THE SEVEN PSALMS

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Preface

LENT originally referred to the lengthening of the days—the days when we begin to get up and it is already light, the days when we can hear the six o'clock news before we draw the curtains. It has come to be an ecclesiastical season, the season of the ecclesiastical year when we think of the forty days in the wilderness and the Temptations of the Lord Jesus. And it has been fixed to precede the commemoration of the Passion and the Cross. I have chosen as subject for this Lenten book the Penitential Psalms. I have chosen them because I am a great believer in the traditions of the past which are concerned with worship and devotion—not to the least degree in any tradition which ends by limiting God's grace or by encouraging any kind of legalism, but in those traditions which explore and manifest the depth of God's redeeming grace, His concern for Everyman, and His demand for repentance and faith. What for this can be better than the Psalms? And what in the Psalter better than *The Seven Psalms*, as they were called many centuries ago?

NORMAN SNAITH

THETFORD
March 1964

CHAPTER I

The Penitential Psalms

MANY A LONG year ago William Langdale wrote:

> I live *in* London/and I live *on* London,
> The tools I labour with/to get my living by,
> Are the Lords Prayer, my Primer/my Dirges and my Vespers,
> And sometimes my Psalter/and the Seven Psalms.

It is plain from *Piers Plowman* that William Langdale knew his psalter very well indeed, since he often quotes from it. He refers once again to the Seven Psalms. This is in 'The Vision of Lady Meed tried before the King', where the judgement is given, and henceforth—

> Priests and parsons/shall hunt——their masses,
> Their psalters and their Seven Psalms/and pray for sinful men.

The Seven Psalms are the seven penitential psalms: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143. They are, as is said in the title of Psalm 102, the 'prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD'. They are (Neale and Littledale, I, p. 125) 'the seven weapons wherewith to oppose the seven deadly sins: the seven prayers inspired by the sevenfold Spirit to the repentant sinner: the seven guardians for the seven days of the week: the seven companions for the seven Canonical Hours of the day'. It was also said by the men of old time that the seven penitential psalms provide the seven steps in the ladder of repentance. The first step is the fear of punishment, and this is Psalm 6. The second step is sorrow for sin, and the verse is Psalm 32^5, which in RV is: 'I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD.' The third step is the hope of pardon, and the verse is Psalm 38^{15}, 'for in thee, O LORD, do I hope; Thou wilt answer, O Lord my God'. The fourth step

is the love of a cleansed soul, and the verse is Psalm 51[7]: 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.' The fifth step is longing for the heavenly Jerusalem, and the verse is Psalm 102[16]: 'For the LORD shall build up Zion, He shall prosper in His glory.' The sixth step is distrust of self, and the verse is Psalm 130[6]: 'My soul looketh for the Lord.' The seventh step is prayer against final doom, and the verse is Psalm 143[2]: 'and enter not into judgement with thy servant'.

The title of Psalm 102, as we have seen, says that the psalm is 'a prayer of the afflicted'. The Hebrew word is *'ani*, spelt with an *'ayin*, a *nun*, and a *yodh*. There is frequent confusion even in the text of the Bible itself between this word *'ani* and the word *'anaw*, spelt with an *'ayin*, a *nun*, and a *vav*. It is important to know of this confusion, because there is often a confusion in our minds also, and if we are to study the penitential psalms properly, we must get the matter clear. Some scholars say that the words are variants and mean the same thing: afflicted, humble, meek, poor. Others deny this. The first word (*'ani* with a *yodh*) is a passive adjective, and strictly it means 'afflicted, humiliated'. The second word (*'anaw* with a *vav*) is an active adjective, and strictly it means 'humble, meek'. I think all this is right. The Seven Psalms are almost wholly prayers of the afflicted, the humiliated. Indeed, only one of them, Psalm 130, really qualifies as a prayer of the humble rather than of the humbled.

The confusion in the actual Hebrew text itself in the Bible amounts to the following: five times the ancient scribes found *'ani* with a *yodh* and officially changed it into *'anaw* with a *vav*; three times they found *'anaw* with a *vav* and officially changed it to *'ani* with a *yodh*. The first word, the passive one, *'ani* with a *yodh*, is found much more often in the singular than in the plural (fifty-two against twelve); the second word, the active one, *'anaw* with a *vav*, is found once only in the singular and twenty-two times (counting the official corrections) in the plural. Summing up: the first word (*'ani* with a *yodh*) tends to be used of an individual, 'the afflicted one',

and the second word, (*'anaw* with a *vav*) tends to be used of a group, 'the meek'.

The one time when the word *'anaw*, the active word, 'the meek, the humble', is used in the singular is in Numbers 12^3, where it is used to describe Moses. It reads: 'And the man Moses was very meek, above all men which were upon the face of the earth.' How can it truthfully be said that Moses was 'very meek', the meekest of all men? This is the man who slew the Egyptian slave-driver and hid his body in the sand. This is the man who drove off single-handed the shepherds who were bullying the seven daughters of Jethro. This is the man who stood before the Pharaoh and bade him, 'Let my people go.' He raised his hand with the rod over the sea and the waters were divided. He raised it again and the waters flowed back and drowned the Egyptians. It was Moses who time and again himself alone, withstood the angry Israelites. Above all, this is the man who, when he came down the mountainside with the two tables of stone in his hands and found the Israelites worshipping the golden calf, ground the calf to powder, mixed it with water and made them drink it. Then he sent the Levites through the camp to cut down every man they met. This is the man who 'was very meek, above all men which were on the face of the earth'.

The explanation is that *'anaw* with a *vav* (meek) means humble towards God, and humbly trusting in Him. 'The meek' who shall 'inherit the earth' are the humble, trusting Israelites who patiently 'wait for the kingdom of God'. Moses was terrible towards men, but humble towards God. 'The meek' were the faithful, humble souls whose lives were built on humble trust in the God of their fathers, the God who had saved their fathers in olden time and would save them in His own good time. Meanwhile, they followed the requirements of Micah 6^8; they did what God had ordained (*mishpat*, EVV 'justly'), they loved *chesed* (i.e. lovingly kept the covenant, steadfastly and loyally), and they 'walked humbly' (lit. 'made modest, retiringly to walk') with their God. In the times of foreign oppressors, the *'anawim* (meek, humble) were

also *'aniyyim* (afflicted ones), and there are instances where it not easy from the context to decide which is intended. There is therefore a certain amount of justification for the doubt of later Jewish scholars, those who cared for and preserved the Sacred Text.

In these penitential psalms we have to do mostly with the humbled, the afflicted ones, those who, for one reason or another, were conscious of indignities and of the almost unbearable disabilities from which they suffered.

CHAPTER II

Psalm 6

BY A CURIOUS chance, this psalm is important for something quite other than anything the content of it would suggest, or anything in the history of its use in the Church. It was the first 'outrider' in that rushing movement whereby the people stole the psalms from the Church. Up to this time all was in Latin: Bible, psalms, hymns, and the rest. For the most part it all meant nothing to the people. Only priest and monk would sing the words, and only some of them appreciate the tune. Let us hope they always understood the words.

In Germany Martin Luther changed this, for the Protestant Reformation was more than a doctrinal one; it opened the door of worship and praise and prayer to the people—direct to the people. Luther translated the Bible into German, but he also wrote hymns, mostly modelled on psalms. The best known of these latter are *Aus tiefer Noth schrei ich zu dir:* (Out of the depths I cry to thee: *MHB* 359) and *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott* (A safe stronghold our God is still: *MHB* 494). The first of these is based on Psalm 130, the second on Psalm 46. Others followed the example set by Luther, both in Germany among the Lutherans and in France, but the other Reformed Churches kept to the actual psalms and did their best to render them into such metrical forms in their own tongues as could be sung by the people. It is from this non-Lutheran origin that the Church of Scotland tradition springs. Scottish Presbyterians stem from Calvin, not Luther, and this is why they traditionally sing metrical psalms rather than hymns based on psalms. The homely rhythm and unique style together indicate their origin. They were made by the people and for the people. The unsophisticated rhymes belong to hillsides and the heather as much as to churches. 'The

metrical psalms, sung in unison, without accompaniment, and with strong, rugged voices predominating, are Scottish history. They bring back the days when people did not sing them in churches, but on hillsides . . .', and Ian Hay, in *The Willing Horse*, goes on to say how there in remote fastnesses the services were led by a man with a price on his head and all were guarded by sentries on the skyline. To this day with the 6th Cameronians the Divine Service does not begin till the officer on duty reports to the commanding officer: 'No enemy in sight, surr.'

But hymns in church after the Luther pattern or psalms in church after the pattern of Calvin and Zwingli were not enough for the people, even though all were, like the words at Pentecost, in their own tongue wherein they were born. Even before Luther's death in 1546 a new stream had begun to flow, and it was a stream which rapidly became a torrent. The first sign of it was Clement Marot's translation of Psalm 6 into French. This was in 1533. Clement Marot was *valet-de-chambre* to Francis I, and he was the favourite of Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre. This particular psalm appeared at the end of the first part of Marguerite's *Mirror*, in which, as the title says, this 'very Christian princess' could see both 'her emptiness and her fullness' (*son néant et son tout*). Nine years later, in 1542, Marot's *Thirty Psalms* were published. These 'holy ditties' (*sanctes chansonettes*) were set to popular tunes of the ballad type, and they quickly gained an extraordinary popularity. They put love-songs wholly out of fashion at the Court, both in the time of Francis I and in the time of Henri II. Everybody sang them, princes and courtiers, princesses and courtesans. Within twenty-five years the court fashion had spread to the common people and thousands gathered every evening in open places, such as Le Pré aux Clercs, to sing these little songs. They were sung to the melodies of Claude Goudinel and Louis Bourgeois.

There was a similar movement in England about the same time, and here the writer of the first translations into truly common speech was Thomas Sternhold, who also was a valet

(groom of the robes), but this time to Henry VIII. The first group of Sternhold's psalms was published in 1548. This contained nineteen psalms. Others, to the number of thirty-seven, were published after his death. There is one only in the *Methodist Hymn Book*: *MHB* 24, which contains part of Psalm 18. Verses 3 and 4 ('The Lord descended from above' and 'On cherub and on cherubim') are particularly valuable because of the combination of real majesty and simple speech, especially when wedded to Orlando Gibbons' tune, *Palatine*. Many of the superior people did not like this sort of thing. Queen Elizabeth did not like them, neither did the cavalier poets and such elegants as the Earl of Rochester. But the common people loved them and continued to sing them; they sang them by the thousand and in the open air. Psalm-hymns like these written by Thomas Sternhold were the English equivalent of the metrical psalms. They were psalms sung to popular tunes, and not chanted, as were the unmetrical versions.

All this was actually started when Clement Marot turned Psalm 6 into a 'holy ditty' in 1533. The results were astonishing, because the movement spread far and wide. Marot's rendering of Psalm 6 was the first showing of white as the great wave rolls in on the beach and begins to topple. Here at last the people had something they could sing and something they could understand. And where the people could not sing their songs inside the church, they sang them outside.

The Venerable Bede, Hilary, and Athanasius associated this psalm with the Coming of the Lord. Their exegesis is strange and to us fanciful. They based their exposition on the occurrence of the word *sheminith* in the title. This word means 'eighth', and they interpreted it to mean the eighth day—that is, the first day of the new creation, the first seven being concerned with the old creation. Thus the 'eighth' is the day when the dead shall rise from the cold earth. According to Athanasius, it is the day when some shall go away into everlasting punishment, and others into eternal life. He said that the sixth age was when the world shall come to an end,

presumably because the creation was complete in six days. In the seventh age, the Lord shall judge the universe. This is because on the sixth day, as the Talmud (b RH 31a) says, 'He completed His works, and began to reign over them'. This, says the Talmud, is why Psalm 93 was chosen to be the proper psalm for the sixth day of the week; and since God 'began the seventh day to a very hair's breadth, and it therefore appeared as though He had completed His work on that very day' (see Rashi, explaining Gen 2^2: 'on the seventh day God finished his work which he had made'), the judgement of the new King began on the seventh day.

The actual meaning of the word *Sheminith* (eighth) is not certainly known. It is used as a musical direction here, and at the head of Psalm 12 and in 1 Chronicles 15^{21}. Some say it means 'according to the eighth key' (whatever this may mean), or 'on the octave', following the Greek (Septuagint) and the Latin (Vulgate). In the Chronicles passage the musical instruments are divided into two groups, psalteries set to *'alamoth* ('maidens' and so ? sopranos) and harps set to *sheminith* (? an octave lower, and so bass). This last suggestion may well be right, but we do not know. Another possibility is that if Hebrew music had quarter-tones (cf. the Near East today), then the word 'eighth' may mean what we mean by a 'third'. This leads to a suggestion that the psalm was sung in thirds by two groups: compare the use of thirds in Arnold's *Leamington* (*MHB* 465) or Mozart's tune (*MHB* 572), taken from *The Magic Flute*.

The title contains other notes. The first is 'To (RV For) the Chief Musician'. The most likely explanation of this is that it is a note to say that the psalm was also to be found in The Chief Musician's collection. The first three books of the Psalter (1-89) seem to have been formed from two earlier Psalters—a Jahvist Psalter (2-41), in which the name for God is JHVH, and the Elohist Psalter (42-83), in which the name for God is Elohim, the ordinary Hebrew word for 'God': plus an introductory psalm and a supplement (83-89). The Elohist Psalter itself was formed from three still earlier

collections: a Davidic collection (51-71 plus 72) and two Levitical Psalters, the Asaphite (50, 73-83) and the Qorahite (42-49). But many psalms were also to be found in the Music-master's Collection, and a note to this effect has been inserted at the head of the psalm. There are references of this kind in some modern collections of hymns.

Neginoth means 'strings', and the direction is found in seven psalms (4, 6, 54, 55, 67, 76 and 60) and Habakkuk 3.

We also get the name 'psalm', *mizmor*. The Greek equivalent is *psalmos*, from whence through the Latin we get our word 'psalm'. But what exactly does *mizmor* mean? There is an Arabic verb, *zamara*, which means 'pipe, play on a reed', and so many have said that the Hebrew word means 'sing, make music, make melody', so that a 'psalm' is something that is sung. This is the traditional explanation, and it may well be right. But there is a Hebrew verb, *zamar*, which means 'prune'. It is used in the famous Song of the Vineyard (Isa 5^6) of the vines that were not pruned. Now pruning is not done by ordinary cutting (slicing) with a knife, but by a plucking movement. The part cut away is cut with a grasping movement of the hand; the fingers holding the knife are clasped in towards the ball of the thumb, and the slip is plucked off. It may well be therefore that the Hebrew *mizmor* did not refer to the matter of the song, but to the accompaniment—on plucked strings, but strings plucked in a particular way. The Greek translators seem to have interpreted it this way with their *psalmos*, because this word means 'twanging with the fingers', and it is used in particular of the sound of the cithara or harp. The Greek verb *psallo* is used regularly of playing a stringed instrument *with the fingers* as against with the plectron. It may well be therefore that *mizmor* (psalm) originally means that the accompaniment was to be strings plucked with the fingers, whereas *neginoth* meant strings played another way. All the *neginoth* directions are apparently from the Music-master's Collection, and it may well be that this type of accompaniment belonged to a special tradition. Would it perhaps be considered more elegant than ordinary playing by plucked strings?

Verse 1

> O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger,
> Neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.

Here we have a good Hebrew couplet, a three-three rhythm and a good parallelism, 'chasten' repeating the idea of 'rebuke' and 'hot displeasure' repeating the idea of 'anger'. The rhythm and the parallels are typical of Hebrew poetry: three-three rhythms being the epic style, and three-two rhythms being mostly for lyrics (e.g. Song of Solomon) and laments.

The psalmist speaks of God as being angry with him, violently angry, full of hot anger. This involves ascribing human passions and feelings to God, and, in this case, not wholly the best. Is it right to speak of God in this way, saying that God is angry with a man? The answer is another question: if we are going to talk about God at all, how else can we speak of Him except in terms gathered from our own experience? We cannot talk except in terms of what we know. We cannot know anything unless we know it 'humanly'. We must perforce think and speak 'from a human point of view'. We cannot speak another way. We must express ourselves in words based on human experience and in metaphors drawn from human life. The alternative is silence. We maintain that God is a Person, and we must therefore use personal terms. We do not know any personal terms except human personal terms. And so we say that God listens to us, that He hears us when we cry to Him. Taken literally, this is nonsense. God has no ears. How then can He hear? But how else can we say that God——? We cannot say it in any other way, and that is the end of it.

God is strangely different from idols of wood and stone. 'They have ears, but they hear not', said the 115th psalmist. Our God has no ears, but He does hear. He speaks to men and women, but He has no mouth. He has no eyes, 'but his eyes behold . . . the children of men' (Ps 11^4). Indeed, if we think of God as having eyes, we know that they are not as our eyes. His eyes are never closed; ours often are. He sees as well in the dark as in the day: 'the darkness and the light are both

alike to thee' (Ps 139[12]). His eyes are never dulled in old age from seeing, as ours can grow to be. Or, again, when we say that God has ears, we know that He never grows dull of hearing, not even slow to begin to listen when someone speaks. He does not therefore have to beg our pardon and ask us to say it again. Far from it: 'before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear' (Isa 65[24]). Much speaking and the continual repetition of prayers is not necessary for God. Some of it may be necessary for us, but not for Him: and even for us there comes a stage when most of it can be positively harmful.

We say in this verse that God is angry with us about sin. When we say that God is angry with us, we mean that He feels about sin as we do, or at least as we know we ought to feel. We are actually projecting our feelings on to God. We are doing what primitive men did, what the animists did; we are making God in our own image. We have said that if we are to describe God at all, we must describe Him in human terms. We have no other terms. But we must use these human terms with great care, because He is God and not man (Hos 11[9]). There are indeed human tendencies and human ways which we must hesitate to ascribe to God: some not at all, some only with the greatest reserve, and always with care.

Is it permissible, then, to use 'anger', 'wrath', and similar words with reference to God? Usually 'to be angry' has to do with passion. We think in terms of at least the stress of emotion, often of a sudden, uncontrollable outburst. The Hebrew does not help us here in this verse, as it sometimes does. The word translated 'anger' (*'aph*) comes from a root which means 'breathe, snort'. The word translated 'hot displeasure' (*chemah*) comes from a root which means 'grow hot'. A better translation is 'hot anger' or 'fury'. The psalmist spoke of God as being full of fire and fury against him, and believed that this was why everything was going wrong for him.

This is a relic of earlier ideas about God—ideas which, let us hope, we have outgrown, especially if we have become 'new men in Christ Jesus' and have grown to at least something

'of the stature of the fulness of Christ'. Such ideas of sudden and violent action on the part of God belong to those times when men looked through a glass (AV) very darkly; indeed, they were looking into a mirror (RV) and saw far too much of their own selves. The stories about the Ark in the Books of Samuel are examples of this early way of thinking about God: that of the men of Beth-shemesh who looked into the Ark (1 Sam 6^{19}) and the story of Uzzah who, with his brother, was in charge of the cart on which the Ark was being transported to the new site (2 Sam 6^{1-18}). The oxen apparently were startled by the appalling noise which David and his followers were evidently making—swirling Near-Eastern music with the clash of tambourines and cymbals. The Ark jerked and swayed, and it seemed as though it was going to fall off the cart. Uzzah put out his hand to steady the Ark, touched it and fell down dead. Popular and contemporary opinion said: Uzzah touched the Ark: God was angry: He burst out and struck him dead. The place was thereafter called Perez-Uzzah, the place where God 'burst out' (*paraz*) and struck Uzzah dead. We would say: Uzzah acted automatically: he put out his hand without thinking, almost involuntarily. When he touched the Ark, he realized that he had broken a strict taboo, and the shock of that realization killed him on the spot. The same kind of thing has happened everywhere in the world where men and women have had such ideas about taboo. We express our descriptions and explanations in modern terms. We use partly our greater physical and medical knowledge, but in this case mostly our clearer understanding of the nature of God and of His ways with the sons of men.

When we say that God is angry about sin, we mean that He hates it, that He is out against it for all He is worth. He will have nothing to do with it, except fight it. He washes His hands of it. But we do not mean that He washes His hands of the sinner. He 'loves the faithless sinner still'. Or again, when we speak of God being angry, we do not think of Him as losing His temper and lashing out in the way that perhaps some of us sometimes do. He is not irrational in His anger, nor is He

impulsive. We ought not to use this word 'anger' in association with God, because in our modern speech it mostly involves lashing out against someone, acting in the heat of the moment and smashing things, having that choking feeling which comes from a sudden fullness in the artery leading up from the heart. The word has always had a strong emotional content in English, due to the original Old Norse root *ang* (be straitened), from which it is derived. We still speak of a wound being 'angry', by which we mean that it is inflamed, like the 'sycknesses and angres' in *Piers Plowman*. We must not associate passion, sudden, unpremeditated, violent action, with God. When, therefore, we speak of God's anger, we mean a steady hostility, a permanent and active antagonism. Perhaps we would do better to use the word 'wrath'. It is true that this also is a violent word, perhaps even more violent than 'anger', but it has been used from Middle English onwards of what we call God's 'righteous indignation'.

When the psalmist says that God is angry with him, he is saying something, not about God, but about himself. He knows in his own heart that if God was like a man, God would be angry with him. He knows that he has deserved condemnation and punishment. This actually is what the Hebrew says: Do not *condemn* me in your anger; do not punish me in your hot anger. In some ways it is a good and wholesome thing that the sinner should think that God is angry with him. Indeed, it is necessary that the sinner, if he is ever going to be different, should think as a sinner, and should therefore think in terms of anger and so forth, like the old converted sinner who was alleged to slip into most blasphemous language when he got excited in extempore prayer. Doubtless the Lord understood and took the will for the words, and it was 'counted for righteousness'. The man could express himself only in words that he knew, and he had not had time since his conversion to acquire a new vocabulary. It is good that a sinner should at first feel in his heart that God is angry with him. It is a sure sign that the work of grace is beginning in his heart. It is when a man finds himself very sure that God is angry with

somebody else that there is danger. Let every man think mostly about the punishment that is deserved when he is thinking about himself; but let him think mostly about the forgiveness that is offered when he is thinking about other people.

Let, then, a man start with feeling that God is angry with him: that is a good beginner's thought. When he knows more about the grace of God, and more about the tender mercies of Christ, he will also learn that 'God is angry' is not the proper way to talk about God. He will know that God is in violent antagonism to sin, but full of an infinite yearning for the sinner. He will know that 'he that doeth sin is of the devil' and that 'the wages of sin is death'; but he will also know that 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son' and that 'the Son of Man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many'. He will know that 'there shall in no wise enter into' the Holy City 'anything unclean or he that maketh [doeth] an abomination and a lie'; but he will also know that Christ ever stands at his door and knocks, and 'if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me'. We begin as babes, physically and spiritually. We must all grow up, spiritually as well as physically.

Verse 2

Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am withered away;
O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed.

AV has 'weak' at the end of the first line, like the Greek; similarly, both Jerome and the Vulgate with 'infirm'. The Hebrew word involves intensive weakness: in popular English, 'weak as a kitten'. A good rendering is 'I am utterly exhausted'; Father Ronald Knox has 'I have no strength left'. (For 'vexed' see next verse.)

'Have mercy' goes back to the Greek, and comes to us through the Latin *miserere* (both Jerome and the Vulgate). The Hebrew word (*chanan*) is usually used in connexion with forgiveness and the rescue of man from enemies, misfortunes, and sins. There is another verb, *racham*, best translated 'have

compassion', which is used more of God's pity for poor, weak humanity. It is the same verb as that found twice at the beginning of the Koran: 'In the name of Allah the compassionate, the merciful', where the same root is used both for 'compassionate' and 'merciful'. This is the sentiment of Psalm 103[14]: 'For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.' This is why God is full of forbearance towards men. 'Forbearance' is an aspect of God's dealings with men as portrayed in the Old Testament, which has not received the amount of attention its frequent occurrence warrants.

The psalmist uses phrases which describe serious illness, and, here or elsewhere, an advanced stage of exhaustion which is near death. The same is true of passages in the Book of Job (Chapters 16, 32). From these chapters and other verses found here and there in the Book of Job, the commentators have sought to diagnose the sickness of the Job of the central poetic section of Job. It is plain that the Job of the prose sections of the book (Chapters 1, 2 and 42) was smitten with some loathsome disease, but the Job of the central poetic portion is not necessarily similarly stricken. There are in Akkadian (Mesopotamian) many penitential poems in which the sinner describes his state in terms of the utmost and most severe sickness. It is the traditional way for the sinner who desires remission of the penalty of his sin to describe the state in which he is. It is very likely that the physical symptoms described in this and other similar psalms are to be interpreted as pleas for remission of sin and misfortune rather than as accurate statements of the man's physical condition. It is small wonder that scholars are confused over this matter. The symptoms described do not belong to any particular sickness; they are miscellaneous statements drawn from general experience of many illnesses.

There is a reason for the association in the psalms of sin and sickness. It arises from the orthodox belief that sickness and misfortune are the results of sin. This belief is at the root of Job's problem, and it is found in general throughout

the Old Testament. Sometimes it is called the Deuteronomic theory of retribution: do right and you will live long and prosper: sin and you will die soon, after a life of misery and sickness and want. It is not easy to see why this theory should be labelled 'Deuteronomic', because it is general. Possibly it is expressed more often and more clearly in Deuteronomy than elsewhere, but the Lord Jesus had to combat it: Luke 13^4: 'Those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that they were offenders [AV "sinners"] above all men that dwell in Jerusalem?' and John 9^2, 'Rabbi, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?' Such ideas are still prevalent. There is the frequent question: 'Why should this happen to me?' and the parallel one: 'What have I done to deserve this?' The answer to each question is the same: I can think of heaps of reasons why this, and worse than this, should happen to you, and should happen to me also. We are both sinners, and we deserve all we get and a very great deal more besides. But there is no necessary connexion in individual cases between sin and suffering. Sometimes there is, and there are diseases which are closely connected with sin and would not exist without (for instance) promiscuity in sex relations. But there can be innocent persons in these instances as in all others, and one of the most frequent happenings in the world is that the innocent suffer for the guilty. Some suffering is not the result of human sin, but is a consequence of living in a world like this. The world is still a boiling cauldron under its skin; sometimes it boils over and often it quivers and shakes. In all disabilities and disasters, whatever their cause—accidental and incidental to a world like this, disasters due to man's search to find out and control the natural forces of the world, troubles caused directly by man's lack of care or thought or by man's deliberate folly—in all these cases the innocent suffer with the guilty. The important factor about the Crucifixion is not that Jesus was innocent, but that it was Jesus who was innocent. That an innocent man should suffer and die is not at all remarkable. It happens every day, and during the last fifty years there have

been many millions. But that the Son of God should suffer and die—that is indeed remarkable; it is unique.

Verse 3

> My soul also is sore vexed:
> And thou, O LORD, how long?

The Greek has 'troubled, disturbed', and so also both Jerome and the Vulgate. The true meaning is rather 'I am scared out of my wits', because the Hebrew verb is associated with nightmares. The corresponding noun means 'sudden terror'. The psalmist in real terror beseeches God to turn to him and save him. In these days it is highly improper to seek to frighten a man by threatening him with hell-fire. If, of course, you do not believe in hell-fire, to try to scare a man by the thought of hell is not only improper; it is downright dishonest and wicked. If you believe that a man has another chance after death, you may perhaps give him a little jolt (if you can), but not a violent one—a gentlemanly warning, perhaps. One of your difficulties in this latter case is that if you believe in one chance after death, the same logic involves you in a second chance, and so on, until all are saved at last. Most people seem to believe in 'another chance', and are therefore accepting some sort of purgatory. A result of all this is that for many of us the word 'salvation' has no meaning. Salvation involves somebody doing something for us that we cannot do for ourselves. That something is a matter of life and death. It means being saved. No man talks about being saved and means it, unless he is in deadly peril, knows it, has done everything he can think of to get out of it, and is still in it. The classic example is the jailer of Philippi. He talked about being saved. The man had done everything an efficient jailer could do to ensure the safe custody of the prisoners under his charge. No jailer, however efficient, can take precautions against an earthquake in the middle of the night, with the very foundations of the prison shaken, all doors wide open and every prisoner's chains broken. If the prisoners escaped, it was

death for him in the morning. It was because he saw nothing in front of him but death that he cried out to be saved. Only under such circumstances can 'being saved' have a real meaning. The jailer meant, of course, to save his skin; and who shall blame him? But Paul had not braved all those perils of land and sea without knowing how to take advantage of an opening like that.

The biblical doctrine is that a man must be born again, and that unless he is born again in Christ Jesus, he must for ever die. There is nothing in the Bible, either in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, which says that man, or any part of him, is immortal by nature. The Bible says the contrary. There is immortality for every man in Christ, and the necessary condition is this new birth. This is why the Bible throughout talks about Salvation. It is because, according to the Bible, man needs it, and needs it desperately. Without it, he is lost. Nobody presumably believes in the full doctrine of the immortality of the soul, the full Platonic doctrine of the pre-natal soul. Many of us have adopted the so-to-speak latter half of the doctrine: the soul created at birth or thereabouts and living on in its own right after physical death. This belief involves Heaven and some sort of Purgatory (intermediate state, which is neither Heaven nor Hell) and/or some sort of Hell. It may be that when once born every soul of man is 'immortal'; in that case it should be recognized that this is a non-biblical doctrine. Further, unless one believes in a penal hell of unremitting punishment, it is necessary to think out very carefully what one means by the word 'salvation'. Such a man does not believe in what the Bible means by salvation; it is for him to say exactly what he does understand by the word.

And, finally, the English versions all have 'my soul'; Moffatt has 'my life'. This is a much sounder representation of the Hebrew. There is no case either in the Old Testament or in the New Testament where the word 'soul' means man's immortal soul. The Hebrew word is *nephesh*, and *nephesh* is what a man is or has when he is alive and is not or has not

when he is dead. In the 'abode of the dead' there is no *nephesh*. The word strictly means 'the breath-soul', as the saying goes —the living vital breath of man, the life that goes out with his breath, the physical breath as associated with the living man; and all of it gone at death. The Latin *anima* is an almost exact equivalent in meaning. Further, this word *nephesh* is also used with a suffix as a personal pronoun, especially in poetry and in what we would call elevated prose. Thus, usually, the English Versions 'my soul' should be 'me', and 'thy soul' should be 'thee' and so on. To follow through the renderings of *nephesh*. The Greek Version (Septuagint) used the word *psyche*, which is Plato's word for 'the immortal soul'. This is the word used in the New Testament, but it is not used there, any more than in the old Greek Bible, to mean Plato's immortal soul. It is used in the sense of *nephesh-psyche*, and it is something that is finished at physical death. The New Testament word for that which lives after death is *pneuma* (spirit), and this is what is in a man when he has been born again. In 1 Corinthians 2, the word 'natural' represents *psychikos*, and the word 'spiritual' represents *pneumatikos*. See also John 3^{1-8}, remembering that all that belongs to the *psyche* is of 'flesh' (*sarx*) and not of 'spirit' (*pneuma*).

Verse 4

> Return, O LORD, deliver my soul:
> Save me for thy lovingkindness' sake.

The usual rendering is 'return, come back, turn to me', as here, but the meaning could be 'deliver me *again*' (Moffatt). The translation which Moffatt gives is much easier and more satisfactory from the Christian point of view, but is not necessary the more correct for that reason. The psalmist may well have thought that God has turned away from him, gone away and left him alone. Such a thought is far from alien to experience. Even the Lord Jesus Christ in the oncoming pangs of a cruel death spoke in terms of being forsaken by God.

'Deliver' is a passable translation of the original Hebrew, but it is not strong enough, not violent enough. The word

means 'snatch out', and the Vulgate is best with its *eripe* (tear away, snatch out). For 'my soul', as usual, read 'me' or 'my life'.

'Lovingkindness' is a word which Miles Coverdale used, mostly in the Psalter, for the Hebrew *chesed*, though here, as often in AV, the rendering is 'mercy'. This latter translation is due to the Greek *eleos* and the Vulgate (and Jerome) *misericordia*. Moffatt has 'love' here. This Hebrew word is one of the most important words in the Old Testament. Basically it has to do with ideas of 'firmness, steadfastness', as in Isaiah 40^6 ('All flesh is grass, and all the *goodliness* thereof is as the flower of the field'), where the ancient Jewish Aramaic paraphrase, the Targum, is the only ancient version to get the true meaning with its rendering 'strength'. The prophet is contrasting the short life, soon to fade, of the wild flowers (see verse 8) with the durability, the constancy of God's Word, with His reliability, His steadfastness. The word comes to be used in Hebrew for that steadfast loyalty which both parties to a treaty or covenant ought to maintain towards each other, and in particular it comes to be used of the Covenant between God and Israel. George Adam Smith proposed 'leal-love', but, though 'leal' was once fairly common in Middle English, it is not now used, except in Scotland and in northern dialects. 'Steadfast love' is perhaps better. The tragedy of much of Jewish history, and indeed of the whole of mankind, is that man's attitude to God has so often been one of waywardness, disloyalty and downright apostasy. 'For your *chesed* (EVV "goodness", but it should be "loyalty, faithfulness") is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth early away' (Hos 6^4): whereas God desires loyalty, steadfast love, rather than sacrifice (Hos 6^6). Because of Israel's repeated faithlessness, the only chance of the survival and maintenance of the Covenant demanded repeated mercy and forgiveness on the part of God. It was this awareness which led the ancient Greek and Latin translators to use their word for 'mercy'. The psalmist, therefore, is appealing once more to God's steadfast loyalty to His Covenant with Israel, that once more God will exercise

His continuing mercy. The awareness of God's unfailing love is evident first in Hosea, whose unwavering love for his wayward wife taught him that God's love for Israel was firm and steadfast, and that even though He might have to let Israel go (11[8]), He nevertheless loved her still. The New Testament idea of Grace has grown out of Israel's experience of this *chesed* of God, God's unfailing love for the Israel of His choice. This is how it has come to pass that we know God's love to be steadfast and sure: 'and loves the faithless sinner still' (*MHB* 346). To the basic idea of steadfastness which is involved in *chesed* there is added the basic idea of 'favour', especially 'favour' in cases where there is no obligation; cf. the Hebrew *chen*. The Greek equivalent of *chen* is the word *charis*, that Grace of God to which Paul, in particular among New Testament writers, realized that he owed so much. But in the Pauline Epistles, *charis* (grace) involves the two basic ideas, steadfast love and undeserved favour.

Verse 5

> For in death there is no remembrance of thee:
> In Sheol who can give thee thanks?

Sheol is the dark, underground world of the dead, where even the great ones of earth are drooping, lifeless shadows (Isa 14[9-10]). This is the traditional and orthodox Old Testament doctrine concerning after-death—forgetfulness, absence of desire, absence of life. Old Testament belief in any sort of life after death developed quite late, and the only two certain references are Isaiah 26[19] and Daniel 12[2].

Verses 6 and 7 tell of the psalmist's sleepless nights, and how his eyes grow dim through grief because of all his adversaries.

Verse 8

> Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity:
> For the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping.

The cause of the psalmist's distress in his 'adversaries', his 'enemies', whom he now calls 'workers of iniquity'. The

psalmist receives an assurance (8*b*-10) that God has heard his prayer, and that these enemies will be ashamed, turned back suddenly in confusion and disgrace. But who are these adversaries of his? The ancient versions and many modern translators have 'iniquity', but the word *'awen* can also mean 'trouble', and sometimes does (Ps 10^7; Hos 9^4, etc.). Probably 'trouble' is the best rendering here. Professor Mowinckel held that these enemies were magicians, men who had brought sickness and distress on the psalmist by their spells. It may be that he is right. He has been greatly influenced by the fact that such things did happen in Egypt and in Babylonia, and there are many spells and counter-spells from these areas which have been found. Possibly we have in Psalm 6 an ancient prayer to be freed from the spells of magicians, but modified and reinterpreted ultimately to find its place in the praises and prayers of Israel. On the other hand, whilst it is true that magicians are 'workers of iniquity', there are plenty of 'workers of iniquity' (or 'trouble-makers') who are not magicians.

Verse 9

> The LORD hath heard my supplication;
> The LORD will receive my prayer.

Possibly, as some have suggested, the sacrifice was offered between verse 8 and verse 9, and this is why we have the past tense, 'hath heard' in 9*a*. There are two difficulties about this. One is that the tense may be the 'permansive', a kind of repetitive 'now' tense (though this may still refer to the regular sacrifices). The other is that there is a Rabbinic tradition 'there is no song except over wine', whereby psalms were sung in the second Temple at the time when the drink-offering was poured out. If this is a sound tradition, then the Temple choirs would not have started singing before the sacrifice was kindled.

The Hebrew word for 'prayer' is *tephillah*. It comes from a root which means 'intervene, interpose', so that it can mean

both 'arbitrate, judge' and 'intercede, pray'. Thus in Psalm 106[30] the verb is translated in both Authorized and Revised Versions as 'executed judgement', which probably comes from Jerome, *diiudicauit*. The Greek (Septuagint) and the Latin Vulgate have 'appeased', but other ancient versions have the traditional 'prayed'. The word certainly means 'intervene, interpose' and the earliest (and indeed to a large extent present-day) ideas of prayer are pleas to God to intervene. In Old Testament religion this idea of intervention by God belongs to everything, even to what we would call cause and effect. It is as though God sits above afar on His heavenly throne and directs every operation and happening everywhere and always. This divides into two types: His normal decision (our cause and effect) and His special interventions. His normal decisions are called *mishpaṭim* (usually translated 'judgements'), a word which can also mean 'custom, habit'. His special interventions occur when He 'visits' (*paqad*) men, either in punishment or with salvation. A good New Testament example is in the Benedictus, Luke 1[78], 'whereby the Dayspring from on high (i.e. Messiah) hath visited [AV] us'. Every prayer is properly a plea for action, for God's direct action. It presupposes a living, active God who is in control of the world He has made. The Hebrews had a word for 'meditation, musing' (the root *hagah*), but they tended to reserve the word *tephillah* for intercession to secure God's direct action.

CHAPTER III

Psalm 32

LORINUS (1569-1634) pointed out that this is the second psalm which begins with 'blessed'. Psalm 1 speaks of the blessings of innocence; this psalm speaks of the blessings of repentance. It is said that Augustine had this psalm inscribed above his bed so that immediately upon opening his eyes in the morning, he could see and read it.

Verse 1

> Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven,
> Whose sin is covered.

William Langland quotes this first line at the end of his Vision of the Seven Sins. He saw the Field Full of Folk, and Reason preaching to all the kingdom. Repentance repeats Reason's words, and so we come to the Shriving of the Seven Deadly Sins, after which Hope seized a horn and blew it to the sound of 'Blessed are they whose iniquity [so Jerome] is forgiven', when all the saints in Heaven sang the hymn and a thousand men crowded together and cried to Christ and his dear mother for grace to go to Truth.

The English versions have 'transgression'. Jerome has the singular 'iniquity', but the Greek and the Vulgate have the plural, and they are followed by the Douay Version. The Hebrew word *pesha'* definitely means 'rebellion'. The psalmist is using a word which strictly involves revolt against God, personal rebellion against Him, deliberate turning away from Him. This is, in the main, the way the prophets thought about sin, and for them the regular word of 'repent' is *shub* (return, turn back). Later in this verse we find the word *chaṭṭath*, which strictly means sin in the sense of error, mistake. It is probable that the psalmist is using both words in a general

way and is concerned with poetic parallelism rather than precise etymological meaning, but in Job 34[37] the writer is quite strict, and he regards the first as being much more serious than the second: 'He hath added rebellion *pesha'* to his sin [*chaṭṭath*]' (see Ps 51[1]).

There are two words used in this verse to describe the way the psalmist desires God to deal with his sin. In AV and RV they are 'forgiven' and 'covered'. Both are due to the Greek and the Vulgate. In the first instance ('forgiven') the translations are all 'dismissed, remitted, loosed, forgiven', whereas the Hebrew means 'lifted up, carried away'. In the second instance 'covered' is the strict meaning of the Hebrew word, and the only variants are Jerome's *absconditum* (carefully concealed, hidden away) and the new Latin text of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, which has *obtectum est*, and its English rendering by Father Ronald Knox, 'buried deep'. He is here taking full advantage of Jerome's first rendering into Latin, which emphasizes the covering up of sins that are forgiven: just as John Bunyan emphasizes it when he says that as 'Christian came up with the Cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and began to tumble; and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the Sepulchre, where it fell in, and *I saw it no more*'.

Toletus (Neale, I, p. 498) went into this matter very thoroughly, and showed that 'covering' was one of many words which the Bible uses to describe getting rid of sin, or what God does with sin. It is, for instance, 'covered', but, as Augustine was careful to point out, this does not mean that the sin is still there, though covered. It does not mean that a cloth has been thrown over it, so that it is hidden from the sight of God and men. It is gone utterly and nothing of it remains. Then there is the AV 'purge', which represents a number of Hebrew words: Ezekiel 20[38], Daniel 11[35] (*barar*, purify), Isaiah 4[4] (*dawach*, rinse away), Malachi 3[3] (*zaqaq*, 'refine' as the dross is refined from gold and silver), Psalm 51[7] (*chaṭa'*, de-sin), 2 Chronicles 34[3] etc. (*ṭahar*, make clean), Isaiah 1[25] (*tsaraph*, 'smelt' and so 'refine') and especially the verb *kaphar*, which

is the great root for 'atonement', translated 'purge' in Psalms 65^{2}, 79^{9}, Ezekiel $43^{20, 26}$, but elsewhere by a whole range of words: appease, be merciful, forgive, make atonement, make reconciliation, pacify, pardon, put off, reconcile, be disannulled, be cleansed. This root *kaphar* is uncertain of origin, since its earliest use, even in Akkadian, is already religious and associated with the doing away of sin. The original idea would seem to be 'cover over'; cf. Arabic, though in Aramaic and Syriac the meaning is apparently 'wash away'. The word *kapporeth* (EVV 'mercy-seat') is used of the slab of gold which was placed on the top of the Ark in the Second Temple. The Greek (Septuagint) Version (*hilasterion*) and the Vulgate (*propitiatorium*) both apparently consider the word as a development from the religious meaning of *kaphar*, the place where sin is covered, forgiven, where God is propitiated. It is difficult to decide whether this is the origin of the word, or whether it means simply 'covering'. But the point of all these words is that sin disappears, the sheet is clean, the record is destroyed, and in personal terms the barrier between God and the repentant sinner is removed. This is the significance of the so-called sin-offering. Apart from the blood which is poured at the foot of the altar and the fat which is burned on the altar—both blood and fat are taboo, and must always go to the altar, whatever animal it is that is slain in the Temple rites—the flesh of the animal is made to disappear entirely, either being eaten by the priests within the holy place, or (if a priest is involved) destroyed by fire 'without the camp'. It is true that the sin-offering of the Temple ritual was concerned only with ritual errors and inadvertent or unrealized mistakes, and not at all with deliberate sin ('with a high hand'), but it is also true that all sin is 'removed' consequent upon repentance and restitution.

But what is it that is taken away, covered, removed, or whatever metaphor is used?

It is not the consequences. Nothing can avoid the consequences. The price of sin has to be paid, and paid to the uttermost farthing. This law is built into the very fabric of the

world. Whatever is sown, that in the course of time is reaped. It is not true so far as the things of this world are concerned that 'whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap'. Paul does not say this in Galatians 6^{7-10}. What he says there is that every individual reaps in his own self what he sows. If he sows 'unto his flesh' (i.e. base, selfish, impure desires), then his end will be corruption and death, but if he sows 'unto the Spirit' (i.e. is 'in Christ'), then his end will be that new life which is in Christ Jesus, that resurrection life which begins with the new birth. Paul is writing eternally, so to speak; he is not writing about the consequences of sin in this world. It is not true that so far as this world is concerned that each separate, individual man reaps his own due reward. That reward is reaped indeed, but it is reaped by the whole group, by society in general, by mankind. We are all bound together in one bundle of life, and no man lives to himself alone. If I were to remonstrate with a man concerning his use of his money, he might, and very likely would, turn on me and ask me what on earth it had to do with me, that it was no business of mine. Is it no business of mine? He naturally resents any interference with what he calls his own. He says that he has a perfect right to do exactly what he likes with his own. But has he? Apart from any Christian ideas of the stewardship of wealth and property—ideas which necessary involve considerable restriction on the Christian—there are bound to be consequences following on what he does with his money and property. Those necessary consequences inevitably involve other people, perhaps a few, perhaps many millions. Perhaps it is no 'business' of mine what he does with his money, but it is a concern of mine, even on a purely selfish basis it is a concern of mine, because what he does may affect me. I may lose everything, even life itself, because of what he does with his money.

No. The consequences of sin are not done away with because of repentance. The price has still to be paid, sometimes by the sinner, however repentant, but almost always by others. The suffering of the innocent is one of the most obvious things in this world. The wonder and mystery of the Cross does not

depend upon the fact of an innocent victim—hundreds of thousands of victims died on crosses under the Roman power and doubtless many of them were innocent. The wonder of the Cross is that the innocent victim was Jesus, son of God. As Miss Dorothy Sayers once said: 'He was man enough to take His own medicine.' It is the common lot of man that the innocent should suffer and die because of the guilty. No: not even repentance can turn back the consequences of sin.

Is it then the guilt of sin that is done away with? First: if one particular man is personally guilty, then it is he that is personally guilty, and nobody else can ever be guilty for him. Personally guilty once, personally guilty always, and nobody else can take that over. Under some circumstances, they share it. This happens in a family when one member is guilty of some more than ordinary serious offence. It is not easy to decide whether this is a feeling of shame or guilt. Certainly, the rest of the family, perhaps in varying degrees, feels responsible. There are cases where the feeling is more than 'What will the neighbours say?' or 'I hope this does not get into the papers.' There are cases where the family, especially the parents, shares the guilt before God. But even then with true repentance the guilt is taken away from between the repentant sinner and God. The barrier is removed. It no longer exists. The guilt is covered up, washed away, purged. This is what is involved in the 'taking away of sin'. So far as God and the individual are concerned, the sin is forgiven, forgotten, as though it had not been—as John Bunyan said, 'and I saw it no more'.

There is still such a thing as corporate sin, and as members of society we must bear our share of responsibility. This lack of a sense of corporate responsibility is one of the most serious features of our time. Apparently many people think in terms of a double code of ethics: that as members of a group they may permit themselves to do things which they would never dream of doing personally. For them group ethics is one thing, and personal ethics is another. There is also the phrase, 'passing the can', which is actually an attempt to push the

responsibility and any subsequent guilt on to somebody else. Ought I to feel any sense of guilt when the Government does something that is wrong or even shameful? If I voted for the party in power, ought I to feel guilty? If I voted for another political party, what then? If I did not vote at all? If I am a shareholder in a public company? and so on. 'Being my brother's keeper' means more than that I shall not personally and directly do him wrong. 'Being my brother's keeper' involves me in a corporate responsibility and a corporate guilt which I cannot shuffle off. It still is my responsibility, even if all the time I did my best to stop it happening. The 'Nonconformist conscience' was at least a recognition of corporate responsibility.

Verse 2

> Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity,
> And in whose spirit there is no guile.

The 'impute' is a relic of Jerome, who has *inputabit*, and of the Vulgate which has *imputavit* (past tense instead of future). So much has been written about God imputing sin or imputing righteousness, and so many confusing things have been said, that it is better to avoid the word altogether, as Father Ronald Knox does, and keep more closely to the Hebrew and the Greek with 'reckon'—consider him to be a sinner. Hebrew and all the ancient versions have 'in whose spirit', except the Greek which has 'in his mouth'. The word here means 'in his disposition'. For 'guile', it is better to read 'treachery, deceit'; but this particular word, *remiyyah*, is used particularly of deceitful *speech*, and that is probably why Septuagint has 'in his mouth'.

Verse 3

> When I kept silence, my bones waxed old
> Through my roaring all the day long.

The commentators, not surprisingly, have had difficulty here. How could he keep silence and yet roar all day? The Hebrew

root *sha'ag* is mostly used of the roar of the lion, but also of a human cry of distress (verb, once; noun, thrice). Greek has *krazein* (shriek, clamour) and so the Vulgate (*clamarem*): 'while I clamoured all the day'. Jerome has *rugitu*, which is the roaring of the lion, but can also refer to the rumbling of the bowels. The best solution is: 'when I kept silent and did not confess my sins'. The bones are the last part of the human body to decay, and when the bones grow old and dry, all life has irrevocably gone. This is the point of Ezekiel 37^2; there was not the slightest vestige of life left in the old Israel. Thus in this psalm the growing old of his bones means that the psalmist is reaching the last stages of exhaustion, and this is intended also in the latter half of verse 4: 'My moisture was changed as (into) the drought of summer.' The versions here vary tremendously, mostly because they were beaten by the rare word, *lashad*, found elsewhere only in the description of the taste of the manna in Numbers 11^8. It means 'juicy, dainty bit'. Taken as a parallel to the first part of the verse it means: My moisture (i.e. of a live bone, in contrast with the dry porousness of a dead bone) is changed to dryness as in the drought of the late summer, when the sky is like brass and the earth is baked hard and dry in the baking, desiccating heat. (Selah probably indicates an musical interlude, a sort of short cadenza.)

Verse 5

Here comes the change of attitude on the part of the psalmist. The crisis was reached in verse 4, and now there comes a change of heart, so that all is well.

> I acknowledged my sin unto thee,
> and my iniquity I have not hid:
> I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD;
> And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

The whole tenor of the psalm is now transformed. So is the life of the psalmist. He has eased his soul and his conscience; he has confessed his sin, and he has experienced the forgiveness of God. The last line of the verse is a little difficult: 'the

iniquity of my sin' is unusual. We would expect 'my iniquity and my sin', which is what some scholars suggest. Another suggestion is not to read 'selah' at the end of the verse, but to read *salachta* instead: 'thou hast forgiven'. This verb is the one which occurs many times in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple, 1 Kings 8^{30}, etc. We now have an excellent couplet:

> and thou didst take away my iniquity,
> my sin thou hast forgiven.

There is justification for the omission of 'selah', some Jerome MSS. and the Syriac Version; and further 'selah' usually occurs only after one third, two thirds, or three thirds of a psalm.

Verse 6

> For this let every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found:
> Surely when the great waters overflow they shall not reach unto him.

All the versions have substantially the same; but there is room for improvement. For the first line, we would read:

> Wherefore in a time of distress, let every faithful man pray (petition) to thee.

The word translated 'godly' is the Hebrew *chasid*, which means 'one who is faithful and loyal to the covenant'. 'When thou mayest be found: Surely' is scarcely a translation of the Hebrew, which is 'in a time of finding, only'. It seems certain that an early copyist made a mistake, and that the text should read 'in a time of distress *matsoq*'. Greek has 'in an acceptable time' (cf. Isa 55^6 and 49^8), and so Jerome, *inuenio*, and the Vulgate, *opportuno*.

'When great waters overflow' is 'in the *sheṭeph* of great waters'. The *sheṭeph* is what is called in Texas a 'flash-flood'. In a summer storm as many as twelve inches of rain can fall in a few hours, with the result that every dried-up river bed

becomes a raging torrent, tearing along and sweeping everything away—roads, houses, people. 'When the flash-flood of many waters comes, it will not reach him', nor sweep him away. The flash-flood is common in tropical and semi-tropical countries. Compare Isaiah 28^{15}, and this is the point of our Lord's illustration in Luke 6^{48}. It was one of these flash-floods which swept the foolish man's house away. The word 'flash' was used in this sense in England in the early eighteenth century. See the *Oxford Dictionary*.

Verse 7

Thou art my hiding place; thou wilt preserve me from trouble:
Thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance.

This reads quite well in the English versions, but Greek and the Vulgate are very different. Jerome's earlier Latin translation substantially supports the Hebrew: 'Thou art my protection, from the enemy guard me; my praise, saving thou wilt compass me about.' The Greek and the Vulgate have: 'Thou art my refuge from the tribulation that surrounds me. My exultation, deliver me from them that compass me about.'

Verse 9

It is the last phrase that has caused the difficulty with this verse, but it is in all the ancient versions. AV has 'lest they come near unto thee'—that is, the bit and bridle are to keep them away from us, whereas RV says they are to bring them near to us. The best solution is to regard the last phrase as having come astray from somewhere else in the psalm, perhaps from verse 7. Then verse 9 becomes a straight appeal to men to use their sense, and not to be headstrong, like mules and warhorses, which have to be securely bridled and well bitted.

Verse 10

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked:
But he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.

The English versions have 'sorrows', following Jerome's *dolores*; but the Greek (*mastiges*) and the Vulgate (*flagella*) have 'scourges, plagues' (PBV). The Hebrew is a strong word, and means 'pain, suffering', though perhaps 'plagues' is somewhat too strong. In Old English 'sorrows' would cover 'pain, suffering', but except in religious phraseology which stems from the Bible, the phrase is now archaic. 'Man of sorrows' means Man of suffering and pain, not of weeping and tears. The psalmist is holding to orthodox theory: pain and trouble for the wicked, peace and pleasantness for the good. He contrasts the painful fate of the wicked with the pleasant paths of the man who trusts in God. This man is compassed about with *chesed*, not 'mercy', but the steadfast, never failing love of the God who remains faithful still. The psalmist was not right when he said that the wicked 'had it bad' and the righteous 'had it good', but there is indeed a peace which passes understanding that the Christian knows, in spite of every disability. It is a miracle of faith, the way in which a Christian man or woman can endure disability and pain and still be calm and serene. We find it from time to time: a man stricken with paralysis which takes thirty-odd years to creep over his body without him having the slightest hope of betterment, and he remains the most cheerful man in the ward. He does more, helpless on his back, to strengthen and uphold men far fitter than he is than ever he did when he was vigorous and strong. It is his firm faith in God that 'enables' him, and in his last weeks his regular request is to hear the 23rd Psalm read to him. And there is the last verse of 'Arm of the Lord' (*MHB* 486), a glorious verse for the man whom God has encompassed with His steadfast love through all troubles and distresses:

> By death and hell pursued in vain,
> To Thee the ransomed seed shall come;
> Shouting their heavenly Zion gain,
> And pass through death triumphant home.

Happy indeed is the man who finds and proves in his own

experience the truth of the word which the Chronicler ascribes to David speaking to Solomon: 'the LORD thy God, my God, is with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee' (1 Ch 28[20]).

Verse 11 is full of joy, according to all the versions, ancient and modern: 'be glad', 'rejoice', 'shout for joy'. If I were asked what is the chief characteristic of a Methodist, I would say, 'Joy'. We have no special doctrine; we accept the creeds of the Church; and we claim to be of that true Apostolic succession which is manifested in the continued witness of the Holy Spirit and in the faithful preaching of the gospel, centred in Ephesians 2[8], 'For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God', this being, of course, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who 'for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven . . .'. Our worship is characterized by joy: first the joy of sins forgiven, and then the greater joy which comes from assurance—that is, from knowing and being sure that at this present time we are right with God, coupled with the sure hope which is grounded in Christ.

CHAPTER IV

Psalm 38

THIS IS ONE of the psalms recommended by John Hooper, bishop of Gloucester, for times 'when the mind can take no understanding, nor the heart any joy of God's promises' (see R. E. Prothero, *The Psalms in Human Life*). John Hooper was burnt at the stake on 9th February 1555. Lest any should think that psychiatry is wholly modern, let him remember that Jerome wrote of this psalm that 'if any sickness happens to the body, we are thereby taught to seek for the medicine of the soul'. Probably the psalmist put down every sickness of the body as due to sin, but that some sicknesses are due to troubles of the mind there can be no shadow of doubt. And some are certainly due to sin, and though this may be called a 'guilt complex', it is a trouble of the soul and not the mind. This makes it much more serious. Troubles of the mind may disturb our relations with men, but troubles of the soul also disturb our relations with God. As Luther said of this psalm: 'For to feel in reality the burthen of the conscience under a sense of sin, is a distress and terror exceeding all other terrors and distresses.' He urges us always to pray, even though we are sinners, because 'though Satan shakes us with the horrible terrors of sin', 'grace is stronger than sin'. We can always hope for the help and consolation of God.

According to the title of the psalm it was used (so EVV) 'to bring to remembrance', a phrase which is also found at the head of Psalm 70, another psalm of great distress because of enemies who seek to dishonour and destroy the psalmist. This phrase greatly puzzled the early commentators, especially since they were not able to think of any incident in David's life which might be applicable, and no one incident in Israel's history more than any other to which the psalm might be

referred. The Greek and the Vulgate add also 'concerning the Sabbath', and they found this equally puzzling. Probably the meaning is that at one time the psalm was used on the Sabbath, but there is no evidence concerning this. Pope Innocent III's copy of the Latin version contained twenty-one verses, and the psalm does fall naturally into three sections (1-8, 9-14, 15-22). He thought of the three Sabbaths of the true servant of God: the Sabbath-rest in the midst of this world's warfare, the Sabbath-rest which comes when a man has overcome the world, and the eternal Sabbath of Heaven.

The reference to remembrance is to be explained by 1 Chronicles 19[4]: 'And he appointed certain of the Levites to minister [i.e. "serve"] before the ark of the LORD, and to celebrate [*lehazkir*, exactly as in the psalm] and to thank and praise the LORD.' All these words—*lehazkir* (to make remembrance), *lehodoth* (to give thanks), and *lehallel* (to praise)—are technical terms associated with the singing of psalms by the Levites who formed the Temple choirs. Many psalms are stated to involve 'giving thanks unto the LORD', and these are to be found in Books IV and V of the Psalter, Psalms 105, 106, 107, 111, 118 and especially 136, which is built up on the couplet:

> O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good:
> For his mercy endureth for ever,

a couplet which may well have been a ritual call to the Levites to begin to sing psalms: 1 Chronicles 16[34], [41]; 2 Chronicles 5[13], 7[3], 20[21]; Ezra 3[11]; Jeremiah 33[11], and apparently the phrase was fully in use in the Chronicler's time. I think also, myself, that it was this couplet that was sung at the end of each of the three sections into which, according to the Mishna, psalms were divided in singing, this interlude being indicated by 'selah'. There are also Hallelujah psalms. 'To praise the LORD' is certainly a way of beginning a psalm: Psalms 106, 111, 112, 113, etc.; and it is most likely indeed that the Greek version is right in placing the Hallelujahs at the beginning of the following psalm in such instances as Psalm 104 (Septuagint

has it at the beginning of 105, and so also has the Vulgate).

In the same way, *lehazkir* ('to celebrate' in 1 Ch 16[4] and 'to bring remembrance' in Ps 38, 70) is a liturgical instruction, and it is connected with the *'azkarah*, the 'memorial' of Leviticus 2[2], etc., the 'token' from the cereal-offering (*minchah*) which accompanied each whole-offering. This consisted of a handful of the meal and oil and all the frankincense. It referred also to the frankincense which was put on the shew-bread (Lev 24[7]), and to the 'token' (consisting of a handful of flour, but neither oil nor frankincense) from the sin-offering of the very poor, those who could not afford even the two pigeons. The offering of frankincense as an *'azkarah* is mentioned in Isaiah 66[3]; slaughtering an ox (i.e. for a whole offering), killing a lamb (i.e. for the sacred meal), offering up a cereal-offering, and, lastly, offering frankincense as an *'askarah*. The intention is double: a token of the whole and to cause God to remember, a frequent phrase in connexion with seeking an answer to a prayer for help. The important thing to realize is that when God 'remembers', He acts; see especially Genesis 30[22] and 1 Samuel 1[19]; cf. Luke 1[72]. Remembrance was the dominant motif in the choice of scripture readings for New Year's Day during the two centuries before Christ (see *The Jewish New Year Festival*, pp. 172f), as is shown in the Talmud (b RH 11a). Also the Tosefta RH IV, 7a says: '*Piqdonoth* (verses mentioning "visiting"), are the same as *Zikronoth* (verses mentioning "remembering")', and goes on to quote Genesis 21[1], where the visiting of Sarah is equivalent to the remembering of Rachel, and Exodus 3[16]. As we have seen earlier, the Visitation of God involves God's immediate action in this world. According to Hebrew thought, remembrance equals visitation. The reference in the title, therefore, 'to remembrance' is certainly apt for this psalm. It is indeed an appeal for the immediate action of God resulting in salvation. Does the reference to 'remembrance' in the early traditions concerning the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11[24], [25]; Luke 22[19]) mean that the bread and the wine are an *'askarah*, a token offering for the rest? It may mean the

same as 'a ranson for many'; it may mean a prayer for effective and immediate saving action on the part of God.

Verse 1 is almost exactly the equivalent of Psalm 6[1], except for a different word for 'anger, wrath' in the first half of the verse.

Verse 2

> For thine arrows stick fast in me,
> And thy hand presseth me sore.

RV margin points out that both verbs are represented by the Hebrew 'lighted upon me'. The 'stick fast' comes from the *infixae sunt* of Jerome and the Vulgate, and this in turn is due to the Septuagint, but the Hebrew should probably be translated by at least 'descend into me', 'pierce me'.

Verse 7 is illustrative of the difficulty of translators. AV has 'filled with a loathsome (disease)', assuming that *niqlah* comes from the root *qalah* II (be dishonoured). RV has 'filled with burning', as if from *qalah* I (roast, parch, burn). The Greek has 'mockery, delusions', Jerome has 'ignominy', and the Vulgate 'illusions'. 'Burning fever' is probably right, and the psalmist is speaking in this line of symptoms, as elsewhere in the psalm. His whole body is full of infection. These details conclude with verse 10, where the first line is 'my heart throbbeth (RV)', where Jerome has 'fluctuates', i.e. palpitations; the Hebrew is an intensive form of the verb which is used in New Hebrew and Syriac of a pedlar, one who goes to and fro.

CHAPTER V

Psalm 51

THIS PSALM has been, for well over a thousand years, the most used of all psalms. It was repeated seven times a day, every day except at Christmas time and in Lent, and it marked the conclusion of the hourly prayers. Luther uses this psalm to show that sin, a great and innate evil, can be dealt with only by being born again by faith in Christ. The contrast is born in sin, and born again in Christ. Godly men in all ages have written on this psalm, some of them to the extent of over a thousand pages. In the Greek and the Vulgate—that is, in all Bibles used by Christians up to the Reformation this psalm was the fiftieth, as it still is in Roman Catholic Bibles: Vulgate, Douay, and so forth. This gave the commentators great scope, with references to the many fifties which occur in the Old Testament and in the New: the width of the Ark, the breadth of Ezekiel's Temple, the freedom from service of the Levites after fifty years, the year of Jubilee. The extensive use of this psalm, and its aptness for our condition, has led to the very frequent use of certain couplets: 'Create in me a clean heart . . .' and 'O Lord, open thou my lips . . .', and so forth.

Verses 1 and 2

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness:
According to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.
Wash me throughly from mine iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.

The psalmist pleads for his sins to be blotted out on the basis of God's steadfast love and compassion: If we are to keep to the

strict significance of the words, His steadfast love for His covenant-people, the people of His choice, and His compassion for poor, weak, and frail man.

There are three words for 'sin' in these two verses: *pesha'* ('transgression'), *'awon* (iniquity), and *chaṭṭath* (sin). It is the case doubtless that Bible writers often use one or other of these words in a general way to denote sin, without seeking to pick out any particular element in it. Further, when the poet is seeking for a simile in order to balance his line and maintain the parallelism, he will use a word which has the same general meaning. Nevertheless, these different words are not strict synonyms. In their origin at least they do reflect varying aspects of sin, and often they are carefully chosen because of that very reason. We deal with the last of these three first, because, in so far as there are degrees of sin, this last word refers to sin in a less serious aspect.

The word *chaṭṭath* (sin) comes from a root which means 'do wrong, commit a mistake', 'miss the mark, miss the way'. These are the meanings in Arabic. In Ethiopic the word means strictly 'fail to find, fail to have', but more generally, and especially in the derived forms, 'to sin'. There are three instances in the Old Testament where the verb is used in its original sense of 'miss': Job 5^{24}, 'and thou shalt visit thy country estate and shalt miss nothing': Proverbs 19^{2}, 'and he that hasteth with his feet, misseth his way', where EVV have 'sinneth', RSV 'misseth', but the RSV margin is best of all, 'misses his way': Proverbs 8^{36}, 'but he that *misses* me (RSV), wrongs his own soul (RSV injures himself)'; AV, 'sinneth against me'; RV, 'misseth me'. Thus the word *chaṭṭath*, according to its derivation, means 'error' in the sense of making a mistake—what the Wimbledon commentators call 'an unforced error'. It involves the idea of a man knowing what is right, trying to do it, but failing. It involves a man shooting at a mark, but missing it. This involves what may be called a Pelagian view of sin: that is, man is capable of doing what is right and capable of doing what is wrong; he has a free choice, and fails to do what is right. He misses his way, misses the

mark. Actually it is wholly unwise to use the word 'Pelagian' in connexion with this psalm, or indeed any Old Testament passage, because the word was not invented until after the Augustine-Pelagius controversy, and therefore cannot be guaranteed in any one instance to have its true meaning, except against the background of that controversy. It is similar to asking the question: 'Is *mana* personal or impersonal?' *mana* being a Polynesian word used to indicate that strange 'other' power with which the primitive man believes himself to be empowered when he has strength or skill to do that which is outstanding. This question about *mana* has no answer. It is a wrong question, and is bound to get a silly answer. The reason is: people who thought of *mana* did not think in terms of the categories 'personal' and 'impersonal'. They were animists, or at least dominantly animistic in their thinking. They ascribed livingness to what we would call non-personal objects. The books say that they ascribed personality to non-personal objects, but this is a misleading statement. They did not think in those terms. They did not make the distinction which we make between the two categories, personal and impersonal, and so set them over against each other. They did not even make the distinction between 'animate' and 'inanimate'. This is the whole point of animistic thinking. Both are included in an active, living 'other'. In the same way, the loose use of the word 'Pelagian' causes nothing but confusion and misunderstanding. Compare O. C. Quick's statement in *Doctrines of the Creed* (1938, pp. 216-29), where he says that the prophets are 'distinctly libertian and Pelagian'. The use of the word in this connexion can cause nothing but confusion, because the word does not mean simply that men 'can always obey God and be righteous, if they will'. It means that they have free will *as against* the Augustinian claim that man is free only to sin, and that he is 'fast bound in sin', as the Wesley hymn has it. Actually Canon Quick was scarcely accurate in any case, because he says 'they (i.e. the prophets) assume without question, that he can (change his way of life), if only he will make the effort'. It is true that there

are statements which, if isolated, can be understood in this way, but the passage makes very strange reading in view of (say) Jeremiah 8^{7}, Hosea 5^{4}, and Jeremiah's solution in $31^{33f.}$

The second word is *'awon*. The usual translation is 'iniquity'. There is a difference of opinion concerning the etymological origin of the word. The first letter of the Hebrew word is *'ayin*, a kind of glottal stop, but actually in Hebrew there are two *'ayin*s, a light *'ayin* and a heavy *'ayin*. These are distinguishable in Arabic, both by sight and by sound, and we know they were distinguishable in spoken Hebrew at the time of the ancient Greek translation. But Hebrew has one sign for both consonants. Which of the two is found here? In Arabic, the root with the light *'ayin* means 'bend, twist'; that with the heavy *'ayin* means 'err from the way'. Some scholars think the Hebrew word derives from the first root, others that it derives from the second. It is probable that the latter is the more likely, because the Hebrew noun is used of really serious faults. There is no question here of accidental wrong-doing and no sense of missing the way. The word is much more serious. It involves a deliberate offence, a deliberate turning out of the way. It cannot be used, as *chaṭṭath* can, of sinning through accident or in ignorance. It is not a question of slipping, but of deliberately going in for a long slide.

The last word to be dealt with is *pesha'*, usually translated 'transgression', but definitely wrongly so translated. The word means 'rebellion'. Sin is thought of as rebellion against God. This is the characteristic word of the prophets. They use other words, of course, but this chiefly. The other two words can be used of sinning against a code, against a law, against something impersonal. This cannot be said of the use which the prophets make of the word *pesha'*. They mean rebellion against a person, and that Person is God. The relative seriousness of the word is to be seen in Job 34^{37}, 'for he addeth rebellion (*pesha'*) to his sin (*chaṭṭath*)'.

The translations are woefully inadequate here. The EVV and RSV have 'transgressions'; Moffatt has 'offences' (which

perhaps is the best); Father Ronald Knox has 'the record of my misdeeds'. The Greek has *anonema* (lawlessness); Jerome has 'iniquities' and the Vulgate 'iniquity'. The rendering 'transgression' arises from a wrong mixture of ethics and religion. It is right and proper that the two should be involved with each other. Religion without ethics can be positively evil, and sometimes is. Ethics without religion can be equally deadly and have no roots, except in opinion. If we start with ethics, then (at the best) we decide what is good morality. In practice this means what is good for man, either each man's highest good (the *summum bonum* of the Schoolmen) or the greatest good of the greatest number. Next we idealize this into the Highest Good and personalize this into God. God is thus the highest good we can conceive, or even a highest good we cannot conceive, the sum total of all Ideas that are right and proper. God is the personalization of Right Conduct, and Sin is a transgression of the rules of Right Conduct. Virtually, this is making God in the image of man—an ideal man, it is true, but nevertheless man. Parallel with this, we get descriptions of Jesus as the Ideal Man, the 'last term in the series of human progress', and so forth.

Or we can start with religion—that is, we can start with a personal God. We come to know what God is, what is His nature, what He does; and we decide our ethics on the basis on that. What our ethics are depends upon what God is. This is why Christian ethics differ from every other type of ethics. For the Christian, sin is not primarily an ethical matter; it is a turning away from God, rebellion against God. Sin is something that is against a person rather than an action against a code or a system of ethics. The regular word, therefore, in the prophets for 'repent' is *shub*, which strictly means 'turn back, return'.

The translation 'transgressions' shows a turning away from a personal idea of religion towards a legalistic conception. This is not necessarily wholly the case, but it certainly involves thinking in terms of breaking a code, passing across a limit, rather than of a particular attitude to a Person.

Verse 3

The psalmist says that he is aware of his rebellious acts against God, and that his sin is continually in front of him. The rendering 'before me' is not truly adequate for the Hebrew, which often carries with it a sense of oppositeness, obviously in front of, and even contrariness. The Latin versions retain this with *contra me*, for which Father Ronald Knox has 'is never absent from my sight' and Moffatt 'never out of mind'. These renderings are much more satisfactory and more true to the Hebrew original. Compare the use of the two words for 'before, in front of' in Psalm 23[5]: 'Thou preparest a table before me *in the presence of* ('in spite of', almost 'blatantly, defiantly') my enemies.' The ancient commentators are very firm in insisting that merely to know one's sin, to be aware of it, is not enough. But the next verse goes a step further. We must be *confronted* with it. The awareness of having sinned is the first step to acknowledging that we are in the wrong.

Verse 4

The psalmist confesses that he has sinned, and that it is against God alone that he has sinned. What he has done is wrong in the sight of God and He acknowledges this. The last couplet is difficult. EVV have 'that thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest'. That is, the psalmist by his confession acknowledges that God has been in the right in what he has said, and pure (clear of offence, in the right) in his judgement. The Greek and Latin versions took the root *zakah* (be clear) in the sense of 'conquer, be victorious', a meaning which is found regularly in Syriac and sometimes in Aramaic. Thus the Douay (following the Vulgate) has 'that thou mayest be justified in thy words, and mayest overcome when thou art judged'; but this is toned down somewhat and made more understandable by Father Ronald Knox: 'thy warnings were deserved, and if thou wert called in question, thou hast right on thy side'. Moffatt has 'Yes, thou art just in thy charge and justified in thy sentence'.

And so we offer: 'and so you were in the right in what you said, and correct in your judgement'. The psalmist thus acknowledges that God was in the right all along, and that he himself was in the wrong.

Verse 5

> Behold, I was shapen in iniquity;
> And in sin did my mother conceive me.

Luther finds here evidence for the necessity of 'being born again by faith in Christ'. 'We have it clearly expressed, that sin is a great and innate evil, and an awful depravation and corruption of nature, in all the powers both of soul and body.' It is here that the fact of hereditary sin is most clearly expressed in the Old Testament. It is small wonder that some have seen here a doctrine of the total depravity of human nature. Some even go so far as to maintain that unbaptized babies are full of sin. Can any doctrine of the innate, hereditary sinfulness of human nature be accepted in these days? Are we born sinners, who need, every one of us, if we would lay hold of eternal life, to be born again?

It is plain that all depends upon the meaning of the word 'sin'. If 'sin' means doing what is wrong, then it is obvious from experience that men are not wholly sinners. Men generally, at all stages of development and in all walks of life, can be trusted to do what is right. Further, under normal circumstances most men prefer to be generous rather than mean. Many non-religious men are fully prepared to go more than the mile that is required, and normally men and women are kindly. It is ridiculous to say that men are naturally sinners in that they habitually do what is wrong. Further, if sin is a matter of doing what is right, then Pelagius was right and Augustine was wrong. Generally, men have the choice of choosing right or wrong; further, in the normal run of everyday affairs what the Jews called the 'good inclination' will triumph over the 'evil inclination'.

If, however, sin involves selfishness, then the situation is very different. If we think of religion in personal terms, being

in the right with God, trusting in Him, loving Him with all the heart, then sin is 'not being right with God', not trusting Him, and loving yourself instead of Him. In this sense of the word 'sin' we are all born in sin. It is the heritage we share with all living things, our necessary share in the whole evolutionary process. The whole evolutionary process has apparently been a struggle for survival. That species, that individual member of a species, which could best built for itself a bridgehead into the future has been the one that has survived. This is to be seen in plants and insects and birds and fishes and animals. Everywhere there is the same struggle. We see the same thing in man, and this struggle for self is the root cause of all our woes. This is why we are so easily swayed by fear for ourselves. It is the root cause of wars. It is to be found in the way in which a proper patriotism can so easily be turned into a bad nationalism. It is the major cause of the casualties on our roads. In man we call it sin, because we ought to know *and do* better. It is 'natural' in animals and 'natural' in plants. It is natural in man. In these sense we are all born in sin, simply because we are human beings. It is sin that makes us turn scientific achievements to our mutual destruction, or causes those of us who can to exploit them to our own individual gain. 'Fast bound in sin and nature's night' is one of the soundest and most accurate lines in hymnody, for this evolutionary heritage of ours is the most difficult thing of all with which we have to deal. We see it in others; it is hard to see it in ourselves. It is never entirely eradicated as long as life lasts. This is why we are always sinners, though we be saints. We are in hourly need of grace, and always he that standeth must take heed lest he fall. This same humanity is to be found in the Lord Jesus Himself and it is plainly at the root of the temptations as recorded in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. He was tempted in these particular ways—though it was one temptation showing itself in three ways—because He was truly human. He was more than conqueror because He was God. 'By this Cross *we* conquer', when self is crucified, and that can only happen as we become new men in Christ Jesus, when and

as the Holy Spirit gives us day by day the courage and the wisdom we need.

Verse 6

Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts:
And in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

This is the rendering of the English Versions and it seems to be the soundest of the varied translations of this verse. It preserves that parallelism which is a marked feature of Hebrew poetry, and is one of our safest guides when there is a word of uncertain meaning. This translation explains the meaning of the next verse, which is that if God does desire truth and wisdom in the secret places of the human heart, then He must purge and cleanse. This follows naturally on verse 5, which stresses the essential sinfulness of man.

The difficulty in this verse concerns the word *baṭṭuchoth*, which is taken to mean 'in the *ṭuchoth*'—that is, in the covered part (things). The English Versions have taken both this and the corresponding word in the next line (*bsathum*: lit. 'in the closed'), to mean the closed and secret place of the heart. But Greek took the two words together and thought of 'the unclear and secret things of wisdom thou madest clear to me', and this has been followed both in Jerome in the Vulgate, and in the Douay Version. This rendering is unsound from the grammatical point of view. Father Ronald Knox has made a different approach and sees in the word in question, the root *baṭach*, which means 'trust'. He proposes: 'But thou art a lover of faithfulness, and now, deep in my heart, thy wisdom has instructed me.' This is sound enough religion, but the normal English Versions make the best sense, and are more accurate.

Verse 7

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

The meaning of the verse is clear enough, as we have already seen. God must do the cleansing from sin if the psalmist is

ever to be clean from it. The actual reference of the first line is uncertain. The Hebrew has 'De-sin me with *'ezob*', and no one is quite sure what this is. Jewish tradition identified it as a kind of wild marjoram, known to the Arabs as *tsa'tar*. There is one of these plants (*Origanum Maru*, L.) which is grown in the near East; it has straight, slender, leafy stalks, small heads, growing from one root. It would make a handy bunch for sprinkling, and the leaves and heads have a pungent flavour, used, when powdered, as a condiment, sometimes sprinkled over bread. It is useful for quenching thirst, because it makes the saliva flow. All these qualities satisfy the conditions: it was used for sprinkling blood in cleansing rites (Lev 14): it was used for spattering blood on the lintel in the ancient Passover rite (Ex 12^{22}). The difficulty has arisen from a comparison of John 19^{29} ('they put a sponge full of the vinegar upon hyssop') with Mark 15^{36} and Matthew 27^{48}, where it is stated that the sponge full of vinegar was put on a reed. Thus many have identified the hyssop and the reed. Whatever the plant was, it grew out of walls (1 K 4^{33}) and was very common. Because of this, some have identified the hyssop with the caper, whose berries have cleansing and medicinal properties. One of the interesting modern renderings is that of Father Ronald Knox: 'sprinkle me with a wand of hyssop', where the introduction of 'the wand' is due to the influence of the New Testament passages. It has no warrant whatever in the psalm, but it provides an illustration of the way in which the translation of one passage of Scripture can be influenced by another, as happens especially in the Authorized Version of Samuel and Kings, due to a comparison with Chronicles. The 'sprinkle' of the English Versions came in with the Greek and the Latin, and is due to the Old Testament references in Exodus and Leviticus. The medieval commentators made the most of all this. The lowly plant that grows on the wall is a sign of the humility in true repentance. The cleansing qualities of the plant signify the cleansing blood of Christ, for He is the hyssop, lowly and fragrant, the Rock and the Great Physician.

The outcome is the cleansing which, by the grace of God,

follows true repentance—this grace of God which is revealed in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. In His love and mercy God (9) covers his face so that He does not see our sins, He wipes out, obliterates our iniquities. Then (10) He creates in us 'a new heart'—that is, He makes us wholly different in the very core of our being, that place whence all desires and purposes spring, the root of thought and feeling and will. With this the psalmist desires 'a right spirit' to be renewed within him. The margin of the Authorized Version is best with its 'a constant spirit'. The 'right' is due to the Greek and the Vulgate (*rectum*), but Jerome has *stabilis*, and the new Roman Catholic Latin text (1946) has *firmum*. This is the meaning of the Hebrew—firmly established, steadfast. Man needs a new element at the centre of his life, and he must have a steadfast spirit—a spirit that is always firm, and never wavers. This is because 'once saved' is not 'always saved'. Much damage has been done by applying the 'once and for all' the wrong way. The phrase applies to the saving death of Christ, but not to what happens in us at the time of conversion. Being sanctified does not mean ethical rightness. It can mean 'pure in heart' in the sense that our intentions are pure, but it does not necessarily mean 'ethically pure'. It means being wholly devoted to God; it means belonging to Him, loving Him with all the heart and self and strength. This is the meaning of the Hebrew word *qadosh* (holy). Since God is primarily God the Saviour, then the Holiness of God is, for Hebrew and for Christian, manifested most of all in His deeds of salvation. Other things are necessarily involved: awesomeness, all that Rudolf Otto included in his word 'numinous', and, of course, right action, ethical goodness. But the saving grace of God comes first. It comes first in the way the Christian talks about God, partly because that is what is truly distinctive about God for us, and partly also because that is the way it all begins in us. A man can be wholly devoted to God, consider himself as belonging to God (i.e. sanctified), and yet be a sinner. As a matter of fact, all the sanctified on earth are sinners—repentant sinners, sinners who know that they are daily in need of

daily grace. The root of sin is in our human nature itself, and it can never be eradicated unless human life itself is torn from us. That selfishness which is inevitable in our human nature, those sudden gusts of passion which sweep through us, the sudden, unpremeditated action which arises through sudden emotion, the firm grip of long habit, either our own acquired habits or those which we have inherited in our blood or had infused into us by environment—all these cause us to fall short of our high calling. The only way in which we can be more than conquerors in these things is by the 'new heart' and a 'firm spirit'. This means that in order to nourish and keep alive and maintain the growth of the new life that is born in us, there must be continual vigilance and constant prayer. We must 'watch and pray'.

Verse 11

and take not thy holy spirit from me.

All the versions and translations retain 'thy holy spirit', but Moffatt has 'thy sacred spirit', thus rightly avoiding the risk of the phrase being interpreted to refer to the Third Person of the Trinity. The RSV, on the contrary, commits itself by printing a capital S. It is true that we have in such verses as this a preparation for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, because in the Old Testament the 'spirit of God' is the source of more-than-human power and wisdom in men. It can enter into a man and control him. The spirit of the Lord is the power of God in and through the lives of men. When the spirit of the Lord came upon Saul, he was 'turned into another man' (1 Sam 10^{6}). For further details of the way in which 'the spirit of the LORD' in the Old Testament is a Preparation for the Holy Spirit, first revealed at Pentecost, see 'the Spirit of God in Jewish Thought' in *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Headingley Lectures, 1937). 'For the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified' (Jn 7^{39}).

Verse 12

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation:
And uphold me with a free spirit.

Jerome here has 'the joy of thy Jesus', which entails the same consonants of the Hebrew word, but different vowels. As an accurate translation this is bad, but as a testimony of Christian belief it is sound. We know that our salvation is of Christ, and that it was 'for us men and for our salvation' that He came down. The Prayer Book version, as more than once in this psalm, is woefully inadequate with 'O give me the comfort of thy help again'. All the ancient versions are firm that 'joy' is right. For Methodists this 'joy' certainly is right, for, as we have seen, our Methodist worship and our Methodist experience is characterized by joy. We rejoice in the experience of sins forgiven and we rejoice in the further experience that is rooted in a growing faith—that is, in a trust in God through Christ that grows stronger and more complete with the years. This is why so many of our hymns are full of joy. It is why so many of our tunes are exuberant. It is why many of the tunes developed extra notes and flourishes during the years, most of which have been excised in more modern times by the musical experts. Our singing is different from the singing of other communions. We sing more heartily, and sometimes with more noise than reverence. There is the danger that we shall be satisfied with 'a good sing', but this is a risk we must take if we wish to preserve our truly Methodist heritage of 'joy in the Lord'.

There is much variation in the understanding of the second line. RV margin has 'willing' for 'free'. AV has 'thy free spirit'. Greek, Jerome and Vulgate have 'princely, noble', apparently referring to the willing, generous, noble spirit which is the result of God's saving work. The translation 'noble, generous' is legitimate because the Hebrew *nadab* means 'generous, willing' and 'noble' in rank as well as in disposition. 'Handsome is', so to speak, 'as handsome does.' Father Knox's translation is: 'strengthen me in generous resolve'. Douay has 'perfect spirit', but the introduction of 'thy' is unjustified. The American Jewish translation (1916) has 'and let a willing spirit uphold me', which is a sound enough translation, especially since the creation of that willing spirit is the work of God the Saviour.

Verse 13

> Then will I teach transgressors thy ways
> And sinners shall be converted unto thee.

There is general agreement everywhere concerning this verse, the only variations of note being that some have 'shall return' instead of 'shall be converted'. This is a reminder that 'return' is the regular word in the prophets and in some psalms for 'repent'. Thus the 'returning' of Isaiah 30^{16}, 'in returning and rest shall ye be saved', is turning back to God, repenting. The important element in the verse is the declaration by the psalmist that his rehabilitation in God's good favour, his getting right once more with God, will be followed by his intention to bring other sinners back to God. Conversion must be followed by witness. This sequence is a characteristic of New Testament descriptions of the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2^{1-8}, when they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they 'began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance'. Acts 4^{31}, 'and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness'. See *MHB* 783: 'Shall I, for fear of feeble man'. Peter and John defend themselves before the Jewish council by saying: 'we cannot but speak the things we saw and heard' (Ac 4^{20}).

Verse 14

> Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation:
> And my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

The Hebrew word translated 'bloodguiltiness' is *damim*, the plural of the regular word for 'blood'. According to the grammars, the plural is used of blood which is shed, as it appears in bloodstains or blood-marks. Since these are usually the result of violence, the word in the plural can mean 'a bloody deed, murder', and hence also 'bloodguiltiness'. E. G. King (*The Psalms*, 1898) says that the word would never have been translated this way if it had not been for the traditional association with David and the murder of Uriah. Apart

from such a connexion, indeed, why should 'bloodguiltiness' be singled out in this fashion? Presumably Rashi saw the difficulty of this when he explained the verse as a prayer for deliverance: deliver me from being slain by the sword as Uriah was slain. Following this, some have interpreted the verse to mean 'Deliver me from death, sudden immediate death', and this fits well with the next line of praise to God for His righteous act, for His deed of salvation (since regularly 'the righteous acts of the Lord' are His 'mighty saving acts'). Another suggestion is that the word should be, not *damin*, shed-blood, but *dumam*, silence, which fits in well both with the previous verse and with verse 14*b*. One ancient interpretation of the Church fathers is: deliver me from the guilt of the Blood of Calvary.

The second half of the verse refers to shouting aloud in praise of God's righteousness. This word *tsedaqah* (righteousness) comes into prominence in the earliest of the writing prophets, when Amos insists upon it. God is a God of righteousness, a God who puts things right and is against all those social injustices of which Amos speaks so freely. This emphasis has ensured that God's *tsedaqah* is concerned particularly with the poor and helpless, with the result that the word tends to belong to the vocabulary of salvation rather than of ethics. This is why so very often we find 'righteousness' and 'salvation' as parallel words in a couplet. Even in the time of Christ, *tsedaqah* could be contrasted with strict 'justice', and in Matthew 6^1 some manuscripts have 'alms' (as AV) and some have 'righteousness' (as RV), the two words meaning the same thing in Jewish thought. In modern Hebrew a *tsedaqah* is a charitable gift. Thus in the Septuagint and in the New Testament the Greek word *dikaiosune* often means 'salvation' rather than 'righteousness'. Jerome has led us astray here: in the first line by translating 'salvation' by *salus* (and so also the Vulgate and the Prayer Book, 'health'), and in the second line by translation with *justitia* (so Vulgate and Douay).

This whole matter of the demand for justice is fraught with danger. It is right that men should desire justice for the

oppressed, and should earnestly seek after it. The demand of Christian men for justice for the oppressed and the unprivileged has been one of the glories of the history of Christianity. It is safe to say that almost every movement for reform in this country has started in the work of a Christian man or woman, who has done what he has done because he has been a Christian. This is true of prison reform (the Howards and the Frys), of work for waifs and strays (Lord Shaftesbury, Dr Barnardo), of the abolition of slavery (Wilberforce), of children ceasing to work below ground (Lord Shaftesbury), of schools for the children of the poor, and so on. It is significant that the organization of the Chartists was the Methodist organization, even to the 1*d.* a week. Sometimes the Church as an organization has been slow in these matters, and sometimes at first it has been in opposition (cf. the Wesleyan Conference and the Tolpuddle martyrs). This is unfortunate, but it is because the pace of an organization tends to be the pace of the slowest member, and when it is a question of reform, it has often been the men with money who have stood to lose by reforms. And, unfortunately, in time past money and social status have had much influence in the policy of the Church: things are much better nowadays. The danger of seeking justice comes when a man seeks justice for himself. This so easily comes to be revenge: justice for oneself comes to be something good, and justice for others comes to be something bad. This is why the Greek word *dike*, which should mean 'justice', came often to mean 'penalty'.

Before God, I do not ask for justice. When I stand before the Throne, as all must do at the last, I hope He will say very little about justice. The less that is said about that, the happier I shall be. But I hope He will have a very great deal to say about mercy and pardon for a repentant sinner. Wherefore, beware always of the man who talks glibly and often about justice. He may be wholly altruistic in his attitude and intention, but far too often an abstract plea for justice is a cloak for pride and selfishness and greed and revenge.

Verse 15

O Lord, open thou my lips,
And my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

This couplet has been in regular liturgical use from ancient times. Its liturgical use began in the synagogues. In the Christian Church it was used at Mattins, the first of the Hours. In the Sarum Use, it followed the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria*, and then the priest opened the service with the first line, to which the choir responded with the second line. From thence it was adopted in the Book of Common Prayer, and in the A.D. 1552 revision the 'my lips' was changed to 'our lips'. A similar change was made at that time in Psalm 40^{13}, 'O Lord make speed to save (me) us.'

Verse 16

For thou delightest not in sacrifice; else would I give it:
Thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering.

The Hebrew and Jerome both say that God does not delight in the two types of sacrifice, the sacred meal and the whole offering. Father Knox is more definite still: 'if I brought them, thou wouldst refuse.' The Vulgate and Douay say: 'For if thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would indeed have given it.' There are some psalmists who see little good in the sacrifices; cf. Psalm 40^{6} and 50^{8-15}. Other psalmists accept the sacrifices as a normal element in worship. Amos (5^{25}) and Jeremiah (7^{22}) both seem to have thought that there were no such sacrifices in the Desert before the Israelites entered Canaan. Other prophets insist on sacrifice of the heart as an essential accompaniment to the Temple sacrifices. All seem to be aware of the danger of thinking that the sacrifice itself is effective apart from right intention on the part of the one on whose behalf the offering is made. There must also be the sacrifice of self. The differences in the Bible correspond largely to the differences today between ritualists and non-ritualists. Thus, in these matters of worship, the Bible does not say: This way and no other way. What it does say is: This way and that way,

but neither way unless there is true desire for amendment of life and a sincere love for the Saviour. This is what verse 17 says:

Verse 17

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

For 'broken spirit', the Prayer Book version has 'troubled'. This is due to Jerome and the Vulgate *contribulatus* (Douay, 'afflicted'). The Talmud makes the most of the plural in the first line: Joshua ben Levi in (b. Sanhedrin 43b) says that when the Temple was standing, everyone who brought a whole-offering received the reward for it, and everyone who brought a meat-offering received the reward for it, but 'the lowly was reckoned by the Scriptures as one who offered every kind of sacrifice at once'. The phrases 'a broken spirit' and 'a heart, broken and crushed' mean the breaking and crushing of man's sinful nature, the destroying of man's self. Moffatt (as often) modifies this by rendering 'a soul with its evil crushed', as though, after the orthodox Jewish Rabbinic pattern, man has two inclinations, a good inclination and an evil inclination, and it is the evil inclination which must be overcome. This is not what this psalmist means, nor is it sound Pauline and Protestant doctrine. Orthodox doctrine is not that man's soul has evil in it, but that man's soul is itself evil. It is not that man's soul needs modification, it needs to be radically changed. He must be born anew; he must be a new creature.

It is probable that the psalm originally ended here, and that the last two verses are an addition to make the psalm more suitable for use in a Zion rebuilt and a Temple restored—a Temple in which the sacrificial system as outlined in Leviticus took a dominant place.

CHAPTER VI

Psalm 102

THIS PSALM was said to be the fifth step (p. 10) because of verse 16: 'For the LORD shall build up Zion.' The psalmist plainly meant the Jerusalem on earth, the Holy City where David came to dwell and where Solomon built the Temple. But for us all, religiously, Zion means three things: Jerusalem that was; Jerusalem that is; Jerusalem that is to come. 'Jerusalem that was' means the City of David, the place where the Lord Jesus taught, and outside which He was crucified and raised from the dead. It means the place where first the Holy Spirit was manifest in the lives of men on that first Pentecost after the Resurrection. Just as Canaan to the Jews of olden time meant not only the land in which they came to live, and the land which God had given them, but also spoke to them of God's continued mercies and His great salvation through the years, so 'Jerusalem that was' stands for the whole story of God's redeeming love. It stands for what God has done and still does on earth. 'Jerusalem that is' is the Church, not any particular organization and particularly not any sect, however much prestige it may have, but the company of God's people, those who have come to join themselves with Him in faith.

There remains 'Jerusalem that is to be'. For us this means Heaven. We, as Christians, are as anxious as anybody to 'build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land', and not only that, but to build it everywhere in all lands, those that are neither green nor pleasant equally with the rest. Indeed, Christians have proved themselves to be more anxious than the rest, for they have invariably been the pioneers in these matters. This is partly why Christianity is having a bad time these days. It is a strange quirk in human nature that makes it very difficult for a man to forgive the one to whom he has done an injury. It is equally strange how often a man turns and bites

the hand that feeds him. Dogs rarely do, but in matters such as these men are not as good as dogs. If men and women in various parts of the world owed less to Christianity, they might not, now that they have their freedom, be so antagonistic to it. But that is another story. We are discussing 'Jerusalem that is to be'. By this we mean more than the new Jerusalem that comes down from Heaven. We mean Jerusalem above, *MHB* 652, 649, 650, but we omitted 'On Jordan's stormy banks I stand'. Perhaps it had to go, since it was only the first verse that was good: especially the last line—'where my possessions lie'. Some of us were brought up that way as children: to hold loosely by possessions here—not to count on them, not to depend on them, though not exactly to despise them: because our possessions were not here; they are beyond. There was a time when many of our people had very 'little here below'. That is why so many Methodist hymns of the first half of the nineteenth century are full of thoughts of Heaven above, like the Negro spirituals, and for the same reason. Such hymns are not used much in these days. It is because we are at least honest. We say that Heaven is here round about us—and in part we acknowledge that we are finding Heaven in the abundance of things that we possess.

We have been wrong to cut out all thought of and the hope for Heaven above. The longing to be with Christ and to be free from the trammels of the flesh and sin is right and proper. Where we have gone wrong is in thinking of Heaven as something to be enjoyed, something to be possessed. It was natural and probably inevitable that the have-nots should think this way and should sing of Heaven above with a mixture of exuberance and nostalgia. When the Negro sang of 'walking all over God's Heaven', he was a man singing who never had any right to walk anywhere and did not possess even his own body. There was more than a little of the same situation in this country before the industrial reforms. It is small wonder that many who were encouraged to think of Heaven as the place where at long last they would enjoy good things should have little use for the Heaven that is beyond now that they can enjoy

so many good things here. They have no need of such a Heaven now; they have all they need this side the grave. Why look beyond? Here is the main cause for the drift away from religion on the part of those who are lower in the social scale. There are other causes, notably that strange credulity which makes a man easily accept every guess of the scientist as being bed-rock fact, combined with a strange blindness which equates the description of how it works with the explanation of why it works. The more we get on earth, the less we want beyond; the more we know about the earth, the less we want to know about Heaven. If only we could realize that the greatest joy comes from giving and serving, and that the greatest thing to receive is that free gift which comes unsought whilst we are seeking something else!

We turn to another element in the psalm: the disease or sickness from which the psalmist is suffering. Commentators have sought to identify this illness. For example, 'The author is suffering from sickness of an intestinal nature' (W. S. MacCulloch, *Psalms*, in *The Interpreter's Bible* (1955), Vol. 4, p. 540); W. E. Barnes (*Psalms* in the *Westminster Commentaries*) thinks the trouble is mental rather than physical, since he forgets to eat.

It is by no means certain that the psalmist is suffering from any particular sickness, apart from general unease and the serious disquiet of conscience. Orthodox theory was quite firm that sin is followed by the loss of *shalom* (lit. 'peace'), which means good health and general prosperity. In case of serious sin, the penalty is death. This means perhaps a sudden death, but certainly an early death, death before one's time. The reward of good conduct is good health, prosperity, and a long life. To see one's children's children is a great joy in any country and in any period of the history of man. Job's ultimate good fortune is expressed by saying that he saw the fourth generation. It is a common thing today for men and women to live to be grandparents, and the number of great-grandparents steadily rises as the expectancy of life becomes greater. But in days and in a country when and where the expectation of life

was (is) roughly half what it is in Britain today, to live long enough to see one's children's children was a great privilege. Grey hairs were greatly honoured. The final proof, so to speak, of the excellence of Moses in God's sight is: 'And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated' (Deut 34^{7}). He was old: he did not suffer from cataracts on the eye: he was full of vigour. And he lived to be one hundred and twenty years old. This was the maximum of human life according to Genesis 6^{3}: 'And the LORD said, My spirit shall not strive with man for ever, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.' This verse occurs in the story of the mixed marriages between 'the sons of God' and 'the daughters of men', as a result of which the legendary Nephilim were born. Now *ruach* (spirit) as against *basar* (flesh) is divine as against human. *Ruach* (spirit) is of God; *basar* (flesh) is of man in contrast to God. 'The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit' (Isa 31^{3}). The one (spirit) is of the heavens, heavenly; the other (flesh) is of the earth, earthy. The spirit is life; the flesh is death. Spirit is immortality; flesh is mortality. Thus, in Genesis 6, in so far as the Nephilim are born of 'the sons of God', they are spirit and therefore immortal. In so far as they are born of 'the daughters of men' they are flesh and therefore mortal. Thus 'my spirit' (the immortality which is mine) is striving with mortal man (flesh), immortality striving with mortality. The limit is fixed at one hundred and twenty years, a compromise between immortality and mortality. And this is the utmost limit, says Genesis 6^{3}, of human life. Moses lives his full span: he is the man 'whom the LORD knew face to face' (Deut 34^{10}). See also Exodus 33^{17-23}. The man who lives long, does so because the *ruach* in him is strong, but wherever there is *basar* (flesh), there is death. All this needs to be remembered in the New Testament in the understanding of the Greek *pneuma* (spirit) and *sarx* (flesh), especially in the writings of St Paul. For him, all men are flesh and must die: the man who lives on is he that is born of the spirit, because the spirit is life.

Thus the man who faints (RV margin, verse 1: title) is the man who is losing touch with God. The *ruach* is growing weak. This is not our modern way of thinking, and it is not saying anything at all about any illness we may suffer today. It is the way the psalmist thought, and if we are to understand these psalms and use them for our spiritual benefit we must realize this. The recognized cause of weakness and sickness is alienation from God. If, therefore, the psalmist is ill, it is necessary that he shall be penitent. Alternatively, if the psalmist is under conviction of sin, the most natural way for him to confess his sin is in terms that belong to illness. One stock phrase is in verse 5: 'My bones cleave to my flesh.' Compare Job 19^{20}, 'My bone cleaveth to my skin and my flesh.' The verse in the psalm means that the psalmist is reduced to a skeleton. The Hebrew *basar* meant 'skin' before it meant 'flesh', and when it came to mean 'flesh' it meant the flesh next the skin: indeed, it is used this way sometimes in distinction from *she'ar*, which strictly is the flesh near the bone. Perhaps the reason for the difficulty which the commentators find in identifying these illnesses is due to the way in which traditionally, as we have seen (p. 23), the penitent speaks in these terms of physical and mental distress. The same kind of thing is found in what are generally known as the Babylonian penitential psalms. This is to be seen in the 'Prayer of Lamentation to Ishtar' (Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 1950, pp. 383-5). Similar penitential poems are found in Egyptian and in Hittite circles (ibid., pp. 381, 391, 400f).

Verse 1

Hear my prayer, O LORD,
And let my cry come unto thee.

This couplet has long been in regular use for communal prayer, the leader speaking the first line and the group continuing with the second line, with the usual change from the singular to the plural. Very often in the old Testament 'hear' means 'listen to, hear and do, hear and obey'. In this verse it is a prayer not only to listen, but effectively to answer. The

commentators from early times have always been careful to point out that this asking to be heard does not mean that God is unmindful of us, and we have to make Him mindful of us; or that He is busy about other matters and has to be roused in order to pay attention to what we have to say. The difficulty is caused in part by a survival of phraseology, going back to a time when men did believe that God was in some sense absent from us—as though it was all an old-fashioned shop and the bell has to tinkle before anyone comes to serve us, or the outer office where there is a notice, 'Ring for attention'. And so one explanation is that it is a petition to put us in the right frame of mind for prayer, or that it is a prayer to the Holy Spirit to put us in the right frame of mind or to make supplication for us. The best explanation is the plain one: it is a petition begging God to listen to us, and it is parallel to those other petitions, such as Psalm 22[1], 'Why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me?' and many similar verses. In earliest times, men doubtless thought that they needed to call God's attention to their plight and needed to beseech Him with fervent prayers. We retain the ancient way of speech, partly because many of us still think in the same way, and partly because the rest of us partly think that way. Actually we know that Isaiah 65[24] is much nearer the truth: 'before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear'. We know from human experience that, if we are proper parents, there is no need for our children to seek our love before we give it. We realize also that there are many things we do not understand about the next generation, and that in many ways their thought-forms are different from ours. We need to have things explained to us, for, in spite of all our efforts, we do live in the past, and certainly our ways of looking at things were largely shaped before they were born. And, further, they and their needs are not always in the forefront of our minds. We have to be busy about many things, and often if a thing is to be well done, we must give our whole attention to it. The most we can say is that they are always in the background of our thoughts. By analogy, prayer may be

explained by some as the need to bring us and our needs into the forefront of God's thoughts, but we know that there is no need of this. We believe that God is not bound by time or space. He has no eyes: He does not need them. He has no ears: He has no need of them. He sees: He hears—everything, everybody, everywhere. He has no feet. He does not need to go anywhere, because He is always everywhere. He has no need to look forwards, and no need to look backwards; with Him yesterday, today, and tomorrow are One Present. His love for us has no limitations. So that, when we pray we can scarcely be seeking any alteration in God's attitude to us or to anybody else. 'Hear my prayer' is what we have to say because that is the way we look at things; but fundamentally it is a plea to us ourselves to turn towards God with hands outstretched to receive.

But always we adopt a supplicatory attitude to God, both in spite of His grace and because of His grace. 'In spite of', that is, the fact that we know He is more willing to give than we are to ask does not remove our need to pray. 'Because of', that is, the fact that all His gifts to us are undeserved on our part will always involve an attitude of grateful humility on our part. It may be that He calls us friends and not servants (slaves), but it still remains that He is God and we are mortals. It still remains true that we are wholly and entirely dependent upon Him even for every breath we draw. It still remains true that we are unworthy of the least of His mercies. Because of all this, we shall continue to beseech Him to hear us and to listen to our prayers. There is no necessity on His side, but every necessity on ours.

Turning to the second half of the couplet, there is not much to say except that 'cry' in the Hebrew means 'cry for help'. The special 'help' reference was already lost in the Greek *krauge* and the Latin *clamor*, though probably the Prayer Book Version, 'crying', is an attempt to regain it.

Verse 2

These two verses are full of the usual opening phrases of

prayer, and they or their close equivalents are to be found often in the Psalter. This does not necessarily make them any the less sincere, but there is that danger. Phrases often repeated can be like coins much used, when the image and the superscription can become blurred. Everything can become flat and featureless, like any 'bun' pennies that still happen to be in circulation. We all tend to use and reuse the old phrases, set formulae in prayer that others have made, favourite expressions of our own in extempore prayer which unconsciously come to roll mechanically off the tongue. Read prayers which are read in a monotone presumably to avoid the intrusion of the personality of the reader, can end by having no life or meaning in them at all, either for reader or read-for. The advantage is that the mind moves more easily along a path already prepared. It is easy to think the same thought again. This is how good habits of thought can be cultivated. It is also how evil can obtain a firm grip of the soul. Regular prayer can turn the soul to God permanently as the compass points continuously to the north, though always there is the same risk of deviation. Regular phrases in prayer can deepen the groove of the path in which we would walk. To be aware of the benefits of prayer and of the perils of all methods of prayer is the duty of the earnest Christian. It is certain that he needs daily help from God, day by day and minute by minute; it is certain also that he must always be in a humble and receptive frame of mind and heart so far as God is concerned. Prayer is the way in which we can ensure this.

Verse 3

> For my days consume away like smoke,
> And my bones are burned as a firebrand.

AV margin has 'into smoke'; RV margin has 'in smoke'. The Hebrew and the Syriac have 'in', but the rest, including a few Hebrew manuscripts, have 'like'. The difference in the Hebrew is small, and *k* (like) and *b* (in, with, by) are sometimes confused. There is more variation in the second line, where AV and

RV margin have 'as an hearth'. Most accurately, the Hebrew says, 'my bones are hot like a burning mass', referring to the burning heat of a fever. The Greek has 'dried up like a *phrugion*'. It is not easy to decide what the translators meant. The verb means 'roast, bake, parch', so that they may have been intending to translate the Hebrew *moqed* as 'hearth'. Jerome has 'consumed like things that are thoroughly roasted'; but Vulgate has 'dried up like dry firewood', whence Douay 'grown dry like fuel for the fire'. This is where the 'firebrand' of AV, RV, and the Prayer Book Version comes from. The general picture is plain. The psalmist speaks of himself as in the last stages of sickness and distress. The Hebrew text as it now stands is the soundest, partly because it speaks of the high temperature of fever, and this is confirmed by Isaiah 33^{14}, where the same word *moqed* is used in parallel with 'devouring fire'. The psalmist feels all burned up inside. This is better than the idea of dry bones, a state which belongs to a period long after death, in which the last hope of any resurrection has gone, Ezekiel 37^{1-14}.

Verse 4

> My heart is smitten like grass, and withered:
> For I forget to eat my bread.

AV and the Prayer Book Version make the second line consequent on the first ('so that'), a possible though unlikely meaning of the Hebrew. The Vulgate follows the Greek and eases a difficult Hebrew construction with 'I am smitten as grass, and my heart is withered'. Jerome did his best to keep close to the Hebrew with 'smitten like grass, and dried up is my heart', which is exactly right, word for word; though both Latin versions have *foenum*, which is a barbaric spelling of *fenum* or *faenum*, meaning 'hay', used evidently to describe dried grass. The withering, drying up of grass is occasionally used as a figure for the shortness of human life (Ps 103^{15})—apart from its use in heating ovens for baking (Mt 6^{30}). In the second line 'bread' is too narrow a rendering for the

Hebrew, though all the versions have it. The Hebrew *lechem* means 'food' generally, particularly the staple food of the country. The Arabic equivalent means 'flesh, meat', and elsewhere it can mean 'fish'. In Judges 13^{16} it refers to a kid, and in 1 Samuel 14^{24} it means honey. Compare the English word 'corn', which here means some cereal, though mostly 'wheat', but in North America it is the name for what we call 'maize, Indian corn'. Scholars have found the 'forget' difficult, and have suggested that perhaps the Hebrew letters got transposed, and that an early scribe wrote *shakachti* (forget) instead of *kachashti* (grow lean)—the *sh* and the *ch* each represent one consonant only in Hebrew—i.e. I have grown thin from not eating food.

Verse 5

> By reason of the voice of my groaning
> My bones cleave to my flesh.

It really looks as though a verb was lost from the first line at a very early stage in transmission, perhaps 'I have grown weary'. 'Cleave to my flesh' is not very good. Here AV is best, with 'skin'. This is what Father Ronald Knox has aimed at when he has 'I am spent with sighing till my skin sticks to my bones'. The psalmist says that he is so reduced by worry and anxiety and by lack of food that he is nothing but skin and bone. One of the best examples of this kind of thing in literature is Mr Trevelyan in Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He was Right*. But it can happen to anybody with secret worries or under real conviction of sin, unless full confession is made in the sight of God and the burden of guilt is removed. True repentance is a great healer of the soul, and often of the body also. Indeed, sometimes nothing that the general practitioner can do can put a patient right, and sometimes the psychiatrist can do no more: not if the root of the matter is plain sin. That can be put right only through repentance and forgiveness, through the knowledge and the awareness in a man's own life that his sins are washed away. Nobody but God in Christ

can do that, and not even He can do it unless there is true repentance and willingness on the part of the sinner.

Verse 6

> I am like a pelican of the wilderness;
> I am become an owl of the waste places.

The 'pelican' is due to the Greek, followed by Jerome and the Vulgate. The most modern opinion is that the references in this verse are to two kinds of owls, probably the horned owl and the tawny owl. See Leviticus 11^{16-18}, all of which are probably various species of owls, except the last in verse 17 (hawk) and the last in verse 18 (osprey). The psalmist is emphasizing his sense of isolation and melancholy: alone in the desert and alone in ruins (much better rendering than 'waste places'). The Greek made the second of these two birds the night-raven, though the Greek word was also used of the long-eared owl, and perhaps that is what the Greek translators meant. RSV offers 'vulture', but with diffidence. The Vulgate simply transcribed the Greek word, but Jerome thought it meant *bubo*, the horned owl. The Douay 'night-raven in the house' is due to the Vulgate, but where the idea of a house (*domicilium*) came from is hard to see, unless it is due to the uncertainty of the Greek *oikopedon*, which means the site, ground-plan of a house (possibly 'ruined house'), but comes also be used of the house itself. The next verse says how the psalmist is wakeful; Greek rightly 'sleepless': Jerome and Vulgate, 'keep vigil', which leads easily to the interpretation; prayers and fastings and vigils. But there is no reference to such religious asceticisms in the Hebrew of the psalm apart from the Latin versions. The verse concludes with another picture of loneliness: like a solitary sparrow sitting on the house-top, which, for us, with our buildings, means on the ridge of the roof. The Hebrew *tsippor* means any small bird that peeps and twitters, but 'sparrow' is everywhere in the translations. The picture of the house-sparrow is not quite right, because we know him as a perky, courageous, small bird, not easily frightened,

and ready to drive any small bird out of nest and home. We would need to specify 'wet and bedraggled', though it is difficult to imagine the house-sparrow letting himself get into that situation. The psalmist wishes to convey the picture of lonely, sleepless misery: our nearest is house-martins sitting on a telephone wire in the rain in late August or September, when they are beginning to gather to be ready to fly away.

Verse 8

> Mine enemies reproach me all the day;
> They that are mad against me do curse by me.

For 'reproach' the Prayer Book Version has 'revile', but 'taunt' (RSV) is better, since the word ought to involve an 'edge' to them: specific and bitter, deliberate insults. The second line means that they use his name and situation to make their curses particular and realistic: 'may you be as miserable and wretched as that fellow, the psalmist'. Instead of 'those that are mad against me', the Greek has 'those that were praising me'; the Vulgate follows this, and the Douay Version in its turn. They read the same consonants, but different vowels. RSV ('those who deride me') seems best.

Verse 10 says that it is all because of God's indignation and anger, because God lifted him up and then cast him down (RV 'away'), and so (verse 11) his days are like a lengthening shadow. The 'decline' of AV and RV is not very helpful, and the 'evening shadow' of RSV is noncommittal. The ancient versions have 'my days stretch out like a shadow'. A feature of the tropics and the semi-tropics is the way in which the sun is strong almost until the moment of setting, so that shadows are most pronounced. Towards sunset they grow longer and longer and longer, and then quite quickly all is dark.The psalmist is thinking of the sudden end which comes when the shadows are long. Thus probably the Prayer Book Version, with its 'my

days are gone like a shadow', is probably closest in expressing the mind of the psalmist.

Verse 12

Verses 12-22 are so very different from the previous verses, and so very unusual in a penitential psalm that many scholars have thought that here we have what was originally another psalm. Possibly this other psalm is continued in verses 24*b*-end, with the intermediate lines, verses 23-4*a*, more in the spirit of the main psalm. These eleven verses fit well the time when Jerusalm was destroyed. The poet is looking forward to a restoration, when the exiles shall be restored and the Gentiles shall be subservient to the God of Israel. We have here much of the spirit and attitude of the Second Isaiah (Isa 40-55 and 60-2), a keen nationalism combined with a sense of complete dependence on God and a hope of greater dominion in years to come.

> But thou, O LORD, shalt abide for ever;
> And thy memorial to all generations.

Instead of 'abide', AV has 'endure'. The 1916 American Jewish translation has 'sittest enthroned', and this is generally recognized now as the correct meaning. The two clearest examples of this use of the verb *yashab* (sit, dwell) are Psalm 29^{10} and Psalm 9^{7}, where the 'endure for ever' of AV has rightly been altered in RV to 'sitteth as king', as the reference to 'throne' in the other line of the couplet confirms. In the days of the Hebrew kingdoms, the taking of his seat on the throne was the great decisive act. He sat upon his throne and assumed the royal authority, establishing his will and dealing out punishment to those who may have opposed his accession.

In the second line, the word 'memorial' is sound, except that few Hebrew manuscripts have 'thy throne', probably due to the influence of Lamentations 5^{19}, thus making an exact quotation. The usual translations of the Hebrew word *zeker* are 'memorial, remembrance, commemoration', but it is probable that the word has a much more specific meaning

than this. There used to be a custom in Persian times of writing memorials of famous and outstanding men, not necessarily after they were dead. The custom is comparable to the fashion of engraved addresses which were presented to worthy men a generation or so ago. In these old Persian memorials the writer extolled the virtues and accomplishments of the hero and denigrated the intentions and accomplishments of his rivals and enemies. It is more than possible that the virtues of the one were painted in brighter colours and the reputations of the others were considerably blackened. Professor Mowinckel once suggested (1916) that the memoirs of Nehemiah (most of Neh 1^{1}-7^{73a}, etc.) and of Ezra (Ezra 7^{12-27}, etc.) are of this type, and that perhaps not all is sober fact, particularly in respect of the astonishing powers which were given to Ezra, but never used by him. The suggestion here is that in this psalm the word *zeker* is used in this way. It means a recounting of the mighty deeds of God on behalf of His people Israel. We have first the idea of the Lord becoming King. There is in the Bible a triple time-content here. He became King when He first created the world and began to rule over it: every time He accomplishes a mighty act of salvation He becomes King: He will become King at the end of days, when He shall have triumphed over all the powers of evil and darkness. Always He was and is and is to be. Always He is enthroned in glory, but always intervening—'visiting' this world of men and affairs, in judgement and salvation. This 'remembrance' by God is one of the great features of Old Testament religion. It marked every festival, and all the sacred occasions became remembrances of God's salvation. The Passover rite had been originally an apotropaic rite, a custom whereby evil spirits were turned away. In the hands of Moses and his successors it became the commemoration of the Day when the Angel of Death *passed over* the houses of the Israelite in Egypt and brought Israel out of Egypt. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was the barley harvest festival of Canaan, but to the Hebrews it spoke partly indeed of the thankfulness of harvest-time, but more emphatically of the rescue from

Egypt. The Feast of Weeks (later Pentecost) was the wheat harvest festival, but it became the general first-fruits celebration. But they made it emphatically more than this. The declaration which the Hebrew had to make when he presented his first-fruits was not simply one of gratefulness for the fruits of the earth. It is found in Deuteronomy 26^{5-10}. The reason the first-fruits were presented was that they were the produce of the land which God gave them when He rescued them from Egypt, so that they were proofs not so much of the fruitfulness of the land as of the mighty salvation which God wrought for His people, Israel. The Feast of Ingathering (later Tabernacles) was the vintage feast, and it marked the close of the agricultural year. To the Hebrews it was a remembrance of the days when God brought them through the desert and safety into Palestine. Thus all these occasions were tied up with God's mighty saving deeds of olden time, and marked by prayers that God would revive His work in the midst of the years and make it known, as Habakkuk 3^{2} has it, this last chapter of Habakkuk being the proper Pentecost reading from the Prophets from ancient times. Thus Psalm 102^{12} is a plea for God once more to accomplish His mighty saving work as in ancient days. Such salvation is the record in all generations of His dealings with Israel. This idea of the ever-coming, always active Saviour God is the characteristic of Hebrew religion. It is important that Israel was truly monotheistic, certainly from the Exile onwards. It is important that Israel developed a social consciousness and a high ethical standard. These two elements were what marked Judaism out during the time of the Roman power from all other religions. It attracted 'devout persons' in all the cities of Asia Minor, these people who so readily responded to Paul's appeal. But, important as these two elements are, they are outdistanced in importance by the theme of God the Saviour, the active, intervening God. He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever, but not as one who is still, perfect, unmoved, static after the notions of the Greek philosophers. He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever in that He is always the active, living, moving Saviour:

always, it is true, the same, but not the same in being so much as in acting. There is a great weakness and danger in the way in which men speak of God as being Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, these being the three great 'values', as though God is what He is and is eternal because He is this and this and this. Certainly God is Truth and Beauty and Goodness, but this is not the important thing. The really important thing is that He is Saviour, and this also is the really important thing about the Lord Jesus. He is indeed the Perfect Man, but far more important than this is the fact that He is the Saviour. The phrase 'Son of Man' does not primarily emphasize His manhood or His sharing with us the weakness of our human nature. Primarily, the title Son of Man emphasizes His heavenly origin, for in Jewish thought the Son of Man is He who shall come at the End of the Days and be God's representative then. He is the Heavenly Man rather than the Earthly Man.

Verse 13

Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion:
For it is time to have pity on her, yea, the set time is come.

There is probably an early doublet here, which is masked by the 'yea' of the English versions; the variants being 'for it is time to favour her (AV)' and 'for a set-time has come'. The Syriac ran the two together with 'for the time to favour her has come', but it seems better to regard the latter half of the verse as combining two early readings. Jerome has added a third element: he has added 'for the compact (*pactum*, compact, fixed arrangement) has come'. This has been added because 'time' is wholly inadequate as a rendering for *mo'ed*. The word means 'fixed time, appointed time' and is used of sacred seasons and occasions in general. It is a wider term than *chag* (Arabic *hajj*, pilgrimage), which is the term for the harvest feasts (Unleavened Bread, Weeks, Ingathering-Tabernacles), which are necessarily pilgrimages since tokens of the produce must be presented at the shrine. *Mo'ed*, the fixed time, is the time when the sands have run out. It is

what the New Testament calls *kairos*: 'behold now is the acceptable time' (2 Cor 6^2, or, better still, Mk 1^{15}, 'the time is fulfilled'). It is something of what we mean when we say: 'It is high time something was done about it'. So here the desolation of Jerusalem and her distresses have lasted long enough. Jerome's addition is sound religiously in that all is bound up with the sure promises of God.

Verses 14-16 say that the people are concerned about the ruins of Jerusalem, its stones and its dust, and when God has rebuilt Jerusalem nations and their kings will revere His name and His glory, because then His glory will be seen, made manifest. 'Glory' stands for a word which primarily means 'to be heavy, to be weighty', so that it can mean riches and honour, and all of these in abundance. It is the glory and prosperity of the king as he sits on his throne, strong and portly, and glittering in jewels and gold, the splendour of the maharajah as he sits on his throne at the *dasara* to receive the homage that is due to him—all the splendour of the Oriental prince and ruler. In Ezekiel and the Priestly Code the word stands for the shining splendour of God, His magnificence and His majesty. It is what is meant by the Greek word *epiphanes*, illustrious, shining forth in splendour. In Isaiah 40^5 the glory of the Lord is to be revealed in the splendour of His triumphal journey across the desert. Here in this psalm the glory of the Lord is proof that He has listened to and answered the prayer of the destitute.

Verse 18

> This shall be written for the generation to come:
> And a people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.

RSV is better: 'Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD.' The Prayer Book Version has 'the people which shall be born'. Some scholars insist on the more literal 'which shall be created' in order to ensure it being understood that the psalmist is thinking of the particular generation which will

rebuild Jerusalem and experience the working out of God's promises in a restored and prosperous Jerusalem. It may be that this is what the psalmist intended, but in any case it is true for all God's people at all times and in all places. There are times when the record of what God has done for others in time past is of the utmost importance for the Christian. This is why it ought to be written down.

If we have to find a minimum of words to stand for what is essential in the Christian life, we must have two—one for God's attitude to us, and the other for our attitude to God. The first is Grace—God's free gift to man, the undeserved favour, the love that is 'unmerited and free', manifesting itself most in the Lord Jesus. The second is Faith—a complete and unreserved trust in God, trusting 'in Christ, Christ alone for salvation' and all that Luther and John Wesley meant by it. From God's side it is all 'Grace alone'; from our side it is all 'Faith alone'. But there are three phases of faith. First, there is the faith of the beginner, 'justifying faith', that first glad joy and trust which the converted sinner experiences when first he comes 'to know the LORD'. It is characterized by great joy and sometimes by exuberant enthusiasm. It is comparable to what Jeremiah once called 'the love of thine espousals', all the joy and confidence of first married love. But this is not enough, and evangelicals who think only in terms of conversion can easily do more harm than good. This first-faith is like first-love. It needs to grow into something else: it must be replaced by something else. The trust in God and the full reliance upon Him,—this is what we mean by 'faith'—must come to be based on experience also. I started by trusting Him because I knew He loved me with an everlasting love, and I trusted Him because I had come to love Him with all my heart. But now it is different. I trust Him for the same reasons as at first, but I trust Him now for other reasons also, and mostly because I have tested it all in my own experience. This is 'sanctifying faith', the firm well-grounded faith of the grown-up Christian, of the one who has ceased to be a babe in Christ and is growing up towards 'the measure of the

stature of the fullness of Christ'. But there is a third stage. Whether 'the dark night of the soul' is an experience which comes to all, I do not know. Sometimes I think it is a morbid state of mind and soul engendered by far too much introspection. However that may be, there come times when we virtually cease to believe, when we doubt everything, when even faith seems to go. It is no use then being told to think of our past experience, just as it is no use telling anyone who is suffering from acute depression to pull himself together. That is just what he cannot do, and that is the nub of his difficulty. Similarly, it is precisely in the realm of faith and experience that our dilemma has arisen. This is when it is good that 'this shall be written for the generation to come', in order than they may realize that (AV) 'there hath no temptation (i.e. testing) taken you but such as is common to man (1 Cor 10^{13}),' and that what God has done for others in time past, He can also do for them now. Isaiah 51^{1-3} is an appeal of this type. Despondent Israel is bidden to look back to Abraham, called out, one man alone, from that self-same country, but blessed and multiplied by God so that from him all the tribes of Israel were descended. Another appeal of this type is Hebrew 11, in which, in order to give substance and body to the faith of a persecuted people, the writer appeals to all the heroes of faith in his (Greek) Bible. These things are written, not only as a warning to us, but as a source of encouragement. Then the unborn may read and rejoice and take courage.

Verse 19

For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary:
From heaven did the LORD behold the earth.

The picture is of God looking over and down from the windows of His palace in the heavens—like Sisera's mother perring through the lattice of an upstairs room (Judges 5^{28}) or Jezebel (2 Ks 9^{30}). The image is that of Amos 9^{6}, the huge heavenly palace, founded on a huge vault that spans the earth, and towering up above that, storey upon storey, rising high

through and above the clouds. It would be good if we understood that, always in the Old Testament and frequently in the New Testament, we should read 'the heavens' and not 'heaven'. This would save a lot of misunderstanding. When God looks down from His palace in the skies it is to hear and answer the groans of prisoners doomed to death. This is one of the frequent figures for the exiles, especially those in Babylon, just as it had been for the bondage in Egypt. The commentators, have taken the verse (20) to refer to all kinds of bondage in all generations, but especially the bondage of sin.

Verse 23

> He weakened my strength in the way;
> He shortened my days.

The Septuagint and the Vulgate have something very different: 'He answered Him in the way of His might, Tell me the fewness of my days.' The Douay Version follows the Vulgate. All this is almost wholly a matter of different vowels, but the same consonants, in the Hebrew text. It is all difficult, but RSV has made good sense of the two verses with: 'He has broken my strength in mid course; He has shortened my days.' and then following with the next verse in the form: 'O my God, I say, take me not hence in the midst of my days, Thou whose years endure throughout all generations.' The introduction of the 'thou' joins the last verses of the psalm well with those two verses, so that whether they originally belonged together or not, they make good sense now. The idea of God changing the heavens as a man changes his clothes, and still enduring unchanging on, is unusual and bold. The nuclear age may prove to be the age in which men destroy the world. But they cannot even then destroy God. 'The earth he has given to the children of men.' I wonder whether any world has progressed as far as this and then been destroyed when men blindly used the enormous stores of energy in their rivalries and wars, as men may easily do in our time. The

selfishness and folly of man has always brought him sorrow and death, and the greater the power that man has been able to wield, the greater the destruction and the more death. And we, civilized man, hold up our hands in horror at the habits of head-hunters and the small tribal wars of half-naked men! 'Oh, wad some pow'r . . .'.

CHAPTER VII

Psalm 130

'OUT OF THE depths': *De profundis*—these opening words mark off the psalm as the one above all others which belongs to the depths of despair and abject helplessness. It is the most truly penitent of all. Martin Luther wrote some splendid hymns, but none truer to the experience of the penitent, forgiven sinner than "Out of the depths I cry to thee" (*Aus tiefer Noth schrei ich zu dir: MHB* 359). He made it descriptive of the hardness of way and the dark night through which the Christian must sometimes travel. We sing it in Catherine Winkworth's translation to the tune 'St Martin'. In the college chapel we used to sing it fairly slowly, and the sound of men's voices gave it a strength and power that is good for the soul. It sounded as though a man sore beset and buffeted was steadily plodding along, through trouble and distress, temptation and doubt, but plodding steadily on without faltering, sure that at last he would be free from sin and sorrow. A man may be full of fear, but that does not prevent him from marching steadily and unfalteringly on. The more full of fear he is, the braver he can be. This hymn, sung to this tune and with men's voices in the college chapel, taught me that a man can be as full of doubt as any man of fear, and he can still have faith. Indeed, the more doubt he has, the greater his faith can be. This is why the ancient fathers associated the psalm with distrust of self. There are two types of this distrust: one is altogether deadly; the other is the door to supreme confidence. Distrust of self with no trust in God is the most destructive and disintegrating thing there is. It destroys all hope and happiness on earth and provides nothing of either anywhere else. But the distrust of self which is accompanied by a trust in God is the surest source of greatest confidence that the world can know. It enables a man to be 'more than

conqueror'. This is what Paul is talking about in Romans 8^{31-9}, that testimony of a man who knew his weakness and in his weakness was made strong. With Romans 8^{31-9} to read and *MHB* 359 to sing, a man may go far.

This psalm certainly enabled John Wesley to go far. In his *Journal*, when he tells the story of what happened on 24th May 1738, he says that in the afternoon he was asked to go to St Paul's, and the anthem was 'Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord'. And then in the evening he went, albeit very unwillingly, to that society meeting in Aldersgate Street. There, he says, 'I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation.' It is important to realize that this particular psalm is bound up intimately with the Aldersgate experience. We have always emphasized the 'warmed heart', and that is good, because the joy of Christian experience, both at the beginning and afterwards, is a characteristic element in Methodism. A man ought to be happy in Christ, and there is no reason why he should not show it. But the emphasis on this warmed heart has sometimes distracted us from realizing what actually happened at the Aldersgate meeting.

John Wesley had always been a religious person, boy and young man. He had been brought up by a devout mother, a truly godly woman, and had been taught that he 'could only be saved by universal obedience, by keeping all the commandments of God', and he was diligently instructed in the meaning of these. He tells us also that from the age of twenty-two (i.e. in 1725), when his father pressed him to take Holy Orders, he 'watched against all sin whether in word or deed, and began to aim at and pray for inward holiness. So that now, doing so much and living so good a life, I doubted not but what I was a good Christian.' He tells us how in 1730 he began visiting the prisons and how he was assisting the poor and the sick in the town. He gave so much away out of his little fortune that, as he says, 'I abridged myself of all superfluities, and many that are called necessaries of life'. He says that he omitted no sort of self-denial which he thought lawful, and that he omitted no

occasion of doing good. But the strange thing and the thing that surprised him was that he was afraid to die. All that he had done gave him no comfort and no assurance of acceptance with God. He had been afraid to die during the storm on the way out to Georgia, when the Moravians sang so calmly on in spite of the fury of the storm. Then again, when he returned to England in January 1738, he was in a low state of health, and the same fear possessed him. He knew very well that this ought not to be, but it was not until his repeated talks with Peter Boehler that he realized what he had to seek in order that he might indeed be free from fear. It is therefore very important to note what John Wesley says in the *Journal* immediately after the reference to his warmed heart. He says: 'I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation.' What happened that night at Aldersgate Street was that John Wesley changed over from thinking that he could save his own soul, get right with God, and know 'the joy of his salvation' by good works and fervent prayer, however good the works and however fervent the prayer. He realized, as the Apostle Paul had done and as Martin Luther had done, that *faith alone* is the key to the situation. 'Trust in Christ, Christ alone' is what he writes. This is why *MHB* 359 is such an important hymn for all Protestants in general, and for Methodists in particular. It is the joy of Christian experience based upon faith in Christ that is our special mark. This is our contribution to the whole Church, and we must not lose hold of it.

This psalm is one of fifteen which are called 'a song of degrees' (AV) or 'a song of ascents' (RV). The Hebrew word is *ma'aloth*, and the varied explanations depend on the varied use of this word. One meaning is derived from Ezra 7^{9}, where the singular *ma'alah* is used of the return (ascent) from Babylon. Earlier commentators thought of the psalms as celebrating the Return from Babylon, though some have thought of the author of Psalm 120 at least as a refugee among the Ammonites (verse 5), which is where the murderer of Gedaliah fled (Jer 40^{14}) when he had made Palestine too hot to hold him. Others have thought of *ma'alah* (going up) as going up on

pilgrimage to Jerusalem for one of the three great pilgrimage feasts of the year. This is why many call these fifteen psalms the Pilgrim Psalter. There is another explanation, as early as the second century and perhaps actually from the time when the Temple was still standing, that the reference is to the fifteen steps which led up from the Court of the Women through the Gate of Nicanor into the Court of Israel. There is a tradition that during the opening all-night festivities of the great Feast of Tabernacles the Temple choirs and orchestras stood on these fifteen steps and sang these fifteen psalms. After all, the word *ma'alah* does mean 'a step', and is so used in Ezekiel 40, 2 Kings 20, and elsewhere. It must have been a marvellous sight at this greatest of all the religious occasions of Jewry to see the whole court lit up with the great lampstands which were set up in the Court of the Women, and kept supplied with oil all night long. For until the last days of the last Temple, the autumn feast was by far the most important. It was only in the critical times of unrest in the last thirty years or so that the Passover grew in importance because it was associated with the Coming of Messiah and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. Previously to that time the annual end-of-the-year, beginning-of-the-year feast held pride of place, for it was essentially the time of the renewal of the covenant between God and Israel. We Methodists have a great and important link here with the worship in the Temple in ancient times, in our Covenant service, which should be regarded as more than the occasion when we renew our vows. It should be the occasion when by the grace of God that bond is renewed which He Himself has created by His wondrous saving power. The great emphasis should be, as always, on what God has done for us and what He is waiting always ready to do now for every repentant sinner and trusting soul. Old Testament scholars are realizing more and more clearly that these great feasts were made primarily to celebrate God's wondrous grace in establishing and maintaining this Covenant with Israel, the people of God. I would like to see a revised Covenant Service in which there is certainly no less emphasis on our part in

adoration, thanksgiving and confession, but much more emphasis on the Mighty Saving Acts of God. I would rewrite the thanksgiving section, and make it more after the pattern of Deuteronomy $26^{5ff.}$ There ought to be more, much more about the continuing work of God the Saviour, that saving grace without which we would have nothing at all.

Psalm 130 is one of the four psalms which Martin Luther picked out as the best in the Psalter. All four are among the Penitential Psalms, and they are xxxii, li, cxxx and cxliii. They are what he called the Pauline psalms. For Luther, 'best' means that which speaks most clearly of the Grace of God and of Saving Faith. This is what makes this psalm the best of the best and Luther's favourite. It speaks of penitence, of forgiveness, of grace, and of faith. When all this, as it must be for the Christian, is realized to be involved pre-eminently in the saving work of Christ, what more could even Martin Luther desire? In so far as there can be any expression of these fundamental elements of the gospel before the time of Christ, here it is in Psalm 130.

Verse 1

Out of the depths have I cried to thee, O LORD.

It is not surprising that there is an ancient instruction (preserved by Thomasius, 1649-1713) that this psalm is to be read with the lesson of the Prophet Jonah. This is because of the similarity of phrases between the first verse of the psalm and the prayer of Jonah in Chapter 2. The prayer of Jonah is the prayer of Israel in exile; 'yet will I look again toward thy holy temple' (verse 4). Compare also Jeremiah 51^{34}: 'Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon hath devoured me, he hath crushed me, he hath made me an empty vessel, he hath swallowed me like the dragon, he hath filled his maw with my delicates; he hath cast me out.' Both Jonah 2 and Psalm 130 have been interpreted through the centuries as descriptive of the depths of sorrow and humility. See Psalm $69^{2, 14}$ for the use of 'the depths' as a metaphor for the deepest distress.

But see also Isaiah 51[10] for the explanation of how 'the depths of the sea' came to be used as a metaphor for the Babylonian exile: the release from Babylon was regarded by the Second Isaiah as a second deliverance from Egypt and a second passing through the Red Sea.

It is when a man is in direct need that he most cries for help. 'They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick' (Mk 2[17]). The oppressed, the unprivileged and the persecuted have found in religion a relief from woes that can become intolerable. This is how sometimes religion has indeed been 'dope for the masses'. Sometimes it has been the sheet-anchor in the struggle for better conditions. For some it has offered hope beyond the grave, for others this side the grave. In latter years the demand for wholeness of life has been for here and now, and in this respect communism and socialism have become the two great rivals of Christianity. Some socialists tolerate religion; others ignore it; a few find it a possible means to an end. Communism is flat against religion. But both communism and socialism promise betterment for the less privileged here and now in this present world. Organized religion has proved to be too slow in satisfying the need of the unprivileged here and now. Happiness and plenty beyond the grave provide no attraction for the masses in these days; and the Churches are too much in the control of the satisfied for any marked advance to take place in this respect on the Christian front. Men do not believe that Christianity can satisfy their need; alternatively, men do not need what Christianity appears to them to offer. What then is the place of religion in this affluent society, or in a world where a militant communism is on the march, offering plenty for all in a not too far-distant future, but offering it this side of the grave in terms of all those amenities and luxuries which the poor have long seen the rich to possess?

Salvation is like the Roman god Janus; it faces two ways, backwards to the past, forwards to the future. A man has to be saved *from* something, and he has to be saved *to* something. Time was when men believed in a never-ending hell beyond

death. That was indeed something to be saved from. Perhaps many were thereby frightened into belief in Christ. If any man believed in a hell of never-ceasing torment, he did well to be frightened into fleeing from the wrath to come. He would have been a fool if he had not been frightened. But most people do not believe in that sort of hell today. They cannot see how a God of love could have anything at all to do with a hell from which there was no escape. There may be, they say, something to be said for remedial punishment after death; but that is not what is meant by the word 'Hell'. This is what Catholics, both Roman and Anglican, call 'Purgatory'. And Purgatory is what some Protestants, including Methodists, believe in, with the doctrine of 'another chance', though they do not seem to realize it. This doctrine of a second chance, and possibly another chance after that, takes all fear out of 'dying in sin'. Especially is this so, if a man believes that all men find their way to Heaven at last. Ultimately it means that man has nothing to be saved *from*. The inevitable tendency is for Christianity to become scarcely distinguishable from a general humanism. It is small wonder that with the development of education and the wonders achieved by modern science many, both of the intellegentsia and of the less well-educated, hold that religion is out of date, and that this is properly the post-Christian age. There is no prospect of abysmal depth from which any man need ever cry: not indeed for many in these modern times.

Is there anything this side the grave from which men cannot save themselves? The affluent society provides for most things and it promises (at least the politicians promise) to provide the rest in the not too distant future. Every time the threat of war looms large and close and then is avoided, as in the Cuba crisis, men become less fearful of a nuclear war. 'It may never happen' can thus easily grow into 'it never will happen'. New independent nations springing to birth have their own messiahs and believe that in their new-found freedom they soon will achieve that higher standard of living which hitherto has belonged to the white men they have seen

living in their midst. There is nothing to be saved from, from which in time mankind cannot save itself. It is true that half the world goes hungry, but communism or nationalism or socialism or the ten-year plan will cure that.

There are two possible solutions. One is to return to the biblical doctrine that there is a judgement for sin, that there is no future beyond the grave except a man be born again, except a man be 'in Christ', and that the alternative to repentance and faith is 'the outer darkness', 'the rubbish heap of Gehenna' (cf. p. 26). This solution is probably not acceptable to most Christian people nowadays. Some would dispute that it is sound biblical doctrine; others hold that here Plato and his spiritual heirs have more to teach us than has the Bible.

The other solution is to concentrate more zealously on the positive aspect of salvation. We ought, in any case, to have been doing this for many a long year. What is it that Christianity has to offer more than any other religion, or more than no religion at all? Either side the grave? If all men are to be saved at last in any case, is there any justification for the exclusive claims of Christianity? Is there anything that Christianity has to offer here and now that is better than can be provided by (say) a six-figure win in the pools? The Christian must be able to show the world a happiness that none can show but he. The Christian must be able to demonstrate daily a serenity and calm that none can demonstrate but he. He must outlive the rest; he must outdie the rest. He must be able to show all men clearly that through Christ he can indeed in all things be 'more than conqueror', in life and through death—in short, that the salvation he talks about is indeed something to be greatly desired and without which a man is poor indeed. Christianity depends upon men having a sense of need, a desperate longing to be what we are not. It depends also on man's realization that he can achieve neither on the basis of his own resources. It is easy to see how in this modern world Christianity can be so emasculated of any salvation motif that it becomes one of those ideas, and by no means the most effective, by which man may build a tower that reaches Heaven.

No longer any cry 'out of the depths'; no longer any dependence on the Grace of God; no longer any necessity for faith, as Paul and Luther and Wesley knew it.

Verse 3

> If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities,
> O Lord, who shall stand?

The Hebrew Bible consists of three sections: the Law and the Prophets and the Writings. The Law consists of the five books of Moses. The Prophets consist of the four Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and of the four Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve). The Writings consist of all the rest. It so happens that this verse (Ps 130^3) is the middle of the Writings, according to the reckoning of the ancient Jewish scholars. There is nothing deliberate about this, and there is nothing that can legitimately be made of it. But it is a curious chance that the central verse of the third and last section of the Hebrew Bible should be a statement that if, as Moffatt translates it, God is going to 'keep strict tally' of sins, then nobody has any chance. Moffatt concludes the verse with 'who could live on?' This interpretation is based on the Hebrew realization that if a man were to receive the reward for his sins that is strictly just, he would fall dead on the spot. According to strict justice and the strict tally of sins, the phrase 'the wages of sin is death' means death now, at this moment. There is indeed a 'strict tally' of sins in the sense that all sin has to be paid for, but there are two things which God can do in connexion with sin. He can forbear and He can forgive. Not nearly enough is made by exegetes and theologians of the forbearance of God this side the grave. Mostly they relegate it to beyond the grave and tend to make it unending. But in the Old Testament God's forbearance is part of His compassion for poor, weak, helpless humanity. 'For he knoweth our frame: He remembereth that we are dust.' This is why, as the same psalm (103) says: 'He hath not dealt with us after our sins, Nor rewarded us after

our iniquities.' This is why the wicked man is allowed to continue in his wickedness, and even to flourish like the green bay tree. What ought to happen is that he should come to a sudden end, and psalmists like the author of Psalm 73[18-20] are sure that this will ultimately take place. But, as Ezekiel 18[32] says, 'I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves and live.' There is thus forbearance for all—forbearance but not forgiveness. There is indeed forgiveness in God's presence, but it depends upon proper awe and reverence towards Him. It depends upon true repentance and the proper humility of the sinner before God.

Verse 5

Therefore the psalmist waits in hope, and he longs for God as the watchman looks for the light of dawn: a splendid simile, as all know who have had to keep awake all night, keeping guard or caring for those that are ill. The Hebrew word for 'hope' is *qawah* I, which has to do with 'twist, stretch'. The noun *qaw* means 'line, cord', and *qewaye* in Syriac means 'threads'. Thus the basic idea of this 'hope' is presumably the tension of waiting and enduring. It may very well be that the hope of the faithful Hebrew of olden times was not characterized by tension and anxiety so much as by quiet trust, like the aged Simeon, 'righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel' (Lk 2[25]), or Joseph of Arimathea, 'which also waited for [so AV] the kingdom of God' (Mk 15[43]). In this last instance, RV has 'was looking for' the Kingdom of God, which is perhaps a better rendering of the Greek. The Christian's hope is a sure hope, what the Epistle to the Hebrews calls 'the full assurance of hope unto the end' (6[11], AV). This hope is tied up with the 'everlasting covenant' which God makes with the new Israel, even 'the sure mercies of David' (Isa 55[3])—that is, the steadfast love which God has shown to David, a steadfast love upon which a man can completely rely. (The Hebrew words are *chesed* and *ne'eman*, usually translated 'faithful', but actually meaning 'that which can be relied

upon'.) This phrase in Isaiah 55^3 is quoted in Acts 13^{34}, as the margin of AV goes out of its way to point out. It is actually an exact quotation from the Greek (*Septuagint*) of the Isaiah verse, and it is associated with the hope of the resurrection. For the Christian this hope of eternal life in Christ is certainly an 'expectant hope' (like that of Joseph of Arimathea), but it is something of which he is quite sure. This certainly is built on no philosophical argument concerning the existence of and the nature of the soul. It is rooted and grounded in faith, that is, in complete reliance upon Christ, in that assurance of which John Wesley wrote in his *Journal* when he was describing the Aldersgate experience. There is nothing tentative here, just as there is nothing tentative in Luther's hymn (*MHB* 359) which is founded on this psalm. This certainty is expressed in verse 7: 'for with the LORD there is mercy', where 'mercy' stands for the Hebrew *chesed*, the word which now is regularly rendered 'steadfast love', the same word that is used in the phrase 'the sure *mercies* of David'.

CHAPTER VIII

Psalm 143

IN THE Middle Ages the monks sought a connexion between the Seven Psalms and the Seven Deadly Sins: Pride, Lechery, Envy, Wrath, Covetousness, Gluttony, Sloth—to use the names which William Langland gave them in 'The Vision of the Seven Sins' in *Piers Plowman*. This last of the penitential psalms was associated with the last of the Seven Deadly Sins—sloth, or *accidie*, as Chaucer called it. Apparently this is the English form of the Latin *acedia* (the double *-c* seems to have developed in Old French), itself a transcription of the Greek *akedia* or *akedeia*. This word was used by Hippocrates as a medical term for 'torpor', indifference caused by grief or exhaustion. A comparison of the Seven Psalms and the Seven Deadly Sins makes it look probable that the associations are to be found in the number Seven rather than in details in the psalms. Certainly the associations are of the slenderest. The link in this last of the psalms is apparently in verse 4: 'My spirit is overwhelmed', where the Hebrew is '*ataph* III, which means 'be faint, be feeble'. The Greek translated this by the verb *akediao*. The Latin Versions have 'anxious', and the Prayer Book 'vexed', whilst the Douay has followed the Vulgate with 'in anguish'. The Greek word is used in Isaiah 61^3 for the Hebrew *keheh*. The English versions have 'a spirit of *heaviness*', but that is not very good. It means 'dullness'. The word is used of the wick of a lamp which is but faintly glowing (Isa 42^3), of Eli's eyes (1 Sam 3^{12}), which were dulled from seeing, presumably by cataracts, and similarly of the aged Isaac, who had to feel the difference between his two sons (Gen $27^{1, 21}$).

They did well in the Middle Ages to place sloth in the list of the Seven Deadly Sins. What inertia is in matter, sloth is in

man. Matter cannot get started by itself. It cannot move; it must be moved. Similarly, we say that if a man is to begin to do anything, he must be 'moved' to do it. Normally man is prepared to follow the routine that he knows. Here and there we find those who are always prepared and usually even eager to try some new thing. These are the inventors, the pioneers, the reformers. But the vast majority of men are not inventors or pioneers. They are full of inertia. If they are to do anything, enthusiasm must be kindled in them, and that enthusiasm must be fanned into a flame. Perhaps the general inertia of mankind has something to be said for it, lest, if we followed blindly like sheep, we might all charge over the precipice to disaster. But sometimes men do rush blindly to disaster; so perhaps we are very like sheep after all.

This twentieth century, after the calmness of the first decade, has seen the rise of ideologies which have convulsed the whole world. We have seen the rise of communism, of fascism, of Hitlerism. The Western world has learned to beware of such movements, so much so that for many of us the word 'ideology' has come to be a bad word, signifying something that in itself is evil. But this is not necessarily so. An ideology is a master-theme, a dominant idea; it embodies an ideal which, with proper guidance, can vitalize the natural inertia of men into a vigorous thrust that scarce can be contained. By an ideology when it is embodied in a leader, the mass of mankind can be energized into a powerful, burning-hot lava stream which sweeps on, overcoming and engulfing all that lies in its path. Whether an ideology is good or is bad depends upon the ideology. Whether an ideology is effective or not depends upon the extent to which that ideology is embodied in a leader. We are learning in our time that democracy as an ideology is not enough—at least some of us are beginning to realize this. Perhaps for some time to come the masses of men will continue to be bemused by the word 'democracy', by the bare idea. But a bare idea is not effective in the world of men. If it is to be effective it must be clothed, and it must be clothed in flesh and blood. It is doubtless true

that the people should rule, but this could never work except in the ancient Greek city-state, where the number of citizens was comparatively small. Even there most of the inhabitants were not citizens, but slaves. Not all the city-states of ancient Greece were democracies, and the greatest of them all, Athens, spent a considerable amount of its time in sending into exile those leaders through whom alone it could ever take effective action. Even a democracy must have a leader, and the good democratic leader must be able to enthuse his people with his own spirit. That was what made Nazi Germany: not only the theories of national socialism, but the spirit of Hitler and the fact that Hitler was able to enthuse the multitude with his spirit. He implanted his spirit, with its ideals and its hatreds, in enough of his people to make Germany the effective force it was in Europe for so many years. As for communism, it was not Karl Marx who started the onward march, though he it was who provided the idea. The march of communism began when Lenin was able to enthuse his people with his spirit, and the continued march of communism in any country depends upon the extent and the frequency with which a Lenin can be reborn.

If this word 'ideology' in the sense of an effective idea were to be translated into Hebrew, it would involve the word *ruach*, commonly translated 'wind, spirit'. When the word is used of breath, it can mean 'breath' in a general sense, but strictly it stands for strong, noisy breathing as against *neshamah*, which means ordinary, quiet breathing. The word can indeed be used in the sense of 'mere breath', as also can *neshamah*. But the Arabic *nasama* refers to a gentle breath of wind, which *ruach* could never do. When the word *ruach*, therefore, is used of the wind, it means a strong wind, tumultuous and powerful, as against a gentle zephyr. When the word is used in a psychological sense, it involves a dominant emotion. For instance, Proverbs 16^{32} says: 'And he that ruleth his spirit (*ruach*) (is better) than he that taketh a city.' When Hosea wishes to speak of that strange and powerful hold which the idolatrous and immoral Canaanite cults had upon the

people of Israel, he describes that power as 'a *ruach* of whoredoms' (4[12], 5[4]), and this is why 'they cannot frame their doings to turn back to their God'. The passage which deals with the test by ordeal in Numbers 5[14f] is instructive. This passage lays down what a man must do if his wife is with child and he suspects that he is not the father. He brings his wife publicly into the Temple to stand, as we are told elsewhere, in the Gate of Nicanor, and thus the shame of his house is laid bare. He is driven to this by what the Bible calls 'a *ruach* of jealousy'—a spirit of jealousy which takes hold of him and drives him on. We all know how jealousy can take hold of and control a man or a woman, and to what lengths they can be driven. The same is true of depression, hatred, love, or any of those emotions which we all know to be powerful indeed. It is this 'spirit', this *ruach*, which induces action.

There are three more things to be said about the Hebrew word *ruach*. The first is this: sometimes a distinction is made between *ruach* (spirit) and *basar* (flesh). When this distinction is made, then, as we have seen (p. 68), *ruach*-spirit is of God and *basar*-flesh is of man; so much so that in Genesis 6[1-3] *ruach* can involve immortality, and *basar* can involve death. The second is this: it is the case that *ruach* (breath) is used of that breath of God by which the inanimate body of flesh can be vitalized into a living creature' (Gen 6[17]); but this involves all living creatures and not man alone, as is plain from Genesis 6[17], 7[16, 21]; just as *nephesh* (usually translated 'soul') belongs to beasts as well as men (Gen 1[20, 26, 30]). It was very wrong indeed for the translators of the AV to put 'living soul' in Genesis 2[7] when the phrase *nephesh chayyah* (properly 'living thing') is used of man, but to put 'creature that hath life' for the same phrase in Genesis 1[20] and 'living creature' in Genesis 1[24] for the same phrase when it is used of animals and reptiles. It is much to be regretted that the revisers did not see fit to alter this and thus maintain the proper standards of scholarship. Nevertheless, even in the misleading English versions, it still remains that *ruach* has to do with animate creatures, human beings and beasts and birds and creeping

things, and definitely not with inanimate things. The third thing is this: the phrase *Ruach Adonai* (the Spirit of the Lord) is used only in association with men. Sometimes the phrase *Ruach Elohim* is used, but again always in association with men. The one possible exception is Genesis 1^2, where the English versions have 'the Spirit of God'. Here the RV has been bold enough to print 'spirit' with a small 's', and RSV has gone one step further by putting 'wind' in the margin as an alternative to 'Spirit' with a capital 'S'. But, as von Rad points out (*Genesis*, Eng. tr., 1961, p. 47), the phrase *Ruach elohim* does not mean *Geist Gottes* (Spirit of God), but rather 'storm of God', or, better still, 'a very strong wind' (vulgarly, 'a God-Almighty wind'), for there are many instances in which the Divine Name is used in Hebrew to express the superlative.

Ruach-spirit therefore stands for an emotion, a conviction, which can dominate a man's whole nature and can change him into what virtually amounts to a different man. In order to be effective, *ruach*-spirit has to be embodied in a person, and when it is so embodied, it becomes effective. Christianity speaks of the transforming, controlling Power of the Holy Spirit, God entering into a man, transforming him, creating of him a new creature.

The Bible does not speak of the Spirit of God as powerful in the creation of the natural, material world, but it does tell of the spirit of the Lord coming upon such as Saul and turning him into another man (1 Sam 10^6). This idea is the basis of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Further, if we follow the lead of the Bible, we do not think of the influence of the Holy Spirit as being gentle, quiet, pervasive, so much as invading, rushing upon a man, sweeping in with tremendous, transforming power. The Hebrew word is *tsalach* I (rush: Syriac, 'cleave, penetrate, advance'), for which the Greek equivalent is *elauno* (cf. Lk 8^{29}). The figure of the descending dove belongs to the Baptism of Christ; Pentecost is concerned with the rushing of a mighty wind. The Christian ideal can become an effective ideology and influence and transform the lives of men only when it becomes embodied in men, possessing

them, changing them, driving them into action. If Christianity is to compete effectively with the modern ideologies then Christians must frankly recognize the power of ideologies in the modern world, and demonstrate by their own zeal and devotion that the Christian ideology is the one truly and permanently effective ideology of the modern world. This can be done only by a surrender and a zeal which matches those of the most ardent communist. If Christianity does not invade and transform the natural sloth of man, then an ardent nationalism or an international communism will. But whatever wins the world will be strong, invasive, powerful, passionate. Nothing less than this will suffice.

Verse 2

> And enter not into judgement with thy servant;
> For in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

The Syriac Version has 'do not bring thy servant'. Moffatt is nearest to this, and incidentally makes the verse more intelligible than other translators: 'Put not thy servant on his trial, for before thee no living soul can be acquitted.' RSV ends the verse with 'for no man living is righteous before thee', which seems to be a retreat from the English versions.

The translation of the Hebrew root *ts-d-q* and the corresponding Greek verb *dikaioo* with a basic meaning of ethical righteousness is the cause largely of many complications in the theories of the Atonement. The noun *dikaiosune* is translated 'righteousness', and the next stage is to decide whether the verb *dikaioo* means 'make righteous' or 'treat as righteous'. When the verb is translated 'justify', which of the two does it mean? Further, is the metaphor one of the law courts? and if so, to what extent?

The whole problem of the relations between God and man revolves around the virtually impossible problem of trying to decide what matters most in the character of God. Is He primarily a righteous God? Is He 'of purer eyes than to behold evil' (Hab 1^{13}), so that nothing that is not pure can ever hope

to be in His presence? When it is said that 'the pure in heart . . . shall see God', what does it mean? It means at the least that no living man can hope to stand before Him (cf. Ps 130^{3}). If therefore a man must be pure of heart before He can see God, if a man must be righteous, then it can only be with a righteousness that is not his own. This has always puzzled the ordinary man, for he finds it as difficult to see how one man can be righteous for another as to see how one man can be guilty for another. Or, God can treat a man as righteous, even though He Himself and everybody else knows that this is not so. And if He can, why should He preserve this façade of righteousness? Is there anyone or any principle to which He is answerable? The difficulties arise for two reasons. The first is due to starting with the Greek *dikaiosune* and asking in the first place what Plato and Aristotle meant by it. (See my *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, 1944, pp. 161ff.) The second is due to starting from the assumption that the Greek verb *dikaioo* means 'to make righteous'. That there is something strange about the Pauline use of this verb can be seen from Professor Dodd's statement (*The Bible and the Greeks*, p. 52) that in classical Greek the phrase *dikaioun ton asebe* (Rom 4^{5}: 'to justify the ungodly') means 'to condemn the ungodly'. All the discussions are based on the assumption that Righteousness is a condition of Salvation (cf. *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, p. 164), and we are faced with the curious situation that if God is going to save a man, He must either give him or assume he has a righteousness which he certainly has not got. If therefore God is a God of Justice, one of His major functions is to find some means of circumventing Himself. All of which, to say the least of it, is decidedly queer. It would have been much more sensible to have abandoned the righteousness test. Why insist on the fulfilment of a condition which by man's very nature man can never fulfil? It is a strange start to eternal life if it begins with a fictitious righteousness, and the non-theologian would be justified in calling it the Immoral Doctrine of the Atonement.

Where does the Cross come in? and how does it cut this

Gordian knot? It is difficult to see how the Death of Christ can make any difference to God's attitude to man. God is the same yesterday, today, and for ever: not that He is static, unmoved and immovable, like the gods of Tennyson's *Lucretius* (cf. *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, pp. 47f), but that His continual dynamic action is consistent. He is always in action and always in action in the same way. No Death of Christ could make God any different in intention or in aim. It might make a difference in His effectiveness. It might be the means by which He could accomplish what He always longs to do—save men from death and win them back to Himself. It might accomplish what Ezekiel realized to be the most important thing in God's attitude to man (18^{32}), which, in the Declaration as to the Forgiveness of Sins, takes the form 'who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness, and live'. That means that the Death of Christ makes a difference in man, effects a change in the sinner. It might soften his heart into repentance. For my part, I never could see what is wrong with the moral influence theory of the atonement provided (and this provision is essential) we have a sound appreciation of the work of the Holy Spirit. I can understand the rightness of all that is said against the Moral Influence Theory (that the Death on the Cross softens men up, and so forth) if the Holy Spirit is regarded as being some gentle, mostly sentimental, largely impersonal influence, or if the phrase means little more than a man's own emotions or the prompting of what is called 'a man's better self'. But if the Holy Spirit is rightly conceived as the invasion of God with power, transforming and changing, then Incarnation-Crucifixion-Pentecost are successive stages of the One Operation of saving grace.

It is difficult to see how the unjust death of Christ could be any sort of satisfaction to a God who is essentially just. Two unjusts do not make one just, any more than two blacks make a white. Further, the whole concept of Christ pleading with the Father is fraught with difficulty and danger. It makes

One Person of the Godhead to insist upon justice at all costs, and another Person of the Godhead to put mercy before justice. Then more complications have to be introduced, such as mystic union with Christ and so forth.

All this depends on the assumption that, whatever happens, righteousness must be served, and by 'righteousness' ethical rectitude is meant. But God does not require righteousness as a condition of acceptance. He requires faith, and faith alone. This involves that a man shall 'trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation'; and then there is given 'an assurance that he has taken away my sins, even mine'. Then it is that a man is right with God. The requisite is that a man must 'Turn from his wickedness', and it is this turning to God that is conversion. The next step is being received by God as a repentant sinner, and this is justification. It means 'getting right with God'. The dying thief was 'justified'. He turned to Christ in penitence and trust, and by grace he was received. He had no good works to offer. If 'righteousness' means doing good works, he never was righteous. He was a repentant sinner, dying and in desperate need. God worked a change in his heart through faith in Christ, and doubtless he felt his heart strangely warmed. Righteousness comes afterwards by the grace of God, by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. This is the process of Sanctification. But this righteousness is more than barely ethical, and fundamentally the test of conduct is not an ethical one: in the sense, that is, that there is any moral code which a man must fulfil. If there were such a Christian code, it is possible that some of us might not fall short, since there are many men and women who sincerely seek to do what is right and take pleasure in it. But the standard for the Christian is the pattern of the Lord Christ Himself. This is why no Christian can possibly do more than is required. There is no such thing for a Christian as a work of supererogation. Going the second mile and turning the other cheek are not extras. The standard is in this sense not an ethical one; it cannot be written down. It is embodied not in a code, but in a person. In this sense the Law is done away. In another sense also the law is done away:

the law-court metaphor fails. It is this failure of the law-court metaphor that causes all the difficulty, and all the complications of 'imputed righteousness' and 'declared righteousness' and the rest are attempts to maintain the old metaphor. The inevitable verdict of 'Guilty' is destroyed through grace. It is not the case that the repentant sinner gets the verdict 'Not guilty'. He cannot receive that verdict, because he is guilty, and not all the sufferings of Christ can take that away. Guilty once, guilty for ever. The court breaks up. The whole law system has to be abandoned. This is what Paul keeps on saying. He keeps the old words; he wrestles with them to make them fit the new conception of Salvation which comes not by fulfilling the Law, but 'by grace have ye been saved through faith' (Eph 2^8).

But what has the Death of Christ to do with this? Was it necessary? It is difficult to see how this can have been necessary to God. God always was and always is and always will be ready to welcome every repentant sinner home. This is the way in which He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. There is no need for any change in God. But there is need for two other changes: one is a change in the sinner: the other is a change in the whole conception of man's relation to God. The passage which has caused most difficulty, and indeed misunderstanding, is Isaiah 53^{12}: 'and made intercession for the transgressors'. The Hebrew verb is *paga'* (meet, encounter), and the causative form, which is used here, means 'interpose', 'intervene'. The meaning here is: 'and it was he who bore the sin of many, and interposed on behalf of the rebels'—that is, he put himself in the way and he bore the suffering and the pain instead of them. This is what is actually said in verse 6, where the same verb is used and also in the causative form: 'and the LORD *laid* upon him the iniquity of us all'. The Hebrew does not refer to any intercession between man and God; it refers to an intervention between 'us' and the suffering caused by 'our sins'. The Greek translates 'and he was *handed over* because of our sins'. The idea of intercession with God comes in with the Vulgate, which has *rogavit*, which the Douay

Version renders 'and hath prayed'. The Hebrew verb is used twice in the sense of interceding, intervening with entreaty, Jeremiah 15^{11}, 36^{25}; but in the Isaiah passage the more general meaning is supported by the other half of the couplet. It means intervening between a man and the consequences of his sin. Compare Isaiah 59^{16}: 'and he was astonished that there was no intercessor', so God Himself intervened with fury to His adversaries.

Paul makes use of Isaiah 53^{12} in Romans 8^{31-4}. In verse 32 he says 'but *delivered him up* for us all', which is based on the Septuagint of Isaiah 53^{12}. The verb *paradidomi* (delivered up, handed over) is used in each case, and this is the verb which is used of the betrayal by Judas. Christ intervenes in the law-court, having been raised from the dead, standing at the right hand of God the Judge. And if God, who 'freely gives us all things' has no word of condemnation, who is there that can pronounce us guilty?

Adopting the terminology of the Sin-offering (Hebrew *chaṭṭath*, lit. 'sin'), Paul says: 'Him who knew no sin, he made to be Sin on our behalf'—that is, God made Christ 'the Sin' (the sin-offering) on our behalf. This sin-offering was not in any sense an offering to God, since no part of it went to the altar, apart from the blood and the fat which went to the altar in the case of all Temple sacrifices. It was a taking away of the sin, so that the sin no longer lay between man and God. Whilst the Levitical sin-offering availed only for sins of ignorance in matters of rites and taboos, yet Christ as the Sin-offering takes all our sins away. The guilt of them is no longer a barrier between us and God. This is that of which the repentant sinner needs to be assured; he need no longer feel guilty before God. He will always be guilty so far as his sin is concerned. That perhaps is as well, since it will remind him of the exceeding sinfulness of sin; but to get right with God, he needs to know that this guilt is no longer a barrier. This he knows to be the case because of the exceeding love of God demonstrated in Christ Jesus, and in His suffering the consequences of sin.

Verse 10

Teach me to do thy will.

The word 'will' stands for one of the grandest words of Hebrew religion: *ratson*, with a long *-a* and a long *-o*, a rich word full of rich sounds. The Greek here has *thelema* ('will' in the sense of 'wish, desire'). The Hebrew word is represented in the Psalter equally by *thelema* and by *eudokia* ('good pleasure', and a much stronger, warmer word). The verb *ratsah* is represented regularly by the Greek *eudokeo*; twice only by *thelo*. The Hebrew *ratson* describes acceptance by God and all the happiness and delight which come from 'being right with God'. It is the aim of true religion, and it was for this that prophets and priests alike exercised their best endeavours. The word *eudokia* is the word used in the Angels' Song of Luke 2^{14}. There is a variation here between 'goodwill towards men' (cf. AV) and 'men of goodwill', on which RV and RSV are based, and most moderns agree is the sounder text. But the important thing is that 'men of goodwill' does not mean general kindness and humanitarianism, getting round a table with give and take and all friendly together. It means, as RV and RSV show by their circumlocution, 'men with whom God is well pleased', men who are right with God. It is as well to remember that Peace comes on earth to men who are right with God. Everything must be done to restrain wickedness and vice, and all that (say) the United Nations Organization can do, but the Christian knows that the solution is to be found in man's relation to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The palliatives may well have to be sub-Christian inasmuch as we live in a sub-Christian world, but let us not imagine that the palliatives are Christian. The Christian solution involves mass conversion.

The last phrase is 'I am thy servant'. The Hebrew word *'ebed* means 'slave' as against *sakir* (hired labourer, paid at the end of the day). But 'servant' is used of the subjects of a king in all their grades, and it is used of worshippers of God. The word *'abodah* means 'labour, service', but it is the proper word

for the 'service of the LORD', our modern Church *services*. But the word can also be used in a special sense of a servant of the Lord who is called to fulfil a special mission. Especially the prophets are God's servants; so are the patriarchs, and particularly Moses and David, until finally we come to the Servant of the Lord in the Second Isaiah, on whom to such a great extent Jesus of Nazareth modelled His life. He stands for complete devotion and for the final triumph of the faithful worshipper.

'For I am Thy servant.'