

The Holy because ultimate, and that taboo is established primarily to avoid violating the ultimate order of things and shattering the entire system that sustains us. At Sinai Moses set a boundary around the foot of the mountain beyond which the unsanctified people and even the priests must not go lest God "break forth upon them." Here the holiness of God is typically understood as power, as an essential element of the divine being, not exercised maliciously or punitively, but simply as a power having by its very nature possible harmful effects on persons not prepared to make the proper approach, as electricity is harmful to careless persons unskilled in handling it. Holiness will never lose this original meaning, but it will be refined through the centuries into the highly spiritual concept of the prophet Ezekiel.

Yet another idea is to be noted that is typical of the religion of the area and the period. When the time came for the Hebrews to leave Sinai to find a permanent home for themselves, they were faced with the problem of taking their newly adopted god with them. It was a common belief that gods were territorial. They were gods of a particular people and exercised power within geographical limits. Yahweh, throughout the greater part of Hebrew history, while *the* god of Israel, was believed to be only one god among many, and the prophets were constantly accusing Israel of turning aside from Yahweh to worship the gods of other peoples, especially those gods native to Canaan, into whose lands Yahweh had brought "his" people.

A very striking example of this idea is found in the story of Naaman, the Syrian king, who was healed of leprosy with the aid of the prophet Elisha, by bathing in the river Jordan. In gratitude for the healing, Naaman took home with him to Syria two burros loaded with the earth from the banks of the Jordan so that he could worship his healer--Yahweh--on Yahweh's own soil in a foreign land (II Kings 5).

Thus Israel at Sinai had a problem--to assure for themselves the continuing presence and power of God as they moved to alien territory. The solution was to build a box, an "ark," which they could carry with them wherever they went--including into battle--and by which the presence of Yahweh was to be assured. It is possible to give this a literal interpretation and say that they believed they actually carried their god in the box or to give it a symbolic interpretation and say that it represented the divine presence accompanying them. In any case, it did involve the idea of the territorial, geographically limited nature of the gods and Israel's problem of being assured that Yahweh, whom they contracted with in Sinai, would accompany them in their journeys to lead them, protect them, and bring them into the promised land.

Before we leave the Sinai period we must look at one more idea representative of the period. We have said nothing about the elaborate construction, furnishings, and rituals prescribed by some traditions for the tabernacle, the portable tent for the worship of Yahweh in the desert. It is hardly likely that such elaborate arrangements were originally made at Sinai or during the desert period following Sinai, but it would be reasonable to assume that there was some portable tent and simple ritual,

probably involving animal sacrifice, which existed in this period.

It is very easy for a modern person to make one of two mistakes regarding ritual and sacrifice. We tend to discuss both either as a lot of hocus-pocus nonsense that has nothing to do with reality and a kind of game grown-ups play to cover up their impotence in the world or as primitive magic, with the belief that it actually does in fact have effects in the real world. It is not necessary or possible for us here to settle that question in its raw form. What is important here is for us to recall that ritual is the language and drama by which people give expression to their perpetual conviction that there is an indissoluble continuity between the ultimate orders and powers of reality that constitute the holy God and the outcome of human ventures, and that people's actions and words play an indispensable part in mediating the two. Ritual, whatever else may be the case, dramatizes this belief to remind people that it is so, and perhaps to help define for us the words and deeds appropriate to the right relation with the holy powers and so assure us of the fulfilling and satisfying outcome of the human venture.

The element of sacrifice in the ritual also commonly involved the idea of a sacramental meal in which both the god and the devotees shared and by which the devotees actually participated in the life of the god. Blood obviously always involves the very life of the sacrifice and the devotion of the worshippers. It was commonly believed that the god entered the blood and flesh of the sacrifice and thus when the blood was sprinkled on the worshippers or was drunk by them or when they ate the meat in the sacramental meal, they were presumed in fact to actually participate in the very substance of the deity himself. This idea was held even in the Greek mystery religions, in which some of the philosophers participated, and it is still present and receives its classic formulation in the orthodox Christian Eucharist.

It is pointless to call it nonsense. It is not supposed to make scientific sense and cannot, therefore, be nonsense in the customary usage. It is meant to give expression to this same deep conviction that antedates science and philosophy. It is the cry of the inner primordial depths of consciousness affirming the essential oneness and continuity of The Holy Ultimate of Being, the "moment" of an individual's existence, and the intimacy between The Holy and the outcome of our daily lives. It thus assumes also the ultimate, abiding faith in the accessibility of The Holy for the human moment.

Period III. Yahweh and his people finally established dominance over the gods of Canaan and their peoples and demanded to have kings like their neighbors and enemies, and so they welded finally a unified nation under three kings--Saul, David, and Solomon.

As we have already said, the united kingdom was short lived--95 years in the entire history of Israel--from 1028 to 933 B.C. In this brief period David and Solomon solidified the dominance of Israel in Palestine and established Jerusalem as a considerable city of grandeur and world-



wide influence with its palaces and the temple to Yahweh. But the grandeur of Solomon's reign was the thing that brought the kingdom to a fatal schism. With all his reputation for wisdom, Solomon had taxed his people beyond endurance to produce and to maintain the grandeur of his reign. At his death the ten tribes of the north seceded under Jeroboam I when Solomon's son Rehoboam rejected their plea for reduced taxes with the declaration that where his father had scourged them with ships he would scourge them with scorpions.

The internal difficulties were soon matched with difficulties from the neighboring nations, and the domestic political problems were compounded by the ethical problem that the commitments under the covenant were celebrated more by their breach than by their observance.

No significant changes came about in the religion of Israel other than this moral degeneration and a general acceptance of the local deities and observance of their worship. This default was highlighted in the dramatic story of the prophet Elijah's challenge to the priests of the Baal--the Canaanite gods--during the reign of Jezebel, the Phoenician wife of Ahab, the seventh king of Israel (a name now reserved for the northern kingdom) who reigned from 876 to 854 B.C. Ahab had established in Samaria a temple to Melkart, the chief deity of Phoenicia, and one to Ashtarte, the deity of fertility whose worship was widespread throughout the Fertile Crescent. Jezebel had directed a purge of the priests of Yahweh and had probably hundreds of them killed. Thus Elijah came to believe himself to be the only prophet of Yahweh left alive and felt commanded by Yahweh to challenge the priests of the Baal to a duel of the gods to see whether the Baal or Yahweh would answer the call of the prophets to descend in fire on the sacrifices set on Mount Carmel. According to the Biblical tradition only Yahweh answered by fire and Elijah had the 450 prophets of the Baal slaughtered on the site of the sacrifice. Whatever is fact or fiction, it is clear that the religious apostasy had reached a great depth. But the work of Elijah did not cure the nation's sickness.

About one hundred years later, in 760 B.C., there emerged one of the most significant movements in the entire development of Hebrew history. From the hill country of Tekoa near Bethel, there came a man called Amos to preach in the marketplace of Bethel and to denounce Israel for its corruption:

*Thus saith the Lord, for three transgressions of Israel, yea for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for [the price of] a pair of shoes. They pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor . . . . They turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth. . . . They trample upon the poor. . . afflict the just and turn aside the needy in the gate [the seat of justice] from the right.*

Amos' graphic bill of particulars of the social-moral corruption of

the life of Israel was matched by the prophet Hosea's condemnation of its apostasy:

*Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; . . . Ephraim is joined to idols . . . they play the harlot continually . . . their doings will not suffer them to turn unto their God; for the spirit of whoredom is within them and they know not Yahweh.*

The message of Amos and Hosea in the north was supported by the work of Isaiah (740-700 B.C.) in the south:

*Yahweh will enter into judgment with the elders of his people and the princes thereof: it is ye that have eaten up the vineyards; the spoil of the poor is in your houses: what mean ye that ye crush my people and grind the face of the poor? . . .*

*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweetness and sweet for bitter. Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes . . . woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine . . . That justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of the righteous.*

And of their apostasy Isaiah wrote: "Ah sinful nation . . . . They have forsaken Yahweh, they have despised the Holy One of Israel."

Apostasy and moral corruption walked hand in hand and presaged national tragedy according to the preachments of the prophets. Hosea said:

*Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them so that not a man shall be left. . . .*

*They sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. . . .*

*I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps. . . .*

*It is thy distinction, O Israel, that thou art against me. . . .*

And Amos declared:

*Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and to them that are secure in the mountains of Samaria. . . they shall now go captive with the first that go captive: . . . The Lord hath sworn by himself: . . . I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his places; therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein: . . .*

The warnings of the prophets were not without substance. The growing

power of the Assyrians on the east was already casting its shadow on the "Promised Land," and in 722 B.C. Israel was invaded and the ten northern tribes--Israel--were deported to Assyria, never to return as a nation.

The superficial criticism that this is a poor view of the character of God--that he should be moved by jealousy and act punitively because of people's sins--is easily come by, but it misses the point. The point is, rather, that here again we have an expression, in terms appropriate to a particular time and place in the history of human thought, of the same abiding conviction that the moral-spiritual integrity of individuals and the overall, long-haul history of a people constitute a continuous, organic whole for "weal or woe" and that The Holy, soon or late, does in fact bring all things under judgment: that there is a moral order in the universe that is somehow continuous with the order of nature and finally comes to be written large in history.

But the lesson of the historic tragedy of Israel to the north was lost on Judah to the south, and the prophetic mission was carried by Jeremiah (625-585 B.C.) and Ezekiel (592-570 B.C.). It is still the same complaint. Jeremiah said:

*The Lord said also unto me in the days of Josiah the King, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? She is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot [worshipped other gods].*

*And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister saw it.*

*And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also . . . and committed adultery with stones and with stocks.*

But Judah was putting its hope in the fact that it had the sacred city of Jerusalem to secure it from its enemies. Surely Yahweh would not permit Jerusalem to fall! But Jeremiah declared:

*Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; And if you oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place. . . .*

*Behold ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely,*



*and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?*

*Is this house which has been called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord.*

Four years after the work of Jeremiah began, a young king by the name of Josiah instituted, in 621 B.C., a reform in keeping with the 140 years of prophetic preaching. The new law and the reforms accompanying it are set forward in the book of Deuteronomy (*deutero-nomos*--"second law"). The book of Deuteronomy was originally probably written some time before 621 B.C. and the action of Josiah--some say as early as 700 B.C. and others as late as 650 B.C.--but it certainly formed the basis of the reformation.

The shrines on the hilltops in the countryside where the worship of Yahweh had been mixed with the worship of other gods were destroyed and their priests directed to be transferred to Jerusalem, which was then established as the only place where Yahweh could be worshipped. The idolatry that accompanied worship at these shrines was abolished and moral reforms were attempted.

But it was to little avail. Josiah was killed in battle in 608 B.C. and the reforms failed. In 597 B.C. the Babylonians from the east, having won the ascendancy over Assyria, stormed Jerusalem and deported the people. The remnant in Jerusalem began to look toward Egypt for help against the Babylonians, who then returned in 586 B.C. to reduce Jerusalem to ruins and to take the remaining inhabitants to Babylon.

So ended the nations of Israel and Judah.

But we have not yet seen the radical nature of the prophetic view. It was not only true to the ancient tradition of loyalty to Yahweh and to the moral obligations of the Mosaic-Yahwistic covenant--in this it was conservative in the best sense--but it was also radical in declaring against the whole ritualistic and sacrificial tradition as never having been part of the covenant obligation. Thus it set the whole obligation of religion in the framework of obedience to the moral law and spiritual fellowship and service to God.

In the north, speaking on behalf of Yahweh, Amos declared:

*I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me burnt-offerings and meal-offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.*

And Hosea said:

*I desire goodness and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

And Isaiah added:

*What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices? saith Yahweh; I have had enough of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. . . . Who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination to me . . . your appointed feasts my soul hateth. . . . I am weary of bearing with them . . . cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

A century later in the south, Jeremiah echoed the refrain:

*Thus saith Yahweh. . . . Add your burnt-offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat ye flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices: But this thing I commanded them, saying, Hearken unto my voice and I will be your God and ye shall be my people; . . .*

But more radical yet was the message of the prophets! Isaiah brought to its fulfillment the ancient theme of The Holy One. It had never lost its origins in the concept of ultimate power. It is implicit in everything these eighth century prophets had been saying about the sanctity of the covenant demanding exclusive worship of Yahweh and about the central obligation to God being obedience to the moral law in daily life as the true worship.

Isaiah, however, takes it beyond this. The tone is set in the famous sixth chapter: "Holy, Holy, Holy is Yahweh of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." It is hard to translate or describe that quality of purity--the absence of any marring or detracting fault or imperfection. It is the imagery of one whose judgments are wholly just, whose motives are not psychological jealousies, but spiritual love; of one whose "demands" lie in the perfection of his being as the One who is perfectly worthy to be worshipped and whose worship, therefore, is the very best and most authentic service people can offer.

Nor is this all. Where Amos called for justice, Hosea called for love. In Hosea we find the imagery of God as a loving husband, betrayed by a whoring wife who deserts him for a long list of lovers, but who in love seeks to win her back in forgiveness and to restore her to her true, original love.

*I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and*



*speak comfortably to her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall make answer there as in the days of her youth, and as the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. . . .*

*I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in justice, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know Yahweh.*

But the times were ripe for even more. The captivities (in Assyria, 722 B.C.; in Babylon, 597 and 586 B.C.) had shattered the nationalism of Israel and Judah. The hope of a political military savior leading them to a place of dominance in world affairs with Jerusalem as a world capital was in ruins and the people dispersed far and wide as subjects of foreign powers.

What was specially hard about this was that the ethic as well as the national ideal was social--group--rather than individual, and that ideal and that hope were centered and anchored in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was in ruins. More important still was the fact that we pointed to earlier--that Yahweh, like any other god, was limited to his own territory and thus could not be worshipped outside of Jerusalem.

But Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke to these problems. God could be worshipped, sought, and found, said Jeremiah, anywhere by anyone. And they both declared that all people, as individuals, carried their own burden before God and not the burden of their fathers' sins or of their tribes.

Thus Jeremiah said to them:

*Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord, and I will turn again your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations. . . .*

*Behold, the days come, saith Yahweh, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: . . . this is the covenant that I will make. . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it . . . . And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Yahweh; for they shall all know me, from the least unto the greatest of them. . . .*

*In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.*



After quoting the same proverb, Ezekiel said:

*Ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die; the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.*

An interesting and perhaps necessary corollary of all this was the growth of the idea that Yahweh was the god not only of Israel and Judah but also of all the nations. If the Israelite and the Jew could see that in their own national calamity the nations who brought their ruin were tools in the hands of God to purge the spiritual life of his people and to bring them back to himself in righteousness, perhaps they could accept the calamity and turn it into a spiritually refining fire.

Thus religion moved from magic to morality, from manipulation to worship, from ritual to holiness, from coercion to love and adoration, from tribal and national ethic and relation to God to a very personal and inward one. This was no mean achievement. It is to be compared to the philosophical achievements of Greece which follow hard on the heels of this Hebrew achievement in religion. In terms of influence upon Western culture from then until now, the influence of the Hebrew view through Christianity is probably greater than the influence of the Greek philosophers. Without doubt the blending of these two great streams of culture, so different from each other in important ways--even in the early days of Christianity and later in the classic system of St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century A.D.--constitutes one of the dominant forces in Western civilization.

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#### FOR FURTHER READING

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ART

In the years between 1200 and 900 B.C. Egypt was in its decline, the Fertile Crescent was in a state of disorganization, the great days of the Cretan Sea Kings were over, and on the Greek mainland the always tenuous power of the Mycenaeans reeled under a succession of invasions by aliens, the Dorics from the north and the Ionians from the northeast. Reorganization came the soonest to Mesopotamia under the tough barbarous tribes of the northern region known as Assyria. From their royal stronghold at Khorsabad they waged unrelenting warfare until, by 900 B.C., they finally captured and subjugated all of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and what is today the Holy Land. Cruel, autocratic kingdoms based on powerful military machines continued to expand in all directions from the Near East until they were checked at the historic Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. Rivalries and wars notwithstanding, the Near Eastern stylistic influences on Greek art during this period were considerable.

## ASSYRIAN ART

The Assyrian system was founded on an unrelenting military and administrative organization, and the people found little time to develop an art uniquely their own. Instead they found it more convenient to depend on the culture and art of the areas they captured. Ashurbanipal's library attests to the Assyrian admiration for the religion, culture, and art of the Sumerians and Babylonians. As a result of their attitude, the art styles of civilizations they had conquered hardened and became more rigid. Relief carving is both stiffer and technically less pleasing than earlier examples. However, the narrative "comic strip" style panels of earlier years (Standard of Ur) became fully developed by the Assyrians. Wall after wall is carved in long bands which tell in great detail of the exploits of their armies on the field of battle, in the organized lion hunts, and in almost every other aspect of their lives. They depict the "passage" of time with an awareness that is never found in Egyptian murals. This seems a perfect example of a dynamic versus a static approach.

On the exterior of the great fortress at Nimrud these narrative reliefs extended to several hundred feet. They were a display of all the cruelty for which the Assyrians were infamous in the ancient world. King Ashurbanipal and his soldiers are pictured herding long columns of hapless captives or charging groups of disorganized enemy soldiers with their huge war chariots. No detail of the mayhem is left out--from the piles of