Sometimes lost within modern discourses on the first three chapters of Hosea is the important ethical ballast associated with knowing God for a covenant people, in this case the pre-Exilic Israelites. To be sure, working through the now-problematic husband-and-wife metaphor and the misogynistic language deployed in its depiction is today, without question, a very relevant conversation for ministers as well as Hebrew Scripture scholars. Still, we ought not to forget the undergirding significance of this figurative language, even as it (rightly) makes contemporary scripture readers uncomfortable: the centrality of God’s covenant relationship with God’s chosen people. For persons within the Judeo-Christian tradition, today as in the 8th century BCE, Hosea outlines in stark terms the need to prioritize always this fundamental relationship, e.g. to “know” God. I intend to examine primarily one specific pericope, Hosea 2:10—11, within this orienting framework. What I hope to demonstrate in a close reading of this passage is that the sense of knowing God understood within Hosea’s socio-historical context is not incidental; that is, to know God as a member of a covenant people is not simply a matter of being a fortunate possessor of proto-Gnostic information about God, but rather suggests a deliberate moral choice in favor of covenant fidelity on the part of a specific individual and group (Israel). Necessarily, to be ignorant of the terms of the covenant relationship with God also implies for Hosea a conscious decision, individually or collectively, to reject the terms of the covenant relationship, and therefore to reject YHWH.

From this critical starting point, I will make two further sub-claims regarding the meaning of Hosea 2:10—11. First, in willfully not knowing God, the ancient Israelites are both fully responsible and morally culpable for ignoring their covenant obligations and turning to worship Canaanite deities (i.e. Baal). Second, the punishment that YHWH inflicts on a negligent, unfaithful people by taking away his material gifts represents more than the literal, manifest frustration and anger of a jealous God. Rather, on a more figurative level, it speaks to the very tangible and negative impact on human flourishing that turning from YHWH and his covenant will have on Israelite society (though, naturally, we must remember that people cannot make God do anything, good or bad). In broad strokes, then, these are both the ethical and the practical stakes of knowing or being in right-relationship with God for both Hosea’s Israelite contemporaries and, as I will argue, for Catholic Christians in the 21st century.

Of course, before anything else, it is necessary to begin with a closer examination of Hosea 2:10—11:

10 She did not know
    that it was I who gave her
    the grain, the wine, and the oil,
I who lavished upon her silver,
and gold, which they used for Baal,
11 Therefore I will take back my grain in its
time,
and my wine in its season;
I will snatch away my wool and my flax,
which were to cover her nakedness.  

Structurally, one should notice almost immediately that vv. 10 and 11 form a natural couplet. Verse 10 outlines an indictment, that is, 1) Israel does not “know” or acknowledge the luxuriant gifts that God has given his people; and 2) Israel used at least a portion of these gifts in worshipping and gilding the Canaanite god Baal, an illicit “lover.” Verse 11, beginning with the transition “therefore,” indicates what the material consequences will be for the infractions outlined in v. 10 as a just punishment; YHWH will eventually take back his gifts, for which he has not received the proper covenantal “acknowledgement” from His spouse. Before proceeding further, I should mention here that this pericope, as well as a good portion of Hosea’s text overall, operate on two primary, interrelated levels: overtly, the Lord is addressing an unfaithful, metaphoric spouse, the nation of Israel, while the language simultaneously mirrors the prophet’s own frustration and pain respecting his unfaithful wife, Gomer, as expressed in v. 4. The use of the past tense in this pericope is also rather significant, for it connotes a longer historical narrative of Israel’s relationship with YHWH that the people should have been aware of. In short, I would argue that for a nation to know God is to remember the complete story, whereas to forget is ultimately to fail to acknowledge the covenant. One should always keep in mind, though, that no particular action, or the omission thereof (like forgetting), on the part of people actually causes God to do anything, including the inflicting of divine punishment. Such a model of causality would imply an equality of agency within the relationship between God and humans; this is never the case. Put a simpler way, when human action alone “causes” a deity to do anything, we are no longer talking about covenant or even religion, but rather magic.  

Still, at first glance (particularly for those of us coming from a more modern or Western ethical tradition) the deployment of the term “know” within this text might nevertheless appear to form the initial basis of an exculpatory statement, only to be followed with an apparently unwarranted, and thus unjust, divine chastisement—that is, why would God punish a people who seemingly did not know that they were being unfaithful ingrates? Commentators Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman offer some crucial insight into how one might better understand the use of the verb “to know” within both the text of Hosea as well as in the prophet’s 8th century religious context. They explain: “This destructive ‘lack of knowledge’...is the result of ‘rejecting’ knowledge, not just of ignorance. Similarly, ‘forgetting’...is a sin, not just a mental weakness. Verse 10 implies a deliberate rejection of YHWH in preferring [the Canaanite god] Baal.” Or, put another way, contemporary readers in the West may appreciate senselessness, stupidity, ignorance or even foolishness as unfortunate personal limitations associated with diminished mental capacity or agency, rather than as character flaws as such, for which one (or a group) might be held liable. That is, non-mentally impaired persons generally do not consciously choose to possess such shortcomings, though they do often wind up cultivating them indirectly through their behaviors and

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3 For more on this significant distinction between religion and magic, see Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 41-44.
other (moral) choices that they make. Within Hosea’s context, however, this sort of moral nuance simply does not exist; in short, persons cannot plead ignorant as a means to avoid ultimate moral culpability for their choices and behaviors.

The specific types of gifts given by YHWH and described within Hosea 2:10—11 are also significant from my perspective in that they fall, more or less, within three categories: staple necessities (grain and flax), commodities (wool, oil and wine) and luxuries (silver and gold). One might interpret this diversity or breadth of goods to mean that God’s fecundating generosity toward Israel makes possible not just life itself, but national economic prosperity, commerce and even material extravagance. In a sense, then, the silver and gold that the Israelites are using for Baal is a double affront to God. Not only is Baal a false deity to begin with, even worse, Israel is using the very best of YHWH’s gifts to fashion a Canaanite idol, the precious metals which God “lavished” upon his spouse, Israel, as a truly extravagant gesture of love and intimacy. Thus, for YHWH to strip the land, that is, to lay bare the nation of Israel is an apt example of the punishment fitting the crime—ininfidelity to Israel’s supreme material Provider.

The reader should note also that the marriage imagery present in Hosea 2 connects the prophet’s use of the verb “to know” in v. 10 more closely with the theme of (fidelity to) a conscious, intimate, covenant relationship that Hosea develops. While my purpose within this present project is not to delve into the particulars of the prophet’s seemingly unhappy, abusive and rather bizarre marriage, I would like to emphasize the possibility that the author’s own unpleasant personal experience of marriage may also have convinced him of the rhetorical advantage of depicting Israel’s infidelity to YHWH as itself a failed wedding covenant. In short, this image arguably drives to the affective heart of Hosea’s understanding of God’s own emotional experience of enduring betrayal and abandonment, as commentator Daniel J. Simundson writes: “The God of Hosea is not unaffected by what people do. Like a betrayed husband, God, too, feels betrayal, hurt, anger, and, finally love...God loves even the unfaithful one. And God wants to be loved.” In other words, this vulnerable, anthropomorphized God that Hosea presents desires, as would any normal husband, a personal relationship with His beloved, Israel, characterized by emotional intimacy and exclusivity (even though God is not a human being). More importantly, the strong rhetorical use of affective as well as juridical language that Hosea offers here allows one more fully to fathom the moral magnitude that the prophet assigns to the greater issue of covenant (in)fidelity and to better assess the overall sense of moral culpability that the Israelites bear for not knowing YHWH. In other words, it does not stand to reason that invincible or even mere ignorance by Israel regarding their ethical covenant obligations to God would alone evoke the extreme levels of divine anger and retribution that Hosea’s language indicates to his audience.

Thus, one may conclude as well that other defiant behaviors such as resisting correction or speaking out of ignorance, far from resulting from a passive or hapless condition, ought to “elicit a response” from God, not excuses for simply not knowing better. To apply this understanding of “willful” ignorance once again to Hosea 2 and the whole (ethical) question therein of knowing God, then, we can now deduce two crucial points: 1) for a people not to know (of) God is an active choice, and not a passive or inadvertent condition; and 2) this foolish choice not to know (or acknowledge) God therefore constitutes a sentient act of rebellion, that is, rejecting God’s authority and neglecting the moral obligations, such as gratitude for gifted material abundance, that necessarily come with being God’s chosen people. We see this sense perhaps most clearly illustrated in Hosea 4: “Hear the word of the Lord . . ./There is no fidelity, no loyalty,/no knowledge of God in the land./Swearing, lying, murder,/stealing and adultery break out;/bloodshed follows bloodshed./. . . My people are ruined for lack of knowledge” (vv. 1—2, 6). And again in Hosea 6:6: “For it is loyalty that I desire, not/sacrifice,/and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Taken together, these two passages arguably lament the sublime, behavioral consequences of

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6 Catherine L. Muldoon (discussion led during a class on the Twelve Minor Prophets, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, Illinois, April 3, 2013).
willful foolishness, in addition to leading the reader back to the figurative, relational language seen earlier in Hosea 2:10—11 and unpacking its essential significance. Actively choosing to reject God’s final authority in favor of Baal by refusing to acknowledge the gratitude due solely to YHWH represents a repudiation of the core relationship that Israel has with YHWH, its one true benefactor and protector.

From this critical point of view, the reader is able to appreciate more fully Hosea’s choice and usage of the spousal metaphor(s) in portraying the fractured personal relationship between Israel and YHWH, as Diane Jacobson asserts in commenting on the often challenging marriage imagery of Hosea 2: “At root marriage is about…dedicated and faithful relationship. The marriage covenant, as the basis of the analogy with God’s covenant with Israel, demands a relationship of trust, commitment, and knowledge of the other. Monogamy is an ideal reflection of monotheism and monolatry.” Likewise, Gale A. Yee posits that “[a]ccording to Hosea, Israelite self-definition lies in the exclusive worship of YHWH alone, to whom Israel is bound in covenant.” I should point out here that both Jacobson and Yee make another critical observation in connection with the notion of Israel having knowledge of and therefore a relationship with God—covenant is the basis of this special relationship. As we shall see, how the ancient Israelites and their prophets conceived of a nation’s covenant with God is far different from the modern, secular and hyper-individualistic paradigm of a social contract with which contemporary societies, by and large, structure and order their laws. Within this same vein, Jacobson again writes, “[i]n contrast to the constitution, the Bible emphasizes responsibility over rights, doing that which is good for the neighbor, helping to build community, and serving God in all things. In this context of this community reading of Hosea 2, emphasizing community responsibility over individual rights sounds potentially dangerous [for modern Westerners].” What one sees emerging here then is a series of societal, moral and ethical implications that stem from Hosea’s use of the word “know” in 2:10: to know God is an expectation fundamental to the intimate relationship with God; this relationship of knowing is established through God’s covenant with His people and, finally, this covenant necessitates that God’s people know, accept and therefore actively respond to a particular set of corporate responsibilities, both with respect to their relationship with YHWH and each other within the community. Again, as we have already seen, this becomes glaringly evident in Hosea 4:1—4, almost as a chain reaction of sorts: when a covenant people forgets its common responsibilities toward God, their moral behavior quickly deteriorates as people forget how to live in right relationship with each other, too—and soon, everything in the land “languishes” (v. 3). However, we should guard against viewing crimes committed against other people as a mere effect of ignoring YHWH in Hosea; indeed, a great part of Israel’s covenant with God is all about how persons, collectively, treat one another. For example, Hosea 4:2 specifically lists the violation of five of the Ten Commandments given in Exodus (“swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery”)—and, in breaking these Commandments to respect and care for one another in community, the Israelites show themselves just as disloyal to YHWH as when they sacrifice to Baal. In other words, the covenant protects the Lord’s rights first and foremost, but also, ideally, the basic rights of the people of Israel. Still, the sense of protecting individuals from being harmed or violated within society seems somewhat lacking in Hosea, at least from a more contemporary vantage point. But, as Jacobson ominously reminds us, the reduction of the rights of individuals (particularly women individuals, like Gomer!) presented in the text of Hosea is also potentially dangerous to human flourishing.

The conundrum that Jacobson raises from this pericope, of course, is another key socio-cultural element of Hosea 2 that a more modern, Western readership might struggle with; that is, the aforementioned notion of corporate responsibility. Simply put, how could all of Israel not have known that YHWH was the provider of “the grain, the wine and the oil” (v. 10)? In response, Abraham Heschel concedes that “[i]n contrast to Amos, whose

main theme is condemnation of the rich for the oppression of the poor, Hosea does not single out a particular section of the community.”11 But Heschel then further explains:

God was alone in the world, unknown or discarded. The countries of the world were full of abominations, violence, falsehood. Here was one land, one people, cherished and chosen for the purpose of transforming the world. This people’s failure was most serious. The Beloved of God worshipped the Baalim...Above all, the prophets remind us of the moral state of a people: Few are guilty, but all are responsible. If we admit that the individual is in some measure conditioned or affected by the spirit of society, an individual’s crime discloses society’s corruption.12

Approached from this perspective, then, the fact that YHWH’s deeds might be unknown to even one derelict renegade reflects a willful failure on the part of the larger Israelite community to inculcate in all the indispensability of the nation’s special relationship with God. Hosea’s charge of infidelity, therefore, includes, or at least strongly implies, a sense that Israel consciously created its own culture of ignorance, disobedience, unfaithfulness and immoral permissiveness. To this interpretive end, though, I would adjust and intensify Heschel’s wording slightly with respect to Hosea 2: All are responsible, and most are arguably culpable as well—“guilt” is problematic as a technical term here, far too subjective, affectively loaded and thus imprecise. In that all are “sinners,” as 1 Kings 8:46, Ecclesiastes 7:20 and Psalm 143:2 each affirm, all are therefore culpable to some extent or another.13 Again, though, this sense of culpability in these Hebrew Scripture texts must be understood within their cultural context of corporate responsibility rather than individual, for as Heschel explains above, the behavior of the individual person is but a reflection of the larger spirit of society which conditions him or her—if one commits a crime, the community as a whole bears responsibility for this act in that its own state of corruption ultimately created the formative conditions whereby this individual might be in a position to sin. Still, Heschel makes yet another significant point here in reflecting on Hosea: an “unknown or discarded” God tends to overlook a people who have “discarded” righteous or moral behavior as well—human flourishing within the context of a relational community, then, too becomes unknown. As Hosea 2:11 indicates, there are even more immediate, and material, consequences for “discarding” YHWH.

Like an unappreciated, cuckolded spouse, YHWH understandably decides to take back the many gifts He has given His beloved, Israel, a people that now believes that these goods and commodities can come from sources other than God—but there is theological ballast here as well as practical and economic concerns. Gale A. Yee explains that for Hosea, the greatest affront is not so much that Israel “forgot” YHWH or even the exclusive covenant altogether, but rather they forgot precisely that upon which the covenant was based: “[a]rticulating his polemical monolatry, Hosea asserts that ever since Egypt, Israel ‘knew’ no other god or savior by YHWH...The elite forgot the nation’s dependency upon YHWH alone, a dependency inherent in the very nature of its covenant with God. It was YHWH alone who fed, taught, and healed Israel in the wilderness [emphasis mine].”14 In other words, generic knowledge of God or even the existence of the covenant relationship per se are inadequate—what is demanded is a total acceptance of, and therefore collective submission to, the reality that Israel’s covenant with YHWH is based on a fundamental “inequity,” to use Yee’s terminology. Like a wife’s relationship with her husband in the ancient Near East, Israel’s covenant with its God was necessarily unequal—YHWH as husband held all power and authority, and thus to forget this fact was tantamount to defying or consciously not knowing the divine and social order.15

12 Heschel, The Prophets, 15-16.
13 Heschel, The Prophets, 15.
14 Yee, “‘She is not my wife’,” 379.
15 Yee, “‘She is not my wife’,” 380-81.
Still, we must ask: is the news from Hosea 2 all bad, that is, is there no other recourse than economic and political destruction, no redemption for a people who have forgotten the parameters of God's covenant? Despite the severe language indicating YHWH's anger and threat of nation-wide material deprivation in Hosea 2:10—11, the reader ought never to lose sight of the fact that God offers the possibility, in fact the invitation, for Israel to know or acknowledge again, and abide by, both the history and the terms of their covenant with YHWH. In this same vein Walter Harrelson calls our attention to Hosea 14, explaining that in the eyes of the prophet,

> God must destroy a faithless people. Knowledge of God in the basic sense of the term leads to no other conclusion. But Hosea is led to the opposite conclusion: God exercises the fullness of his deity in rejecting judgment and choosing forgiveness. He remains the Holy One—hating sin, holding the people to account for sin; but as God, not a human being, he refuses to let his love for Israel be set aside and made of no consequence because of the sin of Israel. He chooses to forgive...This is not knowledge of the sacral traditions only. It is a relationship of intimate communion between lover and beloved.\(^\text{16}\)

Ultimately, suffering, death, destruction and despair do not have the final word! Yet, this sense of “forgiveness” or restoration with Hosea is only made fully operative, in Harrelson’s view, through the “intimate communion” (or marriage) between God and his people, a relationship actualized in history and manifested in covenant fidelity on the part of both the “lover” (YHWH) and the “beloved” (Israel).\(^\text{17}\)

That being said, we must not lose sight of the fact that any relationship between God and God’s people, no matter how intimate, is, by its very nature, unequal. Yee correctly asserts that the marriage metaphor used by Hosea connotes this fundamental (patriarchal) inequality within the covenant bond between YHWH as husband and lawgiver and Israel as wife in that the “senior” (or stronger) partner in the relationship alone reserves the right as well as the power to punish (or reprieve). This notion being already well established, Renita J. Weems also considers another, softer side of this relational equation:

> [b]y using the marriage metaphor, Hosea advocated for a relationship between YHWH and people built not simply on absolute obedience and loyalty, but intimacy and (mutual) love...The kind of intimacy spoken of here is reflected in the word \textit{yade’ah} “know” in 2:10...It means more than simply intellectual knowledge but the kind of knowledge that comes only from personal, intimate interaction. Such use...carries strong sexual overtones such as found throughout the Hebrew Bible.\(^\text{18}\)

In a sense, then, Weems’ interrogation of Hosea’s use of the word “know” brings this conversation full circle, in that at the very least her particular sense of the Hebrew translation comes much closer to contemporary usage of the verb “to know,” that is, as a term that can suggest close, personal intimacy in addition to mere familiarity with static intellectual data, such as remembering or knowing specific covenantal obligations. Furthermore, Weems’ specific allusion to a sexual connotation from the original Hebrew verb (\textit{yade’ah}) adds even something of a dynamism to Hosea’s sense of knowing in 2:10—perhaps the suggestion of mutual, life-giving union or fruitfulness, rather than Yee’s imaging of a relationship based in or on the inequity of its partners.\(^\text{19}\) Nevertheless, the sense of knowing in Hosea that Weems discusses here possesses a profound ethical dimension as well, especially when placed in conversation with Harrelson’s remark that Hosea shows us as well “how easy it is for a religion to fall prey to the encouragement of half-hearted acts of repentance (6:1-3), to develop rich ritual

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\(^{16}\) Harrelson, “Knowledge of God,” 14.

\(^{17}\) Harrelson, “Knowledge of God,” 14.


\(^{19}\) Yee, “’She is not my wife’,” 379.
and sacrificial acts unrelated to public righteousness and interior devotion (6:6).”

Read in this way, Hosea admonishes his audience that when the manifestation(s) of the relationship between Israel and YHWH become purely perfunctory on the part of God’s people, almost as if one were merely crossing items off of a list without any deeper, affective investment, the covenant is always-already compromised. Or, to put it still another way, the vulnerability that comes with complete (sexual) intimacy between lover and beloved means that, ideally, nothing is held back or hidden. Understood from this perspective, then, one can appreciate how Israel failed to know God while still knowing “of” God—the profound, self-giving and self-exposing intimacy behind whatever religious or ritual obligations the people were still maintaining had long since waned—Israel’s heart was, almost literally, somewhere else.

Within this same line of thought, then, I would venture an additional and more nuanced interpretation of Hosea 2:11. That is, God’s “stripping” of his spouse, Israel, is arguably not just a vengeful or even punitive act, but one that, by its very nature, speaks to the core of Israel’s ethical negligence with respect to the personal dimension of the covenant. YHWH does not wish primarily to humiliate his people, but rather to restore that level of openness and intimacy that initially characterized the relationship. God’s removing of Israel’s clothing, then, perhaps signifies God’s desire to remove whatever barriers (i.e. Baal worship) might be serving as obstructions to true affective communion. The point, of course, is that the focus here now shifts away from what a wayward nation has failed to do, knowing YHWH, and back to the supreme agency of God: “repentance itself has to rest upon God’s initiative.”

This does not take the nation of Israel “off the hook,” however, for even though YHWH retains possession of ultimate agency and initiative within the covenant relationship, the people nevertheless have an ethical obligation to know and therefore to respond to God’s initiative, not only in their conduct or acknowledgment of laws, but also by assuming, in particular, an appropriate affective posture which remains open to knowing God’s love and reciprocating relational intimacy.

For Yee as well, Hosea 2’s deployment of the word “know” does not conclude merely with the charge of Israel’s willful ignorance and defiance—within the word itself arguably lies the key to the Israelites’ ultimate renewal of their intimate covenant relationship with YHWH; that is, if one does not know, one can (re)learn! According to Yee, Israel needed to “relearn” its history with YHWH, and the “site of this reeducation is the wilderness itself, the place of the first intimate encounters between God and the people. The wilderness is for Hosea...a place for hope and reconciliation” as well as punishment. The notion of “wilderness” is of crucial significance with respect to Hosea 2:10-11, for not only does it hearken back to the Exodus narrative but, moreover, the precise nature of God’s punishment expressed here, that is, taking back the vital economic commodities of grain, wine, wool and flax (v. 11), ultimately results in a form of national “desertification” for Israel—like a howling wilderness, Israel, too, will be reduced to “nakedness,” stripped, as it were, of the these necessary components of human civilization and prosperity.

On the flip side, though, reducing a thriving nation to a desert or wilderness perhaps is the painful but indispensable experience needed for God’s people to rethink their priorities and then repent. Once again, we should note, this wilderness stage of repentance in Hosea is first and foremost the result of God’s initiative—YHWH acts, and it is then incumbent on the nation of Israel to respond. Thus, one might interpret Hosea 2:10—11 as follows: God punishes Israel for deliberately not knowing Him or forgetting the intimate nature of the covenant; therefore, God takes away the people’s economic abundance, returning them once more to their original desert experience as a way of reeducating the nation—and indeed, human history proves that hardship serves equally well as both a motivator and as a mnemonic device. The good news, then,

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22 Yee, “She is not my wife,” 379.
23 Though within most contexts the related terms “desert” and “wilderness” are not synonymous, Hosea 2:5 appears to equate them: “I will make her like the wilderness,/make her like an arid land,/and let her die of thirst” (emphasis mine).
is that even a defiant state of unknowing or forgetting can, and will, be corrected by YHWH, who is ultimately both loving and merciful with His wayward spouse. For the God of Israel, then, there really can be no such thing as invincible ignorance.

Before bringing this present discussion to a close, I will now make a few brief points respecting the ethical takeaway message(s) that Hosea 2:10—11 offers. First, in addition to a peoples’ responsibility to know God, the covenant and their obligations under it, Hosea in a sense reminds his audience that having God as the senior partner in the relationship has its advantages—that is, the primary agency and the initiative always belong to God. For God’s people, then, the main ethical duty within the relationship is to remain always responsive to God’s will and action: or, a simpler way to put this is, be obedient to God! Thus, to be a “fool,” to be willfully ignorant of God is really to lack not information as such, but rather attentiveness and responsiveness. Furthermore, in terms of how human responsiveness to God (or the lack thereof) affects human flourishing, we might understand the lesson of Hosea 2 this way: a people that remain unresponsive to the demands of their relationship with God are probably not going to be particularly attentive to the needs of other persons or right relationships in the long run, either.

Nevertheless, as Walter Harrelson admonishes, Hosea reinforces the need for external religious devotion to be matched by internal sincerity and integrity—ritual practices by themselves are dead without a properly oriented heart. Granted, maintaining an intimate relationship with God in Hosea is closely associated with collective human flourishing, whereas a forgetting of that special relationship is often linked with hardship. Still, like the Israelites of old, we must resist the urge to understand the mechanism of humankind’s relationship with God as a quid pro quo. Or, as I stated earlier, a group’s collective choices and behaviors might affect humans’ capacity to flourish either for good or for ill, but they do not cause God to do anything. Rather, as Hosea seems to suggest overall, a covenant people ought to know and respect the terms of that covenant with God because such is God’s legitimate due; and, if this same covenant relationship is always prioritized, if a nation always remembers its history of indebtedness to God, all other concerns, practical and ethical, will in the end come to a just resolution.

Walter Harrelson claims that according to Hosea, “[a] people is destroyed without knowledge.” And, though the destruction that the nation of Israel faces in Hosea is neither total nor permanent, but rather rehabilitative and ultimately restorative, in the final analysis, Harrelson’s statement has strong interlocking theological, ethical and relational implications here. Of course, without intimate knowledge of God, there can be no lasting covenant fidelity—the terms, the very nature of a people’s relationship with God are, quite literally, annihilated. Additionally, as has been already suggested, when people are negligent with respect to their covenant obligations, it is not just God’s “feelings” that suffer (as if God were just another human person!), but rather the whole course of human flourishing is stunted as individual moral transgressions in total reveal a degenerate society as whole, a perverse people no longer in right-relationship with God, the greater human community, or even with one-another.

Therefore, as the Christian people of God, Hosea 2:10—11 invites us, the Church, to ask ourselves anew—what do we mean as a chosen people when we proclaim that we truly know God? Indeed, many today may deplore the “anachronistic” language, the misogynistic, patriarchal imagery that the prophet Hosea brings to bear from a time and cultural context very remote from our own—this is all legitimate, critical scholarship. Despite all the ways that theologians and scripture experts might know what it is to “know” God, does our Christian ethical posture in the modern age yet betray that this ancient understanding of what it means to be a covenant people significantly impacts our own intimate relationships with God and others? To help answer this question, I will

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let Harrelson describe the setting for the opening of Hosea: “There is no faithfulness (‘met), no loving concern (hesed), no knowledge of God (da’at’lohim) in the land of North Israel. Instead, there is rampant lawlessness: swearing, lying, killing, stealing, adultery. Bloodshed is everywhere. It is an age of violence, of breaking all boundaries.” In the second decade of the 21st Century, have a Christian people yet come to know a world substantially different than Hosea’s? Clearly not—and perhaps this reality tells us just about all we need to “know.”

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26 Harrelson, “Knowledge of God,” 12.