

'Woman, behold thy son'. And in that sense he restores the harmony that was at the beginning, in Paradise, where Man is one with himself. He has preserved and tended the Garden throughout history—but *for the sake of the City*, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11, 20), the New Jerusalem prepared as a Bride adorned for her husband (Apoc. 21, 2).

The Christ is more than all this, for though it is true that the whole of human history is ordered towards the building up of other Christs who are temples of the Holy Spirit, it is also true that within history this Temple is destroyed. And in the heavenly city there is no temple, for the Lord God Almighty is the temple thereof, and the Lamb.



## THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

ONE of the Scribes . . . asked him which was the first commandment of all. But Jesus answered him, The first commandment of all is,  
 "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one God;  
 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God  
 With thy whole heart,  
 and with thy whole soul,  
 and with thy whole mind,  
 and with thy whole strength."

This is the first commandment. And the second is like it, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' (Mk. 12, 29-34).

We might take the scribe's question literally and interpret it 'what sort' of law (*poia entole*) is this greatest of all laws; for it is in fact, a law of unsuspected universality. Our Lord's answer must in fact have sounded familiar to that Scribe and his contemporaries. They had often heard it read twice daily—even if admittedly they had not always entered into its inward spirit. The famous *Shema* prayer, or confession of faith, seems to have obtained in our Lord's time, if for example we may trust the evidence of Josephus (Ant. 4, 8, 13), 'Let everyone commemorate before God the

benefits which he bestowed upon them at their deliverance out of the land of Egypt, and this twice every day, both when the day begins and when the hour of sleep comes on, gratitude being of its own nature something just, and serving not only as a return for past but also as an invitation for future favours. They are also to inscribe the principal blessings they have received from God upon their doors, and be equally mindful of them upon their arms; so, too, they are to bear upon their forehead and their arm those wonders which declare the power of God as well as his good will towards them, so that God's readiness to bless them may appear everywhere conspicuous about them. . . .'

Though the *Shema*<sup>1</sup> appears to have been well-known, yet too often its essential core, the one thing necessary, could be drowned in a mass of accessories and material details.

Whatever the divergencies between principles and realisation in the Jewish world of the time, it is valuable for us to note the precision added by St Matthew (22, 40): 'on these two commandments depend<sup>1</sup> the whole Law and the prophets'. The whole *raison d'être* of the Law and the Prophets lies in the great commandment. Ritual, ceremonial, types, figures, all was ordered to the great commandment, an ultimate utterance of God revealing in the matter of conduct as of belief. We are reminded of the Transfiguration narrative: our Lord appeared in majesty with Moses and Elias, viz. the Law and the Prophets. These bear testimony to the final Mediator, and then their role ceases. After the theophany, they saw no one but Jesus alone.

As privileged in seeing the things that we see from the vantage point of faith we may here briefly consider how the supreme command was prepared for by the Law and Prophets, or in what sense it was already latent, inchoately or explicitly in the old order that was willed by God. In the words of Professor Orr 'Jesus declares that on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets—they are therefore primary principles of the O.T. religion as well'. (Hastings Dict. of the Bible: 'Love'.)

This last statement is challenging, and it would seem that

<sup>1</sup> *kremasthai* (a) hang, as on a peg, etc.; (b) the word used of our Lord's hanging on the Cross.

there is much against such a presentation. We may take three fairly representative treatments of Old Testament religion.

First, Professor Wheeler Robinson in *The Religious Ideas of the O.T.* (1913): the very titles of his chapters suffice to suggest his treatment, thus: (1) History as the source of ideas, (2) The idea of religion, (3) of God, (4) of man, (5) The approach of God to man, (6) The approach of man to God, (7) Problems of sin and suffering, (8) The hope of the nation (Covenant, Messiah, etc.), (9) The permanent value of the O.T. Nowhere in this work is it suggested that the love of God is a primary, or even secondary, principle of O.T. religion.

Or again, consider the work of J. Pedersen in his *Israel* (1926 and 1940). In this we have the profound and fascinating analyses of a true scholar who has really entered into the Hebrew mind. He has much to say on origins, on the family, property, etc.; on the soul, its powers and capacity, on blessing, honour, shame and name; on common life and its laws; on righteousness and truth, and maintenance of justice—but nothing of the love of God and affective elements in the make-up of a Hebrew's life.

Finally, the work of a Catholic, A. Gelin, in *Les Idées maitresses de l'A.T.*, excellently treats of two or three great 'themes' of the Scriptures and suggests others, e.g., that of *vocation* (Abraham, Moses, the Prophets), or of *faith* or man in his relationship to God (Abraham, Isaias, Job, Hebrews 11, Romans 4), or of *suffering* which enlightens (Jeremias, Job, the *anawim*); or again, the theme of the *desert*, 'I will lead Israel to the desert and speak to their heart' (Osee 2, 6) (Moses, Elias, St John Baptist, our Lord . . .) all these and more can be profitably pursued.

In a word, very different minds, surveying the content of the Old Testament, its essential religious message, come to treat of faith, of Messianic hopes, etc., but *not* outstandingly or even perceptibly of the love of God.

Further, there remains the widespread feeling that the Old Testament teaches largely or exclusively of divine justice, of vindication, of the 'jealousy' of God, of the fear of God, of the wrath of God. . . .

Undoubtedly, too, there are remains of primitive concep-

tions and usages, e.g. the case of Jephthe's daughter<sup>2</sup> (Judges II, 29-40) with the notion that a vow, even foolish, must be kept: 'I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot go back.' And we are told of many crimes and all too human horrors; and perhaps, all too little love.

Now it is true that much in the Old Testament dispensation was imperfect. Revelation, until the coming of our Lord, was progressive; many essential truths (as we call them) were only learned late in Israelite history—even such a fundamental notion as that of survival after death in any full sense.

Yet from small beginnings and slender traits there grew up a tradition of love. Thus at the end of a very old document in Judges (5, 31), in a narrative contemporary with the events described, we read: 'so let thy enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love thee shine, as the sun shineth in his rising'. In the midst of savage fighting and savage feeling, the love of God appears as a ray of sunshine against the sombre scene. So too, in the utterance of a 'jealous' God there is mercy and love: 'I am the Lord thy God, mighty, jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands to them that love me and keep my commandments' (Exod. 20, 5-6).

And so as hundreds of years went by and the sorrows of Israel grew, mingled with its few triumphs, there grew up too a tradition of the love of God. The Old Testament story is, as much as anything else, a story of deepening spiritualisation, of growth in the spirit. This culminated in later Judaism in the Hasidim<sup>3</sup> movement; in the New Israel of

<sup>2</sup> Several Fathers simply praise Jephthe. St Thomas's view is more *nuancé*: 'St Jerome says he was foolish in his vowing, which lacked discretion, and wicked in keeping his vow. Yet the preceding words are *the spirit of the Lord was upon him*, and this because his faith and devotion which led him to make a vow were from the Holy Spirit and so too the victory he obtained; moreover the likelihood is that he repented of his wicked deed, and anyway that deed was a type of something good.'

<sup>3</sup> cf. The magnificent study of J. de Menasce, O.P., *Quand Israël aime Dieu*.

God, in that supreme love of the Son of God who gave his life for us and for our salvation.

If we would understand the legacy of Israel in the matter of love, we must first resolve an ambiguity: 'love of God' for us nowadays more often means our love for God: yet it may also mean God's love for us. At origin, *our love for God is generated by God's love for us*. That is true for us now, and it was equally true over the long history of God's dealings with the chosen people.

Thus we may start with the notion of God's *hesed* or lovingkindness (rather than mercy of the English versions): cf. Osee 11, 4: 'The lovingkindness of God I extended to them, I gave much love'. This prophet brings out strongly the bond of lovingkindness which unites God to his chosen people. His bitter personal experiences 'opened his eyes' to the deeper meaning of a bond between Jahweh and Israel. God came to be thought of as a father and husband (Osee 11, 1; 2, 16). The family or deepest relationships of human life provided imagery to convey the reality of a wounded yet ever living love of God for Israel. Thus the passionate love of Jahweh for his bride (if we may so speak) yearns to give her fullness of life: 'I will espouse thee to me for ever; and I will espouse thee to me in justice, and judgment, and in lovingkindness and in commiserations. I will espouse thee to me in faith, and thou shalt know Jahweh' (Osee 2, 19-20). The tender patience of a father appears in: 'when Israel was a child I loved him and called my son out of Egypt . . . and I was like a foster-father to Ephraim, I carried them in my arms, and they knew not that I healed them. I will draw them with cords of man and with bands of love. . . . (Osee 11, 1-4.) Israel is perishing because ignorant of Jahweh (4, 6) who is husband and father. Emptied of God's lovingkindness, of God's love, life is but a slow death.

Through all the drama of Israel's history, God's love abides, undiminished. But through the schooling of the prophets, men's awareness of, and sometimes response to, God's love, grew too. We may pass over fluctuating fortunes and come to the eve of that national disaster which was the fall of Jerusalem. In that ruined world, Jeremias felt the irresistible call of God: *seduxisti me Domine et seductus sum*:

'Thou hast led me away and I was swept off, thou art stronger than I, and has prevailed: I am become a laughing-stock all the day long, everyone mocks me . . . and if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire in the marrow of my bones and I am weary with forbearing and I cannot contain.' (Jer. 20, 7-12.) Soon after the ruin of Jerusalem (B.C. 587) we are given the astonishing oracle of God: ' . . . they have found grace in the desert, a people who have escaped from the sword. I will go to give him rest, even Israel. From afar Jahweh has appeared unto me: "With an everlasting love I have loved thee, and so have prolonged my lovingkindness to thee<sup>4</sup>; again I will build thee and thou shalt be built, O Virgin Daughter of Israel. . ."' (Jer. 31, 2-6.)

In the period of exile, God taught: 'a new heart also I will give you and a new spirit within you . . . and you shall be my people and I shall be your God' (Ezech. 36, 26). And let us recall the powerful text of Isaias (43, 1): 'fear not for I have redeemed thee and called thee by thy name. Thou art mine'—words equally applicable to the Exiles on their return or future return, as to each individual soul, then as now, as to our Lady herself, the supremely redeemed and chosen of God: *elegit eam Deus et praelegit eam*.

These, and similar texts, serve to give us a total impression. The schooling of the prophets over the years must have meant that the fatherly care, loveliness, utter justice, and much else of God, were borne in more and more upon men's minds, to such an extent that soon they were readily disposed to accept the Unique God of Deuteronomy (6, 4).

The great law of the Old Testament, as appearing in Deuteronomy (6, 4-9) can now be examined more closely. First, the text 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind . . . and these words which I command thee this day shall be upon thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and talk of them when sitting in thy house and when walking in the way, when lying down

<sup>4</sup> or, 'I have drawn thee along with compassion'.

and when rising up. Bind them for a sign upon thy hand and have them for the frontlets between thine eyes. Write them upon the doorposts of thy house and upon thy gates.' The *Shema*<sup>4</sup> is the greatest prayer of Hebrew worship and 'a fundamental article of Hebrew faith' (Driver); we would add: *and of our faith*. St Thomas (I-II, 99, 5) puts Deuteronomy (6, 4) on a level with Genesis (1, 1): both are solemn utterances which manifest the imperative authority of God. At the time of Moses God was worshipped by his newly-revealed name of 'Jahweh' (Exod. 20, 2-3), 'I am Yahweh thy God: thou shalt have no other gods but me'. When we reach Deuteronomy 6, 4, we have gone a step forward: we are given the reason for this last exclusive precept. God in fact is 'ehad or Unique. This is an assertion of true monotheism, as in Zacharias 14, 9: 'Jahweh shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Jahweh, and his name shall be One'.

Deuteronomy (6, 4-9) can be divided up thus: v. 4 the Unique God; v. 5, how we should love God; vv. 6-9, esteem the command given. In Deuteronomy (6, 5) *thou shalt love*. Love of God characterises true worshippers in the spirit of the Decalogue. We have seen how the expression of that love is already in Exodus as in an early text of Judges. The love of God was at the core of Moses's legislation. Thus we can accept at face value the statement of Josue (22 5): 'the law which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you: that you love the Lord your God and walk in all his ways and keep in all his commandments, and cleave to him and serve him with all your heart and with all your soul'. *With all thy heart* is a specially Deuteronomic phrase to convey devotion of the whole being to God; 'heart' here stands for 'mind'; 'Soul', 'Strength' stand for the affective elements, or love. . . .

That the love of God should be a precept at all can, for some, be a real difficulty. St Thomas<sup>5</sup> explains that the precept of the love of God is, *given faith*, to elicit from us acts of the love of God, to produce fruits of that seed which has been implanted by the grace of God.

<sup>5</sup> fides praesupponitur ad legis praecepta . . . fides est necessaria tamquam principium spiritualis vitae. (II-II, 16, 1.)

Verses 6-9 are calculated to make us 'esteem the command'. *Upon your heart* (cf. Jeremias 31, 33) 'I will write in their heart and they shall be my people'. 'Frontlets between thine eyes', need not mean more than constant thought of Jahweh. But later Jewry wrote out Exodus 13, 1-16; Deuteronomy 6, 4-9; 11, 13-21 on small scrolls. These were boxed up to make phylacteries of the type referred to in Matthew 23, 5. *Doorposts of thy house* is a reference to the Mezuzoth or small metal cylinders containing the texts of Deuteronomy 6, 4-9; 11, 13-21. These were touched on coming in and going out of the house while reciting 'The Lord guard thy going out and thy coming in' (Ps. 121: 8). The usage does suggest a prefiguring of the holy water stoup, and its effective predecessor.

With the abiding presence of a constant tradition of sublime teaching in Israel, we can better understand how the expression of the love of God comes to be found in the later books of the Scripture.

Among post-exilic writings, let us recall simply Nehemias 1, 5. Nehemias prays 'I beseech O Lord God of heaven, strong and great and terrible, who keepest covenant and mercy with those *that love thee* and keep thy commandments'. Almost the same words recur in Daniel (9, 4); which makes us suspect a conventional prayer phrase of the period.

Then towards 180 B.C. Ecclesiasticus furnishes a number of fascinating expressions on the love of God, fascinating because we sense that we are drawing nearer to the language and ideas of the New Testament. Thus in Ecclesiasticus 2, 19 (LXX, 2, 16) we get the combination of 'fear of the Lord' with *agape*—soon to be a key-word. 'They that fear the Lord will seek his good grace, and they that love him (*hoi agapontes*) shall be filled with his law.'

In a confident strain is the precept 'Love God all thy life and call upon him for thy salvation' (Ecclus. 13, 8). Awareness of the source of true penance and love and forgiveness appears in texts such as: 'He that loves God shall obtain pardon for his sins' (Ecclus. 3, 4) or 'the eyes of God are upon them that love him' (Ecclus. 34, 15). Sometimes too there lingers a memory of Exodus or Deuteronomy: 'With



all thy strength love him that made thee and forsake not his ministers' (Ecclus. 7, 32).

We can end with a note on the Psalms. All through the long story of Israel Tehillîm or Psalm praises had obtained. The Psalter is in great part a mirror of the devotional life of true Jews from the earliest times to the later.

It will be enough for our purposes to discern in the psalms (a) expressions of the love of God:

'I will love thee, O Lord my strength' (17, 1).

'As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul after thee, O my God' (41, 1).

'What have I in heaven? and besides thee what do I desire upon earth?' (72, 25).

'You that love the Lord, hate evil' (96, 10).

'Love the Lord well, you who worship him' (30, 24).

'Vigilantly the Lord watches over all that love him, but utterly destroys the wicked' (144, 20);  
and to end with: (b) the expression of that spiritual joy that flows immediately from the supreme love of God:

'The light of thy countenance is signed upon us: thou hast given gladness in my heart'. (4, 7.)

'I will be glad and rejoice in thee. I will sing to thy name, thou Most High. I will rejoice in thy saving power'. (9, 3, 16).