

## EXODUS 3 AND 4

<sup>1</sup>Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup>There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. <sup>3</sup>So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

<sup>4</sup>When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush,

"Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said,

"Here I am."

<sup>5</sup>"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

<sup>6</sup>Then he said,

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup>The LORD said,

"I have indeed **seen** the misery of my people in Egypt. I have **heard** them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am **concerned** about their suffering. <sup>8</sup>So I have **come down to rescue** them from the hand of the Egyptians and to **bring them up** out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. <sup>9</sup>And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have **seen** the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.

<sup>10</sup>So now, go. I am **sending** you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

<sup>11</sup>But Moses said to God,

**"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"**

<sup>12</sup>And God said,

"I will be with you. And this will be the **sign**<sup>1</sup> to you that it is I who have sent you.

When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

<sup>13</sup>Moses said to God,

"Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, '**What is his name?**' **Then what shall I tell them?**"

<sup>14</sup>God said to Moses,

"I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

<sup>15</sup>God also said to Moses,

"Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD,<sup>2</sup> the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.'

"This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.

<sup>16</sup>"Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have **watched** over you and have **seen** what has been done to you in Egypt. <sup>17</sup>And I have **promised** to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.'

<sup>18</sup>"The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.' <sup>19</sup>But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. <sup>20</sup>So I will stretch out my hand and strike the

<sup>1</sup> The "sign" here is not the worship – rather it is the sum of the demonstrations God is giving to Moses (burning bush, staff, leper etc...) – or simply God's promise: "I will be with you". Saner, 126

<sup>2</sup> יהוה \* This name (y-h-w-h; traditionally read Adonai "the Lord") is here associated with the verb hayah "to be."

Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

<sup>21</sup>“And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. <sup>22</sup>Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.”

<sup>4:1</sup>Moses answered,

“**What if they do not believe me** or listen to me and say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you’?”

<sup>2</sup>Then the LORD said to him,

“What is that in your hand?”

“A staff,” he replied.

<sup>3</sup>The LORD said,

“Throw it on the ground.”

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. <sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to him,

“Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.”

So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand.

<sup>5</sup>“This,” said the LORD, “is so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you.”

<sup>6</sup>Then the LORD said,

“Put your hand inside your cloak.”

So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, the skin was leprous <sup>a</sup>—it had become as white as snow.

<sup>7</sup>“Now put it back into your cloak,” he said.

So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.

<sup>8</sup>Then the LORD said,

“If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second. <sup>9</sup>But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.”

<sup>10</sup>Moses said to the LORD,

“Pardon your servant, Lord. **I have never been eloquent**, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

<sup>11</sup>The LORD said to him,

“Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? <sup>12</sup>Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

<sup>13</sup>But Moses said,

“Pardon your servant, Lord. **Please send someone else.**”

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses and he said,

“What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. <sup>15</sup>You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. <sup>16</sup>He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. <sup>17</sup>But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it.”

## 7 – MOSES. GOD THE RESCUER

Fr Luigi Gioia

1. Actions of Moses
  - 1.1. Curiosity (3:1-3)
  - 1.2. Responsiveness (3:4)
  - 1.3. Fear (3:6)
  - 1.4. Series of objections:
    - i. First objection: personal lack of authority in relation to Pharaoh (3:11)
    - ii. Second objection: difficulty to win the trust of the Israelites (3:13)
    - iii. Third objection: whether the Israelites will obey (4:1)
    - iv. Fourth objection: personal lack of eloquence (4:10)
  - 1.5. Final attempt to evade the call (4:13)
2. In the book of Genesis, when God has something to say to the patriarchs, God appears to them directly. Ex 3 marks the beginning of a new situation, in which God sends Moses and other prophets to communicate with the people of God and to accomplish certain tasks. Thus, the people may be asking under what name (either a new name or which among the names used in Genesis) can God be known as one who sends people.<sup>1</sup>
  - 2.1. Under what name—what understanding of the nature of God—the Israelites will be able to trust.
  - 2.2. For both Moses and for the Israelites, the sending of Moses marks a new act of God, one that will require new and substantial trust in YHWH.

### The Name of God

3. “And God said to Moses, “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh,” sent me to you.”
  - 3.1. Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh Meaning of Heb. uncertain; variously translated: “I Am That I Am”; “I Am Who I Am”; “I Will Be What I Will Be”
  - 3.2. Hebrew does not have past, present or future tense. The possible translations could be
    - i. “I was who I was” (past tense),
    - ii. “I will be who I will be” (future tense) or
    - iii. “I am who I am” (present tense).

### Interpretations

4. The Hebrew 'ehyeh 'aşer 'ehyeh is claimed to have less resonance with ‘being’ in an abstract sense than do the
  - 4.1. Septuagint’s eimi ho õn (“I am he who IS” or “I am BEING”) and the
  - 4.2. Vulgate’s ego sum qui sum.
5. Gerhard von Rad, who proposes a non-metaphysical reading:

Nothing is farther from what is envisaged ... than a definition of [God’s] nature in the sense of a philosophical statement about his being – a suggestion, for example, of his absoluteness, aseity, etc. Such a thing would be altogether out of keeping with the Old Testament. The whole narrative context leads right away to the expectation that Jahweh intends to impart something – but this is not what he is, but what he will show himself to be to Israel.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Saner 128

<sup>2</sup> <sup>4</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions*, vol. 1, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (London: SCM, 1966), p. 180.

6. Karl Barth

There is no objective definition that we can discover for ourselves. We might say of this revelation of His name that it consists in the refusal of a name, but even in the form of this substantial refusal it is still really revelation, communication and illumination. For Yahweh means the Lord, the I who gives Himself to be known in that He exists as the I of the Lord and therefore acts only as a He and can be called upon only as a Thou in His action, without making Himself known in His I-ness as if He were a creature.<sup>3</sup>

7. Jonathan Platter

God's self-designation, I AM WHO I AM, is given as a response to Moses' objections. Consequently, the significance and meaning of this name is related to the kind of objections Moses is raising.<sup>4</sup>

Moses is asking God for a name of power, by which he will perform the role to which God is calling him

Even if THE ONE WHO IS of the LXX is not the only legitimate translation of the Hebrew, it seems to be not only plausibly included in the semantic range of the original but also related to the request Moses is making. Moses asks for a name of power that validates his mission. [...] God announces just such a name, I AM WHO I AM – THE ONE WHO IS. The name signals a unique kind of power and presence. (302)

8. Ellicot

I AM THAT I AM.--It is generally assumed that this is given to Moses as the full name of God. But perhaps it is rather a deep and mysterious statement of His nature. "I am that which I am." [...]

I AM, assumed as a name, implies

(1) an existence different from all other existence. "I am, and there is none beside me" (Isaiah 45:6: "from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.");

(2) an existence out of time, with which time has nothing to do (John 8:58: "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!");

(3), an existence that is real, all other being shadowy;

(4) an independent and unconditioned existence, from which all other is derived, and on which it is dependent.

9. St Augustine<sup>5</sup>

9.1. God begins by giving him his 'name of esse'—'Ego sum qui sum'—for the following reason:

'That I abide for ever, that I cannot change'. Things which change are not, because they do not last. What is, abides. But whatever changes, was something and will be something; yet you cannot say it is, because it is changeable. So the unchangeableness of God was prepared to suggest itself by this phrase, I am who I am.

9.2. However, this 'name of esse' cannot be isolated from the second name God gives immediately afterwards, the 'name of compassion (misericordia)':

What does it mean then that later on he gave himself another name, where it says, And the Lord said to Moses, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob: this is my name for ever? How is it that there I am called this name that shows I am, and lo and behold here is another name: I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? It means that while God is indeed unchangeable, he has done everything out of mercy, and so the Son of God himself was prepared to take on changeable flesh and thereby to come to man's rescue while remaining what he is as the Word of God. Thus he who is, clothed himself with mortal flesh, so that it could truly be said, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance vol. 2/1 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), §61.

<sup>4</sup> Platter 300

<sup>5</sup> Sermon 6.

- 9.3. God's immutability becomes the background which reveals the real nature of his implication in history, in the becoming, in the realm of changeable realities (mutabilia).
- 9.4. Because God is by nature immutable, his involvement in changeable realities is an act of 'compassion' or 'condescension'. Because, as Augustine continues, the Son of God remains the Word of God while taking up mutable flesh, it is really God that comes to help humanity.
- 9.5. In other words, immutability—and its ontological corollaries of incorporeality and simplicity—becomes a synonym for God's freedom and a way of restating the truth that grace indeed is grace.

#### Significance in relation to Moses

- 10. Though at first Moses responds to the theophany in curiosity and reverence, as the narrative progresses, he is portrayed as one who, like the Israelites, has weakness of will that is to be overcome by a demonstration of power.
  - 10.1. Moses is in need of more than simply information in order to do what YHWH is calling him to do.
  - 10.2. Moses needs to understand who God is, which is described in terms of the divine name.
- 11. Moses' perspective is invited to shift from
  - 11.1. concern about a name to give the Israelites
  - 11.2. to attention toward the reality of the God who is sending him, who addresses Moses directly.<sup>6</sup>
- 12. We often miss most of the real meaning of the Bible because we are loath to credit God with a sense of humour – incidentally yet another of the consequences of our sense of the sacred. The reality is that he is much better at humour than most of us.
- 13. We do not take him seriously unless he manifests himself to us in the way our notion of deity deems that a god should behave: fire, lightning, thunder, smoke, threats, terror.
- 14. Here lies our contradiction:
  - 14.1. when God comes to us walking in the cool of the night, we hide from him, we dismiss him;
  - 14.2. when he manifests himself to us through a gentle breeze, we are unable to pay attention to him.
  - 14.3. But when, on the contrary, he frightens us with fire, thunder and smoke and manages to excite our ancestral sacred terror, then we start respecting him, bow down and declare allegiance to him.
  - 14.4. Since we want to play at this game, he can be quite good at it, as the whole book of Exodus amply demonstrates.
- 15. When, however, God meets someone like Moses, this appeal to sacred terror only is a kind of initial formality before reverting to the mode he longs for, that of a friendly, playful chat.
  - 15.1. Moses gets it. Trained at Pharaoh's court, he has no trouble with formalities and knows the proper reaction to any respectable sacred show; that is, to hide his face and exhibit the terror suitable for the circumstance.<sup>7</sup>
  - 15.2. But he must have quickly raised his head to engage in the extraordinary arm-wrestling with God that we find in this dialogue and that only becomes bolder and bolder in the many others that will follow:
    - i. first he plays the card of humility,
    - ii. then he asks God for his credentials,
    - iii. then he straightforwardly questions the sanity of God's plan,
    - iv. then again he fakes humility,
    - v. and when he has run out of tricks he simply tells God he is not interested and tries to walk away.
    - vi. One wonders where all the sacred terror had gone!
- 16. This, however, is no cheekiness or disrespect on Moses' part. It should be rather seen as the instant complicity between two persons who, although meeting for the first time, immediately understand each other.

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<sup>6</sup> Saner, 131.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 3.5.

- 16.1. Moses got God from the beginning. He was one of those extremely rare human beings capable of perceiving the real face of God, the face most of us had to wait until the coming of Jesus to discover.
- 16.2. He saw immediately that this was an exceedingly caring, compassionate and apprehensive father who had 'seen the misery of his people, heard them crying' and was not shy of sharing this anguish with him: 'I am concerned about their suffering.'<sup>8</sup>
17. We believe in a God capable of friendship, unable and unwilling to resist those who, like Moses, let him come close to them, understand him, trust and love him as he loves them.
18. In his dialogue with Moses, four times God mentions Abraham, Isaac and Jacob fondly.<sup>9</sup>
- 18.1. He so loved them, he bound himself to them to such a degree, that his friendship for them has become a badge of honour for him.
- 18.2. This friendship is the best way he has found to describe himself, to introduce himself to others: 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.'
- 18.3. 'if you want to know who I am, look at the way I have behaved with my friends'
19. When Moses asks God his name, the answer 'I am who I am' means: 'There is no short answer to this question. My name, that is my identity, is to be the "God of Abraham" just as I now want to be the God of Moses: I am and you are what we'll both become thanks to the bond we are establishing with each other now.'
- 19.1. Cf. God's rejoinder to Moses' attempts to wriggle out of God's call: 'I will be with you',<sup>10</sup>
- 19.2. 'I will help you to speak and will teach you what to say.'<sup>11</sup>
- 19.3. which means this: 'What matters is not what you have been until now, but what we become once we embark in this journey together.'
20. This also is the ultimate aim of God's intervention in history through Moses, the most eloquent expression of the freedom he wants to give to the people of Israel: bring them out of Egypt so that they can worship –
- 'And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.'<sup>12</sup>
- 20.1. As it will become clearer in the rest of the book of Exodus, worship is the prelude to Israel becoming the people of God, and God becoming the God of his people Israel.
21. Thus, the name "YHWH"
- 21.1. enables the Israelites to call upon their God,
- 21.2. but it does not offer a means by which they might control God.

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<sup>8</sup> Exodus 3.7.

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 3.6, 15, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 3.12.

<sup>11</sup> Exodus 4.12, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 3.12.