HOLINESS AND THE HOLY TRINITY

Thomas A. Noble
Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City
Nazarene Theological College, Manchester

LECTURE I: HOLINESS AND THE HOLY FATHER

The theme for our conference is holiness. That is clearly of interest to those in the Church of the Nazarene which emerged out of the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement. This had roots in Methodism and the teaching of John Wesley and was particularly interested in the theme of *Christian* holiness, the sanctification of Christian believers. But Wesleyans do not have proprietary rights on this. This is a theme of concern to all Christians and so it can only be valuable for Christians from different traditions to listen to each other.

But we shall begin not with Christian holiness but with the holiness of God. Our God, the God of Abraham and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is surely the One who is uniquely holy. Whatever meaning the word 'holiness' has must be taken from our understanding of God.

What I propose to do in these three lectures therefore is to begin with the holiness of the Holy Trinity, and to see what conclusions we may come to about *Christian holiness*. Christian holiness can only ever be derivative. What we mean by the word 'sanctification' (the making holy) has to be determined by the holiness of the One Triune God from whom the word takes its meaning. To be made holy is to be made like God.

In this first lecture therefore I want to begin by thinking about 'Holiness and the Holy Father'. The designation 'Holy Father' is found on the lips of Jesus himself in the great prayer of John 17, and so that is our starting point. How are we to understand this way of addressing God?

(A) THE HOLY GOD OF ISRAEL

We can only begin to understand what this mode of address means if we see it in its Jewish context. As so much contemporary scholarship has insisted, Jesus has to be understood within the context of Second Temple Judaism. The word 'Jesus' is the Latin form of his name: his Hebrew name was Yeshua. As a boy born into 'the house and lineage of David' (Lk 2:4), he was brought up to worship the God of Israel. This was the God, known as 'the LORD' (*Adonai*), whose own name was not pronounced, and who was revealed in the history of Israel recorded in the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nebi'im*) and the Writings (*Kethubim*).

To call God, 'The Holy One of Israel' (as the book of Isaiah does all the way through) is to sum up the LORD's character, but there were many facets to that. If holiness was the supreme and comprehensive word for the character of God, then it could be refracted into several characteristics or attributes. But as Brueggemann and others have reminded us, the Judaism in which Jesus was raised not an abstract religion and it had nothing like a 'Systematic Theology'.[1] It was a *halakah*, a 'way of life'. And so the way we shall look at the character of Israel's God is not simply by identifying abstract characteristics straight from

[1]. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997, 80-84

the Hebrew Scriptures, but to see how the Jews of Jesus' day interpreted their Scriptures and celebrated their God in the great festivals.

Laying aside the festivals instituted after the exile, we can identify five major festivals associated with Moses which were celebrated during the lifetime of Yeshua. By looking at these we can build up a picture of the God of Israel, identifying the characteristics which together are summed up in the comprehensive overall characteristic of holiness.

1. Pesach (Passover): The God of Redemption

Luke records Jesus' visit to Jerusalem for the Passover at the age of twelve (Lk 2:41), and of course his final journey to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover to be crucified. The feast of Passover, occurring in what to us is late March or early April, celebrated Israel's God as the *God of Redemption* and the significant narrative from the Scriptures was the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

The narrative of the exodus begins, following the account of Moses' early life, with his encounter in the wilderness with the God who revealed himself as the I AM. The holiness of God is evident in the encounter when Moses has to take his sandals from his feet to recognize and honour the God who has revealed himself in fire. Here is the element of *separation*, and that is, the scholars tell us, the root meaning of the Hebrew word. As Jacob Milgrom has stated, 'separation is inherent in holiness...: the word *qados* "holy" means both "separate from" and "separate to".'[2]

But there is something else revealed about this holy God. In revealing the divine name as YHWH, the I AM, the LORD, God also reveals that he is a God of *compassion*. Moses is given this message for the people of Israel, enslaved in Egypt: 'I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt to ...a land flowing with milk and honey' (Exod. 3:17).

A third characteristic to be observed is the note of *judgment*. At the heart of the exodus story is God's messenger of death, the 'destroyer' striking down the firstborn of every family in the land of Egypt. And only when the blood of a lamb is seen on the doorposts will the destroyer 'pass over' a household. This episode is so significant that it gives its name to the festival. It is not called the festival of the exodus, but the festival of the Passover.

Fourthly , the holiness of God is also his *power.* This is made particularly clear later in the narrative of Exodus when the deliverance from Egypt is celebrated in the Song of Moses: 'I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has cast into the sea,' (Exodus 15:1-18). The metaphors of 'king' and 'warrior' feature strongly: 'the LORD is a warrior' (v. 3), and 'The LORD will reign [be king] forever and ever' (v. 18).

There are four characteristics then that are included within the holiness of God as celebrated in the feast of Passover – the elements of *separation*, *compassion*, *judgment* and *power*.

[2] . Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 3B, New York: Doubleday (2000), 1762

2. Shavu'ot (Pentecost): The God of Covenant and Torah

Seven weeks after the Feast of the Passover came the feast which Hellenistic Jews called 'Pentecost' since it was on the fiftieth day (*pentecoste hemera*). The Hebrew name was *hag hashavu'ot*, the Feast of Weeks. It was seven weeks after Passover in late May or early June. There is no clear account of Jesus going to Jerusalem for Pentecost, although it is possible that this is the unnamed festival referred to in John 5. Pentecost celebrated the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and in Second Temple Judaism it had become a commemoration of the giving of the Law at Sinai. But in the scriptural narrative in the book of Exodus the giving of the Torah came of course in the context of the covenant (*berit*). E.P. Sanders established that Judaism was not a legalistic religion, certainly not in the way it has often been caricatured by Christians. It was rather (said Sanders) a *covenantal nomism*, a religion of Torah, translated as 'Law' (Gk: *nomos*), or better 'Instruction,' *within the context of covenant*.[3] It is appropriate therefore to think about the way in which the Feast of *Shavu'ot* or Pentecost made the Jewish people of Jesus' day reflect on Israel's God as the God of Covenant and Torah.

What does the narrative of Sinai reveal about the character of Israel's Holy God?

First it reveals again the *power* of the Holy God, and along with that the element of *separation*. The terrifying theophany at Sinai reveals a God who will not be trifled with. In Exodus 19, there is *separation* between the LORD who has descended on the top of the mountain, and the people who remain at the foot of the mountain. Moses has to act as mediator, ascending the mountain to represent Israel to the LORD and descending to represent the LORD to Israel.

But secondly, God is revealed as the God of *law* and *covenant.* The two cannot be divorced. The LORD has elected this people to be his chosen people and makes a covenant with them in fulfilment of his covenant with Abraham. But he first reveals his character to them in his law (*Torah*), particularly the Ten Words or Ten Commandments. The law demands their exclusive worship of the LORD and lays down how they are to treat each other. And when that has been made clear (Exodus 20-23), Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy elders of Israel worship the LORD, with Moses coming near and the others 'at a distance' (Exod. 24:1). Moses then sacrifices oxen and throws their blood against an altar (representing God) and over the people: 'See the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words' (Exod. 24:8).

What does this tell us about this God? It is that in addition to being a God of *power* whose holiness demands 'distance' or *separation*, the LORD is the God of *covenant* and *law*. *Covenant* implies *relationship*. That is a two-way thing. But it is not a bargain or a contract between equals. It is entirely at God's initiative. The covenant is between two, God and Israel, but it is initiated and completed by One – the LORD. He chooses to enter into this binding relationship with the people of Israel. What we saw at the burning bush as *compassion* is now revealed as *covenant faithfulness*. The Hebrew word is *hesed*, which we used to translate as 'mercy', but it is now often translated as 'steadfast love'. So despite the element of *separation*, there is this element of *relationship* and *covenant faithfulness* – a relationship between two, entirely dependent on the initiative of One and upheld by One – the LORD. And *covenant* is inseparable from *law* (*torah*). The LORD lays down the obligations which Israel is called to fulfil.

---

[3]. E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63BCE – 66CE*, London: SCM and Philadelphia: Trinity Press, (1992), 262-275

In Exodus 34, the LORD himself sums up his character to Moses:

> The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful (*rahum*) and gracious (*hannun)*, slow to anger (*'erek 'appaim*) and abounding in steadfast love (*hesed*) and faithfulness (*emeth*), keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving (*nose*') iniquity (*'awon*) and transgression (*pesa')* and sin (*hatah*), but who will be no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children to the third and fourth generation (Exod 34:6-7).

Walter Brueggemann draws attention to what he sees as a disjunction or contradiction here in God. How can it be said that the LORD forgives iniquity, but will by no means clear the guilty? Is there some kind of contradiction in God? We could put that question this way: how do we reconcile God's grace with God's law?

There is one more point to note here about the God revealed at the feast of Pentecost. Brueggemann notes four 'metaphors of governance' used for God in Exodus – judge, king, warrior, and father.[4] God acts as *judge* in the sense that he sees the unjust treatment of the people of Israel in Egypt and fulfils the Hebrew role of judge in that he corrects the injustice. We have already seen that in the exodus he acts as *king* and *warrior*. But the fourth metaphor – a very minor one – is that he acts as Israel's *father*. Moses is to tell Pharaoh, 'Israel is my first-born son' (Exod. 2:24), and this is elaborated in the Song of Moses at the end of Deuteronomy (Deut.32:1-43). God, 'The Rock,' is said to 'beget' (*yld)* Israel and also to 'give birth' (*hll*) to Israel, thus uniting the metaphors of 'fathering' and 'mothering' (Deut. 43: 18). The metaphor is also picked up by Hosea ('When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son,' 11:1, cf. also 8f.), and Jeremiah ('I thought you would call me, "My father"...' 3:19f.), in addition to the psalmist ('As a father has compassion on his children,' 103:13) and in Isaiah 63:16 ('For you are our father...').[5]

In summary then, the feast of Pentecost reminded the people of Second Temple Judaism that the LORD was the God of Covenant and Law:

> (i) the God of *power*,
>
> (ii) the God of *grace* who enters into *covenant relationship* with his chosen people, Israel;
>
> (iii) the God of *covenant faithfulness*,
>
> (iv) the God whose relationship to Israel may be compared to that of a *father* to his children
>
> (v) the God of *law* (*torah*) who demands the faithful and exclusive love of his people and who requires them to honour each other, indeed to *love* each other as he has loved them.

3. Rosh Hashana (New Year): The God of Creation

The third festival to consider is *Rosh Hashana*, literally the 'Head of the Year'. That came as the first of three festivals which fell roughly in our month of October. It is generally known as the Jewish New Year and it had several associations. It was also called 'the Day of Blowing' since on that day the *shofar* or

[4]. Brueggemann (1997), 233-249

[5]. For a study of the fatherhood of God in the Old as well as the New Testament, see Svetlana Khobnya, *The Father Who Redeems and the Son Who Obeys: Consideration of Paul's Teaching in Romans*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013.

ramshorn was blown to call the people to repentance in preparation for the *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

But it was also associated with the first day of Creation. The great narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures begins with the stately rhythms of the liturgical 'hymn to creation' (as H. Orton Wiley called it),[6] followed by the more human story of the creation of the Man (אָדָם, *Adam*) and his wife. It was an essential part of Israel's faith that the God who was the Redeemer was also the one who created the heavens and the earth. And while it is true that creation was only one of the events remembered at *Rosh Hashana*, and that only once a year, we must balance that with the point that creation was remembered and celebrated *every week* in the hallowing of the seventh day as the sabbath. The weekly day of rest was commanded in the Ten Words as part of the recognition of the uniqueness of Israel's God. And the explanation was clear in the creation narrative in Genesis: 'And on the seventh day God finished the work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation' (Gen. 2: 2-3). While the main focus of Israel's faith was on *redemption*, it was an integral and necessary part of that faith that the God who redeemed Israel was the *Creator* of heaven and earth and all that was. This recognition of the God of Israel as the universal and transcendent God of all is particularly seen in the use of the word *'Elohim*.

So this too was part of the *holiness* of God – his *transcendence*. This is where the God of Israel was unique. The gods of Babylon were not transcendent over creation. They emerged from the raw material of the creation. Scholars have contrasted Genesis 1 particularly with the theogony of *Enuma Elish* ('When on high'), the Babylonian story of creation, recited in their annual festival to glorify Marduk, their chief god. The gods emerge in twos from Tiamat, the watery chaos which is itself divine, till eventually Marduk subdues chaos by battle and bloodshed, creates humanity, and establishes a cosmos of order centred in Babylon. By contrast, the God of Genesis 1 does not emerge from the primeval chaos, but is the sovereign God preceding all else and creating the order of the world by his majestic word of command. There is no doubt that throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, the Lord is 'absolutely unique in authority and sovereignty,' so that 'in a sense, then, the First Testament is monotheistic.'[7]

In Second Temple Judaism it was of course the contrast with the gods of the Graeco-Roman world, rather than the gods of Babylon, which was relevant. But the different monotheistic philosophical systems, Platonist, Aristotelian and Stoic, although seen as allies by such Jewish intellectuals such as Philo, would have been seen as deeply alien by most of the Jewish people who were aware of them, particularly those in Judea and in the country areas of Galilee. Neither the demiurge of Plato, nor the 'unmoved mover' of Aristotle, nor the world Reason or Logos of the Stoics was a conception of a god who was utterly distinct from and transcendent over creation like the God of Israel. For Judaism, in contrast to these other forms of monotheism, the sovereign Lord was transcendent *before* and *over* the cosmos, and yet he was also constantly active *in* the cosmos. The radical transcendence of God did not cancel out his immanent activity.

---

[6]. H. Orton Wiley (1940), 449: on Genesis 1-11, see Gordon J. Wenham, *Rethinking Genesis: Gateway to the Bible*, Eugene, OR: Cascade (2015).

[7]. John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Vo*l. 2, *Israel's Faith.* Downers Grove: IVP (2006), 39

This third festival therefore accentuated the *power* of God which we already have seen displayed in the Passover. The LORD was not only supreme over earthly powers such as Pharaoh. His power means that he was the supreme transcendent Creator of heaven and earth. Nothing was beyond his power. His holiness means that the LORD is the supreme, unique, transcendent God. Everything else which exists is his creation. In the early centuries of the Christian Church this was articulated most fully the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. But the Holy One of Israel was celebrated as the transcendent Creator in the great poetry of Isaiah 40:

> Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in... 'To whom will you compare me, or who is my equal?' says the Holy One (Isa. 40: 21, 25).

Power as part of the understanding of the Holy One, has to be understood as absolute power, utter *transcendence* which does not however hinder God's ability to be *immanent* within his creation and particularly, to enter into *covenant relationships* with those human creatures to whom he shows his grace and covenant love (*hesed*).

4. Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement): The Holy God

On the evening of the ninth day after *Rosh Hashanah* came *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. This was not a feast but a fast and a day of rest, the most solemn day in the whole calendar. It was a day of 'holy convocation' (Leviticus 23:27) for those in Jerusalem, but not a time when countless thousands came in pilgrimage from around Palestine or the Diaspora. More than any other day of the year, the theme of Atonement focused the attention of the worshippers on the sinfulness of Israel in contrast to the holiness of God, a contrast that was physically embodied in the very architecture of the temple in Jerusalem. The separation of the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place, of the Holy Place from the outer court, all physically embodied the concept of *separation* at the root of the idea of the holy. There might be more to be said, but to recall Jacob Milgrom's statement again: 'Separation is inherent in holiness...: the word *qados* "holy" means both "separate from" and "separate to".'[8] Holiness and purity were closely connected.[9]

Modelled on the tabernacle, Solomon's temple and then the second temple built after the exile was the setting for the whole sacrificial system instituted in the Sinai covenant. There a whole elaborate sacrificial system and priesthood were added to the first sacrifice to be instituted, the Passover. Not all the temple sacrifices had to do with atonement. To begin with there were the regular morning and evening sacrifices every day, 'burnt offerings'. But in addition to these offerings of the community as a whole, paid for out of the temple tax, there were three kinds of sacrifices offered by individuals. According to E.P. Sanders, individual burnt offerings were not thought of as atoning (despite Lev. 1:4), but simply as honouring God.[10] But secondly, there were sin offerings and guilt offerings, which were closely associated. Since 'sin offerings' were not always for sin (but, for example, to be offered after childbirth), they are probably

---

[8]. Milgrom (2000), 1762

[9]. See Brower Latz and Ermakov (2014)

[10]. Sanders (1992), 105f.

better thought of as 'purification offerings.' The Hebrew term for 'sin' here is *hatah*, meaning 'missing the mark' or 'deviation from the norm.' E.P. Sanders regards Josephus as his most reliable witness to the sacrifices as practised in the period of Herod's temple, and notes that Josephus distinguishes between sins committed in ignorance and those committed consciously. The 'sin offering' expiated inadvertent sin (as in Leviticus), while he regards the 'guilt offering' as offered for deliberate and intentional sin. Sanders notes that Philo also makes the same distinction between involuntary and voluntary sins. The third kind of sacrifice offered by an individual was the 'peace offering,' but the Hebrew word *shelem* (related to *shalom*) could be interpreted as meaning 'a sacrifice of well-being.'

So while not all offerings were for atonement, the sin and guilt offerings were. And in addition to those individual offerings, the corporate dimension of Israel's sin was recognized each year in the *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. As we have seen, the day came after ten days of self-examination and repentance. The high priest himself officiated, having bathed and changed from his golden festival garments worn for the morning sacrifice into white linen garments. This was a physical faith, acted out in physical drama. But at its heart was the mystery of atonement not only seen in the sacrifices in the Holy Place, but somehow embodied physically in the *kapporeth*, the Mercy Seat or Place of Atonement which was none other than the very throne of God in the Most Holy Place. It was uniquely on the Day of Atonement that the rationale for the physical gradations of holiness in the architecture of the temple was physically acted out. At no other festival or fast did the High Priest enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the *kapporeth*.

The Hebrew verb translated as 'to atone', *kipper* or *kaphar*, from which the noun *kapporeth* comes, literally means 'to cover,' and the simplest explanation is to say that the sacrifice was thought of as a 'covering' of sin. This did not mean that it was 'covered up' or concealed, but that it was obliterated.[11] And quite clearly, in the *Torah*, it was the Holy God himself who had appointed the means - the priesthood and the sacrifices - to wipe the slate clean. However that makes no sense unless there was something about God which demanded that the sin be dealt with. It is true that there was no thought here (as C.H. Dodd argued) that the penitent was persuading God to forgive him in the way that pagan worshippers placated or propitiated their angry gods. In contrast, it was God himself who had given the means of forgiveness out of his faithful love (*hesed*). Yet at the same time, there was something about God which insisted that the offence could not simply be ignored. The sacrifices were clearly costly to the worshippers, as David's dictum witnessed: 'Shall I offer to the Lord my God that which cost me nothing?' (II Sam. 24:24). And sacrifice was demanded by the holiness of God. Though not a pagan kind of propitiation, it is necessary to recognize that this was propitiation of a kind, a propitiation that proceeded from the very covenant love of God but which was a recognition of his holiness. Although there may have been exceptions (nothing is explicitly said about sacrifices in David's repentance, for example), the physical ritual of atonement conveyed to Israel the insistence of God in his holiness that sin could not be dealt with simply by abstract thought or even inward penitence. Sacrifice was of no use without penitence (as the prophets reminded Israel), but the whole sacrificial system witnessed that (normally) the penitence had to be embodied in physical sacrifice. In this very physical religion, it took physical sacrifice as well as an appropriate mental attitude to make atonement for sin. In contrast to the Hellenistic dualism between the physical and 'spiritual', reflected in our assumptions in the era of modernity, the action of the body and the attitude of the heart were not to be separated.

[11] See the Hebrew parallelism in Jer. 18: 23: 'Do not forgive (*t^{e}kapēr*) their iniquity; do not blot out their sin...'

The requirement for sacrifices of atonement therefore tells us something fundamental about the character of Israel's God. We have noted Brueggemann's conclusion that there appears to be not just ambiguity, but a disjunction or even a contradiction in God's self-revelation in Exodus 34:6-7.[12] At the very least we have to say that there appears to be something of a tension between holy, covenant love on the one hand and his insistence in his holiness on the condemnation of sin. Our modern terminology tends to talk about a tension between God's love and God's 'justice' or 'righteousness,' but actually in the terminology of Israel, the idea of 'righteousness' (*sedaqa*) is not simply that of 'justice' in the modern sense, that is, of impartial weighing up of evidence and punishing those found to be guilty. It includes that idea of equity, but the Hebrew word *sedaq* which we translate 'righteousness' is closer in meaning to our word 'faithfulness.' It is God's faithfulness to his covenant people, his constancy and consistency and reliability, and may be best understood as his *restorative* justice rather than his *retributive* justice. The apparent tension therefore is not between his love and his righteousness, but between his love and his holiness in which he is separate not only from the profane, but even more from the sinful. That means that his holy love aims at restoration, but that, reluctantly, retribution cannot be ruled out.

Goldingay takes up Brueggemann's thought about the 'disjunction' in God, but expresses it more perceptively as 'Yahweh's Dilemma.' He suggests that the Hebrew Scriptures take up the same kind of ethical dilemmas that we find in Greek tragedy. The tension in God 'is overt when the First Testament refers to Yahweh having a change of mind... and when it explicitly talks of tension within Yahweh (see Hos. 11) or speaks of Yahweh's "alien" work (Is 28:21) or describes Yahweh as acting "not from the heart" (Lam 3:33).'[13] Goldingay adds: 'Awareness of such inevitable tension within the one God helps us understand the apparent volatility and unpredictability that features within God's character in the First Testament story.' The story is that of the Holy God, 'of purer eyes than to look on iniquity' (Hab. 1:13), who loves his good and noble creatures who are yet guilty, defiled and disgusting. All through the story of Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures, Israel is again and again and again guilty, deceptive, violent, idolatrous and corrupt. And in being so, it is only representative of the corporate sin of the whole human race. How could a passionately loving and holy God be filled with anything other than wrathful grief and deeply grieving wrath? Hosea's prophecy pictures this distraught, anguished husband, deeply wounded and hurt and angry at the persistent unfaithfulness of his spouse. On the Day of Atonement above all days, Israel was confronted with its own sin and with the burning purity of the holiness of their loving God.

So to summarize the revelation of Israel's God on the Day of Atonement: God's holiness speaks of his burning *purity*. Confronted then with the sinfulness of his creatures, we cannot say that there is a disjunction within God, but we can say with Goldingay that God is faced with a dilemma. It was the dilemma of the God of *compassion* and *steadfast love* who was also the *transcendent* God who cannot be other than *separate* from all that is evil.

5. Succoth (Tabernacles): The God of Pilgrimage

Finally, five days after the Day of Atonement, Israel celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. Temporary shelters made of 'branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm and other leafy trees' (Neh. 8:15) were constructed outside each house (or, in compact Jerusalem, on the roof), and the family lived in them

12. See above, 4
13. Goldingay (2003), 409

for seven days, culminating in an eighth festival day.[14] Coming after harvest, this was a joyous festival with (according to Sanders) something of a carnival atmosphere. Huge crowds of pilgrims, second only to Passover, came to Jerusalem and enormous crowds of worshippers gathered in the courts of the temple waving *lulavs*, branches of palm, willow or myrtle each with a citrus fruit attached. Priests carrying willow branches marched round the altar and the Hallel (the Songs of Ascents, Pss 120-134) was sung. According to John 7, the prophet Yeshua celebrated this festival in Jerusalem at least once.

The Feast of Tabernacles particularly reminded the Jewish people of the wilderness pilgrimage of their ancestors on their way to the promised land. By doing so, it pointed to a tension at the heart of the faith of Second Temple Judaism. They were back from the Babylonian captivity in the promised land, and the exile had at last achieved what had seemed so impossible through all the centuries of the judges and kings, namely that the Jewish people had at long last put away their idols and worshiped the Lord alone. But despite that, all the blessings of Deuteronomy and the promises of the prophets had not been fulfilled. There was a sense (as N.T. Wright has argued) in which they were still in exile, still on pilgrimage, and had not yet arrived.[15] The history of Israel had not yet reached a satisfying resolution. Most Jewish people saw themselves as living within an unfinished narrative and were expecting the intervention of their God to end 'this present evil age' and bring in 'the age to come,' the age of the kingdom, the age of the Spirit.

The feast of Tabernacles can be seen as pointing forward to the great hope of the coming of the Kingdom, and it was to that hope that the prophet Jesus spoke when he came into Galilee proclaiming, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news.'

What then did this feast add to Israel's faith in their Holy God? It challenged them to trust that he was indeed the *faithful* God, that he had not abandoned his covenant. It challenged them to see that while they were still in a sense on pilgrimage, God was the God of the End as well as the beginning. In his holiness, God would be *faithful* to his covenant people.

Summary: The Holy God of Israel

What then was the character of the God in whom Israel believed during the life-time of Jesus? They did not think of 'holiness' as some kind of abstract quality. It was not so much 'holiness' they thought of as *the Holy God*. What did it mean to say that God was 'holy'? That comprehensive word for the character of their God summed up the characteristics which had been revealed to them in their history. They were reminded of those characteristics when they celebrated the LORD in these five great festivals. Perhaps we can now put these characteristics in groups: I suggest two groups.

First, to say God was 'holy' was to say that he was *separate*, set apart, not common or profane and but 'of purer eyes than to look on iniquity' (Hab. 1:13). At Passover that was evident in the exodus story from the moment Moses encountered the LORD in the fire of the bush. At the Day of Atonement, it was to be seen in the structure of the tabernacle – the separation of the outer court from the camp, the separation of the Holy Place from the outer court, and the separation of the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. So the *separation* which is integral to holiness is a *separation from sin*. That implied the need for the expiation of sin if Israel was to be his covenant partner.

---

[14] For a study of *succoth* and the festivals in John's Gospel, see Mary Spaulding, *Commemorative Identities: Jewish Social Memory and the Johannine Feast of Booths*, London: T. & T. Clark (2009)

[15] See N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, London: SPCK, 1992, esp. 299-301

But it is more than that. It is also *separation from the created order.* This element of *separation* was given a cosmic dimension at *Rosh Hashana* (New Year), when, among other themes, there was the reminder that their LORD was not just the God of Israel but the Creator God of the ends of the earth. Their God was the universal LORD*, separate* in the ultimate and absolute sense that he was utterly transcendent and not to be identified with any part of Creation. Nor was creation to be regarded as part of him. *Separation in holiness* meant that he had created the world *ex nihilo*, a conclusion which was finally articulated in the Christian theology of Irenaeus.[16] Another way of speaking of this was to say that he was a *powerful* God, as revealed in his defeat of Pharaoh as the warrior king. But he was not merely *more* powerful than any other god or power. This God was not merely a superlative, but unique.

So the holiness of God means that he is separate from sin, but also that he is not to be confused with anything in the created order. He is utterly transcendent. There is a first group under the theme of *separation*.

But there is a second group of characteristics. To speak of the holy God of Israel was also to say that the LORD was *compassionate*. In grace, he sent Moses to rescue Israel from slavery in Egypt. That was also to say that he was *faithful*. He had entered into covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and he came to rescue their descendants from slavery in Egypt in fulfilment of his covenant. That faithfulness was to be further seen in making the covenant through Moses, and would be expressed in his faithful covenant love, his *hesed* or 'steadfast love.' *Compassion* and *faithfulness* therefore characterize the grace of the LORD, and these are all ways of speaking of the *love* of God. Among the metaphors of judge, warrior and king used in Exodus, all of which emphasize the first group of characteristics – *separation* and *power*, there was also the very rare and minor metaphor of 'father', portraying the LORD's *compassion* and his faithful *love* and *commitment* to his people. It was this very love for his creatures which resulted in the LORD's dilemma when his beloved creature rebelled!

This minor metaphor of 'father' leads us into the second major part of this lecture.

(B) THE HOLY FATHER OF JESUS

So far we have been concerned to think of the Holy God of Israel as worshipped in Second Temple Judaism in five of the great festivals. This is the God whom Jesus was brought up to worship. In Luke 2 we read of his first visit to the temple in Jerusalem and in the same chapter his visit to the temple at the age of 12 for the feast of Passover. It is clear from his teaching that his mind was immersed in the Hebrew Bible, particularly Deuteronomy and Psalms. But what is radically new in the teaching of Jesus is the way he took this rather minor Old Testament metaphor of 'father' and made it the key to our whole doctrine of God.[17]

It was Joachim Jeremias, a scholar of a generation ago, who drew attention to the significance of the Aramaic word 'Abba' in the New Testament. In the Greek text of Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15, this Aramaic word suddenly makes its appearance. In Mark's Gospel it is also sounded on the lips of Jesus in his prayer in the garden pleading for the cup to be taken from him (Mark 14:36). Jeremias characterized it

[16] *Adversus Haereses*, II, 10, 1-4.

[17] See Svetlana Khobnya, *The Father Who Redeems and the Son Who Obeys*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick< 2013, esp. 19-44, 'God the Father in Jewish Tradition.'

as the word a small child might use in addressing his father,[18] and that was interpreted in many subsequent sermons as implying that it could be translated 'papa' or 'daddy'. That subsequently brought a reaction from several scholars, denying this.[19] James Barr wrote: 'It was not a childish expression comparable with "Daddy": it was more a solemn, responsible adult address to a father.' But that is a minor adjustment to the substantial point Jeremias was making: that 'Abba' indicates the relationship of intimacy which Jesus knew with God. That is the major point to which the Gospels bear witness.

In Matthew and Luke, that is clearly claimed in the saying, 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son will reveal him' (Matt. 11: 27; cf. Lk 10:22). Here is a claim to a *reciprocal* and *exclusive* relationship between *equals*. While that is borne out in all three Synoptic Gospels, the relationship between the Father and Son becomes an explicit and major theme in the Gospel of John. Jesus in the only Son who is 'in the bosom of the Father' (1:18). The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands (3:35). The Son does what the Father does, and the Father gives the Son life in himself (5: 19, 26). Father and Son are one (10:15; 17:20). 'I am in the Father and the Father in me' (10:38 and 14:10). The Father is glorified in the Son (14:13). 'I love the Father '(15:9). 'Holy Father' (17:11). The Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father (17:20).

What does this mean then for our doctrine of the Holy God? How does this affect our understanding of holiness – what it means to say that God is holy? This is a major point which is going to determine our understanding of Christian sanctification, but long before we come to that, we must make sure we understand what it means for the doctrine of God.

At one level it is not new. The metaphor or model of God as 'father' is there in the Old Testament. As we noted, Moses was to tell Pharaoh, 'Israel is my first-born son' (Exod. 2:24). Hosea picked up the metaphor (11:1). It had particular application to the kings of the house of David who were given God's promise, 'I will be to him a father, and he will be to me a son' (II Sam. 7:14). But at another level this is completely new. Jesus takes this minor metaphor and he makes it central to the whole doctrine of God.

This was the implication drawn by the fathers of the Christian Church who formulated the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, particularly Athanasius as he faced the onslaught of those he called 'Arians'. In the middle of the third Christian century, the more extreme 'Neo-Arians', Eunomius and Aetius, were arguing against the deity of the Son, and they argued their case from the word 'only-begotten' (*monogenēs*). Their argument was that God was by definition 'without beginning' or Unoriginate (*agenētos*), and therefore since the Son had a beginning in that he was begotten of the Father, he could not be God. What Athanasius put his finger on was that the Arians were taking their doctrine of God from their doctrine of creation. Creation was by definition that which had a beginning: God was by definition the One who was without beginning. It was a definition of God which was determined by God's relation to the cosmos. They thought they knew who God was: he was by definition the Uncreated One who created the cosmos, the only One who was without beginning or origin. It was a cosmological definition of God, a definition of God taken from his relationship to the cosmos. Against that Athanasius argued that our doctrine of God should not be taken from his relationship to the cosmos: rather God had to be understood primarily from his relationship to the Son.

---

[18] Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, London: SCM, 1971, 67

[19] Geza Vermes, *Jesus and the World of Judaism*, Minneapolis: Fortress (1983), 42; James Barr, 'Abba Isn't Daddy,' *Journal of Theological Studies*, 29 (1988), 28-47.

He sums up his argument in this sentence: 'It would be more godly and true to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name God from his works alone and call him Unoriginate.'[20] T.F. Torrance brings out the significance of this: 'In this statement, Athanasius was reflecting the emphasis of the Council of Nicaea on the centrality of the Father/Son relation and its primacy over the Creator/creature relation. The latter is to be understood in the light of the former and not vice versa.'[21]

The point is that the revelation of God we have in Jesus Christ must be given priority over all previous revelation. And that has a particular significance for the holiness of God. From our examination of the doctrine of God celebrated by Israel in the five great festivals we noted two groups of characteristics which stand out from the narratives of the Hebrew Bible. The first group included *separation*, *power*, *purity* and *judgment*. The separation was first of all that between God and cosmos: *transcendence*. As the New-Arians rightly saw, God is without beginning, whereas creation has a beginning. But the separation was also between God and sinners – his rebellious, wicked creatures – and all evil. The second group of characteristics included *compassion*, covenant *faithfulness* or *steadfast love*, *commitment* to his people – all reflected in the metaphor of God as Israel's *father*. The two sets of characteristics are not in opposition: they are like two sides of a coin. What Jesus did was to make the latter group central and prior in our doctrine of God as the Holy Trinity.

Perhaps the substantial theological point may be put this way. The meaning of the Hebrew word 'holy' in the Old Testament is first of all connected with the notion of *separation*. As we saw, Milgrom indentified separation as the root meaning of the word. But while this must therefore be part of the definition of holiness and the notion of *separation* must be part of our understanding of the Holy God. It includes the *transcendence* of God over creation: but it is also God's *separation* from sin and his condemnation of evil. He is the God whose eyes are too pure to look upon iniquity. But is that a fully satisfactory understanding of the Holy God? Perhaps we may pose the question like this. Are we to think of God as *eternally* holy? The answer must surely be yes, and that leads to a second question: if holiness *only* consists of *separation*, how could God be holy before there were creatures, and particularly sinful creatures, to be separate from? In other words, holiness cannot consist merely in something negative. It may have negative implications, but it must primarily be something positive. God's holiness cannot be ultimately defined as his separation from his sinful creatures.

God's holiness – that is to say, God's essential character – must rather be understood as that eternal love which is shared in the mutual relationship of Father and Son within the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The peak of the New Testament revelation of the character of God surely comes in the categorical assertion of John: 'God is love' (I John 4:16). To speak of God's transcendence as the Uncreated One is to view him externally from our position as creatures. To speak of God as separate from sin is also to view him externally, this time from our position as sinners. But what Jesus does is to reveal to us the *heart* of God. Jesus gives us the revelation of God from *within* the Holy Trinity. Jesus is our 'point of access' (Rom. 5:2: Eph. 2:18, 3:12) into the inner life of the Holy Trinity. We do not discover anything there that contradicts what we learned from previous revelation. But what is revealed is infinitely more. We learned there that God is *like* a father to Israel, that he was a God of compassion, that he set his steadfast love on Israel. But what we learn now is that is not just an arbitrary or accidental characteristic of God. It is not just how the LORD appears from the outside: it is what God is eternally in very being – a community of love, seen in

[20] Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, I:34 (*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. IV, 326)*
[21] T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988, 49

the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. In his eternal being, God is loving relationship in such a way that the very 'Persons' of the Holy Trinity are *constituted* by loving relationship and *koinōnia*. One theologian who brought out this perspective was the Greek Orthodox thinker, John Zizioulas in his book, *Being as Communion*, in which argued that God's very being was not to be understood as some kind of abstract or impersonal substance, but as the very *koinōnia* of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God's very being is interpersonal love and relationship.[22]

That does not mean that we can dispense with the element of *separation* and *judgment*. That would be the mistake of the nineteenth-century liberalism of Ritschl. Holiness is not *reduced* to love. There is still need for *separation* and therefore for *atonement*. We shall look at that in the second lecture. But what it means is that *love* must be given priority in our doctrine of God. Grace must have priority over law. And that has immense implications when we come to extend our thinking from the doctrine of the Holy God to our understanding of *Christian sanctification*, that is, how we are called to reflect the holiness of God.

[22] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church,* Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's, 1985.