting did not consist of incessant reading: there were interruptions in the form of the people's

response to praise, lifting their hands and bowing down. Alternative sessions of interpretation of the law by the Levites were also introduced.

Ezra 'stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion' (v 4). Even though there is no particular Hebrew word for pulpit, **עַל־הָעֲמֹד**, 'pillar, stand', or 'a place of honour in a meeting' (2 Kg 11:14) and **עֲמֹדִים**, 'special position' (2 Chr 30:16) are mostly used.

The term used in this verse is **מִגְדַּל־עֵץ**, generally meaning 'tower', which refers to its high position, so that all the people could easily see and hear Ezra and his assistants.

Six persons mentioned by name stood on Ezra's right, and seven on his left side. It is not the purpose of this study to debate this apparent discrepancy, as one would expect the same number of people on each side. The Jews would favour the number seven (Buttrick 1954:735), while the number six would symbolise, if not represent, the twelve tribes, as in Ezra 8:35, where twelve bulls were sacrificed 'for all Israel' by the exiles who had returned from captivity. They were indeed important men who shared the platform with Ezra. There is no evidence to support the view that they were priests or Levites. Some are of the opinion that they were Levites and even speak of this platform as the 'Levites' platform' (Fensham 1982:216). Since it was the people who called for the law to be read, however, laymen are not unexpected.

The Masoretic text and most versions agree on the names given to the six men at Ezra's right side, but there is some difficulty with respect to those at his left. It has been suggested that Meshullam, a name omitted in the apocryphal book of 1 Esdras 9:44 (Metzger 1965:21), is a superfluous name in the Masoretic text, since **מִשְׁלָם** may be

the result of a corruption of **מִשְׁמַאלוֹ**, which can be rendered 'on his left hand', an explanation that would supposedly have been repeated at the end of the same verse (Buttrick 1954:735).

The latter view seems more probable, for it would support the idea that six people on each side, totalling twelve, represented the whole people of Israel.

In verse 5 the scroll of the Law is said to have been opened by Ezra. Even though the text says that he opened the 'book' of the Law of Moses (**סֵפֶר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה**), he most probably unrolled the scroll which he must have brought back from Babylon. Ezra was seen as the Law's guardian and as its main exponent, 'a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses' (Ezr 7:6), sent by the king and his seven advisers (Ezr 7:14) and approved by God, 'for the hand of the Lord his God was on him' (Ezr 7:6).

As to the contents of the book, called the 'Book of the Law of Moses' (Neh 8:1), the strongly Deuteronomic tone of Ezra-Nehemiah has led to the conjecture that Ezra's law was the Deuteronomic Code (Buttrick 1954:734). Ezra 7:25a and Nehemiah 8:1 seem to forbid the assumption that the code had been drawn up by Ezra or edited by him. Some prefer to think that Ezra 'brought with him the Priestly source itself as a separate document, or that he worked on the basis of Deuteronomy alone' (Williamson 1987:91). Whatever the material was, it had a profound effect upon the development of the exilic thought and at this new stage would influence the newer generation even more drastically. The traditional view, drawn from 4 Ezra 14:19-48, has been that the book was to all intents and purposes identical with the Pentateuch as we know it. Since the rise of modern critical scholarship and in spite of it, many have continued to maintain this view.

One could infer from this text that Ezra or someone close to him was responsible for the final major work in the Pentateuch's composition.

What matters at this point is that Ezra succeeded in breathing new life into ancient laws that were in danger of becoming a dead letter. 'Against all the odds, he paved the way for the people to find their identity in, and to regulate their continuing life by, a book which from now on was ever contemporary' (Williamson 1987:97).

There are several striking similarities between the ceremony here described, the instructions referred to and the practice of the synagogue. It is difficult to decide how far the description here modelled later liturgical acts in Jewish and Christian worship. The people all stood up when Ezra opened the book or unrolled the scroll. The rabbis concluded from this 'that the congregation should stand at the reading of the Torah' (Yamauchi 1994:714). On standing for prayer, the New Testament describes several instances in which this use had been adopted. Jesus mentions the fact that the Pharisees loved 'to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners' (Mt 6:5; also Lk 18:11). Jesus further suggests that people stood while praying (Mk 11:25). Most Christian denominations still today have the members of their congregation stand while praying, listening to the Bible readings, and in some churches people stand even when singing.

'Ezra praised the Lord the great God' (**וַיְבָרֵךְ עֶזְרָא אֶת־יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים הַגָּדֹל**)

(Neh 8:6). Literally he 'blessed' (**וַיְבָרֵךְ** , a Piel/intensive form) Yahweh, which may also mean that he adored on bended knees (Brown, Driver & Briggs 1962:139). Posture, words and action of the leader come to a climax which introduces a doxology. It is so emphatic that it stimulates the response to the words expressed as a sign of confirmation.

In Jewish synagogues a benediction in a similar wording is pronounced before the reading of each scriptural section (Yamauchi 1994:714). The people lifted their hands in a significant liturgical posture, getting involved in the ceremony to approve what they were hearing. Other Old Testament references to this gesture can be found (Ezr 9:5; Ps 28:2; 134:2). In the New Testament the apostle Paul recommends 'to lift up holy hands in prayer everywhere' (1 Tm 2:8) and that 'every knee should bow... and every tongue confess...' (Phlp 2.10f).

The setting was solemn, but it was evidently not inhibiting... For the Hebrew, emotion inevitably expressed itself in physical attitude. This was because the self was conceived as a unity to a far greater extent than in most modern western culture, where there has been, in many reaches of the Church, a reaction against externalism in religion and a concentration upon inwardness. ... The point that is enduring here is that the reading of the word produced a response which was heartfelt and which was evident to and shared by the congregation.

(McConville 1985:117)

2.3.3 Nehemiah 8: The People's Response

As seen above, emotions ran high at this point of the meeting and provoked physical and verbal response. The lifting up of hands was the first gesture mentioned. Then the people 'bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground' (Neh 8:6). The original meaning of **וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לַיהוָה**, the expression used here for 'to worship Yahweh' (Brown, Driver & Briggs 1962:1005) was 'to prostrate oneself to the ground', especially with the verb in its Hithpael form, in which it appears about one hundred and twelve times in the Old Testament. The preceding verb **וַיִּקְרָנוּ** is the word which expresses the meaning of 'bowing down', always followed by the verb 'to worship'. The verbs used in

the passage and the kind of postures that they present are a clear documentation of a cultic situation.

The culmination of the worship, together with the liturgical settings, proceedings and postures, is the repeated formula 'amen, amen', and connotes the intensity of the feeling behind the affirmation. The repeated 'amen, amen' here clearly depicts amen as a **spontaneous liturgical response** by which the worshippers express their wholehearted participation in and assent to the prayer. The standing during the reading, and the response of the congregation with amen, must have been part of a liturgical procedure already accepted for the reading of the Torah and for the closing of prayers at the time of the return from the Babylonian exile.

Hulst emphasises that the amen response is not only the confirmation of what has been said, but a personal acceptance of the whole matter:

Hoe dit ook zij – het woord Amen als antwoord op een bepaalde uitspraak betekent niet alleen maar, dat men die uitspraak voor waar houdt zonder meer, maar vooral ook, dat men die uitspraak voor zichzelf aanvaardt. Men weet er existentieel bij betrokken te zijn. Het komt mij voor, dat we hier op een belangrijk moment in de betekenisbepaling van het woord "Amen" zijn gestoten, dat we onder geen beding mogen verliezen, doch dat voortdurend ons bewust moet blijven. Amen heeft daarom niet zozeer betrekking op de inhoud van een bepaalde uitspraak, maar juist en vooral ook op de persoon, die deze uitspraak hoort en nu voor zichzelf in al zijn consequentie laat gelden.

(Hulst 1953:55)

Nehemiah 8 is a most important chapter with regard to the picture it paints of Israel at worship. 'We have in these verses one of the most graphic portrayals of Israel at worship in the Old Testament' (McConville 1985:116). This author goes on to explain the worship experience with a heartfelt response:

We are close here to the beginnings of the Jewish synagogue, which may have originated in the Babylonian exile, where the law was read from a raised platform, and where places were reserved for the most eminent synagogue members close to the spot where the law was read. The effect was to show that those who wielded authority in the community were themselves under the authority of God, and that therefore it was the word of God that regulated the whole life of the community.

McConville 1985:116)

2.3.4 Distinctive Activities Connected with Public Worship

There are some features of the Nehemiah 8 ceremony that show the diversity of steps taken by Ezra and his helpers in order to convey the message to the people. One could talk about the methodology used by the Levites in order to interpret the Law simultaneously to different groups of people. To accomplish this, methods of reading, instruction, counselling, caring and sharing were used. These features were important to attain the results and the response that followed.

a) Reading - The first feature of the reading of the Law session was, as the expression states, a 'reading' activity. Imbedded in an oral culture, the people of the time had well-developed listening skills. Ezra read aloud from the Book of the Law 'from daybreak till noon' (Neh 8:3), that is for about six hours. Throughout this extended period of time, 'the ears of all the people were attentive', as expressed in the same verse. This procedure in presenting the word of Yahweh was the starting point of the whole ceremony.

b) Instruction - Another feature was an 'instruction' activity, which followed suit. A team of helpers formed by the Levites 'instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there ... making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people

could understand what was being read' (Neh 8:7-8). The Hiphil Participle form מְבַיְנִים implies that they helped the people or caused them to understand what was being read. It has been suggested that they functioned at the same time as a kind of translator. 'One traditional view is that the law written in Hebrew was translated into Aramaic; the beginning of the Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament, known as *targumim*, was ascribed to Ezra by the later Jewish rabbis, and Nehemiah 13:24 might suggest that knowledge of Hebrew was imperfect by this time' (Coggins 1976:109).

Among the Jews in the Diaspora, after the Exile, the Aramaic language was replacing Hebrew as a universal medium of political contact with the outside world and as a means of communication among themselves, except for their worship language. A significant part of the agenda of this public service was that of exposition or instruction, which must have included the solving of language problems, as מְבַיְנִים refers to a group that had to be attended to so that they understood what had been read. A remark made at a later stage of the development of the synagogue proceedings accounts for the coming into existence of the *targumim*.

Schürer describes this historical process as follows:

As the language in which Scripture was read was no longer familiar to the whole people, a translation had to be provided. The reading was therefore accompanied by a *targum*, a continuous rendering into Aramaic. In the absence of definite evidence, it is not possible to determine whether the interpreter was a permanent officer, or whether competent member of the congregation took it in turns to fulfil this role. The text of the Torah was read and translated verse by verse.... Not until the fourth century AD is there an isolated reference to the translation being read from a written *targum*.

(Schürer 1979:452-453)

The reading and explaining of the Law in the Nehemiah 8 passage might even have been done by making use of group dynamics, each group being led by one of the instructors, as suggested by Blenkinsopp (1988:288): 'It seems safer to take it in the most general sense indicated by the adverb "distinctly", i.e. implying care for the exact pronunciation, intonation, and phrasing, so as to make the units of the piece of Law reading and its traditional sense readily comprehensible'.

In fact, despite the nearly universal literacy among male Jews and the possession of a written Torah, the younger generation (**מְבִינִים** , 'those that were given understanding', definitely refers to those individuals in the audience) had learned Aramaic and begun to write their traditional Hebrew in characters borrowed from Aramaic (Buck 1966:502). If this was the case in the written language, as one could well infer, then oral Hebrew, as read from the Book of the Law , might have had to be explained for a better understanding, as mentioned in the given text. The additional form **מִפְרָשׁ** stands for 'making distinct, clear', 'explaining', and confirms the idea that the Law was 'translated' and being made understood to those who could not grasp the message. Buttrick (1954: 737) adduces proof from the Babylonian Talmud, that says that 'originally the Law was given to Israel in Hebrew writing as the holy language. It was again given to them in the days of Ezra in the Assyrian [i.e. Aramaic] writing and the Aramaic language'. According to this assertion it should be concluded that the explanatory session was one of translating the Hebrew into popular Aramaic. The important point at this cultic setting was that the message had to be correctly understood in order to cause the positive amen response which follows.

The new prominence given to the Law brought about important changes in the life of the returnees from the exile. As from the time of Ezra the priests and Levites were the custodians and exponents of the Law. 'But its scientific study and interpretation naturally drifted into the hands of a professional class who made this their calling. From their work as copyist of the Holy Scriptures these men were known as *sopherim* or scribes... They ... were henceforth to exercise the controlling influence upon Jewish religious life' (Fairweather 1961:67f).

c) Counselling - The effect of the reading and explanation of the Law was that 'all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law' (Neh 8:9). The portion read must have deeply impressed the whole assembly and everyone individually. They were so moved that they mourned as they felt convicted of their sin in transgressing the Torah. This induced Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites to comfort them. The comforting of believers who regret their wrongdoing and confess it, and in this way show repentance, is a fundamental part of worship, as becomes evident from this Biblical passage. The leaders of worship in the post-exilic Israel laid the foundations of later developments in nurturing and strengthening a repenting congregation with a message of confidence and joy. The gathering that had become sad was turned into a joyous one by means of counselling. The powerful and comforting message is: 'Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength' (v 10).

d) Caring and Sharing – Last but not least in this sequence of listening and responding to Yahweh's law is the outcome of the session. At Nehemiah's command, the people disband after having been calmed down and having set aside their grief. 'Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food (to those who had nothing

prepared) and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them' (v 12).

Joy is a vital part and a healthy consequence of all true worship. It becomes a glad service especially when it is done in the willingness to serve God and one's fellow believer.

The common opinion that the Jewish religion was gloomy and austere is erroneous. Its ritual and ceremonial regulations were indeed detailed, and certainly solemn, but there was much of joy in the services. Religious ritual requirements included sacrifices of thanksgiving, of which the larger portion was eaten by the offerer and his friends in a festal meal (Deut. 27:6,7) Of the other seasons set apart for special religious observances, in only one were the people to "afflict" their souls (Lev 23:27). The others were festivals for the commemoration of God's goodness and for the offering of praise to Him.

(Nichol 1954:426)

The word used in verse 12 for 'joy' is שִׂמְחָה, which is widely used in the Old Testament. Another word for 'joy' or 'gladness' is used in verse 10 is תִּרְדְּנָה, of Chaldean origin. It is used only three times in the Old Testament, all of them in the late writings of the Chronicler (1Chr 16:27; Ezr 6:16; Neh 8:10) (Brown, Driver & Briggs 1962:292). The 'joy of Yahweh' is the powerful motivation for the people's strength to carry the burden of keeping the Law. The gladness announced by Ezra was then expressed by the people as they enjoyed choice food and sweet drinks, and by sending portions of it to the "have-nots". The people's gratitude to Yahweh became part of their worship as they showed through deeds of love that they had "understood the words that had been made known to them' (v 12). The attitude of the Israelites shows that they underwent a great change when turning their exilic ordeal and their worship from a grievous and sombre one to a joyful experience. 'Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is

your strength!’ was the final remark of the governor Nehemiah (v 10). After the yoke of servitude in exile had been broken and they had returned safely to the land of their fathers, there was plenty of reason to be glad. The re-establishment of their homes and cities and, last but not least, their renewed commitment to the true worship to Yahweh were the immediate causes of the changes reported.

Keil (1990:553) confirms the fact that this joy and willingness to sharing had become part of the procedures on festive days: ‘Hieraus ersehen wir, daß es Sitte in Israel geworden war, an Festtagen den Armen Portionen von Speisen und Getränken ins Haus zu schicken, um ihnen auch eine Festerquickung zu gewähren.’ What follows in this chapter (Neh 8:13-17) confirms in the life of the people the positive mood they had gained after this solemn event: the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, a description which ends with the cheerful statement: ‘And their joy was very great’ (v 17).

2.3.5 Summary

The new breeze that pervaded the returnees from the Babylonian and Persian exiles led them to undertake major physical activities, like the rebuilding of the city walls and of their own homes. Their efforts finally centred around the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple. As the people gather to reorder their life under Yahweh’s Law, the covenant is renewed. Nehemiah and Ezra contribute to this restoration process, and ultimately Ezra and his team of priest, Levites and other helpers take precedence as those who read and teach the Law and lead the joyful celebrations. Their intention was to make Jerusalem once again a praise and a joy in the earth. As a proof of their success the liturgical session of Nehemiah culminates with the people’s spontaneous response with a double amen, by

which they express their wholehearted participation and assent. The amen response was becoming at that stage of its development a powerful confirmation that the word of God regulated the life of the whole community.

2.4 Final Summary of the Old Testament Liturgical Texts Containing “Amen”

In order to sum up, after the examination of the overall use of amen in the Old Testament as undertaken in the present chapter, one can conclude that **there has been a development and a shift of meaning of the word as time passed by.**

In the earlier texts amen was used to introduce an answer to the words of a previous speaker and was accompanied by another wish (1 Ki 1:36; Jr 28:6; 11:5).

At a later stage the words of the answer were suppressed and amen stood alone, as the only word of one's confirmation and assent. In the instances of an oath or strong statement, amen appears to be the last word of the sole speaker, instead of the first or only word of the person responding to the oath. A group of people could take that same oath or respond jointly to an expression of doom. The ritual of the covenant renewal at Shechem, as determined in Deuteronomy 27, **demands of the whole assembly** to express their compliance towards the curses that were solemnly spoken by the Levites.

A following stage in the usage of amen is where there is no indication of a new speaker, so that the word of confirmation is said by the speaker himself or by a group of speakers after their own prayer, as at the end of some psalms. In these cases amen had taken on a highly liturgical meaning, and worshippers were **expected to react and respond with amen**, especially after a doxology was pronounced. Even though most psalms originated

in an individual experience, yet they generally tended to show the consciousness also of a group, whether of the devout believers or of Israel as a people.

A highly developed form of voluntary response can be noticed in the public recitation and explanation of the Torah by Ezra and by the Levites in Nehemiah 8 and in the reaction to this reading on the part of the assembled people. This event marks the most solemn liturgical setting of the whole Old Testament in which **a congregation of believers responds with a spontaneous amen** in confirmation of the covenant with Yahweh as their true and only God. In fact the response is done with a double amen, as it occurs in some of the liturgical psalms. This repetition adds intensity of feeling on the part of the people and is a further proof of the spontaneity of their response.

The sequence of usage of amen in the Old Testament, as displayed in the present chapter, proves that amen developed as a liturgical response and grew in importance as time passed. In late Judaism the congregation was expected to confirm its agreement responsively, mainly through the liturgical form 'amen'. The Talmudic saying, 'In prayer a man should always unite himself with the community' clearly expresses this procedure. (Robinson 1959: 29).

Amen had become a vital part of post-exilic Jewish worship and was ready to be assimilated by Christian usage in New Testament times and until today.

CHAPTER 5

"AMEN" IN LATER JUDAISM, IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

When studying the amen concept in its occurrences throughout the Old Testament as well as its use thereafter, the investigator can choose a general and/or a more specific angle to achieve his/her aim. To attain the general aim mention is made of all occurrences of the word, and in this author's particular aim attention is given to the **liturgical texts**. The present chapter intends to refer shortly to the occurrences of amen in inter-testamental times and in the New Testament, as well as to trace its history or transmission to the Christian church until the present time. Special attention will be given to the use of amen in today's worship, in order to propose it as a plea for ecumenical understanding.

1 Amen in the Apocrypha

Amen occurs a few times in the *Apocrypha*, the non-canonical books which are largely accepted as writings that appeared in the inter-testamental period.

1.1 The Prayer of Manasseh

The Prayer of Manasseh, written in accordance with the best liturgical forms and breathing a spirit of deep and genuine religious feeling, ends with amen, which is added to the doxology: 'For all the host of heaven sings thy praise, and thine is the glory

forever. Amen!’ (Metzger 1965:220). This is a strong commitment to someone’s own prayer. Even though *The Prayer of Manasseh* is not considered a canonical book and is ascribed to a pre-exilic king of Israel, it reflects the Jewish thinking and religious practice of post-exilic times. The use of amen in this apocryphal book is close to that of Psalm 41, in which a doxology also concludes a very intimate type of personal prayer

1.2 Tobit

In the book of *Tobit*, chapter 8, Tobit and Sarah join in prayer before consummating their marriage. In verse 8, the concluding wish in Tobit’s prayer is confirmed by his wife with ‘Amen’ (Metzger 1965:70). Her answer is probably not so much a confirmation of what has been said, but rather of hope for what is desired. This use of amen complies with the instances in which it is used in liturgical or private prayers in later Old Testament times, particularly with that in Jeremiah 28:6, namely in the sense of a heartfelt desire to be attended to by God.

1.3 Judith

In *Judith* 13:20 the people respond with the double ‘amen, amen!’ to what can be called an outburst of patriotism in the form of a prayer for God’s blessings on Judith for her heroic deed in decapitating Nebuchadnezzar’s general Holofernes (Metzger 1965:92). The response here expressed resembles the situation of public worship in later Israelite history, even though the book may be a work of fiction and the situation that of a public celebration of military victory.

In a second occurrence of amen in the book of *Judith*, the high priest Joakim and the senate of the people of Israel come together to learn the good news the Lord had made known to them. As they all gather to praise Judith for her heroic deed and express their great pride in her, they express the wish: 'May the Almighty Lord bless you for ever!' And all the people said, 'So be it!' (i.e. 'Amen!') (Metzger 1965:93). As on the previous occasion, the people did not gather for cultic purposes, but the amen takes on some responsive connotation in the way people answer a certain kind of prayer or wish, thus asserting their agreement with what had been said.

1.4 Other Occurrences

Other occurrences of amen in the *Apocrypha* are not decisive nor relevant for the present study, since they do not shed any light on the liturgical use of the term. The passages are mentioned here in order to complete the list of occurrences. Furthermore, these amen seem to be a later insertion into the original text: Sirach 50:29; 3 Maccabees 7:23; 4 Maccabees 18:24.

2 Amen in Inter-Testamental Jewish Worship

The main centres of Jewish worship in the inter-testamental period were three: the temple, the synagogue and the home (Beckwith 1979:39). Worship performed at home has been a tradition in the Jewish family for thousands of years and is deeply rooted in the process of religious education over the generations. However, as the point to be proved is of a collective and public nature, private prayers and devotional life in the family, even with the use of amen, will not be treated in this study.

2.1 Jewish Worship in the Temple

Yahweh had promised to meet Israel at the temple first built by Solomon, as he confirmed to him in 2 Chronicles 7:12, 16 NIV: ‘I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as temple for sacrifices.... I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there for ever. My eyes and my heart will always be there’. As Yahweh had associated his presence in a very special way with the temple, after its destruction he himself was, in a sense, in exile. The post-exilic prophets, however, called for the rebuilding of the temple, and Haggai reaffirms Yahweh’s intention to carry on his promises of old: ‘I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord Almighty.... The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.... And in this place I will grant peace...’ (Hg 2:7-9 NIV).

In his thorough study on the Jewish worship in the book *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Elbogen (1931:495) devotes a chapter to the response of the congregation, especially in later Judaism. Strangely and without any documentation, however, he arrives at a conclusion that the response with amen was not admitted in the Second Temple, but that it had been replaced by the eulogy ‘Blessed be the glorious Name and his kingdom forever and ever!’ He does admit, however, that the practice was not uniform.

Die Art des Respondierens und der Beteiligung der Gemeinde war in der ältesten Zeit bei den verschiedenen Teilen des Gebets **nicht gleichmäßig** (‘not evenly used’ -emphasis and translation by the present author). Am einfachsten war der Vortag der Tefilla, die der Vorbeter allein sprach, während die Gemeinde zuhörte und Vers für Vers mit **יְהוָה** beantwortete. Als später eingeführt wurde, daß die leise Tefilla der lauten vorangehen mußte, änderte das die

Vertragsweise nicht, der Vorbeter sprach seinen Text genau so wie in der älteren Zeit und die Gemeinde hatte in derselben Weise zu erwidern.

(Elbogen 1931:496)

There is at least one reference in the Rabbinical literature, however, to the fact that in late Jewish worship amen was not allowed to be spoken in the temple (Oesterley 1965:71). Whether or not this was the case at some early period, it is certain from the passages mentioned in the Psalms that in the temple liturgy amen was indeed used, unless one assumes that these amen are a later addition to the text, a possibility which may not be excluded. Despite these views, it is important to the present author both to defend the integrity of the Hebrew text handed down in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and to trace the liturgical amen back to the time of the composition of the psalms in which the amen endings occur.

2.2 Jewish Worship in the Synagogue

The other central cultic institution of post-exilic Judaism was the **synagogue**. Whether the synagogue began as a substitute for the temple, or a supplement to the temple, it has, in fact, fulfilled both roles. Several attempts have been made to ascertain how, when and where the synagogue first came into existence. There is no historical record of the date and circumstances of its emergence as a religious institution, nor is there any literary reference or archaeological evidence pointing directly to its beginnings. An accepted explanation for the origin of the synagogue is made by Cavaletti (1990:7), who says that 'the Jews, deprived of the temple after its destruction by the Babylonian conquerors, sought for means of replacing the animal sacrifices offered there'. The assumption then is that the Jewish synagogue was established in Babylon by the Jewish exiles there. In this

way the synagogue 'was rooted in a religious need which became deeper and more widespread as time went on, a desire that religion should penetrate more deeply into daily life and that the non priestly classes should have a more lively participation in its activities' (Cavaletti 1990:7).

There is, however, a minority view mentioned and defended by Weingreen (1976:115), which advocates a pre-exilic date for the emergence of the synagogue and locate the place of its origin in Judaea and that it might have existed already in the days of the prophet Jeremiah. In Psalm 74:8 a lament is sung by the psalmist for the destruction of all **מוֹעֲדֵי־אֵל**, an expression which is translated as 'all meeting places' in the land. Brown, Driver and Briggs (1962:417) translate the noun also as 'synagogues', a Greek word which correspondingly means 'meeting place'. The theory of the early origin of the synagogue also takes into account the active part which the ordinary Israelite must have played in religious worship of the Jerusalem temple during the latter period of its existence. Weingreen (1976:115) states in the same passage that 'the nature of congregational worship and associated religious activity in pre-exilic Israel could lead us, by means of a direct line of the continuity of tradition, to the emergent synagogue'.

It is not within the scope of the present study to enter the debate about the origin of the synagogue. Both views, nevertheless, corroborate the main proposal of this author, that the inter-testamental Judaism preserved the basic institutions for congregational worship by means of the so-to-say unofficial approval of the synagogue. For the vast numbers of Jews scattered over the world a visit to the temple in Jerusalem was 'something of the

same kind as the pilgrimage to Mecca – a thing that might be undertaken once in a lifetime’ (Manson 1959:36).

Most important of all, many elements in the Synagogue liturgy were taken over from the service of the Temple, notably the names of the various daily offices, the use of certain psalms, the recitation of the Decalogue and the *Shema*, and some of the oldest prayers.... Hence what is specially characteristic of the Synagogue service is the place given to the reading and exposition of Scripture and to prayer

(Manson 1959:38)

As far as the exposition of Scripture is concerned, there is a direct line of continuity from the historical period of the Old Testament unto rabbinical literary and legal processes of exposition which culminated in the edition of the Talmud: the *Mishna*. This bulk of oral laws constitutes the first part of the Talmud and presents in its six orders or *Sedarim* and its sixty three tractates the authorised rabbinical presentation or exposition of the Torah and other Biblical texts, alongside with sundry religious or legal matters (Weingreen 1959:145). What matters for the present enquiry is that the synagogue and the Jewish religious writings preserved the Old Testament liturgical traditions and developed them further so that they influenced profoundly the New Testament writings and early Christian thinking.

The Psalms were especially well preserved and used in the synagogue worship. It has been mentioned already that in the synagogues the psalms were chanted antiphonally, and that the congregation repeated the first verse of the psalm in question after every verse chanted by the officiant. At the conclusion of the psalm a doxology was added ending with amen. There were many other parts of the synagogue service which the people knew by heart, so that they would occasionally take their proper share in it.

As Jewry from the time of the Babylonian exile and onwards began to emphasize prayer, Amen served them as a mainstay in their existence, whether in connection with the sacrificial ritual or as a replacement of that ritual which could no longer be carried out after the destruction of the Temple. The community of worshippers regarded this ancient formula of affirmation as a prayerful outburst of faith in the Almighty.

(Gevaryahu 1984:94)

The use of amen, therefore, became very common in the liturgical setting of post-exilic Judaism and over the centuries it developed into a detailed set of cultic regulations (Schlier 1979:450). In pre-Christian times the expression of the formula in a loud voice took on a legal and witnessing character. If somebody would not agree by responding with amen, the consequences of this attitude would have to be borne (Seybold 1992:115). Amen was supposed to follow a prayer like an echo. The reaction was liturgically planned. In the Great Synagogue of Alexandria a signal was given with a flag from the central platform when to respond amen after blessings (Seybold 1992:115).

In Judaism the use of Amen is widespread and firmly established. An extraordinary value is attached to its utterance. In synagogue though not in temple worship it occurs as the response of the community to the detailed praises which the leader utters with the prayers or on other occasions, And to each of the three sections into which the priest divided the Aaronic blessing of Nu 6:24-26. It was the confession of the praise of God which was laid on the community and which the community was to affirm by its answer. And it was the confession of the blessing of God which was pronounced to the community and which the community was to make operative by its Amen.

(Schlier 1979:336)

2.3 Summary

It has been shown so far that amen became a liturgical formula in Jewish public worship and as such was preserved throughout the inter-testamental times and even longer. In the prayers at home as in the Temple and synagogues, liturgical traditions were kept in high

regard in their various formulations, with special attention to the Amen-formula as it was in use in later times of the Old Testament. It is necessary to show now that these elements in the Jewish liturgy were - in their original form - pre-Christian. There is no doubt that the use of amen in the synagogues as the people's answer to a prayer and said aloud by a representative was adopted into the worship of the Christian Church. It will be shown that the next step was for the New Testament to take over not only the concept and usage of amen, but also the Hebrew word transliterated into Greek by Ἀμήν. In the Septuagint amen was usually translated as γένοιτο, which expresses the wish 'be it so'. In the later occurrences in the Old Testament, when amen became a responsive phrase, the Hebrew amen is left untranslated, so as to retain the original setting in which it was uttered. Only once, in Jeremiah 28:6 is it translated by ἀληθῶς. A detailed study of each use of amen would, however, take this study too far.

3 Amen in the New Testament

In spite of being a Hebrew word and of Israelite tradition, amen is much more frequently used in the New Testament than in the Old, 'doubtless because the early Christians readily made solemn and ecstatic affirmations of the new revelation in Christ which demanded a responsive amen from the other participants in the worship or a supplementary amen from the speaker or writer in the case of a doxology or blessing'.
(Ross 1991:167)

3.1 The Use of Amen by Jesus

Jesus prefaced his more important declarations with 'amen, amen', as opposed to common Jewish practice. This is the only usage of amen found in the Gospels, so that it

must be considered separately, and as such it does not pertain to the scope of the present study. Amen is used with this meaning and as a single word thirty-one times in Matthew, fourteen times in Mark, seven times in Luke. In the Gospel of John such great importance is attached to the word that in all twenty-five times amen is duplicated, totalling one hundred and two times in the four Gospels.

Jesus used the amen to introduce some of his sayings, with the intention of putting stress on what he was about to say. This was definitely a distinctively new usage by Jesus, as a parallel to the declaration of the prophets, 'Thus says the Lord', although with the difference that he knew himself to be the mouthpiece of God. 'The point of the amen before Jesus' own sayings is rather to show that as such they are reliable and true, and that they are so as and because Jesus Himself in his Amen acknowledges them to be His own sayings and thus makes them valid... the whole of Christology *in muce*' ('in a nutshell') (Schlier 1979:338).

The author of the fourth Gospel attached such importance to this usage of Jesus that he always doubled the 'Amen'. Luke, on the other hand, writing for Gentile readers, retains this prefatory 'Amen' only six times; in the other places where it was in his sources he replaces it by *alêthôs* or omits it altogether. If Matthew sometimes incorporated this expression in redactional additions to the Lord's utterances, this was because he knew it was characteristic of the Lord's usage.

(Ross 1991:167)

There is definitely a unique use of amen by Christ as a word of introduction to his speeches as well as an expression that calls for acceptance and faith in the minds and hearts of his hearers. As such it demands faith in his Messiahship and by following this uniqueness the evangelists preferred to leave amen untranslated.

The overwhelming occurrence of amen in the New Testament Gospels with basically the same meaning does not follow Jewish practice, as has already been pointed out. That the Christian amen has retained its Old Testament meaning and that it continued to be used in liturgical settings must be detected from other passages in the New Testament.

3.2 Amen in the Book of Revelation and in the New Testament Epistles

In **Revelation 1:7**, at the end of the writer's statement that Christ will come again and that all the tribes of the earth will mourn on account of him, amen occurs together with *ναί* resulting in an emphatic 'yes'. It has been suggested that in this verse there is a double assent because *ναί* is the Greek assent of Gentiles and 'amen' the Hebrew assent of Jews, or more probably that *ναί* is the ordinary assent of humanity, but needing confirmation by addition of the sacred word amen (Ross 1991:167).

There are two other instances of the use of amen in the book of Revelation which come close to the category of liturgical response as it appears in later Old Testament writings. In **Revelation 7:12** the great multitude of the redeemed together with other heavenly beings fall down on their faces before the throne and worship God. In the doxology they begin and end with amen. 'From the use of amen at the end of a doxology, in which it becomes part of the doxology or prayer, we can understand how it can come to have a place at the beginning as well, especially when it forms the link between a preceding doxology and that which follows' (Schlier 1979:337).

Finally amen comes at the end of a biblical book in **Revelation 22:20** as the writer's reply to the Lord's announcement of his coming. In this verse it is also preceded by the

affirmation *ναί*, as in Rv 1:7, for the sake of corroboration. The importance of this passage is that amen is the answer of the church, represented by the writer of Revelation, which ‘**acknowledges the divine promise** (emphasis by this author) which is the basis on which the petition can be made’ (Schlier 1979:337).

Several uses of amen in the Pauline letters are an affirmative response to the leader’s prayer. In **1 Corinthians 14:16** the apostle Paul questions whether someone who is sitting among *τὸν τόπον τοῦ ἰδιώτου*, an expression explained as referring to people devoid of special learning or gifts (Analytical Greek Lexicon 1973:149) or an outsider would be able to add his amen to the speaker’s words of praise if he does not know what they mean, since they are uttered in an unknown language. It appears from this passage that the amen was being used at the apostle’s time as a regular response to a prayer of thanksgiving, no matter the language in which it was spoken. It also becomes clear from Paul’s words that amen should always be a conscious response, while someone prays or sings with his mind and spirit, and that by responding in this way a person must understand what has been said and that one is ‘edified’ by doing so (1 Cor 14:17).

There is a differentiated use of amen by the apostle Paul in **2 Corinthians 1:17-20** in a somewhat difficult context. The apostle excuses himself for not having visited Corinth at a given time and combines the change of his plans with the amen expressed for the glory of God. Hasler (1969:69) points out to the importance of one’s ‘yes’ and ‘amen’ to be in tune with the ‘yes’ of God, even in our earthly plans: ‘Wie das Amen das Lob Gottes bestätigt, so bezeugt des Apostels Verlässlichkeit, mit der er seine Abmachungen einhält, die in Christus geoffenbarte Treue Gottes’. Paul says that since the promises of God are yes in Christ, it is through him that the amen is uttered to God by us for his glory. The

congregation is supposed to confirm its agreement with or acceptance of God's promises by saying 'amen' to the divine 'yes'. In this way it makes the prayer or witness its own by adding the customary amen. It seems to have become a common liturgical practice in Corinth, and the apostle wants to re-direct the amen spoken by the believers to the source of their faith, Jesus Christ.

This view is strengthened by a similar use in **Revelation 5:14**, where the four living creatures add amen to the universal acclamation in the previous verse. Another such use occurs in **Revelation 19:4**. After the great multitude praised God for condemning the great prostitute, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures worship God and cry, 'Amen, hallelujah!'. The combination of amen with hallelujah or its eventual replacement by hallelujah, as noted already in some psalms of the Old Testament (Ps 106:48; 150:6) may be explained by the highly acclamatory character of both terms and their adequate use to enhance a festive occasion.

Most doxologies in New Testament writings end with amen, following thoughts of praise, glory, honour, might, power, majesty, authority attributed to God. The formula is used by Paul (Rm 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 16:27; Gl 1:5; Eph 3:21; Phlp 4:20; 1 Tm 1:17; 6:16; 2 Tm 4:18), Peter (1 Pt 4:11; 5:11), Jude (Jude 25), and in the Epistle to the Hebrews (13:21). Besides these passages, others add the amen to the end of an epistle or book (Rm 15:33; Gl 6:18; Rv 22:20).

A sole instance in which amen is used as a noun occurs in **Revelation 3:14**, a usage similar to Isaiah 65:16 in the Old Testament. Here it is found where the letter to the church at Laodicea begins: *Τάδε λέγει ὁ Ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός* ('Thus

says the Amen, the faithful and true witness'). In these words John reproduces not only the Hebrew word amen, but also two derivatives of the Old Testament word amen added to 'witness': *πιστός* for the Hebrew אָמֵן אֱמִתּוֹת, and *ἀληθινός* for אָמֵן אֱמִתּוֹת. The striking similarity between the use of amen as a noun in the above mentioned passages of Isaiah and Revelation seem to assert the truthfulness of God as a departing point of biblical faith and truth, and **amen as a causative expression** which burst out of these concepts as a human affirmation of the divine attributes mentioned.

4 Amen in Early Christianity

By about the second century AD it had become accepted that it was proper to end a prayer with amen, as the early church continued to use amen in three principal ways recorded in the New Testament:

- a) occasionally as emphatic 'yes';
- b) often as the conclusion of a doxology; and
- c) regularly as a response in worship settings.

To illustrate a) above see Palladius's preface to his edition of Athanasius's *Life of St Anthony*: 'May our Lord help and strengthen the writer to write, and (the reader) to read and to perform everything which is commanded (herein). Amen. O Lord, help me and bring me to the end (of the work)! Amen' (Ross 1991:168).

As to category b) as early as at the end of the first century AD Clement of Rome always added amen to his declarations of praise in his first letter to the Corinthians, as in chapter

20:11-12: '...abundantly to us who have fled for refuge to his mercies through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and majesty for ever and ever. Amen' (Ross 1991:169).

The Lord's Prayer ends with a doxology according to the Western versions of Matthew 6:13, and most of them conclude it with amen in accordance with contemporary custom. Glaue conducts a lengthy discussion on the liturgical use of the Lord's Prayer and asserts that the early Christian communities took over the use of a doxological ending of the Lord's Prayer followed by amen as the acceptance of its content by the worshippers.

Als aber das Vaterunser in den liturgischen Gebrauch der christlichen Gemeinde übernommen wurde – und diese liturgischen Formen haben sich zum Teil schon am Ende des 1. Jahrhunderts zu konsolidieren angefangen –, da hatte man entsprechend dem kultischen Gebrauch der jüdischen Gemeinde das Gebet entweder durch ein bloßes Amen abgeschlossen, durch das die Gemeinde ihre Zustimmung zu dem vom Leiter der Versammlung vorgeschprochenen Gebete ausdrücken sollte, oder nach den Mustern, die ja das Alte Testament bot, vgl. 1 Chron. 29,11 durch eine Doxologie; ... ganz von der Gemeinde gesprochen... Dafür daß das Vaterunser durch eine – nicht die jetzt übliche – Doxologie abgeschlossen wurde, ist die Didache der erste Zeuge (Kap. 8,2).

(Glaue 1925:189)

In order to confirm the amen as a regular response in worship settings, as indicated in c) above, Justin Martyr, the Christian apologist who lived in the second century AD, in his *Apology* (1:65) describes the Eucharist and says that after the celebration, prayers and thanksgiving have been completed, the whole congregation signifies its assent by saying Amen (Ross 1991:168).

During Cyril of Jerusalem's time, in the fourth century AD, the enunciation of amen by the congregation took its place in different parts of the worship service, becoming more and more an element of participation of the worshippers:

- a) after the eucharistic prayers;
- b) after the words of consecration;
- c) at the reception of the elements in the Sacrament of the Altar; and
- d) at the end of other prayers and even at the closing of the sermon (Glaue 1925:197).

Glaue raises an interesting debate about later developments of the liturgical formula ending with amen. At a time when clericalism dangerously led to the imposing predominance of Catholic priests over their parishioners, this attitude influenced the worship by restricting more and more the participation of the believer. The priest would take over many tasks that had previously been in the hands of the people, in the light of the dogma that Eucharist was a renewed sacrifice of Christ, to be enacted by the priest on behalf of the congregation. In this process the congregation was deprived of its active participation in worship and relegated to a passive role in the service (Glaue 1925:197). In the words of Ross, 'gradually with the increase of clericalism the "amens" in the liturgy came to be said by the priest only, or by a liturgical ministrant of the choir. In the orthodox liturgies of St John Chrysostom and St Basil an Amen is said by deacon or choir after every doxological prayer' (Ross 1991:169).

At the time of St Augustin the amen was spoken as a consent of the congregation to the prayers said on its behalf by the liturgist. The Gregorian Canon of the Mass delegated the amen to the choir (Glaue 1925:198).

Amen found its way into the Lord's Prayer by means of the *Textus Receptus*, a complete edition of the Greek New Testament of the sixteenth century, even though the doxology ending with amen was not originally in the longer Matthew text, as it is absent from the most trustworthy manuscripts. In this edition a doxological ending and the amen are added to the Lord's Prayer, in accordance with contemporary usage and reflecting the many different forms in use in the early centuries (Ross 1991:169).

One may also note at this stage that amen occurs in early Christian inscriptions. Herbermann (1907:409), mentions the fact that 'as the Greek letters which form Amen according to their numerical values total 99 ($\alpha=1$, $\mu=40$, $\eta=8$, $\nu=50$), this number often appears in inscriptions, especially of Egyptian origin, and a sort of magical efficacy seems to have been attributed to its symbol'.

5 Amen in Later Christian Usage

After the break-up of the Roman Empire in the fifth century AD, Christian practice became more diverse, even though to a considerable extent the usage of amen continued in the types mentioned above. Anselm ended his *Cur Deus Homo* with a benediction followed by amen (Ross 1991:169). In the process of copying the liturgies by hand, the scribes used to write the amen in the margin of the text in ink of a different colour than that of the text itself. This was done to highlight the liturgical procedure that it should be said by the congregation (Glaue 1925:198).

Thomas à Kempis (1379-1471) wrote amen after each of the first three books of the *De Imitatione Christi*, but surprisingly not after the fourth.

Herbermann (1907:408) describes the Roman Catholic view of the use of amen through the ages. Even though the word was added to prayers as early as the middle of the second century AD, it does not occur at the end of the early creeds. It should not be spoken at the end of the formula for the administration of baptism, even though in the Churches of the East amen is still commonly said after the formula of baptism, sometimes by the bystanders, sometimes by the priest himself. In the prayers of exorcism it is the person exorcised who is expected to say amen, and in the conferring of sacred orders the candidate responds with amen. Amen is spoken by the people at the close of the great Prayer of Consecration in the Roman Catholic liturgy. Another instance is that in which amen is uttered by each of the faithful when receiving Holy Communion. The following is a summary of the Catholic use of amen in the church's liturgy:

Still we cannot say that any uniform principle governs liturgical usage in this matter, for when at Holy Mass the celebrant blesses the deacon before the latter goes to read the Gospel, it is the priest himself who says Amen.... Further, it may be noticed that in past centuries certain local rites seem to have shown an extraordinary predilection for the use of the word *Amen*. In the Mozarabic ritual, for example, not only it is inserted after each clause of the long episcopal benediction, but it was repeated after each petition of the Pater Noster. A similar exaggeration may be found in various portions of the Coptic Liturgy.

(Herbermann 1907:408)

In the days of the sixteenth century Reformation, Martin Luther explained the Lord's Prayer and finished with the following comment on the final amen:

What does this mean? Answer: It means that I should be assured that such petitions are acceptable to our heavenly Father and are heard by him, for he himself commanded us to pray like this and promised to hear us. "Amen, amen" means "Yes, yes, it shall be so.

(Tappert 1959:348)

In his Large Catechism, when explaining the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, **Luther links the amen to the belief of the one who prays** by saying:

This word [Amen] is nothing else than an unquestioning **affirmation of faith** (emphasis by present author) on the part of one who does not pray as a matter of chance but knows that God does not lie since he has promised to grant his request. Where such a faith is wanting, there can be no true prayer... But the efficacy of prayer consists in our learning also to say 'Amen' to it – that is, not to doubt that our prayer is surely heard and will be granted.... Behold, such is the importance that God attaches to our being certain that we do not pray in vain and that we must not in any way despise our prayers.

(Tappert 1959: 436)

The *First Book of Prayer* of King Edward VI (1549) discloses some uncertainty of practice. Amen is always printed at the end of the Lord's Prayer, whichever form is used, but the book does not specify who is to say it. A similar treatment is given to amen after the *Gloria Patri* and the collects at Matins, but not after the proper collects for the Sunday of the year, except the First Sunday in Advent, which was possibly intended as a pattern for the remaining Sundays. In the Common Service, however, amen is printed after all the prayers except the confession of sins and the final thanksgiving. The people were entitled to say amen at the end of the final blessing. The Litany has amen only after the two final prayers, but it is plentifully prescribed in the special services for baptism, confirmation and the like (Ross 1991:169).

The Scottish practice at the Reformation was similar to that of the Church of England. John Knox's *Book of Common Order* concludes each prayer with amen or with 'So be it', but does not say whether this was to be said by the minister or the people. The draft new *Scottish Liturgy* of 1617 explicitly directed a congregational amen at the end of prayers and Psalms, and this may represent existing practice in some parishes (Ross 1991:170).

The *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms* drawn up by the Westminster Assembly in 1645 both say in reply to the final question 'that in testimony of our desire, and assurance to be heard, we say 'Amen' at the end of the Lord's Prayer, but Scottish practice did not always conform to the Westminster documents' (Ross 1991:170).

Calvin does not seem to have been interested in the use of amen, as his *Catechism* makes no comment on amen at the end of the Lord's Prayer.

Among some English non-conformists it was the practice for earnest worshippers to interject amen after statements in prayers with which they strongly agreed. This was a more scriptural practice than silently leaving the amen to the leader. This custom was a common practice among the Primitive Methodists in the early nineteenth century, who may have copied it from the United States of America. According to an American Church magazine, the part of the church in the USA that was occupied by people who assisted the preacher with irregular responses was known as the 'Amen Seat' or the 'Amen Corner' (Ross 1991:170).

6 Contemporary Usage of Amen

The most common question about the use of amen in church liturgy is whether it should be added at the end of hymns and chanted psalms. There are differing views about this issue, since amen was not normally sung until the middle of the nineteenth century, according to a study provided by Helmore in his *Manual of Plainsong*, published in 1850 (Ross 1991:170). He discovered that all mediaeval hymns which had amen had it because they all had doxologies. The fashion of adding amen at the end of hymns spread, and at

the beginning of the nineteenth century most Protestant churches provided for it in their hymnals.

More recently, however, the tide has begun to turn, so that it was recommended that amen should not normally be sung except after doxologies. 'In 1951 *Congregational Praise* adopted the uneasy compromise of providing "Amens" for doxologies and after hymns that appeared to be prayers, perhaps in deference to Isaac Watts's contention that all prayers should end with "Amen"' (Ross 1991:171). Christian liberty, however, does not prevent a local church from singing them if it wishes to continue this custom. The whole question of the use of amen hinges on whether one is of the opinion that in this matter a local church can democratically decide what to do.

The present author is committed to the 'congregational' system of church order, which is of a democratic nature. A congregation is a group of people who meet at a certain place and time. The Lutheran Confessions call this type of local church the visible church, with definite marks, as 'the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly' (Tappert 1959:32). Such a congregation is entitled to decide for itself about matters that are not an essential part of doctrine and life in the church. Congregationalism is a religious trend which developed to oppose the Church of England by requiring total independence from secular authority as well as from bishopric and from Synod and made this a part of its constitution (Hanselmann 1969:104). Forms of worship and liturgical response belong to the area in which the local church may decide how to proceed.

Churches have been discriminatorily divided into 'high' and 'low' churches. This distinction, whether fair or not, points to the way in which they conduct their worship services. No thorough study has been done so far on this differentiation, supposedly because the issue is much debatable. A question that has been taboo for so long should be discussed openly. The fact is that no church or way of worship wants to be designated 'low' and there is a psychological blockage with regard to a church which is labelled as 'high'. Differences following this distinction have posed many obstacles to unity arising in matters that are not essential to true Christian understanding.

The so-called 'high' churches emphasise the need of rigid liturgy and pomp and stress the rational element, a thoughtful, reflective, cognitive approach to worshipping God. They base their standpoint on Christian tradition and on assumed 'immutable' elements divinely instituted. Mitchell (1975:6) describes Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans and Episcopalians, among others, as having such characteristics, according to whose long-established practice 'the texts of its prayers and hymns are often a truer guide to the actual faith of a Christian community than a study of its theological books'. Even though there is ground for their stance, these churches are experiencing liturgical change and are prepared to come to terms with these changes.

Churches called 'low' are sometimes referred to in a derogatory way, because of their free form of worship, which is more spontaneous, sometimes with overtones of emotionalism or even entertainment. A plurality of uses is felt to be the best expression of a multiform society, also in worship situations. A statement that describes this trend is the following: 'People are different, and need to worship in different ways, if their worship is to be an authentic offering of themselves to God in Christ' (Mitchell 1975:67).

The informality that marks the worship in so-called 'low churches', amongst which the Evangelical Revival and the whole spectrum of Pentecostals are numbered, has the advantage of the active and full participation of all the audience as befits a community.

The report of a theological commission on the Faith and Order Movement admitted as early as 1939 that some of their tasks were 'to consider not only what are the existing traditions in worship, but also the experiments in "liturgical creation" which are being made in ecumenical and similar gatherings and in the Younger Churches, and the principles which should inform future developments in the field of worship' (Edwall, Hayman & Maxwell 1951:16). According to this commission, this should be done in order to promote growth in mutual understanding among the churches of different Christian traditions.

There is no doubt that responsible worship demands pattern and structure. St Paul's advice is that 'everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way' (1 Cor 14:40). When a liturgy is not performed in a coherent way, the foundational actions of Christian worship are not correctly evaluated and applied. Even improvisation requires pattern and structure. There should, however, be a space and opportunity to introduce different worship styles, so that liturgical services may include greater freedom.

Amen as a spontaneous response of believers, should fit into every church service, as long as it comes from the believer's heart and is motivated and inspired by God's Holy Spirit. Barth (1964:85) speaks along these lines when he states: 'All those who have faith in Christ, who hearken to the Word of God as it has been handed down to us in the Scriptures, are members of the invisible church', and as such 'are a chosen people, a

royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Pt 2:9).

The witnessing feature of Christian worship is set 'to transform the world', in the words of Webber:

Worship has a horizontal as well as a vertical dimension. It is important for us to enact the work of Christ as an offering of praise and thanksgiving to the Father. But it is equally important that we *act on* what we have enacted....The pattern of this world is one of injustice, inequality, discrimination, war, hate, immorality and all those human abuses that the New Testament and the early church fathers describe as the way of death.... The true worship of God inevitably leads the people of God into positive social action. Our calling is to worship God not only with our lips but also with our lives.

(Webber 1982:190)

The outcome of the present study is that amen, pronounced in the Biblical sense and in response to God's blessings, will add meaning and life to the Christian worship and turn the believer back to the Scriptural sources of spiritual strength and health. Emanating from ancient Judaism, amen has become universal in its daily use. As such the response with amen is pronounced by about all devotees of western religions. The Biblical model of Nehemiah 8 serves very specifically as a useful start to the effort of making worship services

- more participative through the people's response;
- more vivid, by the use of gestures and postures;
- more joyful, through cheerful address and consolation;
- more spontaneous by the mood of celebration it evokes.

7 Summary

The occurrences of amen after the Old Testament times have been traced above in order to establish its continual use and importance as a liturgical expression enunciated by Jews and Christians. Special emphasis was given to its use in inter-testamental Jewish worship, then in the book of Revelation and by the apostle Paul, in order to ascertain that Christian worship is deeply rooted in Old Testament and in Jewish tradition. The enquiry into the history of amen has asserted its handing down for usage in early Christianity, in later Christian times as well as in contemporary worship. In the latter it comes closer to its latest Old Testament development when spoken spontaneously by the worshipping congregation in a more participative manner. This leads to the following discussion on the ways of binding the believer's amen to the confession of faith which is thereby confirmed as a common agreement.

CHAPTER 6

“AMEN” AS A BINDING CONCEPT FOR ECUMENICAL UNDERSTANDING

1 Jesus Christ is God's Amen

The liturgical amen represents a great treasure in Christian spirituality. Until the end of times the Christian amen will support the apostle Paul's assertion that 'as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No"... but in him it has always been "Yes". For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God' [emphasis by this author] (2 Cor 1:18-20).

Christian proclamation and a person's faith are based on God's promises and confirmed through his amen in Christ. Then the apostle says: 'Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm (*βεβαιῶν*, 'confirmed, verified') in Christ' (v.21) The participle *βεβαιῶν* is the equivalent to the Hebrew Hiphil, so that it becomes clear that God causes a person to believe through the preaching of the Word: 'How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?' (Rm10:14). The whole debate on ecumenical understanding should ground on the issue of faith and belief in Christ, and by saying 'Amen!' a person will express his faith in God's Amen, Jesus Christ.

אֱמוּנָה 2 and אֱמוּנָה

There are two main derivatives of אֱמוּנָה that must be taken up in order to establish the basis for ecumenical understanding on the grounds of amen. These are the concepts of faith, אֱמוּנָה, and belief, אֱמוּנָה. The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, chapter 1:16 that the gospel of Jesus Christ is 'the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the gentile'. It is not coincidental that the apostle, as he describes the gospel as the power of God 'for one who believes' (τῷ πιστεύοντι) adds to this that the righteousness of God is revealed from God's πίστις to man's πίστις. God causes man's πίστις, in a cause / effect process. Paul connects his argument to the Old Testament concept of אֱמוּנָה by quoting in Greek Habakkuk 2:4: ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται, Ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται (Rm 1:17). A person's righteousness or faith is in its utter reliance upon the divine faithfulness. That is the whole point of אֱמוּנָה יְהוָה בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה וְצַדִּיק בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה. Paul translates this אֱמוּנָה of Habbakuk as 'he who is righteous by faith shall live', instead of 'in his faithfulness', as meaning 'by his works' or by any human co-operation. This must be denied according to the Lutheran *sola fide* ('through faith only') principle. This principle is based on biblical expressions affirming that a person is saved only 'by grace' (Eph 2:8), 'no longer by works' (Rm 11:6), 'because of his mercy' (Tt 3:5).

אֱמוּנָה denotes 'steadfastness' and 'firmness' as it applies properly to God, from the 'theological sphere of judgement' (Barr 1961:163); from a linguistic standpoint, however, it may also apply to a person's firmness. אֱמוּנָה, on the contrary, is normally used in the

Old Testament with a human subject, while with God as subject it occurs very rarely and in unusual locutions like Job 15:15: 'If God places no trust (**לֹא יֶאֱמִין**) in his holy ones, if even the heavens are not pure in his eyes...' Referring to a human subject, however, a key passage is that of Abraham's act of believing in Genesis 15:6: **וְהֵאֱמַן בַּיהוָה וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה** ('He believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness'). Here the belief is a human quality, in the sense that virtues as such as prudence or courage are ascribed to the believer. Abraham is 'caused or led to believe', and the Hiphil form describes a 'man taking refuge from his own frailty and instability in God, who is firm and steadfast' (Hebert 1955:374).

The correct understanding of the Hiphil form **הֵאֱמַן**, to which attention was already given in the second chapter of the present study, is of great importance to the present discussion. Even though the meaning of the root in the Hiphil may have many different shades of meaning, the basic one, the causative, is fully applicable to this text. Abraham was caused to become firm, he was made steady, and the cause of this process is Yahweh himself. Yahweh caused him to become firm and therefore faithful.

As stated already in chapter 2, the present author is aware of the debate raised by Barr (1961:165) against authors who make 'misuse of their "fundamental meaning" of "firmness, steadfastness", firstly in the way in which they allow the discussion of its significance to slide back and forth without discrimination between the various cognate words, and secondly in the way in which they press and overplay this etymological and allegedly fundamental meaning against the semantic evidence of actual usage' Any apparent 'overplaying' must be seen in the light of some good reasons:

- The etymology of the root אָמֵן has not been overlaid in the present study to the point of breaking the rule defended by Barr, due to the great extent of its use, as explained in chapter 2;
- The semantic value of amen has been sufficiently elucidated through the study of the development of its meaning in Old Testament times;
- An attempt to co-ordinate the linguistic, the semantic and the liturgical value of amen has thoroughly been done in order to have this concept applied to present-day religious life.

3 אָמֵן is to Believe and Share

In Christian usage it has been clear that faith has a cognitive, an affective and a psychomotor element. Faith means an intellectual exercise of knowledge, which must be confirmed by the emotional assent of the believer, as well as to prove itself in deeds of love, confession and caring. It must come out of a convinced mind, flow through a willing emotion and end up to make the limbs workable for its cause. Martin Luther's great battle by means of his *sola fide* principle was to insist 'that faith involves above all a personal response of trust rather than a merely intellectual belief' (Hebert 1955:374).

Even though western languages see faith as an act or activity of the human person, the Hebrew meaning of אֱמוּנָה, based on the root אָמֵן, applies faithfulness above all to God, as the supreme evidence and source of all firmness and faithfulness. He then causes

it to be owned by the human person, as Martin Luther explains this process in his *Large Catechism*:

Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. It is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit reveals and preaches that Word, and by it illumines and kindles every heart so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.

(Tappert 1959:415f)

The biblical teaching clearly states that faith is no mere intellectual or historical knowledge of God, since ‘even the demons believe that – and shudder’ (Ja 2:19). Faith that justifies, as this expression is understood in Lutheran theology, is ‘the firm acceptance of God’s offer promising forgiveness of sins and justification’ (Tappert 1959:114). This acceptance is followed by deeds of love for God and for fellow human beings, which is impossible to separate from faith and must be a consequence thereof. The motivating power of the Holy Spirit will lead the believer to perform good works, as the apostle Paul says: ‘For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God’ (Rm 8:14).

The Hiphil Imperative form of אָמֵן is אָמֵן־ , as already stated in chapter 2. If it is accepted that the adverb אָמֵן is derived from the Hiphil Imperative, this would have a strong appeal to commitment by cheering someone: Believe! To say ‘Amen!’ would mean to invite a person: ‘Believe in what you have just said or confessed!’ This willingness to believe in God is caused by God himself, through the power of the Holy Spirit, so that trust can be put in God that he will cause one’s belief to become firm and

steady. If this is true, then biblically ‘to have faith’ is literally “to make oneself secure in Yahweh” (hence the preposition **בְּ** after **יְהוָה**). The object at which, according to this causative Imperative, a believer directs his faith is, according to Old Testament use, something in the future. To the Christian it will be something in the past, the amen of God in Jesus Christ, as well as the future, the fulfilment of his promises of assurance and salvation through Christ. The power which is contained in this amen will unite not only believers of the past, but essentially all believers at present will be able to have this confidence in God’s promises and to share it with one another.

4 Amen as a Plea for Ecumenical Understanding

In his book *Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel*, Stern, who calls himself a Messianic Jew, directs a message to Christians and assumes ‘that Yeshua [his Jewish way of spelling ‘Jesus’] is indeed Israel’s Messiah, and that the New Testament and the *Tanakh* [Jewish designation for the Old Testament] constitute God’s word to humanity’ (Stern 1996:3). Paul’s expression ‘first for the Jew’ is interpreted by Stern not primarily as a historical reference, but as a missionary task, for ‘without Yeshua, the Jewish people, (and other peoples) individually and collectively, have no hope’ (Stern 1996:68). This view confirms Christ’s Great Commission to ‘go and make disciples’ (Mt 28:18). Stern is even more emphatic about this commission by saying that a Christian should bring the gospel to the Jews ‘because it is true, and because it is necessary – without Yeshua Jewish people, like Gentile people, are destined for eternal destruction; moreover, without Yeshua, the true Messiah of the Jewish people, the Jewish people will not achieve its own glorious goals promised by Scripture’ (Stern 1996:68). It is Stern’s firm

conviction that the two-covenant theology (Old and New Testament) began not in Christianity but in Judaism, and that they both call the church of today to review its strategy of world evangelisation.

The issue raised by Stern is of undeniable actuality and one must agree to it in principle. In spite of the Inquisition, the pogroms, the Holocaust and all the other anti-Semitic horrors practised in history, 'not to preach the Gospel to Jews is the worst anti-Semitic act of all' (Stern 1996:68). In the same context he interprets the Romans 1:16 passage, which says that the gospel is 'first for the Jew, then for the Gentile' in following thoughts:

- The passage does not refer only to 'historical priority' and to the fact that the gospel was presented first to Jews and only later to Gentiles, although this is true.
- The verse does not refer to 'covenant priority' either, given the fact that Yahweh had chosen Israel to be the recipient of the promise of the Gospel, although this too is true.
- Romans 1:16 means that there is a 'present priority' in bringing the gospel to Jews. The Church should acknowledge it and restore ministry among this co-covenanted people of God to its biblical place in the strategy of world evangelisation.

Amen! So be it! The ideal put forward by Stern remits Christians and Jews back to their origins of common traditions, a common sacred text, even common words for their prayer and liturgies, and one common plan and person in which salvation is found. All this should be enough to pursue a common goal of **Messianic ecumenical unity**. The term 'messianic' is older and even more comprehensive than 'Christian', for *Mashiach*, 'the

anointed one', was mentioned and the word used long before *Christós*. Together they should believe that at his second coming he will fulfil the highest aspirations of both Messianic Jews and Christians. Christianity is Jewish in its origins, and amen stands as a binding concept for promoting messianic and ecumenical understanding.

5 Amen as a Confession of Christian Unity

Amen says to the believers of all times that as they pronounce this word of agreement, their lives are changing and are being transformed **under the marvellous influence of God**. The repetition of the amen during a worship service indicates a **causal relationship** between the exposition of the doctrine of the Gospel by the ministrant of God's word and the believers' confidence expressed in their prayers and other forms of response under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen will continue to be pronounced as the believers' 'yes' to God, and in doing so, they experience this sound, **vertical relationship** with their Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. At the same time they establish and strengthen the **horizontal fellowship** with other believers. By pronouncing the amen based on their faith, the individual believers build their lives completely on God and on his self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

Many treatises on the principles and practice of Christian worship have been written, inspired to a large extent by the liturgical movement within leading religious confessions. They have all had a greater or lesser effect on helping believers to appreciate the treasures of the liturgy. They unlocked many doors for people to engage in a wider circle of interests and church activities, building bridges between different church denominations. All efforts in this direction are valid, and the present author adds to the treasures

Christians already share the binding confession of God's **אֱלֹהִים** in Jesus Christ, based on the effect of **רוּחַ קֹדֶשׁ** as caused by the Holy Spirit. He is the person and power of God that can break down a person's resistance to repentance and faith, and more effectively re-unite 'the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one' (Jn 11:52). It was Jesus' own wish and priestly prayer: 'May they be brought together to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me' (Jn 17:23).

Although this prayer of Jesus has not produced the practical results one would expect, as far as a wider ecumenical understanding is concerned, the Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran Church is positive on the issue and even proposes ways for this unity:

For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.

(Tappert 1959:32)

This stance is supported by the writing of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:3-5: 'Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all'. Liturgies may differ - and they will continue to differ -, as long as they lead believers to praise the common Lord of Amen. This study should have contributed to this unifying attempt, as the saying goes: 'Take no thought of the harvest, but only of proper sowing' (Hebert 1961:12).

אָמֵן and אֱמִינֵן are to be interpreted and accepted as fundamental to the doctrine of faith. They are to be seen as two words emerging from a common root and deriving from the same verbal mood (Hiphil) to create conditions for a divided Christendom and for divided world religions to come together and to join in a faith that is based on and caused by the faithfulness of God, which was revealed to the world through the Old Testament מְשִׁיחַ יְהוָה and the New Testament Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. They both are expressions of firm and heartfelt belief in the truths of Christianity. By the use of amen caused by אֱמִינֵן Christians all over the world are bound together in their belief in the Christ who is in this way accepted and confessed as the 'yes' of God to a world that needs him most desperately. Words that are thousands of years old carry the power of uniting in Christ what humanity has torn apart. **Amen is the outcry, an outburst and a yearning for Messianic and Christian ecumenical unity.**

6 Summary

The remarkable plan of God's salvation was prepared for everyone and is accepted by those who have the אֱמִינֵן or faith in Jesus Christ as God's Amen. This can be summed up in the causative relationship between אָמֵן and its Hiphil cognate אֱמִינֵן, which contains a cognitive, an affective and a psychomotor element, kindled by the power of the Holy Spirit. As such amen can be pointed out as a God-given element of response that calls for Christian unity.

It is in awe that the true Christian of any denomination breaks into song with the apostle Paul at the end of Romans 11 (v 33, 36), a song so joyous and profound which ends with

a classical doxology and – last but not least – with **amen**: ‘Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! For him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! **Amen.**’

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The word amen is one of a small number of Hebrew words which have been adopted into the prayers and liturgy of almost every Christian church.

The study of the etymology of the adverb אָמֵן points toward its derivation from the common Hebrew root אָמַן, which provides a whole range of related words sharing the basic idea of the root: 'to be firm, steadfast'. In **chapter 2** various examples of derived words were examined, particularly those represented in the so-called Horowitz graphic. The root אָמַן is also represented in other Semitic languages, which proves its widespread use with similar meanings. Due to exaggerations when tracing the etymology of words in the past, attention was given to the debate about the semantics of words, particularly in view of some recent researchers, such as Barr, Albright and Nida. Special attention was paid to Louw's 'structure of meaning' as applying to a complete text in its setting, and not to a single word. This investigation led to the result that grammatical and cognitive categories of meaning develop to more refined levels of communication when accompanied by their figurative and emotive meaning. This applies to the inquiry into the development of amen as having acquired, alongside with its etymology, the semantic and emotive overtone that makes it such an important concept

for the confirmation of a person's belief, as is proved true in the study of its usage in Old Testament liturgical texts.

Following this reasoning, **chapter 3** is concerned with checking semantically all occurrences of amen in the Old Testament and detecting four basic uses of the word:

- a) it functioned as a ratification of somebody's words;
- b) it served as a confirmation and acceptance of a curse or an oath;
- c) it developed to become an expected and even spontaneous approval of a liturgical prayer or doxology; and
- d) amen is used once as a noun or an attribute of God.

The third one, under letter c) was selected as the most significant to the present study, that is, amen as the people's response in liturgical settings or at the close of a doxology. The proposed topic, therefore, intentionally limited this study to so-called liturgical texts in the Old Testament, so that a brief survey of what is meant by 'liturgical' and 'liturgy' had to be done at the beginning of **chapter 4**. For this purpose liturgy is to be described as a public performance of some sort of ritual in general, and the proceedings of a religious ceremonial or worship service in particular. This leads to the main point of this study: three Old Testament pericopes were selected as fitting into this scope and in which amen occurs in what can be considered as a liturgical setting. There are three different ways of interpreting the response of the people that pronounce the amen response in these texts. The following sketch illustrates these differences or demonstrates the developmental semantic changes that occurred in the use of amen. The

place is stated in the first line, the setting in the second, the biblical location in the third. The mention of the attendance comes next, and last but not least the different types of response with amen.

SHECHEM	JERUSALEM TEMPLE	WATER GATE
Covenant Commitment	Cultic Situations in General	Reading of the Law Session
Deuteronomy 27	Ps 41; 72; 89; 106; 1 Chr 16	Nehemiah 8
All Tribes of Israel	Worshipping Congregation	All Returnees from Exile
Stipulated Response:	Expected Response:	Spontaneous Response:
A M E N	A M E N	A M E N

It was effectively concluded the sections of the present study which examine the liturgies in question and their context, that the first of them, the Deuteronomy 27 text, is embedded in a ceremony of civil nature, even though it had been convened by Yahweh himself and was conducted along the theocratic lines of Yahweh's chosen people. The setting resembles a national assembly of a modern democracy, attended by all the people and chaired by their officials. The response was **stipulated** as a commitment of the whole assembly to the binding norms of the covenant contract. There was no way for a member of the meeting to avoid pronouncing the **required** amen response. The curses threatened doom, and the *Arur*-formula suggests the death sentence on anyone who would not agree or confirm responding with amen. This first stage of a public response with amen was to instigate fear and dread.

There is a second stage in the development of amen in the history of Old Testament worship, in which it is clearly shown that amen became a liturgical response of the gathered congregation. The people were **expected** to answer a doxology or a prayer with

amen. In the Septuagint this was done through the Greek words '*génoito, génoito*', and in the Latin translation with '*fiat, fiat*'! In the First Temple amen must have been pronounced by the congregation, due to the clear reference in various psalms, even though some Talmudic comments affirm that [supposedly] in the Second Temple it was not pronounced. The explanation to this was that the worshippers' response was only delayed until the end for fear of interrupting the exceptional solemnity of the rite.

A third and more developed liturgical response was found in the **spontaneous** double amen spoken by the people gathered for the reading of the Law at Ezra and Nehemia's time. The standing during the reading, the lifting of hands, the bowing down with the faces to the ground – all these are explicitly said to have been a set of postures the people adopted while worshipping Yahweh. This undoubtedly was the most intense affirmation of belief and praise ever enacted in Old Testament worship. Amen had become a thriving force and a joyful outburst – not demanded, not expected, but spontaneous - in the believers' response to God's guidance and love.

This definite expression of faith in Israelite life was then adopted by the apostolic church of the New Testament as a most blessed heritage of allegiance to the God and Father of Jesus Christ, 'that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Phlp 2:10f).

In **chapter 5** it became clear that amen had been accepted by Christians, as it is used much more frequently in the New Testament than in the Old, doubtless because the early Christians readily made solemn and ecstatic affirmations of the new revelation in Christ.

This demanded a responsive amen from the other participants of the worship in the case of a doxology or blessing. At all events, as shown in the New Testament occurrences, amen became a well-known response of the whole congregation, and was already in liturgical use in the days of the apostles. Throughout the post-biblical times up to the present day the amen response adds invaluable meaning and God-given life to the Christian worship as a spiritual source of strength, according to its causative origin and as the expression of an expected or spontaneous response to God's grace and favour.

In **chapter 6** amen is proposed as a binding concept for ecumenical understanding. According to the apostle Paul's expression, Jesus Christ is God's 'Amen' to mankind. It confirms God's promises that 'whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (Jn 3:16). The biblical concept of faith is contained in the related word אֱמוּנָה , which is, according to Paul's expression, 'the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes' (Rm 1:16). Once one accepts that amen is derived from the Hiphil imperative אָמַן , a strong appeal or even demand to make this faith a personal belief is in place. The pronouncing of amen then follows a causative plea operated and made secure by non other than the Holy Spirit himself. The theology of amen clearly underlines where the relationship with God starts: not within the believer, but in his causal connection with the One who loved him first. In confessing the amen, Christians of all times and places and denominations should join in the praise of God, a faith built 'on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone' (Eph 2:20).

Amen is a plea for Christian ecumenical understanding here and now, as an anticipation of what will be. The Old Testament praise of Yahweh 'from everlasting to everlasting, amen and amen' (Ps 41:13) is set to re-echo in the great multitude of the redeemed, 'from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne ... wearing white robes and ... holding palm branches in their hands' (Rv 7:9) with the unison cry in a loud voice (Rv 7:12): **'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!'**

Soli Deo Gloria! Amen and amen!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations used in the text and in the list of Works Consulted:

- NIV New International Version of the Holy Bible
RSV Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible
BDB Brown, Driver & Briggs
JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
BHS Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (see under Elliger, K)
STM Sacrae Theologiae Magister, Master's Degree

All other abbreviations follow the guide for the use of the Harvard Reference

System:

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