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The Grace of God in the Old Testament

By WALTER R. ROEHRS

NOTE: This article is the English version of a paper delivered at the "Bad Boll" sessions which were held in Spandau (Berlin) during July of the past summer. Since it was intended for an audience of German theologians, references to theological works in that language may be unusually prominent. The reader is also kindly asked to remember that a paper on "The Wrath of God in the Old Testament" preceded this presentation and that it was followed by a paper on "The Grace of God in the New Testament."

THE above topic asserts that the Old Testament does not only proclaim a God of wrath, but also makes known a gracious God. Man exists and can endure God's presence only because God's wrath does not annihilate him. "For all mankind is under the condemnation of God's wrath, as we have seen, by virtue of its sin and guilt, which God brings to light from every hiding place of secrecy (Ps. 90:7-9). For the wrath of God must always be viewed as having its final cause in sin as a violation of His holiness even when man is not conscious of his sin. The wrath of God brings about the destruction of every man because holiness and sin are incompatible."¹ Without any claim to exist, man has no other alternative but to plead mercy and to say: "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure" (Ps. 6:2).

I. GRACE AS THE "REVERSAL" OF THE WRATH OF GOD

It has been said that the grace of God is the reverse or opposite quality of the wrath of God. However, we must beware of creating the impression as if the wrath and the grace of God were merely the two sides of a sheet, the one black, the other white, and that it is merely a matter of determining which side of the sheet is turned to man at a given moment of time.

On the other hand the tension between these two attributes of God must not be brought to such a point of conflict that the holiness of God is in any way diminished or abrogated, or vice versa. When God is gracious, His holiness does not suffer any

imperfection. This is indeed the concept of the deity that is found in all other religions of antiquity, and of modern times as well, that the attributes of holiness and goodness are so combined that either the holiness or the goodness suffers a compromise, the one attribute negating the other, at least partially. But Yahweh is and remains holy—perfect in holiness, also when He is gracious. Hence Marcion misrepresents God when he says that if God actually were Love, then it would be impossible for Him to give way to wrath. The Old Testament declares unhesitatingly and unreservedly that God is holy *and* gracious. In the pronouncement and the execution of His wrath He still remains a gracious God, and in the proclamation of His grace He is and remains a holy God. In the heathen religions of Israel's environment eternal envy and enmity exists between man and the deity, at least with some gods of their pantheon. In the Old Testament we find a God whose wrath is described in the most drastic terms, but also a God in whom mercy and goodness are endless.

In this connection those passages of the Old Testament are pertinent which seem to speak of a conflict in God between His wrath and His goodness as if these two attributes were wrestling for supremacy to determine His course of action. "If, e. g., Deutero-Isaiah permits us to view the struggle between the wrath and the compassion in the heart of God, then we are not looking into the heart of a tyrant who dispenses wrath and mercy arbitrarily, but we see how *chesedh* (mercy) and *rachamim* (compassion) exercise restraint on His overwhelming wrath and how compassion finally gains the upper hand."² So Is. 54:7, 8: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer." The grace of God overcomes His wrath—so God must put it if we finite beings are to understand that we can draw near to Him in spite of our rebellion against Him. But it is not for us to make the relationship of holiness and mercy in God's nature a problem for philosophic or logical solution. We are not required, nor would we be able, to know the absolute God; we are being informed that we have been saved from an overwhelming wrath which must destroy us because of our sin.

Hence God's deeds of mercy are often derived from His holiness in the Old Testament or at least ascribed to the holy God. Since God's holiness is in the last analysis the perfection of His being, love and mercy cannot be excluded from a perfect and holy God. God is not merely the "*tremendum*" plus ethical perfection, but a perfection which also includes the component and characteristic trait of grace.³ Hence we should not be taken aback when we are told that man's deliverance and redemption also derives from the holiness of God. Thus especially again in Isaiah (chapters 40—66). This whole section is a protracted message of Gospel comfort, but the God who redeems and saves is consistently designated as the *Holy One of Israel*.⁴

But this is not a new doctrine invented by Isaiah or a so-called Deutero-Isaiah. It is the holiness of God which constitutes the basis for Israel's election of grace and her position as His chosen people: "And ye shall be holy unto Me; for I, the Lord, am holy and have severed you from other people that ye should be Mine" (Lev. 20:26).

This duality or polarity of wrath and grace in God finds expression furthermore in those passages of the Old Testament in which the visitations of His wrath are portrayed as designed to lead to repentance and a renewal of His gracious presence. We find this emphasis, e. g., in Hosea. When God withdraws His gracious presence from Israel, He awaits this result: "Afterward shall the Children of Israel return and seek the Lord, their God, and David, their King, and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days" (Hos. 3:5). His purpose in smiting Israel is that He wants the people to say: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up" (Hos. 6:1). Through His chastisement He will lead Israel to return to Him: "in their affliction they will seek Me early" (Hos. 5:15). The immutability of God can therefore not be equated with a human unalterable set of mind. When Israel, under the wrath of God "insomuch that He abhorred His own inheritance," returned to Him with a sincere cry of repentance, God "repented according to the multitude of His mercies." (Ps. 106:40-45; cf. Jer. 18:8.)

Even in the proclamation of a judgment that is irrevocably immi-

nent there can still be heard the call to repentance, in which hope for a deliverance from the judgment of wrath is still present. "God punishes, but He has a plan which projects beyond the punishment, for He will not give up His people"⁵ (Hos. 1:9, 10). In every stroke of adversity Israel is to hear a call to repentance. In Amos (chapter 4) the Prophet recalls God's various visitations upon recalcitrant Israel but laments the fact that they failed to produce the desired result: "yet have ye not returned unto Me" (v. 6).⁶

That the visitations of God's wrath are to effect a return to the Lord is evident also in God's dealing with the heathen. Jonah preached an irrevocable judgment of God's wrath: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4). When the Ninevites repented and God did not rain fire and brimstone on their city, Jonah was provoked because of God's vacillation: "Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish; for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, . . . and repentest Thee of the evil" (4:1). But God finds no contradiction in His treatment of the Ninevites: "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, . . . and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city?" (4:10, 11.)

The same tense relationship or polarity of wrath and grace can be found in those passages that speak of the duration of God's wrath.

In the first place we find that frequently, almost always, God does not pour His vials of wrath upon the transgressor instantaneously, in the very moment when he is in the act of sin or immediately after the deed is done. At times, it is true, retribution comes with the swiftness of lightning.⁷ On the other hand we find that God, as it were, puts restraint upon Himself. There is such a thing as an *'erekb 'appaim*, a lengthening of wrath, a postponing of wrath, A. V.: "long-suffering."⁸ By such hesitation on God's part the punishment is not eliminated entirely; this is apparent in the context of the same passages. But at times this long-suffering is stressed to the point where His justice seems to suffer. Hos. 11:9: "I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee; and I will not enter into the city." But He did destroy Israel in His wrath when His long-suffering had been exhausted.

Similarly, God's punitive holiness and His grace appear to be

opposing forces in determining how long a judgment of wrath is to continue once it has begun. Jeremiah asks: "Will He reserve His anger forever? Will He keep it to the end?" (3:5) and receives the answer: "I am merciful . . . and I will not keep anger forever" (3:12). Hence, even while enduring the visitation of God, the penitent may appeal to the mercy of God and say: "How long, Lord? Wilt Thou be angry forever? Shall Thy jealousy burn like fire?" (Ps. 79:5.)⁹ On the other hand the duration of God's wrath is not determined according to an automatic principle. His wrath also endures forever (Nah. 1:2). It endures "till the indignation be accomplished, for that that is determined shall be done" (Dan. 11:36). This is true particularly of the eschatological wrath of God.

Furthermore, the Old Testament records numerous instances in which the wrath of God gives way to His mercy because of the intercession of prayer. Moses pleads for Israel with the result: "And the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people" (Ex. 32:11-14).¹⁰ The Prophet Amos also intervenes for his people: "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech Thee," with the result: "The Lord repented for this. It shall not be, saith the Lord." (Amos 7:2, 3.)¹¹ Phinehas prevailed upon God in a similar way: He "hath turned My wrath away from the Children of Israel . . . that I consumed not the Children of Israel in My jealousy" (Num. 25:11). At times the intercessory prayer seems to effect at least a moderation of the punishment (Is. 64:8, 9; Jer. 10:24). However, here again the point may be reached when also the pleading of the pious is no longer able to succeed in turning God from wrath to mercy. Jeremiah pleads for his people but is told: "I will now remember their iniquity and visit their sins" (Jer. 14:10).¹² Even the intercession of such heroes of faith and prayer as Noah, Daniel, and Job cannot save Israel when it is ripe for judgment (Ezek. 14:14). Nothing and no one can prevail on God to temper justice with mercy: "Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity; and though they cry in Mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them" (Ezek. 8:18). Yes, the man of God is even forbidden to attempt to alter God's decree of wrath: "Pray not for this people for their good. . . . I will consume them by the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence" (Jer. 14:11, 12).

We can, therefore, sum up this brief discussion of the grace of God as the opposite or obverse of His wrath with this conclusion: When we speak of these two apparent irreconcilables, we must bear in mind that the God of wrath and the God of mercy is *one* God, not an axiomatic principle, but a person. What appears to be a wrestling of grace with His wrath for a balance of power also remains a mystery. In His relationship to man, God reveals Himself in His consuming wrath over sin and in His unfathomable grace and mercy for man condemned to death by this sin. Will the clay say to the potter: Does this make sense?

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT TERMS FOR GRACE

Since our topic is "The Grace of God in the Old Testament," it will prove helpful if we next examine those words by which the Old Testament expresses this attribute of God. In order to differentiate the thought pictures that lie behind these synonyms, we shall look at each individually and then treat some passages in which they are combined or are linked in parallel structure.

1. Mercy — *chesedh*

This term occurs most frequently in the Old Testament to denote God's gracious relationship to man. However, since in Old Testament usage it has a special connotation, its meaning is not easily rendered into English by one word such as mercy, kindness, grace, favor, goodness.

The LXX is not of sufficient help in arriving at the basic meaning of this term. The Greek translation uses *ἐλεος* almost without exception as the equivalent of this Hebrew word.¹³ The New Testament follows the usage of the LXX in rendering it with *ἐλεος*. It will be necessary, therefore, to move a little closer to the specific connotation of *chesedh* in the Old Testament and, above all, to place it into the framework of the Old Testament *Heilsgeschichte*, where it plays an important role.

The British scholar Snaith summarizes his study of this word by saying: "In all its varied shades of meaning *chesedh* is conditional upon there being a covenant. Without the prior existence of a covenant, there could never be any *chesedh* at all."¹⁴ Loft-house in a discussion of the synonyms *chen* and *chesedh* says:

"*Chesedh* is not used indiscriminately where any kind of favor is desired, but only where there is some recognized tie."¹⁵

The reciprocal relationship of a *chesedh*-obligation is the content of a *berith*, a covenant. David expects of Jonathan: "Therefore thou shalt deal kindly [*chesedh*] with thy servant," because he can add: "for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the Lord with thee" (1 Sam. 20:8). "To act from *chesedh* means to acknowledge a rightful claim upon this deed as set down in the terms of a covenant agreement; to demand *chesedh* means to appeal to someone's sense of obligation to what can rightfully or legally be expected of him. In doing *chesedh* one may give expression to love and kindness; but this is not necessarily the case, for the determining factor is not emotional, but rather external and objective. To reproduce the basic meaning of this word, therefore, it would perhaps be translated more accurately, in many instances, with faithfulness, *Bundestreue*."¹⁶

But since *chesedh* is experienced as an act of benevolence, as an act of grace, especially from those who are in higher stations of human society, it is also found in the context of gracious deliverance and is linked with terms denoting grace, as we shall point out a little later. And if it is true that in human relations the element of obligation may recede and *chesedh* gain the connotation of grace, then in God's dealing with men especially it takes on the meaning of grace and favor.

To be sure, God's *chesedh* also rests on a *berith*, a covenant in which He has freely bound Himself with obligations to man. In his prayer at the dedication of the Temple, Solomon said that the Lord keeps "covenant and mercy [*chesedh*] with His servants" (1 Kings 8:23).¹⁷ The believer can therefore appeal to the mercy of God because he knows that God "remembered for them His covenant and repented according to the multitude of His mercies [*chesedh*]" (Ps. 106:45).¹⁸

Man, on his part, is also expected to fulfill his covenant obligations. "Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the Lord, thy God, shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which He swore unto thy fathers" (Deut. 7:12).¹⁹ However, since man breaks the

covenant, but God remains faithful, the word *chesedh* takes on unmistakable coloring and meaning of something undeserved—of grace. Yes, inasmuch as man, having been unfaithful to God, has no claim to God's *chesedh* and yet hopes for it from God, it assumes the character of forgiving grace. "Pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of Thy mercy [*chesedh*] and as Thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now" (Num. 14:19). "Hence it transcends the Old Testament covenant concept of a mutual relationship of obligation and becomes filled with the meaning of universal, Messianic, eschatological salvation." "For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed; but My kindness [*chesedh*] shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Is. 54:10).²⁰

The adjective merciful (*chasidh*) is used in a similar meaning. Those who have covenanted with God and hence are aware of a mutual obligation of faithfulness are the *chasidhim*. "Gather My saints [*chasidhim*] together unto Me; those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice" (Ps. 50:5). Since they are in this covenant relationship to God, "He will speak peace unto His people and to His saints [*chasidhim*]" (Ps. 85:7). By parallelism they are bracketed with the upright: "The good man [*chasidh*] is perished out of the earth; and there is none upright among men" (Mic. 7:2). They are contrasted with the wicked: "He preserveth the souls of His saints [*chasidhim*]; He delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked" (Ps. 97:10). They are righteous: "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men [men of *chesedh*] are taken away" (Is. 57:1). Such a person can implore God and say: "Remember me, O God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds [my *chasidhim*]" (Neh. 13:14); for God delights in them: "For I desired mercy [*chesedh*] and not sacrifice (Hos. 6:6). Like the A. V. ("saint"), the LXX therefore usually translates the Hebrew adjective with *δσιος*.

In spite of the origin of *chesedh* in a covenant and its emphasis on the mutual obligations of such an agreement, the *chesedh* of God can in the final analysis only emanate from pure grace. For although *chesedh* and covenant are correlative terms and

belong together, the covenant itself could come into existence only because God was and is gracious; the covenant itself is an act of God's grace.

2. Grace — *chen*; LXX: χάρις.

While the previous word is based on a covenant relationship, *chen* denotes a universal and unlimited grace that cannot be demanded or earned. *Chesedh* involves something mutual and reciprocal; *chen* proceeds only from God in one direction. This is true of the verb: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious" (Ex. 33:19). The noun is never found with the article, occurs only once with the suffix, and is never used in the plural, in contrast to *chesedh*. Very frequently the noun is the object of the verbs "find" (*maza'*) or "give" (*nathan*). Although the verb as well as the noun also occurs to denote a relationship among men, the adjective (*chanun*) is only applied to God (thirteen times) and in every instance coupled with the root *racham* (compassion). *Chen*-words therefore always stress undeserved grace and favor, the unadulterated goodness and condescension of the donor who stands exalted far above the recipient of this grace. No one is justified in lodging a protest against him if he does not dispense *chen*.

3. Love — 'ababbah. LXX: ἀγάπη

Like *chen*, and in contrast to *chesedh*, the root 'ababb denotes "as love a spontaneous feeling that urges a giving of self. . . . Love is an unexplainable power of the soul residing in a person. . . . One loves with all of one's heart, soul, and might (Deut. 6:5) if one responds fully to the promptings of love."²¹

In the Old Testament usage, love is not restricted to persons as its object. People love, or are capable of loving, food (Gen. 27:4), sleep (Prov. 20:13), agriculture (2 Chron. 26:10), wisdom (Prov. 4:6), instruction (Prov. 12:1), the good (Amos 5:15), mercy (Micah 6:8), evil (Micah 3:2), etc. But usually it expresses a relationship to persons, the noun always and the verb in a ratio of 4 to 1.

In human relationships this root denotes the love between man and man (Ps. 109:4), the love to one's neighbor (Lev. 19:34), to a son (Gen. 22:2), to one's self (1 Sam. 20:17), sexual love (the Hebrew does not differentiate between ἀγάπη and ἔρως), the love

of the adulteress (Hos. 2:7, 9). Noteworthy is the fact that this word is not used to denote the love of a wife to her husband or that of children to their parents.²²

When we examine the use of this word to denote the relationship between God and man, we find that it occurs with equal frequency to express the love of God for man as vice versa.

The love of God manifests itself, above all, in the election of Israel to be His holy people. "I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau" (Mal. 1:2, 3). It was as the result of this unmotivated, unmerited, spontaneous love that the covenant came into existence. The *chesedh*-mercy has its origin in the *'ahabbah*-love. Only because God acted from this kind of love could a *chesedh* relationship be established in which God obligates Himself to be merciful and pledges eternal faithfulness. This connotation of preference and choice is also reflected in the "secular" use of this word. Rachel's pre-eminence over Leah in Jacob's affection is put thus: "I loved Rachel . . . and Leah was hated" (Gen. 29:30, 31).²³

Hence it is constantly dinned into the ears of God's chosen people that there was nothing in Israel that elicited God's love; no one in Israel should say: "For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me into this land" (Deut. 9:4, 5). Why did God love Israel? God gives two answers: "For Mine own sake," and "for My name's sake." (2 Kings 19:34; Ps. 106:8; etc.) This unmerited, wooing, seeking love of God is portrayed in such drastic, unabashed language in Ezekiel 16 that Western feeling of decency is inclined to become prudish.

"Hosea knows that legal contracts and provisions based on mutual rights cannot suffice to explain Yahweh's ties of obligation with His people when he portrays this God as a man wooing a worthless woman contrary to custom, every sense of propriety, and ordinary reason. 'Love a woman,' Hos. 3:1. Hosea is to love an adulteress, as Yahweh loves the sons of Israel—a love so strong and incomprehensible that it all but appears to be grotesque to sound human thinking. Hosea tears down the superstructure of the covenant theory in order that its foundation, God's love, might appear, and then he proceeds to erect the covenant anew in righteousness, judgment, mercy, and faithfulness, Hos. 2:9."²⁴ God's love chose His people; Israel did not choose God.

4. Compassion — *rachamim*

Another word group that occurs in the Old Testament to express the gracious attitude of God is derived from the root *racham*, variously translated in the Authorized Version with "to have compassion," "to have pity," "the bowels yearn for," etc. The noun usually appears in the plural. In contrast to *chesedh*, this word originally denotes the sensate feeling that we call emotion and hence approaches in this respect the connotation of the *'ababb* words (Gen. 43:30; 1 Kings 3:26; Prov. 12:10). Basically it means to know and feel one's self as a part of another. It is, above all, the feeling of the ties of affection of a father and a mother for their child, of brothers and spouses toward one another (Amos 1:11; Hos. 2:1, 2; Is. 63:15, 16). In the intensive form of the verb it denotes a feeling of "belonging to," and a consequent readiness to act in behalf of, another. Thus Is. 49:15: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee"; Jer. 31:20: "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him [*racham*], saith the Lord." Although this term can, therefore, very well be reproduced in English by "love," in many instances it has the overtones of pity and compassion, since it denotes an attitude that springs into action when the other is in dire straits of need. Because abstract thinking is foreign to the Hebrew, we find this term referring less to the emotion than to mercy and pity in action. Compassion is "done" (*'asab*), Zech. 7:9; God "gives" compassion (*nathan*), Deut. 13:17; He "extends" mercy (*sum*), Is. 47:6; one receives mercy "before" someone (1 Kings 8:50).

Finally God's compassion expresses itself in gracious forgiveness. "To the Lord, our God, belong mercies [*rachamim*] and forgiveness" (Dan. 9:9). Israel can rely on this pardon if it turns to God: "Let the wicked . . . return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him [*racham*]; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Is. 55:7). This compassion also becomes a part of the Messianic hope (Is. 14:1): "For the Lord will have mercy [*racham*] on Jacob and will yet choose Israel and set them in their

own land; and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob."

There are other terms that deserve consideration under the topic of the grace of God in the Old Testament, such as the word groups "good," "goodness," "to delight in," "take pleasure in," and others, but limitation of space demands restriction to those treated above.

However, it will prove profitable to review these basic terms also in some passages where they themselves are combined and linked with one another as synonyms and then to proceed to find them in close parallel combinations with other terms which either underscore their basic meaning or place these concepts of grace into a relationship with, and at times into apparent contradiction to, other attributes of God.

In many instances mercy and compassion are used as surrogates for one another, e. g., Ps. 69:16. Likewise grace and compassion are linked as parallel terms, e. g., Ps. 102:13. These combinations emphasize that the covenant mercy of God is an unmerited love and that His compassion is undeserved grace.

In addition, the word *chesedh* is found linked with other terms that shed additional meaning on this synonym for the grace of God. It appears forty-three times attached to another noun by the copula "and." In twenty-three of these passages it is combined with "faithfulness" (*'emunah*) or "truth" (*'emet*), both from the root *'amen*, to be firm, unmovable, and then in the transferred meaning: to persevere, remain steadfast, believe.²⁵ Ps. 89:24: "But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with Him; and in My name shall His horn be exalted." Ps. 25:10: "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." In seven other instances it is equated with "covenant," as in Deut. 7:12: "the Lord, thy God, shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which He sware unto thy fathers." God is also said to be the believer's Mercy (A. V.: Goodness) and Fortress (Ps. 144:2).

In all of these instances the thought of *chesedh* as covenant faithfulness comes to the fore again; God is firm and unmovable, He keeps His promises, promises of grace which He gave by oath

in His covenant. It was an act of grace that He made the covenant; His faithfulness to the covenant likewise exceeds every human requirement of contract and every human concept of constancy. Man need not hesitate to rely on His mercy because He never breaks faith. The believer can fasten himself on God's mercy and say: "Remember not the sins of my youth nor my transgressions; according to Thy mercy (*chesedh*) remember Thou me for Thy goodness' sake, O Lord" (Ps. 25:7). There is a compassionate, unchanging Helper and Deliverer whose grace is vouchsafed in His mercy, a mercy that no one should presume to demand, but which everyone can expect in faith.

In other instances the mercy of God is coupled with words which seem to vitiate the concept of a covenant of grace.

We have already pointed to the close relationship that exists between the grace and the holiness of God,²⁶ so that "the divine holiness does not only embrace the divine integrity of His being, but also a divine self-disclosure whereby God does not remain in Himself, but acts in His holiness thereby that He effects a segregation in the world for His purpose."²⁷ We might add here that God is designated as holy for the first time in the account of the deliverance of Israel from bondage and the establishment of the theocracy. When Moses speaks of the great deeds of God in Israel's behalf, he says: "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Ex. 15:11.) Isaiah, the evangelist of the Old Testament, as he has been called, finds nothing incongruous in ascribing gracious salvation to the Holy One of Israel. From the holy God issues His condescension to deliver helpless man: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Is. 57:15).

A still sharper antithesis seems to result as we establish that the Old Testament puts the mercy of God into very close equations with His righteousness or justice. Ps. 33:5, e. g., combines these attributes of God in a parallelism: "He loveth righteousness and judgment; the earth is full of the goodness [*chesedh*] of the Lord."

Is. 46:13 brackets righteousness and redemption: "I bring near My righteousness . . . and My salvation shall not tarry." Thus we find also that "in the Psalms the poets often rely on the righteousness of God when they expect help, or the Prophets say that God does or will do something in righteousness, which in reality is an act of grace."²⁸ If, however, God's mercy is not by desert or merit, then grace and righteousness should be mutually exclusive.

We cannot examine the concept of righteousness in the Old Testament at any length in this article. The Catholic Old Testament scholar Heinisch defines it thus: "Correspondence to a given norm is the essence of justice in common parlance. In the Old Testament, however, justice (*tsedeq*, *tsedaqab*) almost always implied some action. We arrive closest to the concept which the Old Testament writers had of divine justice if we consider it as God's will accomplishing all the requirements of the moral order, i. e., blessing those who subject themselves to His will and punishing those who oppose Him. In other words, God's justice (or better: justness) consists in rendering to each one his due according to his thoughts, words, and deeds, be they good or bad."²⁹ This does not mean that the sinner, even when he repents, is entitled to demand acceptance by God on the basis of a legal right, but he may and can believe that God is straight, upright, true to the ethical requirements of faithfulness and hence can rejoice in God's righteousness which will prevail in the carrying out of His promises of grace. Thus Luther actually translated the Hebrew word *tsedaqab* with grace in Micah 7:9: "Er wird mich ans Licht bringen, dass ich meine Lust an seiner Gnade sehe."

In his *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Eduard Koenig finds these two aspects of the righteousness of God. There is first the righteousness which "functions in the upholding of His demands. This is the punitive righteousness of God. It expresses itself in His zeal (*qinah*) according to which He is a jealous God." There is also "a righteousness of God which becomes apparent in the realization of the promises given on each level of the covenant relationship. . . . It is to this second phase of the righteousness of God that the pious of the Old Testament appealed when they designate righteousness as a source of their salvation."³⁰ Hence the covenant, as an instrument of demand and promise, unites the

apparent opposite poles of righteousness and grace, and we praise Him from whom they proceed:

*"Righteous is the Lord in all His ways;
Merciful [A. V.: holy] in all His works" (Ps. 145:17)*

(To be concluded)

NOTES

¹ Otto Proksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1950), p. 644.

² Gerhard Kittel, *Theologisches Woerterbuch zum N. T.*, p. 410, s. v. ὀργή. This article also refers to the grace of God as the "Kehrseite" of His wrath.

³ The holiness in its relation to the wrath of God was discussed at greater length in the first paper, "The Wrath of God in the Old Testament." For a good presentation of the holiness of God as His transcendence over all created things, see the article by Dr. Theo. Laetsch in Synodical Conference Report of 1940.

⁴ This designation for God occurs thirteen times in these chapters.

⁵ Otto Weber, *Bibelkunde des A. T.* (Furche Verlag, 1947), II, p. 131.

⁶ The same refrain, "yet have ye not returned unto Me," is found in the same connection in verses 8, 9, 10, 11 of this chapter of Amos.

⁷ Cf. Ex. 19:12; Num. 11:33; 2 Sam. 6:7; etc.

⁸ Cf., e. g., Ex. 34:6; Nah. 1:3; Num. 14:18; Is. 48:9.

⁹ Cf. also Zech. 1:12; Ps. 85:5; 89:47.

¹⁰ Again in Num. 11:18-20. Moses also reminds Israel of his successful intercession in its behalf in Deut. 9:19 ff.

¹¹ Likewise Amos 7:5, 6.

¹² Cf. also Amos 7:8; 8:2.

¹³ About 170 times. On the other hand, ἔλεος is also used six times to translate *rachamim*, and the verb ἐλεεῖν appears regularly as the equivalent of the verbs *chanan* and *racham*.

¹⁴ Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Westminster Press, 1946), p. 119. In this section I am heavily indebted to this author as well as to Kittel's *Woerterbuch*, especially for the compilations on the frequency of occurrence of these synonyms.

¹⁵ W. F. Lofthouse, *Zeitschrift fuer die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1933, p. 33.

¹⁶ Kittel, *op. cit.*, s. v. δίκη, p. 177.

¹⁷ Cf. also Is. 55:3; Ps. 89:49.

¹⁸ Cf. Ps. 6:4; 119:149; 143:12; Neh. 13:22; 2 Chron. 6:42.

¹⁹ Cf. Ex. 20:5 f.; Ps. 103:11; 1 Kings 8:23; Hos. 10:12; etc.

²⁰ Kittel, *op. cit.*, s. v. ἔλεος, p. 477.

²¹ *Ibidem*, s. v. ἀγαπάω, p. 21 f.

²² It is used only in one instance to denote the feeling of attachment of a woman for a man, that of Michal for David (1 Sam. 18:20, 28).

²³ As God's unmotivated love in the election of Israel, 'ababbab approaches the meaning of the verb *yada'*, to know. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). To know in Hebrew is not merely an

intellectual knowledge or a mental awareness, but also a knowing "*cum affectu*," which prompts to action. This explains its use to denote a man's relationship to his wife in marital union: "Adam knew his wife."

²⁴ Kittel, *op. cit.*, s. v. ἀγαπάω.

²⁵ The LXX renders "*emeth* with ἀλήθεια (A. V.: "truth"). That the Greek concept of truth as an abstraction or a system of thought is foreign to the Hebrew word is evident from those passages that speak of doing ('*asab*) *chesedh* and '*emeth*: Gen. 24:49; 47:29; Joshua 2:14; 2 Sam. 2:6; 15:20.

²⁶ Cf. p. 897.

²⁷ Gust. Fr. Oehler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1882, p. 161.

²⁸ Heinr. Andr. Christ. Haevernick, *Vorlesungen ueber die Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1848, p. 58.

²⁹ Paul Heinisch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1940, English Edition by William Heidt, 1950, p. 90.

³⁰ Eduard Koenig, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1922, p. 190 f.

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