



A Determined and Subjective Love: Agreeing with Luther's Evangelical Reading of Hosea 2

Brett Muhlhahn

Abstract

A close reading of Hosea 2 seems to reveal some inconsistencies in a feminist approach to this particular text. This essay challenges a particular feministic reading of Hosea 2 with an analysis that contends for the hearing of Yahweh's voice as he addresses Israel with a determined and subjective love. The relationship between Hosea and Gomer is used by Yahweh as a sign-act and in no way should the psychology of Hosea and Gomer take centre stage in the reading of this text. When the text speaks, it reveals that Yahweh's love is enduring, proactive and emotional. It also sets the tone for how we may continue to understand the tension between command and promise which may give cause to reshape the responsibility of today's theologians and church leaders. Eventually this text rests on the promise of Yahweh, by way of command, that there will in fact be a great day of blessing to come for his people (Hos 1:11; 3:5).

Keywords

Hosea, Apostasy, Repentance, Forgiveness, Hope

I. Introduction

Is God a misogynist? Does Hosea have a 'voyeuristic fantasy for rape'? According to one particular feminist reading of Hosea the answer is 'yes.'¹ In supporting this answer, this feminist interpretation plays Hosea and Gomer off against one another without giving due exegetical priority to the voice of Yahweh and the addressees in the biblical text referred to (Hos 2). In Luther's reading of it, chapter two strikes out with a dynamic rhetorical force that conveys the existential pain and determination of Yahweh as he relates to a wicked and

¹ J. Kirby, "Hope and Hubris in Hosea," in *Sewanee Theological Review* 50/4 (2007) 487–494.

apostate people; his people. Chapter 2 is bracketed by the marriage metaphor of Hosea, which functions as a sign-act in direct opposition to the stark reality of Israel's covenant failure.² I propose, against a feminist reading, that the marriage sign-act of Hosea serves the prophetic declaration of Yahweh himself and that it is Yahweh's voice, which is to be heard throughout chapter two. This declarative and determined voice is addressed to Israel via Hosea. The context of chapter two within chapters one, three and four give a clear indication as to who is speaking, narrating, and being addressed.

Further, it is Luther's understanding that chapter two is not an address by Hosea, directed to Gomer, in an attempt at family intervention. Yahweh is using the obedience of Hosea as a direct sign-act against the whoring mother, the apostate and culpable priesthood. The reality of the sign-act gives Hosea a depth of pathos and sympathy with Yahweh rarely seen, even in the biblical record. There is no tension in roles between Hosea and Yahweh, as per Kirby. Hosea is Yahweh's prophet and serves as an incarnational embodiment of God's word of judgment over Israel. The redemptive hope of full restoration transcends Hosea's historical marital condition. It is Yahweh alone that can bring the fulfilment of that vision, hence the abundance of typological inference, reflecting New Testament promise, woven throughout the book of Hosea.³

There seems to be support for this contention when Hosea 2 is placed within its literary and historical context. An exegetical analysis of the text and the specific development of key themes in the text, contend that there is real illocutionary intent in the book of Hosea.⁴ Yahweh, Israel's God, has profound locutionary force in this text, he is author and designator of textual meaning. It is on this foundation that Hosea reveals redemptive hope in a milieu of certain judgment.

II. Historical Setting

There are two historical markers in the first chapter of Hosea that define our contextual parameters. The first is the introduction of the book that places Hosea ben Beer, as one that is directly addressed by Yahweh during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoshaphat king of Israel (Hos 1:1). The second is the explicit reference to the

² D. Stuart, *Hosea* (Waco Texas: Word Books, 1987) xxxii–xlii. Stuart has compiled an extensive list of covenant curses and blessing which locates Hosea's prophecy directly in the salvation-historical paradigm.

³ See Hosea 2:1–3; 2:16–25; 3:4–5; 6:1–3; 11:1–11; 13:14; 14:5–9.

⁴ Luther's Bible translation will assist in this regard.

massacre at Jezreel by the house of Jehu (Hos 1:4). The historical grounding of Hosea is, in our opinion, very important for a correct exegetical outcome. Those who deny the historical aspect of the book and adopt a purely rhetorical approach, do a grave injustice to the word of God and his illocutionary intent in the book.⁵ The text itself is thoroughly dependant on redemptive history (*Heilsgeschichte*).⁶ This basis will give certain grounding in our approach that actually minimizes the sign-act of Hosea and his marriage to Gomer, and gives priority to Yahweh, the one who addresses his people through the prophet Hosea. It is God's voice that the book has us contend with, and that voice is jilted, broken hearted, and determined to put things right with those who *are* his people, these people, with whom in all reality, don't deserve the privilege of being as such. The General come King Jehu (842BC), at first glance was a passionate man of God, who desired to see syncretism—which had been given unprecedented access to the life of Israel under the rule of Ahab—abolished and Israel return to monistic Yahwism as its only *raison d'être*.⁷ However, when Jehu is given the opportunity to put things in order, the violence and senselessness of his acts portray a very different picture, a picture that Yahweh would remember well into the future.

Jehu exercised an insatiable bloodlust and exterminated the entire family of Ahab and all connected with it.⁸ He then slaughtered a delegation from the court of Jerusalem and set on the worshippers of Baal, with whom he butchered with alarming zeal. "It was a purge of unspeakable brutality, beyond excuse from a moral point of view, which had, as we shall see disastrous consequences."⁹ When Jehu took the throne of Ahab it inaugurated a period of calamitous

⁵ In her essay *Hope and Hubris*, Kirby, sets an agenda, which seems to depart radically from the biblical intent. In essence she sets Hosea and Yahweh against one another so that she can freely impose feminist language and categories on the text. We will deal with this issue at large below but for now make a point of it to highlight the importance of historical grounding in all methodological approaches. The question arises as to whether Kirby is actually doing justice to the rhetorical school itself in her use of its methods. Osborne would seem to correct Kirby here, "In fact, in literary theory, the identification of the original situation is an essential component, for that situation dictated the rhetorical strategy employed" (G.R Osborne, *The hermeneutical Spiral: a comprehensive introduction to biblical interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991) 125.

⁶ See G. von Rad, "Typological interpretation of the Old Testament" in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics* (Richmond: John Knox, 1965) 140; and W. Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1968) 88.

⁷ Jehu is commended by Yahweh in 2 Kings 10:30–31 for the blood purge. He had done right in the eyes of Yahweh. Yet the strange thing in the text is that Jehu continued to follow the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat. It smacks of hypocrisy, and shows that the presence of apostasy and idol worship still remained even after such bloodletting. The worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan still continued (2 Kings 10:29).

⁸ J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (London: SCM, 1972) 247.

⁹ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 247.

weakness, for all Israel's neighbors had been put off side by broken alliances and a period of economic and political turmoil would follow.¹⁰ Though Jehu had purged Baal from the land, the worship of the golden calf still continued (2 Kings 10:28–30).

The text of Hosea will show that the action of Jehu is of special historical importance for the Israel of Hosea's day, for it betrays a significant departure from the ways of the Lord even though it is veiled in purging zeal. The killing of Baal worshippers was at best a peripheral act that avoided the real problem, the problem in which the Baals had been invited into the life of Israel by its monarchy and that this action had been accepted and promoted by the priestly leaders of the time. This state of affairs reached its despicable climax in Hosea's time. The massacre at Jezreel as a historical marker also serves to reveal Yahweh as a long-suffering covenant partner. Yahweh is no unthinking hot head ready to strike at any hint of betrayal. Yahweh suffers well past the point, where he rightfully could have brought an end to the covenant himself.

Approximately 108–116 years after the massacre at Jezreel, the veneer surrounding Israel was one of resurgent prosperity under the leadership of Jeroboam II (786–746). The physical dimensions of the kingdom rivaled the time under Solomon, yet 'the northern state at least, in spite of its healthy appearance, was in an advanced state of decay, socially, morally, and religiously.'¹¹ Greed and the unmerciful advantage taken over the poor gave physical evidence that Israel's heart was rotten. Our text will issue a series of indictments against the leadership of Israel and the syncretistic pluralism that had evacuated the priestly and prophetic office of its role of accountability (Hosea 4:1–14; 8:4). The rise of the monarchy had destroyed the solidarity characteristic of tribal society, Yahwism as a national religion was only paid lip service to.¹² Jehu's purge of Baal Tyrian had not driven idolatry from the hearts of the people, especially from the heart of the priesthood, and in a state of great abundance and prosperity, Israel's national pride had assumed a presumptuous confidence on God's promises, while attributing the wealth of provision to the rain god Baal.

Hosea's major target seems consistently to be the syncretistic cult of the North.¹³ Baalism had continued to exert an influence in the life of the kingdom to the point where it had superseded Yahweh as

¹⁰ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 250

¹¹ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 256.

¹² Bright, *A History of Israel*, 257.

¹³ H.D. Hummel, *The word becoming flesh: an introduction to the origin and meaning of the Old Testament* (St Louis: Concordia, 1979) 285.

the identified provider of life (Hos 2:7, 10). Linked to this were the fertility and prostitution cults.¹⁴ Heschel says,

It was the worship of a god of the land rather than the creator of heaven and earth, a god who in return for the blessings of fertility demanded the gifts of incense and the excitements of the flesh rather than a God who in return for all the blessings demanded righteousness and justice, love and mercy, faithfulness and attachment, who was the lord of nature everywhere as well as the master of history at all times.¹⁵

Baal and Ashtoreth were easy to worship.¹⁶ These pseudo-gods placed no real ethical demand on the people. When Baalism is seen in the context of the northern state in the late eighth century, it is seen as promoting Baal as a fertility god only in the sense that he (supposedly) controlled the rain.¹⁷ The time frame given in the opening of Hosea's prophecy is one strangled by Baal worship. What Ahab had started by giving over to the worship of Baal—that prompted the radical response of Jehu at Jezreel—is now at the time of Hosea a problem with more subversive traits. Syncretism was pervasive in the land.

The lax sexuality that accompanied the dedication to Baal may have developed into a fully functioning sex cult at the time of Hosea's ministry (Hos 4:14) of which Gomer is often associated. It is likely that the denial of God's word and the syncretistic practice that had been undertaken at the time was a justification for the indulgence of all the fleshly pleasures, not only at a cultic-sacrificial level but throughout all levels of society. More than likely, a justification for this behavior was the superficial prosperity and abundance of the nation at the time, which was attributed to Baal. The abomination of all this for Yahweh was that Israel had been led to believe that he looked upon all this favorably, while his word was eclipsed by drunkenness, debauchery and sexual license under the aegis of true religion.¹⁸

With syncretism running riot among the leadership of the northern state, it is no wonder that it was inept politically. Within 25 years of Jeroboam II Israel was no more, in the ten years following Jeroboam II there were 5 kings, and of these five three ascended to

¹⁴ The existence of cultic prostitution in the religious life of Israel is contested among the scholars. Wolff says 'yes', Rudolph says 'no,' see in B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979) 376. Hos 4:14 seems to indicate some form of cultic prostitution. It is possible that the negative opinion is driven more by the desire to free Gomer from the charge of prostitution and to spiritualize the nation's actual and physical sin.

¹⁵ A. Heschel, *The Prophets, Vol I & II* (London: Colophon, 1962) 46.

¹⁶ Heschel, *The Prophets*, 46.

¹⁷ J.M. Hadley, "Baal" in *NIDOTTE* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997) 422.

¹⁸ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 270.

the throne via assassination. In 734BC the anti-Assyrian coalition led by Remaliah of Syria and Pekah of Israel, marched against Ahaz of Jerusalem. Because of Ahaz's alliance with the Assyrian leadership, Assyria moved against the northern coalition swiftly, and annexed the nation under Tiglath-Pileser II (732BC).

In 732 Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea who first submitted and then rebelled against Assyria (2 Kings 17:3–4). Hoshea made overtures to Egypt and, under the impression that a weak and unimportant Egypt could play a role in Israel's liberation from Assyria, Hoshea withheld tribute from Shalmaneser V.¹⁹ In 724 BC Shalmaneser responded to the defiance of Hoshea and attacked the northern state again. In 722 Samaria fell and Israel as a nation was to be no more. Hoshea presided over the downfall of Israel as a prisoner (2 Kings 9–10).²⁰ Hosea prophesied during these times.

I have followed a structure that takes a linear movement throughout the first four chapters of Hosea in an effort to correctly view the whole of chapter two. The justification for this lies in the fact that the opening texts draw on a progressive *linear* view of history. The movement from Ahaz to Hoshea is clear and distinct. The text itself is deeply indebted to a historical understanding of redemptive implications. For example Hos 2:17 reflects on the early period of the exodus event as determinative for the covenantal life of the nation.²¹ This view gives us a clear picture in regard to the real intent of the text and the role of the prophetic sign-act within that intention. The structure reveals Yahweh as the God that speaks, and the one that specifically addresses Israel through the prophet. In doing this Yahweh addresses Hosea himself to a lesser extent; Hosea is more the vehicle for the prophetic word.

It is Yahweh that does all the talking and gives all the prediction. Hosea does not actually get to speak until Hosea 3:3. Exegesis must realize a distinction between the children of Hosea in Hos 1:4–9, and the children of Israel, Hosea's brothers and sisters in 2:3. Our textual analysis will reveal greater detail but it is good for us to recognize that this distinction determines the voice in Hos 2. The voice in Hos 2 is Yahweh's and not Hosea's address to Gomer. It is the mother of Hosea's brothers and sisters that is being addressed by Yahweh, not the mother of Hosea's children.

By allowing the text to freely unfold itself, one is constrained by the text and its intention. It is unwilling to allow fanciful, exegetical self-aggrandizement.²² Instead, it brings us into direct

¹⁹ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 272.

²⁰ J. Limburg, *Hosea–Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox) 8.

²¹ See also Hos 12:9; 13:4–5.

²² Kirby has made this fundamental flaw in promoting a dubious hermeneutic that is foreign to the text. True rhetorical analysis would bear this out, but one suspects that

confrontation with the God that speaks; a God that makes declarations. It is *His* utter disgust with a people that have prostituted themselves with syncretistic libertinism, and justified their actions with self-aggrandizement and dubious hermeneutics that is at the heart of this passage. The syncretistic self-evaluation of the leadership in the northern kingdom has tempted the determined love of God to act decisively where the leadership had continually failed to do so. But though God's act against the people will entail a great upheaval and judgment, the determined love of God—with whom Hosea is in sympathy—will prevail and create a new day. The new day will come as surely as judgment is upon the nation.

The word comes at a specific historical point (Hos 1:1–2). The Lord begins to speak and he addresses Hosea. The first chapter moves through the progression of address and narrated response. Hosea does not speak, just obeys. God has addressed Hosea and created a sign-act in response to the nature and act of the nation. The children of Hosea's obedience are signs for and against the nation. When the Hebrew text transitions into Hos 2,²³ it is the voice of Yahweh speaking in direct fashion, not even in a narrative sense as per Kirby.²⁴ Hos 2 has the tone of a juridical indictment procedure. But it is given in a monological direction as God speaks and Hosea listens. We are invited, as readers to listen and respond appropriately.

Hos 2:1–3 specifically locates the thread of hope in a concrete historical progression (2:2), and makes it abundantly clear that the text is an address of Yahweh to his people, those that are Hosea's brothers

analysis is the last thing on the agenda of Kirby's programme. Accordingly, to mistaken the identity of the narrative voice and the addressee, the dubious exegete can find in Hosea Ch 2 all sorts of fanciful illusions. Hosea becomes one that 'sanctifies violence against women' (Kirby, *Hope and Hubris*, 487). He is a misogynist with a voyeuristic fantasy for rape (*Hope and Hubris*, 489). It is physiological rubbish that grovels in the perverse delight in using such graphic language that supposedly represents a textual dichotomy between an angry man (Hosea) and the wounded lover (feminine God). It is not Hosea that has created the metaphor/sign-act, it is Yahweh. Our textual analysis below will explicitly deny a feminist reversal in this text and seek the voice of Yahweh, a voice that addresses and commands in the posture of a determined lover.

²³ The English translations for some reason do not follow the Hebrew, LXX and Luther *Übersetzung*, which rightly transitions with the end of the English equivalent of 1:9, and begins chapter 2 with 1:10.

²⁴ It is strange how Kirby could miss this fundamental point. Probably on the basis that if one has a hard time distinguishing narrator and the like, it gives more felicitous grounds for the development of one's own particular agenda. Context in this case promotes a sensible understanding of who the narrator is. Sanders reminds us "Context is not solely or even principally a literary reference, but refers primarily to the full, three dimensional situation in antiquity that is necessary to understand the significance of the literary record" (*From sacred Story to Sacred text* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 89. By lifting a text out of its historical setting one can determine, or choose not to determine narrative voice. In the case of Hosea it is a definite character that addresses us; it is Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To divorce rhetorical analysis from historical context risks the path of calling evil good and good evil.

and sisters. The shift into Hos 2:4 then puts the complete burden of the indictment on the *mother* of Hosea and his siblings (Israel) not the mother of Hosea's children. Theologically the '*Mother*' stands as the apostate priesthood that has implicated the people (children of whoredom) by their treachery and unfaithfulness. In no sense is this a direct address by Hosea to Gomer. The text only allows for that particular address to take place in Hos 3:2, and even then it is an act of love and redemption on the part of Hosea towards Gomer as a sign-act in sympathy with Yahweh. Even in this part of the text Hosea's act is overshadowed by the Lord's love for the Israelites. Hosea's narration in Hos 3:4–5, makes it clear that the prophecy is broader than the marriage of Hosea and Gomer. It is cast in such a way that the whole of Israel is directly challenged, a later redaction would give the text specific implication for Judah and then still later it speaks to the following generations that entertain the idea of a syncretistic lack of faithfulness.²⁵

III. Translation And Exegesis Hos 2: 1–2²⁶

Hos 2:1 Yet it will be that the number of Israelites will be as [numerous] as the sand in the sea, as one can neither measure nor count. And it shall come to pass that instead of one saying to them: "you are not my people", to them one will say: "Oh you children of the living God!"²⁷ 2:2 For the Judeans and the Israelites will come together and choose a common head and move up out of the land; for the day of Jezreel will be a great day. 2:3 Say²⁸ to your brothers, you are my people, and to your sisters,²⁹ you are in my mercy.³⁰

The transition into Hos 2 is one of pre-emptive hope. Yahweh is speaking in concrete terms of what will and will not happen. It also forms an *inclusio* with Hos 2:24–25, that gives the second part of a twofold meaning to Jezreel.³¹ God, in his ability to create a

²⁵ Childs sees a threefold development in the text (*Introduction*, 378–381).

²⁶ My translation from *Die Bibel: LutherÜbersetzung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1999).

²⁷ 'Uios' is translated *Kinder* in the German. It has a masculine emphasis on the legitimate son.

²⁸ Luther uses *Sagen*; 'eipate' is in the second person plural, (M. Luther, *Die Bibel: Luther: Übersetzung*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1984).

²⁹ The plural denotes a conversation between the Lord and Israel, not an inter-relational conflict between Hosea and Gomer.

³⁰ Luther uses *Gnaden*, 'eleemene', to have mercy and compassion on, it is not 'love' as in the NIV. *Ruhamah* is one pitied.

³¹ In the first instance Jezreel is the name given to Hosea's first born as a sign against the massacre at Jezreel by Jehu. It is in the nature, authority and ability of Yahweh to create a positive meaning out of a despicable incident. In this sense he exercises his authority over history.

new understanding of Jezreel; will plant his seed, *spora Theo*, as a response to his ‘yielding’ on that day 2:23. With Jezreel planted in the land, it will come to pass that the negative sign-act of Hosea’s children will be created in a new and merciful light. The call in the plural to Hosea’s brothers and sisters sets the stage for Yahweh’s confrontation with the ‘mother’ that must take place. It is a stage that justly sees the ‘mother of whoredom’ ultimately responsible for the children of whoredom, and will make good the deception while acknowledging that the children by nature have contributed to the downfall of the nation.

Hos 2:4 Demand from your mother— yes, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband!—that she is to put away the sign of her whoring from her face and the sign of adultery from between her breasts. 2:5 Or will I not strip her off and put her down as naked as the day she was born, and will I not make her a dried up wilderness and not leave her to die of thirst! 2:6 And I will not have pity on her children, for they are the children of whoredom. 2:7 For their mother is a whore, and she has carried them as one driven and disgraceful and said: I will run after my lovers, for they give me bread and water, wool and flax, oil and drink.

Who is the mother? Who is she that is to be directly challenged by Hosea on behalf of his brothers and sisters? In our estimation, the ‘mother’ is the nation of Israel’s leadership that was supposed to represent and commend the Mosaic covenant to the people.³² Hos 4:1–14 give this a more precise definition by implicating the priesthood. In saying this, the text does not fully exonerate the people of Israel, vs.4 pre-empted the blame game by holding all to account. Yet the text lays a particular blame at the feet of the priesthood.³³ They are the *mother of whoredom* that must be destroyed (4:5). The charge against them is that they failed to communicate the knowledge of God (*daath elohim*). The priesthood was unable to instruct and guide the nation with this knowledge because they had rejected it themselves (4:6). The whole point of the marriage sign-act between Hosea and Gomer is to portray Hosea’s deep sympathy with Yahweh’s struggle. Hosea had embodied the *daath elohim*. Heschel reveals that among the nuanced meanings that *daath elohim* has, one of them is to have sympathy, pity or affection for someone, based on an experiential knowledge of that person. This was the very thing that the priesthood of Israel had abandoned.³⁴

³² Von Rad and Luther support this thesis. Luther goes as far as to say that the “breasts” (2:4c) are the wicked teachers “who, like a mother’s breasts, feed the people” (M. Luther, “Lectures on Hosea” *Luther’s Works* (St Louis: Concordia, 1975) LW 18:8.

³³ See Hosea 4:5, 6,7,9; 5:1; 9:15,17.

³⁴ Heschel, *The Prophets*, 57.

The priesthood is implicated in this terrible manifestation of all that is non-covenantal. Because of their apostasy, the nation will pay a heavy and ultimate price, for they are the children of whoredom (2:6). The priesthood have forsaken/forgotten Yahweh's providence and attributed it to Baal (2:7,10,11). The power of Yahweh's conviction and determined love is given emphatic expression in the repetition of the term 'I will'. He uses it some 26 times in this chapter alone.

Hos 2:8 Therefore, behold, I will obstruct her way with thorns and draw up a wall so that she will not find her path. 2:9 And when she runs after her lovers and she cannot haul them in, and when she still seeks them and cannot find them, so then she will say: I will go again to my earlier husband;³⁵ for at that time it went better for me than now. 2:10 But she will not recognize, that I am the one that has given her corn, wine and oil, and much silver and gold, with which she has had to use to honour Baal.

Yahweh pronounces that he will move against the priesthood with the intention of compelling her back to himself, the previous husband (2:9). It is difficult with the transition from vs.9 to vs. 10 to perceive whether he has already tried to lure her back with thorns and a wall and that she has still failed to recognize that he was the one that has provided for her all along. The honour of Baal is the focus of the priesthoods affections (2:10) which clouds the minds of the people. Hos 2:10 also serves as another direct implication of the priesthood as the whoring mother.

Hos 2:11 Therefore I will again take my corn and my wine in its time and snatch from her my wool and my flax with which she covered her nakedness. 2:12 For I will uncover her shame in front of the eyes of her lovers and no one will deliver her out of my hand. 2:13 And I will make an end to all her joys, festivals, new moons, Sabbaths and all her solemn gatherings.³⁶ 2:14 I will let her vines and fig trees run wild, because she said: "That is a reward from my lover, these have my lover given to me." I will make her a wilderness, and the animals of the field shall eat her. 2:15 So I will afflict on her the days of the Baals,³⁷ for the smoke offerings she raised up, and for running after her lovers decorated with jeweled necklaces. But me, she forgets, says the Lord.

³⁵ Implies that the woman referred to in both accounts is the same woman: Gomer. Chapter 2 is cast in the sense that Gomer had abandoned her covenant with Hosea and that Hosea is in direct existential pathos with Yahweh. It brings the reader into direct confrontation with the call to take her back in chapter three, and opens the possibility of a sharp and painful identification of Yahweh with Hosea

³⁶ The German has *Feiertagen* (holidays), the NRSV and NIV have "appointed festivals," the Greek *panegureis* emphasizes a solemn gathering at the festivals. The German rendering of 'holidays' would be very controversial in today's culture.

³⁷ She will be punished with the truth of her adultery.

So Yahweh will withhold his provision. He will expose the nation and her pseudo-gods for what they really are. Hos 2:12 is a direct challenge to the gods she had prostituted herself with. He will stand against her with absolute authority and ability; the gods are challenged to do otherwise, to save her out of his hand if they can. Ironically, the nation has forgotten the last battle between Yahweh and Baal. Elijah set the task before the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel by placing the sacrifice before the storm/rain/lightning god (1 Kings 18:16–46). There was no storm, no god of the Baals defending their claim over apostate Israel, only the consuming fire of Yahweh that put the so-called rain/lightning god to shame. Yahweh holds out the same challenge to the priesthood of Israel, but with the fulfilment of Hosea's prophecy Baal is once more exposed as impotent. In fact Israel is shown to be the type of whore that is not worth a whole lot to her captor anyway and Hosea buys Gomer back for a mere 15 shekels of silver and a homer of barley (3:2).

The captivity is perceived in the abandonment of her inheritance (2:13–15). It will grow wild for being unattended. Her glorious festivals will be brought to an end. The picture of the priesthood acting all solemn and priestly at the festivals dedicated to Baal, is not overlooked by Yahweh, it is abominable, a threat of the highest degree to the covenant, an act that betrayed the heart of the people as wicked, an act that broke the covenant.

Luther's German translation of vs. 15a has an interesting play on words "so I will afflict on her the days of the Baals." It appears that the priesthood and her children will receive what Baal is actually capable of, nothing. They will be carried off into a foreign land helpless and powerless against her destruction. Vs. 15 ends a series of indictments and their implied declarations of judgment by laying full blame at the feet of the priesthood. They had courted their pseudo lover, but forgotten the one that truly and always loves her, the sigh of a determined yet broken lover. Brokenness however, will not be permitted as the last word. Vs. 16–25 are the sure words of the one with authority as creator over his creature, the one that will create a new time.

Hos 2:16 Therefore, behold, I will entice her and lead her in the desert and talk kindly with her.³⁸ 2:17 Then I will give her back her vineyard, and make the valley of Achor a gate of hope. And there she will be willing to follow, as in the time of her youth, as she moved out of Egypt. 2:18 As [it was] then, says the LORD, you will call me "my

³⁸ Luther sees this verse as a pre-figuring of the apostolic teaching. "Through my apostles I will teach you a sweet doctrine that is different from the Law" (*LW* 18:11). Given the prevalence of the law/gospel distinction throughout the text of Hosea, it seems reasonable that Luther make this assertion.

husband' and no more [call me] "my Baal."³⁹ 2:19 Then I will put away the names of the Baals from her mouth, so that their names shall be remembered no more.

Hosea's prophecy is deeply embedded in the historical-redemptive 'dumb facts' of Israel's past. Yahweh, in his determined love, will create a new exodus. But this time Israel will recognize her faithful husband. For at a given time he will once again lead her into the desert, speak kindly to her and replenish her inheritance. What was once a place of confusion (*Achor*), will become a gate of hope that harks back to the euphoric days of Israel's liberation from Egypt. Some scholars determine a problem with this idealization of the first exodus event. But it is easy enough to picture the rapturous delight of the crossing of the sea and the song of Moses and Miriam, as being central to the faith history of Yahweh and his people. It was not until the refusal at Kadesh Barnea (Deut 1:19–46) that things began to go wrong for the people. So it is possible to reflect on the time before Kadesh Barnea as a time of youthful exuberance. In this new time it will be Baal that is forgotten, Yahweh will be given willing credit where it is due.

Hos 2:20 And at that time, I will, myself, for her, enter into a covenant with the animals of the field, with the birds under the heavens, and the worms of the ground, and I will break bow, sword and armor in the land and let her dwell safely.⁴⁰ 2:21 I will betroth you with me for all eternity, I will betroth you with me in righteousness and justice, in grace and compassion. 2:22 Yes, in faithfulness will I betroth you with me, and you will recognize the LORD.

At this time Yahweh will make a new covenant with creation. It is so pervasive that it will reach as high as the birds in the heavens and even to the depths of the worms under the ground. The covenant and creation theology alluded to here speaks of a concrete renewal of provision for Yahweh's people. The political apostasy followed by Israel in their attempt to make security arrangements with their neighbours will be eclipsed by Yahweh's strong hand, and she will dwell safely. The new covenant will be an eternal one. It will be dependent on Yahweh's faithfulness alone.

Hos 2:23 At that time I myself will respond, says the LORD, I will respond to the heavens and the heavens shall respond to the earth, 2:24 and the earth shall answer corn, wine and oil, and these shall answer Jezreel. 2:25 And I will sow him/her⁴¹ for myself in the land, and my

³⁹ Indicates the treachery of syncretism; of knowingly mistaking identity.

⁴⁰ To dwell safely in the land is linked to the eschatological tense reflected in Hos 11:11. It also reflects the time of the new exodus spoken of in Hos 3:5.

⁴¹ The German has *ihn*, the Hebrew is feminine.

mercy will be on Lo-Ruhama, and I will say to Lo-Amami: “you are my people”, and he will say: “you are my God.”

Luther’s translation renders the NIV’s use of ‘respond’ with *erhören*, which is to ‘answer.’⁴² ‘Response’ is a correct translation by the NIV for theological reasons. It presupposes that something first happens and then Yahweh responds. What does God respond to? In our rendition God actually acts in response to prayer. The asking of Jezreel is eventually answered (2:24). In responsive answer, which indicates more than mere listening, God initiates a chain reaction of creative providence. It is God that has power over the heavens as opposed to Baal the pseudo rain god.

When God answers/yields to the heavens against his rightful and justified cause for complete retribution, the heavens yield, give over their resource to the earth and the earth shall yield corn, wine and oil. The very things for sustaining life that were once wrongly attributed to Baal are given their true provenance. They are located in the creative and loving act of God. This abundant re-creation by God will, by implication, lay the fertile ground in which Jezreel will be planted. This life sustaining chain reaction started by the forgiving and yielding nature of God’s determined love will ultimately sustain, bring to yield, Jezreel. Hos 2:25 rounds out the inclusio that began in 2:1. The inclusio keeps the central focus on God’s redeeming love and his re-creative power. The marriage metaphor serves this overall theme.

IV. The Marriage Metaphor

A major point to be made in regard to Hosea’s message of hope is that it did not arise out of the personal experience of the prophet in his marriage, nor can it be located in the prophet’s self-understanding. It is a theological judgment that bears witness to God’s continual and passionate loyalty to his people in the face of Israel’s flagrant and persistent disloyalty.⁴³

This insight by Childs highlights our conviction that the marriage of Hosea plays an important yet ancillary role in the prophecy. It is in the text for the purpose of saying something significant about God, yet it is limited in this role because the nature of hope is

⁴² The Hebrew renders it as ‘will answer’. It is possible that Luther chose to use the word *erhören* for theological reasons based on the Hebrew. To hear in German can also be translated as *to yield*. In keeping with the planting metaphor of Jezreel, the process of *yielding* that begins with God and eventually *yields* Jezreel is very interesting. See (LW 18:114).

⁴³ Childs, *Introduction*, 382.

located outside Hosea's marriage and in the pure and powerfully determined will of God. Some may see this treatment of Hosea under God's direction as unethical, yet Hosea, in sympathy with God, is willing to incarnate a very difficult marriage—fully aware of Gomer's propensity for adultery—for the sake of his brothers and sisters under God's direction. Hummel calls it an 'eschatological suspension of ethics'.⁴⁴ It speaks of a God that is free to take action in the face of covenantal crisis. The use of the marriage metaphor by Yahweh gives a precise indication of the essence of Israel's failure, she has broken the marriage vow between herself and her faithful and devoted lover. An interesting aspect is that Gomer does not repent in the text. After Yahweh clearly portions out the share of culpability across the priesthood and nation, he calls Hosea to make the move, against Mosaic Law,⁴⁵ in a bid to take Gomer back. She is offered back to Hosea it seems without much struggle by her captor.

The actual historical marriage of Hosea and Gomer also serves to drive home the existential nature of the knowledge of God, the *daath Elohim*. Hosea is drawn into the pathos of the subjective God, a God that feels deep pain and rejection. For Hosea it is an emotional solidarity with Yahweh.⁴⁶ This deep sympathy and experience of God serves as a sign-act against the priesthood whom had forsaken the knowledge of God, and therefore failed to instruct the nation. This lack of genuine experiential knowledge by priest and nation is one of the main indictments condemning them to judgment.

V. Daath Elohim

"Hosea's central complaint against the people is that they do not *know* God."⁴⁷ This knowledge of God (*daath elohim*) compasses inner appropriation, feeling, and the reception into the soul. It also means to have sympathy, pity or affection for someone. In this regard Hosea is contrasted with the priests and people of Israel, for they lived in a time of prosperity and Hosea lives with the twofold burden of a marriage gone wrong and the experiential knowledge of impending destruction. Israel prospers superficially as a nation and they do not *know* God. Though Hosea suffers terribly, he has *daath elohim*.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Hummel, *The word becoming flesh*, 287.

⁴⁵ Heschel, *The Prophets*, 57. A husband publicly betrayed by his wife is prevented by law and by emotion from renewing his marital life (Heschel, *The Prophets*, 51). Yet Yahweh breaks the rules and Hosea is called to follow suit as a sign-act.

⁴⁶ Heschel, *The Prophets*, 49. See also Hos 9:17.

⁴⁷ Heschel, *The Prophets*, 57). See Hos 4:1, 6; 6:6.

⁴⁸ The NIV renders the Greek with 'acknowledgement'.

The words *daath elohim* mean sympathy for God, attachment of the whole person, his love as well as his knowledge; an act of involvement, attachment or commitment to God. The biblical man knew of no bifurcation of mind and heart, thought and emotion.⁴⁹

Limburg lays the blame for the lack of knowledge (*daath elohim*) specifically with the priests and theologians who have failed in their tasks (Hos 4:4–10).⁵⁰ Zimmerli makes the added distinction between knowledge and ‘acknowledgement’ as per the NIV.⁵¹ Von Rad sees it as a particular knowledge, the personal knowing reflected in the German *Gotteserkenntnis*.⁵² The *daath elohim* implies acknowledgement in the total conduct of the person concerned, the very opposite of what the nation had done, as was graphically revealed in their licentious and forbidden acts.⁵³ Ward says ‘without the knowledge of God, there was no creative centre, no source of morality.’⁵⁴ This insight by Ward harks back to the creative sustaining process of God yielding up life giving order (Hos 2:23–25). It also echoes the creation narrative and the key function of the creative word of God. Without this embodiment of the word of knowledge, Israel was destined to fall. Its psalmic liturgy continually calls them back to this creative word/torah (Ps 119).⁵⁵ It is in the acknowledgement of God and the embodiment of his word that God uses as means to actually bring his saving history to pass. ‘*Heilsgeschichte* is a course of history which is kept in motion, and guided to its God ordained good, by the constantly intruding divine word.’⁵⁶ When the course of salvation history is threatened by the apostasy of the priesthood and its effect on the nation, God is compelled to act decisively against them, for them.

VI. Eschatology, Typology And The New Time

Judgment is not the last word for Yahweh in relation to his people. He is a determined lover that redeems his guilty partner using his own means. He is able to create and foretell a new time. Yahweh

⁴⁹ Heschel, *The Prophets*, 59.

⁵⁰ Limburg, *Hosea–Michah*, 3.

⁵¹ Zimmerli, *Old Testament*, 188.

⁵² Von Rad, *Old Testament*, 143. Knowledge (*scientia*) knowing (*notitia*) would be better. Passively, this is “learning to know” (*cognitio*). This is how Is. 11:9 has it “For the earth is full of the knowledge (*scientia*) of the Lord.” See also Is 53:11. To know (*cognoscere*) God as God, to know that we receive every good thing from him—that is learning to know (*cognitio*) God’ (Luther, *LW* 18:19).

⁵³ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 188.

⁵⁴ J.M. Ward, *Thus says the Lord: the message of the prophets* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991) 229.

⁵⁵ See Psalm 119.

⁵⁶ von Rad, *Old Testament*, 27.

speaks of a new exodus (Hos 2:17) that will outshine the former one, for it will be eternal (2:21). Hummel, in our opinion correctly sees the messianic fulfilment in Jesus as the pivotal event in the creation of a new time.⁵⁷ In Jesus the Davidic king is restored to the throne (Hos 1:11; 3:5). The new covenant inaugurated in Jesus is prefigured in the Hosea text, for it is obvious that ‘the movement in thought is from covenant breach to covenant renewal.’⁵⁸ Hosea accounts for a resurrection in the new time (Hos 6:1–3, 1 Cor 15:3–5). Hummel thinks ‘it is possible that Hosea originated the metaphor of God—later Christ—as the groom of the people of God.’⁵⁹ In an essay dedicated to the messianic and eschatological aspects of Hosea’s text, Pentiuć finds several very strong connections to the new covenant period.⁶⁰ He understands that woven throughout Hosea is an understanding that *messiah* would come to rectify the failure of the monarchy.⁶¹ In connection to the Diaspora and end of the northern states history, Pentiuć finds in Hosea the fulfilment of the promise made by Yahweh to Israel as being embodied in the Christ event, ‘the Lord’s resurrection is a typological embodiment’ of Israel’s revival, which will be fulfilled literally at the end of time when the new Israel, all who believe in Christ, will be raised up.⁶²

In this light, Luther inaugurated a new epoch in typology.⁶³ It is the typological sense running throughout Hosea’s text that gives some remarkable understanding of the broad scope of Yahweh’s plan for salvation. ‘The Old Testament is dominated by a form of typological thinking, namely, that the eschatological correspondence between beginning and end (*Urzeit und Endzeit*).’⁶⁴ The difference between allegory and typology is that allegory is rigidly attached to the text, whereas typology is ‘astonishingly free of attachment to the word or the letter, yet bound to a much greater degree by the historical sense.’⁶⁵ It is because of this that Luther in his lectures on Hosea can distinguish the woman of whoredom as a typological representation of the apostate Roman curia. This methodology allowed the text of Hosea to move into his *sitz im leben* and charge the

⁵⁷ Hummel, *The word becoming flesh*, 293.

⁵⁸ W.J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: a theology of the Old Testament covenants* (London: Paternoster, 1984) 170.

⁵⁹ Hummel, *The word becoming flesh*, 29.

⁶⁰ E.J. Pentiuć, ‘Messianism in the book of Hosea in light of patristic interpretations’ in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (46, 1/2, 2001) 35–56). See Hosea 2:16–25 [2:18–25]; 3:4–5; 6:1–3; 11; 14:5–9.

⁶¹ Pentiuć, *Messianism*, 36.

⁶² Pentiuć, *Messianism*, 45. See 1 Thess 4:13–17 and Hosea 1:11; 3:5.

⁶³ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 22.

⁶⁴ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 19.

⁶⁵ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 21.

apostate church with the same apocalyptic doom faced by the nation of Hosea's time. "One sees from Hosea 2:16–20, that already within the Old Testament the dumb facts of history had become prophetic, and had come to be viewed as prototypes to which a new and more complete redemptive act of God would correspond."⁶⁶ It is in this line of thought that Von Rad answers the question: "what part do we have with Old Testament Israel?" The answer for him is that we are deeply connected to it, for it is the same God and the same redemptive line.⁶⁷ In this sense Hosea speaks directly to us today, by building out the historical and textual locution and allowing the text to take its right place as illocutor of Yahweh's intention. "The references of the Old Testament statements to the New is not restricted to the person and life of Christ, but embraces the whole/entire Christ event as this is witnessed in the New testament, including its ecclesiological aspect."⁶⁸ This is our calling as people that live under and by the word of God.

VII. Conclusion

The illocutionary point intrinsic to Hosea's text is directly addressed to the contemporary church as we participate in the redemptive line (*heilsgeschichte*) 'in' Christ. Does the church continue to take God at his word? Or is it guilty of the priestly whoredom, and the withholding of the divine knowledge from the people? The text of Hosea is a clarion call to the ecclesial leadership that presumes priestly and theological responsibility for the people of God. It plays the role of law/command for our existing leadership. Therefore, it is not a psychological model of inter marital abuse that smuggles in a foreign characterization of God in the book of Hosea. Instead, we see in this text a determined and subjective God striving/struggling for a corrupt and rebellious people. One of the ways he contends for a people that act as if they are not his is the bringing to bear of command.

However, the command of God is not his final word in Hosea's text; the command is enjoined with the promise, the promise of a new time. In commenting on Hos 2:23 Luther says "When Christ said: 'He who believes and is baptized will be saved' (Mk 16:16), what else is that than to say to believers" 'You are My people?'"⁶⁹ The command and promise distinction is so pronounced in Hosea that Hummel states, "Nowhere does the thematic of judgment and

⁶⁶ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 34.

⁶⁷ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 36.

⁶⁸ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 37.

⁶⁹ LW 18:15.

grace, law and gospel seem so indigenous.”⁷⁰ In the posture of obedience (*vita passiva*)—embodied and exemplified by Hosea’s sacrificial action—the church is called, addressed by Yahweh, to respond in repentance or to take action where the priest and theologians have failed to “yield” appropriately in response to the new covenant. As with Hosea, the word is to become flesh, in us.⁷¹

Hosea personally exemplifies Jesus’ call to be salt and light in a context that resonates with our own today. Our church lives in a context that contends with the challenges of prosperity and wealth, a context that encourages false teachers and prophets to roam freely across the airwaves and to chant feverishly from the pulpits. Moreover, all the while our people sit numbly and apathetic, pining after something real in place of the frequent misconstruals that are traded as enlightened “grown up” interpretation (see a radical feminist approach).

Hosea calls us back to what Luther called the “the function of the gospel.”⁷² Our provider and redeemer (*Erlöser*) is so generous in the total giving up of his personal wealth for and to us, that we can yield our security and freedom now for the sake of the nations. “The poor should be improved by the [gospel].”⁷³ The apocalyptic imagery is ratified by history, and one can say that as surely as Israel was carried off at the command of Yahweh so the messiah would come. As surely as the messiah came, so too will the last days come and those days will be great as Hosea’s prophecy testifies,

The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel. Afterwards the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessing in the last days (Hosea 1:11; 3:5).

Brett Muhlhan
Perth Bible College
Postgraduate Coordinator
1 College Court
Karrinyup
Perth
Western Australia
Australia
brett@pbc.wa.edu.au

⁷⁰ Hummel, *The word becoming flesh*, 290.

⁷¹ W.A. La Sor, *Old Testament Survey* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982) 345.

⁷² LW 18:76.

⁷³ LW 18:76.