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“MY GOD” IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE phrase “My God”, occurring about 131 times¹ in the Old Testament, covers a wide range of different meanings, one extremity being the designation of a graven image or an idol by “My God”, while the other extremity is characterised by “My God” as an address in prayer expressing the intimate communion of God with him who prays. Thus the examples of “My God” reflect the religious history of the Old Testament from its origins, alongside the religion of Israel’s neighbours, up to its transition into the New Testament where “My God” as an address in prayer is surpassed in intimacy and fervour by “My Father”. It is therefore worth while to investigate the different shades of meaning of “My God”, especially as such a survey, it is to be hoped, of all examples of “My God” occurring in the Old Testament will help us to recognise and appreciate the full and peculiar content attached to this phrase in special prayers.

I

In two instances “My God” clearly denotes a graven image or an idol, and it is significant that these instances do not only tell of very old events, i.e. in the second half of the second millennium B.C., but that they also are rather old from the point of view of literature. In Gen. xxxi. 30 Laban, not finding his teraphim, reproaches Jacob, his son-in-law, who had fled together with his wives, children and cattle, and asks him, “Wherefore hast thou stolen my god?”, and in Judges xviii. 24 the Ephraimite Micah, trying to recover from the Danites the graven image robbed together with the priest, replies to their question why he pursues them, “Ye have taken away my god which I made, and the priest”. A graven image is also meant by the address “My God” in Isaiah xlv. 17, about four centuries later. For here the writer strikingly demonstrates the folly and ridiculousness of making and worshipping graven images by saying that people addressed a graven image made from the residue of a log of wood, part of which had been

¹ Usually אֱלֹהַי [Elohai]; in Ex. xv. 2; Isa. xlv. 17; Ps. xviii. 3; xxii. 2, 11; lxiii. 2; lxxviii. 25; lxxxix. 27; cii. 25; cxviii. 28; cxl. 7, it is אֱלִי [Eli]; in Dan. iv. 5; vi. 23, אֱלֹהֵי [Elohi]; in Dan. iii. 14, אֱלֹהַי [Elohai].

used for roasting and baking, as "My God". The sarcasm is made the more biting by the revelation of the contrast between the objective reality and the subjective faith of that "pious fellow". In reality such an idol is a useless object, made of a substance otherwise used for domestic purposes, but the "pious fellow" thinks it a god, his god.

II

In another group of instances, ranging over the whole period of the religious history of the Old Testament, the speaker, by saying "My God", means the god he worships as opposed to other gods or another god. In Numbers xxii. 18 Balaam replies to the servants of Balak, who want to induce him to curse Israel at all costs, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more." It is true, "My God" here means that Balaam feels he is a servant to his God and therefore bound to Him, and therefore this passage could also be quoted in the third section following below. But the idea that Balaam's God is different from Balak's is at least implied at the same time. The same might be said of Joshua ix. 23, where Joshua, from whom the Gibeonites had by craft obtained a league and the guarantee that they should live, after discovering the truth declares: "Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." A change of religion in the times of the Judges is referred to in Ruth i. 16, when Ruth, of Moab, refuses the proposal of her mother-in-law Naomi, of Judah, to stay in Moab and not to accompany her to Judah, by declaring: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." The worshipper of another god or other gods than Jahwe is also spoken to in 2 Sam. xxiv. 24 with the words which David speaks to Araunah the Jebusite as a reply to his offer, "Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which does cost me nothing." This is also the case with the message which the young King Solomon, according to 1 Kings v. 4, 5 (cf. 2 Chron. ii. 3), sent to Hiram, King of Tyre, "But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. And, behold, I purpose to build a house unto the name of the LORD my God." Finally in Daniel iii. 14; iv. 8; vi. 22, too,

the speakers, saying “ My God ”, oppose their God to the gods worshipped by their neighbours: thus Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iii. 14, furiously asking Daniel’s companions, who had not worshipped the golden image according to royal orders, “ Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods? ”; and again Nebuchadnezzar in iv. 5 in a decree unto all people, “ But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god ”; finally Daniel, relating his delivery from the lions’ den to King Darius (vi. 22) “ My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths.”

III

In a third group of instances, equally relating to all periods of the religious history of the Old Testament, “ My God ” is used without any reference to the worshipping of other gods. On the contrary, they occur among people who, like the speaker himself, profess Jahwe. In these cases “ my God ” expresses the fact that the speaker belongs to Jahwe or acts on His commission, and it remains in abeyance to decide how far this relation of belonging to one’s God also includes an internal communion. At any rate, in this third group the existence of such a communion is not so obvious as in other examples mentioned below. In this group—as far as “ My ” refers at all to an individual and not to a collective subject, which happens in some instances—it is chiefly men like Moses, David, and the Prophets who use the words “ My God ”. That means, they all serve their God in a special degree and have a greater title to the phrase “ My God ” than others, while on the other hand God specially claims them as His servants.

In Deut. iv. 5 Moses says to Israel “ Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me.” In two passages of Deut.—xviii. 16 with the words of the people terrified by the horrific phenomena of Jahwe’s appearance on Mount Sinai, and xxxi. 17 with the confession of guilt of Israel, when the catastrophes happened with which Jahwe had threatened them for their idolatry—“ my God ” is meant collectively, referring to the people of Israel; in Joshua xiv. 8, 9 however, “ My God ” is again used by an individual. In Joshua xiv. 8 Caleb ben-Jephunneh can boast of the fact, “ but I wholly followed the LORD my God ” and can add in xiv. 9 that Moses had confirmed this by saying,

“Thou hast wholly followed the LORD my God”. Chronicles several times makes David use “My God”. According to 1 Chron. xi. 19 he indignantly refuses the offer to drink of the water which three of his followers have under risk of life fetched from the well of Beth-lehem, held by the Philistines, by saying, “My God forbid it me, that I should do this thing”; and according to 1 Chron. xxii. 7 he said to his son Solomon, “My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God”; in xxviii. 20 he consoles and encourages him, “The LORD God, even my God, will be with thee”; in xxix. 2, 3 he is made to say unto the whole congregation, “Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold. . . . Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God. . . .” Among the prophets, Micaiah ben-Imlah in 2 Chron. xviii. 13 replies to the demand made by a messenger of King Ahab that he should at all costs give the king an agreeable answer, “As the LORD liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak”; when King Ahaz, in the crisis of the year 734 B.C., instead of showing pious resolution, proved despondent and fickle, Isaiah flung the words in his teeth, “Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?” (Isaiah vii. 13); the prophet in Isaiah lvii. 21 declares, “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked”; Hosea (ix. 8) proclaims, “The watchman of Ephraim was with my God”; and (ix. 17) “My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him”; Joel (i. 13) exhorts the priests, “Come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God”; Zechariah (xi. 4) repeats an order received from his God by saying, “Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter”, and refers to the apparition of Jahwe at the end of days by “And the LORD my God shall come” (xiv. 5); Daniel introduces his great prayer, Dan. ix. 4-19, by “And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said . . .” (ix. 4), and (ix. 20) adds, “And whiles I was speaking . . . and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God. . . .” A sage, in Prov. xxx. 9, begins his prayer for protection from poverty with the words, “Lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain”. Finally we must quote here those passages from Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s memoirs

differing from the prayers contained therein, which we shall discuss further on, as both of them several times use “the LORD my God” (Ezra vii. 28) or “my God” (Neh. ii. 8, 12, 18; vii. 5). For, while in those passages in the prayers the “My God” clearly is evidence of a communion between God and him who prays, the cases mentioned here do not explicitly go beyond the statement of the connection between God and the speaker. However, these cases form a transition to those instances where “My God” occurs in prayers or in passages connected with them and where it is evidence of a special communion between God and His worshipper.

IV

The use of “My God” in prayers or in speeches resembling prayers was certainly frequent in the religion of Israel from its beginnings. And the forms of prayer with “my God” included in the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah, written down, therefore, in the second half of the fifth century B.C., as well as the “My God” occurring in Daniel’s prayer (Dan. ix. 18, 19), prove that this address in prayer kept alive up to the final stages of the development of the Old Testament, and is alive still nowadays.

In about half of the passages under consideration here it is—more or less distinctly—a collective subject, the people of Israel, which says “My God”; thus in the hymn ascribed to Moses and Israel in Ex. xv. 1–18, which (xv. 2) runs, “He is my God . . . and I will exalt him”; equally in Deut. xxvi. 12–15 in the liturgical formula for the third year’s tithes, “I have hearkened to the voice of the LORD my God” (xxvi. 14); in the hymn of thanksgiving Isaiah xxv. 1–5 beginning with “the LORD my God” (xxv. 1); in the complaint put in the mouth of Israel, “My judgment is passed over from my God” (Isaiah xl. 27); in the self-encouragement, full of confidence, which helps Ebed Israel to overcome all temptations, “My work is with my God” (Isaiah xlix. 4) and “My God shall be my strength” (xlix. 5); in the song of thanksgiving in Isaiah lxi. 10 which begins, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God”; in the prayer of repentance, uttered by Ephraim in Jeremiah xxxi. 18–19, that in ver. 18 contains the confession, “For thou art the LORD my God”; in Hosea ii. 23 where Jahwe promises reconciliation to Israel, which He calls “my people”, and allows them the address

“ my God ”; in Hosea viii. 2, which probably has come down to us with textual corruptions and which runs, “ Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee ”; in the beginning of Zion’s elegiac prayer, Micah vii. 7–20, which opens, “ Therefore will I look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me ” (ver. 7); Zechariah xiii. 9, where Jahwe promises those escaping the final judgment, “ I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God ”; at the end of Daniel’s prayer, Dan. ix. 4–19, which in ver. 18 runs, “ O my God, incline thine ear, and hear ”, and in ver. 19, “ Defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name ”. In one or the other of these passages the address “ My God ” pronounced by Israel will scarcely be meant to express more than the statement that Jahwe is Israel’s God, i.e. only that which “ My God ” in the passages summed up in the last group was meant to say. But in the overwhelming majority of the cases the content of “ My God ” is certainly greater. Where it is used in a hymn (Ex. xv. 2) we hear pride of being able to claim such a powerful God. The “ My God ” of the song of thanksgiving (Isaiah xxv. 1) is full of a joyful satisfaction that Jahwe by his actions has really proved the God of the people, “ their God ”. In prayer or complaint the “ My God ” is sustained by the hope—either confident or anxious—that Jahwe will grant the requests of His people (Jer. xxxi. 18), and this confidence may, even without a special request, be independently expressed in the statement “ My God ” (Hosea ii. 23). At any rate “ My God ” here always expresses more than the mere statement that Jahwe is the God of the speaker.

This is in a much higher degree the case in those instances where it is not a collective subject, but an individual who says “ My God ”. Here the “ My God ” is evidence of a personal communion between the person praying and his God. However, we do not yet reach the height of “ My God ” in certain psalms, as we are going to see, where it expresses the assurance of a communion between him who prays and his God which resists all vicissitudes of life and is superior to goods and chattels, to life and limbs. On the contrary, “ My God ” as used in the prayers under consideration here always aims at the fulfilment of a special wish. This is the case with David’s prayers, as the Chronicler renders them (1 Chron. xvii. 16–27 with ver. 25;

xxi. 17; xxix. 10-19 with ver. 17) as well as with those of Solomon (1 Kings iii. 6-9 with ver. 7; viii. 15-53 with ver. 28=2 Chron. vi. 14-42 with ver. 19 and 40). Maintenance of the dynasty, happy government, protection of the people, and similar requests are made, and “ My God ” inserted in the prayer expresses the confidence that, as a consequence of the alliance with the person praying, Jahwe will grant his prayer. The same applies to Elijah’s prayer on the occasion of the illness of the widow’s son at Zarephath, when he exclaims, “ O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? ” (1 Kings xvii. 20), and then, stretching himself upon the stiff body of the child, prays, “ O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again ” (ver. 21). A similar judgment might be made on the sentence, “ Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God ” (Jonah ii. 6); in the psalm of thanksgiving recorded in Jonah ii. 2-10 as uttered by the prophet when saved by the fish from drowning, similar ideas are expressed, as this song, which properly speaking belongs to the psalms, pronounces the thanks for delivery from evil illness and therefore generally follows conventional lines rather than expresses special personal piety. In Habakkuk’s outcry, “ Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die ” (Hab. i. 12), we really feel in a higher degree that it comes out of a heart harassed by grave temptations of faith, a heart which has an intimate communion with God, which it feels menaced by the apparent triumph of injustice, a loss that would be far greater than all external distress. Finally we must specially mention the “ My God ” of the short prayers inserted in Nehemiah’s memoirs (Neh. v. 19; vi. 14; xiii. 14, 22, 29, 31). For, whereas the beginning of the prayer put in the mouth of Ezra (Ezra ix. 6-15), “ O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God ” (ver. 6), scarcely requires special mention, those short prayers, without doubt composed by Nehemiah himself, with their “ My God ” give an insight into the soul of this man and into the manner of his communion with his God. His prayers ask either for a reward for his unselfish acts, devoted to his people and to his God—thus v. 19 “ Think upon me, my God, for good ” or xiii. 14, 22, 31—or for a punishment of his adversaries, as in vi. 14 “ My God, think thou upon Tobiah . . . according to these their works ”

or xiii. 29. Certainly the "My God" occurring here is evidence of genuine piety, and the whole of Nehemiah's memoirs makes him appear as a sincerely pious man. But he did not reach a communion with God which carries its worth in itself and does not ask for reward for himself or punishment of his enemies.

V

In quite a number of cases occurring in the psalms and expressing a communion between God and him who prays, protection of the pious from misfortune or at least delivery therefrom on the one hand, and disadvantages of the impious adversaries on the other, are regarded as matters of fact; here a communion of the pious man with his God which would carry its worth within itself, is quite outside the scope of the speaker. The passages where "My God" has this meaning need only be mentioned by the way. But there also occur instances where the "My God" is evidence of a communion with God superior to reward or punishment, fortune or misfortune, yea, even life and death, and which is only sustained by itself. These cases occur in all chief branches of our Book of Psalms, in the hymn, the complaint, and the song of thanksgiving.

The "My God" at the beginning of the two hymns Psalms cxlv and cxlvi, "I will extol thee, my God, O King" (cxlv. 1) and "While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being" (cxlvi. 2) scarcely rises above the conventional. On the other hand, in Psalm lxxviii. 24, "They have seen thy goings, O God; even the goings of my God, my king, in the sanctuary"—where "my" perhaps is to be taken collectively, referring to the people or the congregation—one is entitled to recognise unselfish and disinterested joy in Jahwe's magnificence as it appears in a religious procession. Still more so, the poet of the eighty-fourth psalm, though else regarding as a matter of fact the blessings bestowed by God on the pious (ver. 11, 12), must have witnessed hours or moments in the temple when he felt a wonderfully blissful communion with his God, which did not ask for external reward. Could he else have exclaimed, "Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she shall lay her young, even thy altars, O LORD of hosts, my king, and my God" (ver. 4), and, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to

dwell in the tents of wickedness ” (ver. 10)? Deeper still, and be it only because of being independent from the place of worship, is the communion with God expressed in the beginning and end of the hundred-and-fourth psalm, “ Bless the LORD, O my soul: O LORD my God, thou art very great ” (ver. 1) and, “ I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being ” (ver. 33). The pious man speaking here does not pronounce a single request for his person or his people. Yea, apart from the idea—relating not to himself, but to God’s creation and thus to the benefit of God Himself—that the sinners and impious, the only dark stain in the creation, might vanish, he does not utter a single wish. In complete devotion and unselfishness this singer rejoices rather in the majesty of his great and magnificent God, which elevates himself, too, and which manifests itself in the universe. With superior calm, even with aesthetic delight he is able to observe and describe the eternal change of rising and falling, which also affects his own living and dying (ver. 29, 30): “ Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.” In this sense he is satisfied to know himself the servant of this great and magnificent God and to be allowed to call Him his God, without expecting any special reward from Him. As from itself, a reflection of the godlike magnificence falls on him, His worshipper.

In the complaints, it cannot always be decided with certainty, whether they must be regarded as coming from a collective subject or an individual, i.e. whether we hear the people and the congregation or an individual speaking; here the address “ My God ” is often used, and motifs with “ My God ” similar to complaints are also occasionally to be found in psalms belonging to other kinds. In Psalm lxxxiii, a people’s complaint, with a prayer to God for revenge on the enemies, “ O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind ” (ver. 13), the “ My God ” is certainly to be understood collectively, and its context, i.e. the cursing of the enemies, clearly reveals that it does not exactly express deep contents. Neither does a series of complaints of individuals, all of them complaining about persecution by enemies or illness or both of them, and praying from delivery from necessity, rise to a height, where the “ My God ” would enable the person praying to forget his own

misfortunes and to find calm and satisfaction in a communion with his God; on the contrary, this "My God" is still connected with the expectation of reward for piety and of revenge upon the enemies of the praying man. To this group belong Psalm iii with "Arise, O LORD, save me, O my God" (ver. 7), Psalm v with "Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God" (ver. 3); Psalm vii with "O LORD my God, in thee do I put my trust, save me from all them that persecute me, deliver me" (ver. 1) and "O LORD my God, if I have done this; if there be iniquity in my hands . . ." (ver. 3); Psalm xiii with "Consider and hear me, O LORD my God, lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death" (ver. 3); Psalm xxv with "O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me" (ver. 2); Psalm xxxv with "Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, even unto my cause, my God and my Lord: Judge me, O LORD my God, according to thy righteousness; and let them not rejoice over me" (ver. 23, 24); Psalm xxxviii with "For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O LORD my God" (ver. 15) and "Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me" (ver. 21); Psalm lix with "Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me" (ver. 1) and "My God, his mercy shall prevent me: God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies" (ver. 11 with $\text{יְהוָה} [\text{Elohai}]$ instead of $\text{יְהוָה} [\text{Elohē}]$, and ver. 18, to be corrected according to ver. 11); Psalm lxix with "Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God" (ver. 3); Psalm lxxi with "Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man" (ver. 4), "O God, be not far from me; O my God, make haste for my help" (ver. 12) and "I will also praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God" (ver. 22); Psalm lxxxvi with "Preserve my soul; for I am holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee" (ver. 2) and "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore" (ver. 12); Psalm lxxxix with "Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation" (ver. 26); Psalm cii with "I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days" (ver. 24); Psalm cix with "Help me, O LORD my God: O save me according to thy mercy" (ver. 26); Psalm cxix with "Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God" (ver. 115); Psalm cxl

with “ I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD ” (ver. 6); Psalm cxliii with “ Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God ” (ver. 10).

In the psalms just quoted one may already recognise certain differences with regard to the depth of piety reflected in the use of “ My God ”. Thus the complaint Psalm xxxviii, showing genuine feeling of guilt, rises above the others, and when here the psalmist in prayer addresses Jahwe with “ My God ” (ver. 15) and concludes his prayer with “ O Lord my salvation ” (ver. 22), this delivery, even though it be from external distress, is not the only and not even the chief thing prayed for. This is rather to be found in the assurance that he may again be sure of the communion with God, this supreme salvation, which had been destroyed by the committal of a sin. A genuine communion of the singer with his God is also evident in Psalm lxxi, not only when the poet praying to God exclaims “ My God ” (ver. 4) and reminds Him of the confidence he put in Him from the womb (ver. 5, 6), but also when he thanks God in advance by “ My God ” and vows Him eternal thankfulness and devotion (ver. 22-4). Similar thoughts are expressed in Psalms lxxxvi and cxliii. The former sings of a longing for God, a God of goodness and mercy (lxxxvi. 4, 5), and in the latter the poet compares his soul languishing for God with a land thirsty for rain (cxliii. 6) and asks Him that His good spirit might lead him in uprightness (cxliii. 10).

The warmth of a still more intimate communion with God radiates from the “ My God ” of Psalms xxii, xxxi, xlii and xliii, lxiii, and xci. The poet of Psalm xxii lives in specially severe necessity. Illness and persecution by enemies cause him bitter distress. Therefore a specially stirring appeal is to be heard in “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent ” (xxii. 1, 2); but at the same time he is filled with an exceedingly great confidence, shown in ver. 10 which runs, “ I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly ”. It is not to be wondered, therefore, that it was the beginning of this psalm which according to Matt. xxvii. 46 and Mark xv. 34 Jesus prayed in the pain of His death on the cross. The poet of the thirty-first psalm, too, sings of the blissful experience of a security in danger and necessity, rising from a genuine communion with God, when he

is able to overcome all distress arising from illness or calumny, by stating, "But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God" (ver. 15). Once more it is not without significance that this psalm, too, gave one of the sayings to Jesus on the cross, ver. 5 which according to Luke xxiii. 46 Jesus exclaimed before breathing His last; neither is it insignificant that this verse was of considerable importance in the medieval instructions on the *ars moriendi* and was thus also prayed several times in his last hours by Martin Luther, who was well acquainted with this art. The communion with God testified here is so firm and profound that in spite of its limitation to this life it almost naturally appeared to the Christian intelligence as lasting beyond grave or death even and as reaching into eternity. In Psalms xlii and xliii the very beginning, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (xlii. 1) reveals a pious man to whom communion with God is the highest good. This blissful longing is also expressed in the "My God" of the thrice repeated refrain (xlii. 5-6; xlii. 11; xliii. 5), "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God", and of the wish at the end of the psalm "Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God" (xliii. 4). Of a similar kind is Psalm lxiii which begins, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (ver. 1), and which further confesses to its God, "Thy loving kindness is better than life" (ver. 3). An atmosphere of wonderful confidence rising from God further permeates Psalm xci, where the poet is able to address God with "He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (ver. 2). Even if the salvation promised by God at the end to the pious man with "With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation" (ver. 16) is still limited to life here below, as it is proved by the comparison to a long life, this pious man does not esteem goods and life here below for their own worth, but for God's favour proved by them.

Finally "My God" may be found in several songs of thanksgiving. In Psalm xviii, which is twice included in the Old Testament, as it was ascribed to David after having overcome all his enemies and therefore recorded as spoken by him before his

death in 2 Sam. xxii, “My God” occurs several times. “My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower” (ver. 2, cf. 2 Sam. xxii. 3, where *יְהוָה* [*Elohē*] stands instead of *יְהוָה* [*Elohai*], “In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears” (ver. 6=2 Sam. xxii. 7); “For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God” (ver. 21=2 Sam. xxii. 22); “For thou wilt light my candle: The LORD my God will enlighten my darkness” (ver. 28=2 Sam. xxii. 29 without “my God”); “For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall” (ver. 29=2 Sam. xxii. 30). These are the rejoicings of this pious man after his delivery, and full of thanks he raises his eyes to God, thus testifying a communion with Him, which at the same time signifies a subjection under His moral will—apt to be self-complacent, it is true, but nevertheless meant in earnest. Psalm xxx contents itself with stating the granting of a prayer and vowing eternal thankfulness: “O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me” (ver. 2), “O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever” (ver. 12). Psalm xl, however, which by the way ends with the request “Thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God” (ver. 17), after a thankful remembrance of the granting of the prayer, “Many, O LORD, my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward” (ver. 5), expresses, somewhat in the way of Psalm xxii, the resolution to fulfil Jahwe’s will and thus to confirm the communion with Him, “I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (ver. 8). Psalm xciv, originally a complaint, which towards the end passes into a song of thanksgiving, contents itself with the thankful confession, “But the LORD is my defence: and my God is the rock of my refuge” (ver. 22). Thanks, rejoicing thanks for Jahwe’s goodness permeates Psalm cxviii. Framed within the request, “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever” (ver. 1, 29), it ends with the confession and vow, “Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee” (ver. 28). It is quite impossible to imagine that the pious man speaking here could ever have forgotten or even denied this communion with his God so strongly felt and experienced.

VI

In a number of psalms—as the hymn Psalm civ, the complaint Psalms xlii and xliii or the song of thanksgiving Psalm cxviii—the address “ My God ”, come down from the origins of the religious history of the Old Testament, has undergone a singular deepening and ripening of its contents. We should greatly like better to know the pious poets whose hearts could pour forth such a “ My God ”, or at least to know to which age they belonged or in which society they lived. The first wish will never be fulfilled, but with the second, fulfilment does not seem quite hopeless. At any rate, many are of the opinion that the religious individualism expressed in these psalms with their “ My God ” cannot be imagined to have happened before the victory of the individual in the religion of Israel, connected with the name of Jeremiah. According to this opinion these psalms must then be regarded as the effect of the spirit of Jeremiah and his monologues or confessions, which, justly to a certain extent, are claimed the first birthplace of religious individualism. And this opinion will prove true, though absolute certainty will hardly be obtainable. “ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth.” In the history of religion there is no development following firm and unalterable laws, and thus there is no possibility sufficiently to explain each phenomenon and to fix its time. If—and that may well be—Psalm civ, where “ My God ” seemed to be evidence of specially pure and tender communion with God, really is connected with the famous hymn of the Egyptian king Echnaton of the fourteenth century B.C., this fact alone will exhort us to caution. But the time of the composition of these psalms with their momentous “ My God ” really is not the main point. What matters, is that such meetings with God were at all experienced and written down in song so as to make happy and blissful all those who have an ear and a heart to receive them, as a testimony of a pious way of life, which in its deepest emotions recognised nothing but God and the soul, the soul and its God.

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