Rescripting for a Fresh Performance Midst a Failed Script

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I begin with four qualifying comments:

1. The great fact for so-called "mainline" Protestantism in the United States is the deprivileging of the church as a result of pluralism and secularism. This deprivileging constitutes a threat to business as usual, but also provides an opportunity for fresh articulation of the peculiar missional identity of the church.

2. I will line out my argument in terms of the Old Testament; it will, however, require very little imagination to transpose my argument into the more familiar categories of New Testament faith.

3. The context of church education in the United States is in the midst of the scripting of technological, consumer militarism, a script that is powerfully seductive but that is, I suggest, manifestly a failure in its capacity to deliver either happiness or security or both.

4. Baptismal identity as a genuine alternative to that failed scripting is the task of church education, an identity that is rooted in deep gospel claims and manifested and exhibited in an alternative life in the world.

I

Thesis: The Bible, the tradition, and the long history of church practice constitute a peculiar, distinctive, clear but flexible script according to which life in the world may be lived out differently. This scripting of life as a counter-scripting is the primal task of education; that work does not guarantee but it makes possible an alternative performance of human life in the world, a performance that requires precisely the kind of imagination, courage, energy, and freedom for which this script vouches in peculiar ways.

II

The first dimension for rescripting that may generate a fresh performance marked by imagination, courage, energy, and freedom is that there is a normative narrative memory upon which an alternative life is staked, a memory that must be learned, reiterated, inhaled, and embraced. This normative givenness is not negotiable and does not arise from contemporary experience but is a given that was there before us, awaits us, addresses us, and includes us in its peculiar rendering of reality. In the New Testament, in all its variations, this given
normativeness behind which criticism cannot go is what C.H. Dodd termed “the kerygma” (1 Cor. 15:3-4).\(^1\) In the Old Testament that given narrative is at bottom the Torah, the five books of Moses, that are endlessly interpreted but not questioned as norm and basic truth that must be accepted as a true rendering of the past that was there before us.\(^2\) Christian education is nurture in a peculiar rootage that is profoundly countercultural.

The narrative account of reality stretches wondrously from creation, that daring moment of first light in the midst of darkness, when elemental confusion began to take ordered form that made life possible. The story moves through one of the world’s great dysfunctional families (in Genesis) through the slave camp of Egypt, through the desperate hunger of wilderness, all the way to Sinai. And there, out of the very mouth of God, is disclosed an alternative way to order the world. We are perhaps so smitten with “historical” questions or so keen to produce definitive closure that we grow inattentive to the huge panorama of our past that connects the sweeping vista of creation to the insistences of Sinai. For Sinai is a directive about how to live differently and congruently with a shalom-ordered world as God’s creation.\(^3\)

That root tradition is marked in a variety of ways that characterize the peculiar perspective of this community:

1. Every facet of Torah tradition is focused on YHWH, the God of Israel. It is the remembering and reciting of the narrative that keeps YHWH as the defining character for all reality:

   - It is YHWH who turns chaos to life-giving, life-sustaining creation;
   - It is YHWH who turns barrenness to birth and the durable prospect of land;
   - It is YHWH who turns barren wilderness to a place of adequate bread;
   - It is YHWH who speaks ten times and reorders the world toward well-being.

The Torah is countercultural because it testifies, repeatedly, against every itch toward autonomy and against every anxiety of disorder, for it is YHWH who is the primal subject of every treasured cadence of the root tradition.

2. This YHWH, moreover, is active agent in transformation, a power, a will, an agency well beyond Israel who in the concreteness of daily life heals, restores, liberates, and makes new. Church education is nurture in the canonical recital of transformations wrought by YHWH,

   who by understanding made the heavens . . .
   who spread out the earth on the waters . . .
   who struck Egypt through their firstborn . . .
   who divided the Red Sea in two . . .
   who led his people through the wilderness . . .
   who killed famous kings . . .
who gave the land as a heritage . . .  
who rescued us from our foes . . .  
who gives food to all flesh . . . (Ps. 136).

The transformations are given us in a stock recital.

Two things strike me about this recital. First, it is poetry with a recognizable cadence; I have no doubt that church education must teach the cadences of the "mother tongue" that produces wide-eyed amazement in the primal mode of self-transcending praise. The remembered inventory of transformations impinges upon the imagination of the remembering generations of those who appropriate the tradition. Second, this cadenced recital is not user friendly, but shows how this tradition is rooted in violence that implicates both God and people. It is God who struck the first born and killed kings—eggs necessarily broken, they might say, for the omelet of emancipation and well being.

3. This root tradition of doxology tropes the transformations in special ways to save the recital from excessive explanation. The tradition does not explain or ask how but accepts transformation as "wonder, sign, miracle," that is, happenings beyond any critical scrutiny. Thus in Psalm 136:4, "...who alone does great wonders" (nephla'oth gedoloth), acts that evoke not curiosity but awe . . . "wonder, love, and praise." Thus church education is a practice of the suspension of disbelief and the embrace of innocence before a normative recital that contradicts the reason of this age and of every age. Education is to commit to a miracle-remembering recital.

Indeed, Israel has a full and rich vocabulary to witness to this most elemental claim that can only be voiced and heard lyrically, out beyond controlling reason:

One generation shall laud your works to another,  
and shall declare your mighty acts.  

On the glorious splendor of your majesty,  
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.  
The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,  
and I will declare your greatness.  
They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,  
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness (Ps. 145:4-7).

4. The accumulation of "wonders" that live on the doxological lips of Israel—and that attest, against much critical evidence, to YHWH as the agent of palpable newness in the world—yields a certain narrative world that the faithful inhabit, a world marked by bottomless fidelity.  

Thus the mother-tongue cadences of Psalm 136 offer counterpoint to every concrete wonder with the refrain, "for his hesed endures forever." In verse after verse, the psalm offers a characteristic interpretive novum that seems commonplace; it is, however, a novum that reflects the evangelical imagination upon which the entire rootage of
Torah rests, namely, that specific, concrete, named transformations ("he killed famous kings") lead to the deep generalizing verdict, "his hesed endures forever." The second line of each verse of the psalm does not need to follow the first and is indeed something of a leap. It is, however, the characteristic, quintessential leap of Torah faith that produces the doxological sweep that knows the world to be, at bottom, upheld by cosmic, holy, sovereign fidelity.

The outcome of (a) God as subject, (b) named transformations, (c) taken as signs and wonders of God's engagement, (d) rendering a general verdict of doxology attests the world as God's sphere, as a safe place in which and from which and toward which we may live joyously.

Before I leave Torah, one other note is important: As Jews have known for a very long time, the Torah culminates in and is dominated by the commands of Sinai. These commands, moreover, begin in God's own utterance and then trail off to Moses and to endless interpretive variations, because Israel was never finished at Sinai, because the God of Sinai is never finished commanding. Of course the question of the relation of narrative to commandment is an old one, and the tradition is profoundly complex. At bottom it is, however, sufficient that the wondrous transformative miracles that make new life possible summon to a particular kind of life in the world and evoke a particular response of glad obedience. The Christian misconstrual of this matter is spectacular, all the later distortions in the name of "gospel and law" that produced deathly stereotypes of Jews.

Church education in a therapeutic culture can no longer afford to witness to grace that is so cheap and thoughtless that the miracles are wrongly understood as unconditional gifts without commanding expectations. Thus if the shape of the Torah means anything, it means that one must read straight through to the end of Sinai, that the sustained interpretive energy of the Torah is about an obedience that is commensurate with miracles. The Sinai traditions mediate an alternative to the demanding world of pharaoh in which there are many commands but no constituting gifts of miracle. The God of miracle intends an alternative community, initiated by an infinitive absolute in Exodus 19:5, without compromise, a relation of fidelity that summons to fidelity in response.

Thus church education can imagine a community scripted by a narrative (a) that centers on God, (b) that receives transformations, (c) that tropes its life as miracle, (d) that embraces steadfastness, (e) that haunts beyond explanation, and (f) that summons to obedience. Clearly such a script invites a performance of faith outside the deathly realm of autonomous consumerism.

III

Rootage in tradition is clear and normative; a simple story line is readily followed. Having said that, church education must, I believe, script the baptized into an awareness that the root tradition is complex and many-layered, so that the performance of the script requires a knowing, sustained energetic act of
imaginative interpretation. That is, church education must be nurtured in the practice of hermeneutics (even if the word is never used), what Robert Alter terms "a culture of exegesis."

It cannot be doubted that the root tradition of Torah is immensely complex, and serious church education cannot leave the impression that the root tradition is flat, seamless, or spoken in a single voice. The documentation of complexity, or as we now say, "multivalence," has been a major aim of historical criticism. It is most unfortunate that the so-called "Documentary Hypothesis" has been reduced to a "scissors and paste" explanation, because, as later tradition history has made clear, the impulse of the Documentary Hypothesis is the recognition that the root tradition consists in layers and layers of interpretation, because the root tradition never arrives at a final interpretation. Each subsequent interpretation, in a new time, place, and circumstance and from a somewhat altered perspective, must re-say the tradition in a way now seen to be adequate and satisfying. The new interpretation, however, must always know that in due course it also will be found inadequate and unsatisfying, and so subject to "correction" and "rearticulation." Thus the root tradition that evokes the community is the product of the ongoing work of interpretation, no part of which is absolute, but all parts of which together yield a world of bottomless fidelity that evokes responding fidelity.

Although it is hardly necessary to do so, we may point to some clear examples of layered interpretation that exhibit the dynamism of the tradition:

- The two creation narratives of Genesis 1-3 attest that the origin and character of the world as God’s creation cannot be voiced in only one way. More specifically, human persons and human community must be renarrated not only as "image" but also as "dust," not only as "dust" but also as "image."

- The self-announcement of YHWH in the pivotal disclosure at Sinai after the golden calf suggests the complexity of YHWH’s own internal life (Exod. 34:6-7). In that decisive utterance, God is known to be utterly faithful and forgiving, all the while punishing to the fourth generation, an enigma of self-giving generosity and self-regarding sovereignty that will not be mocked or trivialized.

- The layered character of the root tradition as a complex act of imaginative interpretation is nowhere more evident than in the traditions of Deuteronomy. It is remarkable, unsettlingly complex, and endlessly interesting that the root tradition of Genesis-Deuteronomy includes Deuteronomy as a covenantal enactment that happened apart from Sinai, at a later time by forty years, at a later place on the Plains of Moab, in a different circumstance now focused on an agrarian economy. As Gerhard von Rad has seen, Deuteronomy exhibits the central hermeneutical dynamic of Israel’s Torah that by interpretation what is old is made new, not once, but
in an endless process of “today and today and today,” a day of liturgy and a day of catechetics, so that the educated believer is always engaged in catching up, by eager interpretation, with the new place where God has put God’s people. This dynamism is evidenced:

- In the introductory formula of Moses in Deuteronomy 1:5: "Beyond the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law as follows." The verb “expound” is difficult; it is in any case clear that Moses in the belated venue of Deuteronomy did not simply reiterate what is remembered from Sinai, but said it over with interpretation.
- In the epitome text of Deuteronomy 5:3: “Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.”
- In the offer to the king of a “copy” of the Torah in Deuteronomy 17:18, a deuteros, that is, a second version pertinent to the monarchical period.
- In the later effort of Ezra, in what is taken as the founding moment of Judaism, that clearly intends to do yet again all that Moses had done on the Plains of Moab: “Also . . . the Levites helped the people to understand the [Torah], while the people remained in their places. So they read from the book, from the [Torah] of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading” (Neh. 8:7-8).

It is always with interpretation. It is always exposition that takes the written text and connects to the new; and afterward the exposition itself that connects also becomes normative. In the text itself, Deuteronomy was “with interpretation” to Sinai. In Nehemiah 8, Ezra’s work is “with interpretation” to Deuteronomy. And beyond the biblical text, Lutherans know that Luther’s “with interpretation” became normative; in Reformed circles, moreover, Calvin’s “with interpretation” becomes normative; and more broadly the exposition of Martin Luther King Jr., “with interpretation” is normative for civil religion in the United States at its best. It is only the innocent, the uninformed, and the frightened who imagine [sic] that one has the text without interpretation.

An extended scholarly literature shows how Deuteronomy expands and turns the older corpus of the Covenant Code to new use, so that “strict constructionism” of biblical material is manifestly impossible. Beyond “expansion” we may notice two remarkable and characteristic “leaps” in the dynamic of the tradition whereby new context evokes fresh Torah:

a) In Deuteronomy 17:14-20, the tradition of Deuteronomy offers an entirely new commandment on monarchy that has no explicit rootage at Sinai. The command, moreover, is a venturesome act of imagination, for the e-text “invents” a notion of kingship whereby kingship in covenant – unlike that all around Israel – is not for self-aggrandizement by way of silver, gold, wives,
horses, or chariots, but is for daily, disciplined pondering of the Torah. Thus the ongoing root tradition conjures a fresh mode of covenantal power eventually exhibited in the royal narrative through the good king, Josiah (2 Kings 22-23).

b) Conversely, the imaginative, legal corpus of Deuteronomy ends in 25:17-19 with a Mosaic mandate to conduct permanent ethnic cleansing of the Amalekites: “You shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; do not forget.” This command is rooted in the old narrative of Exodus 17:8-15, but it has no warrant or precedent in Sinai commands. I cite this text to suggest that the dynamism of the root tradition is not always “healthy.” The tradition is clearly capable of development that is ignobly negative and in contradiction to the main flow of covenantal imagination; that this particular command stands in the final position of the corpus of commands suggests that it is to be particularly pondered ... alas!

The complexity of the tradition – with the prime example of Deuteronomy – indicates that Torah education of a canonical variety consists in immersion into the tradition and then the demanding, endless task of interpretation in order always to bring the mandates of the God of Sinai close to the place of contemporary obedience.

IV

This community, rooted in a complex tradition of critical interpretation, evidently must cross the Jordan into the land and into the prophetic canon. The land has been the defining project of Israel since the initial promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and the invitation to the slaves in Egypt (Exod. 3:7-8). It is the land that God will give, that Israel will receive, that is contested by Israel’s neighbors, and that is endlessly at risk in the interplay of power and faith. It is the land that delivers the Bible and church education from excessive privatism, spiritualism, romanticism, moralism, or otherworldliness. For land is seen in this tradition to be indispensable for life, completely the gift of God, utterly and endlessly contested among the neighbors.10

In canonical form it is Torah that permits Israel to think prophetically about its land. It is the prophetic that brings Torah into the real world. Church education must take up the prophets as a way in which Torah re-reads the world, to show that the world is not as we thought it is, but it is a quite odd place where the rule of God cannot be outflanked, even if that rule remains hidden. I wish, of course, to disallow the popular notion that the prophetic is simply indignant social action. It is rather re-reading the soil of promise through the texts of Torah:

1. The “historical” narrative of Joshua-Kings, called by Jews “Former Prophets,” is a sustained reflection on land as gift, land as risk, and land loss according to the mandates of Deuteronomy. While the narrative is complex, I shall instance only one point, namely, that Joshua-Kings is a model of social
criticism, a narrative critique of social power that masquerades as faith, but that in fact serves narrow political-economic interests.

- The narrative presentation of Solomon is one of high irony in which the glories of Solomon are duly reported, but with a pervasive awareness that in fact Solomon’s royal system was a replica of that of pharaoh (one of his fathers-in-law), and that it was a practice of abusive economic power that amounted to oppression that ended in an Exodus-like tax revolt in the meeting at Shechem (1 Kings 12). Thus the social criticism of Solomon is direct and confrontational.

- The narrative corpus of Elijah and Elisha in the middle of the royal narrative of Kings is not only testimony to the astonishing power of these uncredentialed outsiders sent by God; it is at the same time an exposé that kings, who are their contemporaries, are non players, without power or authority. The prophetic figures characteristically seize the initiative, and the kings (who are anointed to manage the land) are dismissed by default as an irrelevance.

- The brief testimony to Josiah indicates a deep critique of conventional royal power (on which see Jeremiah 22) and asserts the claim that royal power can be practiced acceding to the Torah. Josiah represents a powerful critique of conventional power and an embodiment of an alternative mode of power that could be covenantal.

The sum of this narrative exposé is a script for the faithful in seeing the world with alternative eyes through alternative tradition. What passes for the conventional in an ordinary way is here shown to be a distorted packaging of power in the disregard of truth. I regard this exposé as a critical facet of church education, for without such a sustained church alert, the capitalist power of technology can advance without any critical challenge.

2. In the pre-exilic prophets such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah—the ones we know best—the combination of Torah command and Torah sanction (blessing and curse) is transposed into prophetic lawsuit of indictment and sentence. That is, the uncompromising connection made in Torah between present obedience or disobedience and future life or death (Deut. 30:15-20) becomes a prophetic assumption. While there are, to be sure, modest invitations offered to repentance, Westermann has seen that the prophetic speech of judgment is the primary mode of communication.11

The pre-exilic prophetic material is a sustained meditation upon the recognition that in a world governed by the God of Torah, Israel’s hold on the land is precarious and the land itself is deeply at risk. Note well, it is the land that seemed completely guaranteed that is deeply at risk. The prophets employ the fragile craft of poetry to ponder, probe, and provoke, in the face of the deep ideology of guarantee and certitude. Thus church education might consider
poetry that penetrates certitude, the poetry of Paul Celan, Rainer Rilke, and many more recent poets who by utterance make risk palpable.

In that context of jeopardy, the voices of canon say it like this:

Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel;
for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or loyalty,
and no knowledge of God in the land.
Swearing, lying, and murder,
and stealing and adultery break out;
bloodshed follows bloodshed.
Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish;
together with the wild animals and the birds of the air,
even the fish of the sea are perishing (Hos. 4:1-3; see Amos 4:1-3; Mic. 3:9-12; Jer. 5:27-29).

Of course I have taken the easiest, most obvious case. But imagine, at the center of canon, a script of jeopardy in order to ponder how loosely we hold that which we most passionately treasure, aware that in harsh poetic utterance all the certitudes are savagely rendered null and void.

3. With the fruition of covenantal threat and the enactment of prophetic jeopardy in 587 – we do not think it could happen, and they did not think it could happen in Johannesburg or in Moscow – the scene changes abruptly. The savage rhetoric of jeopardy designed to penetrate denial now gives way, for now there is loss and grief, the whole long weeping of Lamentations, the silence of despair, sullen beyond anger. In such a land loss – like the loss of the whole known world of Western, white, male, heterosexual domination – Israel’s poets must find new voice, now the rhetoric of buoyancy designed to penetrate the despair and give utterance to possibilities for land when there seem none. Church education might ponder the poetry of possibility that we do not usually associate with the prophetic. Except that the prophetic is characteristically a contradiction of the conventional, an alternative voice of the impossible made possible because it is the God of Sarah who vouches for newness that is not possible. Where else are the cadences of possibility to be heard in a mean world of despair, if not through church education in this script that ponders land loss and land yet again to be given? My judgment is that education in hope is now an urgent matter for us, but one not possible until there has been an embrace of the education in loss. In canonical Israel that loss has been accomplished:

- between Isaiah 39 and Isaiah 40 sits the Book of Lamentations;
- between Jeremiah 28 and Jeremiah 29 sits the Book of Lamentations;
- between Ezekiel 24 and Ezekiel 25 sits the Book of Lamentations.
After Lamentations, only after Lamentations, there is the God who will wipe away every tear that is honestly shed over loss. The poets said it in many ways. In all those ways, however, they witness to the same astonishing reality. The present and the future, derived from Torah rootage, are not finally about land loss. They are about land gift that the world — and even Israel — thinks is impossible. The poets are able to give voice to a claim so difficult for the managers. Long before it addresses concrete policy matters, church education is the practice of poetic cadences that refuse to take the world as it seems to be.

4. The former prophets of Joshua-Kings clap with one hand and go beyond loss only in the enigmatic final paragraph of 2 Kings 25:27-30. The poets, however, do more and sound the clap of the second hand. Brevard Childs and especially Ronald Clements have shown that the prophetic books (especially the “Big Three”) are now editorially, canonically arranged to join together the rhetoric of jeopardy and the rhetoric of possibility, in order to contradict in turn the denial of Israel about land at risk and the despair of Israel about the land about to be given yet again.¹²

That juxtaposition of jeopardy and possibility contradicts in turn the denial and the despair that constitutes the covenantal (some would say evangelical) shape of prophetic faith. It is possible to think that the Torah that lives outside Pharaoh’s world could be a utopian world of otherness that imagines Israel unaffected by the world out there.¹³ The prophetic tradition, of course, permits no such misperceived utopianism, for the twin rhetorics of jeopardy and possibility are shot through with raw transformative power. Israel must utter, treasure, embrace, and practice prophetic cadences in the real world of imperial danger. The empire is familiar, for all empires (including our own as the most recent) act in the same way. In that familiarity, however, prophetic cadence renders our most known world unfamiliar, made unfamiliar by the hovering, hidden, decisive presence of the God of Torah who plucks up and tears down, who plants and builds (Jer. 1:10).

The God-given jeopardy that the poet utters is in, with, and under empire.¹⁴ It is Assyria who is for the moment “the rod of my anger” (Isa. 10:5). It is by “the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, my servant,” that Jerusalem will be destroyed (Jer. 27:6). Much more astonishing, however, is the utterance that declares that it is by Cyrus the Persian, “my messiah,” that Judaism will spring to new life (Is. 45:1). Just now it is faith making its fragile way midst the global economy.

This is the real world of familiarity processed through the unfamiliarity of YHWH that yields a strange, new world:

- not Sargon against Samaria without YHWH, but also not YHWH against Samaria without Sargon;
- not Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem without YHWH, but also not YHWH against Jerusalem without Nebuchadnezzar;
• not Cyrus to remake Judaism without YHWH, but also not YHWH without Cyrus.

It may be that this double-visioned, bilingual version of reality is already inchoate in the Torah. It is in any case the most characteristic mode of transformative rhetoric in Israel, a familiar world made unfamiliar by the centrality of YHWH in the rhetoric, not a rash supernaturalism featuring a God of magic, and not a flat naturalism of cause and effect, but an unfamiliarity only possible in poetic, prophetic, covenantal cadence. This is the very cadence upon which rests church education, the very cadence now so difficult in church education because our technological attention deficit disorder has no patience for such flimsy, amorphous rhetoric. But without it of course, there can only be denial, despair, and surely death. 15

The best procedures of liturgy, preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and diaconal work all belong to the act of rescripting. Only such scripting permits new performances of obedience and praise in the world. Embedment in the old scripts of amnesia, autonomy, despair, and self-sufficiency will yield old performances. Victor Borge had a much-used piano routine in which he would play a familiar classical piece by Mozart or Beethoven. But his one hand was recalcitrant and in the middle of the number, while the other hand kept with the program, that recalcitrant hand reverted always again to “The Third Man Theme.” He would grab his hand and bring it back to Mozart, but it refused. Rescripting is like that. We play the new piece, but our bodies revert to the old familiar script, so that rescripting takes great practice, patience, and passion.

We may, however, imagine a great renewal among the baptized. We may reverse the imagery: while the media, the market, and the furies of technological reason seek to induct us into new scripts of autonomy and brutality, our hands are practiced and will-nilly revert to our best script of baptism. We are tempted into the narrative of Coke or Nike or Toyota or Budweiser; but our disciplined, baptized hands revert to Miriam:

Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea (Exod. 15:21).

Our educated baptized lips sing with Sarah defiantly in exile:

Sing, O barren one who did not bear; burst into song and shout, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than the children of her that is married, says the Lord (Isa. 54:1).

Our enigmatic baptized bodies dance with all the saints:
The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever (Rev. 11:15).

We will keep learning; but we will not learn the new mantras of control.

Against Nike, we know about wonder;
Against Coke, we know about love;
Against Coors, we know about praise.

In our resolved baptismal anthems of wonder, love, and praise addressed to God, we know that right after comes a second like unto it: “neighbor!” Everything hangs on these two, much more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mark 12:33). It has been so since Sinai; and it is so for all imaginable futures for which we wait with eager longing.

ENDNOTES

2 It is a primary contribution of Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology I (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962) to have shown the way in which the Pentateuch developed as an ongoing dynamic process of reinterpretation.
3 It is the great merit of Terence E. Fretheim, “The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster,” Journal of Biblical Literature 110 (1991): 385-96, to have suggested a fresh way in which to understand the relationship between the Exodus narrative and creation faith. See also Walter Brueggemann, “Theme Revisited: Bread Again!” (forthcoming), who proposes a closer linkage between creation faith and the sojourn tradition.
5 Robert Alter, Canon and Creativity: Modern Writing and the Authority of Scripture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 15. Here, in speaking of the Samuel narrative, Alter writes: “The Hebrew imagination, as early as its founding biblical phase, laid the grounds for what could be called a culture of exegesis. Prose narrative was its first instrument for expressing the reality of the nation’s historical experience, but unlike the lucid, leisurely narrative of Homer’s sunlit world, it is a kind of abrupt story that turns on dark places, that is riddled with unsettling enigmas—in the instance of the text that stands behind Faulkner’s novel [Absalom, Absalom], incestuous rape, fratricide, insurrection, a bloody struggle for succession, and the spectacle of a once-powerful man on the throne who seems to have lost the capacity to wield power. The primary narrative is, as we have noted, composite, a redactor’s orchestration of tensions among divergent or even clashing views of the represented figures and events. . . . One readily understands how such a narrative would generate three thousand years of exegesis, with no end in sight” (15-16).


Frank Crüsemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of the Old Testament Law* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 57, nicely says, “Sinai is, however, a utopian place. It is temporally and physically outside state authority... The very real survival of Israel... depends on a fictional place in an invented past.”


In a longer version of this paper I suggest that the world rendered unfamiliar by the prophets is shown in the wisdom traditions to be the world of daily familiarity, only now reconfigured by God’s holiness that places the familiar in jeopardy and yet permits buoyancy.
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