

GOD AS ÜBER-KING OF MORAL LEADING: VEILED AND UNVEILED

PAUL K. MOSER*

Loyola University Chicago

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord your God, who teaches you for your own good, who leads you in the way you should go.
— Isaiah 48:17

ABSTRACT. How can the Biblical God be the Lord and King who, being typically unseen and even self-veiled at times, authoritatively leads people for divine purposes? This article's main thesis is that the answer is in divine moral leading via human moral experience of God (of a kind to be clarified). The Hebrew Bible speaks of God as 'king,' including for a time prior to the Jewish human monarchy. Ancient Judaism, as Martin Buber has observed, acknowledged direct and indirect forms of divine rule and thus of theocracy. This article explores the importance of divine rule as divine direct *leading*, particularly in moral matters, without reliance on indirect theocracy supervised by humans. It thus considers a role for God as Über-King superior to any human king, maintaining a direct moral theocracy without a need for indirect theocracy. The divine goal, in this perspective, is a universal commonwealth in righteousness, while allowing for variation in political structure. The article identifies the importance in the Hebrew Bible of letting God be God as an Über-King who, although self-veiled at times, leads willing people directly and thereby rules over them uncoercively. It also clarifies a purpose for divine self-veiling neglected by Buber and many others, and it offers a morally sensitive test for unveiled authenticity in divine moral leading.

KEY WORDS: Divine hiding, Divine kingship, Divine leading, Divine ruler, Moral leading

God as Ruler

A recurring and defining theme for ancient Judaism is that God *rules*, even prior to the establishment of the Jewish monarchy with King Saul. An early sign of this

*PAUL K. MOSER (PhD 1982, Vanderbilt University) is Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University Chicago. Email: pmoser@luc.edu

ruling arises with Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon): “Then the Israelites said to Gideon, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also; for you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian.” Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over [אֱמֹסֶל; *’emšōl*] you” (Judges 8:22–23, NRSV here and in subsequent Biblical translations). A similar announcement of God reigning as king comes from ‘the Song of Moses’ before the monarchy: ‘The Lord will reign [יִמְלֹךְ; *yimlōk*] forever and ever’ (Exodus 15:18). This announcement involves kingly rule for God, of a kind to be clarified.

The story of Samuel, like the story of Gideon, assumes divine kingship prior to the Jewish monarchy: ‘The Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king [מִמְלֹךְ; *mimməlōk*] over them”’ (1 Samuel 8:7). Similarly, having arranged for Saul to be King over Israel, Samuel remarks: ‘When you saw that King Nahash of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ though the Lord your God was your king [מַלְכֶּם; *malkəkem*’ (1 Samuel 12:12; cf. Dead Sea Scrolls 4Q51 Samuel A). Samuel, of course, has in mind a time before the installment of Saul as king.

The previous passages assume that God is ruler-king over the Israelites, despite the absence of a human king in Israel. They thus assume that divine kingship can be direct in not depending on human kingship. They allow for a direct kingly role for God, without reliance on human royal authority of the kind found in many theocracies supervised by humans. Divine kingship in ancient Israel, like divine lordship there, includes God as ruler, sometimes without human supervision. Ancient Israel combines divine lordship and kingship in one God, with or without a subsidiary human king. So, divine kingship for ancient Israel can proceed without a human monarchy. This is important because it allows Israel’s God to be more than a national God, to be a kingly God even in the absence of human kingship. A theocracy with human monarchy is not required by or for this God. We shall explore some important but widely neglected normative consequences of this consideration.

Martin Buber, following H.J. Kraus, has summed up the role of God as ruler in ancient Israel as follows: “‘Israel’—this means “May God manifest Himself as Lord, Ruler!” This is what it comes to: the realization of the all-embracing rulership of God is the Proton and Eschaton of Israel’ (Buber 1967: 58). This may seem vague, but Buber clarifies his perspective. He remarks:

YHWH is indeed a *melek*, but He transcends the nature of a Semitic *malk*-god so intrinsically that a formula must be avoided which could threaten to want to restrict Him to it.... That which I regard ... as the central [idea] among the ancient religious ideas of Israel is something which emerges from early texts; it can be expressed in the

words: *YHWH leads us...* YHWH [is] revered and trusted as *the God who leads the community...* This divine Lord ... leads his own Himself, directly, as a sheik leads his wandering tribe (Buber 1967: 22–23).

We need to clarify the relevant idea of divine ruling as direct *leading* if we are to understand divine kingship. Our clarification will include a contrast with Alfred North Whitehead's following characterization of ancient Jewish monotheism: 'The early, naive trend of Semitic monotheism, Jewish and Mahometan, is towards the notion of Law imposed by the fiat of the One God.' We shall identify an alternative to Whitehead's suggestion of 'Law imposed.' The relevant divine leading, we shall see, takes a different, uncoercive form neglected by Whitehead and many others.

Leading toward Righteousness

The God of ancient Israel manifests and promotes a distinctive kind of righteousness, including morally impeccable goodness, aimed at human salvation that transcends national boundaries. This righteousness includes steadfast love, faithfulness, and justice based on such goodness, including in interpersonal relationships. Many of the Hebrew Psalms give a central place to this righteousness. For instance:

The Lord is king! Let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!
Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness [צֶדֶק; *ṣēdeq*] and justice are the foundation of his throne....

For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth;
you are exalted far above all gods. (Psalm 97:1–2, 9)

Psalm 89 straightforwardly endorses God's kingly righteousness:

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.
Happy are the people who know the festal shout,
who walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance;
they exult in your name all day long,
and extol your righteousness. (Psalm 89:14–16)

This God of righteousness, according to Jeremiah, will raise up a human king devoted to divine righteousness and thereby to the salvation of God's people: 'The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved [תִּישָׁע; *tiwwāša'*] and Israel will live in safe-

ty. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:5–6; cf. Jeremiah 9:23–24).

Divine righteousness, according to Jeremiah, will result in Judah’s being ‘saved.’ A similar theme arises in the book of Isaiah:

I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe [עָרָא; *rāʿ*];
I the Lord do all these things.
Shower, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness;
let the earth open, that salvation [יְשׁוּעָה; *yešaʿ*] may spring up,
and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also;
I the Lord have created it. (Isaiah 45:6–8; cf. Isaiah 59:15–17)

God creates conflict (not to be identified with evil) for the sake of bringing righteousness to people, according to the book of Isaiah, and that righteousness is joined with salvation by God. Psalm 74 draws an explicit connection between divine kingship and salvation for people: ‘God my King is from of old, working salvation in the earth’ (Psalm 74:12). Ancient Judaism thus relates divine kingship to divine and human righteousness and thereby to human salvation by God. The nature of that relation calls for clarification.

One feature is clear: The God of ancient Israel functions as an Über-King and an Über-God: a King over all other kings, and a God over all other gods (Psalm 82). This ‘over-relation’ is presented as one of rightful authority, with the God of Israel as the worthy top authority over all other kings and gods. After announcing that ‘the Lord is King,’ as cited above, Psalm 97 states: ‘For you, O Lord, are most high [עָלִיּוֹן; *ʿelyōn*] over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods’ (Psalm 97:9). Psalm 82, as noted, makes all other gods in the pantheon subsidiary to the ‘Most High’ God of Israel: ‘I say, “You are gods, children of the Most High [עֲלֵי־יְיָ], all of you”’ (Psalm 82:6). Israel’s righteous God is thus the Über-God and therefore an Über-King over all other powers, in heaven and on earth. (For the bearing of Israel’s notion of the ‘Most High’ God on Jewish monotheism, in connection with El and related divine figures, see Smith (2001: 47–53); cf. Mettinger (1988: 95, 122). On the role of Psalm 82 as defining God in terms of righteousness, see Moberly (2020: 93–123).) A pressing issue concerns the nature of the superior power characteristic of Israel’s ‘Most High’ God and King. The struggle in ancient Israel to identify and represent that power includes a conflict over who God really is, in contrast with lesser or false

gods. That conflict has not disappeared in subsequent theology, particularly when issues of divine righteousness arise.

The authors of Deuteronomy assign universal authority to their 'Most High' God. For instance: 'When the Most High apportioned the nations, when he divided humankind, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the gods; the Lord's own portion was his people, Jacob his allotted share' (Deuteronomy 32:8–9). Israel, in this perspective, has a special relation to the 'Most High' God, but it is not an exclusive relation against other groups and nations. (For discussion, see Mikva (2020: 103–19). This God works across national boundaries to promote divine righteousness and salvation (see, e.g., Isaiah 25:6–8, Amos 9:11–12, Micah 7:16–17), even given a special redemptive purpose for Israel. We need to explain how the transnational divine work proceeds.

Direct Divine Leading and Hiding

Divine leading in ancient Israel attracted various, sometimes conflicting responses and interpretations. Commenting on YHWH as 'the One-who-goes-on-before,' Buber has identified some relevant variations: 'The leading of the One-who-goes-on-before remained so much the central idea of Israelitish faith that the wilderness-wandering reported by the narrator as the punishment of an entire generation of people and also remembered as such in song (Psalm 95:10ff.), appeared to many singers and story-tellers as an abundant mercy [cf. Psalm 136:13–16, Jeremiah 2:6]' (Buber 1967: 102). In Buber's reading, 'YHWH is the One who is with them, the One who remains present to them, thus the One who comes-along with them (Exodus 13:21, Numbers 14:14, Deuteronomy 1:30, 33), the Leader, the *me-lek*' (Buber 1967: 104; Buber approved the English translation of the body of his book.) On this basis, Buber acknowledges the divine view that 'you do not need to conjure me, but you cannot conjure me either'; he thus endorses the 'de-magicizing' of faith in this God (Buber 1967: 106).

Buber's perspective on the kingship of God correctly points to a central role for divine leading, but the divine role in ancient Israel is more complicated than he suggests. God's 'remaining present' to the people in ancient Israel is not as continuous or constant as Buber suggests. The recurring themes in the Hebrew Bible of divine self-hiding, or self-veiling, and of the human need to seek God confirm the complexity of the matter. The theme of divine self-hiding (of God's presence) arises explicitly in the Hebrew Bible, on various occasions. For instance: 'Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior' (Isaiah 45:15). In keeping with this theme, the psalmist asks God: 'Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?' (Psalm 44:24). Such remarks assume that God does not 'remain present' to the awareness of the people of Israel. Indeed, they assume that God ac-

tively self-hides from people on occasion. (For evidence, see McEntire (2013) and Terrien (1978). Buber (1952: 205–206) takes exception to talk of God as ‘hidden.’ We will use ‘self-veiling’ synonymously with ‘self-hiding.’)

The theme of a human need to seek God fits with the theme of divine self-hiding. A clear example comes from Jeremiah: ‘When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord’ (Jeremiah 29:13–14). A second clear example arises in Deuteronomy: ‘From there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul’ (Deuteronomy 4:29). There would be no need for searching after God if God ‘remained present’ to the (awareness of the) people of Israel. According to many reports from the Hebrew Bible, God is often elusive and calls for human searching after God. Buber’s account of divine kingly leadership neglects this important consideration. We need an approach to divine kingship and leading that corrects this neglect.

According to the Hebrew Bible, God worked among, and was present to, people outside ancient Israel for various divine purposes, even if the people of Israel were unaware of this at the time. Cyrus the Great of Persia serves as an example of such divine work, in second Isaiah:

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus,
whose right hand I have grasped
to subdue nations before him
and strip kings of their robes,
to open doors before him—
and the gates shall not be closed:
I will go before you
and level the mountains,
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut through the bars of iron. (Isaiah 45:1–2; cf. Isaiah 41:2–25, 42:6)

On a more positive note, we find: ‘In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: “Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah” (2 Chronicles 36:22–23). So, according to the Hebrew Bible, ancient Israel was not the only recipient of divine leading. In ad-

dition, such leading occurred even when it was not recognized to be divine by those who were led (Isaiah 42:16).

We might expect the divine leading of humans toward a righteous community to rely on a recognized human authority, such as an explicit political theocracy, to promote God's ways. The story of ancient Israel, however, is more complicated. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 3d ed., offers the following on 'theocracy': 'A form of government in which God (or a deity) is recognized as the king or immediate ruler, and his laws are taken as the statute-book of the kingdom, these laws being usually administered by a priestly order as his ministers and agents; hence (loosely) a system of government by a sacerdotal order, claiming a divine commission; also, a state so governed: esp. applied to the commonwealth of Israel from the exodus to the election of Saul as king.' Saul's kingship did represent a recognized political theocracy, but the role of divine kingship in ancient Israel was not always so explicit.

Buber has rightly noted how theocracy can be externally minimalist in ancient Israel: 'There is in pre-kingly Israel no externality of rulership; for there is no political sphere except the theopolitical, and all sons of Israel are directly related to YHWH, who chooses and rejects, gives an order and withdraws it' (Buber 1967: 136). Buber observes how this God typically allows for freedom in human responses to divine challenges and expectations, despite a divine desire for a righteous community. Divine coercion is not the main motivator in divine leadership. The 'direct' theocracy noted by Buber proceeds without a royal political system, let alone a coercive system, of human rulers, despite the guiding role of priests and prophets. Only God is king as ruler for Israel prior to Saul, and when a human king is introduced later, God remains as Über-King, to whom all people, even approved political leaders, are accountable.

Divine leadership without an explicit public structure has its turbulence and frustration for humans, particularly for group decision-making and action. A person can lack direct evidence of the divine leading had by another person or a group of persons, with no recourse to a publicly shared standard for a resolution. In addition, the divine intervention in a human life for the sake of moral leading would not need human preparation or permission. It could come as a surprise and start a new, deeper variation on righteousness. Such change can be socially disruptive, as the history of ancient Israel illustrates. We need to acknowledge this prospect of creating social turbulence by the Über-God of Israel for the sake of rightening, or rectifying, wayward human relationships toward righteousness.

Divine Moral Leading Tested

The God of ancient Israel is a God of redemptive surprises: that is, surprises intended to lead people (deeper) into a faithful and righteous relationship with God and others. Two of many obvious cases include the laughable promise of a child to

the aged Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:10–15) and the divine challenge to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:1–18). At a minimum, the God of ancient Israel exceeds the expectations of humans, whether they are inside or outside Israel. Redemptive surprise is often the result.

It would be a mistake to infer that the God of ancient Israel is *altogether* ineffable, incomprehensible, or inscrutable. Some definite attributions do apply, and *must* apply, to a God worthy of trust and worship: concerning righteousness, faithfulness, mercy, and so on. We should expect divine righteousness, however, to be deeper, more profound, than ours and thus to go beyond our specific expectations for God at times. Divine redemptive surprise, then, would be a live option for humans relative to God. Some interpreters, perhaps including Jesus, would cite the role of an approved messiah from God who suffers and dies to attract people to God. This would exceed ordinary human expectations, inside or outside Israel. (For discussion, see Moser (2021).)

A direct theocracy uncontrolled by humans allows for divine redemptive surprise. It allows for God to be an Über-King who rightly has and exercises authority over any human group of leaders, including kings and priests. In that case, human leaders are limited or subsidiary in their authority in a way that leaves room for God and a deeper divine righteousness, even with surprises. Contrary to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous *Fear and Trembling*, we should not expect God to suspend or to transcend morality or righteousness, unless we are willing to end up with God as demonic, as Buber (1952: 113–20) has rightly observed. Instead, we should expect divine righteousness to be shown to be more profound than we humans initially expected and to try to take us deeper into such righteousness, for the sake of the common good. A group of human political authorities who block this option, even while claiming to uphold a theocracy, would be antithetical to the movement of divine redemption in righteousness.

A theocracy with human supervision that represents God should be avowedly incomplete, and thus open to revision in the (subsidiary and fallible) authority assigned to its human leaders. It should acknowledge divine corrective authority over any human representatives and traditions, thus allowing for moral deepening prompted by new manifestations of divine righteousness. Human 'infallibility,' whether in a group or in an individual, would not fit with this approach to a righteous Über-God. Such alleged human infallibility would wrongfully tread on the authority that belongs only to the kingly Über-God (cf. Isa. 44:6–8).

The approach to divine kingship on offer safeguards what many interpreters call the 'mystery' of a perfectly good God. Terence Fretheim has remarked: 'Both God and Moses recognize that God is not demystified through further understanding. In

fact, the more one understands God, the more mysterious God becomes. God is the supreme exemplification of the old adage: 'The more you know, the more you know you don't know' (Fretheim (1991: 62–63); see also Moberly (2020: 78–79)).

RWL Moberly (2020: 79) adds that 'the recognition of God as a mystery aligns well with the bush that burns without being destroyed, the bush whose unconsuming fire is alive and not on a trajectory towards death.' (Moberly finds the same kind of mystery suggested by the use of 'YHWH' in the Hebrew scriptures.) Such openness to a righteous Über-God who exceeds our full understanding and expectation can save humans from abuse by a human system of political authority.

We should expect God to self-hide divine presence at times to take people to a new depth of seriousness about righteousness, given their experience of divine absence. We do not need to have (nor do we have) a full theodicy of explaining God's ways to appreciate this lesson. (For the kind of theodicy we might expect, see Moser (2022).) Divine reasons for self-hiding at a time can, and often do, elude us, just as such reasons for allowing evil can and often do. We should expect this of a transcendent God who works with relatively limited humans for the sake of righteousness that exceeds their expectations.

The God of ancient Israel refuses to be reduced to the solution of a merely intellectual problem for humans. Jeremiah indicates the moral robustness required for knowing (and thereby testing for) this righteous God who seeks to rule uncoercively but also to self-hide when needed:

Are you a king
because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well.
Is not this to know me?
says the Lord. (Jeremiah 22:15–16)

This God thus aims to lead people to the doing of righteousness, beyond mere thinking and arguing about God and righteousness. (For relevant discussion, see Heschel (1962: 195–220). Indeed, opting out of the doing of righteousness can result in God's withdrawing from one's awareness, including conscience and related moral experience, until an opportune time when one is prepared to cooperate in action. (On the role of conscience and moral experience in evidence for divine reality, see

Moser (2020); cf. Forsyth (1913).) Human reflection is thus not the final goal for this God who seeks to lead humans in righteous action.

Willing human participation in divine righteousness is central to knowing God aright, beyond mere knowledge that God exists. Jeremiah had in mind participatory knowing of God, including willingly sharing in God's righteousness, of the kind that can deliver human redemption by God. It goes beyond a mere intellectual response to evidence of God, to human volitional cooperation with that evidence. It thus can reorient a life toward sharing in God's distinctive moral life, including in enemy-love. The relevant evidence of God, then, is not limited to intellectual factors, such as arguments. It includes experiential features that represent God's moral character and will, and those features can have motivational power for a willing person. The model for participatory knowing of God is set by Jesus in Gethsemane. He puts God's will first, above his own, in a way that enables God to empower his life in obedient righteousness. His disciples are called to follow suit, obeying God as 'Abba' (Mark 14:36–41). (For discussion, see Moser (2017: chaps. 2–3).)

Buber rightly takes exception to reducing the domain of God and theology to the domain of ethical matters. He remarks that 'the absolute norm [in the domain of ethics] is given [by God] to show the way that leads [humans] before the face of the Absolute [that is, God]' (Buber (1952: 105)). How does this intended 'leading' to the face of God proceed? The answer is central to how God can be an Über-King and Über-God who leads without relying on a human system of supervision and while relying on self-veiling from some people at times. We should consider goal-directed moral goodness in human experience as the basis for intended divine leading. The divine power in such intended leading takes the initiative in human experience, with different kinds of good interruption in experience, but it seeks human cooperation, without divine coercion of human wills.

Through human cooperation, God's righteous power of goodness comes to active fruition in a human life as the redemptive, rightening power it is intended to be. Without such cooperation, the presentation of such power is frustrated by human recalcitrance or complacency, and a person then may fail to see its unique power in its fruition. Divine self-hiding then can save a person from doing further damage toward a righteous divine-human relationship on offer. (For discussion of Buber and Franz Rosenzweig on such a relationship, in connection with the Law of God, see Levenson (2016: 184–97).) Such hiding can provide an opportunity, and needed time, for one's later, more judicious reconsideration of a new life-direction toward righteousness. So, the divine leading in question can be complicated and even postponed or rejected by human attitudes and responses.

Humans have a morally sensitive test for the authenticity of divine leading. It becomes effective when their cooperation with divine righteousness in their experience empowers them actively to become more righteous and less unrighteous in ways exceeding mere human tendencies. A salient feature is the emergence of righteousness that includes love of one's enemies, even at one's own risk. Such love manifested in human experience is best explained as anchored in divine self-manifestation, and thus as an identifying feature of goal-directed divine goodness from God. Paul thinks of God's love for us to precede our welcoming or otherwise responding to God, while we are ungodly enemies of God (Romans 5:6, 10). God's goodness and love thus come to human enemies of God, who do not merit that goodness and love (cf. Romans 4:2–4). If we inquirers about God fail to see that this consideration applies to us, and not just to *our* enemies, we may fail to appreciate the scope and power of divine love.

Before Paul, Jesus considered God's enemy-love to be integral to God and to being children of God: 'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous' (Matthew 5:43–45; cf. Luke 6:35–36). (For relevant historical discussion, see Meier (2009: 528–50).). According to Jesus, enemy-love is God's unique signature, and Paul evidently agrees, in the wake of Jesus (Romans 12:9–10, 20–21; cf. Romans 5:6, 10).

Paul acknowledges God's unique love being poured by God's Spirit into the hearts of people receptive to it (Romans 5:5). This love includes uniquely divine enemy-love, distinguishing it from typical human love. Typical humans are not inclined to practice enemy-love or to support it, even on reflection. The same is true of many traditional claimants to the title 'God.' Jesus, however, portrayed God as distinctive in enemy-love, and we thus should be open and attentive to God's intervening Spirit to self-manifest divine love accordingly. In the absence of such love, we would have a case for agnosticism about the God of Jesus.

Active guiding toward enemy-love among humans is no small matter; it brings the ring of truth to a claim to divine leading. We humans, when candid, have enough awareness of what righteousness requires to rely on such a test in many cases, even if we face some gray areas at times. We know, for instance, that the notorious abuses by ISIS are unrighteous, even if we lack a precise argument for what we know. Similarly, we know that care for refugees in desperate need is righteous and commendable (cf. Leviticus 23:22, 25:35, Deuteronomy 10:19, 14:28–29), even without a precise argu-

ment. So, we need to separate the wheat from the chaff in interpretations of divine leading, and we can make some progress with due candor and discernment.

If one discerns a moral challenge from goal-directed righteousness in experience, in God's good time, the stage will be set for divine leading. At that point, a person faces a vital decision: to cooperate or not to cooperate; to be led or not to be led into deeper righteousness. This decision is ongoing and uncoerced, with indifference amounting to a decision against the righteousness on offer and thus against God. The human freedom involved here is striking, as its use can be tragic or enlivening. God would refrain from making the latter choice for humans, in order to preserve genuine personhood as agency here. God thus would leave room for other persons, whether they are for or against divine righteousness. Whether, however, they leave room for themselves in God's kingdom is ultimately up to them.

Leaving room for God, according to Paul, includes human openness to being led by God. He thus remarks that 'all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God' (Romans 8:14). This perspective on the children of God mattered to Paul, because it enables God to be the rightful God of Gentiles as well as Jews (Romans 3:29), and it includes his understanding of God as 'Abba' (Romans 8:15–16; cf. Galatians 4:6–7). Divine leading can transcend national and ethnic boundaries, and we should expect it to do so if God seeks the common good for humans of all backgrounds. We have seen appreciation of this lesson in parts of ancient Israel, particularly where the broad scope of divine righteousness is recognized. The original promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3) lies behind this inclusive perspective, and it calls for the kind of direct divine leading acknowledged by Buber. We do well, then, to attend to such leading if we are to sustain the morally important attitude behind Abraham's vital question: 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?' (Genesis 18:25). That attitude must not be confused, however, with a demand for a public theophany in divine leading.

Conclusion: Beyond Public Theophany

A striking feature of ancient Israel is the departure of its Über-King from the use of public theophany to lead people. The book of Exodus reports public theophanies to Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness and at Mount Sinai (e.g., 19:11, 18–20, 20:1, 22, 24:9–11), but this pattern narrowed and eventually disappeared after Moses. The contrast, for instance, with divine intervention for Elijah at Mount Carmel is striking. Samuel Terrien (1978: 231–32) remarks:

The threefold repetition 'And Yahweh was not in the wind,' 'And Yahweh was not in the earthquake,' 'And Yahweh was not in the fire,' constitutes a repudiation of not only the mode of divine intervention on Mt. Carmel but also of the possibility that the Mosaic

theophany on Mt. Horeb could occur again in later history. The era of the theophany is now closed, and its validity is consigned to the hoary glamour of distant ages.

This claim of closure is about public theophany, and the change is hard to dispute. Our account of divine leading needs to accommodate this change.

The core of the change is in the divine use of public visual evidence. Richard Elliott Friedman (1995: 24) has commented on the divine response to Elijah at Mount Carmel: 'It is just one dramatic stage in a series of stages, spanning the entire Hebrew Bible, through which God step-by-step removes the visible markers of His presence.' The approach to divine leading offered here makes sense of this change. The key is in moral leading toward interpersonal righteousness that does not require visible markers from God.

The departure from visible markers is understandable if God is a Spirit (and not a visible body) set on morally robust interpersonal relations between God and humans. Such relations do not require visible markers for their existence or proliferation. John's Gospel has Jesus hint at this idea in his remark to Thomas: 'Have you believed because you have seen [ἑώρακάς] me? Blessed are those who have not seen [ἰδόντες] and yet have come to believe' (John 20:29; cf. Matthew 16:17). Paul remarks in a similar vein: 'We look not at what can be seen [βλεπόμενα] but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal' (2 Corinthians 4:16–18; cf. Romans 8:24–25). Paul thus highlights the requirement of the things of God being 'spiritually discerned [πνευματικῶς ἀνακρίνεται]' (1 Corinthians 2:14), and this includes yielding, cooperatively, to God's Spirit in action. Visible markers can get our attention at times, but they also can distract us from the divine Spirit morally at work among us and within us. Their value is thus selective at best, including in public settings.

The leading from divine kingship extends to how we discern our moral experience, with the prevenient help from God's guiding Spirit. The priority in such leading thus belongs to God, as kingly leader, but the realized leadership in human action depends on our cooperation as we appreciate and conform to divine goodness in our experience. God is unveiled to us as righteous Über-King in that interaction, even without a public theophany or a visible sign. This kingly God is thus unveiled in interpersonal righteousness, while being veiled to those who are not ready for such morally challenging transformation in divine leading. Divine self-veiling is often a form of divine waiting, with the patience of divine love. Even if God is Über-King and thus Über-Ruler over humans, the status of being Über will be unfulfilled as long as humans resist or ignore the divine move in their experience toward deeper righteousness.

A pressing final question, taking us beyond mere reflection, is: Are we humans willing to be led in righteousness, including enemy-love, by the Über-King of Israel? This question is a divinely intended consequence of divine self-veiling and self-unveiling before humans, and its answer does not depend on a public theophany or any other visible sign from God. An assessment of divine hiding should begin with such considerations, if the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus is to receive a candid hearing.

Bibliography

- Buber, Martin (1952) *Eclipse of God*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Buber, Martin (1967) *Kingship of God*, 3d ed., trans. Richard Scheimann. New York: Harper & Row.
- Forsyth, PT (1913) *The Principle of Authority*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Fretheim, Terence (1991) *Exodus*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press.
- Friedman, Richard Elliott (1995) *The Disappearance of God*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Heschel, Abraham Joshua (1962) *The Prophets*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Levenson, Jon D (2016) *The Love of God*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- McEntire, Mark (2013) *Portraits of a Mature God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Meier, John P (2009) *A Marginal Jew, vol. IV: Law and Love*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Mettinger, Tryggve ND (1988) *In Search of God*, trans. F.H. Cryer. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.
- Mikva, Rachel S (2020) *Dangerous Religious Ideas*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Moberly, RWL (2020) *The God of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Moser, Paul K (2017) *The God Relationship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moser, Paul K (2020) *Understanding Religious Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moser, Paul K (2021) *The Divine Goodness of Jesus: Impact and Response*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moser, Paul K (2022) Theodicy Incarnate: Divine Self-Justification. *Expository Times* 133(5): 192–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00145246211057033>
- Smith, Mark S (2001) *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Terrien, Samuel (1978) *The Elusive Presence*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Whitehead, Alfred North (1933) *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: Macmillan.