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Barbara Green

GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT: A BACK-STORY FROM THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE (GENESIS 37-50)

ABSTRACT

The story of Judah within the longer Joseph story (Genesis 37-50) provides an apt place for readers to discern the work of the Holy Spirit and what is recognized in spirituality as the work of discernment. The character goes from venal and crass to empathetic and self-giving, and the question is how the narrative shows evidence of that process. With the help of the philosopher/theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, the narrated experience of the character in seven scenes is examined for evidence of Judah's journey of transformation – presumably guided by God's widening and inspiring Spirit, with special attention given to the scene (Genesis 44) where Judah must persuade his (unrecognized) brother Joseph, serving as Viceroy of Egypt, to allow Judah to take punishment in place of their brother Benjamin for the sake of their father. The larger Holy Spirit and discernment context of the story is the dreams of Joseph.

1. INTRODUCTION

What changes the character Judah from exhibiting a crass and greedy willingness to sell his brother Joseph with no care for the impact on their father to demonstrating a resolute determination to rescue another brother for the sake of their father? That is, how is Judah shown to judge well and choose properly with the good of others in view, somewhat against probability? How does our capacity to sense and trace that process assist our project of living in the same way, perhaps also against probability? Each of those related queries is crucial: How the representation is managed in language, and how we experience our appropriation of it.

The choice and skill of the reader to discern and construct the process of Joseph's brother Judah growing in compassion is an exercise and gift

Barbara Green, Professor of Biblical Studies, Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology at the Graduate Theological Union, 2301 Vine Street, Berkely, CA 94708. Research Fellow, Department New Testament, University of the Free State, South Africa. Email: bgreen@dspt.edu.

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of the Holy Spirit, helping us be shaped constantly by "Scripturing" into a more profound relatedness with God and with other creatures. The literary character is available for such discernment, if we ourselves are able to read well, not simply with academic and artistic skills (though surely drawing upon them) but with an awakened heart. Though we are not provided in this narrative with much explicit information about the processes of discernment, the whole story moves responsively to the two dreams Joseph recites and that his family interpret from within their own experience (Gen 37:5-11) (Green 1996). We may in fact feel that the dreamer's kin discern rather poorly and that Joseph himself never comments on his own dreams, though we as readers see them as urgent and productive.

The common methodological issue shared among these articles and ourselves as writers and readers involves the nature and dynamics of biblical spirituality, specifically the correlation and fruitful demonstration of various component factors. How to relate Christian spirituality to the vast general field of spirituality, to the particular field of biblical spirituality; how appropriately to distinguish among spiritualities in the biblical text, in lives of believers, in more theoretical discussion of discourse and discipline; how to appraise and make fruitful use of the vast and growing set of methods and tools of biblical exegesis; how to bring usefully to bear comprehensive interpretive frameworks, whether from theology, culture study, or philosophy of language; and how to situate participant experience (Welzen 2011:37-60). No single interpretive endeavor will include all these aspects, but to recognize them as relevant and useful in the discussion is key.

I adopt the language of Sandra Schneiders, who defines Christian spirituality as the project and process of orienting one's life toward what is of ultimate concern, which for the Christian is the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ into whose life we are incorporated by the action of the Holy Spirit (Schneiders 1998:1, 3-12). This understanding highlights the active and dialogic role of the process – the human partner working intentionally and responsively with the divine partner initiating and drawing creatures ever more closely to Godself. Since the divine role in human transformation remains somewhat mysterious to us, language about this relationship is most appropriately phenomenological and provisional. But I assume that the dance aligns the capacity of the human to grow in compassion, a central and most prominent quality of God.[1] For a sense of human compassion, I offer the definition of scholar of world religions Karen Armstrong, who writes: "The principle of compassion lies at the heart of

1 Karen Armstrong, having studied and written extensively on world religions for some decades, urges that compassion is possibly the best candidate for God's most basic and cherished identity (1993:391-92).

all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves." It includes working tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center, to honor all humans with absolute justice, equity, respect; to refrain from inflicting pain, from speaking violently out of spite, from denying rights, inciting hatred

> ... [C]ompassion means to endure something with another person, to put ourselves in somebody else's shoes, to feel her pain as though it were our own (Armstrong 2011: 6-9).

In short, if God's nature is compassion and we are capable of it, then God's role can be constructed as transforming us into such a reality.

For Christians, the taproot of understanding God's role is Jesus, though not apart from God's ongoing projects under the guidance of the Spirit – not available simply with the arrival of Jesus, important though that moment clearly is. In the Old Testament, the contours of God's Spirit are not so clear and coherent as they become in the New Testament, where they remain appropriately and wonderfully rich and thick. We can catalogue ways in which God's Spirit has been glimpsed at work in the time and production of the Old Testament (Waaijman 2002:483-515) even if less prominent, presumably nonetheless active. Christians may and should presume coherence of God's Spirit over time. The citing of texts, though useful, may not be the most important thing to do, with a resolute presentation seeming too abstract to be useful in any practical way. A related approach is to track the presence of the familiar word for the Spirit as that of *ruaḥ* related to wind and breath, appearing in both nominal and verbal forms throughout Hebrew texts.[2] This word does not appear in the story we will be reading, where God is described to operate in three ways: Joseph's dreams (and dreams in general) are understood as being from God (37:5-11; 40-41); God is characterized by the narrator as being with Joseph (39:2,23;41:51, 52; 45:7-9; 50:20); and God appears specifically to Jacob to explain to him the process of his descendants' leaving the land (46:1-4).

2 Clines (2010: 427-40) and Kronholm & Tengström (2004:341-396) agree that two roots are not clearly distinguished. I am grateful to my colleague Paul Scriberras who affirmed that in Maltese (a language derived partly from Arabic and thus related to Hebrew) these two roots *rwḥ/riḥ* are used both for the agency of spirit and also for widening space, making room. Thus one can use the language to speak of taking clothes out of a crowded closet, shaking them to air them and give them more space.

Cognate in some way with the familiar Hebrew root for *breath* is the word for *breadth*: wideness, space, relief, refreshment, hosting the project of transformation quite well. Though it also is not attested in the story at hand, I suggest that we use it as a general marker for God's presence with Judah. At issue here is not simply the presence of a Holy Spirit role in the mind of the author and in the authored text but our skill and gift to read the presence of the Spirit where it may not be directly visible, to discern the Spirit presence as gift and the fruit, reinforcement of and catalyst for ongoing participation. Without needing to make the claim that the Joseph storyteller intended to foreground the role of the Holy Spirit as breadth, nonetheless our capacity to discern and construct her presence is what counts, our reader's capacity for such a move – to discern, to recognize and be drawn within the dynamic of this transformative process and to comment upon it. If, as Armstrong notes,

> religion is a practical discipline that teaches us to discover new capacities of mind and heart ... , is ... self-forgetfulness ... an *ekstasis* that enable[s one] to 'step outside' the prism of ego and experience the sacred ... (Armstrong 2009: xiii)

then this secondary meaning of our Hebrew root is most appropriate: breadth as well as breath.

Indispensable for Christians is the biblical and specifically scriptural nature of the project, since for Christian believers (and analogously for many others) Scripture is one of the main pathways for transformation. To highlight the crucial role of Scripture makes clear the basic interpretive and hermeneutical nature of the transformation process. Assisting in diverse ways are the many tools, ancient and modern, traditional and fresh, religious and mundane, facilitating the process. By whatever means a passage can be transformatively understood, such tools are licit and required. An interpreter will need to hone the skills that may be needed – many useful methods – and cultivate also the skill in using them well.[3]

My process: After a brief introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin's thought, I will read for and with us seven scenes from the book of Genesis where we can appraise the character Judah in his journey of transcendence toward God/compassion. I will comment briefly as I go in terms of how Bakhtin assists

3 In practice, tools produce various insights, some less crucial than others. In the present narrative, less important issues for me are the reconstruction of factual or historical circumstances of narrated events, quest for the genetic processes by which the story grew to its present form, authorial identity or intention, character psychology. Nor is my wish to allegorize or spiritualize the story in some vague way.

us to re-link with the larger discussion of spirituality, and then draw larger conclusions.

2. METHODOLOGY: BAKHTIN

My main procedure, conversant and compatible with current issues in spirituality discourse, draws primarily on the work of Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1985-1975) (Green 2000). I need to lift from his thought two useful concepts and their base: First, the ethical and spiritual challenge of *answerability*, his name for the project of awakened integrity. Second, his sense of the simultaneous deep relatedness and radical difference between consciousnesses, such that our process of healthy or respectful "*othering*" can help us with compassion. Additionally, the radical compatibility between Bakhtin's philosophical/aesthetic work and biblical texts needs summarizing. Though Bakhtin was not an exegete, he can show us one way to engage Scripture responsibly, touching on its cognitive, ethical, aesthetic and religious – hence "spiritual" – aspects, offering us a coherent way to engage the interlocking set of questions posed by contemporary biblical spirituality, as raised earlier in this paper.

2.1 Bakhtin's general point of entry

First: Bakhtin's project of answerability.[4] A major concern in Bakhtin's early writings is an apparent discontinuity between artist and artwork, agent and an ethical deed – to which I would add, between an author/reader and a text. He uses the oppositional pair "given" and "posited" in order to show how these ostensibly estranged entities can be in relation. The "given" is abstract(ed), universal, closed, static, autonomous, objectified; the "posited" is characterized by particularity, vitality, openness, process, interdependence and subjectivity. Though one can say that a work of art, an action, or a narrative becomes objectified, the point Bakhtin wants to argue is that a human being needs to grasp the possibility and significance of choosing to live and act (aesthetically and ethically) "posited" – answerably – with the apparently separate planes claimed as unified. He asserts,

> (T)he answerable act or deed alone surmounts anything hypothetical, for the answerable act is, after all, the actualization of a decision – inescapably, irremediably, and irrevocably (Bakhtin 1993:28).

4 Bakhtin's writings were edited decades after he wrote them and not in chronological order. I will rely in this part of the essay on Bakhtin's work edited in 1993 by Liapunov and Holquist.

Artists and their deeds of art are deeply, reciprocally, interpenetrated.

Bakhtin holds that part of being human is to wrestle with these matters in the situations of our particular lives, to relate all the pieces of our existence architectonically. Such a project is not managed without reflection, nor does it happen by simply living out of a prefabricated framework. So our making real and posited what might be otherwise abstract and given entails that we claim active responsibility for our lives lived conscious of the significance of these relationships, trying insofar as possible not to excuse ourselves or blame others for our deeds. Bakhtin uses the image of "signing" as a figure for taking responsibility for our choices and deeds: "... [S]igning is that indispensable enabling gesture that makes it possible for morality to coalesce around a human being ..." (Morson & Emerson 1990:69). Such a life will admit no major splitting off of what we desire, think, do, say; nor will it make fundamental distinctions between how we relate to other creatures (of whatever type: self to self, to other humans, to other sentient life) or to the source of life. Bakhtin's two vivid names for the refusal to sign are to claim an alibi and to be a pretender. He writes:

> I can ignore my self-activity and live by my passivity alone. I can try to improve my alibi in Being, I can pretend to be someone I am not. I can abdicate from my *obligative (ought-to-be) uniqueness ...* It is only my non-alibi in Being that transforms an empty possibility into an actual answerable deed ... (Bakhtin 1993: 42, emphasis original).

Greg Nielsen sums up these concepts:

> My non-alibi in Being means to struggle with the seduction of pretending[,] where I imagine how the other might see me or I imagine how I would like them to see me (Nielsen 1998:222).

That is, the goal is to resist a claim of being elsewhere, of hiding in some way behind the others.

A second fundamental cluster of insights comprising Bakhtin's thought rises from the Einsteinian observation that no two bodies can occupy the same space at the same time; we each occupy some space and so are situated, particular, corporeal. So Bakhtin develops his understanding based on alterity: how am I *different* from the other – all the others – and, more important to Bakhtin, in what many ways am I *related* to all the others. For though I am surely not the other – am outside every other – yet still we are co-related and crucial for each other. I cannot be a self apart from intensive relatedness with many others. We cross over constantly to

construct identity, potentially to the gain of all.[5] Bakhtin eventually coins the term "dialogism" to address the many ways and degrees of active relationship among participants.

Crucial for his aesthetics and ethics and for the sort of authoring processes that I hope to show relevant below is the reality of outside-ness (exotopy). By this language, Bakhtin asserts the irreducible uniqueness of each actor: I can only be and must be myself; your self is situated in some way at angles to me, however close we may become in art or in life.

> I occupy a place in once-occurrent Being that is unique and never-repeatable, a place that cannot be taken by anyone else and is impenetrable for anyone else ... (Bakhtin 1993:40).

One of us does not merge into the other, nor does one impose one's own view as though it were inevitable or natural. Whatever happens, even when authors construct characters, a minimum of two positions is required.

> The truth of an event is not the truth that is self-identical and self-equivalent in its content, but is the rightful and unique position of every participant – the truth of every participant's actual, concrete *ought* (Bakhtin 1993:46).

Those concepts may be shuffled and re-dealt so as to be ready for the game at hand. Though he ended as a great theorist of language (considering speaking, writing and reading to be the most privileged human action [Morson & Emerson 1990:65]), Bakhtin began by thinking about acts – ethical and aesthetic. Such an act – and here we may posit an example like throwing a pot, engaging in a political demonstration, reading a text – is not simply its material or its devices; those are part of it, but my shaping clay, choosing to engage in creative protest, constructing a narrative are also to be considered in terms of purpose, content and end: what occasions them, constitutes them, and what they accomplish. Their quality arises not from an adherence to abstract norms, nor does it come from choice that is heedless of the intensely communal aspects of all creativity. I cannot satisfactorily think of my pot and my resistance as though they were uniquely mine (too subjective), but neither as though they were simply general behavior types with no relation to me (too abstract). As an artist or agent, I do not wholly dominate passive matter; it

5 Bakhtin has been critiqued by many, notably by feminists and post-colonialists, for his rather too-optimistic view of the benignity of such a process. The possibilities for abuse of the willingly vulnerable are legion; and yet there is considerable healthy truth in self-giving as well. My interest is primarily in the effects of loving as the bond of relatedness.

will exert something of itself in relation to my handling it. In short, my deed is constructed as all those vectors of form, materiality, artistic intention and function cross. It does not live outside of those factors, cannot wholly escape them.[6] Any action taken will have effects, of various kinds. Some I will intend, but others will uncoil outside of my conscious plans.

And these points may be again specified in more detail in terms of interpreting biblical texts, since that is where we are headed in this article. A sampling of questions: How do I engage a narrative critically without wholly reducing it to an object, perform methodological maneuvers that are not so general and abstract that I can hide behind them? How do I walk the line between reducing meaning to authorial intent and eliminating the authoring voice completely from the reading transaction? What is the genre of the text, and what genre constraints or conventions are operative within it? Since reading is not wholly private, how can I well consider the layers of a narrative's reception history in the various communities for which it is a key text? But at the same time, how can I take responsibility for the ways in which my own situation affects my reading of the text and cede that same space to others, so that discrepancies become productive? How do I sort layers of possible signification and meaning, surely those that are normative but particularly those which may strike me as harmful? What difference does it make if I hold the text to be inspired and revealed, or if I do not accept (or do not critically conceive) those categories? Such matters are woven into the reading below.

In order to be sure the heft and scope of the question are clear for the text at hand: How does an author construct a character, both a character dreaming influentially and his brother who reshapes the dreamer's plan midway through the story? How do dreams "do" characters, with their awareness but mostly without it? What is the impact of the continual re-scissioning of the story's key events, such that the lines of verbal ownership and of reality become hopelessly tangled and hopefully fertile? As characters talk, what options become discernible at those sites of articulation? How does the text offer a space for our sketching a character authoring that shows him to have accomplished an answerable and deeply generous deed which is made available to us? How may a reader, granted with interpretive moves made explicit, construct (not retrieve) processes which make radical change in characters explicable? How does such reading allow for, or catalyze, the processes of transformation which accompany participation in art? Susan Sutton, drawing on the work of

6 Bonetskaia, (1998: 85), talks about the Russian absorption in the problem of how to give artistic form to spirit without "murdering" it, or perhaps without the offspring dying at birth.

Deborah Haynes, suggests that viewing art (reading a text) may lead us to re-evaluate our own self-accounting and validate aspects of ourselves previously unacknowledged. Though we read partially to find what we are looking for, our effort to include another's angle as well may lead us to fresh appraisals without abandoning our own place.[7] It is this process of constructing that Bakhtin develops – for authors and heroes, for readers as well.

2.2 Coates (1998) on Bakhtin

A Russian Orthodox thinker and writer who lived his adult life co-terminous with the USSR will not have made it easy to discover the religious base of his thought. But it is the claim of Ruth Coates that biblical categories are not simply illustrative of Bakhtin's ideas, not merely good places to "apply" them; rather, biblical narrative fundamentally structures Bakhtin's understanding of the processes involved in authoring. Bakhtin did not read the Bible and extract theology and then replicate it into theory. Rather, from his experience and reflection, his vast erudition and familiarity with literature and the chronic problems of philosophy, he saw that certain biblical texts discuss the most elemental human concerns, including authoring and alterity – all of which can be subsumed as aspects of the dialogic. Coates lists these motifs (with slight variation) as creation, fall, incarnation, salvific deed, response. They underpin what Bakhtin thinks about answerable human living, aesthetic and ethical doings. I will summarize here in overview the key points, omitting the chronological nuances that are well articulated in Coates. The phrasing is selected to lay the groundwork for Bakhtin's theory of literary authoring and its various components, particularly for biblical texts.

Bakhtin posits a creator God, fundamentally transcendent (or exotopic) to creatures, existing on a separate plane, but intensely involved with them. God's creating or authoring involves a divine going forth to bring something to exist and then sustaining it in being. As Bakhtin describes this moment, there is struggle involved as aesthetic significance is bestowed upon the creature. The creature, our human selves in this case, is authored with a need for some aspect of self to be given (soul – a word used with particular technical valence by Bakhtin), since we are unable to provide for ourselves all that makes us existent; we inevitably interdepend. And, compatibly with the biblical narrative of creation in the early chapters of Genesis (and rampant elsewhere), a breach becomes evident, not simply between the creator and the creatures but among creatures as well. Bakhtin prefers words like split, fragmentation, separation to describe the experience that

7 Sutton (2000:18), referring to the work of Haynes (1995:174).

is sometimes referred to as "the fall" by other Christian writers. At the heart of it is human pride and the futile arrogance of self-sufficiency.

In order to struggle against the effects and experience of this isolation, we creatures need something bestowed from outside of ourselves, need value given, aesthetic justification, a thirst always orienting us toward the future. Humans may strive toward meaning in our lives, but none of us can accomplish it totally on our own. It comes to us unearned and at least partially from the outside. Bakhtin has a string of words for this moment, borrowed from biblical language: redemption, atonement, salvation, grace. For him, the clearest moment to see this moment in the authoring dynamic is in the life of Jesus. His self-understanding, his orientation toward God, his manner of relatedness to others are all paradigmatic for Bakhtin. Also fundamental is the self-giving and self-asserting character of this act, which is grounded in love.

But here is where I would stress carefully – not so much with Bakhtin or Coates – that though the "Christic moment" is unique and key, it is not wholly without precedent, at least biblically speaking. To read Scripture well is to remain alert to God's carefully instructive *torah*, ubiquitous *hokmah* or resourceful *sophia*, and the comforting, abiding presence of *shekinah*. So what Christians celebrate as the incarnation of God's *logos* in Jesus is part of a pattern of how God is described to deal with human beings in the Bible. This caveat also implies that though the "enfleshedness" of Jesus is a crucial event and needs to be treated as such, the anthropological and theological processes under consideration here are not best seen as happening in sequential, linear time: so not first creation, then fall, then redemption, and so forth. Bakhtin understands the processes and situations to be ongoing simultaneously.

In any case, the gift given, the kenotic authoring evidenced by the incarnated *logos*, Bakhtin stresses, is benign rather than heavily judgmental, is characterized by graciousness, respect, mercy, love. And it engenders in ourselves, as recipients, both a turn from isolation and a move toward God: faith, a joy in healthful interdependence with others, love, prayer, repentance – all of which are transformative over time, that is, deepen our ability to live interdependently. As Bakhtin's thought develops over the decades, the relation of creator to (human) creatures shifts and widens, with the creation becoming less managed from the outside and more mutual and respectful.[8] The creature is less passive and the relationship

8 The need for better language about how God "is" with creation is a topic with which others besides Bakhtin have struggled in recent decades. His move toward greater creaturely freedom and to allow a greater "divine weakness" is compatible with a good deal of recent theology and theological anthropology.

between God and humans more dialogical (polyphonic) and more socially conceived. One can see – and Coates explicates – how these ideas contend for Bakhtin as he works with the tremendous problems of authorship that are entailed in his understanding. So with Bakhtin's categories sketched, and with their deep compatibility with biblical language asserted, it is time to move to the text.[9]

3. SEVEN NARRATIVE MOMENTS

We now visit Judah's experience of living in and outside of the land, issues of ties among competing kin who have suffered severely at each others' hands. The story is sophisticated and dense with themes and meaning, and the seven stepping-stones laid down here do not begin to exhaust it. But they will help us make the crossing we need to manage. My choice here is to focus upon Judah, though within the fuller context of the story in which he is featured.

3.1 First moment

Judah's ***first*** interpretation of events comes at 37:26-27, product of the multiple uneven positions in which the brothers are cast prior to that moment: one father, four mothers; diverse working assignments; tale-bearing by one about others; one coat amid many sons and brothers (vv. 2-4). Joseph's two dreams, provocative with their numbered items and hierarchical positions (vv. 5-11) are the specific reason the brothers articulate for their attack on Joseph when they see him advancing toward them (vv. 19-20). With Joseph stripped of his coat and stored at least temporarily in a pit, the question is whether to do more to him or let him die. Judah's plan, his reading of the situation, is that to sell Joseph is preferable to killing him outright or letting him die, since profit can be made from the sale. Why waste a brother, he asks, if gain can be had from him? Judah's language is worth scrutiny here, since we will see re-runs of this moment shortly: <What gain for *us* to kill and cover his blood, when *others* can be brought into action by a sale; let not *our* hands be against him; for he is *our brother, our flesh*.>[10] Presumable impulses of the brothers may win no awards from us, though we need to recall that is we ourselves who supply and evaluate their motivations, we who appraise which brothers help and

9 Coates, (1998:14), with many others observes that Bakhtin drew little on "Holy Writ" for the development and illustration of his theories and insights. She notes as well, however, that he may have undervalued biblical narrative.

10 I use these brackets (<. . . >) for clarifying by paraphrase my interpretation.

hinder.[11] Joseph, despite and because of his brothers, moves closer to the position of primacy he needs to fill for the well-being of the family. We have a glimpse into Judah's motivation, provided in direct discourse, and could contrast his characterization with the brothers-in-general and with Reuben, if we chose.

3.2 Second moment

Judah's ***second*** move in company with the pack of brothers, compounding his first, comes at 37:32, when having re-written the distinctive coat with blood, they offer it to their common father, asking him to identify it as Joseph's, or not. This is a complex moment, beautifully symbolic, as the "coatless ten" press the single garment back on the one who made and gave it so unevenly, urging him to (mis)interpret and colluding silently in his ambiguous evaluation of what happened to the coat's erstwhile wearer. Their question is binary – your son's or not – and it occludes rather than uncovers their claim of having found the coat. The point is not so much whose coat as whose blood, whither the owner, how the finding. But Jacob, successfully distracted from these things, rushes to pronounce as presumably he was meant to do. Among other things we might say of this moment – rich in hints, allusions, and verbal ricochet – it appears to be planned and executed with no care for the feelings of the father, whose subsequent reaction of endless mourning simply compounds the feelings the brothers have evidenced so far. Indeed, the scene dynamics exacerbate the position of Joseph-absent but still favored. Bakhtinian analysis could do a lot with the character Jacob.

3.3 Third moment

While Joseph becomes accustomed to life in Egypt (chs. 39-41), we have Judah's ***third*** and crucial moment in a briskly moving and long-arcing scene whose temporal features bother many readers. The narrative camera snaps him frequently: journeying, settling, marrying, begetting three sons, burying two of them, and withholding the survivor from the widow so as to generate male progeny for the dead, and finally becoming a widower himself (38:1-12). As has been well discussed in literature, this male character has been deftly drawn by a narrator who contrasts Judah's transient mourning for his sons and wife with the ever-bereft and grieving

11 White (1991), has explored the Joseph story, drawing upon Bakhtin's thought. Though his larger project, insofar as I understand it, is to establish a typology of narrative to which Bakhtin's thought as well as that of a number of other contributes, I struggle somewhat to see how his readings relate to mine.

Jacob; who compares Judah's importunate zest to meet his own physical needs with his chronic disregard for those of his daughter-in-law, Tamar; and who juxtaposes Judah's arrogant hypocrisy about the effect of his deed at the roadside and his indignant condemnation of his now pregnant partner with her laconic shrewdness (vv. 13-24). However, when Tamar, carrying the seed of Judah's line, presents evidence accusing him, Judah's last words of the chapter readily acknowledge his responsibility for the injustices he has done and of which he accused her: "'She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to my [surviving] son'" (38:26). The point to offer here is not a justification of Judah but rather the reminder that he has lost two sons and fears for the third, has sired two more and comes close to destroying them as well. Being a father is not the same as being a son. Losing a son is not the same as "disappearing" a brother. The scene rings with vocabulary and themes of ch. 37. We may suppose that Judah has learned something here and spent a portion of that experience while banking some, as we will see. For the first time Judah seems to take into account something besides his own profit – though not to the exclusion of his gain. Indeed, Tamar has planned for their mutual good in a way Judah had not bothered and had indeed refused to do. The question to probe is how such a change is set up.

3.4 Fourth moment

A ***fourth*** moment of reflection (in chapter 42), not featuring Judah specifically but as part of the set and providing him language for later re-use, comes on the occasion of the brothers' first excursion to Egypt. Food has run short in Canaan and must be obtained from the breadbasket of the world. With the brothers in obeisance around Joseph, who having come down first now looms above them, we catch the power of the dreams. The depiction of this fraternal dynamic engages us in more complex angles of perception, as the capacity to see becomes increasingly uneven in these complex character interactions.[12] Simplest is the brothers' view: They see only a powerful Egyptian minding the store and construe themselves as suppliants to him for food. He, of course, sees differently: the supine shoppers are also his brothers. His angle, exotopic to them in so many aspects (though not in all, we must recall), gives him considerable advantage. We watch Joseph put into play his outside-ness to his brothers. With our present concern attached to them and not to him, standing with them rather than with him, we hear them account for themselves as brothers, sons of the same father,

12 Among the best commentators on this aspect of the narrative, consult Ackerman (1981:85-113); Alter (1981); Berlin (1983); Greenstein (1981:114-125, 306-10); Niehoff (1992:577-95); Sternberg (1985).

claiming the youngest brother left at home and another "'who is no more'" (v.13).

Joseph, not content with their claims, lowers all of them into a pit and finally retains there one of them as bait to assure the return of the rest. The brothers interpret this dream-driven scene aloud to each other: "'Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us'" (42:21). Their construction is that a bad deed to a brother is linked to bad deeds experienced by brothers, specifically as regards their lack of compassion. They have raised the Bible-sized problem of retribution, particularly God's role in it, rehearsing as well the problem of whether and how to love those who have seriously wronged us – without yet being very wise on either topic, we may think. They disclose to us now what we were not shown previously: that Joseph resisted their original grasping of him and they paid no heed.[13] The brothers are, for a moment, so caught by the similarity of the "fraternal pit dynamic" that they reflect candidly and at some disadvantage (depending on our point of view, of course! Is it a gain to acknowledge a grubby deed, or better to hide it?). The nine brothers' previous exposure to a scene of apparently unfair and arbitrary imprisonment helps them understand how their brother felt in a way they did not evidence in chapter 37 (or since). Indeed, this is the high point of their acknowledgment of what they did.[14] As the story winds on, conspicuously missing is the brothers ever acknowledging except in allusive spurts what they did. As a group, they are sketched as refusing very full ownership of their deed, which nonetheless repeats on them sporadically. The scene concludes when they refuse to name one of themselves to remain as hostage, though when Joseph seizes Simeon, there is no discernible demur (42:24). By the time they arrive home and tell their tale to their father, the moment of empathy seems vanished. Unpacking goods under Jacob's gimlet eye, they review their experience in Egypt, omitting much of it and altering slightly what they do tell, with the effect that they divulge information only when pressed by "the man." But more about these shifts later.

13 In fact, the narrator says (37:25), they ate their lunch.

14 At 50:16, they reveal to Joseph that their father had urged them to beg Joseph for forgiveness, but it appears that they had not done so then and, in fact, do not quite do it at this moment. Perhaps the discernment learning is that hard work is involved and cannot be omitted.

3.5 Fifth moment

The ***fifth*** moment we watch (opening chapter 43) highlights Judah by name again, allowing us to watch him pull somewhat away from the pack, as he did in scenes one and three and will shortly do in moment six. The interpretive conversation rehearses issues of acquiring fresh provisions in Egypt: whether to go, when to go, who, how many, and so forth. The shifting of their father to agreement from his initial refusal to allow the current favorite son to accompany them, as stipulated by the powerful and food-dispensing Egyptian, concludes the scene. We may imagine Jacob, arms folded across his chest, importuned ineffectually by Reuben and successfully by Judah, who reads his father more shrewdly. As Everett Fox translates, "'... I will act as his pledge ... if I do not bring him back to you and set him in your presence, I will be culpable-for-sin against you all the days (of my life)'" (43:9) (Fox 1983:179). <Hold me accountable forever,> Judah offers his long-memoried and self-centered father, who with admirable practicality, resigns himself to letting his "new favorite" go down. As was the case in chapter 38, we see Judah dislodged from serving simply his own ends, shrewd enough to offer his father the one thing that will reverse Jacob's refusal: Judah himself as pledge. The moment wants analysis, which will be provided shortly. How can two brothers be motivated to change when the ten are not?

3.6 Sixth moment

The center of our reflection comes in this ***sixth*** moment of the story, arguably the book's climax (44:1-17), though six chapters remain. It comes as Joseph has set up and successfully run the accusation and apprehension of Benjamin as thief. The reading of the character Joseph has remained off limits here and must continue so, as we concern ourselves again with Judah and his transformation. In this long biblical narrative about favoritism, dreams, and forgiveness, we have a tale told several times, including my summarizing it into scenes. Besides the narrator and myself, the characters also tell stories, reviewing several times their encounter in Egypt with the powerful man and his demands to their family. To keep from tangling any more than is inevitable, we may review quickly how this present moment is layered:[15] Certain events occurred, both in 37:18-35,

15 The most useful treatment of the particulars of the speech is Savran (1988). His interests are different from mine (he catalogues the types of repeated speech, reads character motivation, and discusses the quotation phenomenon throughout the Hebrew Bible); but his discussions of Judah's speech were most helpful, e.g., pp. 20, 58-65, where he counts that it is nine quotations in sixteen verses.

first when Joseph was "lost" and then in 42:7-25 when the imprisoned brothers are reminded of Joseph's fate and reflect briefly on those. When the brothers return home in 42:30-35, they relate a version of what had happened to them in Egypt, more conversation about the past. And then when food runs out, they discuss their "recollections" again (43:3-7).

We have now come to the last of these re-combings, where Judah as spokesman needs to reformat the story in such a way as to get a particular result. To shift the image a bit: See Judah as a street artist quickly drawing their portraits so as to tempt passers-by who have no obligation or perhaps inclination to buy one. In this confrontation (Judah's rhetorics aside) the balance of power lies quite clearly with the powerful Egyptian whose divining cup has been stolen by an ungrateful foreigner. A heavy burden of argumentation is on Judah if "the man" is to be dissuaded from his announced intention of detaining the thief in Egypt while dismissing the others to Canaan (44:17). Judah now swings into rhetorical high gear, launching the longest narrative speech of the Old Testament.[16] Its desired outcome is clear: Benjamin must not remain enslaved in Egypt; alternative: Judah will take the place of the "guilty" one and pay the penalty. But it is the particular construction of the speech, its strategies of depiction, that are worth scrutiny. In these seventeen verses Judah pens at least three sketches, each of which is itself richly ambivalent. At the end of the speech, he makes his sales pitch – surely to the man but also to himself and to us. Can we – which of us can – accept the portraits proffered?

3.6.1 Judah's sketch of the father

First is the figure of the old father. Judah's language stresses him as old, bereft of all but one of the sons born to their mother (i.e., of two!), much attached to the remaining boy (44:20, 22). The removal of also this last dearest son has now been threatened repeatedly, a loss that would kill the father (vv. 21, 23, 25-26). Judah gives the beleaguered figure of Jacob hypothetical direct discourse (vv. 27-29), shows him speaking earnestly, desperately, as though he were reviewing for his other sons the relevant circumstances. The words that issue from this Jacob's lips are borrowed from the disappearance of Joseph scene: "... [O]ne went forth and I said, 'torn to bits' and I have not seen him since. If you take this one also from me and he come to harm, you will bring my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol" (37:33,37 and 42:38).[17] Judah pencils in around this pathetic parent other

16 Savran tells us (1988:87), that this present speech and that of Eliezer in Genesis 24 are the longest in the Hebrew Bible.

17 Schwartz (1990:49) reminds us that there is no privileged version of the disappearance of Joseph. Savran, when commenting on this quotation (44-45),

dutiful sons – hungry but watchful, desirous of both protecting him from further loss while also persuading him to let his last favored one go off to Egypt. In this "street sketch" the aged parent never actually gives way (as in fact the hungry old patriarch managed to do in 43:11) but somehow the scene segues to draw (again hypothetically) the waiting father expiring upon the non-return of the youngest son, a scene collaged on top of the scene of non-return of the first favored one (44:31 borrowed from 37:33-35). Vintage Bakhtin, all this shared discourse, language in several mouths, disputed, enriched.

We may recall that we watched that play as well and may recall a bit differently: Jacob was surrounded by offspring eager not so much to help him keep a son but to cover up how he had lost one. In Judah's present sketch, the father is given to talk about his old grey head going down to Sheol should a *second* young son be lost, the words in fact he spoke when the *first* one disappeared. For Judah, having been on the receiving end of that comment the first time, to use that language again is bold and ironic in the extreme. There is another subtext to this drawing, hustled forward in 44:33-34: cheer up the old man by non-returning Judah instead of Benjamin – a lineament not too fictional, given the Jacob we know who does have a hierarchy of offspring. The old gray head did not go down when Simeon was detained (42:36), nor when Dinah was taken off (Genesis 34). We may note that Judah's picture matches rather minimally – if quite shrewdly – the story as we may know it, may correspond little to the strong-willed patriarch we know from this story and elsewhere.[18] This is arguably a painfully self-aware moment for Judah, who argues fictively what he knows to be true, that his father loves some sons more than others, more than him.

3.6.2 Judah's sketch of the man

Second, as Judah talks, he is shaping his utterance in terms of the man he sees before him.[19] We can intuit the edges of how he sees that figure by attending to the rhetorics of the sketch, somewhat as we can sometimes imagine a "whole" phone conversation by being in a room

notes that the words were rehearsed but not uttered. Rather, though the sons rehearsed but did not later deliver them, the father (as if eavesdropping on their practice session) did say them.

18 Savran, (1988:61), thinks Judah's strategy is to make "Joseph" feel responsible in some way for all that is happening (or may happen) to the father. That is possible but not definitive.

19 For a wonderful essay on the effect of Judah's speech on the character of Joseph, consult O'Brien (1997:429-47). With methodological assumptions and strategies different from mine, O'Brien performs a reading of Joseph.

where one speaks into the phone. So how does Judah draw "the man"? Judah first undertakes the appeal for desired leniency from a man who is justified in harsh sentencing. That is, Judah concedes, perhaps easily, that someone in the family group is a thief and so that the charge is not false, the punishment not undeserved. The pitch is to a man of absolute power: Drawing with self-deferential and other-inflating language the portrait Judah hopes to sell the man, the suppliant casts himself in the third person and urges that the man is like Pharaoh himself (44:18): right, mighty, and maybe kind, susceptible to appeal and persuasion. He goes on to describe the man's apparent interest in the family when the shoppers from Canaan first appeared (rearranging the dialogue of 42:9-20, 29-38 and 43:3-7 not inconsiderably as he recasts it in 44:19 [n.b.: the man knows what he said, and Judah knows that he knows]).[20] It is a delicate moment when Judah has to review the ukase of the viceroy – that the youngest brother must come next trip – without making it appear arbitrary and cruel. Judah has the request emerge rather naturally from the man's inquiry into family affairs (vv. 19,21). Though there is a brief cavil from the concerned brothers (v. 22), the request remains (v. 23), is reiterated (vv. 25-6). As Judah sketches the hungry family in Canaan as they sort options, implicit is the power of the man to have gotten what he had originally demanded. Judah's art, his softened sketch of the implacable Egyptian, is to imply that the man cannot have known – until this moment – the whole of what he was asking. And the powerful one has indeed gotten what he demanded and is about to compound it, unless he gives way to Judah's plan: switch one of Jacob's sons for another. The scene – both patched together from the moment when Jacob learned of the loss of Joseph and Simeon and fabricated from what has not occurred, worn about threadbare, we may feel – sets up the loophole Judah offers the man of capable of power and justice: a moment for mercy.

Again, we need to look slant at this drawing, since we know more than Judah does about the man with whom he is speaking: Joseph was not witness to the scene of his father's learning of his absence and so has had no way to know what transpired when he did not return home. That is, we need to recall that the "real Joseph" is learning new and sensitive

20 Savran, who consistently calls Judah's interlocutor Joseph, seems to miss the split. As he indicates (1988:128, note 16), Joseph does not know some of this detail; but the Egyptian in charge of the visiting Canaanite brothers does presumably know the conversation he held with them on their previous trip. Reinforced here, however, is Savran's larger point (21-3): the speech does not *mis*represent when it wanders from strict accuracy but rather *re*presents in service of current concerns. Hence Savran's Joseph should be willing to put up with such artistic and rhetorical license.

information at the moment under construction. Joseph can see himself in this sketch as the first absent son, grieved over when he did not come home and presumed to have been torn to pieces, and again in the scene drawn when Benjamin is threatened. Given the careful dynamics of this family tale, Joseph cannot have known all that poignant detail until he hears it at this moment. It makes a powerful impact, which only we can appreciate.[21] Whether it is strictly accurate from our point of view is – at least for the moment – moot. Will it sell is the question: Will the man, who is also Joseph, be persuaded to let Benjamin return to the bereft father?

3.6.3 Judah's self-portrait

The third figure in the scene, anticipated and shaped by the dynamics of this dialogue, is Judah himself. For starters, Judah pencils himself (a bit disingenuously) as virtually optionless. The evidence of serious theft is so compelling that there is no defense possible (44:16); all Judah can do is appeal for the guilty, as responsible family member, and ask that the sentence be reassigned. The picture presented is, by the time we stop work on it, much more complex and in fact the most sophisticated of the portraits, which of course are a set. Judah draws his self as caught between strong men in Canaan and Egypt, caving in each time before their wills, needing finally now, he says – for the Egyptian to give way rather than to have the old father at home lose out, again. So he begs to whisper in the great man's ear, claims it is as good as that of Pharaoh for receiving an appeal (44:18). Under the kind questioning of the man, Judah begins, the brothers had blurted their sad story of losing a sibling; the one who had lost his full brother is touched on here – their other losses delicately implied (vv. 19-20). His own subsequent role, as he elaborates it, is in some practical way to protect the father from another such episode, even sketching such a hypothetical scene where the father learns that Benjamin has been detained (vv. 22,24, 29-31). This version of the speech culminates in his self-quote about surety: Judah discloses that the only reason the brothers stand before the man in Egypt is because of the pledge that Judah has already made to the father: where, if something were to happen to Benjamin, Judah would accept it as his perpetual sin. Now, the unthinkable having happened, Judah's last move is to ask that the literal sin be loaded onto him and that the thief go home free. "'How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the

21 I think there is not the slightest hint in the story that Judah has recognized his brother by this moment in the story.

suffering that would come upon my father!'" (44:34).[22] Now we get to the heart of the matter: How can Judah, as we have known him in this story, have come to such a moment? That is, how is such a double gesture of asking for and offering mercy possible to credit, on the part of his brother, himself, and us as readers?

At this moment, in keeping with the selected imagery of my story, I take the chalks from Judah's hand and work at the sketch myself. He cannot complete the self-portrait he has begun, as none of us can finalize ourselves. If Judah and Joseph were Dostoevsky heroes, or even if they were more like Job and his "comforters," we might have considerable more information or process on the transformation of Judah from profit-monger to hostage-ransomer, and of Joseph about to shift from bringing his brothers to their knees before his disguised self to the drama of pulling off his mask and owning his identity quite early (only year two of seven) in the game of famine relief. But, since their process remains implicit – miniaturized – I will use Bakhtin's categories to envision what may need to happen for such a transformation of relationships to occur. It is entirely possible, from this text, to read Judah as a more wily version of Joseph, as a glib manipulator, a poker player able to bluff his way into victory even with a poor hand. But I am going to take his language at face value and let it signal a change in him over the length of the story. The authoring of him as a hero has been rather minimal; that is, though it is possible to see a change, it seems not very comprehensively motivated.

We have, however, seen some authoring of Judah by others and catalogued his verbal responses. His father had made him non-favored, to which Judah had rejoined by his plan for profit (37:3 and 26-7); Tamar had calculated him to be greedy and insensitive but fundamentally practical and fair – and with each of those authorings he has collaborated (38:13-26). We need not make Judah too pious here, since it is his own offspring he saves as well as their mother, but he does come through as candid at the moment of crunch. Joseph has authored Judah with the others when giving them a chance to leave another brother in a pit, to which Judah with the others acquiesced silently (42:18-25). Home again, the family accused and blamed, rehearsed and re-sliced old issues, activating from Judah his practical and effective offer to pledge for his youngest brother (43:1-7 ended by 8-10).[23] To sum that up a bit differently: Judah has been shown

22 Attending even more closely to the rhetorics of the speech, Hyman (1989:10) notes that the appeal involves three nouns starting with aleph: father, brother, lord, and the sentence includes ten words that start with that same letter.

23 In addition to all this authoring at the level of characters, we have the wider authorial depicting of Judah as the prominent brother (culminating in 49:8-12), made visible as Jacob's will is read, so to speak.

to be crass, dishonest, manipulative, depriving a father of a son; he also has been authored to be generous, forthright, manipulated, and deprived of sons. He has signed the charge Tamar presented to him, gaining two sons but losing some honor (n.b. 38:23). He appears willing, as we just left him, to sign the deal he hopes Joseph will offer him, gain for his father but a loss for himself. And lest we think these signings easy, we also watched him alibi and pretend when his father blamed a wild beast for Joseph's absence (37:33) and hinted the same of his sons themselves, though indirectly and temporarily (42:36).[24] The author and the characters have given us artistic language, and my charge now is to do a reading that I can offer for consideration and that I can sign myself. That is, to shift back now to the language of Bakhtin, I will aestheticize the character Judah and comment on the process by which such a (scriptural) narrative aestheticizes our readers' experience. Since we cannot penetrate Judah's consciousness definitively or finalize him, we can only sort his authoring in terms of our own experience and ask, is this valid? The purpose of art is for us to see ourselves – the good and the bad – and to cope with what we see. Can I – can you – buy this portrait as being of ourselves?

Before concluding, let me sum up my sense of Judah's achievements: What Judah hated as a son, he did as a father, to the near-detriment of his whole family. Thanks to the skill of the mother of his last sons, he is saved from his own foolishness. When we see him again returned to his son status, he brings to bear what he experienced as a father/husband and offers himself in pledge, and against his likely expectation, must once again be willing to pay up. Broadened by his first experience, he can offer himself again. The first pledge, extracted from Judah by someone he has wronged, an embarrassment to him when he sends to reclaim it from dubious hands, turns out to be exactly what he needed for his next step. Judah's past works for him, and he allows himself to be broadened by it. Far from needing to be submerged or denied, the transformative recycling of it is what produces fruit. Jacob does not "deserve" this action of Judah, but Judah acts in any case. As the story winds on, the

24 In a very useful article Lambe (1999:53-68) asks a similar question to mine but answers it differently. That is, if a main question is how does Judah change, Lambe offers a structure for Judah's experience visible in Genesis 38 which enables him to return to his family and be spokesman. Though we agree in making the sojourn comprising chapter 38 key to it, Lambe seems to describe the change as complete when Judah returns to his family, whereas I see the change as slower and more hidden, less systematic. "My Judah" has a number of untransformed moments post Genesis 38. Lambe is also more prone to read the psychology of Judah than is my preference to do. Ackerman (1981:104), makes a specific link between the pledging which occurs in 38 and in 44, though he develops the point a bit differently from my effort here.

father never changes the pattern that Judah reacted against, nor is there evidence of much change on the part of the brothers. The transformation of Judah is enough, however, to bring him through well in a pinch. The story represents Judah appropriating experience effectively, if not easily, with lines that are for the most part loving and gentle, but which I construe as well-intentioned. Judah's experience of losing sons, some actually and others nearly, sets him up to be alert to the same situation as he imagines it for his father. What he was callous about with Joseph's disappearance he manages much better when Benjamin's is threatened.

3.7 Seventh moment

Oddly, and without much apparent practical gain, we catch one more (***seventh***) scene at the end of the long narrative, where after all events have transpired successfully, including the death, repatriation and burial of Jacob, the brothers again evince fear of Joseph, of his capacity and willingness to retaliate for their deed – which, we may note, they have not yet acknowledged in their own words. Perhaps that is the point: Having papered over what they did, it continues to worry them, preventing reconciliation from occurring, at least from their angle. That Joseph maintains he wills them no harm and has blended their deed into a larger stew does not seem to help them be able to do the same. The narrative thus ends with compassion not decisively or conclusively achieved, as of course is often the case. Judah's moment and our reading of it does not land us securely on any safe rock for ever.

4. CONCLUSION: BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A reader performs a text. A skilled reader, able to draw deeply from a brilliant narrative which is also Scripture is in a position to accomplish something insightful, provocative, catalyzing. Insofar as God's deepest hopes are for the transformation of our narrow and self-focused little hearts to inhabit a place broader and more compassionate, God's Spirit assists. We bring our life into relationship with a narrative of someone else's process of change and growth. We do not, of course, become Judah or take his journey as our own in any literal sense. But standing close to him, overlapping him, we recognize enough and trust enough to draw and be drawn with his chalks. We must wager that his narrative can help us, that he as a human/literary construct catches well enough to us that he can catalyze compassion in us as he comes to welcome and be swamped by it as well. It is a moment we can resist, if we choose, and then nothing will happen. But insofar as

we author some inter-penetration with his experience as it is proffered to us, we move with him. Bakhtin has a lot of technical language for this, but at base it is simple enough. The Judah character is drawn with great honesty – a favor and gift to us if we can bring enough self-knowledge to bear, we who are also daughters and sons, fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives. Brilliant literature that is Scripture most intensely allows us the space, the breadth, to change. Seeing Judah and moving into some temporary coherence with him allows us a place to experience something akin to what he learned, as our life-experience widens out his journey. No alibi, no refusal to sign. We are given and want to wrest familiar texts from what Bakhtin called the given to the posited, to engage a text with as much active readiness to respond and create as possible. Ethics and aesthetics, indeed, the spiritual life. We sign our portrait with compunction for our shortcomings, with gratitude for graces received. We close the book, knowing it will call out to us again when we turn to it afresh.

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