

**A Priestly Kingdom
and
A Holy Nation**

**An Introductory Commentary
on Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers**

by

MICHAEL FALLON, MSC

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A NOTE ON THE FORMATTING OF THE TEXT

The biblical text is presented in narrow columns on the outer side of the page. The commentary is presented in wider columns towards the inside of the page. Where the commentary extends beyond the page on which the biblical text is presented, the whole page is given over to the commentary.

Cover photo: The first page of the Hebrew text of the Book of Exodus

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PREFACE

I had the privilege of spending most of 2007 living with my brother MSC in our Italian provincial house in Rome, ten minutes walk from the library of the Pontifical Biblical Institute. I thank the Australian Provincial Council for organising this time for me, my Italian brothers for their hospitality, and Father James Dugan SJ for so graciously allowing me such easy access to the library. On the academic side, I am especially grateful to Father Jean-Louis Ska SJ, professor of Old Testament studies at the Institute. It was he who gave me invaluable assistance in working my way through the complexities of modern research into the Pentateuch, and who kindly read and commented on the Introduction to this commentary.

One fruit of my recent Roman research is this introductory commentary in which I hope to make available to the interested reader an accessible starting point for reading the stories that tell of the journey of the people of Israel from Egypt to Sinai and from Sinai to the Promised Land, as well as the laws that were developed over centuries – laws that governed the social and ritual life of ancient Israel.

In the Introduction I attempt to put the many strands of writing in their historical context. Knowing which group composed the different sections of these books, and when they did so, as well as exploring when it was that the various strands were brought together into the Books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers as they have been handed down within the Jewish and Christian communities for well over two thousand years, helps us to avoid reading these works out of their historical context.

I thank Father Warrick Tonkin for the time and care he put into reading the manuscript and granting it the ‘Nihil Obstat’, and Archbishop Mark Coleridge for permission to publish. My prayer is that this Introductory Commentary will enrich your appreciation of these ancient, inspired, and inspiring books.

– Feast of the Sacred Heart 2008