YHWH as Dialogical Character

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The word *God* is of course generic so that it can be (and has been) construed in any number of directions. In one direction, that of popular spirituality, "God" can be rendered as a vague force or impulse that tilts toward goodness. This direction is as ancient as Gnosticism and, in contemporary thought, can readily drift toward New Age religion. In the opposite direction, that of much classical Christian theology (of a scholastic bent or of a popular understanding of classical theology), "God" can be understood in terms of quite settled categories that are, for the most part, inimical to the biblical tradition. The casting of the classical tradition in a more scholastic category is primarily informed by the Unmoved Mover of Hellenistic thought and affirms, as the catechisms reflect, a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, a Being completely apart from and unaffected by the reality of the world. There clearly are a variety of other options for the articulation of "God" on a spectrum that runs from New Age vagueness to classic settledness.

YHWH as Active Agent

But of course, "God" as rendered in the Bible—and most particularly in the Christian Old Testament—does not conform to either the temptation of vagueness or the temptation of settledness. In contrast to both of these interpretive alternatives, "God" as rendered in the Old Testament is a fully articulated personal agent, with all the particularities of personhood and with a full repertoire of traits and actions that belong to a fully formed and actualized person. Such a particular person cannot settle for vagueness because the particularity has a history and an identity that remain constant over time. Such a particular person cannot accept a fixity as reflected in some forms of classical tradition, because this particular person possesses all of the dimensions of freedom and possibility that rightly belong to a personal agent. To be sure, such a rendering of God suffers all of the problematic of the scandal of particularity, as this God is embedded in the interpretive memory of ancient Israel. Thus it is common to be embarrassed about the anthropomorphic aspects of this God, so embarrassed as to want to explain away such a characterization or at least to transpose it into a form that better serves a generic notion of God. There is a common propensity, in order to deal with the embarrassment, to reduce the agency of God to "force" or "impulse," and classical theology prefers to substitute aseity for the engagement of the personal. All such embarrassments, however, fail to do justice to the scriptural tradition. Beyond that, they fail to match the rich theological, religious, and pastoral resources that are available only through the personal and the interpersonal. While such a personal rendering of God may strike one as primitive or as supernatural, it will be clear in what follows that the personal dimensions of YHWH and the interpretive memory of ancient Israel—with all of the dimensions of faithful and less than faithful interaction—is fundamental to faith and therefore cannot be explained away or transposed into any other categories.

"Common Theology" Transposed

YHWH as the God of Israel did not emerge in a vacuum, but in the old, rich theological tradition of the ancient Near East. It is clear that in its articulation of Israel, Israel both appropriated from that ancient Near Eastern tradition and transposed what it appropriated into its own distinctive articulation.[1] The extent to which this was a process of *borrowing* or *transposing* depends upon one's view of the *commonality* of Israel's religion to its cultural context or one's conviction about the *uniqueness* of Israel's faith. While the data are not completely supple, the decision about

commonality or distinctiveness to some great extent depends upon the impulse of the interpretive and the milieu in which the interpreter works.

Morton Smith articulated a "common paradigm" of ancient Near Eastern religion around six theses, and his articulation has been taken up by Norman Gottwald.[2] That paradigm operates, according to Smith, with these convictions:

1. There is a "High God" who is the generative power behind all natural and human phenomena.
2. That High God is active in the world, in nature, in history, and in society. This activity eventuates in a moral order in worldly reality, a moral order sanctioned through the legal and administrative organs of society.
3. That High God is presented in terms of natural and human analogues, so that "anthropomorphic" articulation is already present in the "common theology."
4. The High God is known to be powerful, just, and merciful. The divine power is in the service of justice. It is evident that the crisis of theodicy is inchoately present from the outset in this common theology.
5. This High God is peculiarly and definitively connected to a particular people or region. Thus the ambiguity of "universal" and "particular" is present from the outset. This also means that some contractual notion of covenant is definitional for the common tradition.
6. The High God is interpreted and represented by human agents who claim authority to voice divine purpose and will.

The accent in this common tradition is upon the sovereignty of God. There is no doubt, moreover, that Israel's doxological tradition—in turn taken up by the prophets—fully affirms the singular sovereignty of YHWH.[3] And while that sovereignty is primally directed toward Israel, there is no doubt that YHWH's rule and purpose extends beyond Israel to all reality.

The Old Testament is theologically interesting and demanding, however, precisely because it is not willing to settle for the common theology; it undertakes what Norman Gottwald terms a "mutation" of the common theology.[4] One can articulate that distinctive theological bent in the Old Testament in order to discern the ways in which YHWH is unlike the other gods of the ancient Near East. But one cannot explain how that has come about. Thus a comparative study that asks about the history of religion can go only so far. Then, in terms of the text itself, one falls back on human imagination of a constructive kind or on revelation. And even if one is shy about speaking of "revelation," if one is theologically

serious, one can entertain the possibility that human imagination of a construc-
tive kind is led by a revelatory intrusion. In any case, with reference to Exod 3:1-9;
19:1—24:18; 34:6-7, Israel's own text attests that the distinctiveness of YHWH
in the tradition of Israel is the result of YHWH's generous self-disclosure, first to
Moses and then through Moses to Israel.[5]

Norman Gottwald has lined out in one mode what is differentiated in
YHWH when compared to the common theology of the ancient Near East.[6] He
notices first that YHWH's claim is unitary and uncompromising, thus on the way
to monotheism (mono-Yahwism).[7] Second, that single God Israel knew to be the
sponsor and advocate of a certain polity, namely, a covenantal Torah that pertains
to the practice of political, economic power and to the organization of society.[8]
From that, Gottwald draws two conclusions that are important for our discussion.
First, a focus on Exod 34:6-7 indicates that YHWH's propensity toward YHWH's
special people is laden with issues concerning steadfast love, that is, covenantal
reliability: "The most that is asserted is that YHWH is acting true to 'his' nature
when forgiving sin and when punishing sin. . . . The ambiguity about forgivable
and unforgivable sins noted in the liturgical formulation of Exodus 34:6-7 finds
various 'answers' in the way that YHWH is represented as forgiving and punish-
ing sins in the course of 'his' generations-long dealings with Israel."[9] Second, the
authorization of human agents as representatives of YHWH, in the tradition of
Israel, concerns the authority of Moses, the articulator of the Torah at Sinai, and
the ongoing interpretive work of Levites in the practice of Torah.

Given these several dimensions of mutation, we may judge that the distinc-
tiveness of "God" in Old Testament tradition concerns YHWH's deep resolve to
be a God *in relation*—in relation to Israel, in relation to creation, in relation to
members of Israelite society and of the human community more generally. The
power and sovereignty of YHWH is a given in the Old Testament that is rarely
called into question. What is readily and often called into question in the text is
the character of this God *in relation*, a defining mark of YHWH that requires a
radical revision of our notion of God. The overriding indicator of God in relation-
ship is covenant, which sometimes is understood as a unilateral imposition on the
part of YHWH and at other times as a bilateral agreement.[10] It is precisely because
the covenant is articulated in so many variations that we are able to conclude that
covenantal relatedness makes it impossible for this God to be settled, static, or
fixed. This God is always emerging in new ways in response to the requirements
of the relationship at hand. This God is fully engaged in interaction with several
partners and is variously impinged upon and evoked to new responses and—we

may believe—to new dimensions of awareness and resolve. Because so much of the faith of Israel is "talking faith" in liturgy, oracle, and narrative, we may say that YHWH is a party to a dialogic exchange that never reaches closure. Rather, like any good dialogue, YHWH is engaged in an interaction with YHWH's partners that always pushes to a new possibility, that makes demands upon both parties, and that opens up fresh possibilities for the relationship. To be sure, in any particular utterance from YHWH's side, there may be an accent of finality. The wonder, however, is that after any such cadence of finality, there is always another text, another utterance, and another engagement.

It is clear that such a defining covenantal transaction—dialogic and interactive—caused YHWH to be impinged upon both in terms of emotive possibility and in terms of public performance.[11] Thus the text exhibits YHWH's reach, ever again, to various zones of agony and ecstasy; that emotional range is recurringly matched by policy initiatives of judgment and restoration that regularly run beyond the present situation.

One can speculate whether YHWH is so fully committed to relationship that there is something held back of sovereignty or whether, as in Job 38–41, YHWH's sovereignty will eventually prevail and trump relatedness. Such speculation, however, runs against the grain of Israel's readiness to situate YHWH in an ongoing dramatic transaction in which everything is at stake in the moment of interaction. As in all serious relationships, it is futile to speculate about grand outcomes when everything is at risk in the crisis of exchange. Thus while the character of YHWH reflects the common theology, Israel's own peculiar articulation of God takes YHWH's readiness to relate—with all of its problematic—as definitional. There are immense ramifications from this defining claim for Christian theologies of incarnation and immense pastoral resources in our culture milieu that is dominated by technology that wants to rob all interrelatedness of its thickness. Israel's sense of YHWH is definingly thick.[12] Its tradition attests to a thick relationship that renders the defining character of the biblical text as "strange and new."[13] Clearly such an interpretive propensity cannot be reduced to the fixity of scholasticism or to the vagueness of New Age spirituality.

Jewish Probes of the Dialogical

Entry into the Old Testament does not require Christian readers to deny their Christian confession. It does, however, require them to recognize the complexity of reading the Old Testament as Christians, and an attempt to take the text, as much

as possible, without imposing Christian readings.[14] Beyond that, however, I suggest that a Christian reading of the Old Testament requires, in the present time, a recovery of the *Jewishness* of our ways of reading the text.[15] Whereas a recurring Christian propensity is to give closure to our readings and interpretations, it is recurringly Jewish to recognize that our readings are always provisional, because there is always another text, always another commentary, always another rabbinic midrash that moves beyond any particular reading. Jewish reading knows that "final readings" are toxic and eventually lead to "final solutions." Reading in ways that refuse finality causes our dialogic way with the text to be commensurate with the substance of the text, namely, YHWH's dialogic transaction with YHWH's several partners.

We may identify three Jewish interpreters who have contributed most to our understanding of dialogic reading. Foremost is Martin Buber, whose dialogic understandings are at the center of his philosophic thought. This concern is evident in his most popular work, *I and Thou*.[16] But beyond that best-known work, the matter of dialogue permeates Buber's thought. In his daring insistence upon religious (as distinct from philosophic) categories, Buber proposes that there is an "ontology of the between" in which subjective agents have an encounter marked by an intense immediacy. While Buber's rhetoric tilts in the direction of mystical encounter, there is no doubt that he is primally informed by the deepest claims of the Hebrew Bible in which the meeting of subjective agents is given a historical casting. From the initial encounter of the burning bush in which YHWH gave (and did not give!) the divine name, YHWH has been a confrontive, engaged agent in the life of Israel and in the life of the world. While Buber will insist that YHWH is always "Thou"—and does not entertain the thought that Israel may be the "Thou" for YHWH's "I"—it is clear that the "Thou" of YHWH is not only generative for the "I" of Israel; even as "Thou," YHWH is impinged upon by the "I" of Israel, called to account, and pushed in new directions. Buber stops before he goes further. In my judgment, however, it would be congruent with his work to entertain a provisional reversal of roles, so that on occasion YHWH might be the "I" authorized by Israel's "Thou." I think, for example, of Ps 22:3, wherein YHWH is "enthroned upon the praises of Israel." If Israel did not engage in doxology, YHWH's throne—and therefore YHWH's governance—would be diminished. It is for this reason that Israel's doxologies begin with a vigorous summons to praise.[17] There is much at stake for YHWH in Israel's doxology! This is beyond Buber's articulation but not incongruent with it.

Second, Franz Rosenzweig is Buber's close companion in insisting upon the dialogic character of faith. Rosenzweig's mode of expression is dense and enigmatic,

but the direction of his thinking is clear enough. The creator God enacted creation as a monologue.[18] The monologue is transposed into dialogue when the "I" of creation answers back. The "I" who answers back to the "Thou" of God does not do so willingly, however, but prefers to hide. Rosenzweig clearly alludes to the narrative of Genesis 2 and 3 in this judgment, though the text is not cited: "To God's 'Where art Thou?' the man had still kept silence as defiant and blocked Self. Now, called by his name, twice, in a supreme definiteness that could not but be heard, now he answers, all unlocked, all spread apart, all ready, all-soul: 'Here I am.'"[19] It is when the answering "I" hears that dialogue ensues, the dialogue that is on God's terms. And when one asks about hearing and obeying, the focus is upon commandment:

> The answer to this question is universally familiar. Millions of tongues testify to it evening and morning: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might." Thou shalt love— what a paradox this embraces! Can love then be commanded? Is love not rather a matter of fate and of seizure and of a bestowal which, if it is indeed free, is withal only free? And now it is commanded? Yes of course, love cannot be commanded. No third party can command it or extort it. No third party can, but the One can. The commandment to love can only proceed from the mouth of the lover. Only the lover can and does say: love me!—and he really does so. In his mouth the commandment to love is not a strange commandment; it is none other than the voice of love itself.[20]

The commanding imperative of God is the voice of "I": "God's 'I' remains the keyword, traversing revelation like a single sustained organ note; it resists any translation into 'he'; it is an 'I' and an 'I' it must remain. Only an 'I,' not a 'he,' can pronounce the imperative of love, which may never be anything other than 'love me!'"[21] Rosenzweig understands the entire drama of the dialogue with the focus upon the reception of divine command. The only appropriate response to "Thou shalt love" is "I have sinned."[22] And the "I have sinned" is in turn answered by the divine word, "I forgive." Thus the dialogue is undertaken, while the "Thou" of God retains the initiative: "But here it really must do so. God does not answer the soul's acknowledgment, its 'I am thine,' with an equally simple 'Thou art mine.' Rather he reaches back into the past and identifies himself as the one who originated and initiated this whole dialogue between himself and the soul: 'I have called thee by name: thou art mine.'"[23] Rosenzweig goes on to assert that "prayer is the last thing achieved in revelation," the completion of the exchange.[24] Thus the answering "I" plays a decisive role in culminating the dialogical transaction.

Like Buber, Rosenzweig casts his rhetoric in quite personal terms. In reading the Old Testament it is clear that we must extrapolate from the deeply interpersonal transaction to public issues, for it is the same dialogic sovereign creator who presides over kingdoms and empires. The issue with all of the partners is the same. Finally it is the "I" of YHWH who will preside over public as over intimate transactions:

> For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. (Ezek 34:11-16)

Even the powers will learn, soon or late, that YHWH holds the initiative to which response must be made:

> It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the people and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever I please. (Jer 27:5)

> You shall be driven away from human society, and your dwelling shall be with the wild animals. You shall be made to eat grass like oxen, you shall be bathed with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, until you have learned that the Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals, and gives it to whom he will. (Dan 4:25)

Thus Rosenzweig situates the entire drama of faith as a dialogic exchange in which (a) YHWH's preeminence is unmistakable, but (b) in which the answering partner has a decisive role to play.

Third, Emmanuel Levinas follows after the work of Buber.[25] While there are important distinctions between them, the general direction for Levinas, as for Buber, is dialogical. Levinas insists that face-to-faceness creates a generative openness for both parties, whereas the attempt to circumscribe in rigid ways the interaction leads to a closed totality that is authoritarian and is eventually given over to violence. While an ethical concern is surely central to Buber, Levinas is much more explicit in his judgment that the *face* of the *other* is itself a *commandment* that evokes an engaged response of obedience. Thus every usual understanding of "ontology" is interrupted by such engagement. It is this interruption by "saying," moreover, that is the defining issue for faith that is recast as *utterance and response*, as *command and obedience*, as *confession and forgiveness*, as *petition and attentiveness*, all the interpersonal ways of Jewishness that resist reductionism.

When we take seriously the way in which Buber, Rosenzweig, and Levinas have cast the argument, it is unmistakable that faith is a dialogic transaction that refuses closure, but that insists upon serious engagement that has commandment at its center. In the exposition that will follow in this volume, we will see that that serious engagement of *command and response*, *failure and restoration*, is a recurring theme in every sphere of the horizon of faith.

God in Pathos

We may take one further step in articulating the categories through which we will understand "God as partner." The general dialogic, relational quality of covenantal faith was given special and focused attention by Abraham Heschel in his exposition of YHWH's pathos.[26] While the notion of pathos, especially lined out by Heschel, may be taken specifically as the capacity of God to suffer, in fact the implication of Heschel's work is much broader. It concerns the engagement of YHWH with Israel and with the world, and therefore YHWH's vulnerability and readiness to be impinged upon. The particular focus of Heschel on God's hurt in the traditions of Hosea and Jeremiah makes abundantly clear that the God of Israel is unlike the God of any scholastic theology and unlike any of the forces imagined in any of the vague spiritualities available among us. The peculiar character of this God is as *available agent* who is not only able to act but is available to be *acted upon*.

I may mention two derivative studies that are primally informed by the work of Heschel. On the one hand, Kazo Kitamori has poignantly written on God's

pain.[27] Special attention may be given to his appendix concerning Jer 31:20 and Isa 63:15. Kitamori notes how discerningly both Luther and Calvin, without any sentimentality, were able to take notice of God's pain. The articulation of that pain, moreover, required the poetic imagination of ancient Israel to speak in terms of bodily upset and consternation, resisting any attempt to permit this God to float off as an ephemeral spirit. The God of dialogic engagement is fully exposed to the realities of life in the world that we might most readily term "creaturely," except that those realities are, on the lips of the poets, the realities of the *creator* as well.

It is obvious that this line of reasoning, so characteristically Jewish, has immense implications for Christian theology. Jürgen Moltmann, informed by the work of Heschel, has forcefully carried the issue of God's vulnerability in Christian theology:

> It was Abraham Heschel who, in controversy with Hellenism and the Jewish philosophy of religion of Jehuda Halevi, Maimonides and Spinoza which was influenced by it, first described the prophets' proclamation of God as *pathetic theology*. The prophets had no "idea" of God, but understood themselves and the people in the *situation of God*. Heschel called this situation of God the *pathos of God*. It has nothing to do with the irrational human emotions like desire, anger, anxiety, envy or sympathy, but describes the way in which God is affected by events and human actions and suffering in history. He is affected by them because he is interested in his creation, his people and his right. The *pathos* of God is intentional and transitive, not related to itself but to the history of the covenant people. God already emerged from himself at the creation of the world "in the beginning." In the covenant he enters into the world and the people of his choice. The "history" of God cannot therefore be separated from the history of his people. The history of the divine *pathos* is embedded in this history of men. . . .
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> Abraham Heschel has developed his theology of the divine *pathos* as a *dipolar theology*. God is free in himself and at the same time interested in his covenant relationship and affected by human history. In this covenant relationship he has spoken of the *pathos* of God and the *sympatheia* of man, and in so doing has introduced a second bipolarity.[28]

Moltmann has considered the way in which classical Christian theology has asserted the *apatheia* of God. It has done so by acknowledging the suffering of the Son in which the Father does not participate. Moltmann has shown, against that propensity, that in Trinitarian thought the Father as well as the Son suffers:

To understand what happened between Jesus and his God and Father on the cross, it is necessary to talk in trinitarian terms. The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son.[29]

Moltmann's statement is completely congruent, in the categories of Christian theology, with what Heschel had already discerned in Israel's prophets. The God of Christians, understood in the midst of God's revelation to ancient Israel, is a God deeply at risk in the drama of fidelity and infidelity in the world.

The Speech of Dialogical Fidelity

Because we are dealing with texts and because the dialogic transaction of God and God's partners concerns the sayable, we may consider particularly the modes of speech through which this dialogic engagement is transacted in the text. George Steiner has notably observed: "It is the Hebraic intuition that God is capable of all speech-acts except that of monologue which has generated our arts of reply, of questioning and counter-creation."[30] Very much scholastic theology has reduced God to a monologue. And very much fuzzy spirituality has eliminated speech altogether. Against such disembodied silence or against scholastic authoritarianism, however, Israel's covenantal speech is emphatically an antiphon between the God who *speaks* and the partner who *answers* or, conversely, the partner who *speaks* and the God who *answers*. Insofar as the community of biblical faith is a cultural linguistic community with well-established and well-disciplined practices of speech, we may in turn imagine how the partners practice the dialogue of faith.

We may begin with a consideration of Israel's practice of speech as it is addressed to God and take Israel's speech as a model for dialogic fidelity that may be practiced by all of God's partners.[31] We may take it as a truism—an important truism—that Israel's dialogic approach to YHWH is through praise and lament. If we appeal to Rosenzweig's formulation, we see that praise and thanks are primary but that lament functions as a crucial countertheme in the dialogue:

Praise and thanksgiving, the voice of the soul, redeemed for harmony with all the world, and the voice of the world, redeemed for sensing and singing with the soul. . . . All thanksgiving unites in the dative; thanksgiving gives

thanks for the gift. By offering thanks to God, one acknowledges him as the giver and recognizes him as the fulfiller of prayer. The individual *qua* individual could not soar higher than the prayer of the individual, the individual lament. The fulfillment lay beyond except that, insofar as it occurred within the soul of the individual, the prayer was, as ability to pray, already its own fulfillment. All prayer, even the individual lament, subconsciously cries out for the coming of the kingdom, the visible representation of what is experienced only in the soul's holy of holies. But the kingdom does not come in revelation, and the prayer thus remains a sigh in the night. Now fulfillment is directly there. The kingdom of God is actually nothing other than the reciprocal union of the soul with all the world. This union of the soul with all the world occurs in thanksgiving, and the kingdom of God comes in this union and every conceivable prayer is fulfilled. Thanks for the fulfillment of each and every prayer precedes all prayer that is not an individual lament from out the dual solitude of the nearness of the soul to God. The community-wide acknowledgment of the paternal goodness of God is the basis on which all communal prayer builds. The individual lament out of the lonely depths of dire need is fulfilled by the very fact of wrestling its way out, by the soul's being able to pray. But the congregational prayer is fulfilled before ever it is prayed. Its fulfillment is anticipated in praise and thanksgiving. The congregational thanksgiving is already the fulfillment of that for which it is possible to pray communally, and the coming of that for the sake of which alone all individual pleas can dare to approach God's countenance with the compelling power of community: namely of the kingdom. Communal confession and praise must precede all communal praying as its fulfillment.[32]

In praise and thanks, the partner cedes its life over to God in all and gratitude.[33] Praise is the exuberant abandonment of self and the glad ceding of self over to the one addressed in praise. The patterned doxology of Israel, given succinctly in Psalm 117, consists in a *summons* to praise and an inventory of *reasons* for praise of YHWH that recites variously YHWH's past miraculous actions or YHWH's recurring characterization of fidelity and attentiveness.[34] It is clear that such doxological utterance is designed to enhance and magnify YHWH at the expense of other gods; it is also clear that such utterance, offered in unqualified loyalty, is a performative act whereby the rule of God is enacted and embraced. The response to YHWH in such praise runs all the way from stately enthronement psalms (Psalms 96–99) to the pastoral mood of Psalm 103 that concerns YHWH's

reliable readiness to forgive (vv. 9-14) and YHWH's attentiveness to the reality of limit and fragility (vv. 15-18).

Israel's dialogic speech moves from the large sweep of praise to the specificity of thanksgiving, exhibiting Israel in a posture of glad gratitude. As Claus Westermann has shown in his category of "psalms of narrative praise," the articulation of thanks tells of a previous need of the human speaker, the remembered petition of that need, and the transformative intervention of YHWH in response to the petition.[35] Thus Israel's speech testifies to the entire drama of human need and human response under the rubric, "I called" (Ps 116:4) and "You delivered" (116:8). Such glad affirmation attests Israel's gratitude is appropriately accompanied by a thank offering (payment of vows; see 116:14-18), thus making clear that the dialogic exchange is both verbal and material.

The performative effect of praise and thanks is to portray a world that is concrete in need and abandonment but in which YHWH is featured as the defining character. In praise Israel responds to YHWH's generosity. In thanks Israel responds but also recalls Israel's own initiative in the utterance of petition. The initiatory petition of Israel is in fact located in an already established tradition of YHWH's fidelity and attentiveness.

The other pole of Israel's part in dialogic faith is lament, complaint, protest, and petition (the very petition remembered in songs of thanksgiving).[36] In a most elemental way, the lament is a cry of need in a context of crisis when Israel lacks the resources to fend for itself. The petition is an acknowledgment of such need and a turning to YHWH, who is recognized as an agent capable of rescue and transformation.[37] But lament, when it becomes complaint and protest, may also be more than an eager, desperate statement of need. It may also be an utterance that voices betrayal and abandonment, and therefore disappointment in the God who has left the speaker bereft. Such utterance dares to call into question YHWH's fidelity, so that the utterance may also be an accusation wherein Israel's prayer shades over into the forensic language of accusation.

The repertoire of *praise-thanks* and *lament-complaint* bespeaks Israel as a fully engaged dialogic partner who plays a role vis-à-vis YHWH in which a profound drama of fidelity and infidelity is regularly performed. Such covenantal-interactive utterance is not governed by the laws of conventional logic, and therefore Israel as utterer can move easily from one posture of address to another, the important point being the full range of postures vis-à-vis YHWH. The dialectic of lament (complaint) and praise (thanks), when appropriated in Christian tradition and transposed into christological formulation permit the faithful church to utter the

loss of Friday crucifixion in lament (Ps 22:1) and to voice the wonder of Sunday resurrection in exuberant doxology. Thus the church, in its attempt to continue to "perform" the "mystery of faith," takes up the dialogical practice that is a staple performance in ancient Israel. It is enough that the dialogic utterance of Israel (echoed by the church) walks fully and honestly into the reality of *abandonment* and walks boldly and buoyantly into the wonder of *restoration*. This dialogue with YHWH is attestation to the crisis of fidelity that is the recurring subject of faith, for faith addresses the God who "for a brief moment abandoned," the God who in "everlasting love" restores to new life (Isa 54:7-8).

It is no surprise to notice that the utterances of YHWH are commensurate with the utterances of Israel. The two partners are indeed engaged in recurring subject matter that concerns both of them critically. YHWH's foundational utterance in the Old Testament is promissory speech that "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom 4:17). YHWH's promissory speech is indeed performative in which YHWH *does* what YHWH *says*. At the outset, YHWH's utterance to Abraham is a promise (Gen 12:1-3) that is fleshed out in Genesis 15 and 17, and subsequently reiterated to his son and to his grandson (Gen 26:3-4; 28:13-15). In the completed tradition of Israel, that promise is seen to be fully enacted (Josh 21:43-45). The divine promise is crucial to the slave community in Israel (Exod 3:7-9) and again to David and David's heirs (2 Sam 7:1-16). The promises, inescapably, contain an imperative of alignment with YHWH, so that even the great promise to the slaves in Egypt already has the Torah of Sinai in purview.

It is most remarkable (and often noted) that the great Vesuvian cluster of promises in the Old Testament occur in the exilic prophets; it is in the abyss of abandonment that YHWH speaks an originary word that generates new possibility in Israel, a possibility that was nowhere on the political horizon of the sixth-century displacement.[38] Thus the great promissory utterers of YHWH in the tradition of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel generate new possibilities. Belatedly, moreover, we are able to see that the Book of the Twelve also culminates in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi in promise, a promise to which the hagiographer refers in 2 Chr 36:22-23.[39] The outcome is that both the culmination of the Christian Old Testament in Mal 4:5-6 and the conclusion of the Hebrew Bible in 2 Chr 36:22-23 bespeak a divine promise that is to be enacted in the historical process. The promissory utterance of YHWH, whereby YHWH has solemnly pledged new possibility, serves, whenever performed, to place the entire narrative of Israel (and of the world) under the future-generating utterance of YHWH.

The promissory speech of YHWH whereby YHWH initiates and participates in dialogue is matched in divine utterance by speeches of judgment in which YHWH recognizes the failure of the relationship and summons the partner to account for the default.[40] The harsh rebukes of the *indictment* and *sentence* leads YHWH's utterance into juridical categories of innocence and guilt. In the utterance of YHWH, of course, the fault is unfailingly with the partner, just as the fault in Israel's protest is predictably with YHWH.[41]

We may, without pursuing the point, observe that YHWH's utterance, not unlike the utterance of Israel, is preoccupied in a rendering of a failed relationship (divorce, alienation) and the startling renewal of the relationship.[42] One sign of this startling renewal is the recurring covenantal formula, "I will be your God and you shall be my people," a formula that occurs just at the null point when the relationship had been exhausted.[43] Mutatis mutandis, it is clear that these recurring patterns of divine speech serve well the Friday-Sunday form of the Christian mystery, for the *speech of judgment* is about the *abandonment of Friday* and *the promise* is about the inexplicable *wonder of Sunday*.

While the actual dialogic practice of YHWH and YHWH's partner is more complex than this might suggest, this identification of four speech practices suggests a notable symmetry between the partners about the relationship:

- *Praise* is Israel's appropriate utterance toward the God who makes *promises*.
- *Protest* is Israel's appropriate utterance toward the God who offers juridical *rebuke*.

Or one may reverse the symmetry:

- *Promise* is the divine utterance that becomes the trigger for Israel's *praise*.
- *Speech of judgment* becomes the venue for Israel's *complaint*, as the two parties adjudicate fault for a dysfunctional relationship.

The continuing outcome of such a rich, complex, and thick dialogical transaction is a lively relationship in which all parties are capable of candor, in which all parties are available for new possibilities, and in which all parties are addressed and summoned to engagement and invited to respond. It is no wonder that the God of the Old Testament is cast as a *person*, for it is only the *personal* and the *interpersonal* that make possible the kinds of interaction that are generative of new transformative possibility. Every attempt to move away from the embarrassing particularity of the interpersonal entails a costly loss of that transformative dimension of faith.

Scholastic temptations in theology tend to freeze the relationship and to stifle its
dynamism. Vague spirituality tends to compromise the sharp over-againstness that
is generative of newness. This dialogic faith does not aspire to settlements and
final formulations, though it may come to some of those (that remain provisional)
through the transaction. What counts is the *performance*. The performance con-
tinues to extend the transaction into all kinds of new situations, and is capable,
always again, of surprise and innovation.[44]

Regulation via Imagination

What we have in the biblical text is a *human* document, a product of daring,
evocative human imagination. But serious readers of this text of human imagina-
tion regularly are recruited, in the process of being addressed, to the conviction
that what is surely daring artistic human imagination is, at the same time, an act
of *divine revelation*. There is something different here that insists always on being
"strange and new." What is *revealed* here is a Holy One who is undomesticatedly
available for dialogic transaction; and because of dialogical transaction, what is
revealed here, as well, is mature personhood that is commensurate with the undo-
mesticated fidelity of the Holy One: "until all of us come to the unity of the faith
and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full
stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13); "It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone
and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in
Christ" (Col 1:28). I cite these texts (with their use of the word "mature" [Greek
telos]) not to tilt the discussion in a christological direction, but to notice that
the fully formed human person, in this relationship, is one who is engaged in the
dialogical transaction of faith and obedience. Well before this particular episto-
lary formulation, Israel had understood that "maturity" as a creature concerns life
congruent with the creator God. I judge, moreover, that Israel would further claim
that the same "maturity" (completeness, Hebrew *tam*) may well pertain to every
partner of YHWH, every creature—human, nonhuman, Israel, nations—for the
creator God summons all creatures to maturity.

The reason I stress that the biblical testimony is revelation-as-human-
imagination is that the text tradition fully delivers on adequate partners for YHWH,
partners who are capable of sustained dialogic transactions of fidelity. Israel, in its
formation and transmission of the text, found itself drawn out beyond itself into
this always lively, redefining transaction. And while the framers and transmitters
of the textual tradition lived a quite concrete human life—of family and sexuality,

of money and property—they also understood that life in faithful intentionality was a performance of an ongoing transaction that caused it to be different in the world. Beyond its own performance, moreover, it also imagined (was led by the spirit to imagine) that all other creatures are also partners of the same God and so recruited into the same dialogic transaction. Thus Israel could construe the life of sea monsters and birds and creeping things as YHWH's creaturely partners (see Ps 148:7-10). And it could in like manner discern Nebuchadnezzar as "servant of YHWH" (Jer 25:9; 27:6) and the unwitting Cyrus as "YHWH's messiah" (Isa 45:1). It could imagine in the sweep of its performance that all of life is drawn into this dialogic transaction.

The commensurability between *dialogic God* and *dialogic partner* is well articulated by Jürgen Moltmann. In his thoughtful discussion, Moltmann has contrasted the apathetic God and the God capable of pathos. Then he extrapolates:

> In the sphere of the apathetic God man becomes a *homo apatheticus*. In the situation of the *pathos* of God he becomes a *homo sympatheticus*. The divine *pathos* is reflected in man's participation, his hopes and his prayers. Sympathy is the openness of a person to the present of another. It has the structure of dialogue. In the *pathos* of God, man is filled with the spirit of God. He becomes the friend of God, feels sympathy with God and for God. He does not enter into a mystical union but into a sympathetic union with God. He is angry with God's wrath. He suffers with God's suffering. He loves with God's love. He hopes with God's hope.[45]

The human person stands alongside YHWH in engagement with the tribulation and wonder of the world. In the exposition that follows in this volume, we dare to imagine as well that YHWH's other partners are also drawn into the same dialogic structure of *friendship*, *wrath*, and *hope*. There is of course a great deal at stake in this dialogic interaction of God with God's partners. The religious temptation to dissolve the dialogue into an authoritarian monologue is matched by the temptation to self-authorizing autonomy. Both authoritarianism and autonomy are temptations that are everywhere around us. The offer of technological solutions to relational problems is an encompassing temptation among us. Continuing attentiveness to this textual tradition is an affirmative reminder that our God-given, God-engaged creatureliness is of another ilk. It is not too much to conclude that the future of the world depends upon the continued performance of this dialogue that resolvedly refuses closure and buoyantly offers newness. ▬