

# Jesus and the Divine Name

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*Whoever has the word of Jesus for a true possession can also bear his silence.*

—*Ignatius of Antioch* 15:2

In his estimable work *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief*, Christopher Morse wisely observes that in the biblical context God's name is understood to be communicated by God. God's name "is revealed as a proper and not a generic name or an appellation chosen by human preference."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to elaborate:

According to ancient tradition in Genesis the names of creatures are chosen by human selection: "whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name" (Gen. 2:19). Not so with the name of God. So sacred is this name in Hebraic tradition that it is not spoken. Another word, "LORD" (*Adonai*), is substituted in its place wherever the original appears."

In this essay, I want to explore the scriptural dynamics of God's self-communicated name with special attention to what is no doubt a simple but nevertheless important and often overlooked fact. The practice of honoring the divine name by avoiding its use is not only a Jewish tradition, as Morse rightly observes, but a Christian one as well. I offer these reflections in token of my great esteem for Christopher Morse as a theologian of the church and in gratitude for his unfailing friendship and generosity.

By way of introduction, let me call to mind a bit of theological tradition and ask a question about it. The tradition is this. Christians have commonly interpreted the Mosaic law in its ritual dimension according to a pattern of inner (Christological) fulfillment and outer (ecclesial) obsolescence. That is, Christ inwardly fulfills the law, while rendering its continued observance obsolete and, indeed (according to theologians such as Augustine and Thomas) mortally sinful. The pattern of inner fulfillment and outer obsolescence originated, perhaps, as a way of understanding Christ's reconciling death in relation to temple sacrifice (cf. Hebrews 9). Over time, though, Christians extended the interpretive pattern to

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief*, 2nd ed (T&T Clark, 2009), p. 132.

encompass the Jewish law as a whole (the so-called “moral law” excepted). According to Thomas Aquinas, for example, Christ’s death fulfills and renders obsolete—not merely temple sacrifice—but every aspect of the ritual law, including, for example, dietary law and circumcision (cf. *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 103, a. 4; cf. q. 104, a. 3). An upshot of this teaching in its generalized form is that insofar as Jews receive the gospel, they must cease entirely to live as Jews, while insofar as they do not receive the gospel, their continued practice of the Mosaic law renders them odious to God. Or, as the Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod has observed, the teaching suggests that God wanted Jesus—or at any rate, Peter—to be the last Jew.

Now, my question is this. Suppose it should turn out that for all these years Christians had continued to cultivate the outer letter of Jewish religious practice, more or less unawares and behind their own backs as it were. What if, moreover, they had done so to the greatest extent precisely in their corporate worship, in their reading of scripture, offering of prayers, and celebration of the sacraments? What, in that case, should they do? Should they seek to uproot the practice from worship as quickly and thoroughly as possible, on the grounds that all such practices were inherently obsolete and indeed sinful? Or, should they take their cue instead from the liturgical rule of thumb *lex ordandi est lex credendi et agendi*, and conclude that since they themselves had been practicing it, Christ’s fulfillment of the law must not have rendered it comprehensively obsolete after all?

I will return to this question at the end of my essay. Now, as one might guess, I want to suggest that something like this hypothetical scenario is in fact the case. The bit of religious practice that I have in mind is that of honoring God by avoiding the pronunciation of God’s personal name, the Tetragrammaton revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:15).<sup>2</sup> For, knowingly or not, Christians have indeed hewed rather consistently to this ancient bit of Jewish oral law, for a simple reason: they have worshipped God in the language of Christ and the apostles, who themselves observed this practice with unwavering scrupulosity.<sup>3</sup>

2 The Tetragrammaton (from Gk. *tetragrammaton*, lit., “having four letters”) is so called because it consists of four Hebrew characters: y (*yod*), h (*he*), w (*waw*), and h (*he*), spelled right to left in Hebrew hwhy, and transliterated left to right as “YHWH” in English. These four letters are typically represented in English Bible by the capitalized Lord, a word which, following ancient precedent, is neither a translation of the Tetragrammaton, nor a transliteration of it, but a *surrogate* used in its place, in token of reverence for the name itself.

3 See esp. Gustaf Dalman’s work *The Words of Jesus Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language*, trans. D. M. Kay (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909), which despite its age remains an excellent overview of this dimension of the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ’s own speech. Julius Boehmer, *Die neutestamentliche Gottesscheu und die ersten drei Bitten des Vaterunsers* (Halle: Richard Mühlmann Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1917), provides an inventory of every word and phrase in the New Testament reflecting the impact of reserve before the name of God, totaling well over 2,000 instances in all. (Allowing for differences of length, this means the density of allusion to the Tetragrammaton is roughly the same in the New Testament as in the Old, if not greater still.) Contemporary scholars who have extended this line of research include Gilles Quispel, Jean Daniélou, Richard Longenecker, Alan Segal, Christopher Rowland, Jarl E. Fossum, Charles A. Gieschen, Martin Hengel, Sean McDonough, C. Kavin Rowe, Dale C. Allison, Scott McKnight, Markus Bockmuehl, Karl Judson Davis, and others.

## THE DIVINE NAME IN SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

The Christian movement originated at a time when concern for the sanctity of the divine name was widespread among Jews of every description, who expressed this concern in a variety of fascinating ways. For our purposes, however, it is enough to concentrate on two features of Second Temple Judaism, to set the stage for considering the early Christian movement’s posture toward the divine name.

A first such feature is the one we have already noted, namely, the practice of honoring the sanctity of the Tetragrammaton by avoiding its pronunciation. The origins of the practice are notoriously hard to pin down, but most historians believe that it was already a couple centuries old by the beginning of the common era.<sup>4</sup> The deepest roots of the practice, however, are older still, and reflect the fierce zeal with which the LORD guards the holiness of his own name. In the third commandment, the LORD declares that he will not acquit anyone who misuses his name, while in Lev. 24:11, cursing the name (or cursing with the name) is declared a capital offense. In the latter passage, all those who were within earshot of the blasphemy are instructed to first lay their hands upon the perpetrator’s head before stoning him, as though to cleanse themselves of having heard blasphemy and return the contagion to its source. Texts such as these indicate that misuse of God’s name is not only sinful but defiling and dangerous, for individual and community. Avoidance of the divine name, it seems, arose gradually in response to this generally felt circumstance. To use the terminology of later Jewish tradition, name avoidance reflects a form of building a fence around the third commandment. The misuse of the divine name is avoided by avoiding the pronunciation of the divine name altogether. By the beginning of the common era, the practice was universally normative among Jews of every description, including members of the early Christian movement.<sup>5</sup>

Still, the presumption against pronouncing the divine name was not absolute, and this brings me to the second feature of Second Temple practice I want to note. Even as the spoken name ceased to circulate widely, it remained in currency in one place above all: the Temple in Jerusalem. Indeed, it is quite possible that

4 It is not easy to pin down the precise nomenclature that would appropriately describe this ancient feature of Jewish piety. The practice is so deeply rooted it is not easily classified. To employ the framework of Rabbinic Judaism in its developed form, name-avoidance is for first century Jews (and those of later periods) a matter of “Oral Torah,” or universal, authoritative halakhah. Indeed, it might be regarded as so self-evident that it would (anachronistically) be seen as a matter of Written rather than Oral Torah. In any case, it would not fall under the category of mere “custom” (*minhag*), a technical legal term in rabbinic thought that refers to observances that are adopted in certain local communities but not in others. On the other hand, historians caution that the notion of Oral Torah in its later rabbinic sense did not emerge until later, perhaps the third century CE, and can be applied only with some anachronism to the first century Jewish world. The Pharisees had “oral traditions,” but the use of the singular noun (Oral Tradition) to refer to a second type of “Torah” (the “dual Torah”) is not extant in the first century.

5 Sean McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos: Rev. 1:4 in its Hellenistic and Early Jewish Setting* (Wipf and Stock, 2011), 58–122.

the reservation of the divine name to the temple, and its prohibition elsewhere, are simply two sides of the same phenomenon, two expressions of the same conviction that Israel should invoke the divine name only when and where the propriety of doing so was beyond dispute. If this is the case, however, it is remarkable that even within the temple itself, the divine name appears to have been employed with great reserve. According to later rabbinic sources, only the high priest himself pronounced the divine name, and then only in the performance of his priestly duties on the Day of Atonement.<sup>6</sup> Israel's sinfulness, which made the ordinary use of God's name impossible, also made its extraordinary use necessary, in order to pronounce the LORD's forgiveness of the people's sin.

Turning from the Second Temple period generally to the NT in particular, what do we discover?

### JESUS' AVOIDANCE OF THE DIVINE NAME

Well, a first thing we discover is that, according to his Gospel portraits, Jesus of Nazareth shared the zeal for the divine name that was characteristic of his age. "Hallowed be thy name!" is the first petition of the prayer that he gave to his disciples, while according to the Gospel of John, "Glorify your name!" (John 12:28) is the first and only petition of Jesus' own prayer upon entering Jerusalem on the eve of his crucifixion.

We can sharpen this initial impression by connecting Jesus' posture toward the divine name with the two features of Second Temple Judaism that we just described, namely, reservation *toward* the name and pronunciation *of* it. What we will discover, I believe, is that the Gospels portray Jesus as an intensification—indeed, I think we can say, a fulfillment—of both trends of Second Temple Judaism.

Along one axis, then, Jesus routinely speaks of God in ways that consciously avoid the use of God's name, just as indeed everyone portrayed in the Gospels does. And yet this way of putting things is too weak, allowing the surmise that Jesus may merely acquiesce in prevailing custom. In fact, Jesus' practice reflects

6 m. Yoma 3:8; 4:2. Of these passages, McDonough writes, "[I]n Yoma it is explicitly stated that the high priest uttered the tetragrammaton itself. In the latter portion of 3:8, during the prayer of confession given between the porch and the altar, he quotes Lev. 16:30: "For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you; from all yours sins shall you be clean before the Lord." The people respond by saying "Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom for ever and ever!" Similarly, when the lots are cast for the two goats, he declares that one is a 'son offering to the Lord," and the people again respond, "Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom for ever and ever!" (4:2). That this is a response to the uttering of the tetragrammaton itself becomes apparent in 6:2, where it is emphasized (after a repetition of the quotation from Lev. 16:30 in the confession over the scapegoat) that this is the 'Expressed name.' The response of the priests and the people in the temple court reaches a crescendo at this point, and it is said that on hearing the name "they used to kneel and bow themselves and fall down on their faces and say 'Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom forever and ever!" It seems unlikely that such a crucial part of such a major festival would be fabricated by the rabbis out of whole cloth even generations after the temple was destroyed" (McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, 100–101).

a heightening and intensification of reserve toward the divine name that goes beyond the standards of his day.

We see this, for example in Jesus' teaching on oaths. By Jesus' day, the idea had apparently arisen that oaths became less binding in proportion to how indirectly they invoked God's name and person: the less direct the invocation, the less binding the oath. This view treats circumlocutions for the divine name as a kind of buffer that conveniently distances the speaker from the holiness of God, like the insulation of an electric wire. The more oblique the circumlocution, the less the majesty of God and God's name is implicated. Jesus angrily rejects this view.

Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath.' You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred? And you say, 'Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on the altar is bound by the oath.' How blind you are! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? So whoever swears by the altar, swears by it and by everything on it; and whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears by it and by the one who dwells in it; and whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by the one who is seated upon it. (Mt. 23:16–22)

Note that the target of Jesus' condemnation is not the use of "buffers" in place of God's name. As Gustav Dalman observed about this passage over a century ago, "Even [Jesus] appears to approve the non-pronunciation of the name of God." Rather, Jesus' scorn is directed at the premise that circumlocutions *re-place* the divine name rather than to *refer* to it and its bearer. In Dalman's words, "Swearing by heaven is looked upon by Jesus as equivalent to swearing by God's name because *a real name of God was being intentionally avoided*."<sup>7</sup> Jesus calls his disciples to a higher righteousness, which of course is not the explicit use of God's name (as would be the case if he regarded name-avoidance as a mistake or a perishable custom), but adherence to a yet more rigorous form of name avoidance: the eschewing of oaths altogether (5:24).

Dalman suggests that Jesus' teaching on oaths is perhaps connected to another feature of his speech, namely, his habit of emphasizing his teaching with the word "Amen."<sup>8</sup> This use of "Amen," (usually translated "truly") is as utterly unattested in ancient literature outside the Gospels, as it is ubiquitous within them, where it appears dozens of times in accounts of Jesus' speech.

7 Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, 196, cf. 206.

8 Dalman: 1909, 226–9. The synoptic Gospels record Jesus saying this some 49 times, John some 25 times. The idiosyncratic form of dominical speech is also discussed in Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 292; Bruce Chilton, "Amen": An Approach through Syriac Gospels" in *Targumic Approaches to the Gospels: Essays in the Mutual Definition of Judaism and Christianity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 15–23.

“*Amen* I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” (Mar 10:15 NRS)

“*Amen Amen*, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” (Joh 3:3 NRS)

What’s going on? Well, Dalman suggests that Jesus, lacking recourse to the use of oaths, “had to seek for some other mode of emphasis, and found it in the solemn ‘Amen.’” Yet once again, “one may speak of a conscious avoidance of the name of God.”

Let’s consider one final expression of Jesus’ reserve toward the divine name: the so-called “divine passive.” That is, Jesus habitually teaches in the passive voice, a practice that eliminates the need to refer explicitly to God in at all. Consider these examples:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they *will be comforted*” (Mat. 5:4)

“Blessed are the merciful, for they *will receive* mercy” (v 7)

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they *will be called children of God*” (v 9),

“Do not judge, so that you may *not be judged*” (Mat. 7:1)

“The heirs of the kingdom *will be thrown* into the outer darkness” (8:12)

“But the one who endures to the end *will be saved* (24:13),

“Do not judge, and you will not *be judged*; do not condemn, and you will not *be condemned*. Forgive, and you will *be forgiven*. (Luke 6:37)

“On that night there will be two in one bed; one *will be taken* and the other left” (Luke 17:34)

“all who exalt themselves *will be humbled*, but all who humble themselves *will be exalted*”

“I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I *was sent* for this purpose” (Luke 4:43)

“But after *I am raised up*, I will go ahead of you to Galilee” (26:32)

“Son, your sins *are forgiven*.” (Mark 2:5)

“*Be made clean!*” (Mt. 8:3)

“All authority in heaven and on earth *has been given* to me” (28:18).

And so on.

The “divine passive” is so typical of Jesus that a full survey basically amounts to a recapitulation of his public teaching. Still, it is worth noting one more example: the first petition of the Lord’s prayer, “Hallowed be your name!” From a purely grammatical point of view, the petition is ambiguous, since the subject of the verb “to hallow” is unspecified, a fact that has given rise to a host of proposals regarding *who* it is that is supposed to hallow God’s name: the church, creation, and so on. Once Jesus’ customary use of the divine passive is taken into account, however, the ambiguity disappears. Jesus is calling upon *God* to sanctify his name, to cleanse it of every besmirching obscurity and make it shine forth throughout creation with the radiance of a single truth only: “I am the LORD!”

The first petition helps us get at the theological significance of Jesus’ practice of name-avoidance. Name avoidance points away from the one who offers the petition to the one who alone can fulfill it. Name avoidance expresses final impatience with every human use of God’s name and eschatological longing for its vindication by God. It acknowledges our human inability to say God’s name in a way that corresponds to the eternal uniqueness of its bearer. It renders a verdict on human God-talk and bids our vacuous and self-serving invocations to cease. It represents an un-saying and a non-saying, an apophaticism, if one likes, of the divine *name*. It divests itself of the divine name in hopeful longing that God will cause it to be remembered throughout heaven and earth, as only God can do. In sum, Jesus’ non-pronunciation of the divine name is an outer figure, a humble token of his inward longing for the eschatological vindication of God’s name.

#### JESUS’ DECLARATION OF THE DIVINE NAME

The Gospels, however, portray a second side to Jesus’ relation to the divine name, one that stands in dramatic contrast to what we have described thus far. Just as the high priest casts aside all ordinary reserve and declares the divine name openly on the Day of Atonement, so too Jesus Christ—according to the Gospel of John—*openly declares the divine name*, climactically on the very eve of his passion and death. In his prayer in the Garden of Gethsamene (John 17), Jesus refers four times to God’s name, indicating that he has been given “your [i.e. God’s] name” *in order to make it known*.

*I have made your name known* to those whom you gave me from the world. (17:6a)

Holy Father, protect them in *your name that you have given me*, so that they may be one, as we are one. (17:11b)

While I was with them, I protected them in *your name that you have given me*. (17:12a).

I made *your name known to them, and I will make it known*, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. (17:26)

Jesus, then, is the new High Priest, and his own impending crucifixion the new temple. And yet it is really not enough to equate Jesus's declaration of the divine name to that of the High Priest in the temple. The high priest declares God's name as something that belongs exclusively to God and not at all to himself. But Jesus Christ declares God's name in a qualitatively different way: he declares it as his own name as well, as "your name that you have given me."

To appreciate this claim, we should connect Jesus' language in the High Priestly Prayer (e.g. "your name that you have given me" vss. 11b, 12a) with Jesus' extraordinary words "I am" seven times over the course of the narrative. Jesus declares "I am" in an absolute fashion, without any elucidating predicate. The seven absolute "I am" sayings are these:

Jesus said to her, "I am, the one who is speaking to you." (4:25–26 mg., Gk.)

He said to them, "I am; do not be afraid." (6:20 mg., Gk.)

"You will die in your sins unless you believe that I am." (8:24 mg., Gk.)

Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am." (8:28 mg., Gk.)

Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." (8:58)

"I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am." (13:19)

The seventh and climactic occasion occurs just before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, where the words "I am" appear three times in quick succession.

9 On the "I am" statements, Richard Bauckham, "Monotheism and Christology in the Gospel of John," in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 147–66; Raymond Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 2:754–56; C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 417n2; Ben Witherington III and Laura Michaels Ice, *Shadow of the Almighty: Father, Son, and Spirit in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 93–94; further discussion and literature, see Stanley Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 200, 209–20.

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am." (18:4–8 mg., Gk.)<sup>10</sup>

According to Mishnah (Yoma 6.2), when the high priest declared the divine name in the sanctuary on Yom Kipur, those within earshot "used to kneel and bow themselves and fall down on their faces" (Yoma 6.2). Similarly, when Jesus declares "I am," the party [from the temple] who has come to arrest him falls to the ground. And yet, as I have already noted, it is really not enough to equate Jesus's declaration of the divine name to that of the High Priest in the temple. The high priest declares God's name *as something that belongs exclusively to God*. But Jesus Christ declares God's name *as his own as well*, as "your name *that you have given me*." When the arresting party falls to the ground, the analogy is not merely to the temple liturgy, but to the LORD's own words as expressed in Isaiah:

Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.<sup>23</sup> By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." (Isa 45:22–23 NRS)

Falling to the ground, the temple police and Roman soldiers represent Israel and the nations bending the knee before God's own name-declaration in Christ. Jesus Christ is the name-declaration of the One God, personified.

#### NAME AVOIDANCE AS THE OUTER FORM OF JESUS' NAME DECLARATION

But now notice something. Even as the Gospel of John portrays Jesus Christ declaring the divine name—indeed, even as it portrays him as the embodiment of God's own name-declaration—it portrays Christ employing not the divine name itself, but rather an interpretive surrogate in its place. For of course, "I am" is not itself the divine name, the sacred Tetragrammaton, but simply another among many surrogates employed to in its place elsewhere in the NT, such as "Lord," "the Power," "the Blessed," "name above every name," and so on. Thus *even as Jesus Christ declares the divine name, he continues to observe the same reserve toward it that characterizes his speech generally, that is, he avoids its direct use*.<sup>11</sup>

10 I have altered the NRSV translation where necessary for accuracy, e.g., by changing "I am he" to the more literal "I am."

11 Cf. Charles Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology" *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003) 115–158, 141. Gieschen writes, "Although the EIGO EIMI formula in John should not be understood as the Divine Name that Jesus is said to have been given (17:6), nevertheless these absolute

That “I am” is best understood as a reverential allusion to the Divine Name depends upon the close association of these sacred terms in Scripture.<sup>12</sup> Far from being limited to Exodus 3:14–15, such passages are quite common in the Septuagint, thanks to God’s ubiquitous declaration “I am the LORD!” (*egō eimi kyrios*), and are especially characteristic of Ezekiel and Isaiah 40–55, where the saying evokes the LORD’s incomparable uniqueness and proven character as Creator, Redeemer, and Consummator of all things. Significantly, Isaiah several times reports God’s self-declaration “I am the LORD” in the abbreviated form “I am!” (LXX: 41:4; 46:4; etc.). In such cases, the short form is materially identical with the longer one: “I am” = “I am the LORD.” On three occasions, the Septuagint renders God’s self-declaration with the extraordinary phrase, “I am I am”! (LXX: *egō eimi egō eimi*; Heb. *anoki anoki hu*). So, for example, Isaiah 43:25 reads:

I, I am He [Gk. *egō eimi egō eimi*, lit., “I am I am”]

who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,

and I will not remember your sins.

In this and similar passages, the author of Second Isaiah creates a virtual synonymy between the phrase “I am” and God’s personal proper name, which is implied rather than explicitly stated. Though Second Isaiah wrote before the practice of avoiding God’s name became customary, the synonymy he created has obvious relevance for understanding the Gospel of John, written during the Second Temple period, when the custom was universally normative among Jews. Distinct from God’s personal name yet closely linked to it, the words “I am” permit one to evoke God’s name while leaving the name itself unspoken.

Now, I confess that I find the coinherence of name-avoidance and name declaration in Jesus’ speech a very suggestive state of affairs. Let me briefly suggest three lines of potential significance.

1. For one thing, it seems to me laden with Trinitarian significance. Jesus Christ, the incarnate word of God, comes into the world to manifest not his own name, but the name of the one who sent him. Christ is indeed the great “I am,” the bearer of the divine name, but he is this as one receives the divine name—as indeed, he receives everything that he is—from the One to whom he prays, who

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sayings are very closely related to it and function as a way of indicating that Jesus is the possessor of the Divine Name” (Gieschen: 141). Rudolph Bultmann also articulates this view as a possible interpretation of the I-am statements, only to reject it. See R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 327–8. Bultmann’s rejection prompted the literary critic Harold Bloom to remark that New Testament scholarship “manifests a very impoverished notion as to just what literary allusion is or can be”; see Harold Bloom, *The Gospels* (New Haven, CT: Chelsea House, 1987), 295.

12 See Bauckham, “Monotheism and Christology,” 157–160; Harner, *The “I Am” of the Fourth Gospel*, 8–18; Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, 89–90.

is the sourceless source of the divine life in its fullness. Viewed in this Trinitarian context, Christ’s declaration of the divine name in the mode of its non-pronunciation serves to point away from himself as the Word and Image and Revelation of God to the One whose Word and Image and Revelation he is.

Let me carry this a step further. Christians have commonly oriented themselves on the dominically attested language of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” as they have made the move from the Trinity’s self-manifestation in the economy of salvation to the Trinity’s eternal being as God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Without in the least wishing to challenge the propriety and indeed necessity of this, do we not have here *another* dominically attested way of making this same move? It seems to me that we do. Attending to Jesus’ reverence for and openness to the divine name, we discern the following: the first person of the Holy Trinity is the LORD as the One who bears the Divine Name so as to *give* it away. The second person of the Holy Trinity is the LORD as the One who *receives* the Divine Name. The third person of the Trinity is the Spirit, who proceeds from the LORD as the one glorifies it in its being given and being received. I would argue that this pattern of mutual relations displayed in the paschal story is an icon of the eternal Trinity, which expresses just what the language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit expresses—in a different key oriented to the LORD’s self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush.

2. Again, it seems to me eschatologically significant that even as Christ declares the divine name, he does so in a manner that continues to avoid its direct use. What we have here, to my mind at least, is a strangely powerful expression of the already-and-not-yet character of the gospel. Insofar as Christ reveals “your name that you have given me,” he is the real presence of the unsurpassable future, the fulfillment of God’s greatest promise: “You shall know that I am the LORD!” Yet insofar as Christ cloaks his revelation of the divine name in the form of reverential indirection, fulfillment remains imbued with eschatological longing, and directs us in hope toward future encounter with “He who is and who was and who is coming” (Rev. 1:8).

We can also formulate what is at stake here in negative terms. What is lost when Christians attempt to vocalize the divine name in worship and study, say as Jehovah or Yahweh? In such cases, I would suggest, they in effect attempt to strip the name from its Christological context, which is precisely Jesus’ zeal for God’s own eschatological glorification of the name. In effect, we de-christologize and de-eschatologize the divine name at the same time. We lose its essential character as a token of our fellowship with Christ in his longing for God’s coming kingdom, and make it theologically and liturgically inert.

3. Finally, it seems to me there is a further, ecclesiological line of significance. That Christ’s declaration of the divine name is indirect also means this, that this aspect of traditional Jewish practice entered without diminishment or es-

sential modification directly into the bloodstream of Christian worship, thanks to the example of Christ, the apostles, and writers of the New Testament, whose precedent on this point was determinative for the shaping of ecumenical Christianity, even for those long periods of time when Christians lost all awareness that there was such a thing as the Tetragrammaton at all, let alone indirect ways of alluding to it. Thus even as the conviction hardened among Christians that Christ's coming rendered every living expression of Jewish ceremonial practice dead and deadly, such practice lived on—thanks to Christ's influence among Christians themselves.

Now, once we become aware of this circumstance, it seems to me that there are basically two directions we can go, as I suggested at the beginning of my paper. We can continue to insist that Christ's fulfillment of the Old Law necessarily entails its comprehensive obsolescence, and seek to achieve greater conformity with this principal by reintroducing the pronunciation of the divine name into Christian worship. This is indeed the crystallized theological conviction of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who maintain that the suppression of the divine name in Christian worship represents a catastrophic surrender to Jewish superstition that adulterated the church almost from its inception beginning. In a less crystalized form, this is also the conviction of the early modern Jehovah piety that bequeathed to the church so many hymns still sung by Christians today—and yes, I love many of those hymns, too.

Yet there is of course another direction we can go. We can take our orientation from the actual practice of name-avoidance in Christian worship, which is so much deeper and more extensive than the occasional Jehovah hymn, and we can conclude that we have been wrong to assume that Christ's fulfillment of the old law necessarily entails its obsolescence. On the contrary, we can conclude that, in this instance at least, Christ's inward fulfillment of Jewish practice is tied—not to its obsolescence—but to its reaffirmation and reanimation.<sup>13</sup> And, if in this instance, then perhaps in others as well.

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13 In sermon on Proverbs 18:10, a younger Karl Barth wrote, "Therefore it was a fine custom among the old Jews (and I am not one of those who takes part when this gets poked fun at!) that they abstained from taking the revealed name of God "I am who I will be" upon their lips, rather, respecting the fact that they have no right to pronounce it, replaced it each time with the human name for God 'the Lord' in order to recall by means of this restraint that God himself was and is the one who communicates to his people the unique, differentiating One that he is" (Karl Barth, *Predigten 1921–35*, ed. Holger Finze (Zürich: TVZ, 1998), 24–38. What Barth manages to overlook is that this "fine custom along the old Jews" is one that Christians themselves continue to practice in worship and liturgy, precisely insofar as these hew to their New Testament model.