The God of Israel, God of Love

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STUDIES
THE GOD OF ISRAEL, GOD OF LOVE

FIVE HUNDRED years before the birth of Christ, when Tze-kung asked his master Confucius for one word that could guide his life through all its days, the great Chinese sage told him: "Is not shu, fellow-feeling, the word? Do not do to others what you would not like done to yourself." 1 Another disciple, Tseng Tze, explained his master's way as chung and shu, faithfulness and fellow-feeling.2

The Indian sage Yajnavalkya, about to leave home for a hermit's life, delayed his departure long enough to explain to one of his wives the role of love in the attainment of lasting happiness: "Verily, creatures are not dear that you may love creatures; but that you may love the Self through the creatures, therefore are creatures dear."3 For man to roam in the Absolute—the universal Soul—ancient Hindu thought required these four "sublime contemplations": maitri, benevolence toward all creation; karuna, compassion toward the distressed; mudita, joy at the happiness of others, and upaksa, indifference to their faults. To some of Buddha's followers, nirvana meant the destruction of all existence; to others, it was the triumph over non-self. Having attained this triumph, one need not shut one's eyes to the world, they held; one should rather offer light to others. Hence these beautiful words: "I would be a guard to them that have no protection; a guide unto the traveler; a ship, a well spring, a bridge for the seekers of that shore; I

2. See ibid., IV, 15. Chung and shu have been variously rendered by translators of The Analects as "loyalty" and "consideration" (Waley), "conscientiousness within" and "consideration for others" (Soothill), "being true to the principles of our nature and the benevolent exercise of them to others" (Legge), or "loyalty and reciprocity" (Ware). The terms "faithfulness" and "fellow-feeling" I adopted are those of Leonard A. Lyall in his The Sayings of Confucius (London: Longmans, Green, n.d.).
would be a lamp to such as need a lamp, a bed for the weary that need a bed, the very slave of such as need service."  

In the Middle East, no less than in the Far East, there is proof of the reverence with which those outside the biblical orbit spoke of their love for other men and for their gods. Sumerian verses stamped on clay tablets, found at Nippur, praise human love. 5 Egyptian papyri of the later empire attest that the presence of the loved one helps the sick more than potent remedies or collections of sacred texts, more than visits of the head physician or magic phrases of the priest. 6 In the "Daily Prayer of the Hittite King" an appeal is made to Telepinus, so benevolent a god that the royal supplicant can say: "Of the oppressed, the lowly . . . thou art father, mother; the cause of the lowly, the oppressed, thou, Telepinus, dost take to heart." 7 In the Cairo museum an old manuscript, written during the Twenty-first or Twenty-second Dynasty, that is between the eleventh and the eighth centuries B.C., bears instructive words set down by a father for his son; he is told not to neglect his god but always to pray "with a loving heart." 8

The sacred books of China and India, the cuneiform and hieroglyphic texts of the Mediterranean world prove the great role of love in pagan life and worship. No doubt, the apex of pre-Christian thought on love is Plato's Symposium. In that dialogue, he assembled all that a great philosopher considered worth saying about love "in its spiritual sense, in its relation to well-being and, better still, in its function as mediator at the heart of being." 9

THE MOVEMENT OF LOVE

Fellow-feeling, benevolence, love powerful, joy-giving love, linking man with man and leading man to the higher world—what can the sacred books of the Jews and Christians add to what others seem to have said so well? The answer is rebellion, not love but murder, not human love but paganism. He is wrong, not merely because the Bible is the pages of the Bible. Familiar it records. Heartache from generation to generation, But the undiscerning reader is deceived by the name of God.

He is wrong, not merely because the Bible is not a pagan life and literature. He is wrong, not merely because the children of Israel, as God's love, are not nearer to his heart than the loved one helps the sick more than potent remedies or collections of sacred texts, more than visits of the head physician or magic phrases of the priest. In the "Daily Prayer of the Hittite King" an appeal is made to Telepinus, so benevolent a god that the royal supplicant can say: "Of the oppressed, the lowly . . . thou art father, mother; the cause of the lowly, the oppressed, thou, Telepinus, dost take to heart." In the Cairo museum an old manuscript, written during the Twenty-first or Twenty-second Dynasty, that is between the eleventh and the eighth centuries B.C., bears instructive words set down by a father for his son; he is told not to neglect his god but always to pray "with a loving heart." In the "Daily Prayer of the King," an appeal is made to Telepinus, so benevolent a god that the royal supplicant can say: "Of the oppressed, the lowly . . . thou art father, mother; the cause of the lowly, the oppressed, thou, Telepinus, dost take to heart." In the Cairo museum an old manuscript, written during the Twenty-first or Twenty-second Dynasty, that is between the eleventh and the eighth centuries B.C., bears instructive words set down by a father for his son; he is told not to neglect his god but always to pray "with a loving heart." 

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have said so well? The answer may be disconcerting. Not love but rebellion, not love but murder, falsehood, incest, fornication abound in the pages of the Bible. Famine, drought, war, exile, are the grim sequence it records. Heartache, sorrow, loneliness are man's sorry lot, from generation to generation. So an undiscerning reader concludes. But the undiscerning reader is wrong.

He is wrong, not merely because crimes of every sort also dominate pagan life and literature. He is wrong, for in spite of the many failures of the children of Israel, and all their and our early ancestors, love, God's love for man and man's answering love for God, is at work from the first page of Genesis to the last page of the Apocalypse. There is no dichotomy between the Old Covenant and the New. The history of salvation unfolds between two visions of eternity: the vision of God's creative love in paradise and the vision of God's triumphant love in the heavenly city. Love links the first scene with the last.

Several Hebrew words seek to express this inexpressible love, for instance, the noun *'ahabah* and the adjective *raham*. When used of God's love for man or man's for God, *'ahabah* is strong, dignified, unique in its power. Applied in a religious sense, it speaks of a love that unites, that endures, that never flinches. For man to love God means to serve Him; for God to love man means to elect him, to set him apart and give him all good things. *Raham* is warmer. It means merciful and speaks of pity for those in need, sympathy for those in pain. It is affectionate, compassionate, friendly, trusting.

These two aspects meet and mingle and move through the story of God's love for man that is the Bible. Like a mighty river flowing by city, town, and village, this strong and tender love touches the whole of life, all moments grave and gay, and it moves on, making glad the city of God. Where words falter, music can be eloquent. *The Moldau*, one of Smetana's masterpieces, describes the highlands of Bohemia where the two sources of the river rise out of the earth. One is strong, steady,
determined; it starts on its long journey to the sea with a sturdy resolution no obstacle can arrest. The other springs brightly and merrily from its mountain bed; gaily it rushes along its stony way. With melodic brilliance and sustained power, the great Czech composer shows how the two streams come together, widen and deepen as they crash in cataracts or pause in fern-banked pools or hurry past woodlands where the hunter's horn rings out clear and true; move through villages where the tolling church bell tells of human loss; hasten past the green where dancers move to century-old folk tunes; dare the dark mysteries of the midnight forest; majestically survey the comforting sights of fields and homes and gardens, to reach at last the serried rows of the houses of Prague with all their human hopes and fears. Far beyond the city waits the sea, unmeasured and unknown, awesome and terrifying to those who have watched the flow of the Moldau and understood its symbol is: Strong and gentle, like its waters, are the ways of God's love.

Mighty and tender, love and mercy were an experience in Israel before they were a doctrine. This experience was gradual, and so was the unfolding of the plan of salvation. Slowly it was revealed to make development in both dogma and morals possible. This is the way of divine dispensation: Man is bound by space and time. Creation and temporal succession are linked to one another, and distinguish the creature from God. Even within the limits of his knowledge, Aristotle was able to say: "He who examines the admirable works of nature knows that the fruit cannot ripen unless the seed and blossom precede, this succession, akolouthia, artistically guiding each thing to its fulfillment." St. Gregory of Nyssa: "It is without reason, O man, that you grieve and groan over the sequence of the necessary succession of things. You do not know towards what end the economy of the world is leading. It is necessary that all things progress in an orderly way [akolouthia], according to the artistic wisdom of the One who directs all, to be united with the divine nature."

Time after time, God's love manifests itself in the Bible. This succession of events is not without meaning; Each marks an ordered ad-

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13. Aristotle, Works, XLVI, 547D.

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The God

vance to an end. This end is God's love for mankind.

The akolouthia of God's love is understood under many themes: God's...
The God of Israel, God of Love

With melodic resolution and merrily from the. With melodic loser shows how they crash in woodlands where the green where mysteries of the hills of fields and of the houses of beyond the city and terrifying to understand its ways of God's Silence in Israel, and so was veiled to make is the way of Creation and distinguish the edge, Aristotle works of nature ossom precede, in to its fulfill­
gory of Nyssa: the sequence towards what end things progress wisdom of the people. This suc­h ordered ad-

vance to an end. This end is God's undisputed reign, man's union with Him.

The akolouthia of God's love in the Old Testament can be unified under many themes: God's revelation of Himself as Lord or Law­ giver or Father; God's demands on man in terms of faith or service; God's faithfulness as expressed in His attitude toward sin, retribution, conversion; God's victory as seen in exodus, kingship, messianism; God's plan as manifested in the divine election, the people of God, the covenant between God and man.15

THE COVENANTS

In a way, the covenant theme subsumes all the others: It controlled the whole history of Israel and is consummated in the Church Christ founded. God elected a people, made them His own, dwelt in their midst, united Himself to them and prepared them for an even more blessed intervention.16 Two consequences of this tremendous mystery may be noted immediately: Israel's religion is historical and her history is religious. God is not a dim, distant, abstract supreme being, not the conclusion of a philosopher's syllogism. He is a Person, He is near, He acts in time, He creates and re-creates man, and His love can be known in an existential situation. Thus history is more than a succession of events, it is the disclosure of His saving design, a mystery of love and mercy. In the course of this history, God's covenants were first experienced and only later stated, hymned, proclaimed.

THE LORD SAID TO ABRAHAM

The history of Israel begins with a solemn promise. When the Lord ap­ peared to Abraham and declared: "I will make a great nation of you... In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12:2–3), the first chapter opened in the long love story of the chosen people—the story of a frequently repeated divine summons and of a sometimes slow and often faltering human response. Abraham may have been surprised to learn of the Creator's predilection for His

creature, yet Abraham's call was not the initial expression of friendship between God and man.

In the verbal images of Genesis, God is said to have walked and talked with our first parents, called to them when they hid from Him, promised to set right their mistakes, resolved to re-create in even greater love those whom His love had created. In the common symbols of thorn and thistle, bread and dust, in the offerings of crop and firstlings of flocks, in the cosmic symbols of a flood of waters, of the unaltered course of seedtime and harvest, of cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, of a bow set in the clouds—in all these man could read the sequence of sin and punishment, the need for sacrifice, the promise of a new beginning and the pledge of a never-ending covenant made by God with all living, mortal creatures upon the earth.

From the earliest accounts of eastern Mediterranean civilization, it is clear that man's need of divine help was paralleled by a belief that the gods were unhappy without human worship. In Homer's Greece covenants between a man and a god were common: Cult was offered in exchange for protection. In the various writings of the Near East, the mutual needs of men and pagan deities are said to be satisfied by some form of alliance. But no matter what the similarities between them, the covenant into which Abraham entered differed from the covenants made by his neighbors in inception, nature, and consequences. The initiative came not from Abraham, but from God. Like all subsequent covenants uniting Israel with her Creator, the divine intervention was a sovereign gift, not a bilateral contract. Appropriate here are words better known in another context: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (Jn 15:16).

God's gesture was not an answer to Israel's plea, neither was it a recognition of her good conduct and exceptional merits. "It was not because you are the largest of all nations that the Lord set His heart on you and chose you, for you are really the smallest of all nations. It was because the Lord loved you . . ." (Deut 7:7–8). This uncompromising address by the Lawgiver plainly disposed of any such self-gratifying illusion. It prepared Israel to acknowledge her unworthiness of God's love and to accept the moral obligations that the divine election imposed. The terms of the covenant were clearly these: Only if the Israelites loved Him and walked in His ways (see Deut 30:16) would the Lord of hosts be on their side; only if they did what was right and good in His sight (see 6:8) would the promises be fulfilled.

The prodigious consecration of the Lord's solemn oath to Abraham on his day, sealed the sacred covenant deep and awesome sleep. God moving, in the form he had immolated (see Gen 15:17) for him and for his descendants, blood they were to be "their own, into their bodies were to be" (see Ex 24:7) and ratified their covenants (see Ex 24:4–8, 11).17

The day came when the Lord said to Moses: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. . . ." (see Ex 24:7) and ratified the covenants (see Ex 24:4–8, 11).18

17. From Assyria, Babylon, Egypt was a memory, Thunder, lighting, the majestic cloud, the voices, the proclamation of God's power. His people first are unsatisfied: "I myself today shall strike the Canaanites, not even a hint of a thought of God's goodness and Abraham's and his descendants (19) Passages attributed for instance, Ex 19:11, 17, 20; 19:11. The Elohist tradition and Deut 1:20, 19, 19:4, 1953, 374–397.

18. The narrative of Genesis is the account of Abraham's descent from Abram to Abrakham, his name from Abram to Abraham, is expected to lead to the Lord's solemn oath to Abraham, and his male descendants (see Ex 19:11, 20; 19:11). The Elohist tradition for instance, Ex 19:11, 17, 20; 19:11. The Elohist tradition (1953), 374–397.
good in His sight (see 6:18) would they experience the blessedness of His power, would they know and see the whole impact of His loving promises fulfilled.

The prodigious consequences of the covenant were the object of the Lord's solemn oath to Abraham. A mysterious rite, widely revered in his day, sealed the sacred engagement: Abraham was plunged into a deep and awesome sleep, and in the darkness of ecstasy discerned the Lord moving, in the form of a flaming torch, between the animals he had immolated (see Gen 15:7). Circumcision, he was told, would be for him and for his descendants the sign of this covenant. In their blood they were to be "baptized," in their flesh marked as the Lord's own, into their bodies was cut the obligation to serve Him. Circumcision was to be a divine pledge that they would share in the covenant's blessings according to the measure of their fidelity to its demands.¹⁸

THE LORD SAID TO MOSES

The day came when the Lord spoke to Moses (see Ex 3; 4:1–17) and another when, through His spokesman Moses, He called upon Abraham's descendants to make the patriarch's engagement their own. Egypt was a memory, Canaan a hope, the desert a present reality. Thunder, lightning, the trembling of the earth beneath their feet proclaimed the majesty of the wholly Other. To Him they pledged obedience: "All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do" (Ex 24:7) and ratified their pact with a solemn sacrifice and ritual meal (see Ex 24:4–8, 11).¹⁹

¹⁷. From Assyria, Babylonia, Greece, and Rome come accounts of similar ceremonies. Livy suggests a plausible interpretation when he relates that a Roman envoy warned the Alban with whom he was making a treaty: "If the Roman people first are unfaithful to this contract . . . may Jupiter strike them as I myself today shall strike this pig." Whereupon he killed the pig (1, 24). Yet there is not even a hint of a threat in Gen 15; on the contrary, there is every expression of God's goodness and Abraham's future greatness and happiness.

¹⁸. The narrative of God's covenant with Abraham comes to us in two forms. The first is the account of the covenant rite, possession of the land of Canaan is promised to the patriarch's descendants, no obligation is imposed (see Gen 15:6–20). In the second account no rite is mentioned but God changes the patriarch's name from Abram to Abraham and assures him of many descendants. Abraham, on his side, is expected to lead a blameless life and to accept circumcision for himself and his male descendants (see Gen 17).

¹⁹. Passages attributed to the Yahwistic tradition identify the site as Sinai (see, for instance, Ex 19:11, 18: 34:4), as does the priestly code (see, for instance, Ex 19:1). The Elohist tradition and the Deuteronomist speak of Horeb (see Ex 33:6 and Deut 1:2, 6, 19). See Marcel Haelvoet, "La théophanie du Sinai, analyse littéral de récits d'Ex., xix–xxiv," Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses, XXIX (1953), 374–397.
Singular proofs of God’s favor had preceded this sacred moment. He had spoken to their leader Moses, made him His prophet, given him the power to work wonders; He had rescued His people from Pharaoh’s dominion, guarded them by day and by night, and made clear the meaning of all that He had done:

You have seen for yourselves how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to myself. Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

(Ex 19:4–6)

Their role was a privileged one, carrying obligations as well as honors. Each of the pentateuchal traditions refers differently to the duties imposed by Israel’s bond with God, but whether we read of the Ten Commandments (see Ex 20:1–17), the covenant code (see 20:22–23:19) or of cultic laws (see 34:17–26), we know that the people of God was meant lovingly to hear and heed His word, to carry out His will with eager heart. He was to be the melek, the king, the center of their camp (see Ex 15:8; 17:15). He was to be the warrior-hero who would lead them into battle (see Ex 17:16). He was the ruler of the whole earth, and yet to one portion of it He gave His special love: The people of Israel was made His segullah, His own treasure, a people set apart.

20. Did divine condescension go so far as to reveal the meaning of the divine name? Myles M. Bourke concludes, after an examination of the pertinent literature, that Moses was given an insight into the great biblical message that Israel’s God is a “hidden God” (Is 45:15) who is incomprehensible and ineffable. “By love may He be gotten and held; but by thought never.” (“Yahweh, the Divine Name,” The Bridge, III, 287.)

21. The theme of the election of Israel is closely connected with that of the covenant. Both are expressions of the initiative of love. Each renewal was a reaffirmation of this fact. According to Deut 28:69, the covenant was renewed when Moses led the people to the land of Moab, east of the Jordan. The clauses of this covenant are believed to be laws given in Deut 12–26. As Johannes Pedersen observes, covenant is the most appropriate term to describe Yahweh’s relation to Israel: “This denotes the psychic communion and the common purpose which united the people and its God. It is also expressed by saying that the peace of Yahweh reigns in Israel (shalom, Jer 16:5); therefore the relation between them is characterized by love, the feeling of fellowship among kinsmen. The covenant finds expression in the nature and customs of the people. By observing this mishpat, Israel maintains the covenant, but a departure from true custom, to which in the first place would belong intercourse with other gods, is a breach of the covenant.” (Israel, London: Oxford University Press, 1953, IV, 612.)
THE LORD SAID TO JOSHUA

After Moses, the Lord's servant, had died, the Lord spoke to Joshua who had been Moses' aide:

Prepare to cross the Jordan here, with all the people, into the land I will give the Israelites. ... I will be with you as I was with Moses: I will not leave you nor forsake you. ... I command you: be firm and steadfast! Do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord, your God, is with you wherever you go.

(1:2, 5, 9)

Into a rich and beautiful land, then, Joshua led his people, into the land the Lord had promised. If we follow the idealized portrayal of Israel's conquest as given in the book of Joshua, neighboring powers were weak and did little to hamper their advance.Coalitions of Canaanite kings are pictured as unable to resist tribes made strong by a common purpose and loyal to the alliance they renewed at Shechem, in the pivotal pass between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Yet, even if the conquest of Canaan was not as swift and thorough as a first reading of the book of Joshua might indicate, it was a sign of God's fidelity.

It was this fidelity that raised Joshua as a leader for Israel. A man not to compromise, he stated the case plainly:

Take great care . . . to love the Lord, your God. . . . If you transgress the covenant of the Lord, your God, which He enjoined on you, serve other gods and worship them, the anger of the Lord will flare up against you and you will quickly perish from the good land which He has given you. . . .

Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him completely and sincerely.

And the people answered:

Far be it from us to forsake the Lord for the service of other gods. For it was the Lord, our God, who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, out of a state of slavery. He performed those great miracles before our very eyes and protected us along our entire journey and among all the peoples through whom we passed. . . . Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for He is our God.

(23:12, 16; 24:14, 16-18)

22. See Martin Noth, The History of Israel (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 92. It is possible that this covenant was an extension of the Mosaic covenant to clans who had not been present at Sinai. (See Le Livre de Josué, trans. F.-M. Abel, O.P., Paris: Cerf, 1958, p. 104.)
THE WORK OF KINGS AND Scribes

More than once this scene was to be repeated. Though the Lord had spoken to David His servant; though He had taken him from shepherd his father's sheep to be a leader over His people; though He had been with him wherever he went; though He had promised to establish the throne of His kingdom forever; though He had allowed David's son, Solomon, to build a temple where His majesty and love did dwell; and though the Lord had done all this and more, some of David's successors gave to strange gods the honor and worship that was the Lord's alone (see 2 Kg 7:8-16; 3 Kg 6:1-2). Time and again, weak and wicked kings turned the land that was God's gift to His beloved people and meant to be a province of loving submission, into a haven for idolatry. Yet time and again, the spell of false gods was broken by those who remembered the word of the living God.

When, for instance, in the eighth century B.C., the priest Jehoiada ordered the idolatrous and murderous queen Athaliah slain, he made a covenant between the Lord, Joash, the seven-year-old king, and the people so that they should truly be the people of the Lord. The worship of the One God was restored, the shrines of baal destroyed, its altars and statues shattered, and baal's priest killed (see 4 Kg 11:1-18; 2 Par 23:8-17). Two centuries later Josiah, another descendant of David, again renewed the people's pledge to live by the covenant, promising to walk in the way of the Lord, to keep His commandments and observe His statutes with all his heart and all his soul. And all the people, both small and great, priests and prophets, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all of Judah signified their assent and promised to live according to the Law bequeathed them by their forefathers (see 4 Kg 23:2-3).

Another two centuries later, Ezra assembled the people in a public square in Jerusalem and read to them the "book of the law of Moses" (2 Esd 8:1). The Persians were then supreme in Israel. Ezra, a priest learned in "the law of the Lord" and well read in "the book of the law of Moses" and all its statutes and commands, had knowledge and understanding of the Law bequeathed by Moses (see 2 Esd 8:1). When the Persians gave him the freedom to bring the people back to God, he led them with great enthusiasm and intelligence. The people were saved. 
learned in "the law of the God of heaven" (1 Esd 7:21), had come to enforce, with the support of Persian authority, the long-neglected covenant obligations. From early morning until noon, he stood on a specially constructed platform reading from the Law, while the Levites at his side explained its meaning (see 2 Esd 8:4–9). Not only did the Israelites listen to the solemn reading of the Law, they acknowledged their sins and willingly submitted to cultic and social reforms. And on the Feast of Tabernacles, the representative leaders signed a binding covenant, set their seal unto it, while everyone who had knowledge and understanding supported them, taking an oath to walk in God’s law (see 2 Esd 9:38–10:29).

Before the men and women, their sons and daughters, promised to keep themselves undefiled from pagan ways, Ezra proclaimed that God alone was the Lord, He who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and who gives life to all living creatures; it was He who chose Abraham, delivered the enslaved from Egypt, and came down on Sinai. Though He had done all this, Ezra confessed, the Israelites did not remember the wonders they had seen but hardened their necks, wishing to return to their former bondage.

But thou, a forgiving God,
Gracious, and merciful,
Long-suffering, and full of compassion,
Didst not forsake them.

(2 Esd 9:17)

As their children and their children's children, Ezra continued, multiplied and prospered, they again provoked God's wrath, throwing His law behind their backs and killing the prophets. Only when they were given into the hands of their enemies did they cry to God. And again they were saved.

In thy very many mercies
Thou didst not utterly consume them,
Nor forsake them:
Because thou art a merciful and gracious God.

(2 Esd 9:31)


26. Mention must also be made of a covenant concluded with the tribe of Levi (see Deut 33:9; Num 18:10; Jer 33:20–22; Mal 2:1–9) and with the house of David (see 2 Kg 23:5; 7:8–17; Ps 88:4–5; Is 16:5).
THE VOICE OF THE PROPHETS

With the prophets, even before the exile and the return under Ezra, the long instruction of the chosen people entered its most important phase. Divine love had been found true by patriarchs, by wanderers in the wilderness, by pioneers in Palestine, by members of the first amphictyones; it was found true by citizens of a unified kingdom, by brothers dwelling in a land divided, by exiles heartick beside foreign shores, as it was to be later by the chastened members of the second commonwealth. Time had not only proved God's faithfulness, it had also disclosed new dimensions in the covenantal bond. The anawim, the poor of Yahweh, who in their "poverty" of soul depended on no one but Him, were quick to discover these new values and the basis of a life of poverty and prayer. Having nothing, they turned with childlike confidence to Him who possessed all. They never ignored or denied the juridical aspects of the covenant but they looked beyond the sign to the reality signified. They gave trust and received mercy. Their misery was an additional reason to hope in Him.

The experience of this mercy and well-placed hope led to a deeper insight into God's love, which the prophets sought to express in new images. Hosea describes the bond uniting Israel to her God under the figure of marriage; the words he uses have covenantal overtones:

So I will allure her;
I will lead her into the desert
and speak to her heart. . . .
She shall respond there as in the days of her youth,
when she came up from the land of Egypt.

27. Certain critics allege that the pre-exilic prophets knew nothing of the covenant. It is true that an examination of their writings provides no long list of texts containing this word. When berit does occur, it refers, the critics maintain, exclusively to the solemn act, not to the relations engendered by the act. For an interesting analysis of this subject see P. van Imhooch, *Theologie de l'Ancien Testament* (Tournai: Desclée, 1954), I, 252-254.

28. See Albert Gelin, "Heureux les pauvres," *Grands Thèmes Bibliques*, pp. 79-83. In this short chapter all the pertinent texts concerning the anawim are assembled and the history of these privileged souls is skillfully summarized. Poverty which had once been a sociological problem was later recognized as a spiritual qualification. It became a synonym for piety. Jeremiah was the patron of the anawim, Job the literary model of their dialogue with God. On the shores of the Dead Sea, the Qumranites tried to fashion their lives according to this teaching. On the Mount of Beatitudes, Jesus blessed and promised the poor a great reward. (See also Albert Gelin, *Les pauvres de Yahvé*, Paris: Cerf, 1953.)
Because of His covenant with Israel, God, like a faithful husband, will have pity on her who is unpitied, the prophet explains; He will again say to the Israelites: “My people!” and Israel shall answer “My God!” (2:23–24). No image, not even that of wedded love, is enough to describe God’s bond with His people. Hence Hosea recalls a father’s embrace of his son:

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
who took them in my arms;
I drew them with human cords,
with bands of love... 

The book of Deuteronomy made clear that the covenant laws were neither the impositions of an exacting ruler nor the price grudgingly paid by a people needing protection; obedience to them was the grateful expression of love offered in return for multiplied proofs of the Lord’s love.

For love of your fathers He chose their descendants and personally led you out of Egypt by His great power, driving out of your way nations greater and mightier than you, so as to bring you in and to make their land your heritage, as it is today. This is why you must now know, and fix in your heart, that the Lord is God in the heavens above and on earth below, and that there is no other. You must keep His statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you today... 

Such teaching transformed Israel’s grasp of the nature of sin. It was more than an offense; it was a betrayal. It was more than the infringement of a precept; it was a failure to respond to an invitation of love. The Deuteronomist’s teaching also opened the eyes of the people to the true nature of punishment. Frequently chastised for their waywardness and made subject to their enemies because of their infidelities, the people learned that to break the bond of love was to bring down suffering upon itself.

No one understood sin and punishment more clearly or explained them more poignantly than Jeremiah and no one saw with greater
vision that faithful observance of the covenant he knew pointed to a
greater covenant of the future.

The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the
covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to
lead them forth from the land of Egypt. I will place my law within
them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall
be my people.

(31:31-33)

Loving service, freely given, will make obedience to the new covenant
an unreserved donation of self.

Ezekiel, too, uses several images to hail God's pledge. God's love is
as tender as a bridegroom's for his bride (see 16:8-14), as solicitous as
a shepherd's for his flock: "I will appoint one shepherd over them to
pasture them, my servant David. I will make a covenant of peace with them. Thus they shall know that I, the Lord, am
their God, and they are my people, the house of Israel, says the Lord
God" (34:23, 25, 30).

The Shepherd-to-come is David, another David, one who will ac-
complish the messianic mission promised to the king. His work will
be one of peace. Thus the Second Isaiah speaks of the days of the
Messiah as an era of unalloyed happiness, a fulfillment of the pledge
of love:

Though the mountains leave their place
and the hills be shaken,
My love shall never leave you
nor my covenant of peace be shaken,
says the Lord, who has mercy on you. . . .
Come to me bountifully,
listen, that you may have life.
I will renew with you the everlasting covenant,
the benefits assured to David.

(54:10; 55:3)

THE MYSTERY OF CREATION

There is found in Scripture the art of plural melody musicians call
counterpoint, an interplay of themes, which gives its message not only

a dimension of depth but

I have been tracing the
history of the chosen people
sacred writers as the Lord is
conscious that they were a people
self to be their helper, their
this experience of divine
deeper awareness of divine
companied His interventive
experience taught them that we
Israel's election and covenant
understanding of God's act
the divine tenderness, so that through the sacred pages:

Three words are used in
they are bara, 'asah, yapar.'
always refers to a divine

Lift up your eyes
and see who has
He leads out their
calling them all
By His great might not one of them

This same recognition
found in the Psalms:

Yours are the
the world and
North and South
Thabor and

29. This whole theme has been

30. See also Ex 34:10, Num
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a dimension of depth but overtones of transcendent beauty. So far I have been tracing the melody of divine love as expressed in the history of the chosen people. This is basic. God is revealed by the sacred writers as the Lord of history. The children of Israel were conscious that they were a people set apart and that God had shown Himself to be their helper, their defender, not once but many times. Out of this experience of divine power in their history, there grew an ever deeper awareness of divine power in nature. Cosmic control had accompanied His intervention on their behalf; thus centuries of experience taught them that without this expression of might, the story of Israel's election and covenant would have been very different. As this understanding of God's activity in nature gave them new insight into the divine tenderness, so it suggests to us another melody moving through the sacred pages: God's love and the mystery of creation.29

Three words are used in the scriptural affirmation of creative love; they are bara, 'asah, yāqār. The word bara means to shape, to create; it always refers to a divine activity, to God's work in fashioning the heavens and the earth or to His work in fashioning man and his heart:

Lift up your eyes on high
and see who has created these:
He leads out their army and numbers them,
calling them all by name.
By His great might and the strength of His power
not one of them is missing!

(Is 40: 26)30

This same recognition of God's power in the world of nature is found in the Psalms:

Yours are the heavens, and yours is the earth;
the world and its fullness you have founded;
North and south you created;
Thabor and Hermon rejoice at your name.

(88: 12-13)

29. This whole theme has been made the subject of a thoughtful essay in biblical theology by Evode Beaucamp, O. F. M., La Bible et le sens religieux de l'univers (Paris: Cet, 1959); see also Carroll Stuhlmueller, C. P., "The Theology of Creation in Second Isaias," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XXI, 4 (October 1959), pp. 429-467.

30. See also Ex 34:10; Num 16:30; Ps 103:30; 147:5; Am 4:13.
Another verb, 'asah, meaning “to do,” “to make,” is used by the prophets to awaken love for the Lord who has done so much for His people (see Jer 10:12; 27:5; 51:15). It also serves the psalmist to evoke wonder at the Lord whose power is everywhere (see 8:4, 7; 18:2; 94:5; 101:26). Lastly, there is yasur, "to fashion," "to model." Isaiah, for instance, makes use of it to describe the work of God’s hands fashioning the earth, stretching over it the vast expanse of the heavens, shaping Israel, the people that is to tell His praise, or forming in the womb His servant who is to bring salvation to the ends of the earth (see 45:18; 43:21; 49:5).

Perhaps one name given to God, better than any other, shows how history and creation are related, indeed joined, in the divine plan. It is Yabweb Zebo ot. Most frequently it is translated “Lord God of hosts,” sometimes “Lord God of armies,” and can be found over and over in the historic books of the Bible, in the writings of the prophets as well as in the Psalms. The people turned to God as their leader in battle, thus the tribes of Israel could be called "my army" or "the hosts of Yahweh" (see Ex 7:4; 12:41). Yahweh led them out of Egypt and He would never fail to command them and bring them to victory. Were not all these wonders recorded in the "Book of the Wars of the Lord" (Num 21:14)?

Centuries passed, and the prophets invested this name with more than a military meaning. The priestly account of creation concludes with the statement that the heavens and the earth were finished and "all their army," "all their host" or "array"—a metaphorical expression to denote the totality of created beings the heavens and earth contained. Yabweb Zebo ot is the Creator of the universe and Guide of His people. Protecting the ranks of men and women who followed Moses into the desert and who crossed the Jordan under Joshua, He proved time and again that He ruled both history and nature.

The prophets never tire of proclaiming this twofold reign. Amos tells His people to be ready to meet its God:

Him who formed the mountains, and created the wind, 
and declares to man His thoughts; 
Who made the dawn and the darkness, 
and strides upon the heights of the earth: 
The Lord, the God of hosts, by name. 
(4:13)

And in the book of Isaiah we read:

*For He who has become your husband is your Maker;*

*His name is the Lord of hosts;*

*Your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel,*

*called God of all the earth.*

(54:5)

How could Israel doubt the power of His love? The covenant experience had taught her that God was the Lord of nature as well as of history. More than this, it had taught the chosen people that His attributes are "Almighty" and "All-loving," and that both are one.

**THE MYSTERY OF WRATH**

Love, it is true, is expressed in many ways in the Old Testament, but is it not equally true that the God of mercy is called the God of wrath? Can we ignore the fact that hate and violence are engraved upon its pages? Canaanites, Ammonites, Moabites, Amalekites were hostile to the descendants of Abraham; were not the descendants of Abraham hostile in their turn? More surprising, perhaps, is the hatred and violence of the just man. No doubt, a partial answer to this bewildering fact is that Israel's enemies were God's enemies. When they invaded Israel they were invading the inheritance given her by God, they were profaning His Temple, which He had chosen for His worship. It may be said that the violent outbursts of the just man against the sinners reflected his deep friendship for God. Yet, whatever explanations we try to find for man's conduct in the Old Testament, it is far harder to explain the unexpected manifestations of divine anger.

Is God the God of wrath or of love? Is He a father or a tyrant? And if He is a father, why does He make so many demands upon His children, and why does He allow so many horrors in the world He has fashioned for those whom He has called the children of His love? "Conflict, like love, is engraved in our deepest being." 32 Hatred, sadness, despair, fear, anger—according to St. Thomas they are all rooted in love. Hatred owes its origin to the avoidance of evil, and evil is anything that is opposed to the object of our love. Sadness arises

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when the person or thing we love seems to elude us. Despair grips us when they seem beyond our grasp forever. Fear seizes us when the beloved is in danger; anger, when our struggle for his favor is frustrated, when our pleas are ignored and our gifts cast aside."

To answer the questions, whether the God of Israel is the God of wrath or of love and how man's suffering can be reconciled to God's goodness, it is necessary to reject the alleged tensions on which they are based. There can never be any conflict between divine love and divine severity: Love must always be opposed to what is contrary to love. Nor can there be any conflict between divine love and divine power: Love must always employ all the resources at its command to protect what it holds dear. The biblical examples of divine jealousy and divine wrath are not the clumsy anthropomorphisms of a primitive people but the best, though not the only, means of solving the difficult problem of translating into human language something of the incommunicable realities of God's wisdom and holiness.

The jealous anger of pagan gods and goddesses is a disturbingly frequent theme of ancient mythologies. Passionate reprisals fall from the heavens with lightninglike destructiveness when these volatile and vindictive beings are aroused, or their loves are thwarted or their possessions jeopardized. More disturbing is the appearance of such passion in Old Testament allusions to Yahweh. More surprising still is the clearly stated fact that in Yahweh love and jealousy are linked. Men who offered Him a love divided would long rue their folly, but a single love would receive a lavish reward:

You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation; but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation, on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments.

(Ex 20:4-6)

In a narrative rich in covenant traditions, Joshua reminded his contemporaries of Yahweh's goodness in times past and times more recent, of His goodness to their fathers of old and to their immediate

forebears... they wisely cautioned God who is a jealous good He will not He will not. He will not.

Joshua's words reflect Ezekiel's condemnation of divine wrath. He who is a jealous God will not.

Therefore, if we find the sanctuary venerated, the land, our forebears... they seemed that is a jealous God who is a jealous good He will not.

What is deserved, the biblical text says, is rejection or anger of the Jews. In divine dispensation they ignored the anger of the land,our Jews, they ascribed (see Jg 2:19). What seemed the (Ezek 11:18) His anger... puzzling.

Puzzling or deserve.

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I grips us forebears. And in it he warned them of the nature of the Lord to whom they wished to pledge their service. “You may not be able,” he cautioned, “to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God; He is a jealous God who will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If, after the good He has done for you, you forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, He will do evil to you and destroy you” (24:19-20).

Joshua’s fears were well founded. Prophets of the exile like Ezekiel and the Second Isaiah watched the divine jealousy become the divine wrath, saw man’s sin call down upon itself the just decrees of Him who is omnipotent Love.

Therefore, as I live, says the Lord God, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable abominations, I swear to cut you down. I will not look upon you with pity nor have mercy. . . . Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will wreak my fury upon them till I am appeased; they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken in my jealousy when I spend my fury upon them.

(Ez 5:11, 13)

What is this divine wrath that is so righteously unleashed, so richly deserved, so opposed to the tolerant indifferentism of today? In biblical terms it is the manifestation of an all-holy God; it is the rejection of all that is soiling or impure; it is the punishment for sin. If we find expressions of divine anger hard to understand, so did the Jews. Invariably they looked on all public calamities as signs of divine displeasure. When fire burnt the outermost part of the camp, they ignored all secondary causes and attributed the disaster to the anger of the Lord (see Num 11:1-3). When invaders plundered the land, outwitted the slow-moving tribes, foiled their best stratagems, they ascribed their many defeats to the Lord’s displeasure with His own (see Jg 2:14-15). Conversely, good fortune and welcome success seemed the harbingers of His contentment, prosperity the proof that His anger had waned.

Puzzled, the author of the book of Job seems to plumb the depths of

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34. See George E. Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” The Biblical Archaeologist, XVII (September 1954), 50-76. This analysis of Hittite suzerainty treaties throws great light on the covenant concept of Israel and is indispensable for an understanding of Jos 24. (See also Neal M. Flanagan, “The Covenant and How It Grew,” American Ecclesiastical Review, CXLIII, September 1960, 145-156.)

35. See Ez 36:5; 38:19; Is 42:13; also Ps 36:1; Prov 23:17.

36. See Philippe de la Trinité, op. cit., p. 123.
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this mystery. He states his case plainly: The Lord is responsible, let Him explain and justify His ways with the world:

It is all one! therefore I say:

Both the innocent and the wicked He destroys.

When the scourge slays suddenly,

He laughs at the despair of the innocent.

The earth is given into the hands of the wicked;

He covers the faces of its judges.

If it is not He, who then is it? (9:22–24)

From the midst of a whirlwind Job learned his lesson. Unhesitatingly, the Lord began His queries: Where was Job when the earth was measured, when the morning stars sang together, when the sea was set behind its bars, when the dawn flung away the darkness, when man's exits and entrances were planned, when snow and hail were stored in the sky, when stars were flung jewel-like against the heavens, when birds and beasts and fish were given their domain? All this and much more was required of the man who had "clouded the truth with words ill-considered" (see 38:2) and who acknowledged that he was unable to explain all the mystery of the visible world. It is not to be wondered, then, that the mystery of the invisible world was beyond his understanding.

Were God man's equal, He might be understood; were He an "extra," a mere addition to our existence, He might be ignored. Since He is the Wholly-other, the All-powerful, the All-wise, the Sublime, the Ever-present, the Always-acting, the Eternally-immutable, the Omniscient and the Good, He must be served. In this brief day, man can do no better than honor Him who is near yet totally unique, praise Him without whose power he would not be, exalt Him whose wisdom gives meaning to all things, revere Him who is above all creatures, near all creatures, protecting all creatures, unchangeingly concerned about those to whom He gives all manner of unrecognized good.

Had they encountered the God of Israel, Tze-kung would have discovered in Him far more than was hidden in his cherished shu; Tseng Tze would have seen that Yahweh's wisdom was greater than shu plus chung; Yajnavalkya, Buddha, all the sages of East and West would have found in the two Testaments the love for which they searched, which most hidden de inscrutable that not to speak of mystery of this
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searched, which alone could satisfy their deepest needs and fulfill their most hidden desires. So mighty is the love of Yahweh, so wise, so inscrutable that the sorrows of man, even his wickedness and mistakes, not to speak of his virtues and joy, have eternal meaning in the mystery of this love.

37. The unique moral contribution of ancient Israel is examined by John Ferguson in Moral Values in the Ancient World (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959). In his conclusion he declares that "ahabah, the election-love which represents the very nature of God, when applied to man, slides over into hesed, the loyal fulfillment of covenanted obligations, and hesed, when it requires definition, is seen in terms of zede; which, while remaining theocentric, expresses, I think, at first at least, God's will rather than His nature" (ibid. p. 226).