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A table of contents for *Scripture* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_scripture-01.php

Scripture

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SIN AND REPENTANCE

The great difficulty in dealing with any theme in biblical theology is the conflicting interests of theological synthesis and historical analysis. It is misguided and misleading to treat the Bible as a homogeneous block; throughout its long and complicated history we must expect that ideas will evolve and develop. Historical analysis is itself a difficult and delicate subject. But for practical purposes we may follow the accepted critical positions on the development of biblical literature, and divide it into three periods, corresponding roughly with the three strata discernible in the Pentateuch.¹ The first period runs from the beginning to about the time of the monarchy, when J and E were composed. The second is the period of the prophets, whose thought and spirit is expressed in D. The third is the exilic and post-exilic era reflected in P.

We begin, therefore, at the beginning. In fact, if we are to appreciate the origins of strictly biblical thought, we have to begin before the beginning. What idea of sin has man without revelation? We speak of the natural law—the demands of the Creator known from the nature of His creation. But what idea had men at this stage of reasoning, of nature, or creation, or Creator? Certainly they had some idea of God—of divinity, of something other than themselves. And man's attitude in the face of this mysterious other was one of awe, terror, recoil. It was something he had to keep his distance from. Precisely because it was 'other,' it indicated certain limitations on human existence which it was dangerous to overstep; certain spheres of interest were marked out as forbidden territory, and to trespass on that territory was 'sin.'

But even this idea of an 'other' was not clearly and specifically defined. For primitive man lived in a whole world which was to some extent 'other': a strange and frightening place; storms, thunder, lightning—even the more benign phenomena of day and night, ordered seasons and growth of crops—all of this was utterly

¹ cf. Michael M. Winter, 'Reflections on the Sources of the Pentateuch,' *Scripture*, 1960, pp. 78-89

mysterious, beyond his comprehension and control. It made the world in which he lived a fearsome place. And this fear was not clearly distinguished from the other, namely awe of the divinity which lay beyond their sphere. Awe of the divine is not clearly distinguished from panic—terror of 'Pan,' of all things, of the alien natural forces which made up their world. Mythology is an expression of that confusion—the mysterious natural forces were personified and looked on as manifestations of the divine, of the *mysterium tremendum*.

But it was not sufficient to give a theoretical explanation of the world ; men had to learn also how to live in it. By a process of trial and error, coupled with the same imagination which produced the mythologies, men worked out empirical rules which enabled them to come to terms with their environment—magic, the first step in the development of the natural sciences. And here again, the rules he thus forged for himself were not clearly distinguished from the rules governing his relationship with the divine. All of them together were things 'not done,' under pain of disturbing the precarious order in which we live ; here too, transgression is 'sin,' and the result is or may be death.

For that, at the lowest and in the concrete, is what men were—and are—most deeply concerned with : life—not merely existence, but life, health, prosperity, fertility, harmony between men, harmony with their environment, harmony with whatever it is that controls our existence. This is what men are concerned with ; and 'sin' is the name given to anything which violates or endangers this vital quality. In order to ensure life and ward off 'sin,' certain rules are formulated : the confused mass of convention, superstition and taboo which regulate human existence.

This is the pre-biblical concept of sin ; and we do not expect revelation to make any sudden revolutionary change in this concept, bringing about a miraculous advance in clarity and precision of thought which the rest of mankind was not to achieve for centuries. We expect to find, and we do in fact find in the Bible itself, something very like what we have been talking about. We find it in the most basic Hebrew word for sin—*ḥata'* ; the root meaning of which is to go astray, to miss the mark : to do something which is 'not done' and in consequence to fail to achieve one's objective—just as the failure to utter the correct incantation will invalidate the spell. We find it also in the things which are called sin. Oza touches the Ark of the Covenant to prevent it falling—and he dies ; for this belongs to God, and Oza has trespassed on that forbidden territory. Aaron's sons, newly consecrated and unfamiliar with the ritual, offer incense without observing the due forms—and they also die.

Sin is used to denote actions contrary to God's will where there is no question of conscious responsibility: Abraham deceives Pharaoh about his relationship to Sara; but when the king takes her in good faith, he is punished and has to make amends. The law even lays down regulations for actions which are explicitly said to be performed unwittingly: 'If anyone lets slip an oath in any of those matters in which a man may swear thoughtlessly, then, when he comes to realise it, he is responsible for it: he must then confess the sin, and offer God a sacrifice for the sin he has committed . . .' (cf. Lev. 5:4ff).¹

Even more akin to the attitude of a previous stage are those cases where sin is used of things in which there is no question of morality at all, either subjective or objective: of child-birth, for example, or menstruation. Or even more strangely, to our eyes, of dry-rot in a house—called, by analogy, leprosy: 'The priest will offer sacrifice for the sin of the house . . . and after the rite of expiation has been performed, the house will be pure' (Lev. 14:49-53).

Clearly, in such an indiscriminate collection there is room for many distinctions. Some of these distinctions will be indicated later. But no matter what distinction is made, the language used by the Bible points clearly to a certain attitude of mind: sin refers much more to the action done than to the intention of the doer; it is the mechanical, automatic transgression of a rule, of a standard. Even more truly one could say that sin indicates the state of disorder, of disharmony, a state of impaired vitality; and the fact that this is due to our activity, and even more whether that activity is culpable or not, is of secondary importance.

But that does not mean to say that even in this stage there is no difference at all between the biblical attitude to sin and the pre-biblical. On one vital point there is an immense step-forward. We find it expressed in the Bible's account of the origin of evil. Sin covers every aspect of disorder, physical as well as moral: on this the Bible would have agreed with a pagan contemporary. But since physical disorder is a universal phenomenon, especially in its most crucial form, death, then the origin of it must be sought in some universal ancestor. This follows from the fact of corporate personality: we are all in a state of 'sin,' therefore the father of us all must have put himself into a state of sin. Now, to explain how this came about, the author has before him various models, various theories such as those we have

¹ The law distinguishes between sin-offering and guilt-offering, and it is tempting to interpret this in terms with which we are more familiar, by the distinction between material and formal sin. But more probably the distinction is between offences against God and offences against the community—with the subjective consciousness a secondary element.

outlined above. To a large extent he accepts the data of current thought, but he reinterprets it with wonderful theological penetration. He accepts the idea of God as 'other'; but he realises that God is other precisely because he is not a creature. He is Creator, maker of all that is and lord of all. And if lord, supreme controller and arbiter of its destiny—arbiter of its good and bad, right and wrong. And man's fear in the face of this supreme God, which for the pagan is blind panic, is for the author of Genesis respect for God's supremacy. To trespass—as the first man trespassed—is not merely the objective fact of doing something which happens to displease the god; it is a challenge to that supremacy; it is refusal to recognise the infinite gulf between the Creator and the creature; it is to arrogate to oneself autonomy; it is to rebel—and this now is a new name for sin which enters the biblical vocabulary: *peshah*, revolt.

Clearly, this is an immense advance, and one that makes a decisive difference between biblical and pre-biblical thought. But we must not over-estimate the influence of this step-forward. Sin is given a very definite religious setting; it is rebellion against the Lord whose will is supreme. But God's supremacy could be shown in the mere fact of a command, without regard for which actions are commanded: the reticence of Genesis on the exact nature of the command given to the first man is remarkable. There is, then, not much critique at this stage of precisely which actions are commanded and are therefore sin. Much of the pre-biblical material which we summed up as convention, superstition and taboo continued to be invoked in Israel. Of course they were not now invoked as superstition. Nor on the other hand were they rationalised (one might so easily have expected the legislation concerning clean and unclean animals, for example, or the laws about leprosy, to be rationalised and presented as social legislation). They are merely incorporated into Israel's religious life, under the rubric: 'Thus says Yahweh. . . .' But the fact that it *is* Yahweh's will, with all that Israel meant by Yahweh, is the great advance of this first stage of Israelite religion.

All that Israel meant by Yahweh: but it was the prophets who were mainly responsible for exploring the deeper significance of that revelation.

Israel's faith stemmed from the covenant at Sinai. A covenant is an agreement between persons—not an equal agreement, of course, but nevertheless both parties must be equally persons: you cannot have a covenant with a storm or a sun or any of the other forces which the pagans personified as gods. The God of Israel is a person as real as the Israelites themselves, as real as Moses. And the prophets realised that in the covenant and the law which embodied it God had revealed

His personality. He had shown them what manner of God He was. They were not to have an image of God ; no image could do other than distort and debase the notion of a transcendent God. But their God was not for that reason vague and impersonal : He was real and close to them ; ‘ no other nation has its god so close to it as our God is to us—in commandment and precept and ceremony ’ (Deut. 4:7). The law, then, is the expression of God’s will ; but it is not an arbitrary will. It is the expression of His will because it is the expression of His person.

And what is God ? The two words which run through the Bible as most characteristic of God are *hesed w^e emeth* : mercy and truth : charity and justice. And because these are the characteristics of God, they are the characteristics demanded of God’s people Israel. Those two words are indeed a fair summing up of the whole of the prophetic teaching : their fierce indignation with social injustice, with dishonesty and luxury and wealth won by oppression, the oppression particularly of the poor and helpless. Had not God found Israel poor and oppressed, in nakedness and utter nothingness ; and had He not then, out of sheer love and mercy, picked them up and clothed them and given them food and even made them rich ? This is what God is ; and therefore how great a distortion it is that the people who are to carry His name before the world should show no care for the fatherless, the poor and the widow.

In this way the prophets came to see which actions were sinful, and why they were sinful. But they go a step further, and see also the deeper relationship between a man and his deeds. A covenant is a mutual relationship between persons. God has come to Israel in pure, unmotivated love ; and He demands in return our whole selves, with equal love. Reflection on the supremacy of God led the author of Genesis to see that sin was rebellion. But reflection on the covenant gives a deeper meaning to that word rebellion : it is the rebellion of a subject against his king, of a son against a father. God is Father, and Israel is His first-born son : ‘ Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth ! I have brought forth sons and brought them up—and they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its master, and the ass its master’s stall ; but Israel has not known Me ’ (Is. 1:2-3). Father and son : man and wife even, prophets like Osee preach. The covenant relationship is as close as the bond of marriage, and the same love and affection and care which should be found in marriage, and which characterises God in His relationship with Israel, is demanded by God in return : ‘ Hear, O Israel ! The Lord thy God is one God ; and you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength ’ (Deut. 6:4-5).

This was the implication of the covenant. A later prophet¹ sees the same implication in the very transcendency of God. We have seen how Israel interpreted the vague intuition of an 'other' in terms of an Almighty God. Now the Hebrew word for this idea is Holy. The root-meaning is 'cut off': absolutely other, absolutely separate from men and our world. But this does not mean cut off in the sense of remote and uncaring. On the contrary, it means that all creation depends on him for existence, and exists for him. 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of hosts—Heaven and earth are full of his glory.'

This world exists for the glory of God, for His service. And it is man's function to use it in this way—to make it, like the hymn of the seraphim, a hymn of praise to the Creator. This was in particular the function of Israel; that is why God had chosen them, to be a kingly priesthood and a holy nation: a nation dedicated to the service of God, and through whom the world would be dedicated to Him. To fail in this function—to use creation in a way which excluded this purpose, to use it for man's own benefit without regard to the transcendent rights of the Creator—was blasphemy against the holy God. And that was what made certain acts sinful, and this gave a criterion by which we could know their sinfulness.

But if dedication to the holy God means showing His dominion over creation, that dominion must extend first of all to us, to men called to His service. Total service: not merely, then, the service of our hands, but of our hearts also; not merely deeds, but deeds which express our will. Our God is a jealous God: and that means not only that He will not give His glory to another—it means also that He will not allow our love to go to another; He will not accept anything less than heartfelt service.

And it is in the light of such penetrating and exalted teaching that the prophets see sin. By reflection on the covenant they see that sin is rebellion against an Almighty God, the rebellion of a son against a loving Father, the unfaithfulness of a spouse to her beloved; it is failure to reflect in our own lives the God who has revealed Himself to us. And by analysis of the concept of 'otherness,' they see that sin is blasphemy against God's supreme and total rights. This is already a far cry from the idea of sin as simple transgression. The prophets have now been able to see exactly why certain things are wrong, and therefore to launch a pungent attack against all superstitions by showing more precisely *which* actions are wrong. But in

¹ The prophet referred to is Deutero-Isaiah; this might then seem to disturb the historical development indicated at the beginning of this article. But in the first place it is pointed out below that this historical scheme is not to be taken in too rigid a sense; and in the second place, although this teaching is seen most characteristically in Deutero-Isaiah, it is not altogether absent from the pre-exilic prophets; cf. Is. 6:3, quoted below.

addition they have even been able to show in what spirit these acts should be performed : the service of the heart, the giving of love for love. Jeremias even envisages the time when this alone shall count ; when there shall be a new covenant in which the law will not be written on stone, but in the hearts of the people (Jer. 31:31).

This is noble teaching indeed ; and it would be most satisfying if we could end the Old Testament on that exalted note. But after the prophets comes that rather indeterminate body of literature called the Didactic books, and, in somewhat the same spirit, the Priestly author who put the finishing touches to the Pentateuch.

This seems to be the moment to take notice of an obvious objection. When we were speaking of the primitive form of biblical religion, that in which relics of the pre-biblical stage were most evident, it was to the book of Leviticus that we most naturally turned. It is here that we find all that strange legislation that attaches the word 'sin' to such things as child-birth, illness and dry-rot. And yet this book of Leviticus is normally attributed to the Priestly author, who belongs to this third and latest stage of biblical development.

It is very tempting to dismiss this objection with the facile jibe that legalism is always an anachronism from the point of view of genuine morality : that to make a code of laws to regulate a personal relationship of love is bound to be a return to that mechanical, quasi-superstitious attitude which we met in peoples who are unclear on the real nature of God and on man's relationship to him. This is a temptation all the greater because there is so much truth in it, as we find from a consideration of the religion of the Pharisees.

But it is too facile to be the whole truth. In the Bible above all, we cannot admit that the ingenuity or limitation of human minds is the complete explanation of the development that takes place. It is nearer to the truth to look at it like this. We have been talking about stages of development ; but we must not think of these stages as simple, clear-cut divisions, with one stage marking a complete break from the preceding. In religion above all, an immense value is attached to traditional forms and ideas ; so that the characteristics of one stage persist into the following, even if it is necessary to give them a new interpretation if they are to survive. An obvious and simple example is the law of the Sabbath : by comparison with other civilisations, it seems clear that a special regard for the seventh day is connected with the idea of *dies fasti et nefasti*—days on which it was lucky or unlucky to do certain things, depending on the position of the moon : a perfect example of primitive superstition. Israel inherited this custom, but adapted it to her theology : first, through the idea of God's supremacy—all time belongs to God and one day is

chosen to represent this ; then the prophetic view given in Deuteronomy adds a humanitarian motive—God led Israel out of bondage into rest, and therefore on this day all should have opportunity to rest ; and then the Priestly author returns rather to the earlier point of view, specifying particularly the duty of refraining from work, just as God ceased work on the seventh day.

And in the same way, practices and observances which had remained current in Israel from the earliest days were reinterpreted in the exilic and post-exilic periods. This is not the place to go into the details of this reinterpretation ; but in general we can say that the keeping of the law of God was made the test of true religion. The prophets had preached personal devotion to God ; but this personal devotion is a meaningless phrase or empty emotionalism if it is not expressed in devotion to God's law. Of course the prophets too had seen this ; indeed they had taught that this is what the law was—the expression of God's personality. But now the emphasis is reversed. The law now is made the touch-stone of religion ; this is how in practice we distinguish between good and evil : ' Blessed is the man whose will is in the law of the Lord, who has not walked with sinners . . . ' The sinner is he who has not kept the law of God ; to keep the law is to put oneself on God's side. (That is the point of the self-righteous-sounding claims in some of the Psalms : ' Lord, if I have done that, if I have stained my hands with fraud or done evil to my benefactor, then rightly let me be crushed ' : ' Test and search me, Lord : I have not sat with the wicked, I have hated evil-doers, I have washed my hands with the innocent. ' They are not as smug as they sound : they are rather a desperate assertion of loyalty ; it is taking sides—and the side that the psalmist chooses is faithfulness to the standard of God as expressed in the law.) It is above all the contrary to that practical atheism which is involved in ignoring God's law : ' The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, there is not one that does good ' (Ps. 13:1). It is an attitude we should recognise ; it is the attitude of the ordinary Catholic, for whom religion is primarily a matter of keeping the commandments. We ' practise our faith, ' because our faith is something which has practical implications.

Religion is to be practised. It is a rule of life. In the concrete, it is the law that marks out this rule—this way, which is God's own way : *Beati immaculati in via*, God's own way, that is, His practical directions on how to reach Him. It is therefore the highest wisdom—' the law of God is true, giving wisdom to little ones, enlightening the eyes and giving guidance to the feet. ' Typically, then, the old term for sin is now reinterpreted : sin is *ḥata'*, going astray—but not now in the sense of invalidating the ritual, but in the very concrete

sense of straying from the path marked out by God. And at the same time a new word for sin now becomes popular : it is *nabal*, folly.¹

When we come to the New Testament, we find, as we would expect, that the same teaching is maintained, though it is given a wonderfully supernatural twist. We find, for example, that our Lord's practical criterion of morality is not different from that of the Priestly author or the scribes : ' If you love me, keep my commandments ' : ' He who claims to love God and does not keep His commands, is a liar.' Our Lord has come to fulfil the law, not to destroy it ; our justice must abound more than that of the scribes and the Pharisees. But in the New Testament even more clearly than in the Old, it is taught that it is not the act which justifies or condemns, so much as the intention : ' It is not that which enters into a man which defiles a man, but that which comes out of a man ; for out of the heart proceed lies, murders, adulteries.'

The intention—the motive power behind the actions : above all and essentially, then, love of God. This is the centre of morality, and in the light of this, the greatest of the commandments, all other commands fade into the background : to love God and to love one's neighbour is to have kept all the law.

We return, then, to the ideal of the prophets, which we have already seen as a high-point in religious development. Our Lord himself points out that his doctrine of the primacy of charity is such an Old Testament ideal : ' What read you in the law ? ' But the New Testament is not a mere reaffirmation of the Old. No ; it is precisely at this point that there takes place that profound deepening of the thought which gives its morality its specific character. At the very beginning of our consideration of sin, we pointed out that it should be viewed in relation to life : sin is anything which impairs or endangers this most basic quality. Even in the Old Testament there was something sacred about this quality of life—it was breathed into man from the breath of God Himself. But what the Old Testament only dared hint at in impossible longings, is now in the New boldly asserted to have come true : ' I have come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly ' : ' If any man believes in me, he

¹ Clearly, there can be no question of attempting a complete theology of sin in one essay ; and many valid and even important aspects have been omitted in favour of one clear line of thought. This is particularly true of the post-exilic period, in which many valuable developments took place ; the increasing spiritualisation of sin, for example ; the consequent suggestion of a distinction between the physical and moral elements which were up till then indiscriminately classed as ' sin ' ; which in turn opens the way for the theology of Redemption as it will be sketched in a later section ; important also is the beginning of a doctrine of Original Sin through the doctrine of man's *yeşer*, his innate feebleness through which he is ' inclined to evil from his earliest youth.'

shall have eternal life': 'I in them, and they in me—that they may be one, as thou, Father, and I': 'I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me.' . . . A whole stream of texts testifies to the realisation that the Christian is living the life of God through Christ. But what is God? God is love. To share the life of God, therefore, means to share this love. God is love, and he who remains in love remains in God. God is love, and the Christian life is sharing that nature and that love. For the prophets, whole-hearted service was demanded because without it there was not total service—that which was most essential to man, his whole personality, was not involved. But the Christian demands whole-hearted service simply because it is the expression of the life that is in him. That is why St John can say, in a text quoted above, that the man who claims to love God but does not keep the commandments is a liar. To sin is to deny the life that we have been given, the divine life. To sin is to return to that death from which Christ came to deliver us.

Sin, for the Old Testament, was anything which impaired the quality of life. That is why it included such things as sickness and death under the term sin. We seem to have quietly let this aspect of 'sin' drop out of sight. But in the Bible it never drops out of sight; even in the New Testament, in Matthew in particular, the attitude to our Lord's miracles makes it quite clear that our Lord is founding the kingdom of heaven just as much in curing leprosy as in forgiving sins. But although this theology of sin still persists, on this point too a new twist is given which lets it be seen finally, and surprisingly, as a theology of repentance. One may reconstruct the line of thought in this way.

When sin was looked on as simply transgression, the most obvious way of avoiding the harmful consequences of this transgression was sacrifice—sacrifice looked on almost as a bribe offered to God, or at the very least as a 'sweetener,' or else as a recompense for the injustice of trespassing on His interests. Against this view of sacrifice the prophets reacted strongly, and stressed the internal attitude that sacrifice should express: 'What do I care about your countless sacrifices? I am sated, I am nauseated; but wash your hands, take away your evil from my sight, and then come before me. . . . Woe to those who offer sacrifice with injustice. . . . I will have charity and not sacrifice.'

At another stage, there was a clearer realisation that the impaired life that 'sin' involved was the loss of a quality which came from God. Therefore by certain symbolic acts they tried to return to union with God—by washing in water, for example: water very fittingly symbolised the living God, and by immersing himself in water a man

could be symbolically united once more with God, the source of all life.

But no matter what symbolic expression was chosen, the basic attitude is summed up in the word 'return.' Sin is going astray, a step in the wrong direction ; it is rebellion against God ; it is a breach of personal union with God. The first thing necessary is to correct that false step, to turn away from one's sins, to turn back to God. This is true in the New Testament just as much as in the Old ; the first words of the gospel are 'Repent'—*metanoete*, change your minds.

But obviously, this change, this repentance, will involve confession : 'Repent and confess your sins,' is the subject of the first Christian sermon by St Peter. It will involve admitting that we were wrong : you cannot turn back without admitting that you were going in the wrong direction. And if we admit that we were wrong, we must also admit that we deserved punishment : 'All that thou hast done to us, O Lord,' Daniel prays in the captivity after the destruction of Jerusalem, 'Thou hast done justly : because we had sinned and gone astray from thee' (Dan. 3:28ff.). Therefore, an important element in repentance is not merely the admission that we were wrong and a change of direction ; it is also the acceptance of suffering which our sins have deserved : we have not only to repent, but 'to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance.'

Repentance involves penance. Can penance achieve forgiveness ? The Old Testament gropes towards this truth : if sacrifice can bring forgiveness, should not suffering also : 'A sacrifice to God is a contrite heart.' And the same idea, no doubt as a result of the suffering of the Exile, is even more vividly expressed by Deutero-Isaiah : 'It was our sufferings that he bore, he was crushed for our sins. And it was by his wounds that we were healed.'

And so the theology of Redemption is evolved—that through the sufferings our sins deserved, our Lord expresses and effects man's return to God : atonement, reunion with God. Death is indeed conquered. Its power has been completely reversed. It was sin's most powerful partner and ally ; like sin, it was the antithesis of life. But our Lord has made it the means by which sin is destroyed and the fullness of life achieved.

And from that doctrine of Redemption, a doctrine of repentance too emerges in a new light. It is true that our Lord died once and for all ; and it is true also that his death and resurrection are symbolically and sacramentally effected in us by Baptism, equally once and for all. But nevertheless the Christian living with the life of Christ must be continually dying to sin ; we live a dying life ; we die daily. Our whole Christian life is a continual turning away from sin—a continual

repentance ; and we do it in the same way as our Lord did it. What in Christ is Redemption, in the Christian is repentance. Our Lord made suffering and death into a means of Redemption ; we also take them, and make them an expression of repentance. Our Lord's Redemption was, in the sense that we have seen, an expression of repentance ; our Christian life is a living out of the Redemption, which is a living out of repentance. 'If we are dead with Christ, then we believe that we shall also live with him. . . . His death was a death to sin once and for all, and life to God. You also look on yourselves as dead to sin, and living to God in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 6:8-11).

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Ushaw

THE PROPHETICAL MEANING OF CELIBACY—II

II *Propter Regnum Caelorum* : Positive aspect

A previous article¹ has shown that, according to the Bible, and according to Jeremias and St Paul especially, celibate life is a prophecy in action, a foreboding of the end, a public proclamation of the fleeting character of this world.

It goes without saying that this is only one aspect of the mystery. There is another one. The last days are not only days of doom : they are also days of resurrection. Jeremias was not only the prophet of the fall of Jerusalem : he was also the prophet of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-5). Similarly for St Paul the last days are only secondarily days of woe : primarily, they are the days of the Parousia when Christ will come and hand over to the Father the world revived by the Spirit (1 Cor. 15). The Apocalypse ends its enumeration of the eschatological calamities by the resplendent description of the heavenly Jerusalem where everything is made new (Apoc. 21). Christ's death on Calvary was only the beginning of his Exaltation (Jn. 3:14-15 ; 12:32-3). The full prophetic meaning of virginity is to be understood in reference to the whole mystery of death and life contained in Christ. Celibacy is not only an enacted prophecy of the imminent doom : it announces also and anticipates the life to come, the life of the new world in the Spirit.

Jeremias, who had announced the New Covenant, might have

¹ *Scripture*, 1960, pp. 97-105