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*God's Covenant with Abraham*



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# God's Covenant with Abraham

## The Primordial Covenant

We saw last week that Adam and Eve were not simply given the gift of human nature, but were also created in a state of supernatural communion with God. This is expressed above all with the metaphor of walking with God in the cool of the day, an expression that suggests an intimate friendship with God. This friendship with God is the most central idea of the notion of covenant: it is the extension of a familial relationship of communion between God and His rational creatures. It is an extension of the inter-Trinitarian communion outside of God, elevating man to enable him to enter into a filial and bridal relation with God.

The core idea of covenant is also expressed in the image of the tree of life in the center of the Garden. The covenant is a kind of tree or source of supernatural life and blessing, which is an apt symbol of sanctifying grace, which signifies our participation in the divine life. The covenant gives man access to the divine life.<sup>1</sup>

Covenant always has a condition by which man can demonstrate his fidelity: not seeking dominion over good and evil but receiving it from God. This was given in the Garden by the prohibition on eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Fidelity to the covenant in Eden guaranteed a manifold harmony: between God and man, between man's own soul and his body and passions, between man and woman in society, and between man and nature. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 376 describes this state: "The inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between man and woman, and finally the harmony between the first couple and all creation, comprised the state called 'original justice.'"

All of these blessings of the original covenant were lost with the original sin. The first consequence that we see is man hiding from God instead of walking with Him in the cool of the day. The state of intimate friendship with God is lost. Secondly, we see the loss of inner harmony in man and between Adam and Eve, expressed in being naked and ashamed. Third, we see the loss of harmony with nature in the penalties given by God. The final consequence that we see is expulsion from the Garden and the loss of access to the tree of life. In Genesis 3:22–24 we read:

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" — therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the

garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

As we said last week, we should understand this becoming like God, knowing good and evil, as a seeking of moral autonomy, defining good and evil for oneself as if one were God. This breaks the filial and bridal relationship with God, and involves the loss of charity, which is the filial love for God above all things. The consequence of losing the filial relationship with God is the loss of sanctifying grace, symbolized by the tree of life.

The rest of human history is the drama of longing for the primordial covenant, and God's action in salvation to restore the lost blessings, and especially the divine friendship—walking with God—and access to the tree of life, with divine superabundance.

## The Promise of the Restoration of the Original Covenant: Genesis 3:15

Right after the Original Sin, when Adam and Eve were in danger of falling into despair, God reveals the future coming of a Redeemer, a descendant born of their lineage, who will triumph over the devil. After the sin, God speaks to the three protagonists of that event: the serpent, Eve, and Adam. To the serpent He says: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he [the seed of the woman] shall bruise [crush] your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Christ the Messiah is the "seed of the Woman" who will crush the head of the serpent, who indicates the devil.

## The Covenant with Noah: Typological Covenant

After the expulsion, we see the loss of the original harmony exemplified in the murder of Abel by Cain. Then we see the introduction of polygamy with Lamech (Gen 4:23), one of Cain's descendants. However, we also see the line of Seth who "call on the name of the Lord" (Gen 4:26), which indicates divine worship. One of the descendants of Seth is Enoch, of whom it is said: "Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen 5:22–24). This mysterious figure anticipates Abraham, and the central notion of the covenant: walking with God.

Another anticipation of the restoration of the covenant is Noah, the great-grandson of Enoch. His name means

<sup>1</sup> In the New Covenant, the Eucharist as the "bread of life" corresponds to the tree of life in the Garden.

“rest” or “relief.” Genesis 5:29 explains: “Out of the ground which the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.” Noah thus is a precursor of the longed for restoration of the primordial covenant.

Meanwhile, the extension of sin brings about the great flood. To Noah, however, is promised a covenant in Genesis 6:17–18:

For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

The covenant is further developed in Genesis 9:9–17:

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.”

The covenant with Noah is above all typological, as we saw in our lecture series on typology. The destruction and death caused by the Flood is a type of the loss of divine life caused by sin. The ark of Noah is a type of the Church, in which one has relief from the flood of the sin of this world, escaping eternal death.

## **The Promise of Blessing to Abraham: Genesis 12**

The next step in the preparation for the realization of the promise given in Genesis 3:15 and the restoration of the primordial covenant is given in God's calling Abraham out of his father's land and promising a universal blessing:

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

God promises to Abraham three fundamental blessings. He will be the father of a great people. He and his people will be blessed. And in him and his seed all nations will be blessed.

The only condition of the covenant that is expressed here is that Abraham walk with God by leaving his father's house and going where the Lord would lead him. This theme of walking with God is mentioned again in Genesis 17:1–2, where God tells Abraham: “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.” Walking with God is essential to the notion of covenant! In the New Covenant this is expressed by the following of Christ: *imitatio Christi*.

## **The Faith of Abraham and Sarah**

All of these blessings promised to Abraham are predicated upon him having a son. Thus Abraham had to believe in God's ability to give him a son in order to realize the promised blessing. Here we see a second condition of the covenant: faith in God's ability to fulfill the promised blessings. Abraham gives a heroic and paradigmatic illustration of this faith through the drama of his lack of a son, in spite of which he continues to believe.

God made the promise when Abram was already 75 and Sarai barren and past menopause. But as if that were not enough, God waited twenty five years to fulfill the promise, and yet Abraham continued to believe! Genesis 15:1–6 illustrates Abraham's faith:

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, “Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir.”<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir.”<sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”<sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.

After ten years of fruitless waiting, Abram is 85 and Sarah 76. Sarai suggests that they take matters into their own hands, so to speak, to realize the promise through Sarai's handmaid, Hagar.

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar; and Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my maid; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived... (Genesis 16:1–4)

The result of this stratagem is Ishmael, whom the Lord did not elect. God wished to elect a son from the holy bond of a monogamous marriage, and not from concubinage. He further wished to bless the barren and elderly mother, to show that the blessing is from Him, and not from natural human power. God elects the weak things of the earth to show that the action is His, and Sarai is a prime example. (Two thousand years later the promised blessing for all nations would likewise be born within the holy bond of a matrimony that was not naturally fruitful, but made fruitful through a still greater miracle.)

Thirteen years later the promised son has not arrived. Abram is now 99 and Sarai 90! At this point God appears again to Abram and gives him the new name, Abraham, which means “father of a great multitude.” Sarai likewise receives a new name, Sarah, which means *princess*. The grandiose dimensions of Abraham’s promised progeny requires a still more heroic faith.

God said to him, 4 “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. . . .<sup>15</sup> And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.”<sup>16</sup> I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”<sup>17</sup> Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”<sup>18</sup> And Abraham said to God, “O that Ishmael might live in thy sight!”<sup>19</sup> God said, “No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.<sup>20</sup> As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.<sup>21</sup> But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year.”

Shortly afterwards, God appears to Abraham in the form of three angels at Mambre, repeating the promise:

They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.”<sup>10</sup> The LORD said, “I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.<sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.<sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?”<sup>13</sup> The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’<sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son.”<sup>15</sup> But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said,

“No, but you did laugh.”

Despite Sarah’s laugh, she believed. The faith of Abraham and Sarah through these 25 years of seemingly impossible promise is beautifully extolled in Hebrews 11:8–12:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. <sup>9</sup> By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

### Liturgical Sealing of the Covenant: Sacrifice

Covenants in the ancient world were typically sealed by sacrifice and meal in common. This aspect of Abraham’s covenant with God is given in Genesis 15:7–21.

<sup>7</sup> And he said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.”<sup>8</sup> But he said, “O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?”<sup>9</sup> He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.”<sup>10</sup> And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.<sup>11</sup> And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup> As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him.<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years;<sup>14</sup> but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.<sup>15</sup> As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.<sup>16</sup> And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

<sup>17</sup> When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.<sup>18</sup> On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,<sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,<sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,<sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites and the Jebusites.”

The theme of a sacrificial sealing of the covenant is clearer in Mosaic covenant, but especially in the New Covenant, in which Christ’s own sacrifice, made perpetually present in the Eucharist, seals the New and eternal covenant.

## The Promise of the Land

We have seen a key part of the Abrahamic covenant has to do with the land of Canaan. Why the importance of the land? The land is not extraneous to the key elements of God's covenant that we have seen in Eden. The land is a place of freedom in which Israel can walk with God who literally dwells in her borders. God's presence in the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple will be a kind of restoration of God's presence in the Garden walking with Adam and Eve. Secondly, the land is always described as a garden flowing with milk and honey. In other words, the land of Israel is an image of Eden, and it prefigures the future restoration of the original covenant. In other words, the promise of the land should not be taken as a mere temporal blessing, but is essentially tied to the familial relationship that is the heart of the covenant. The land is particular, as a bride is particular, and as the chosen people from Abraham's loins is a particular people.

The book by Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, gives a great insight into the mystical and profound meaning of the land of Israel for Judaism. He writes:

The theme is not an idea, but a story, a drama. The *dramatis personae*: a people, a land, and a divine presence. The drama has many scenes. First comes the election of one man whose vocation is to proclaim the sovereignty of the One, demanding justice and supreme sacrifice, and who is to be a father of many nations and a blessing to all nations. His vocation is to be continued by his seed, a people yet to be born, a people to be given a home, a land. But before inheriting the land they must go through the agony of slavery, through redemption and the trials of forty years in the wilderness. After centuries of battles and tribulations the people inherit the Promised Land.<sup>2</sup>

As Heschel points out, the heroic trial of faith of Abraham in his promised seed is paralleled in Israel's faith in the promise of the land, despite centuries of exile.

That the most profound meaning of the Promised Land is the promised divine indwelling is confirmed also by the Jewish theologian, Michael Wyschogrod, who writes:

The land of Israel is the land chosen for God's indwelling and for the indwelling of the people of God. When Israel sins, the divine indwelling in the people and in the land is diminished. God's presence, to some degree, is withdrawn from the people and the land. But never completely and never permanently. The divine presence remains with Israel and in the land, though it is now less visible, more obscured.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 52.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 102.

## Genesis 17. The Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision

In Genesis 17 three elements of the covenant are emphasized: fruitfulness, the promise of the land, and the sign of the covenant, which is circumcision.

<sup>7</sup>And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. <sup>8</sup>And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

<sup>9</sup>And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup>This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup>You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup>He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised; every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, <sup>13</sup>both he that is born in your house and he that is bought with your money, shall be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup>Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." . . .

<sup>22</sup>When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. <sup>23</sup>Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. <sup>24</sup>Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>25</sup>And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>26</sup>That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised; <sup>27</sup>and all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Circumcision as a sign of the covenant has several aspects. It indicates membership in the people set apart for the Lord and separated from other peoples. Thus it is a sign of consecration. Secondly, it is the sign of faith, and an outward witness of it. Third, it represents an interior consecration—the circumcision of the heart—through an outward sign. This anticipates the sacramental principle and sacramental character that will mark the New Covenant through Baptism and Confirmation.

## The Sacrifice of Isaac and the Reconfirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant

The episode of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 continues the theme of mutual fidelity in the covenant. Abraham is extraordinarily faithful in walking with God

in the darkness of faith, to the point of being willing to sacrifice the son of the promise. As Hebrews 11:17–19 points out, Abraham's willingness to obey God to sacrifice Isaac implied a faith in God's power to raise him from the dead so as to fulfill his promise that the covenant blessing would pass through Isaac:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, <sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." <sup>19</sup> He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence he did receive him back and this was a symbol.

God, in his turn renews His promise of fidelity and seals it with an oath, which was a fundamental part of covenants in the ancient world. God Himself condescends to swear to His fidelity to the covenant:

<sup>15</sup> And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, <sup>16</sup> and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, <sup>18</sup> and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:15–18)

This solemn oath of God confirms the promises made in Genesis 12: blessing, a great people, and the blessing of all nations in Abraham's seed. This last promise is the Messianic promise first hinted at in Genesis 3:15. We see thus that there is a chain of blessings that extends from Abraham, to the multitude of his descendants (the chosen people), and finally to the universality of nations that will be blessed in his seed. It is thus implied that the seed of Abraham in which the nations will be blessed is himself the source of blessing: the Messiah.

### The Faith of Abraham and Mary

There is a beautiful parallel between the faith of Abraham and Mary. John Paul II brings this out in his great encyclical on Mary, *Redemptoris Mater* (RM), of 1987. Because of his heroic faith in God's ability to realize His promises, Abraham is the father of those who come to believe in the God who revealed Himself to mankind precisely through Abraham. Because of her faith in the message of the angel, Mary has become not only the Mother of God, but also the universal mother of all those who believe in her Son and are called into His Church. Just as Scripture praises the faith of Abraham, so Mary's faith is singled out for praise in the inspired words of St. Elizabeth at the Visitation: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45).

In RM 14, John Paul II brings out this parallel:

Abraham's faith constitutes the beginning of the Old

Covenant; Mary's faith at the Annunciation inaugurates the New Covenant. Just as Abraham "in hope believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations" (cf. Rom 4:18), so Mary, at the Annunciation, having professed her virginity ("How shall this be, since I have no husband?") believed that through the power of the Most High, by the power of the Holy Spirit, she would become the Mother of God's Son. . . . Mary's "obedience of faith" during the whole of her pilgrimage will show surprising similarities to the faith of Abraham. . . . To believe means "to abandon oneself" to the truth of the word of the living God, knowing and humbly recognizing "how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways" (Rom 11:33). Mary, who by the eternal will of the Most High stands, one may say, at the very center of those "inscrutable ways" and "unsearchable judgments" of God, conforms herself to them in the dim light of faith, accepting fully and with a ready heart everything that is decreed in the divine plan.

Abraham's faith inaugurated the Old Covenant. It was proven above all in two respects: in his faith that in his seed all peoples would be blessed, and the faith to sacrifice that son from whom the promise was to descend. As stated in Hebrews, Abraham had faith that God would be faithful to His promise, and thus even if Isaac were slain in sacrifice, God could raise him from the dead. Mary likewise showed her faith above all in the promise at the Annunciation, and through her readiness to sacrifice that Son in whom all hopes centered, whom she also knew could rise from the dead.

With regard to this second aspect of Mary's faith, a crucial moment is marked by the prophecy of Simeon, which was "like a *second Annunciation to Mary*": "While this announcement on the one hand confirms her faith in the accomplishment of the divine promises of salvation, on the other hand it also reveals to her that she will have to live her obedience of faith in suffering, at the side of the suffering Savior, and that her motherhood will be mysterious and sorrowful" (RM 16). This aspect of Mary's faith was prefigured by Abraham's faith at the sacrifice of Isaac.

St. Pius X explains Mary's co-Redemption at the foot of the Cross in the encyclical *Ad diem illum*, in words that bring out the parallel with Abraham:

Moreover it was not only the prerogative of the Most Holy Mother to have furnished the material of His flesh to the Only Son of God, Who was to be born with human members (S. Bede Ven. L. Iv. in Luc. xl.), of which material should be prepared the Victim for the salvation of men; but hers was also the office of tending and nourishing that Victim, and at the appointed time presenting Him for the sacrifice. . . . When the supreme hour of the Son came, beside the Cross of Jesus there stood Mary His Mother, not merely occupied in contemplating the cruel spectacle, but rejoicing that her Only Son was offered for the salvation of mankind, and so entirely participating in His Passion, that if it had been possible she would have gladly borne all the torments that her Son bore. And from this community of will and suffer-

ing between Christ and Mary she merited to become most worthily the Reparatrix of the lost world and Dispensatrix of all the gifts that Our Savior purchased for us by His Death and by His Blood.

The blessings of the covenant are fructified by heroic oblation, in the New as in the Old. Heschel writes:

Hope is *not* cheerfulness, a temperamental confidence that all will turn out for the best. It is not an inclination to be guided by illusions rather than by facts. Hope is a conviction, rooted in trust, trust in Him who issued the promise; an ability to soar above the darkness that overshadows the divine.<sup>4</sup>

Even the “darkness that overshadows the divine” has its place in God’s covenant. It makes possible heroic faith and perseverance, so that, through God’s grace, man can merit the blessings of the fulfillment of the promise in God’s own time.

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<sup>4</sup> Heschel, *Israel: Echo of Eternity*, 94.