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Salvation by Grace: The Heart of Job's Theology

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CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

Salvation by Grace: The Heart of Job's Theology

ALFRED VON ROHR SAUER

The Church in Community Organization

MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN

Homiletics

Brief Studies

Theological Observer

Book Review

Vol. XXXVII

May 1966

No. 5

SHARED TIME:

threat or
promise?

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when church
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Salvation by Grace: The Heart of Job's Theology

ALFRED VON ROHR SAUER

FEARING GOD FOR NOTHING

God desires that anyone who fears Him and serves Him should do that gratis, for nothing. Serving God for nothing, fearing God for nothing—that is the theme that runs through the Book of Job. In the prologue (Chs. 1–2) the author states that Job was a man who feared God and eschewed evil. The Lord also told Satan in the prologue that His servant Job was a man who feared God and shunned wickedness. So Job was considered a pious, God-fearing man; there was no question about that, even Satan conceded that point. The question, however, was this: What was the basis for Job's piety? What was the motive behind his fear of the Lord? Satan challenged the view that Job's piety was a free gift to the Lord. He asked, "Has Job feared God for nothing?" (1:9). He contended that Job feared God for a price, for a consideration, that he was pious merely because the Lord had blessed him so richly, that his piety would vanish like a vapor if the Lord's blessings were withdrawn.

The Lord took up the challenge and authorized Satan to test Job's piety. First Satan was permitted to take away all that Job had. In quick succession messengers came to report to Job that he had lost everything: his servants, his flocks, his camels—even his dear children had been taken away from him. Did this stroke of

misfortune move Job to stop fearing the Lord? Did it reveal a false motive behind his fear of the Lord? Not at all! When Job heard the report of this great loss, he worshiped and said: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21). Job still feared the Lord. He still feared the Lord *for nothing*.

Then the Lord gave Satan the authority to test Job further, namely, by afflicting him with a very loathsome disease, possibly leprosy. Job sat in an ash-heap, covered with scabs from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, and he used a potsherd to scrape himself. Did this affliction reveal the fact that Job was serving God for selfish reasons? Not at all! Job's wife indeed succumbed to selfish motives when she suggested that Job curse God and die. But not so Job! He told his wife, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (2:10). The fact that in the midst of his suffering Job did not sin with his lips indicates that he still feared the Lord, that he still feared the Lord for nothing. Thus the prologue answers the question of Satan affirmatively. It presents Job as a man who feared the Lord without expecting any gain or profit from such a response.

While the reader is told in the prologue that the Lord was testing Job, Job himself

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was not informed of this. Neither were Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, aware of the fact that Job's piety was being put to the test. Therefore for 28 chapters (4—31) Job and his three friends debated about the motivation for Job's piety. Nine speeches were made by the three friends, and nine times Job spoke up in answer to them. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar agreed in their charges that Job was being chastised because he was guilty. Job maintained that he was innocent.

Elihu was probably present throughout the debate but held his peace because of his youthfulness. Finally, however, he also presented his views (32—37). He chided Job because of his complacency. He chided Job's friends because the alternative that they proposed was also wrong. He called Job to repentance by making his transgression known to him. Thus he prepared the way for Job's interview with the Lord.

The Lord spoke to Job in Chapters 38—41. He reminded him of his puny stature over against God. He put him in his creaturely place by asking, "Will the faultfinder argue with the Almighty? Will you make Me guilty that you may be innocent?" (40:2, 8)

The Hebrew word that means "for nothing" is *chinnam*, closely related to the word *chen*, meaning grace. So "fearing God for nothing" means relying solely on His grace. With a clear conscience Paul could testify, "I know nothing against myself," that is, "I am conscious of no deliberate sin" (1 Cor. 4:4). That was also the viewpoint of Job. But Job had to learn to say with Paul, "Yet am I not hereby justified."¹

¹ Wilhelm Moeller and Hans Moeller, *Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments in heilsgeschichtlicher Entwicklung* (Zwickau, Sachsen: Johannes Herrmann, n. d.), p. 458.

This he finally learned from Elihu and the Lord, whose speeches stressed the Biblical truth that justification must come from God.

In the following paragraphs the treatment of the theme of salvation by grace is divided into three general headings. I. Desperate man needs the mediation of an umpire. II. Mortal man needs the vision of immortality. III. Complacent man needs the summons to repentance.

I. DESPERATE MAN NEEDS THE MEDIATION OF AN UMPIRE

The Book of Job has some extraordinary things to say about the greatness of man. It extols his achievements in the technical field, especially in the area of construction and engineering. Job's friend Zophar devotes one of his speeches in Chapter 28 to this subject. He observes that man is able to put an end to darkness (v. 3). One need but look at any main street in America on a given Friday or Saturday evening to see what modern electrical engineers have done to demonstrate the truth of Zophar's words. The ancient sage recognizes man's resourcefulness in opening shafts in a valley away from where men live (v. 4). The efficient mining engineer contributes to the march of progress by bringing the natural resources of the earth to the surface for man's use. Zophar sees man overturning mountains by the roots (v. 9). The latest 20th-century turnpikes and freeways bear witness to man's ability to cut through mountains and to produce a remarkably smooth path for transportation. By no means the least among man's accomplishments is his binding up of streams so that they do not trickle (v. 11). The great contemporary dam building projects that provide flood control, electrical

power, and recreational possibilities illustrate in a remarkable way how right the ancient philosopher was in his eulogy of man. From the perspective of the space age, Zophar's Biblical panorama might be extended to include such recent achievements as nuclear fission and fusion, the orbiting of satellites around the earth, and the projected trip to the moon.

Man's opportunities for achievement and greatness are indeed legion. And yet, as Zophar must lament that man is unable to find the way to true wisdom, that God alone understands the way to it and knows its place (vv. 12, 13, 23). Men advance so rapidly with their technical abilities that their sense of ethical and moral values cannot keep up with them. This is evident in the persistent struggle for political power and commercial advantage, in the perennial slaughter on the highways, in the frustrations and tensions that tend to undermine people's mental well-being. The main area, however, in which man's lack of true wisdom becomes evident is in the area of spiritual anxiety, uncertainty, and doubt.

Portrait of a Doubter

For a look at a man who is tormented by severe internal crisis and acute spiritual strain one turns to Chapter 6. There Job draws the self-portrait of a doubter. On his face there is a look of intense suffering caused by an apparent conflict between his will and the will of God. But there is also an expression of sincerity, of reluctance to question or deny the truth of God. In addition there is a measure of patience and forbearance in this doubter's look; he is willing to bide the time and await a satisfactory solution to his problem. The discerning eye will even see in

the doubter a spark of faith, a flame which, although it may be glimmering, is still not spent. Above all, there is in the questioning look of the doubter a plea for kindness, for brotherly concern on the part of those who are close to him.

Job described himself as such a man, about to dissolve and to collapse spiritually, practically on the verge of forsaking the fear of the Almighty (6:14). Certainly there have been such doubts and doubters ever since people on earth believed. Do not most of us at times belong in that category of double-souled people who trust in God and yet do not trust? While Job acknowledged his doubts, he rebuked his friend Eliphaz for not helping him overcome them. His comment in 6:14 has been translated in three different ways, and each of these translations throws light on the subject of the doubter.² According to the American Translation Job says

To him who is faint there should be kindness from his friend, though he forsake the fear of the Almighty.³

This would be a confession on the part of Job that his faith was ready to collapse. Yet Job argues that even such an imminent collapse does not justify his friend's turning against him; rather it should move the friend to be kind to the doubter. The translation of Moffatt, equally plausible, suggests that where there is not yet a spiritual collapse in a person failure to be kind to him may drive him to such a crisis. Job says

² Samuel Terrien, "The Book of Job, Introduction and Exegesis," *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, III (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1954), 955-956.

³ J. M. Powis Smith and Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Bible, an American Translation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1935), Job 6:14.

Friends should be kind to a despairing man, or he will give up faith in the Almighty.⁴

The most shocking consequences of the failure to show kindness to a faltering friend are brought out in the Revised Standard Version. Job states boldly and challengingly:

He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.⁵

Not the man who is in need of kindness, but rather the one who fails to show kindness really makes himself reprehensible. Job argues that despite his many challenges of God's justice there is a greater lack of true religion in Eliphaz than there is in himself because failure to love points to a lack of faith.

Such doubts and concerns were not only expressed by Job, they were also hinted at in the speeches of his friends. Bildad despaired of man's ability to find righteousness before God. He observed that even the moon is not right and the stars are unclean in God's sight. How much less then can man presume to be righteous who is a mere maggot and a worm (25:4-6). Similar perplexity was voiced by Eliphaz. He did not expect mortal man to be pure in the sight of God. If the Lord charges even his angels with error, how much more must He find flaws and weaknesses in those who dwell in houses of clay? (4:17-19). If God cannot put trust even in His holy ones, and if even the heavens are unclean in His sight, how much less

worthy must man be, who is abominable and corrupt! (15:15-16)

God Is Not a Man

That Job's doubts had to do with his status in the sight of God is indicated by the question that he put in Chapter 9, "How can a man be just before God?" (9:2). He was desperate because he feared it was hopeless to achieve righteousness in the sight of God. The only answer to the question that he knew was, "If one wished to contend with Him, one could not answer Him once in a thousand times" (9:3). There was no chance of standing before God.

Later on in the same chapter he said to God, "If I wash myself with snow and cleanse my hands with lye, yet Thou wilt plunge me into a pit" (9:30-31). There seemed to be no possibility of reaching an understanding with God. Job could only lament, "For He is not a man, as I am, that I might answer Him, that we should come to trial together" (9:32). God is not a man like me. Would that He were! ⁶ At least, "Would that there were an umpire between us, who might lay his hand upon us both" (9:33). He longed for a person other than God and other than man who could put his hands on the shoulders of both and bring them together. He was thinking of an extraordinary referee with power to act, to whom this matter between God and himself might be referred. He had in mind a third party, a middleman, who might be called on to intervene and to bring about a solution.

Like the psalmist (32:4), Job had the feeling that God was standing over him with a club to smite him in His wrath.

⁴ James Moffatt, *A New Translation of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1935), Job 6:14.

⁵ *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1952), Job 6:14.

⁶ Terrien, pp. 984-985.

At the same time he hoped that the remarkable umpire would do something about that punishing rod of God. "Let him [the umpire] take His [God's] club away from me, and let not dread of Him [God] terrify me (9:34). Thus the doubter asked that the umpire might remove the fearful punishment with which God was afflicting him and that the dread of God might no longer terrify him. If the prayer were granted, he would be at liberty to talk without being afraid of God, to approach the Lord's mercy seat like an intercessor in his own right and plead his cause. All of that would be accomplished, if the need of an umpire were fulfilled, but it took an umpire. Job conceded, "I am not so in myself!" I am not in a position to do this by myself, I cannot attain to such freedom alone. (9:35)

"Do it yourself" people can still learn something from Job about the attainment of righteousness. They need to be shoved into the ditch of despair by the Lord in order to show them that they cannot wash themselves with snow. They must be warned that they cannot approach a God who is not man in order to contend with Him. Only then will they be able to appreciate the great miracle that took place when God *did* become man. In the Incarnation the divine Christ *did* appear as man's Umpire, his Middleman, his Mediator. The Referee, Jesus Christ, laid His one hand on God's shoulder and His other hand on man's shoulder and brought them together. He removed the rod of God's just wrath from man by deflecting it and making its deadly strokes fall on Himself. He opened the way for man to approach God and address Him without fear.

That the plea for an umpire was no mere passing fancy on Job's part but rather

a confident hope may be indicated by another discourse in Chapter 16. There he may have the same middleman in mind, even though he calls him by another name, "Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he that vouches for me is on high . . . and he will maintain the right of a man with God, like that of a man with his neighbor" (16:19,21). The doubter is certain that there is a celestial figure other than God who testifies for him in God's presence, who comes to the defense of his honor and must ultimately vindicate him. The heavenly witness is able to maintain Job's right with God, because he is in a position to speak to God the way one neighbor chats with another, over the fence in the backyard, as it were.

One in a Thousand

Job's desire for an umpire and his confident assertion concerning a witness may be echoed in a word of counsel that young Elihu offered in Chapter 33. He called Job's attention to a person—was it the same one whom Job had mentioned earlier? He called this person an interpreter, an explainer (v.23).⁷ What was this remarkable figure to interpret or explain? Two things! First, he was to explain to man what is right for him in the sight of God. Secondly, he was to interpret to God how frail and impotent man is. The double explanation was necessary because man in his creaturely state could not fulfill the will of God and because God in His grace needed to be involved to come to the help of frail man. He was an interpreter, then, of judgment and mercy, of sin and grace, of Law and Gospel. Small wonder that in the Targum this Hebrew

⁷ Ibid., pp. 1137—1138.

word for interpreter or explainer is rendered by the Aramaic transliteration of *parakletos*, meaning the Paraclete, or the Comforter, the word which the fourth Gospel uses to refer to the Holy Spirit.

But this singular interpreter did still more. He appeared before God on man's behalf and said that he had found a ransom for him, a price for his deliverance, a payment that would set him free. The precious ransom is not described further. Why not? Could it be that the interpreter offered himself as a sacrifice of expiation, that he was both the ransom and the ransomer? This becomes quite probable when one looks at the last of the names that are given to the interpreter. He is called "one among a thousand."

One among a thousand! What does that mean? A very simple explanation would be: He is one among the thousand angels whom God uses as His messengers to implement His will. But is that all? Is it not possible that one must probe much deeper? One among a thousand! That might conceivably mean: one out of a thousand, one set apart from a thousand, one for a thousand, one instead of a thousand, one on behalf of a thousand. That the substitutionary concept of one as a ransom for many is known to the Old Testament is evident. In the Fourth Servant Poem the one-for-a-thousand motif is spelled out in truly prophetic detail. It was the Servant of the Lord who bore his people's griefs and carried their sorrows. It was He who was wounded for their transgressions and bruised for their iniquities. It was He who bore the sin of many. (Is. 53:4-5, 12)

Who, when he hears these prophetic words, is not impelled to think of the one

Mediator between God and man, namely, the man Christ Jesus? In Him men of today have more than an angel to help them out of their despair. They have a divine Interpreter who reminds God how frail and impotent and feeble they are, who issues a fervent plea for their help and deliverance. They have a Ransomer who gave Himself as the price for their redemption. They have "one in a thousand" who emptied Himself into death on their behalf. Indeed they have a Lord who rose from the dead so that they might be accounted righteous.

II. MORTAL MAN NEEDS THE VISION OF IMMORTALITY

In his despair man needs the mediation of an umpire. But there is another area in which he is deficient. In his mortal state he needs the vision of immortality. Job felt thwarted and frustrated. He looked for God but could not find Him. He could not share the conviction of the psalmist that God was always available (46:1). In sheer disappointment he insisted that God should set up a schedule of office hours, "Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty, And why do those who know Him never see His days?" (24:1)

Job was not the only one for whom the office doors seemed locked. When the dying groaned, God did not hear; when the murderer waylaid the poor, God did not seem to care; when the godless waxed strong, God gave them life and security (24:12, 14, 22). With these others Job went forward, but God was not there; he went backward, but he could not see God (23:8). His attitude was in marked contrast to that of the psalmist who could not escape from God's presence, who was un-

comfortable because God knew when he sat down and arose, when he walked and lay down, because God was behind him and before him, so that even in heaven or in Sheol he could not escape from the Spirit's presence. (Ps. 139:1-8)

Job was sure that an injustice was being done to him and that he could not find God to have the injustice corrected. He was so discouraged over this dismal prospect that the thought of suicide rose up in his mind. He was unable to leave his times in God's hands, as the psalmist did (31:15); rather he threatened to take his life into his own hand (13:14). The well-known wording of the Authorized Version, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (13:15), is quite out of keeping with the context. It is better to read with the RSV: "Behold, He will slay me; I have no hope." Far from trusting the Lord at this point, Job was very much inclined to defy Him. He was convinced that if he let things take their course, God would slay him. He had no hope, and yet he was resolved to defend his ways to God's face. In drawing up his case he knew that he was innocent; he asked to be shown wherein he had transgressed and sinned. (13:18,23)

Shall the Dead Live?

But if God should take Job's life, or if Job should take his own life, what hope could there be for him in death? This question is taken up in Chapter 14. The opening words are the familiar lines of the committal service, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not" (vv. 1-2). When a tree is cut down, Job continues, there is hope that it will sprout

again and will keep on having shoots. Even though its roots become aged and its stump is dead in the earth, yet it will bud anew as soon as water touches it, and it will produce young branches again.

But how much less hopeful is the future of man? He dies and is cut off, he breathes his last and what happens to him? Just as the waters fail from the sea and the river decays and dries up, so man lies down without rising again. Till the heavens be no more there will be no awakening, nor will he be roused out of his sleep. It would be difficult indeed to find a more hopeless statement of the lot of mortal man than that in Job 14:7-12.

Yet in the next section of this chapter (vv. 13-15) a brilliant ray of immortality flashed through the midst of Job's pessimism. He expressed the fervent desire that God would hide him in Sheol, that somehow the Lord would conceal him there until His wrath passed, that God would make a definite appointment with him and ultimately remember him. "If a man die, shall he live again?" Job would be happy and willing to wait out all the days of his suffering, until his final release would come. God would get lonesome for His creature and issue an urgent call, and Job would respond.

This hopeful prayer of Job in Chapter 14 takes its place with a number of other significant Old Testament passages in which a life after death is pointed to. The Isaiah apocalypse affirmed that God would destroy death forever (25:8) and that Israel's dead would live and her corpses would be revived (26:19). The Daniel apocalypse stated that many who were asleep in the dust of the earth would awake (12:2). A number of psalmists also point to the hope of immortality. It is possible to

suggest that at least two looked for a divine reception that would be comparable to the translation of Enoch (Ps. 49:15; 73:24; cf. Gen. 5:24). One expected to live in God's presence amidst pleasures that would abide forever (16:11); another pointed to a service of adoration in which those who go down to the dust would participate. (22:29)

The Living Redeemer

Job's hope of immortality would not be complete without a look at Chapter 19. This chapter with its well-known reference to the living redeemer is cherished by many as the greatest statement on the resurrection in the Old Testament. But even in the context of this resurrection credo Job was still caught in the web of his own self-righteousness. He argued that if it were true that he had erred, his error would be his business, not that of his friends (v.4). He charged that God had not only put him in the wrong but had closed His net about him and walled up his ways so that it was impossible for him to pass (vv.6-8). Because of God's judgment Job's brothers had been alienated from him, his relatives and intimate associates had failed him (vv.13-14). So he turned to his three friends as a last resort and begged them to have pity on him, because the hand of God was upon him. (v.21)

Almost abandoning hope for the present, Job wished that his words might be recorded, that his defense of his righteousness might be written in a book. But even a book might be easily destroyed, and so his thoughts would be lost to posterity. Therefore he wanted those words of defense engraved on a rock forever with an iron stylus, so that future generations might recognize his innocence. The words that

he wanted recorded were the noble credo concerning his living redeemer. In Terrien's translation the credo reads,⁸

25. But as for me, I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall arise at the latter day upon the dust;
26. And after I wake up, I shall stand up, and from within my flesh shall I see God;
27. Whom I, even I, shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; my reins are consumed with hope within me.

Whom did Job have in mind with this redeemer? He was not merely an avenger of Job's blood, nor the closest relative who was obliged to produce offspring for Job, nor one who had the first option on Job's estate. Rather the redeemer was one who would come to the defense of downtrodden Job and deliver him. Such a redeemer would appear in the latter day on Job's grave. Job hoped that, following his death and burial, he would wake up, stand up, and see God. He would do that from within his own flesh, that is, in the flesh that would be revitalized after his death.

It is significant that in this text Job did not look forward to being vindicated, to being declared just and righteous, rather he was satisfied just to be brought into the presence of God. The vision of God was of such importance to him that he added with emphasis: It would be he, even he, and not another, who was going to behold the face of God. Terrien put Job's conviction this way,

From within my flesh, as a concrete, vital, substantial, responsible, fully characterized person, I shall see God. Not as a disin-

⁸ Samuel Terrien, *Job: Poet of Existence* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1957), p. 144.

carnate, disembodied entity, but I, even I, my total self.⁹

Like the poet in the Great Nevertheless, Job was satisfied that seeing God was all that he wanted:

Nevertheless I am continually with thee . . . afterward thou wilt receive me to glory. If I only have thee, I ask for nothing in heaven or on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:23-26)

If it is maintained that Luther found more in the opening portion of this text than the above translation includes, it must be added that he appears to have followed one of the versions. Luther had Job say,

Afterward he will awaken me out of the earth, and then I shall be enclosed within this skin of mine. (vv. 25b-26a)

Close scrutiny of the original and the versions suggests that Luther probably followed Jerome's Vulgate in this reading rather than the original Hebrew. While this text clearly points to Job's seeing God in his body and after his death, care should be taken not to read more into the text than is there. On the other hand, there appears to be good reason for linking the redeemer of Chapter 19 with the umpire of Chapter 9, the witness of Chapter 16 and the interpreter of Chapter 33.

III. COMPLACENT MAN NEEDS THE SUMMONS TO REPENTANCE

The lofty expressions of faith discussed thus far show that Job was given insights which are found only rarely on the pages of the Old Testament. And yet despite these noble assertions Job continued to be a very complacent fellow. He was so sat-

isfied with himself that his young friend Elihu had to chide him for this attitude; and Elihu was in a very advantageous position to do this. His speeches in the book of Job have been compared to a gradual that leads over to the theophany in the whirlwind. The effect of his words has been described as bringing the worshiper to the very threshold of the holy of holies. If the three friends of Job followed in the train of Amos and John the Baptist in preaching repentance, Elihu takes his place beside Hosea and Jesus in stressing the magnitude of God's grace.

The name Elihu means "*He is my God.*" That is grace. The psalmist could exhort his reader to know that the Lord *is God* and base his plea on the Lord's creative omnipotence (100:3). The prophet could stress that the Lord *is God* and that beside Him there is none other and thus glorify God's exclusiveness and uniqueness (Is. 43:10-11; 44:6). But the name Elihu suggests a possessiveness that can be explained only in terms of divine love and mercy: *As God He is mine.*

Elihu was a spokesman of grace. Yet the statement is made of him four times that his wrath was kindled (32:2-5). That may suggest another question: Can the wrath of a gracious God be aroused? Does the gracious God become angry? The Biblical answer is a most emphatic affirmative. Elihu's wrath was kindled because Job had justified himself rather than God. Job had claimed that he was innocent, that God had taken away his rights even though he was without transgression (34:5-6). Therefore Elihu was moved to say that he did not know another man like Job who drank up scoffing like water and who said it profited a man nothing that he should take delight in God (34:7-9). In his ar-

⁹ Ibid., pp. 152—153.

gument that there was nothing to be gained by doing the Lord's will, that in fact the wicked were better off than the righteous, Job had appealed to the wisdom of those who traveled the roads, the international wise men (21:29). They recognized that the wicked are spared in the time of trouble (21:30), that the wicked reach a ripe old age and grow mighty in power (21:7), that it is a rare case indeed when the lamp of the wicked is put out. (21:17)

Tried to the Limit

But Elihu had an answer to the problem of theodicy. He reminded Job and his other friends that it was far from God to do wickedness or wrong (34:10). Actually God was the giver and preserver of life. If He were to take back His spirit and gather His breath to Himself, then all men would perish and return to the dust (34:14-15). Other sages in Israel would agree with Elihu that Job was speaking without knowledge. Because of his stupid comments Job deserved to be tried to the limit. God ought to fill his cup of chastisement to overflowing, because his answers were like those of the wicked, because he heaped rebellion upon his sin, because he clenched his fists at his friends and increased his charges against his Creator. (34:34-37)

With another thrust at Job's complacency, Elihu asked him if it was just and fair to claim that he was right before God. By asking, "What advantage have I? How am I better off than if I had sinned?" Job demonstrated that he did not fear God for nothing, that all of his piety was really based on the benefit that would accrue to him through it (35:1-3). Therefore Elihu shifted the accent and rephrased the question. Did Job think that by multiplying his transgressions he took anything from God

or that by being righteous he gave anything to God (35:4-7)? No, he took or gave nothing, all of his charges amounted to empty talk; therefore God did not listen to him.

Nevertheless Elihu did have something more to say to Job on behalf of God (36:2). God was not wont to withhold His interest and concern from the righteous, rather He used chastisement in order to move people to repentance, He showed them their unworthiness and summoned them to turn from their wicked ways (36:7-10). If people listened and obeyed Him, they would live out their time in peace and well-being, but if they failed to observe His precepts, they would be bound to die by the sword. Therefore Job should be careful lest his anger turn him into a scoffer: "Be careful that you turn not to wrong; because for this you were tried by suffering." (36:21 American Translation)

Elihu urged Job not to criticize God, but rather to extol His work (36:24). Surely the works of God were beyond human comprehension, how then did Job dare to challenge Him? He who controlled the whirlwind and produced ice with His breath, who balanced the clouds and spread out the skies, was He not worthy of the reverence and homage of men? Not a complacent challenge, then, but humble submission ought to characterize Job's response to his Creator. (37:24)

People today are inclined to cling to a program of anthropodicy rather than to a program of theodicy, and to do it just as tenaciously as Job did. It is only natural to try to justify oneself rather than God, to take personal credit for the success of an important undertaking. It is quite human to expect that God is going to keep a record of man's performance and then

reward him in terms of what he has achieved. On the other hand, who can say that he has not been terribly disheartened at times, so frustrated in fact that he is ready to say with Job: "It profits a man nothing that he should take delight in God." "How am I better off than if I had sinned?" (34:9; 35:3)

When even the godly are tempted to motivate their piety by the hope of benefit or advantage, the wrath of God is rightfully aroused to bring such men to repentance. The gainful motive becomes a kind of golden calf that makes God just as angry as the idolatry of the Israelites at Sinai did. Thus man in his complacency needs the vision of the whirlwind today as much as ancient Job did.

Out of the Whirlwind

Job 38 and 39 present a review of the divine work of creation that is comparable to such other creation chapters in Scripture as Genesis 1, Genesis 2, and Psalm 104. These two chapters propose to show the great distance that separates the Creator from His creature. It is their aim to point out to Job his puniness and creatureliness in the sight of God. Job had been putting questions to his Creator with an air of arrogance and defiance. Such a challenging attitude called forth the theophany in the whirlwind as a sort of divine shock treatment. The tornado or cyclone was the symbol of destructive power (1 Kings 19:11-12). From this figure Job was to conclude that the Lord could dispose of him as easily as a whirlwind whisks away a house, a tree, or an individual.

In a withering cross-examination the voice of the Lord asked, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will

question you, and you shall declare to me" (38:2-3). By his questions Job had really confused the issue. In naive self-pity he had acted quite like a child. Therefore he was required to acquit himself like a real man, to submit to a reversal in this encounter and to be questioned rather than do the questioning. In verbal blasts that issued forth like bursts from a machine gun God said:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth . . . when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (38:4,7). Who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth from the womb . . . and prescribed bounds for it . . . and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?" (38:8, 10, 11)

The Lord's creation review continued. He asked Job whether he could presume to have charge of the interchange of day and night, whether he knew the secret of life and death, whether he had been to the place where the rain and the snow came from (38:12, 17, 22). Did Job's influence extend to the starry heavens, could he bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion, was it in his power to send forth lightnings that they might go and carry out his will (38:31, 35)? What about the secrets of the animal world? Did Job know when the mountain goats brought forth their young, was he aware of the number of months it took for them to produce their offspring, had he been able to make the wild ox serve him and to spend the night at his crib (39:1, 2, 9)? Did Job dare to claim that it was he who gave the horse his power and who enabled the hawk to soar to the heights of heaven (39:19, 26)? Summarizing the first phase of His indict-

ment, the Lord insisted that such a human faultfinder had no right to contend with the Almighty, that he who argued with God had better answer for it. (40:1-2)

At this point a definite break became apparent in the complacency of Job. His response was couched in subdued terms. He had to concede that he had no answer to give to the Lord, because he was of such small account. There was no alternative but to lay his hand on his mouth and to pledge himself to silence. (40:3-5)

Do You Condemn Me?

But the Lord had still more to say to Job. For the second time He charged him to deport himself like a man and submit to additional questioning. He asked: "Will you even put Me in the wrong? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?" (40:8). Job's claim of innocence really amounted to a declaration of God's guilt. That was a serious offense of the creature against his Creator. To counter this claim the Lord drew a unique comparison. He pointed to two of the most powerful creatures that He had made, the hippopotamus and the crocodile. As the first of God's works the ancient "river horse" was characterized by the great strength of his loins. He was so powerful that it was difficult for men to take him with hooks or to pierce his nose with a snare (40:16, 19, 24). The crocodile, too, was a beast of prodigious energy. One would not think of playing with him as a bird or of putting him on a leash as a pet for one's daughters. Laying hands on him would produce a struggle that one would not want to repeat (41:5, 8). If God could produce two beasts so formidable that man could not restrain them, how could any man

stand before Him? If he was the Sovereign of the entire universe, how could any man dare to say that the Lord was under any obligation to him? (41:10-11)

Once more Job had to admit that his smugness had been exposed by the Lord's questioning. As a creature he conceded that the Creator was all-powerful and that His will and purpose could not be brought to nought (42:1-2). The doubter granted that he made statements that were beyond his theological depth, that were too abstruse for him to comprehend. What he had known of God previously had come to him by the hearing of the ear, through hearsay, through indirect reports from others. But the vision of the whirlwind gave him a new insight. He beheld the Lord with his own eyes and was moved to despise himself and to repent in dust and ashes. (42:5-6)

How can man be just before God? Does he still insist on the quality of his own performance? Does he still hold that in this or that area of faith and life God is in the wrong and he is in the right? If he does, God may well be justified in striking him in a whirlwind of judgment. God's wrath may visit him with destruction such as only the atomic age and its lightninglike missiles are capable of. Therefore it behooves man to heed God's warning and to repent in dust and ashes. No one is more righteous than Job was. No one can answer God once in a thousand. But there was one Umpire-Interpreter in a thousand who did provide the answer for man, namely, God's own Witness, Jesus Christ. To Him, then, let all men turn in faith as Job did of old and accept His priceless gift of righteousness in the sight of God!

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