

gets down to the practical business of the last sacraments and housey-housey. But all that is at last changing; we are returning at last to the great tradition in which theology is the intellectual aspect of our total response to the word of God. We are returning to a theology which is immediately related to the scriptures and also immediately related to our personal Christian lives, a theology which makes sense of our lives as adult Christians in the world in which we live.

## ENCOUNTER WITH GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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‘**A**S the kingdom of God in its perfect form does not lie in mere knowledge, but rather in the life that the knowledge awakens, so it could not be prepared for by the mere knowledge that it was approaching, nor even by the knowledge, outwardly communicated, of what it was. It could be prepared for only by bringing in, and that in ever fuller tides, the life of which it consists. . . . What we meet in the Old Testament are two concrete subjects and their relation. The two are: Jehovah, God of Israel on the one hand, and Israel, the people of Jehovah, on the other; and the third point, which is given in the other two, is their relation to one another. And it is obvious that the denominating or creative factor is the relation to Jehovah.’

Thus a very great theologian, nowadays somewhat neglected,<sup>1</sup> has defined the scope and significance of the old testament. It is the record of a people chosen from among the peoples to live in the light-giving and life-bringing *presence* of Yahweh, and to draw from that presence ‘in ever fuller tides’ supernatural light and life. And this process is to continue until at last the Light of the World comes ‘that they may have life and have it *abundantly*’ (Jn. 10, 10). Again we could say that the old testament is a complex of traditions recording Israel’s awareness of the presence of God in her midst. Out of her elemental experiences of Yahweh’s *presence to her*, Israel draws the intricate web of tradition in which

1 A. B. Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament* (1904).

she articulates her own response to that presence, the response to holiness.

But if we are to press on to the deeper implications of this idea, we must take cognizance of the fact that the old testament traditions, tangled and interwoven as they are, offer us not one but several distinct ways of conceiving of God's presence, and as many distinct attitudes of response to it. Chief among these alike in antiquity and in theological significance are the two master-ideas of 'Kabod theology' and 'Shem theology'. The former derives from the basic conception of Yahweh's presence through his radiant cloud of fire, his *kabod*, the latter from the idea of his sacred name, *shem*, which he has laid upon the people, their land, and their sacred city. In this article I am going to develop the first of these two ideas.

*Kabod* theology, at least in its earlier stages, may with equal justice be called 'encounter' theology or 'apparition' theology. The elemental experience which it records and from which it grows is of Yahweh, whose normal dwelling-place is heaven, suddenly descending to manifest himself in the midst of radiant fire and to encounter those whom he chooses at specific points and dynamic moments.

Exod. 3, 1. 'While Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law . . . the priest of Midian, he led the flock beyond the desert . . . 2. Then an angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush (*s'neh*); and when he looked, behold! the bush was on fire and blazing, yet the bush was not consumed! 3. "I will turn aside and see this great sight", said Moses, "Why it is that the bush does not burn away". 4. But when Yahweh saw that he had turned aside to see he called out to him: . . . 5. "Do not approach hither", said he, "and take your sandals off your feet, because the place where you are standing is holy ground".'

The fact that the burning bush is by no means unknown even as a natural phenomenon in the Middle East is not immediately relevant to our purpose. What is important for us is that fire, in this *kabod* theology the element most immediately associated with Yahweh's person, is the supreme manifestation of his holiness. He appears here as *numen*, as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Fire displays all the qualities, so difficult to define, which go to make up the numinous: 'otherness', mystery, sublimity, awfulness,

fierce destructive energy, and above all overwhelming fascination. The unquenchable fire in the story evidently possesses all these attributes. It is quite outside Moses' experience, completely other to the world which he knows; its blazing dynamic energy exercises an overwhelming attraction over him and draws him irresistibly towards it. Then comes the voice, the most sacred manifestation of all, warning him of the danger, warning him not to come too close and to take off his sandals, because he has already entered the radiant sphere of holiness which the *numen* creates about itself.

This concrete instance will serve better than any attempt at an abstract definition to indicate the special experience of holiness which lies at the roots of *kabod* theology. The theophany at Sinai (Exod. 19) is a repetition on a vaster scale and before all the people of the same basic experience. The word-play on *s'neh*, 'bush', and 'Sinai', the name of the mountain, serves to point the correspondence between the two theophanies.

Exod. 19, 11b. '... The third day Yahweh will come down in the sight of all the people on Mount Sinai, 12. Do you set bounds for the people all round, and tell them: "Take heed to yourselves, do not go up the mountain! Do not touch its fringes! All who touch the mountain shall drop dead!" ... 18. And the whole of Mount Sinai was smoking because Yahweh had descended on it in fire and the smoke rose up like the smoke of a furnace and the whole mountain was shuddering violently. ...'

It is the same 'fire' visitation in an intensified form. Yahweh descends and makes present his holiness in the form of terrible and mysterious fire which creates, by its fierce consuming energy, a radiant sphere of holiness about itself, mortally dangerous to all who enter it unbidden. Yet the voice of Yahweh himself issues from the fire, actually choosing certain representatives of the people to enter this mortally sacred sphere, actually summoning them to join him at its centre:

Exod. 24, 1. 'Then he said to Moses: "Come up to Yahweh, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. 2. Moses alone may approach Yahweh; the rest must not approach, and the people may not come up with him" ... 9. Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. 10. And they saw the God of Israel; under his feet was something like a

pavement wrought in lapis-lazuli, like heaven itself for purity. 11. He did not lay his hand upon the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they gazed upon God and ate and drank.'

Here we have a further 'prototype situation' of the theology of encounter. The author emphasizes with evident wonder that the chosen representatives of the people were here summoned into the intimate presence of this fiery God of Sinai, and survived. Profane though they were, they were miraculously allowed, in this sacred moment, to walk alive and unscathed into the destroying flame of Yahweh's purity. They saw the God of Israel in his purity! They looked upon him! They ate and drank with him! He did not lay his hand upon them! Any further miracle of protection wrought on Israel's behalf is secondary beside this supreme one of having entered into personal communion with Yahweh without being destroyed. Out of this primitive tradition grows Israel's deep and lasting sense of the danger and sublimity involved in living so miraculously close to this God of fire. The flaming holiness of Yahweh is actually absorbed into the people and becomes their life. This is achieved through a communion meal. In the society characteristic of that period and region, human covenants were inaugurated by meals eaten in common by the parties involved. (cf. Gen. 26, 26-31; 31, 44-54.) What is the significance of this? Firstly it involves the bestowal of gifts. A man's property, his flocks and herds, are conceived of as an extension of his own life and person. When he gives one or more of his beasts, representative of the whole, to another, he is in effect bestowing a share of himself on that other. He who accepts the gift incurs the sacred obligation of good will, protection and favour towards the donor. This is particularly clear, for example, in the case of Abraham's gift of seven ewe lambs to Abimelech at Beer-sheba (Gen. 21, 28-32). Furthermore, the sharing of the victim or meal gives rise to and nourishes communion of life between the two parties. Just as food strengthens and nourishes the life of an individual, so this food, eaten in common, strengthens the common life, the 'comm-union' life or 'psychic community', as one author calls it, between the two.

Now the same custom is used by Yahweh to inaugurate a new and miraculous covenant between himself and Israel. According to the ethics of nomad society the Israelites are now sacred to Yahweh—his guests, and at the same time the bringers of gifts

which he has accepted and eaten with them. They have broken bread with him and can be sure of his protection. And because this is no ordinary meal, but a covenant meal, this relationship is to be permanent. This is, indeed, what the covenant means in the more primitive southern tradition with which we are here concerned. The rules of this covenant are laid down in the so-called 'cultic decalogue' of Exod. 34, 10-28, likewise proper to the southern 'J' tradition. Here too the emphasis is on the meal eaten in Yahweh's presence. Periodically the Israelites are to come on pilgrimage to the holy mountain (in later tradition Mount Zion), to renew the encounter and the communion of Sinai. The seasonal feasts marking the changes of the agricultural year are to be purged of their idolatrous connotations and to acquire the new meaning of covenant meals eaten with Yahweh. 'Three times a year all your males shall appear before Lord Yahweh, God of Israel' (Exod. 34, 23). 'You shall worship no other god; for Yahweh, whose name is "Jealous", is a jealous God; lest you make covenant with the inhabitants of the land . . . and someone call you and you eat of his sacrifice' (vv. 14-18). The quality most appropriate to a God who manifests himself in fire is jealousy. Israel is to draw her life, her strength, her security exclusively from Yahweh the fiery, Yahweh the jealous, in these dynamic moments of encounter and communion.

In the same connection we may notice that in human society to eat with one's enemies, or with those of one's covenant-partner, would be inconceivable. *Ipsa facto* such an act would weaken and kill the communion life of the covenant. The command not to partake of the sacrificial food offered to other gods is the counterpart in the divine covenant of this human custom. Again in human covenants the great ones of the earth must be propitiated in the very first moment of encounter. The first thing their eyes must fall upon must be the gift in the suppliant's hands, offered in the appropriate attitude of self-abasement. This ensures that from that first vital moment onwards, the expression on the great one's face will be benevolent. Drawing down the favour of the potentate's countenance upon one constitutes a major old testament theme in itself; although it would be impossible to pursue it here, it is a concept of the utmost importance for the theology of grace. Here we must confine ourselves to noticing that it is for this reason that no

suppliant or weaker party in the semitic world would dream of approaching a king or potentate without a propitiatory gift in his hands. With such a background one can understand why it is explicitly stipulated in the 'cultic decalogue' that 'no-one shall appear before me empty-handed' (Exod. 35, 20). The usage of the semitic world has been transformed and elevated into the sacramental context, and Yahweh is thought of as the potentate, the favour of whose countenance must at all costs be gained.

Finally let us notice, as an element of lasting importance for the development of *kabod* theology, that the place of encounter between Yahweh and Israel is a holy mountain.

To summarize: Pilgrimage, encounter, communion are the three cardinal points of 'encounter' theology as we find it in this tradition. Israel goes on pilgrimage to a sacred mountain at sacred times to meet her covenant God. Yahweh descends from heaven amid fire to meet his people and to impart to them his holy life, the energy of his holiness, by means of a covenant meal.

Now it has been argued, by no means implausibly, that the list of place names between Sinai and Canaan recorded in Nb. 33 contains an ancient list of pilgrimage stages from Palestine to Sinai, the original order of which has been reversed to fit the historical context in which it now stands. If true, this would imply that pilgrimages from Palestine to Sinai were regularly made during the early stages of the Israelite settlement. The ancient fragment of tradition preserved in Exod. 24, 1-2, 9-11, which we have quoted above, may well reflect such a practice. The fact that we do find an explicit instance of 'pilgrimage, encounter, communion' in the story of Elijah (1 Kgs 19) lends colour to the theory. What does appear certain is that, under the influence of the Jerusalem cultus, the entire theology of 'pilgrimage, encounter, communion' transferred itself wholesale from Sinai to Zion. In Ps. 68, 7 we actually catch a glimpse of this 'migration': 'Why do you glower, you high mountains, at the mountain which God has desired for his home? Yahweh will indeed dwell in it for ever. . . . The Lord is among them as in Sinai in the sanctuary.'

At this point let us spend a few moments in considering the theme, so immensely significant as it is for both old and new testament theology, which grows, whether proximately or remotely, directly or indirectly, out of this 'prototype' theology

of 'pilgrimage, encounter, communion'. This theme has been examined by Jeremias in connection with the new testament prophecy of the mission to the gentiles.<sup>2</sup> He analyses it under five headings: (1) The Epiphany of God. (2) The Call of God. (3) The Journey of the Gentiles. (4) Worship at the World Sanctuary. (5) The Messianic Banquet on the World Mountain. These headings alone, I think, will serve to suggest that the theme is a development on the eschatological plane of 'pilgrimage, encounter, communion' as they occur in our 'prototype' situation. But let us briefly consider a few examples from the texts themselves.

*The Theophany.* One of the most striking features of the eschatological theophany is that it is to take place in the sight not only of the Israelites but of the gentiles too. 'The *kabod* shall be revealed, and all flesh together shall see it' (Is. 40, 5). The *kabod* will blaze out again over Zion, so long darkened and deserted, drawing all other peoples to it, even as long before, when it blazed over Sinai, it had drawn the Israelites themselves. 'Arise! Shine! For your light has come, and Yahweh's *kabod* has risen over you; for see! Darkness shall cover the earth, and pitch darkness the peoples, but Yahweh shall rise over you, and his *kabod* shall appear upon you. The gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the radiance of your rising.' (Is. 60, 1-3; cf. also Is. 24, 21-23; 26, 11; 30, 27 ff.; 52, 8-12; Hab. 3, 3 ff.; Nah. 1, 2 ff.; Dan. 7, 10, etc.)

*The Summons.* 'Yahweh, God of gods speaks, and summons the earth from sunrise to sunset; from Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth.' (Ps. 1, 1-2 cf. 4-7; Is. 45, 20-22; 48, 13-14; Ez. 39, 17 etc.)

*The Pilgrimage.* 'In the last days the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be set firm on the top of the mountains, and lifted up above the hills, and all the gentiles shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say: Come, let us go to Yahweh's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob' (Is. 2, 2-3). 'And they shall bring all your brethren from all the gentiles as a gift to Yahweh, on horses and in chariots, in litters, on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain, Jerusalem' (Is. 66, 20; cf. Is. 56, 6-8; 60,

<sup>2</sup> The extension of salvation to the gentiles had been foretold in the old testament but it is not fulfilled in the new until the moment of our Lord's ascension: 'You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight' (Acts 1, 8).

13-14; Zech. 8, 20-23; cf. especially the theme of the 'new exodus' in Deutero-Isaiah: 40, 3-4; 42, 15 ff.; 43, 16 ff.; 48, 21; 49, 9 ff.; 51, 9-10; 55, 12.)

*The Encounter.* 'I will bring them to my holy mountain, make them rejoice in my house of prayer; their holocausts and sacrifices shall be well-received on my altar' (Is. 56, 6-7). 'I will gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and see my *kabod*' (Is. 66, 18; cf. Is. 27, 13; 35, 2; 45, 5, 14, 23, 24; 49, 23; 59, 19; Jer. 16, 19; Zech. 14, 16; Pss. 22, 27-29; 86, 9; 96, 9-13; 97, 46; 98, 3).

*The Communion.* 'Upon this mountain Yahweh Sabaoth will make a banquet of fat things, a banquet of vintage wine, of fat things full of marrow, of vintage wines well-clarified. Then he will destroy upon this mountain the mourning-veil that veils all the peoples, and the veil that is spread over all the gentiles. He will destroy death for ever, and Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from every face' (Is. 25, 6-8). 'You shall have a song as in the night when a feast is celebrated, and gladness of heart as when to the tune of pipes, one enters in to the mountain of Yahweh, to the rock of Israel' (Is. 30, 29). This theme appears to have developed in four phases: (a) the grossly corrupt cultic festivals and banquets sternly condemned by the prophets from Amos onwards (cf. Am. 2, 8; Hos. 4, 11; 8, 13; 9, 1; Is. 28, 7). (b) In deliberate antithesis to this, the terrible 'banquet of blood' decreed by Yahweh against evil-doers, to which he summons as his guests the destructive powers of heaven and earth, especially the beasts and birds of prey (cf. Zeph. 1, 7 ff.; Ez. 39, 17; Is. 34, 6; Jer. 46, 10). (c) This gives way to the theme of the peaceful banquet which the gentiles come to share (Is. 22, 28 ff.) in adoration. (d) A spiritualizing variant appears to have originated in the early prophetic literature, and to have been developed especially in the Wisdom literature, whereby the food of the divine banquet is identified with the word of God (Am. 8, 11 ff.; Jer. 15, 16; Is. 55, 1-3) or with divine wisdom (Prov. 9, 1-6; Sir. 24, 9-22, etc.).

(To be concluded in the May number)