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Biblical Scholar and Theologian Henry Wheeler Robinson

WE ARE CELEBRATING the centenary of the birth of a great man and a great scholar and I feel honoured that I have been asked to be your spokesman on this auspicious occasion, charged to pay tribute to one whose name is indelibly inscribed in the tradition of this college*. It is not of his achievements as principal that I am to speak; there must be many here in a much better position than I am to assess them. In that connection, so far as he or the present principal are concerned, all that I need say is: "Si monumentum requiris circumspecte." It is only those who were privileged to teach or study here who can testify to what it meant to be led or taught by such a man as Principal Wheeler Robinson. I have been brought in from outside from another country (though one indeed in which he studied and ministered for some time) and from another denomination to speak about his notable achievement as Biblical scholar and theologian.

In the past two generations in this country no denomination has done more in the field of Old Testament scholarship than the Baptist and I am glad to think that the great succession continues. There is little doubt that the man who is my theme today, if not the first in the field, had a good deal to do with bringing this about. Not only so. Throughout his career the emphasis he laid was on the ultimate reason why one ought to study the Old Testament at all. As in these past months I have been reviewing his literary output, I have been amazed at the range of his competence. When about forty years ago I first encountered him at meetings of the Society for Old Testament Study, he was one of that impressive band of senior Old Testament scholars whom younger men like myself looked up to with a wholesome measure of awe. It was some time before I realized that Wheeler Robinson, besides being a Biblical scholar, was equally distinguished in theology, while he moved easily in the field of church history as well and had indeed taught that subject for a number of years. He was also very much at home in the philosophical debates of his time. Indeed in my recent effort to assess the achievement of this remarkable man I have found myself paying a good deal of attention to the background, both theological and philosophical, against which his life's work has to be viewed and I shall have occasion to refer to that later. At this point I must express my indebtedness to the memoir by Dr.

*A lecture delivered at Regent's Park College, Oxford, on Tuesday, 8th February, 1972.

Ernest Payne from which I learned much that I could not otherwise have discovered for myself.

Wheeler Robinson was very much a man of his own time, sensitive to the wider movements of thought, in science as well as in the humanities, in an extremely interesting transition period. But, as I have read and reread and allowed his insights and convictions to impress themselves on my mind and, more than that, as I have compared them with those of other contemporary thinkers—there were great men in those days—I have come to think very strongly that my task is by no means the antiquarian one of reviving your interest for a little in a great figure of the past who is worthy of grateful remembrance for what he did for his day and generation. Of course in certain respects his work dates. No one escapes that fate. But much of what he says is by no means out of date. He has still many vital things to say to us in our contemporary situation, some of them even more needful today than they were when he first said them.

It is a truism to say that we are living in an age of specialists and it is virtually impossible today for anyone to be the polymath, so swift is the increasing tempo of research. There is even a certain tendency to depreciate breadth of scholarship because of the real danger of superficiality which attends it. On the other hand there is the opposite danger of missing the wood altogether owing to interest in a few individual trees. We are perhaps better off than ever before for men who show an admirable expertise in their chosen subjects. But I believe that we are badly in need of men of Wheeler Robinson's intellectual stature capable, while by no means neglectful of detail, of surveying the landscape with a broad sweep of vision and asking the ultimate questions which today more than ever are pressing for an answer. We may be back in square one, but the men we need will not be forthcoming if we are not willing to learn from the wisdom of our predecessors. What one notices especially about Wheeler Robinson is that, when he is writing on some specific point of Biblical scholarship or of historical theology, he does so with the authority of the specialist, yet never gets lost in his specialism. It is true that he does not anticipate the modern fashion, which indeed has much to commend it, of making full documentation in all the relevant literature, but it is perfectly obvious to the discerning eye that he is familiar with that literature, even though he does not obtrude his knowledge.

There are not a few today who object on principle to any raising of ultimate questions. We are told from a high philosophical altitude that our minds being what they are, it is actually meaningless to use them except for the non-metaphysical purposes for which alone they are adapted and, of course, for the purpose of pointing out that they are so limited. Yet the particular sort of nonsense which used to be taught in this university and elsewhere is perhaps worth reconsidering from time to time. No doubt our predecessors had their own blind spots and even their own share of humbug, but so doubtless have we,

and, but for what they achieved, we would not be in a position to criticize them and, if we are wise, to allow ourselves to be criticized by them.

Just a word about the scope of Wheeler Robinson's literary output. I set on one side his contributions to denominational themes, as it would be presumptuous of me to discuss them before this audience. May I just refer, however, to the ironical fact that Karl Barth, to whose theology Wheeler Robinson invariably refers adversely, eventually came out on the Baptist side on the subject of adult baptism? That by the way. Allow me then to offer a very rough classification of Wheeler Robinson's books and articles. The arrangement is to suit my own convenience. First of all there are the admirably succinct text-books, namely *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament*, *The History of Israel: its facts and factors* and *The Old Testament: its making and meaning*. Then there are the commentaries, *Joshua/Judges* in the old Century Bible, a brief commentary on Jeremiah in the original Peake's Commentary and numerous scattered articles on Old Testament subjects in encyclopaedias, in other composite volumes and in journals. Of the articles I select several for special mention because of their unusual significance—several treatments of Hebrew psychology and, in particular, of so-called corporate personality, a discussion in his history of Israel of the Hebrew philosophy of history and two essays on the nature and the main themes of Old Testament theology¹. There is one book, the very last he wrote, which could only have been written by a master in the Biblical field and is undoubtedly a classic of Old Testament scholarship. I refer, of course, to *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, which was planned and executed as Prolegomena to an Old Testament Theology. Finally there is a group of books which contain much of his theological thinking—the great trilogy which I wish some enterprising publisher would reissue as cheap reprints, namely *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit* and *Redemption and Revelation*, to which should be added that intensely moving little book *Suffering Human and Divine* and *The Cross in the Old Testament*, originally issued as three paper-backs dealing with Job, Jeremiah and the Servant, while a similar treatment of Hosea appeared posthumously bound up with an essay on Ezekiel. The above list is not exhaustive but it will, perhaps, serve its purpose.

In the time at my disposal it would be quite impossible to do anything like justice to Wheeler Robinson's legacy of scholarship and profound theological reflection. His theological work, of course, is all the more valuable since he was one of the outstanding Old Testament specialists in this country. One would not claim for him that as a Biblical specialist he ranked as high as, for example, S. R. Driver who among other notable achievements mediated to scholars in this country the substance of the revolution associated with the name of Wellhausen. He did not initiate new movements of thought as Gunkel and Mowinckel did on the Continent. Yet in less spectacular ways he

made his mark in the ongoing process of Biblical interpretation. He may be claimed as a pioneer in the subject of Hebrew psychology and, as an extension of that, in the application of the idea of corporate personality, which is borrowed from the investigations of the anthropologists Lévy-Bruhl and Durkheim into primitive mentality, to the elucidation of certain phenomena in Biblical thought and expression. His careful study of Hebrew and Greek terminology disposed effectively of certain erroneous ideas which had tended to obscure the true Biblical view of man. It is possible, as A. R. Johnson has cogently argued, that he went too far in his theory of diffused personality and did not allow for the likelihood that, when a Hebrew writer attributed knowledge or volition or emotion to an organ or member of the body, he was actually intending the unified person by synecdoche.

One of my own memories is of being present in 1935 at the international gathering of Old Testament scholars in Göttingen, when Wheeler Robinson deeply impressed a distinguished audience by his exposition of the theory of corporate personality which drew attention to the curious oscillation in Hebrew thought between the collectivity and the representative individual. He suggested that here was a key to unlock the mystery of the "I" of the Psalms and of the identity of the Servant in Deutero-Isaiah. One unexpected consequence of that lecture was that it raised a question in the mind of one of the auditors which some years later resulted in the fine book, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* by C. R. North, one great scholar provoking another to his best work.

At this point I would venture to interpolate one of my own hesitations. I admit that the theory of corporate personality fits the phenomena of Hebrew psychology. Where I feel less happy is where the further step is taken (see *Redemption and Revelation* p. 150) of using the theory to elucidate the relation between God and prophet. Jeremiah undoubtedly implied that the true prophet enjoyed temporary membership in Yahweh's council, but surely this is not the same as having his personality "temporarily merged in that of God." It seems to me risky to suggest that a Hebrew would have thought of surrender to the will of God on the part of a prophet even as the temporary loss of that limited freedom of man for which Wheeler Robinson rightly and repeatedly contends and which surely is implied by the Old Testament view of human responsibility. Should it not be maintained that the dialogue relationship, Martin Buber's "I-Thou" relationship, between God and man, does not pass into anything else at the climax of full obedience, rather that at that very point man becomes most truly himself? The unannounced change of speaker in Hebrew prophetic utterances is a familiar enough phenomenon and that may suggest the real explanation of the cases where in a prophetic oracle the deity is thus suddenly introduced as speaker.

When St. Paul speaks of being in the Spirit or says "to me to live is Christ" or "not I but Christ in me", are we not wrong if we dissolve

such phrases into a kind of vague mysticism in which distinctions are lost? Rather does the climax of communion not result, not in mystical identity, but in the perfect liberty of the children of God? The "I" and the "not-I" must be distinguished and at the same time held together. The self-limitation of God in creating man as a free centre of creative activity undoubtedly presents a problem which may be intellectually insoluble. I realize that I am at issue here with R. C. Moberly. What he says in *Atonement and Personality* seems to me to show the influence on his thought of absolute idealism. Perhaps the truest wisdom is to say *solvitur vivendo*.

As I have already hinted, Wheeler Robinson's final legacy to students of the Old Testament was the volume *Inspiration and Revelation* which, whatever criticisms might have to be made in detail—scholarship never stands still and new evidence keeps pouring in—reveals him at the height of his power as an interpreter possessed of a felicitous gift of expression. The book speaks for itself and it would be no service to you if I attempted to summarize it. Suffice it to say that it contains a masterly study of the Hebrew view of nature, of human nature and of history as vehicles of revelation, of prophet, priest and wise man as its mediators and of the psalmist as voicing man's response to it. Above all it is argued that it is in the value-judgments of the prophets that the truth of God most clearly authenticates itself and that the same holds for the apostles in the New Testament. The use of the word "value" betrays the influence of Ritschl and Herrmann, though I feel sure that Wheeler Robinson held much more strongly to the realism of the concrete event than Herrmann did, for whom value took the place of historical objectivity. Of course the subjective side is important; value is always value for someone. But the objective side is equally important and both sides are held together in the unity of consciousness. Religious experience then is quite fundamental and the authority of Church and Bible is pronounced to be secondary to it, mediating, as it does, the authority of God himself. Since man was made in the image of God, emphasis is laid on the possibility of genuine encounter and fellowship between the human personality and God, God being held to be personal, since to regard him as impersonal would be to regard him as less than man.

It was at this point, where Wheeler Robinson and others who felt as he did insisted that in the last resort theology had to build on religious experience and that life was the category of religious knowledge, that he entered his protest against the Barthian theology, as every reference to Barth in his writings will show. He objected to Barth's laying all the emphasis upon God's part in the redemptive process and none upon man's and to there being no attempt to bridge the gulf that was thus created. Wheeler Robinson was, of course, reacting against the paradoxical character of Barth's thinking as the majority of English theologians did. In this country theologians tend on the whole to keep to what we in Scotland call the crown of the causeway and are irritated by one-sidedness of statement. I wonder how Wheeler

Robinson would have reacted could he have read the frank admission made by Barth in 1956—you can read it conveniently in his remarkable little book entitled *The Humanity of God*—in which he says that his earlier extreme statements required revision though not retraction. Listen to this: "It must now quite frankly be granted that we were at that time only partially in the right, even in reference to the theology which we inherited and from which we had to disengage ourselves. . . . How we cleared things away! And we did almost nothing but clear away. Everything which even remotely smacked of mysticism and morality, of pietism and romanticism, or even idealism, was suspected and sharply interdicted or bracketed with reservations which sounded prohibitive."

It has to be remembered what Barth and the other dialectic theologians were contending against at a time when theology was being fought with buttons off the foils, namely a theology which in its main representatives was becoming increasingly anthropocentric and humanistic. For Schleiermacher religion had been a feeling of absolute dependence, but that had been dependence upon God. It was not long before the interest moved right over to piety and to religion as essentially knowledge of the self. Perhaps the dictum of Schopenhauer had something to do with it: "Religion is consciousness of the infinite; thus it is, and can be nothing else than, the consciousness which man has of his own, not finite and limited, but infinite, nature." (L. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, English Translation, pp. 1, 2—quoted by Baron von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses*, First Series, p. 31). Hence the concentration upon the psychology of religion. You can see existentialism and, beyond that, in our own time, the death of God theology coming over the horizon. But, in the little book from which I have quoted, Barth, realizing his own earlier exaggerations and concentration upon what was made to seem the divine monologue, now extended a friendly hand to Bultmann and the existentialist theologians and expressed the hope that they were standing for genuine dialogue between God and man and not for humanistic monologue.

Now it seems to me—and that is why I have allowed myself this digression—that, in the event, Barth, setting, as he does, in this book the humanity of God in the very centre of his thinking, says something not so very different from what Wheeler Robinson consistently contends for, namely that in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Christ the eternal humanity of God was actualized and something achieved in time which was an addition to eternity. When Barth, moreover, says that this Gospel has to be *preached*, it shows that he recognizes the need for man's response in the power of the Holy Spirit.

You will notice that there is virtually an identity of view between Wheeler Robinson's insistence upon human freedom, involving, as it must, a certain divine self-limitation in creation, and John Oman's unwavering contention throughout his great book *Grace and Person-*

ality, that grace must not be thought of as irresistible but must always respect human freedom and never treat man as a thing, an error of which fundamentalism and some kinds of church authoritarianism have been guilty.

Has the time not come to recognise that there are different ways of saying the same thing and to join forces against the real enemy? Karl Barth was not a Barthian. I once long ago heard him say in a lecture: "Don't be surprised if some day you hear me putting in a word for Schleiermacher." To interrogate religious experience, as men like Wheeler Robinson did, was not to stray into humanism, but to seek to discover how it is that in this mysterious world with its tragic human history man became aware that he was not alone but was met and supported by an active divine concern. That is the question that we must still keep asking at a time when so many are assuring us that it is a foolish and even meaningless one. The Scriptures offer the classic material for such an enquiry, for in them as nowhere else the human predicament is mirrored. This must be said quite firmly to those theologians who are turning away from the Bible, so we are told, back to their psychology and sociology, subjects which certainly have their legitimate part to play but which will never answer man's ultimate questions.

When Wheeler Robinson went up to Oxford as an undergraduate, the neo-Hegelian idealist school was still in its heyday and though T. H. Green was dead by that time, his influence was still powerful. One of the main problems which engaged the minds of the absolute idealists concerned the status of human individuality to which they allowed only temporary significance. On the other side there was James Ward in Cambridge whose thought on this subject stemmed from Leibniz and Lotze and who contended for the permanent significance of human personality. Wheeler Robinson reacted against the idealist position though he valued the stand which idealism made against naturalism. The greatest philosophical influence upon him was undoubtedly that of Kant of which he writes in an article published in 1934: "I do not know any book which has influenced me more profoundly than Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Ethics*, read in my undergraduate days. But I recognize how much that influence depended on earlier training in the Victorian scheme of morality, with all its limitations." Perhaps that was why, on first acquaintance at least, Wheeler Robinson made a certain impression of austerity. It was a little like meeting the categorical imperative in person. Kant's ethical theory chimed in very well with the Old Testament emphasis on volition and obedience.

While I am speaking about influences upon Wheeler Robinson I should perhaps mention that one book to which he acknowledges his indebtedness is Edwyn Bevan's *Symbolism and Belief*. One remembers his important essay on Prophetic Symbolism² and also the insistence which he shares with Bevan on the significance of time as being

greater than Henry Vaughan's Platonic vision of time as the vast shadow of eternity would suggest. Wheeler Robinson acknowledges affinity with the thought of philosophers like Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, W. R. Sorley, James Ward, A. E. Taylor and C. C. J. Webb and of theologians like William Temple, Baron von Hügel and H. R. Mackintosh. These were all men who sought to look at life steadily and see it whole and were very conscious of its many-sidedness, unlike some of our contemporary thinkers who seem to me to be too narrowly intellectualistic. Of course we cannot just go back as if nothing has intervened between these thinkers of a past generation and ourselves. We must listen respectfully to the criticisms which have been passed upon them. But to ignore the insights they attained and enshrined in memorable language would be to miss much that might help us today.

As I look back over many hours of reading and comparing one passage with another, a number of what one may call Wheeler Robinson's controlling ideas emerge very clearly. I have referred at some length to what he says about man's freedom of will. He defends his view by pointing out that the hypothesis of a closed causal nexus serves the physicist and the chemist in their researches but neither the biologist nor at a higher level still the historian. The lower level indeed conditions the higher and is included in it, but it cannot explain it. Mind and spirit cannot be reduced to something lower than themselves. We are not justified in denying human freedom on the ground that, for example, chemical laws take no account of it. All this is familiar enough and yet there are still positivistic historians who proceed as if they had never heard of Wilhelm's Dilthey's battle for the emancipation of the *Geisteswissenschaften*.

One of Wheeler Robinson's most characteristic words is 'actuality' with the corresponding verb 'actualize' and its abstract noun 'actualization'. "History," he says, is properly "the continuous methodical record' of events. We need a word to describe the quality or status of the event as that which has taken place once for all. We can hardly find a better term than 'actuality.'" Part of the trouble when we speak of history is that the word is ambiguous, as it is commonly used both for the record and for what is here called its "actuality". This makes for confusion. It is true that in the historical record we encounter events as interpreted, not as bare, events and events can be reinterpreted again and again as they are seen from new points of view and in different contexts. Moreover the interpretation or reinterpretation or, if you like transvaluation of an event may itself become a potent event in history. But we should not forget that there is the event *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, to use Ranke's famous phrase, the actuality of which Wheeler Robinson so properly speaks. Those of you who are familiar with Gerhard von Rad's *Theology of the Old Testament* will remember how great a part the transvaluation of events plays in it and how that brilliant scholar gets into trouble owing to his somewhat sceptical attitude to the actuality of Israel's

early history. We may be grateful to Wheeler Robinson for the trouble he takes to define his terms.

There is, however, a further step in his use of the word "actuality" according to which he does not confine it to the event *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. Since we only know interpreted, and not bare, events, he also applies the word "actuality" to an interpreted event and speaks of certain events, as interpreted by the prophets, becoming vital factors in history and so actualized and given significance as revelation of what God was doing. Perhaps the ambiguity here is not serious. At all events it becomes possible to say that at the climactic point of history the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ and in the events associated with him God's will was actualized supremely in human history. In Christ "the human volition is taken up into the divine, without thereby losing its human actuality." It is suggested that something of vital importance is added to God, something that he has willed should happen. We may perhaps speak of a category of actuality. "The actuality of history, up to and including the Incarnation, is God's supreme medium of utterance to man." You will notice that it is not only Christ's acts of will that are accorded this tremendous significance. I quote again: "A new *depth* of being seems to be added to the thoughts of God when they are actualized through human wills."

In all Wheeler Robinson's discussions of the ultimate questions of faith there appears the constant linking together of the concepts of human freedom of the will—made possible by the self-limitation of God—and of values emerging in the unity of consciousness, that is as a unity of the subjective and the objective and possessed of an intrinsic authority. It is not enough to apprehend values; they have to be actualized in the real world and this is true of intellectual and aesthetic values as well as of moral and religious values, though, of course, it is only in the case of moral and religious values that such actualization is incumbent on everyone. Wheeler Robinson himself shows a keen appreciation of art, music and poetry and of speculative truth and admits that the Bible, though revealing literary sensitivity and in places appreciation of natural beauty, concerns itself mainly with moral and religious values, the realization of which is essential for the achievement of living together. In one of his early pronouncements on this subject he disavows any intention of suggesting "a philosophy of revelation which would not make room for all the contributions of all the peoples, as well as of Israel." He admits, however, a Puritanic element in Israel's religion but argues that its "peculiar strength . . . at times of crisis and grave peril, lay in just the intensity and concentration which sprang from its blending with morality." There is a place in life for what he later called the ministry of error, an example of which would be over-emphasis on some particular value, as on occasion demanded by the historical situation, such as the attempted hellenization of the Jews in the second century B.C., which was fanatically resisted by the orthodox section among them. But it is abundantly clear that Wheeler Robinson was concerned for a full-orbed response to all

values, aesthetic, speculative, moral and religious. It could not be otherwise for a man so sensitive to truth and to beauty in nature and art. He admits that Israel's one artistic invention was the religious lyric and that Israel produced no philosophy, and he rejoices in the tremendous aesthetic and speculative contribution made by the Greeks.

The great irrational mystery of life, resulting from man's divinely granted freedom, is the actualization of evil in history as well as good. One of the most characteristic parts of Wheeler Robinson's whole scheme of thought is his treatment of the Atonement. He recognizes the relative truth of the various rationalizations which have been attempted all down the Christian centuries and maintains that they are all reflections of the truth of God's identification of himself with sinful mankind and his unwillingness at whatever cost to himself to reject the sinner. It is here that Wheeler Robinson joins issue with Baron von Hügel's refusal to admit suffering on the part of God on the ground that a God who suffered would be less than the Absolute demanded by philosophy, and argues that the very opposite is true; a God who did not suffer because of man's sin would in that respect be less than a good man. He quotes his favourite poet, Browning:

"this is the authentic sign and seal
Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,
And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
Into a rage to suffer or mankind."

The divine joy is not incompatible with suffering. God is never more truly God than when he takes upon himself the burden of man's sin and by the miracle of forgiveness transmutes sin into something of positive value. It is impossible for us fully to comprehend a love like this or to reflect it as we should in our lives. We can only marvel at it and allow God to come all the way in redemption. Wheeler Robinson quotes a penetrating saying of H. R. Mackintosh; "We see the atonement so often through the frosted glass of our own lovelessness."

A hunting word of Horace Bushnell about the Atonement seems to have fascinated Wheeler Robinson as it has many others: "It is as if there were a cross unseen, standing on its undiscovered hill, far back in the ages, out of which was sounding always just the same deep suffering love and patience, that was heard by mortal ears from the sacred hill of Calvary." His comment is: "Our only way of realizing the eternal reality is to concentrate on the temporal actualization of it, and to see God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." The cross is more than a revelation of the reconciling love of God; it is an actualization of it in time which means a permanent addition to eternity.

We are accustomed to speak of *kenosis* with reference to Christ. Incidentally Wheeler Robinson interprets the well-known passage in the Epistle to the Philippians as referring primarily to Christ's death by a virtual quotation from Isaiah liii where we read of the Servant pouring out his soul unto death. Whether he is correct or not in this

interpretation of Christ's *kenosis*, he goes on to make a very interesting application of the word to the Holy Spirit and speaks frequently of the *kenosis* of the Spirit, that is to say the suffering endured by the redeeming God through all ages, both before and after Christ, by virtue of his identifying himself with his people in the Spirit. For the holy God to be brought into such intimate relation to sin must involve suffering infinitely greater than we can imagine, but, as has been said, this involves no diminution of divinity, since it is transmuted into the joy of victory.

This, of course, leads on to the question of universalism, by universalism being meant, not just a climax to the human story in which the whole last generation of mankind would inherit the kingdom of God and justify the long travail of mankind, but a universalism which would embrace all the generations. It is to Wheeler Robinson's credit that he sees the issue here so clearly, while for so many the problem does not seem to be a burden. He refers with approval to Berdyaev's lack of enthusiasm for a supposed consummation of history which would be "celebrated by the future elect among the graves of their ancestors." It is interesting to note that on this subject of universalism Barth of all people permits himself to cherish the hope hinted at in the Epistle to the Colossians, i 19, where it is stated that God has determined through Christ "to reconcile all things to himself," and says with confidence: "This much is certain, that we have no theological right to set any sort of limits to the loving kindness of God which has appeared in Jesus Christ." And yet, as Wheeler Robinson points out, the human will is free and so the dreadful possibility remains of an ultimate defiance of God's reconciling love.

I am fully aware that I have succeeded in doing but scant justice to my theme. Many aspects of it have had to be passed over; no doubt another lecturer would have made a different selection. Rightly or wrongly it seemed to me that I should concentrate on those central affirmations of faith which made Wheeler Robinson the effective thinker and teacher he was. Here is a man who was sure that humanism is not creative of values, however confidently this is asserted in certain quarters today, rather that the emergence of values in history is only made possible through the communion of the human spirit with the eternal Spirit, that they have to be actualized by the exercise of volition and creative action, and that, since man is unequal to the task, not at the climax but at the centre of history, a supreme act of will accomplished something of eternal consequence both for God and for man. Through grace the actuality of the cross in which sin did its worst undergoes transformation. This is the supreme transvaluation of values.

Again and again, as I have read his writings, Wheeler Robinson has spoken to me and freshly illuminated some conviction. Sometimes he has done it by a penetrating flash of thought, sometimes by a quotation from one of the poets, from Wordsworth or Browning,

special favourites of his, or by a word of Traherne or Bushnell or Newman. He was a man of deep compassion for ordinary, sinful mortals and that no doubt served him as a clue to reach his profound thought of the *kenosis* of the Spirit, God suffering with, and redeeming, men and women in all their sorrow and sin and even degradation all down the ages. In his revealing devotional book, *The Veil of God* (pp. 37-38) he calls it "the direct continuation of the 'self-emptying' of the Incarnation and the Cross." And he goes on to quote R. L. Stevenson's description of ordinary folk who, contrary to all expectation, keep the flag of witness to God's secret grace flying in face of circumstance: "these men and women, all the world over, in every stage of history, under every abuse of error, under every circumstance of failure, without thanks, still obscurely fighting the lost fight of virtue, still clinging in the brothel or on the scaffold, to some rag of honour, the poor jewel of their souls." Theology and life are kept in close touch in Wheeler Robinson's thought, because he knew that theology must seek to penetrate down into the depths of life where God is at work, and this suggests that we should ourselves exercise a deeper compassion as we peruse the Biblical record and, in particular, when as *gerim* we pass behind the Christian Scriptures into the strange world of the Old Testament. In conclusion I would venture to add a favourite quotation of my own from the pen of the late Professor F. M. Powicke of this university (*History, Freedom, and Religion*, p. 24): "Is it possible that the human experience which we call history, at the moment, nay, as the very condition of its being, meets an infinite understanding, and comes to rest in a divine compassion?"

NOTES

¹ See *The People and the Book*, (Ed.) G. S. Peake, pp. 353 ff. and Bibliography on p. 486. *Werden und Wesen des Alten Testaments*, (Edd.) Volz and Hempel (B.Z.A.W. 66), pp. 49 ff. *The History of Israel*, H. W. Robinson, pp.220 ff. *Record and Revelation*, (Ed.) H. W. Robinson, pp. 303 ff.

² *Old Testament Essays*, (Ed.) D. C. Simpson (Papers read at meeting of Society for Old Testament Study at Oxford in 1927), pp. 1 ff.