

Spirit alone who can guide us in this matter, who can teach us to know when the novel outlook and the fresh method are real and valid re-interpretations of old ways, who can give us that obedience to God and his church, the 'reasonable service' of which the liturgy speaks, which submits to the voice of God wherever and whenever heard and yet does not use such a submission as the excuse for a merely human passivity and inertness, a false passivity that can so easily become a substitute for active co-operation with the dynamic force of the will of God. We are at the parting of the ways, and there are movements and stirrings of life in the church to a degree unknown for centuries. That these great awakenings should not degenerate into a pre-occupation with means over ends, into an impoverishment rather than an enrichment, that is, in the last resort, to be decided by souls at prayer. If at the heart of all activity—both as individuals and as members of the church—the soul is learning of God in prayer, then there will ever be present those deeper insights which reflect the true light 'which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world'. 'Upon thy walls, Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; day and night they shall cease not to praise the name of God'; it is the contemplative in his watch-tower upon the walls of Jerusalem, the ramparts of Christ's church, who peers through the darkness without, watching and waiting for the coming of the Son of Man. Around him and about him, as the scripture tells us, 'the stars blaze in their endless eternities'.

Encounter with God in the Old Testament—II

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In a previous article¹ we considered the Old Testament theme of 'pilgrimage, encounter, communion' from its initial instance at Sinai to its later eschatological developments. At the root of this theme lies the idea of the *kabod*, the visible manifestation of Yahweh's holy presence

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to the people in the form of a numinous and fiery cloud. We have now to consider a second tradition which grows out of this initial conception of Yahweh's presence by his *kabod*, and which has also exercised a decisive influence on the development of Old Testament theology as a whole. It is the theology of the tent of meeting. We have seen that the essential characteristic of *kabod* theology is that the fiery cloud, the *kabod*, descends at certain sacred moments on a holy place chosen by Yahweh for his encounter with his people. At first this is Mount Sinai. But at Sinai itself Yahweh chooses to have a movable sanctuary made so that he can accompany the people. Instead of the people going up to him in the mountain, he will come down to them at the tent. The shrine which awaits his presence accompanies them wherever they go. It becomes the resting place of the pillar of fire and cloud. And there is a further significant difference. Yahweh appears now suddenly and unpredictably. Henceforward, instead of making pilgrimage to the place of encounter at regular intervals, the Israelites must hold themselves constantly in a state of preparedness, so that when the *kabod* descends it may find them ready to receive it—to bear the impact of the *numen*.

The prototype text for this 'tent of meeting' theology is Exod. 33. 7-11. 'Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp. When Moses went out to the tent the entire people arose and took their stand, each one at the entrance to his tent, and watched Moses until he entered the tent. And when Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the entrance of the tent and spoke with Moses. Now when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people arose and bowed down, each one at the entrance to his tent. But Yahweh spoke to Moses face to face, as a man is wont to speak to his friend'.

As at Sinai, the sacred place of encounter is set apart and separate from the profane sphere of everyday life, here represented by the camp. 'Encountering' Yahweh, though it no longer involves a pilgrimage to a distant mountain, still implies walking out of the 'this-worldly' sphere into the sphere of the holy, because holiness of its very nature imports separation from the mundane. Here however, the Holy One has made himself available to Israel in a new and startling sense. Each individual Israelite can now approach the tent of meeting and seek guidance from Yahweh there whenever he has need. And when Moses approaches, the *kabod* descends to meet him there on each separate occasion and speaks to him 'face to face as a man is wont to speak to his friend'. Moreover it is clear that a somewhat different aspect of Yahweh's

numinous presence is here being emphasised. He appears not primarily as a God of fire, but as a God of light, an enlightener. And again the unique intimacy of Yahweh with Moses is revealed in the circumstance that his own face becomes infected and charged with this numinous light as a result of his initial encounter with Yahweh (Exod. 34. 29ff.); so intimately and so palpably has he been drawn into the sphere of Yahweh's holiness.

The 'fire' aspect has not, however, been lost in this theology of the tent of meeting. In moments of crisis and defection, and above all when Moses' own authority is being challenged or his person endangered, the *kabod* descends on the tent and at such moments, to borrow Isaiah's words, 'the light of Israel becomes a fire and her Holy One a flame' (Is. 10. 17). ' . . . Then the whole assembly proposed to stone them with stones, but the *kabod* of Yahweh appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel' (Nb. 14. 10; cf. 16. 19, etc.). Fire comes forth from the presence and devours the two hundred and fifty men who have rebelliously offered incense in the schism of Korah, and it is the numinous fire of the *kabod* (cf. Nb. 16. 19, 35). And afterwards the son of Aaron is ordered to take up their censers and make them into beaten plates for the altar because, sinfully as they have been used, they have been brought into the presence of Yahweh and are charged with his radiant and fiery holiness. 'For they offered them before Yahweh and they are holy' (Nb. 17. 3). Through sin the sheltering and atoning effects of the covenant are lost, and the holiness that has attached itself so sublimely and so dangerously to Israel leaps out instantly as a devouring flame upon the sinners and destroys them from the sanctuary of the tent.

A further stage in the development of *kabod* theology is represented by the so-called 'Priestly' tradition, the latest of the four great tradition-strata of which the first five books of the Old Testament are composed. Here the tent of meeting becomes identified with what was originally a quite different kind of tent, namely the *mishkan* or dwelling. This was not an oracle tent, but rather the panoply of the ark. It was pitched not outside the camp but at its centre. As the shelter of the ark it had a different theological meaning, and a different tradition of Yahweh's presence had grown up about it. Now, as a result of combining these two objects, and a corresponding fusion of the two distinct traditions associated with them, the meaning of both becomes radically modified. The tent of meeting still retains its character as a place where Yahweh encounters the people. But it also becomes the shelter of the ark. And

it now occupies the centre of the camp, with the result that the camp itself becomes the sphere of numinous holiness. The ark, too, acquires a new theological meaning. In the rival school of the Deuteronomists, with their quite different 'Name and word' theology, the supreme significance of the ark was that it contained the tablets on which Yahweh's holy words had been written. It was a sacred container of the word. But in the Priestly tradition it is not primarily a container but a throne. For the exponents of this tradition the most sacred part of the ark is not its interior, but the *kapporet* ('propitiatory' or 'mercy-seat' in the versions), the flat platform with which it is surmounted. This is the empty throne of Yahweh, waiting for his divine *kabod* to descend upon it. Here then the tent of meeting becomes not merely the oracle tent, but the throne-room of Yahweh. Henceforward the presence of Yahweh becomes more continuous. 'The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the *kabod* filled the dwelling (*mishkan*)'. (Exod. 40. 34). In the verses which follow this passage it is evident that the *kabod* remains in occupation of the shrine for long intervals, and not, as in the primitive 'tent of meeting' theology, merely for moments of crisis.

The significance of this is reflected in the priestly conception of the Israelite camp. In the Deuteronomist tradition the camp is essentially a war camp in which the Israelites as Yahweh's chosen warriors sanctify themselves for the holy war. But the camp of the Priestly tradition is not a war camp at all. It is the sphere of Yahweh's numinous presence within which his priestly people live, reproducing and manifesting in their human activities the divine glory of the God who dwells in their midst. Israel is here a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exod. 19. 6), chosen out of the profane world, purged from its contaminating influences, ordered into a sacred and sacerdotal community and ranged in a carefully organised hierarchy round the central shrine. From the tabernacle of the *kabod* holiness radiates out, steeping and consecrating the entire community which stands within its sphere, the Aaronites most of all, for these are in immediate contact with the shrine itself and with its sacred cult-objects, but the rest of Israel too in varying degrees. Since the whole life of the people is now passed within this holy sphere, a state of ritual purity which in earlier traditions was enforced only on exceptional occasions of 'encounter' and for brief periods, must now be maintained *continuously*. Hence the elaborate rules of purity in Lev. 11-16, which cover every form of human activity and which are designed to purge away every sort of contamination from the Israelites themselves and from their camp. Similarly all food is sacrificial food

and every meal is a communion meal. Thus we find laws prescribing that all animals slaughtered for food, no matter where they are killed, must be brought to the entrance of the tabernacle and there offered as victims of sacrifice (Lev. 17. 3-4, 8-9). The simple communion meal of the primitive Sinai tradition is elaborated into a whole system of sacrifices covering every aspect of the relationship between Yahweh and his people. Praise, thanksgiving, supplication, the fulfilment of vows, and especially the expiation of sin—each of these acts of Israelite worship has its own distinctive form of sacrifice. But the holocaust, the whole burned offering, is the most direct expression of sheer worship, the supremely appropriate response to a God who has manifested himself in fire. For the expression of worship corresponds exactly to the initial form of the divine self-revelation. In Deuteronomist 'Name and word' theology Yahweh manifests himself in auditional terms, by imparting to Israel his holy voice, his Name and his words. She worships him by honouring his Name and 'hearkening to his words'—his 'commandments and statutes and precepts' in the stereotyped Deuteronomist phrase. But in the Priestly tradition with which we are here concerned, Yahweh's self-revelation is not auditional but visual. Israel knows him as a God of fire and light. And the 'all-embracing response' of her worship is conditioned by this fact. Smoke arises as a sweet savour from victims consumed by fire before this God of fire. Rich vestments and precious stones and metals flash brilliantly on the ministering priests, in response to the light of the *kabod*. And, as a recent author has noticed, the form of the cult in this tradition is almost startlingly inarticulate. Yahweh is worshipped almost in silence, by ritual actions rather than by words. Almost the only sound to be heard is the tinkling of the little bells on the High Priest's robe, to remind him of the danger in which he stands when he enters into the inner presence of the *numen*. (Exod. 28. 35).

It will be seen that this idealised vision of the community of Israel grouped hierarchically round the shrine of Yahweh's presence is dominated by a sense of radiance and convergence. Holiness radiates outwards to the people from the shrine; worship embracing every form of human activity ceaselessly converges upon it from the people. Within the sacred sphere the whole of human life is consecrated and liturgical. Israel's whole meaning and destiny is to reflect and to reproduce the glory of her God who dwells in her midst. As the Priestly tradition develops, this sense of radiance and convergence, the outward and inward movements of revelation and response, are extended to the

wider context of history and of creation itself. In the inspired vision of the Priestly writers all creaturehood is ranged in a series of concentric rings round the shrine of the God of Israel in the midst of his people. The cosmos and all that it contains exists for the purpose of reproducing and manifesting in visual terms the glory of Yahweh. The innermost ring is constituted by the tribe of Levi; the Levites are grouped immediately about the shrine with the Aaronites in the place of honour on the east side, facing the entrance to the tabernacle. (Nb. 3). These are bound to Yahweh most intimately by the 'covenant of salt' (Nb. 18. 19). The rest of the tribes constitute an outer ring, with Judah in the place of honour on the east (Nb. 2). Working outwards from the central shrine into the broader context of history, the descendants of Abraham, united in the covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17), comprise a third concentric ring, which includes the descendants of Ishmael (Gen. 25. 12-18), Keturah (Gen. 25. 1-6), and Abraham's concubines. Here the descendants of Isaac are clearly in the place of honour, corresponding to that of the Judahites and the Aaronites in the inner rings. 'I will establish my covenant with Isaac' (Gen. 17. 21). Vaster still in scope is a fourth ring, consisting of all the creatures which survived the flood. Here Noah and his sons clearly occupy the place of honour and the so-called 'Noachic covenant', though it includes all living creatures, is established with them. 'Then God said to Noah and his sons with him: And I, see, I establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living soul that is with you: with bird and beast and every earthly creature that is with you, from all that comes out of the ark to every earthly creature'. (Gen. 9. 8-10). Finally creation itself constitutes the widest ring of all, with Adam, the image of God in the place of honour. (Gen. 1). Thus all creaturehood is ranged in successive circles round the shrine of the *kabod*, the fiery and glorious presence of the covenant God. Aaronites, Israelites, Abrahamites, Noachites, Adamites all converge in space and time on this shrine. This is the Priestly *Weltanschauung*.

At this point we may notice the elements in the Priestly idea of covenant, for it is by successive covenants that the hierarchical circles are established. In this tradition alone the phrase to 'establish' a covenant is used. It designates each covenant as a free act of God by which he separates off some sphere of creaturehood to himself, orders it according to his will, and fills it with his holiness. In this tradition each successive covenant is a creative act, an irrevocable stage in the vast creative process which leads up to the establishment of the ideal theocratic

community of Israel. As this creative process unfolds, successive layers of sinfulness and profanity are purged away: the chaos in the creation, the corrupt sinners at the flood, the idolatrous peoples by whom Abraham is surrounded, and from whom he springs, in the Abrahamite covenant, the Egyptians at Sinai. In each case the 'two-sphere' mentality predominates—that is, the sense of dichotomy between the profane and the holy which dominates the whole vision at all of its levels. An element of the created order is divided off, chosen and so rendered holy and separate to Yahweh. In each covenant a law is given, or an order is imparted to the chosen group: the hierarchical order or creation in the creation narrative, the order to abstain from blood in the Noachic covenant, the order to circumcise in the Abrahamite one, the whole range of legal prescriptions for Israel as a whole, and the special 'priestly torah' for the Levites at Sinai. In each covenant we find a sign: the sun, moon and stars at the creation, the rainbow in the Noachic covenant, the sign of circumcision for the Abrahamites, the Sabbath ('For it is a sign between me and you' Exod. 31. 13) for the Judahites, salt for the priests. In each covenant a blessing of fruitfulness is imparted, except in the case of the priests who share in the general blessing upon all Israel. Finally in each covenant Yahweh prescribes some special covenant food for those whom he has separated to himself: the green herb at the creation, the flesh without the blood in the Noachic covenant, the fruits of the land of Canaan for the Abrahamites, the clean beasts for the Israelites, and the special 'anointing portion of the wave-breast and the heave-thigh' (Exod. 7. 34, etc.) for the Aaronites. It should be emphasised that the Aaronite covenant merges with and indeed contains the Israelite one. There is no mention of a distinct covenant with Israel apart from it. Nevertheless there is some distinction in the covenant elements, as we have seen.

At this point we may pause to consider the fulfilment of this specifically priestly vision in the coming of Christ. Here I shall only briefly indicate points which I hope to develop more fully in a later article. The earliest formulation of *kabod* theology was articulated in terms of 'pilgrimage, encounter, communion'. It is easy to see how these motifs become the very structure of the fulfilment in Christ. Christ, the 'effulgence of God's glory' (*kabod*) (cf. Heb. 1. 3) is 'lifted up' (Jn. 12. 32) on Mount Zion and so 'draws all men to himself'. It is precisely at the moment when certain Gentiles, come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, ask to see Jesus, that he proclaims: 'The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified' (Jn. 12. 24). This then is the fulfilment of the theme

of the Gentile pilgrimage to the banquet on the world mountain, the eschatological development of 'pilgrimage, encounter, communion' which we noticed in the previous article. Jesus, the incarnation of the divine glory, the *kabod*, summons us and draws us to the communion with God, and we, the Gentiles, encounter God on Mount Zion as our Father. The gift we bear into his presence is his own Son, and the presence of the Son in us draws down upon us the loving and protecting Fatherhood of this God of numinous fire. The vision of the tent of meeting, the oracle shrine of the *kabod*, is no less clearly fulfilled in Christ. Descending from heaven he pitched his tent (*eskenosen*) amongst us, so that we saw his glory (*kabod*), the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. In this important sense the gospel is nothing less than the last supreme oracle proclaimed from the tent of meeting which is Christ's own human nature. Finally let us notice how the priestly vision of the world ranged in concentric circles which converge in space and time upon the central shrine of the *kabod*, is also fulfilled in Christ. In Christ too, the whole world and all its ages converge upon the incarnate glory in worship. From his human nature, the shrine of that glory, holiness radiates outwards to the uttermost parts of the earth. And the new and eternal covenant which binds all men to Christ fulfils and reproduces the successive covenants of the priestly vision point for point. Covenant separation here means dying to the world in baptism and living to Christ; the covenant sign becomes the seal of the Spirit upon us; the covenant order becomes the perfect law of liberty, the love of Christ which makes us keep his commandments; the blessing becomes a blessing of eternal life; the covenant food becomes his own flesh and blood.