God's Proper Names: Yahweh

THE DISTINCTIVE PROPER NAME of the God of Israel is YAHWEH. Not only does this name occur more than 6,800 times in the Old Testament, but it alone—in contrast with ELOHIM and ADONAI—is never used in reference to other gods but is reserved exclusively for Israel's God. T. Rees called it "the personal proper name *par excellence* of Israel's God" and said pointedly that "Hebrew theology consists essentially of the doctrine of Jehovah and its implications" ("God," 2:1254b–1255a). YAHWEH's crowning historical manifestation occurs in dramatic special events in the life of the Hebrews: Israel's divine deliverance from Egyptian bondage, Israel's adoption as a chosen nation, and Israel's guidance into the promised land.

The derivation and original meaning of the word YAHWEH are unsure, and critical negation of the biblical testimony has served only to deepen the obscurity of the name. Modern interpreters have suggested a number of etymological derivations, but the resultant meanings are often artificial.

Evolutionary naturalists looked outside the Hebrew movement for the inspiration of almost all its distinctive ideas, but the meaning of YAHWEH will hardly be deciphered by the nonbiblical religions. The evolutionary bias long regnant in comparative religions study encouraged attempts to trace the term to Egyptian or Assyrian sources, or to propose early etymological connection with the Latin *Jove* (*Iovis*), but no objective evidence confirms such dependence. Explanations of the name YAHWEH in terms of natural phenomena, such as "He rains," or "He blows," betray their speculative origin at once. R. H. Pfeiffer held "this name … is not Hebrew but belongs to an otherwise unknown Semitic dialect" (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 48). The Kenite hypothesis theorizes that Israel at Sinai was converted to the Kenite religion of YHWH as a fire-god (so Lods, *Israel*, pp. 367 ff., and Oesterley and Robinson, *Hebrew Religion*, 1930, pp. 110–14). Kenite derivation is supported by Ludwig Koehler (*Old Testament Theology*, pp. 42–45). Even in the modified form presented by Rowley (*The Faith of Israel*, p. 54) it can be accepted only by sacrificing the Exodus account. Kenite derivation must be considered only a convenient hypothesis until we know more Kenite; meanwhile we must agree with Buber that exegetical justification for the theory is lacking (*Kingship of God*, p. 33).

Edmond Jacob comments that "up to the present we have no attestation of Yahweh as a name for God outside Israel" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 49). Since Genesis 4:26 suggests that men called on the name of YAHWEH long before the Mosaic age, it may be one of the very oldest names for God. Widespread approximations of the name (for example, its presence even in the name of Jupiter—*yu* = *yw* is *piter* = *pater* or father—hardly settles anything about its Hebrew derivation or conceptual content). Some scholars note, in view of the connection of YAHWEH with the verb "to be," that the Egyptian verb "to be" (*iw*) has a sound somewhat similar to YAHWEH. Others suggest that God's special name was taken over from pagan Canaanite neighbors, since the Ugaritic Tablets tell us that the supreme god had a son whose name is written *yw il*, which means "*yaw* (*e*)—is—god," but this is very meager evidence for the derivation of the Hebrew name of God from Ugaritic materials. Albright asserts that the many attempts to derive

YAHWEH from the term *Yahu* have all broken down (*From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 259).

Both A. Murtoneau (*A Philological and Literary Treatise on the Old Testament Divine Names*) and von Rad have commented on the difficulty posed by the term YAHWEH, since etymological research "contributes little or nothing towards the theological significance of the name" (*Old Testament Theology*, p. 10). The question of the early significance of the root consonant is still unsure. Also, because the full name occurs thousands of times in the Old Testament, a study of etymological relationships is no minor task. Moreover, the short form YAH is also found in parts of the Old Testament (Exod. 15:2; Isa. 12:2; Ps. 68:18), and scholars are unsure whether this is (1) a poetic contraction (since it is nearly always found in poetical and liturgical composition, (2) an archaic survival in the ritual tradition, or (3) an exclamation of wonder (such as, "Oh!") in the presence of a mysterious divinity.

The crucial passage for the meaning of the term YAHWEH is Exodus 3:14. Quite apart from the etymological difficulty with YHWH, there is the uncertainty whether the Tetragrammaton is a nominal or verbal form. If it is verbal, does it lead to the interpretation (based on the imperfect qal, a Hebrew verb stem), of "the passionate," "the one who loves passionately," as S. D. Goitein ("YHWH the Passionate," pp. 1 ff.) and others contend? Or does it lead to the interpretation (based on the imperfect hiphil, a Hebrew verb stem carrying a causative connotation) of the One who "calls into being," or "causes to be," as Albright contends (*From the Stone Age to Christianity*, pp. 259 ff.)? Or does it have some other significance? In view of the lack of scholarly agreement on the meaning of YAHWEH, Speiser warns that through these rigidly conflicting interpretations, "the name of Yahweh is constantly taken in vain" (*Genesis*, p. 38). But it would be remarkable indeed if the high point of the self-disclosure of the divine Name in revealed Hebrew religion were so obscure that, thirty-five hundred years later, biblical scholars are involved only in a game of blindman's buff.

Happily many scholars are moving beyond the semantic hypnosis that reduced "biblical understanding" to an analysis of word-structures and the derivation of their elements from root-originals. S. F. H. Berkelbach appropriately remarks that such exegesis is much like a historian's demolition of an ancient building into stones and rafters until he can visualize the quarry and forest from which they came, and loses the purpose of the structure (*Handboek voor de Prediking*, 1:37). It is contextual use more than etymological origin that determines the sense of meaning of concepts and words. There may be more truth than error in the somewhat sweeping comment of Morton Smith that "the Israelites and Jews preserved place names and adopted foreign names often without any knowledge of the original meaning, and often, when they did happen to know it, without any concern for it" ("Common Theology," p. 136). We need not suppose that the name YAHWEH was simply emblazoned on the sky; it was likely derived from something, if only from some feature or city that held special significance in the early days of Hebrew religion. We are not even sure it is a Hebrew word; it may, as R. Laird Harris thinks, have been only phonetically equated with the Hebrew verb "to be" (HWH), so that not only would the usual pronunciation be questionable, but all attempted etymological derivation would be unfruitful.

Can we then discern the meaning of the name YAHWEH by sensitivity to contextual considerations in the classical passage in Exodus? Five main interpretations are now proposed, and it will be well to devote some attention to each.

1. "I am the One who is." This translation has lost favor because of its assimilation by medieval scholastics and modern Roman Catholic scholars to the Greek view of eternal substance, because of the antimetaphysical activist and existential temper of twentieth-century theology. There is indeed no basis in this text for any philosophy of static divine Being, and one can only deplore the speculative identification of YAHWEH with *ens realissimum* ("most real being"). Surely no abstract notion of *ontos on* is here in view.

If, however, the Old Testament provides no basis for a speculative doctrine of Being, neither does it provide a basis for turning YAHWEH into an antimetaphysical symbol, and for denying that God in his self-revelation communicates some truth about his inmost nature. The Psalmist can call the people to "know that YAHWEH is the Godhead" (Ps. 100:3). If YAHWEH suggests the eternity of his divine Being, the God who is faithful from generation to generation as the One who is, and we recognize that his self-existence and metaphysical independence are less explicit than implicit in this assurance, the interpretation satisfies the rules of Hebrew word-formation which indicate a statement about being rather than about acting. If we derive the sense of YAHWEH from the common Hebrew verb *hayah* ("to be"), an abstract metaphysical sense is not at all precluded. The French version regularly uses *l'éternelle*, and James Moffatt everywhere translates YAHWEH by "the Eternal," the "always being."

When, therefore, von Rad tells us that the text does not envisage "a definition of his nature in the sense of a philosophical statement about his being … a suggestion, for example, of his absoluteness, aseity, etc." (*Old Testament Theology*, p. 180), we may surely commend von Rad's desire to differentiate the revelation of YAHWEH from the postulations of abstract metaphysics, yet we shall need to ask whether an antimetaphysical bias or anti-intellective view of revelation underlies this warning. On the ground that such definition "would be altogether out of keeping with the Old Testament," von Rad cautions against overestimating the importance of the words "I am that I am" as "a theological first principle.… We are certainly not to assume that the narrator's intention was thus to give the interpretative formula of the name which was theologically fundamental and normative for Israel" (p. 181). Von Rad contends that except for Hosea 1:9 ("And I, I am no longer yours") other Old Testament passages lack any etymological interpretation of the name YAHWEH, and that less ambiguous theological alternatives ("YAHWEH, YAHWEH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness," Exod. 34:6, RSV, and "YAHWEH, whose name is Jealous," Exod. 34:14, RSV) indicate different angles from which the name YAHWEH was understood. Von Rad therefore erodes confidence in Exodus 3:14 as "a final axiomatic formula" epitomizing the nature of YAHWEH'S revelation.

But unless we recognize in this revelation of the divine Name a supreme manifestation of the close connection between God's character and his deeds—an idea von Rad himself considers of "quite fundamental importance" for the cultic life of the ancient East—we cannot adequately explain the strategic importance that the revelation at the exodus came to hold in the Hebrew worship of YAHWEH. The divine presence is today often misinterpreted in the framework of modern epistemological theories that

exclude the rational significance of revelation and speciously rule out any possibility of God's disclosure of conceptual truth about himself and his purposes. In consequence, the revelation of YAHWEH'S presence remains exposed to the crudest religious misunderstanding. We are indebted to Edmond Jacob who, though too hurriedly setting aside any revelation of God's self-subsistence in Exodus 6:3, nonetheless puts us on guard against the prevalent modern antimetaphysical bias. "It must not be supposed from the little grasp which the Israelites had of abstract ideas that they were incapable of understanding the reality of being and it is not attributing to them a metaphysics too highly developed when we imagine they could define God as 'he who is' over against things which are temporary—the succession of days and seasons, the verdure of the desert which grows and withers, flocks which are born and die, the successive generations, men whose bodies return to the dust. The Old Testament is full of statements about the eternity of Yahweh as over against the ephemeral character of all created things (Ps. 90:1; 102:27–28), the God of Israel does not die (Hab 1:12), the terms eternity and Yahweh are sometimes even synonymous" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 51 f.).

Even if we insist that the context does not permit us to understand YAHWEH solely in terms of the eternality of God, and emphasize that in any event we are here not given a philosophical elaboration of a doctrine of divine Substance, we must wholly resist the notion that the revelation of divine eternity would be "too advanced a metaphysical conception of God for an early nomad people" (Oesterly and Robinson, *Hebrew Religion*, p. 153), or that such a divine revelation is inadmissible because it would imply an extraordinary "break" in the historical development. What else does divine revelation imply but an advance beyond man's own conceptions?

If the emphasis on God's independent divine Being is not wholly adequate to explain the revelation of YAHWEH, the objection must not assume that this conception is beyond the early mentality of the Hebrews, nor that divine revelation has merely a practical and nontheoretical significance, but rather that in context this explanation does not seem fully to correspond to the situation of Moses and the Hebrews.

2. "I am who I am" (cf. Exod. 33:19; 34:6). On this view, YAHWEH suspends his disclosure upon his free activity as Israel's sovereign, withholds the full meaning of his Name, and does not commit himself to Moses (lest Moses invoke his Name at will for the demonstration of miraculous power). Barth's dialectical theory of revelation clearly underlies his emphasis that "the great revelation of the name in Ex. 3 consists precisely in a refusal of the name" (*Church Dogmatics*, I/1, p. 370). Von Rad stresses that even in his self-manifestation in Moses' time, YAHWEH reserves his freedom to himself and therefore—so von Rad contends—communicates no fixed knowledge.

Walter Harrelson contends that YAHWEH "both hides Himself and reveals Himself in this encounter with Moses.… Moses properly asks for and is given His name. Yet the meaning of the name is not fully explicated: it is to be accepted as—a name! The name of God, in short, does not provide the knower with power over the one named" (*Interpreting the Old Testament*, p. 79). The Catholic scholar A. M. Dubarle argues that Exodus 3:14 marks God's refusal to disclose his name at a mere mortal's request ("La signification du nom de Iahweh") and Gustav Lambert takes essentially the same tack ("Que signifie le nom divin YHWH?" pp. 897 ff.). Helmut Rosin holds that untranslatableness of YHWH as a name signals its absolute uniqueness and the impossibility of converting it into any general concept or definition in advance of future revelational guarantees (*The Lord Is*

God, 1955). Rosin contends there should be no missionary translation of the untranslatable name lest YAHWEH be equated with what he is not, and we conceal his nature as the God wholly free to act.

With any emphasis that God is not exhaustively revealed in his self-disclosure we wholly agree. Surely God's progressive self-revelation has not even yet erased all elements of divine mystery and epistemic transcendence. But this theory fails to do justice to the intimate relationship between the divine Name and nature in biblical theology, and to the divine disclosure of reliable and authentic religious knowledge. It superimposes on the biblical religious situation a dialectical or existential misunderstanding of revelation shaped by recent European theological speculation, and thereby exaggerates divine transcendence at the expense of cognitive revelation. Edmond Jacob's reminder is surely to the point: Moses was "on a Divine mission which demands precise information" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 51). In order to dissociate YAHWEH from all conjuration it is not necessary to existentialize or dialecticize his self-revelation. That the living God cannot be summoned or controlled at man's whim, but establishes his relationship with Israel at his own initiative, is integral to the body of biblically revealed truth: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exod. 33:19, RSV). But to contend that this sovereign freedom of God demands his "indefinite definiteness" (so Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent*, p. 176) is nonsense, for then we have no transcendent basis for definiteness even about this interpretation of what was the case.

Ian T. Ramsey holds that God has not revealed his name, and that the ideal religious situation precludes his doing so. According to Ramsey, "the logical structure of the phrase given as God's name" in Exodus 3 "is not at all a personal proper name" but rather it is "a phrase which could be posited by the religious man to do justice to the commitment his religion carries with it" (*Religious Language*, p. 127). "The true logical point," Ramsey contends, lies in the tautology: "I'm I," which discloses a final option. As such it is not even a statement of God's nature or a promise of his faithfulness, however possible these variants may be on the basis of the Hebrew language. "What is given in Ex. 3 as the name of God, is not a 'name' … but a phrase … men can use … of that full commitment in which … loyalty to God is expressed" (p. 128).

The turning point of Ramsey's contention that God deliberately withholds his name (in some contexts Ramsey inconsistently says that God does not reveal his name "completely" or "fully") is that all divine mystery would be destroyed and men would inevitably fall into idolatry were God to make his name known. He asserts: "It is a well known fact of Old Testament theology that the Hebrews were nervous about naming God" (ibid., p. 124). Ramsey supports his contention (1) by noting that the sacred Tetragrammaton was never pronounced, and (2) by espousing a philosophical theory of religious experience that in principle would dissolve the cognitive significance of all the divine names.

Quite apart from the question whether Ramsey accurately assesses the attitudes of Old Testament Jewry, there was not on the part of Christians—the early Christian Hebrews included—least of all by Jesus of Nazareth, any reluctance to use the divine Name. Indeed, Christians gloried in the Name, insisted there is "no other Name" whereby mankind could be redeemed (Acts 4:12), and they explicitly baptized converts in the Name. But is it really a "fact" of Old Testament times that "the Hebrews were nervous

about naming God"? If Ramsey means that they refused to invent names for God, then his remark defectively understates their disapproval. If he means that they normatively hesitated to use the divinely revealed names, then the comment defectively overstates the situation. For avoidance of the divine Name was not at all characteristic of Israel at her prime. Nonpronunciation of the Tetragrammaton was a late development of the intertestamental period, and was due to scribal superstition.

While those who know God's Name might fall into religious formalism and idolatry, ignorance of the divine Name would seem to make idolatry unavoidable if not inevitable. The Hebrews in their periodic apostasy did lapse into idolatry, not because they knew the Name, but because they forsook the Name. If nonknowledge of the Name precludes idolatry, what, on Ramsey's premises, would account for the periodic lapses of the Hebrews? To argue, as Ramsey does, that "the inevitable elusiveness of the divine name is the logical safeguard against universal idolatry" (ibid., p. 129) inverts the logic and history of Hebrew religious commitment. Moreover, the notion that God's mystery logically requires his anonymity places Ramsey in the peculiar position of peddling secrets about divinity which, on his own theory, ought to be universally hidden.

Furthermore, Ramsey's occasional qualifiers "fully" and "completely" serve to confuse the issue of the revelation of God's Name. Are these terms the opposite of "partly," or of a total withholding of the divine Name? Ramsey helps matters when, elsewhere, he uses the term "approximate." In any event, the notion that the religious situation would be lost unless "only God could know his own name" (ibid., p. 129), presupposes that the religious situation ideally exists in a cognitive vacuity. This modern philosophical premise is grossly out of harmony with the actualities of biblical religion.

With these views, associating the term YAHWEH with the hiddenness and sovereign freedom of God, we reach an almost total contradiction of Umberto Cassuto's insistence that when the Hebrews spoke lucidly of God's attributes they used the name YAHWEH, and used ELOHIM when they spoke more generally and obscurely about God (*The Documentary Hypothesis*, 1941). No evangelical theologian has ever doubted that there is more to God than we know. But God either reveals his Name or he does not.

3. "I will be what I will be" (cf. Exod. 33:19). Current interest in process theology has encouraged some contemporary religious philosophers to assign the Exodus text an activist, futurist interpretation. But if the rules of Hebrew word-formation are decisive, it must be a statement about being, not acting. The attempt to impose modern process philosophy upon the Mosaic account has no solid basis either in Hebrew linguistics or in Hebrew theology. The Hebrews, moreover, would not have been misled by modern notions that the world is as necessary to God as God is to the world. They knew God as sovereign Creator.

Calvin long ago noted that the future tense here in the Hebrew has the same force as the present: "He is self-existent and therefore eternal: and thus gives being and existence to every creature." YAHWEH *is* (Exod. 3:15, ASV) "the God of your fathers," The fathers had lived centuries earlier, but YAHWEH is the same.

4. "I cause to be what I cause to be," or "*I cause to be what occurs*." On this view YAHWEH'S disclosure is that as Creator of the universe and Maker of the Covenant he is able to fulfill his purpose for his people in Egypt. Albright contends that the enigmatic formula "I am what I am" must be understood by deriving YAHWEH from the verbal stem HWY ("to fall, become, come into existence") and hence, in the third person singular, the

meaning in the hiphil (or causative) would be "he causes to be what comes into existence" (*From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 261). Albright seeks to justify this rather abstract idea of divine causal action by citing Babylonian, Canaanite and Egyptian analogies from the second millennium B.C. Julian Obermann supports the view by an appeal to Phoenician inscriptions also ("The Divine Name YHWH in the Light of Recent Discoveries," p. 301).

But many scholars consider this interpretation highly vulnerable. Norman Walker, replying to the similar view of David Noel Freedman ("The Name of the God of Moses," pp. 152 ff.), in a critical note in the subsequent issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (p. 277), rejects it as "conjuring up a non-existent hiphil form" (since the existence of the verb *hawah* in the hiphil is nowhere attested). He insists, less convincingly, that "the idea of 'causing to be' is foreign to the Hebrew mentality." R. Laird Harris considers most difficult any verbal derivation of the name and meaning of YAHWEH from outside sources. The *W* of YAHWEH is a problem, he comments. The ordinary verb for "become," "be," in Hebrew is HWH and in Hebrew a *W* at the beginning of a syllable usually turns to *Y*. What, he asks, is the relation of "to fall" and "to come into existence"? "Cause to be" should be *Yahyeh*.

Although the Israelites long regarded YAHWEH as "Creator of All," this does not necessarily predetermine the revealed meaning of YAHWEH in the Exodus account, particularly since the fact of creation had long been associated with the name ELOHIM. Moreover, Silver notes that the name EL ELYON, known to the patriarchs, already included the notion of "He who causes to be" in the sense of Creator. He thinks YAHWEH designates the "Accomplisher," "He who performs what He promises" (*Moses and the Original Torah*, p. 25). He quotes Jewish writers who interpret the meaning of YAHWEH as "I can be trusted" (to make good, or to fulfill my Word).

5. "I am present is what I am." On this view YAHWEH emphasizes his living active presence, responsive to the needs of Moses and his people, in whose behalf he is redemptively ready to intervene. YAHWEH speaks not of "the being of God," writes Miskotte, but of "the presence of God," and especially "his presence in his activity," in which he "reserves the freedom to act as he wills" (*When the Gods Are Silent*, p. 121). "He can be known only in His acts" (p. 122). YAHWEH is here understood not in a metaphysical sense but in an active, phenomenological sense as he who executes his promises ("I will be with you"; "I will be your mouth"; "I am YAHWEH … and I have remembered my covenant" (Exod. 6:2–4). Koehler contends that because YAHWEH was revealed to Moses by his divine works, therefore no revelation of the secret of his nature is given and " 'I am who I am' is … *Deus Absconditus* in the strictest sense" (*Old Testament Theology*, p. 242).

On the surface much may seem to commend a merely phenomenological interpretation. In the context of the Mosaic revelation at the exodus, and frequently also in the larger Old Testament disclosure, YAHWEH gives unyielding assurance of his personal presence and active deliverance. In context, God's self-revelation of his Name to Moses does not seem to imply God's disclosure either as eternal unchanging Being or as Creator of all, but rather as Israel's redemptive Deliverer. This fuller revelation to Israel thus involves YAHWEH'S disclosure, as A. B. Davidson expresses it, not of an ontological name, but of a redemptive name (*The Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 47). The preceding contextual stress is on the words "Certainly I will be with thee" (Exod. 3:12,

KJV; compare 2 Sam. 24:16 for the use of the verb *hayah* in the sense of "be [found] with"). Here one thinks of numerous passages in which the Name of God signals his presence (Deut. 12:11, 21; 14:23–24; 16:2, 11; 26:2; Neh. 1:9; Ps. 74:7; Isa. 18:7; Jer. 3:17; 7:10–13, 30).

But can the notion of presence be derived from the root of the word, or from the term YAHWEH itself, or is this an illegitimate transfer of meaning? The root *haya* is used, albeit in a secondary sense, for "to abide," when accompanied by stipulations of place and time. But however interesting or even plausible in connection with certain theories the etymological study of the name of YAHWEH may be, it cannot supply information conclusive for its meaning and content beyond that indicated in the scriptural source, which does not indicate that etymological analysis provided the spiritual vitality of this dramatic biblical episode.

Martin Buber emphasizes the correspondence of the meaning "I will *be* there" (to vindicate his revelation in person) with God's promise to Moses in Exodus 3:12 (*Moses*, pp. 18, 19, 53). It is noteworthy that *'ehyeh* is used in the sense of "being present" (*adesse*) in 3:12 (KJV), "I will be with thee" and in "I will be thy mouth" (cf. Gen. 31:3, KJV, where "I will be with thee" marks the promise of special assistance and protection for Jacob). Edmond Jacob writes, "To make the people aware of the presence of Yahweh in their midst was exactly the task committed to Moses.… The priority of presence over existence gives a new and unexpected aspect to all the interventions of Yahweh; the presence of Yahweh corresponds each time to a new approach and the prophets stigmatize as a grave illusion the faith of those who interpreted the 'God is with us' in the sense of a definite and inalienable possession" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 52 f.). J. Barton Payne supports the emphasis on God's testamental nature as "faithful presence" in his self-disclosure as YAHWEH (cf. Exod. 6:2, 4; Deut. 7:9; Isa. 26:4) (*Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 148). "God is rather Jahve," asserts Oehler, "in as far as He has entered into an *historical* relation to mankind, and in particular to the chosen people, and shows Himself continually in this historical relation as He who is, and who is what He is" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 95). The revelation to the oppressed people centers in YAHWEH'S manifestation in rescuing grace. Thus God identifies himself as that same YAHWEH who in covenantal care singled out Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There he called out one family and its posterity; now he calls out a nation. God answers the question regarding his name or nature (Exod. 3:13) in verb form: "I am" or "I will be" or "I will be present,"

Yet, if we emphasize here God's redemptive revelation, we have really no basis on that account to delete all transcendent ontological or metaphysical connotations from YAHWEH, and to espouse a dynamic view of revelation that leaves to prophetic voices the ingenious discernment of what YAHWEH is doing. It is precisely the Exodus narrative that emphasizes that God clearly reveals his purpose before he acts in redemptive rescue. Although philosophical metaphysical conjecture is excluded, that the living God reveals himself as Creator and as the eternal and independent Lord of all, who in sovereign freedom works out his redemptive purpose in history, is nonetheless integral to the biblical view of divine disclosure. While the forward-looking manifestation of YAHWEH has in view the pledge of redemptive presence, the name YAHWEH accumulates to itself all that the patriarchs had already known about God. The Hebrew verb "to be" had originally to do with absolute existence, not relative relationships. In our view, YAHWEH

is the revelation of the Eternal, the independent sovereign of all, who pledges in free grace to come to the redemptive rescue of his chosen people. *The God who is*, who is *eternally there*, will personally manifest his redemptive presence in Israel's midst.

If, Moses asks, when he explains that he is sent by "the God of your fathers," the Israelites should ask "What is his name?" what answer is he to give? God replies to Moses: "*I am that I am* … say … *I am* hath sent me.… say … YAHWEH the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me … this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.… say … YAHWEH the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me.… unto the king.… say … YAHWEH the God of the Hebrews hath met with us.… Let us go … three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to YAHWEH our God.… the king of Egypt will not let you go.… And I will … smite Egypt with all my wonders … and after that will he let you go. And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians.… And Moses answered … they will say, YAHWEH hath not appeared unto thee" (Exod. 3:13–4:1, KJV).

By the serpent-rod God manifests his presence "that they may believe that YAHWEH the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared" (Exod. 4:5, KJV). By the miracle of the leprous hand he again manifests himself, saying, "If they will not believe … these two signs" there will follow the changing of the water into blood. A God angered by Moses' hesitancy then dispatches him to his people and tells him to go bearing "this rod … wherewith thou shalt do [the] signs" (Exod. 4:9, 17, KJV). This context seems to require for the understanding of "I am that I am" God's special redemptive solicitude and presence in behalf of his people.

We must now focus on etymological considerations. In Exodus 3:14 YAHWEH is said to be the equivalent of *'ehyeh* (an abbreviated form of *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, translated "I am that I am"). For good reason the Hebrews connected the name YAHWEH with *hayah*, "to be." For through the striking formula, "I shall be to you a God" (Gen. 17:7; cf. Exod. 6:7; Lev. 11:45; 26:12, 45; Deut. 29:13; Jer. 31:33; 32:38), God manifests himself in the patriarchal period as the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This "I shall be" finds its expression as a present indicative, "I am," in the revelation to Moses; the God of the covenant relation bares himself redemptively in Israel's present need. The "I shall be," which almost always has a covenantal sense, retains this sense in the divine disclosure "I am," which dramatically connects this covenant relation with the immediate crisis in Hebrew history. And the name YAHWEH is simply the imperfect third person masculine of the same form: "He is." YAHWEH is the God of covenant promise, of covenant relation, whose active redemptive concern for his people is—is not merely a *memory* of past history, is not merely a *future hope*, but *is*.

In the exodus revelation God "gave himself away" to Israel—within his freedom indeed, yet bound by covenant to historical redemptive deliverance. This pledge of nearness and ready help guaranteed by his word and character assured Israel of access to his heart. The Old Testament scholar William J. Martin notes that the niphal (the passive of the qal stem) form *yechaway* (Jehaweh) would acquire a tolerative sense, "He suffered himself to be" (cf. "Seek the Lord while he suffers himself to be found"). YAHWEH will come to Israel's aid "for his name's sake" (Pss. 23:3; 25:11; 143:11; Jer. 14:7; Isa. 48:9). God's *coming* to man, his special redemptive activity, thus historically vindicates his Name through his free initiative in gracious disclosure to a chosen people.

This Name, this revelation of God as the divine redemptive intervener, is the Name whereby God desires to be known: "YAHWEH … this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (Exod. 3:15, KJV). The tabernacle itself objectively embodies this truth (Exod. 29:43–46) and YAHWEH is used always in the Old Testament as the memorial name of God. The Old Testament associates God's special presence with the Ark of the Covenant which links God's reality with his promises. In the golden calf idolatry (Exod. 32) the Hebrews reintroduced the pagan Egyptian motif of the immanent nature-and-fertility deity, which misconceives divine presence and blurs the transcendent Creator who speaks his Word and publishes his purposes. "In the cult, the divine name was used by Israel at sacrifice, in prayer, in blessing and cursing, and also in holy war," notes von Rad, "and it had been given her for this purpose" (*Old Testament Theology*, p. 183). "To hallow the name of Jahweh was tantamount in itself to acknowledging the uniqueness and exclusiveness of the cult of Israel *per se*. Wherever Israel in any way opened its doors to the cult of another deity, the name of Jahweh was profaned.… On the positive side, the name was hallowed by obedience to the commandments, by 'walking in the name of Jahweh' " (p. 184).

The revelation of YAHWEH'S will is the main theme of the entire Sinai tradition: YAHWEH has revealed to his people those binding ordinances which make possible human life in his service and communion. The decisive and preeminent factor is not the exceptional position of Sinai or the exceptional role of Moses, but beyond these, the unique history that YAHWEH has made possible. The commandments assert YAHWEH'S sovereign rights over man and summarize YAHWEH'S holy will for man. The Decalogue is introduced by the words: "I am YAHWEH, your God" (cf. von Rad, ibid., p. 192, n.11). It was the "glory of YAHWEH" that came down upon Sinai; the "glory of YAHWEH" that came down upon and filled the tabernacle; the "glory of YAHWEH" that approved the first sacrifice offered after the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests. In short, not only does YAHWEH disclose the fundamental requirements through which Israel may experience life before and with God, but the "glory of YAHWEH" comes to dwell in the very midst of Israel.

Franz Delitzsch asserts that the names ELOHIM EL SHADDAI and YAHWEH are "the sign-manual of three degrees of Divine revelation and Divine knowledge … (the first) the God who so made nature that it exists, and so preserves it that it consists … (the second) the God who so constrains nature that it does His will, and so subdues it that it bows to and subserves grace … (the third) the God who carries out the purposes of grace in the midst of nature, and at last puts a new creation of grace in the place of nature" (*A New Commentary on Genesis*, 2:32). Oehler notes the displacement of earlier names in deference to the later and larger revelatioin: "As soon as the name *Jehovah* unfolds its meaning, the name El-Shaddai falls back on the one hand into the list of the *more general names of God*.… But, on the other hand, it is still used at times *alternately with the name Jehovah* where God's omnipotence is made prominent in contrast with human weakness" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 91).

In conclusion, we must consider also the divine name ADONAI. The name ADONAI appears first in Genesis 15:2 and 8. *Adon* is the Hebrew word for "owner," "master," "lord." It is used of both divine and human relationships. When applied to God, it denotes his role as divine ruler (Ps. 2:4; Isa. 7:7) and emphasizes his power over man and the world as the giver of life and death. Hence, like EL and its combinations, ADONAI stresses

God's sovereignty. In Malachi 1:6 the usage demonstrates God's claim upon man's service. In some occurrences it is conjoined to ELOHIM and also frequently to YAHWEH.

In the early period the name BAAL was applied to God as a synonym for ADONAI in the sense of "owner" (1 Chron. 8:33), but the prophets later opposed this use when that name became generally associated with the pagan Baalim and thus acquired an idolatrous meaning (contrast 2 Sam. 2:8 with Hos. 2:16–17).

Additional names for God appear in the post-Mosaic era, although some are compounds of ELOHIM and YAHWEH. Some may be descriptive phrases rather than names. Payne mentions EL HAI, "living God" (Josh. 3:10), used synonymously with YAHWEH; ELOHIM Q'DHOSHIM, "holy God" (Josh. 24:19); YAHWEH SEVAOTH, "God of hosts" or "of armies" (1 Sam. 1:3, etc.); and also BAAL (1 Chron. 8:33) (*The Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 150). But new names for deity are no longer found in Israel's consolidation period (Robert Dick Wilson, "The Names of God in the Psalms," pp. 1–39, provides a useful study of the divine names in the literature of the Psalms).

Some scholars consider Daniel's use of "God of heaven" (Dan. 2:37) to be the final Old Testament development in the use of divine names. The absence of all divine names from the Book of Esther has long been a subject of theological discussion, the problem being posed by the fact that it is a conspicuous exception. Even the phrase "God of heaven" is found only in the Aramaic portions of Daniel-Ezra, and usually in a context relating to unbelievers; its correlation by some scholars with a descriptive phrase for God's sovereign and universal power found in Genesis (24:3–7) is questionable. In contexts in which the name YAHWEH is not employed, it is an apt description for general use.

In the post-Old Testament period, pronunciation of the divine Name was avoided through superstitious reverence, and the term *Heaven* became a substitute (cf. 1 Macc. 3:18–19, NEB, and elsewhere in the Apocrypha). But the inspired writings do not share any avoidance of the divine Name, since in the revealed Name the living God discloses his nature and individuality.

In the intertestamental period the name YAHWEH was no longer pronounced aloud in the synagogues, apparently to accommodate scribal superstition. The name was replaced orally (although not in writing) by ADONAI. Yet the Old Testament texts themselves not infrequently carry the conjunctive YAHWEH-ADONAI. When the medieval Masoretes later added vowel points to the consonantal text YHWH, they combined the Tetragrammaton with the vowel points of ADONAI. The curious end result was "Jehovah" (used by the American Standard Version). *The Jerusalem Bible* regularly uses YAHWEH. Recent studies emphasize the late emergence of the "ineffable Name" concept in Judaism, and support the notion that during the intertestamental and early Christian era Jews on occasion reversed their practice: if others held the name to be secret, they pronounced it; if others used it publicly, they declared it to be ineffable. The English translation of the Old Testament issued by the Jewish Publication Society of America in 1917, and especially adapted for use in Hebrew synagogues and schools, retained I AM for the name of God in Exodus 3:14. Except in Exodus 6:3, where YHWH was retained (with the footnote: "the ineffable name, read *Adonai*, which means, the Lord"), it elsewhere translated YAHWEH by LORD.

But the use of ADONAI for God carries over in the New Testament identification of Jesus Christ as LORD. The Septuagint commonly used the Greek word KURIOS (LORD) to

render the Hebrew ADONAI and—as Vincent Taylor notes—"what is more important, it is the usual substitute for the personal name 'Yahweh' " (*The Names of Jesus*, p. 39). Taylor pointedly remarks: "The first Christians read the Old Testament with new eyes, and as soon as Jesus was confessed as 'the Lord,' many ancient passages which spoke of the Lord must have been applied to Him. Septuagint usage is not, therefore, a factor which can be ignored in stimulating the use of the title" (p. 51).

The Old Testament therefore exhibits two principle names of God, one of sovereign power and the other of redemptive presence: ELOHIM, the Creator and Ruler, and YAHWEH, the Covenantal Redeemer. Erich Sauer has pointed out that, while names of God occur about ten thousand times in the Old Testament, the name ELOHIM is found 2,570 and YAHWEH some 6,000 times (*The Dawn of World Redemption*, p. 187). ADONAI occurs 450 times, the next largest number. The double name YAHWEH-ELOHIM correlates the comprehensive work of God in creative power and redemptive grace, even as the New Testament depicts the LOGOS as the agent both in creation and in redemption.[1]

[1] Henry, C. F. H. (1999). *Vol. 2*: *God, revelation, and authority* (210–225). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.