From England

PUNISHMENT AND RETRIBUTION: AN ATTEMPT TO DELIMIT THEIR SCOPE IN NEW TESTAMENT THOUGHT [1]

by Charles Moule

It is likely, I know, that many readers — perhaps most — will find themselves in disagreement with the radical thesis I am about to present. But my hope is that time will not have been wasted — whatever the conclusions reached — because the thesis leads us in any case to ponder, once more, the very heart of the Gospel.

What I offer for your consideration is the thesis that the word 'punishment' and other words related to it (especially 'retribution') have, if used in their strictly correct sense, no legitimate place in the Christian vocabulary. The word 'punishment' is often loosely applied, it is true, in modern parlance, to suffering inflicted for other purposes — disciplinary or deterrent. But for such inflictions I believe that it is an incorrect and misleading term. Similarly, in many places where the notion of punishment (even if not the actual word) appears in the New Testament, careful pondering shows that what is meant is, again, not strictly speaking punishment. There is no denying, however, that there are further passages in the New Testament where the idea of retribution is most deliberately intended. But here, I would dare to say, the essentially personal character of the Christian gospel is temporarily obscured. In other words, what I want to ask is whether suffering inflicted for disciplinary and deterrent purposes (which are entirely relevant to the gospel) is not too lightly confused with suffering inflicted for the purposes of punishment and retribution, so that the latter have been dragged into a Christian context where they do not properly belong.

Let me start from what, in England at any rate, is a widely held view, among Christians as well as others, and from a formulation of it by a distinguished British theologian, Dr Leonard Hodgson, formerly Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford. In his book, *The Doctrine of the Atonement* (London, 1951), embodying the Hale Lectures, Dr Hodgson devotes a considerable section of a chapter (Ch. III) to the subject of punishment and forgiveness.

In the course of this he describes punishment as, essentially, the disowning by the community of evil done by its members (p. 57, etc.). By this I think we have to understand that, quite apart from anything that is done to rescue and reform the offender, and quite apart from any action that may be deemed likely to serve as a deterrent to prevent a repetition of the offence — over and above these, and distinguishable from them — Dr Hodgson maintains that a purely *punitive* duty is laid upon the community. Quite apart from their duty to try to reform the offender and their need to protect themselves from again becoming victims of his offence, the members of a society have to maintain the moral standards of that society by expressing their disapproval of the offence: they have formally to repudiate it as something they refuse to accept into their system, by judicially assessing it and awarding an appropriate penalty. Over against the offender's 'Yes' to the offence, the community has a duty to utter its equivalent 'No'.

In an entirely different context, here is a concrete example of the same attitude, though expressed very much more diffidently and without any confessedly Christian presuppositions. It is in a short book-review by Philip Toynbee, which appeared in *The Observer* for the 11th June, 1961. The book under review was *The Case of Adolf Eichmann* by Victor Gollancz — a moving plea against Eichmann's trial and, most of all, against his execution. The reviewer went a long way with Gollancz, but, at the end, came to precisely the point which I am raising. 'Mr. Gollancz', he wrote, 'points out that it would be absurd to defend the trial of Eichmann on deterrent grounds: it would, I think, be almost equally difficult to defend it on reformatory grounds. But are there other legitimate grounds for the infliction of punishment by human beings on one of their kind? Retribution is an ugly and an arrogant word, but are we quite sure that punishment is morally improper simply *qua* punishment? Are we quite sure that our motives are *only* bad when we feel indignant that some evil-doer has "got away with it"? Does Eichmann deserve at least his arrest and trial simply because it is, in however helpless a way, *fitting* that he should be exposed to the world for what he is or was? I can only say that I am *not* sure about these points ...'

Now, all of us, I know, can understand that reviewer's instinctive query and Hodgson's reasoned affirmation. But, nevertheless, I venture to think that this sense of the fittingness of retribution and the idea that punishment is proper, simply *qua* punishment, do need to be challenged in the name of personal values and, especially, in the name of the Christian gospel. I want

to ask whether there is any room at all for this principle inside the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, or, indeed, inside any relationship between persons as persons. May it not be one of those alien bits of secularism and sub-personal standards that still adhere to thinking that has got beyond their stage, and subtly cloud the issue?

The facts may, I hope, become clearer if, for a start, we look briefly at two famous New Testament themes — namely, the wrath of God, and sacrifice.

About wrath, (*orge*), it seems to me that three things may be said by anyone who presupposes the long and familiar debate around the word.

The first is that it is probably a mistake to imagine that Paul — let alone any other New Testament writer — thought of 'wrath' (*orge*) impersonally. As D.E.H. Whiteley, one of the most recent writers to discuss the word, says: 'When he [Paul] says "wrath", he means "wrath of God", though he seldom includes the words "of God". In referring to what *we* should call "impersonal, automatic" processes, he employs "personal" language'.[2] In this, Whitely follows C.K. Barrett[3] and others against C.H. Dodd.[4]

The second thing that may be said (again, with Whiteley)[5] is that — for Paul, at any rate, *orge* relates not to a *feeling* (*affectus*) in God, but to his *action* (*effectus*). In this, Whiteley is in agreement with Dodd. Thus, thirdly, even if *orge* is not merely some impersonal phenomenon but is *God's orge*, we are still not compelled to assume that it must be retributive and punitive — least of all, if it denotes less a *feeling* than an *action*.

If God has willed the dire consequences that ensue on sin, it does not necessarily follow that he has willed them retributively, punitively. It may be that he has willed them as the only way of doing justice to the freedom and responsibility of the human personality, as he has created it. There are, it is true, passages, as we shall shortly remind ourselves, where the sense seems, in fact, to be retributive, but they are strikingly few, and I shall argue that they are not really integrated with the logic of the gospel. Indeed, I suspect that, once we have eliminated *affectus* in favour of *effectus*, we have logically eliminated any need to associate punishment in its strict sense with *orge*.

About sacrifice, I have written at some length elsewhere.[6] Very briefly, I would submit that, although it is *possible* to interpret the ritual and cultic offering to God of material objects — animal or other — as a gesture of pure adoration, it is, in the main, extremely difficult to dissociate from the word sacrifice, and from the action we so denote,

the notion of bribery and barter and propitiation. If the word sacrifice has, in fact, been rescued from these associations, that is due to the astounding discovery that God himself initiates, provides, and, indeed, offers the sacrifice — the discovery adumbrated by Hebrew prophecy and implemented in Jesus Christ. But in so far as God's initiative does become evident — in so far as he is thus revealed as the subject rather than the object of the action — the notion of sacrifice, in any cultic sense, is correspondingly weakened. And precisely because the initiative is God's, it becomes impossible any longer at all to think of him as requiring to be propitiated or capable of being bribed. The language of sacrifice is, indeed, used metaphorically in the New Testament of the death of Christ, but comparatively seldom, and, in terms of Christ offering sacrifice to God, only in Eph. v.2 and in Heb.[7] And the root *hilask* — is notoriously stood on its head by the New Testament, so that it can no longer logically be rendered by words of propitiation. Sacrificial language is used metaphorically also of the self-dedication of Christians to the service of God. But, for both these actions — Christ's and ours — the word 'sacrifice' tends to be misleading, because it is so heavily charged with notions of propitiation and satisfaction — terms which consort badly with an action initiated by God himself and effected at his own infinite cost.

It may be that the cultic language of sacrifice is still the only language which sufficiently preserves the idea of adoration and worship and dedication on man's side, but I have my doubts. Costly self-surrender must surely be capable of being described in other ways. Meanwhile, the matter is at any rate germane to our inquiry, because the more cleanly and clearly the notion of compensation and satisfaction is eradicated from the Christian doctrine of atonement, the less clouded will be the issue about the place of retribution inside the gospel. If words like 'compensation' and 'satisfaction' could be successfully specialized, so as to relate exclusively to what has to be done in order to restore the wrong-doer to his proper personhood, to his full stature and dignity as a responsible person, then they would be tolerable — perhaps even desirable. But it seems to me extremely difficult to detach them from the suggestion of compensation and satisfaction to a feudal lord for injuries done to him; and this is something which is alien to the gospel.

With this preliminary, we come specifically to the question of rewards and punishments. It seems, at first sight, that, in the Gospels, at any rate — most obviously in the parables, but also in many other contexts — we are moving in the realm of quantitative justice, and that the language of retribution, of penalty and punitive measures, as also of reward and merit, is here, at any rate, perfectly clear — indeed, inescapable.

Even here, however, in the Gospels, I question whether, on closer scrutiny, one is not driven to recognize that what is described (though less often than we sometimes think) in popular terms of reward and punishment is (usually, at least) something much more organically related to the actions and attitudes in question than these words suggest. It may be that the language of reward and punishment is used in these passages only because it is the plain man's way of talking — perhaps the plain man's only way of understanding. But, if so, it is so rough and ready that it needs much qualification and amplification the moment one attempts to be more precise.

For instance, in Lk. xiv. 12-14 Jesus is represented as saying that one should give generous meals not to the rich who might offer hospitality in return but to the poor, because then one will be rewarded at the resurrection of the just. But this is not necessarily different from saying that virtue is its own reward. 'Reward' in its normal sense is a mercenary word, and the mercenary-minded would be intolerably bored by the resurrection of the just — by heaven. The very notion of heaven compels us to transvalue the word 'reward' by some such paradox as this. Similarly, the so-called 'rewards' named in the beatitudes, and the so-called 'penalties' in the corresponding woes in the Lucan version, are not mercenarily or arbitrarily fixed. They are organically related to the attitudes for which they are socalled 'rewards' and 'penalties'. The avaricious, because they are avaricious, do not know how to enjoy anything other than material riches: they already have (*apechete*, Lk. vi. 24 f.) the only 'reward' they are capable of receiving. Conversely, it is because the poor and the distressed may become thereby aware of their dependence on God that they, as a class, are capable of the permanent and inexhaustible riches of fellowship with him.

There are exceptions, and Luke, in particular, is prone to quantitative ideas, but there are instances of the same paradoxical use of mercenary terms in Tannaitic literature. Morton Smith[8] quotes the saying: 'The pay for a commandment is a commandment, and the pay for a transgression is a transgression'. It is difficult, as a matter of fact, to find more than a few parallels

from the New Testament to the use of 'pay' in a sinister sense, to denote the results of sin. Acts i. 18 (Judas bought 'a plot of land with the price of his villainy' (NEB)) is not an instance, for there the *misthos* ('price') evidently means the literal silver he was paid by the Jewish authorities for betraying Jesus; and II Pet. ii. 13 ('suffering hurt for the hurt they have inflicted' (NEB)) is too obscure for us to be confident. I can think of no more than three clear examples — though two of them are very striking. The first is in Rom i. 27, where homosexuals are described as '... paid in their own persons the fitting wage' (NEB). The second is in Rom. vi. 23, where the contrast between the two halves of the verse is instructive: 'For sin pays a wage, and the wage is death, but God gives freely, and his gift is eternal life, in union with Christ Jesus our Lord' (NEB). This is perhaps a deliberate attempt to express the ruthlessly mercenary nature of sin as an employer and to contrast this with God's huge generosity which makes terms of merit or reward on God's side wholly ridiculous. Thirdly, there is Heb. ii. 2, which says that, even under the Mosaic Law, every disobedience received its appropriate requital. (Of course, there are other passages where the same idea is expressed without precisely the 'pay' metaphor (for example, II Thess. i. 6, (*antapodounai*)). But these are not relevant to the present point.

Thus, the New Testament uses the 'reward' metaphor seldom for the consequences of evil; and whatever use it makes of it for good, is offset by such passages as the one just quoted from Rom. vi, where the utterly paradoxical, unmerited graciousness of God is stressed; and, in any case, the New Testament uses the metaphor in such a way as to show that it is really inadequate for its theme.

Even in the parables, where one might expect the vividly pictorial presentation to employ this sort of language extensively, it is comparatively restrained. To say, for instance, as in Lk. xvi. 19 ff., that a person who is blind to the needs of the beggar on his doorstep is bound to suffer irreparable remorse — indeed, that regard would not otherwise have been paid to his responsibility as a person, and that there is no way of forcibly making a man do good without violating that personal responsibility — is not the same thing as saying that he *deserves* this pain *as a punishment*, or that it has been determined *as a punishment* for such conduct. Again, the parables of Matt. xiii merely describe consequences: the wheat is garnered and weeds are burned; and (translating literally) 'that is where the weeping and the gnashing of teeth will be'. There are other parables in which the 'rewards' and 'punishments', so-called, are as

thinly disguised as in the beatitudes. The parable of the money in trust, for instance, is — at least on its 'rewarding' side — notoriously like that Tannaitic saying I quoted just now. The 'pay' for obeying the 'commandment' to use the money well, turned out to be another 'commandment' to exercise the same acumen and diligence in a still wider sphere. Virtue has, in that sense, become its own reward. Even in the allegory of the sheep and the goats, the two classes are merely invited into the kingdom or ordered off to misery. It is true that that misery is described as prepared for them 'the eternal fire that is ready for the devil and his angels' (NEB), Matt. xxv. 41, cf. 46';[9] and it is perfectly true that, in such a hint as this, and occasionally elsewhere, the dire consequences of wrong are described as penalties judicially imposed. For instance, two undeniable examples are Matt. xviii. 35, 'that is how the heavenly father will deal with you' (NEB), that is, something comparable to the enraged king who ordered the unforgiving servant off to the torturers; and the savage finale to Luke's version of the money in trust, Lk. xix, 27: 'But as for those enemies of mine who did not want me for their King,bring them here and slaughter them in my presence' (NEB). Here, too, it must be added that Luke manifests (whether by selecting traditions or by his own shaping of them I will not here discuss) a clearer tendency towards a quantitative scheme of justice and responsibility than the others. Lk. xii. 47 f. definitely assumes degrees of responsibility and of deserts: to know one's duty and to neglect it deserves a severer flogging than unwitting failure. To have more gifts is to be more responsible. The same principle is implied in Acts iii. 17, where Peter says that he knows it was in ignorance that the Jews killed Jesus.[10] Again it is in Luke (if it is an original reading — though this is doubtful) that we find (xxiii. 34), 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do' — a prayer which in this respect contrasts, as a matter of fact, with the unconditional prayer of Stephen (Acts vii. 60), 'Lay not this sin to their charge'. There is also, in Lk. xxiii. 41, the dying robber's statement that, while Jesus suffers innocently, he and his companion deserve all that they get: 'For us it is plain justice; we are paying the price of our misdeeds' (NEB). But I believe it is fair to say that this kind of thing is the exception rather than the rule, even in the realm of parable, where, in any case, we have learnt to accept the picture as a whole, and not press details in an allegorical spirit.

Thus far, our discussion of the language of reward and punishment in the New Testament has chiefly concentrated on the traditions of the words of Jesus. Apart from my excursion into the meaning of *orge* and of sacrificial

terms, I have stayed outside the evidence of the rest of the New Testament. When we move on to that, my conclusion will be that there are passages, indeed, which are quite clearly retributive and even vindictive; but, once again, that they are fewer and more limited than is sometimes imagined; and, as I believe, peripheral and alien to a strict exposition of the Gospel.

Before we look at the passages in question, I beg you to remember that I am at no point denying — who in his senses could? — that, throughout the New Testament, dire consequences are attached to sin; neither am I saying that these are not 'willed' by God. That sin leads to suffering, and that, without suffering, there is no reconciliation, nobody could hope to deny. Precisely because God's grace is, by definition, respectful towards personality and recognizes the dignity and responsibility of a free person, it cannot 'pauperize' the recipient. Grace is stern, it is challenge and demand, precisely by reason of its generous concern for the whole, undiminished entirety of personhood. But to say that is not the same thing as saying that punishment, penalty, retribution belong within the compass of grace, any more than reward does, except in the extremely paradoxical senses already indicated.

With that reminder, we face the chief passages outside the Gospels in which punitive words are used with precision and cannot but imply a definite notion of retribution.

(1) In Rom. ii. 5-11 Paul is in what anyone belonging to a Reformed tradition might be tempted to call a distinctly unpauline mood. He speaks quite specifically in terms of retributive justice: v. 6, God will give everyone his due, each in proportion to his deeds.[11] To those who, by patiently doing good, seek glory and honour and immortality he will give eternal life; to those whose concern is nothing but selfinterest and who reject truth and accept falsehood he will give wrath (*orge*) and anger (*thumos*) (v. 8) ...For God is impartial in his verdicts, v. 11. In short, the theme of the whole paragraph is God's exact justice (v. 6).

Well: justification by works! But it has always been recognized that, in these opening sections of his mightiest epistle, the Apostle is building up a massive indictment against mankind, Jew and Gentile alike, and is arguing from the premises accepted by anyone who recognizes a moral code.[12] It is not until we are shown to be all alike legally without defence that the good news of grace is introduced. In a sense, therefore, this section is deliberately taking up a preevangelic, pre-Christian standpoint.

I am not pretending by this that Paul at any point consciously repudiates the system of justice it implies; but it is worth observing that the point at which he develops to its extreme a system which, as I am arguing, has no real place within a fully personal relationship, is precisely the point at which he is consciously taking a pre-Christian stance — as it were, deliberately leaving the Gospel out of account for a while.

(2) Not so, however, the next passage, Rom. xii. 19-21. Whatever this means in detail, nobody can deny that it is firmly within a confessedly Christian standpoint. And it is here that the same note of retribution occurs, with a quotation again, as in Rom. ii, from the Old Testament: 'Justice is mine... I will repay' (NEB) is quoted (v. 19) with approval from the Pentateuch. It is perfectly clear that, while Christians are here forbidden to vindicate themselves by retaliation, v. 19, this is not because vindication, as such, is deemed undesirable, but because the proper person to achieve it is God himself. The phrase 'leave a place for divine retribution' (NEB) is extremely difficult to interpret in any sense except 'give *God's* wrath room' — stand aside and let God wreak vengeance.[13]

K. Stendahl, in a very forceful article,[14] maintains that we must face the fact that, as in much of the Old Testament and Qumran, so in Paul, there is no feeling that the Lord's enemies ought to be spared, but rather a confident expectation of the vindication of the Lord's own against them. The New English Bible hints that the Pentateuchal affirmations are intended to be transcended and replaced by a better way at the point at which Paul goes on to quote Prov. xxv. 21 f., 'If your enemy hungers, feed him', etc. In the Greek, this quotation is introduced merely by *alla* ('but' or 'in another way'). The New English Bible expands the *alla* to 'But there is another text'. Stendahl objects[15] that there is no instance to support such a translation, and that the *alla* must be either a straight adversative, giving the correct alternative to self-vindication, or else a heightening particle (meaning, I suppose, something like 'No: rather, if your enemy hungers, you must feed him'). I think that Stendahl is probably right grammatically. I only wonder whether the New English Bible may not be right *as a paraphrase,* and whether Paul, by his very introduction of the Proverbs passage and by his application of it, is not giving a new meaning to retaliation. Are we bound to accept Stendahl's paraphrase of the idea in 'heap', *soreuseis:*[16] 'If you act in non-retaliation, your good deeds are stored up as a further accusation against your enemy for the Day of Wrath to which you should defer all

judgment'? May it not be (even if we abandon the New English Bible's rendering of *alla)* that Paul is *reinterpreting* vengeance in terms of remorse? And, if so, remorse being capable of leading to penitence, it would no longer be necessary to regard this sort of 'retaliation' as retributive or vindictive. Paul's climactic summary (v. 21), 'Do not let evil corrupt you,but use good to defeat evil' (NEB) is suggestive — particularly when the object of conquest is carefully placed in the neuter — *to kakon.*

I am bound to say that what looks like a dreadfully vindictive passage seems, after all, to be not far from that paradoxical transvaluation which we have already watched in the Gospel sayings: and I am not persuaded by Stendahl's closing remark,[17] that perhaps even in the Sermon on the Mount the injunction to non-resistance ought similarly to be interpreted as meant to point to the quickest way to vengeance.

(3) But now, thirdly, within the Pauline corpus, we come to II Thess. i. 5-11. The authenticity of this epistle is sometimes questioned, but I have never been able to find persuasive grounds for believing that it is not Pauline. If it is Pauline, it strikes a distinct discord in the Pauline symphony. Within the space of these few verses we have a number of phrases specifically welcoming revenge.

The theme is that the Christians are to face their sufferings with a good heart, because these are evidence, not that God is unjust but, on the contrary, that he is just: they are (v.5), going to result in the Christian's being deemed worthy of God's Kingdom; for (v. 6) it is only fair if God compensates with anguish those who are anguishing them, and compensates with relief those who are now experiencing anguish. 'For the Lord Jesus will be revealed in (or, accompanied by?) a flame of fire, dealing vengeance to those who do not know God or obey the gospel. ... These (v. 9) shall pay the penalty of eternal destruction, excluded from his presence' (or? 'destruction which proceeds from before him')'. Short of certain parts of the Apocalypse, this comes as near as anything in the New Testament to the vindictive gloating of a Tertullian. The interesting thing is that in this respect it is unique in the Pauline corpus.

(4) Going outside Paul, we meet, first, in Heb. x. 29, the only New Testament occurrence of 'penalty', (*timoria*), and it is used with a word of deserving: if law was ruthless in the Mosaic dispensation, how much worse a penalty will be deserved, do you think, by the apostate from Christianity? There is no vindictiveness here, only dread of apostasy, but the language of deserving

and of retribution is plain enough. Three times in the same epistle — and, in the New Testament, only here — occurs the word *misthapodosia*. It occurs at ii. 2, where it is in the rare sense of penalty. The other two are in a good sense — x. 35, do not cast away your confidence (*parresia*), for it carries a high remuneration; and xi. 26, Moses counting the stigma of the Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt, because his eyes were on the recompense. These last two uses fall easily inside the category of metaphor which we found in the Gospels, and there is no need to interpret them in a mercenary way. The remuneration of *parresia* (boldness and unashamed Christian confession) and of accepting the stigma of being a follower of the Messiah is a fuller realization of the same — it is fellowship with the Christ, not some arbitrary prize.

So far as our concern goes, then, Hebrews yields us one definite phrase of deserving punishment: not a very large result.

(5) II Peter and Jude furnish notorious examples of a retributory justice. Not that in II Pet. ii. 4-9 God is spoken of, as clearly as one might expect, as bringing retributory punishment on evil. He is said to have brought disaster on the rebellious angels and the antediluvian world and on Sodom and Gomorrah, and thus to have judged them and made an example of them. It is not till v. 9 that we meet the phrase about keeping the wicked under chastisement until the Day of Judgment. But the tone of the passage is vindictive, as in that of -

(6) — the more condensed phrase in the corresponding passage in Jude 7: 'They paid the penalty in eternal fire, an example for all to see.'

(7) Finally, the Apocalypse contains a number of not only retributive but positively vindictive passages. There is no lack of emphasis on the necessity for Christians to *suffer*, like their Lord and Master; and there is no suggestion in the Apocalypse (a point sometimes forgotten) that Christians ought ever to resist the secular power. They are to suffer passively; and the blood of the martyrs, like the blood of the Lamb, has indeed redeemed the Christian community. It is now viewed as powerful, not to redeem the enemies of Christ, but to smash them with a rod of iron; and there is never any sign of doubt that that is what they deserve.

This is too familiar a fact to need illustrating at length. Let me remind you simply of xvi. 5 f., 'just art thou in these thy judgments, thou Holy One who art and wast, for they shed the blood of thy people and of thy prophets,

and thou hast given them blood to drink ... They have their deserts!' (NEB) and xix. 1 f., where there is an exultant shout of 'Alleluia!' in Heaven, because God, in his justice, 'has condemned the Great Whore ... and has avenged upon her the blood of his servants.' (NEB). In the light of such passages, I find it almost impossible to believe (much as I should like to) that the blood that flows like a great river out of the winepress of the wrath of God, in xiv. 20 is — by a splendid paradox — meant by the Apocalyptist to be the redemptive blood of the suffering Christ. This has been suggested — but can it be so?

This, I believe, completes my review of the main passages of the sort we are considering. There are undoubtedly scattered phrases here and there which could be added to the list, but I do not believe that they would amount to anything considerable. What conclusions, then, is it legitimate to draw?

One thing, I think, is undeniable, namely, that the New Testament writers as a whole (not least St Paul himself) do their thinking in a framework of ideas in which quantitative justice and retribution are axiomatic. Indeed, for the most part, their framework is that of the Old Testament Law; and if there is any reason to think of St Luke as a Gentile (though this is being questioned by some), it is remarkable that his writing, even more than those of known Jews, shows particularly clearly, as we have seen, the consciousness of a quantitative system.

But, this being so, is it not the more significant that — apparently without realizing it themselves — these writers have so remarkably confined and reduced their expressions of this attitude? The passages we have considered where retribution *in its strict sense* is favoured are comparatively few, and mostly evoked by the stress of persecution and set in a context of apocalyptic. The language of punishment and retribution, also, is strikingly confined. Of these words for punishment, chastisement annd deprivation, *poine* (punishment) does not so much as occur in the New Testament; *timoria* (punishment) occurs only in Heb. x. 29 (the verb, *timorein*, being applied only to Paul's persecution of Christians before his conversion — Acts xxii. 5, xxvi. 11); *kolasis* (chastisement) — except in I Jo. iv. 18, where it is specifically criticized, comes only once again, in Matt. xxv. 46; *kolazesthai* (apart from Acts iv. 21, where it describes what the opponents of Christianity wanted to do) comes only in II Pet. ii. 9; and, in any case, it is a neutral word for infliction of pain, without necessarily

carrying retributive notions. It can easily be reformatory. The same applies to *zemia* and *zemiousthai*, which denote deprivation, for whatever reason — it could be deterrent (as in a fine) or educative.

Am I, then asking you to believe that the deliberate infliction of suffering has no place in a Christian society? Am I an eccentric, advocating the removal of sanctions from community life? Indeed not! What am I trying to say can, I hope, be gathered up in a few sentences as follows.

(1) First, I am pleading for a clear recognition of distinctions between the various purposes for which suffering may be deliberately inflicted — by God on man, or by man on man.

Ignoring mere cruelty, suffering may be deliberately inflicted with the hope of reforming and educating the offender, or in order to deter from a repetition of the offence. Both these motives, I would say, are perfectly compatible with the Gospel — indeed, required by it. But there is a third motive — that of seeing justice done or causing it to be seen that justice has been done. This motive — distinguishable from the other two — concerns abstract justice; it is essentially retributive and retaliatory; and it is the appropriateness of this motive within a Christian system that I am questioning. The best that can be said for it, I fancy, is (what I quoted L. Hodgson as saying) that it may be the only way of maintaining standards, the only way in which a community can say 'We disapprove of this action'. But I fail to see that that declaration is not already implied by the other two motives. If a community tries to reclaim and reform the offender and to prevent a repetition of the offence, surely that is a clear enough expression of its disapproval.

You may say, the one amounts to the other — so why quibble? I reply, because the satisfaction of abstract justice (although in many cases it may *look* (and, indeed, feel!) exactly the same and take exactly the same forms as the others) is a sub-personal motive; and to allow it into one's scheme of thought does, in the end, distort one's judgment and one's idea both of God and man.

(2) For, secondly, the moment one comes to the level of personal relations — and, most of all (so far as one can conceive them) to the absolute heights of the love of God — mere justice ceases to be relevant. The father of the prodigal son does not say, 'Here comes my son: before I receive him back, I must secure that the family sees justice done'.

(3) Instead — and this is my third point — whereas the suffering involved in a reconciliation is almost infinitely intensified, it is never, when we stand inside the Gospel, *retributive* suffering. Suffering there is in plenty. If a reconciliation could be effected without suffering, it would not be a reconciliation between persons. (The only painless reconciliation I can think of is a mathematical one — as between two columns of figures in an account-book.) A person is, by definition, responsible. If he has committed an offence, he cannot be restored to fellowship until he has accepted the pain of responsibility for his offence and (so far as possible) made reparation. Anything less would be a diminution of his personality. To demand of him less would not be 'grace'; it would be insult. But his responsibility is not to some abstract system of justice: it is to God and to his fellow-men. That, and nothing abstract or sub-personal, is the measure of his responsibility. On the side of the injured party — who, ultimately, is God himself — the suffering of forgiveness is boundless. This too, is the cost involved in the structure of personal relationship, as God has created it.

But, on both sides, the suffering is creative and restorative and healing, and in obedience not to abstract laws of justice but to the demands of the living organism of persons which is most characteristically represented by the Body of Christ. That is why I also query the ultimate appropriateness of a word like 'sacrifice' in its strict sense.

Therefore — to conclude — while I say, with deep conviction, 'I do not deserve God's love', that is not because I have fallen short of some divine code of laws, but because love, by definition, cannot be *deserved* (least of all infinite, divine love). And, accordingly, I am not sure that it is a Christian attitude to say 'I deserve damnation' either. Certainly I may be on my way to damnation as long as I reject God's love, as long as I remain ungrateful and unresponsive; for to be my true self is to respond to God's love, and to fail to respond is to forfeit selfhood. But I doubt if *deserve* or *merit* is the right word on the debit side of the account, any more than it is on the credit side. 'Worthy' (*axios*) is doubtfully at home in the Christian vocabulary except in the cry of pure *adoration* — 'Worthy is the Lamb ...!'. In a word, I am asking whether there is any *ultimate* obligation or moral imperative (however necessary intermediate sanctions may be for the time being) except the obligation to gratitude, which is a personal, not a legal, response. Many other, and secondary, levels of obligation may in fact be needed as scaffolding (so to speak), to build the ultimate structure; a legal code may help, as a

temporary crutch, to attain to the level of personal relationship. But the moment we use the secondary as primary and normative and confuse ends with means, we are on the less than Christian track; and this applies as much to the principle and motives behind a so-called penal code as to a preaching of the Gospel in terms of penal substitution.

Notes

1. Among relevant publications since this paper, note especially W. Moberly, The Ethics of Punishment, London, 1968, and E. Moberly, Suffering, Innocent and Guilty, London, 1978.
2. The Theology of St Paul, Oxford, 1964, p. 67
3. The Epistle to the Romans, London, 1957, p.33
4. The Epistle to the Romans, London, 1932, pp. 21 f.
5. Theology, 69.
6. The Parish Communion Today, ed. D.M. Paton, London, 1962, pp. 78 ff.
7. ix. 14, x. 10, 14.
8. "Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels," J.B.L. Monographs 6, 1951 64. For other similar sources, see the bibliography in R. Schnackenburg's Die Sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testamentes, Munchen, 1962, 122, n. 15, where Schnackenburg also criticizes Morton Smith.
9. Cf. the similar use of *hetoimazein* in bonam partem in Matt. xx. 23, Mk. x. 40.
10. D. Daube has observations on this principle in Judaism, e.g., '"For they know not what they do": Luke 23, 34' in Studia Patristica IV = T.U. 79, 1961, 58 ff. But all this, I think, is exception rather than rule in the Gospels as a whole.
11. Cf. II Tim. Iv. 14.
12. In the same section of Romans, another clear example of the retributive idea of deserving is Rom. I. 32, 'Those who behave like this deserve to die' (NEB).
13. Cf. 1 Sam. xxvi: 18, Sir. xix: 17.
14. 'Hate, Non-Retaliation, and Love,' H.T.R. 1, 4, Oct., 1962, 343 ff.
15. H.T.R. 1, 4, 1962, 346, n. 9.
16. H.T.R. 1, 4, 1962, 348.
17. H.T.R. 1, 4, 1962, 355.

The Reverend Professor C.F.D. Moule was the Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity at Cambridge 1951-1976.

Comment by Wayne Northey

Ever since I first saw a footnote about this essay (in William Klassen's Release to Those in Prison, Herald Press, 1977), I was very taken with its

central thesis '...that the word 'punishment' and other words related to it (especially 'retribution') have, if used in their strictly correct sense, no legitimate place in the Christian vocabulary.' The author is a noted New Testament scholar.

I have only read one book-length work directed singly to this same theme (again footnoted in Release to Those in Prison, and regrettably only in German, entitled Das Recht im Dienst der Versöhnung und des Friedens, Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1972, by Siegfried Meurer) and it comes up with very similar conclusions. Moule, as you will notice, draws attention to two other works. Furthermore, John Driver in Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church (Herald Press, 1986) throughout rings the changes on this orientation. C. Norman Kraus in Jesus Christ Our Lord (Herald Press, 1987), especially pp 198ff argues along the same lines. Walter Wink presents a similar case in Naming the Powers (Fortress Press, 1984), pp 53ff. And much of the biblical reflection of French anthropologist Rene Girard is in the identical direction, as shown in 'A Transformation of Sacrifice: An Application of Rene Girard's Theory of Culture and Religion' by Mary Barbara Agnew in Worship, 61-5, Se., 1987.*

*The Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok in which the essay first appeared in 1965 granted permission for this to be reprinted as part of the 'Occasional Papers' series. Then C.F.D. Moule likewise graciously gave permission, and finally Cambridge University Press did so**. The essay in its reprinted form was taken from: Essays in New Testament Interpretation, C.F.D. Moule, Cambridge University Press, 1982. Some of the other essays in the collection are of related interest, particularly essay 18, 'The Theology of Forgiveness.'*

Professor Moule in a personal letter responded to my query about how his attention had been drawn to this theme: 'My interest in the subject has been a constant one, because New Testament theology has been my special interest — not to mention that the attempt to preach the Gospel demands it anyway (and I am an Anglican clergyman also).'

I hope that all who read this reprint will be led, according to the author's opening words in the essay, '...to ponder, once more, the very heart of the Gospel.'

* *In personal correspondence, he has also highlighted Christ and the Judgment of God: Divine Retribution in the New Testament, Stephen H. Travis, Basingstoke, England, Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1986.*

** *Professor Moule underscores in personal correspondence that he is keenly aware that much water has flowed under the bridge since the essay's initial appearance – not least in discussion of Rom. 1 and 2 – and he has himself changed his mind on some of the details, though holds strongly to the main thesis.*

In this version for Justice Reflections Professor Moule has made several alterations to the original script. He is an admirer of more recent work on this topic by Christopher Marshall and Howard Zehr.

Recent books by Christopher Marshall include:

2005 'Satisfying Justice: Victims, Justice and the Grain of the Universe', Interface: A Forum for Theology in the World 15 (forthcoming May, 2005).

2005 Biblical Justice: Little Books on Justice and Peacemaking (Intercourse PA.: Good Books Forthcoming late 2005).

2005 'For God's Sake! Terrorism, Religious Violence and Restorative Justice', Publication forthcoming.

2004 'Crime, Crucifixion and the Forgotten Art of Lament,' Justice Reflections 6/43 (2004), 1-14.

2004 'How Does Restorative Justice Ensure Good Practice? A Values-based Approach', in conjunction with H. Bowen and J. Boyack, Critical Issues in Restorative Justice, edited by H. Zehr and B. Toews (Palisades NY: Criminal Justice Press, 2004), 265-76.

2003 'Prison, Prisoners and the Bible', Justice Reflections 3/13 (2003), 1-18.

2003 'Atonement, Violence and the Will of God', Mennonite Quarterly Review 76:1 (2003), 67-90.

2003 'The Moral Vision of the Beatitudes: The Blessings of Revolution', in D. Neville and P. Matthews (ed.), Faith and Freedom: Christian Ethics in a Pluralist Culture (Sydney: Australian Theological Forum, 2003), 11-33.

2002 'Pain, Justice and the Hope of Redemption', in Justice Reflections 1/3 (2002), 1-14.

2001 Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition SPS 5 (Telford/ Scottdale, Pa.: Pandora Press/ Herald Press, 2001).

2001 Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime and Punishment (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001).

2001 'Following Christ Down Under: A New Zealand Perspective on Anabaptism', in J. D. Roth (ed.), Engaging Anabaptism: Conversations With a Radical Tradition (Scottdale, Pa./ Waterloo, On.: Herald Press, 2001), 41-52.

2000 'Paul and Christian Social Responsibility' Anvil 17/1 (2000), 7-18.

1994 'The Use of the Bible in Ethics: Scripture, Ethics, and the Social Justice Statement', in J. Boston and A. Cameron (eds), Voices for Justice: Church, Law and State In New Zealand (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1994), 107-146.

1993 Kingdom Come: The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus (Auckland: Impetus Publications, 1993). Chinese language translation of Kingdom Come (Hong Kong: FES Publishing)

1989 Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative SSNTMS 64 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Paperback edition, 1994.

Recent books by Howard Zehr include:

2004 Critical Issues in Restorative Justice (ed., with Barb Toews) (Criminal Justice Press: Monsey, NY). The Little Books of Justice and Peacebuilding (General series editor; following titles are part of that series) 2005 The Little Book of Contemplative Photography (Intercourse, PA. Good Books, forthcoming 2005).

2004 The Little Book of Family Group Conferencing, New Zealand Style (Intercourse, PA: Good Books,2004). With Allan MacRae.

2002 The Little Book of Restorative Justice (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2002). The Little Books of Justice and Peacebuilding (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, ongoing). Series editor.

2001 Transcending: Reflections of Crime Victims (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2001)

1996 Doing Life: Reflections of Men and Women Serving Life Without Parole (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1996).

1990; revised 1995 Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990; revised 1995). Changing Lenses is considered a foundational work in restorative justice and is cited extensively in most discussions of the field in North America and internationally.