

## Homily for Wednesday in the Sixth Week of Easter

May 20, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Acts 17:15, 17:22–18:1; Psalm 148:1–6; John 16:12–15*

Last summer, our former colleague Father Matthew Mead engaged me in a conversation about the decision made for the 1979 Prayer Book to use in three places the personal and sacred name for the God of the Hebrews, twice in the psalms and once in the Song of Moses,<sup>1</sup> a canticle appointed to be sung at the Great Vigil of Easter after we have heard the story of Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea.<sup>2</sup>

After Easter Week, following the practice I knew at Nashotah House, we this use song at Morning Prayer three times each week until Pentecost. Both usages in the two psalms come up most months of the year.

The Prayer Book explains this decision with these words, “In two passages (*Psalm 68:4* and *Psalm 83:18*), the context requires that the Divine Name be spelled out, and it appears as Yahweh. A similar construction occurs in the Canticle, ‘The Song of Moses.’” With respect, I don't think this is at all required or helpful.

---

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 68:4; 83:18; and Canticle 8 (page 85).

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 14:10–15:1.

In 1976, there was significant amount opposition to the proposed inclusion of the Reproaches on Good Friday because of the alleged history of anti-Judaism associated with them—and they were omitted. Father Louis Weil, a convert to Christianity, born of a Christian mother and a Jewish Father, disagreed with that decision and did his best to neutralize the opposition to it. He wrote a really helpful article for us to addresses the objections and to argue for their inclusion. The Reproaches had always been part of his experience of Good Friday as a Christian, and he argued that they were words for Christians, not about the Hebrews.<sup>3</sup>

It seems to me and, I think I can say, for Father Mead as well, that the greater and more problematic issue in this area was the decision to vocalize the name of God.

After the Second Sunday of Easter, we follow the pattern for using praying the canticles that I knew at Nashotah House. The Song of Zechariah, about John the Baptist, the bridge, as it were, between the Old and the New Testaments, we pray after the first lesson. For the rest of the Easter Season, on Mondays,

---

<sup>3</sup> You can find this article by scrolling down at this link:  
<https://www.stmvirgin.org/parish-archives>.

Wednesdays, and Fridays, we pray The Song of Moses and the *Te Deum* on the other four days until Pentecost.

While praying Morning Prayer in the rectory by myself since the middle of March, I've not been vocalizing the sacred name for the God of the Hebrews. In the verse of the canticle that begins, "The Lord is a mighty warrior;" Y-H-W-H is his name, I say, "The LORD is his Name." In the two psalms I do the same thing. And it really does work for me.

I'm pretty good about following the Prayer Book, but for now on, when I pray the Daily Office privately, I will continue to use "the LORD" out of respect for the Hebrew traditions of our faith.

The preface to the 1952 Revised Standard Version of the Bible (the Bible we use in worship at St. Mary's) does comment on the four Hebrew consonants that represent the name of God: יהוה (Yud, Hey, Vav, Hey). It says, "The use of any proper name for the one and only God, as though there were other gods from whom he had to be distinguished, was discontinued in Judaism before the Christian era and is entirely inappropriate for the universal faith of the Christian

Church.”<sup>4</sup> An introductory section called “To the Reader,” in the 1989 New Revised Standard Version, copies the earlier statement word for word.<sup>5</sup>

Father Jay Smith, in a homily last week, spoke about the painful cut-off that exists between Christians and Jews and the terrible evil that shadows our history. Perhaps it might help many of us Episcopalians renew our respect for a Name that was sacred to God’s Son and his friends.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2020 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1952, 1946), vii.

<sup>5</sup> *New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, An Ecumenical Study Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), xvii–xviii.