St Paul and the Anger of God

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Since the publication of his commentary on Romans in 1932, C.H.Dodd has won considerable support for his treatment of the apostle's concept of the anger of God. The most notable contribution has come from Dr A.T.Hanson. In his book'The Wrath of the Lamb'(1957) he traces the idea of'impersonal wrath'within the whole biblical tradition and concludes that Dodd's observations are correct. The Christian public have been acquainted with the issues through the"Daily Bible Study" commentaries of William Barclay who acknowledges himself indebted to Dodd's insights.

Dodd holds that when Paul uses'orgē theou'(wrath of God) he is not describing "a certain feeling or attitude of God towards us, but some process or effect in the realm of objective facts." /1 He examines the idea of'the angry God'from its roots in primitive religion, through the OT and the teaching of Jesus, into the writings of Paul. He concludes that there has always been something'impersonal'about it from the beginning. Thus, "in the long run we cannot think with full consistency of God in terms of the highest ideals of personality and yet attribute to him the irrational passion of anger." /2 Paul and Jesus, he believes, have abandoned the archaic concept of the angry God for the view that his love and mercy are all-embracing. Can Paul's use of"orgē"sustain this interpretation? Any answer must first examine the major sources of his thinking, mainly the OT, Judaism and the teaching of Jesus.

1. The OT and the anger of the Lord

The two major convictions upon which OT theology is founded are the reality of God and the reality of the universe over which he reigns(Ps.10.16). Within history he has made himself known to Israel; the Sinai Covenant is his gift to her as well as his demand for her fidelity. Yahweh's covenant is a serious matter, a matter of'blessing and cursing'(Deut.11.26), a matter of life and death.

Yahweh's revelation of himself at Sinai reflects an Israelite cultic confession: "The Lord, the Lord,a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,...but who will by no means clear the guilty"(Ex.34.6-7). All such formulae(Neh.9.17,31; Jer. 32.18) underline the goodness and severity of Yahweh. His anger is inherent in his character as his'curse'is inherent in the covenant regulations. It flows from his holiness(Lev 10.1-7) and righteousness(Ps.97.2-3). Other terms such as'avenge','judge', and'destroy' also express aspects of his wrath.

The writers of the OT were deeply impressed by Yahweh's anger as their abundant references to it testify. The most usual noun is 'ap' and its most frequent synonym Hēmah . Moreover eighty per cent of the'anger' references relate to Yahweh, and twenty per cent to human anger. When used of God the noun form is overwhelmingly preferred to the verbal.

What factors provoke the anger of the Lord? The answer is simply wilful and persistent sin. Israel falls under wrath for despising the covenant(Hosh 23.16); the nations do so for threatening God's people, undermining her loyalty to the covenant(Ex.23.23-4), and breaking the basic moral laws of humanity by excessive cruelty (Amos 1.11). The Flood(Gen 6-8) and the tower of Babel (Gen 10) demonstrate Yahweh's spiritual and moral concern for the whole world.

How does Yahweh's anger touch human existence? Though not all misfortune is the result of man's sin or God's wrath, yet wrath can be expressed in cosmic disturbances(famine, earthquakes , plagues et al.), political disasters (military defeat, collapse of national life), and legal retribution in which the covenantal 'curses' often determine the content of justice(Deut 27-28).

Can Yahweh's anger be averted? The ritual of the sacrificial system with its expiatory offerings eg burnt-offering, sin-offering, guilt-offering, culminating in the annual day of atonement, provided 'covering' for Israel's sin, removal of the threat of wrath, and renewal of reconciliation with Yahweh. Essential also was repentance (Jer.3.12), a return to covenantal obedience.

Sometimes the prayers of the righteous(Ex 32.32),and the punishment of offenders who bring wrath on the community(Num 25.1-13), can turn away wrath. In Deutero-Isaiah's "suffering servant" appears one who bears the sin of Israel, the wrath of God and thus achieves redemption for his people (Is 53.1-12). Frequently nothing can stop Yahweh's anger running its terrible course.

In the OT therefore the anger of the Lord is part of his covenantal nature, and is repeatedly demonstrated in his relationship with Israel and the nations.

2. Judaism and the anger of the Lord

The fall of Jerusalem(587BC) and the exile cast their shadow over the religion of the inter-testamental period; the day of Yahweh's wrath had finally come for Israel(Esdras 1.49-52). With the return of the exiles (538BC) the essential features of Judaism begin to emerge: the sole reality of Yahweh, the importance of the law, Israel's strong sense of election. During the Seleucid period apocalyptic convictions appear as hope in the renewal of the Davidic state recedesand faith in the supernatural kingdom of God advances.

The idea of God undergoes some changes. His transcendence is emphasised as surrogate titles such as"the Most High God" and the "King of Heaven" begin to replace the sacred name'Yahweh'. There is concern for a'pure' concept of God, as in the LXX, devoid of unworthy anthropomorphisms. Surprisingly anger is not one of these for"the LXX translators have reproduced correctly the original Hebrew in the OT passages dealing with wrath." /3 Again,the concept of Yahweh as the coming Judge, "with whom are mercy and wrath"(Sir.5.6) is painted in even darker colours than in the OT.

The Torah as divine revelation written and oral becomes the sole standard of religion, and in keeping the Torah alone is there hope of salvation at the last judgment. Occasionally there is optimism that some might achieve righteousness with God by keeping the Torah but generally a gloomier evaluation prevails.

Whether it be in the spiritual, moral, civil or cultic spheres, the Torah defines what sin is. Sin is, moreover, linked firmly with the individual as the idea of collective responsibility weakens. /4 Since all men have sinned, all live under the cloud of wrath, unless that cloud is removed by a radical return to the Lord(2 Esdras 8.34-35).

Judaism is pervaded by an acute sense of sin and a corresponding concern for expiation. Cultic rituals and repentance remain central, but the human role in achieving atonement is stressed. Good works such as almsgiving(Sir.3.31), sufferings borne as divine chastisements, and death itself are given expiatory power. The sufferings of the righteous and the nation's martyrs can be expiatory and propitiatory(2 Macc.7.37-38)

The day of judgment dominates eschatology as"the great event towards which the whole universe is moving and which will vindicate once and for all God's righteous purpose for men and all creation." /5 Judgment will be universal, fair and irrevocable. Condemnation brings the terrible prospect of Gehenna(Hell) where the souls of the dead are tormented after the great assize. Gehenna constitutes the most terrifying metaphor in which the anger of the Lord is clothed.

The OT view of the wrath of God flows naturally into Judaism and broadens out in certain directions which we have noted above. Nevertheless it remains a frightening prospect.

3. Jesus and the anger of God.

Hardly a mention is made in the teaching of Jesus, apart from some parables(Mt 18.34; 22.7)of the specific concept of the anger of God. Does this mean,as Dodd suggests that Jesus had abandoned the whole idea? If the words are rare, is the concept absent? A brief survey of the teaching of Jesus would suggest the opposite.

The major theme in Jesus' message is the reign of God. The coming of the kingdom in his life and ministry heralds the beginning of the end for the forces of anti-God;it also spells danger for unholy man. What Jesus presents

is not peaceful idyll; for some it brings hope of salvation, for others dread of judgment(Mk 8.38; Mt 25.12, 26-30). Though Jesus bestows the messianic gift of forgiveness (Mk.2.5; Lk 7.47), there is a sin for which there is no pardon(Mt 12.32f and pars), that is,recognising the Spirit-filled mission of Jesus,yet defying, resisting and cursing it. Far worse than physical death awaits those who reject the kingdom(Mk 8.34f). The good news of the kingdom is a gift of grace as well as a demand for conversion and a warning of impending judgment.

If we rarely hear'anger' on the lips of Jesus, it is also striking how rarely anger is attributed to him by the synoptic writers. He looks around at the Pharisees 'with anger'(Mk 3.5) and is'angry"(some mss have'moved with compassion') at the suffering of the leper(Mk 1.41); he is"indignant" that his disciples should turn away children from him(aganakteo Mk 10.14). Here is the anger of the whole Christ, God and Man. /6 Upon his lips however we hear the prophetic'woes' pronounced upon Israel's leaders (Lk 11.37-54; Mt 23). He foretells the doom of Jerusalem,'the centre of disobedience', where the blood of the Son of God will be spilled(Mk 13). Its destruction will be a day of wrath (Lk 21. 23- only here does Jesus use 'wrath' outside a parabolic context)

Does Jesus see his death on the Cross as bound up with divine wrath? At his baptism he was conscious of being the messianic Son of God and servant of Yahweh(Mk 1.11; Ps.2.7; Isa 42.1). Later he presents his death in terms which recall the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 (Mk 10.45). His self-offering is sacrificial, vicarious and redemptive; it inaugurates the new covenant (Mk 14. 24) in which sin is covered; but is there any divine wrath to be removed? Several things would suggest there is: he must drink the cup of suffering (Mk 14.36 - in OT often the'cup' is a synonym for 'wrath'), /7 enduring the divine smiting which is a wrath-bearing experience ("smitten by God"- Isa 53.4; cf also 53.10; with Mk 14.27 cf Zech 13.7),and be abandoned by God, an experience which calls forth the cry of dereliction(Mk 15.34; in the OT the worst of all fates was to be'forsaken' by

God). /8 Taken together these references suggest that "the Cross of Christ is the visible,historical manifestation of the wrath of God." /9

Although the kingdom is present in Jesus, he often speaks of its future consummation. (Mk 14.25; Lk 11.2) Its coming means that there is joy in the prospect of salvation but danger in the prospect of judgment. A man's destiny will be decided by his response to Jesus (Mk 10. 39; Lk 17.33); all self-achieved merits are worthless (Lk 17.7-10). "No one in the world of men comes to his end without his fate being decided by the person of Christ." /10 It is the danger of receiving the sentence of condemnation that gives the message of Jesus its seriousness.

The idea of divine wrath surfaces in the teaching of Jesus in the imagery of Gehenna. It is the outcome of condemnation pronounced at the Judgment. Jesus certainly believed in Gehenna as deeply as he believed in eternal life (Mk 9.43,45,47 etc). For him"the judgment of Gehenna is a judgment of wrath". /11 There is no other possibility for those who reject God's kingdom.

In the light of this, it is difficult to maintain that Jesus discarded the concept of the wrath of God. In the face of evil it was a terrible reality.

4. Paul and the anger of God.

Since Dodd's argument scans the whole biblical tradition, it has been necessary to glance at the anger of God in the OT.,Judaism and the teaching of Jesus. Wrath has been seen to be inherent in the character of the God of the covenant and to determine the'judgment' aspect of his relations with Israel and the world. It cannot be concluded that for Jesus "anger as an attitude of God to men disappears, and his love and mercy become all-embracing." /12 But there is evidence that Paul has discarded this'archaic'concept? Dodd believes there is:-

(i) Paul speaks quite freely about God'loving'man, and'the love' of God, of God "being gracious' to men and 'the grace' of God, but he never makes God the subject

of the verb 'to be angry', because Paul was aware that 'anger' does not befit the character of a loving and gracious God. (ii) When Paul uses the noun 'wrath' he does so in an'impersonal' way. Of the 16 occasions when it is used, 13 appear in the absolute form ('wrath', 'the wrath'), dis‿associated from God. Only on three occasions does Paul speak of 'the wrath of God'. Paul prefers the'impersonal'form because he understands wrath as an impersonal process of cause and effect in a moral universe, "not a certain feeling of God toward us." /13 (iii) To Dodd's case, Dr Hanson adds another factor. There is a "tradition of impersonal wrath' in the OT and Judaism which is the forerunner of Paul's usage. He affirms that"the significance of the treatment of the divine wrath in the Chronicler's work must not be underrated. We need look no further for the origin of Paul's doctrine of the wrath of God." /14

How strong then is the linguistic case presented here? We will look at the arguments in turn:

(i) Dodd is correct in saying that Paul never uses God as subject of the verb 'to be angry'. This is particularly noticeable in Romans where the verb occurs on ten occasions. The appearances of "wrath'(noun) in Ephesians(2), Colossians(1) and 1 Thessalonians(3) do not provide sufficient linguistic data to allow an adequate comparison with the verbal form to be made. Nevertheless why does Paul not use God as the subject to the verb"be angry' in Romans? Dodd's explanation is not the only possibility. A linguistic solution to this linguistic phenomenon is possible. Already we have noticed how in the OT nouns for 'wrath' appear about fifteen times more frequently than the verbs. Since Paul was steeped in the law and the prophets, it is not unlikely that his theological terminology is conditioned linguistically by that source. The verb/noun relationship in the OT is in the ratio of about one to fifteen; in Romans it is in the ratio none to ten. Furthermore in Romans Paul can make God the subject of a verb which has'wrath' as an object,

thus associating God with wrath eg 'what shall we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? '(Romans 3.5; cf 9.22). Again there is no reluctance on Paul's part in making God the subject of expressions that can be seen to be parallel to the verb 'be angry' eg the solemn repetition of"God gave them up"(Romans 1.24,26,28). When Paul says "leave it to the wrath of God" (RSV of Romans 12.19),this may appear impersonal but it is closely linked up with and serves to refer to the very personal quotation "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." Here Paul quotes from Deut.32.35 and reveals one source for his understanding of the wrath of God in the OT. If Paul then does not use the verb 'to be angry' of God, he comes as close to it as possible. A linguistic rather than a theological explanation would seem to be in order, though both are not necessarily inseparable.

(ii) Dodd's statement that "he(Paul) constantly uses 'wrath', or 'the wrath' in a curiously impersonal way" needs to be qualified. It is true that on thirteen out of sixteen occurrences Paul does not link 'wrath' with God but (a) what about the other three occurrences? Can these be discounted? One of them is basic to his closely articulated argument in Romans 1.18ff 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men'. Cf also Ephesians 5.6; Colossians 3.6. (b) In Romans 9.22 we have the sentence "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction...." The phrases 'show his wrath' and 'make known his power' are clearly the repetition, characteristic of preaching. Is there any good reason why both should not be seen as personal expressions of God's activity? Especially when God is the subject of 'show' and 'make known'?
(c) Again Paul sets the phrase 'vessels of wrath' over against 'vessels of mercy'(Romans 9.22,23). It is surely merely tendentious to make one of these impersonal and the other personal viz God can be linked with being merciful but not wrath? The two terms 'mercy and

wrath' are constantly linked in Jewish writing eg "with him are mercy and wrath" (Sirach 5.6 et alii)
(d) We have already noted the absolute'wrath' in the phrase "give place to wrath" linked up with the very personal "Vengeance is mine....." (Romans 12.19).
(e) How far is it possible to make distinctions in parallel terminology eg "The wrath of God is coming" (Colossians 3.6) and "Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" ? It would be natural to treat them as varied expressions of the same phenomenon. Can we separate the words "the day of wrath" from the words "of God" in the sentence "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"? The alternative and repetitive phrases are surely to be equated.

Despite therefore the unusual way in which Paul speaks of God's anger it is doubtful whether he deliberately avoided applying it to the personal activity of God. The evaluation of Stählin seems apt: "It can easily be demonstrated that in none of the NT passages is wrath a rigid principle acting independently of God, but that it stands everywhere in the closest possible connection with him and in fact with the God whose personal reaction it is." /15

(iii) Does the Chronicler's 'tradition of impersonal wrath' provide the origin for Paul's doctrine of the wrath of God? If this could be proved, it would be important. On five occasions the Chronicler does use'wrath' in an absolute manner eg., "Therefore wrath came upon him" (2 Chron.32.25; cf also 19.10; 24.18; 28.13; 1 Chron.27.24) This however is only one side of the picture.(a) On fourteen occasions he uses 'wrath' in personal association with God eg.,"the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah.." (1 Chron 13.10; cf 2 Chron 6:36; 12.7,12; 19.2 et alii) (b) The phrases'wrath' and 'wrath of the Lord' are seen to be interchangeable eg., "Therefore wrath came upon him.. so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them".
(c) Again we may note the way in which the source of the'absolute'wrath is explained i.e. in personal terms: "Wrath has gone out against you from the Lord."(2 Chron 19.2) (d) The Chronicler can make

Yahweh subject of the verb 'to be angry' (2 Chron 6.36) If therefore the writer manifests a 'tendency', it is clearly in the direction of the traditional Hebrew understanding of 'wrath' as the personal reaction of Yahweh against evil. It is surely from the same source that Paul drew his 'doctrine' of wrath. Perhaps it could be suggested that the Chronicler reveals the 'origin' of Paul's terminology for wrath, and this because the tendency to speak of God in Judaism by the use of surrogates included aspects of God's nature spoken of in abstract terms; thus 'wrath' may be the result of the process illustrated in the rise of absolute terms like 'The Word', 'the glory', 'Wisdom' i.e. avoiding the use of the divine name.

How then does Paul understand the nature of God's wrath? To the end of his life the apostle remained proud of his Jewish heritage (Phil 3.4-6), and from this source were derived his deepest convictions about God. For Paul, God is the 'rex tremendae maiestatis', a Being of supreme moral excellence, the Righteous one, before whom all must bow in awe and reverence. He remains all this, even though he is demonstrated in the Gospel to be the God of all grace.

The situation of the world prior to God's saving intervention in Christ

In Romans chapter one and verse 18 until chapter three and verse 20, Paul outlines the hopeless condition of mankind, both Jew and Gentile, before the gospel came on the scene. The heathen world had plunged headlong into every kind of perversity, iniquity and idolatry. There are no extenuating circumstances that can be presented as an excuse for such a situation because God has made himself known to the world by an act of creation which is at the same time an act of self-revelation. Furthermore by the very way in which he has constituted human beings, he has written on their heart the basic moral and spiritual content of the Torah (Romans 2. 14-15). In surveying the pagan world Paul can see God's anger revealed through what is happening in it.

There are distinct signs that God is punishing sinners by'handing them over' (1.24,26, 28) to further enslavement and degradation at the hands of the sins to which they have chosen to be obedient. They are now'perishing' and are 'lost' even though they know nothing of salvation as it is in Christ. /16

Jews would have agreed with Paul's assessment of the pagan world, but even as they condemn heathenism they are pronouncing their own doom (2.1 to 3.20). Despite all their inestimable privileges, they are not heaping up merit with God but rather'wrath', and this is because they remain impenitent and hard. The law in which the Jews glories pronounces its curse on his sinfulness and threatens God's dreaded wrath (Galatians 3.10); it brings down God's anger on the man who knows the law but does not keep it. The world without Christ then stands guilty before God because of its sin. already it is experiencing a foretaste of God's anger; something even worse awaits it (Ephesians 2.4).

The way in which God sets the world right with himself.

Into this scene of universal hopelessness Christ has come to liberate mankind from the vicious circle of sin, death and divine wrath. Paul demonstrates that it is by the Cross that God puts the world right with himself, for it is the supreme revelation of God's saving righteousness. Men are now put right with God by his sheer grace, as it is expressed

> "through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith"
>
> (Romans chapter three,vss 24,25)

Paul considers the Cross of Christ as the manifestation of God's love for sinners (Romans 5.8; 2 Cor.5.19). Here also the son of God bears all the sin of mankind (2 Cor 5.21) and, in doing so, takes upon himself for our benefit, the'curse' of the law (Galatians 3.13),for

" in the curse of the law wrath and condemnation already press on man". /17

But what does Paul mean when he calls the sacrifice of Christ an 'hilasterion'? Can the word mean 'expiation' or 'propitiation'? In other words, is the death of Jesus to be viewed as removing the defilement of sin (expiation) or as putting away the divine wrath -which in itself implies the putting away of sin the essential cause of such wrath- or does it involve both? When Paul uses the term 'hilasterion'he is almost certainly thinking of the cultic setting of the day of Atonement in which the word is found in the LXX. The only other non-LXX occurrence of the term is the non-cultic setting of the expiatory and propitiatory death of the seven brothers on behalf of Israel (4 Maccabees 17.22). In the LXX however 'hilasterion' can refer to a place, the well-known cover of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies, which was sprinkled with the blood of the expiatory victim in the ritual of the annual day of atonement. It can therefore be regarded as a noun(to hilasterion) and mean the'lid of expiation' or the 'mercy-seat'. It is better however to regard 'hilasterion' as an adjective agreeing with'Jesus'. Thus Jesus is the person through whom expiation is effected rather than the place where it was made.

Dodd examines the associated verb 'hilaskesthai' in the LXX and concludes that it means 'to perform an act whereby guilt or defilement is removed.' /18 He adds that the idea"of placating an angry God...is foreign to biblical usage." /19 The weakness of Dodd's investigation is that it isolates 'hilaskesthai' from its immediate contexts. In many of these the 'wrath' of God is found as a prominent idea. Moreover so interwoven are the concepts of 'sin' and'wrath' that in the OT "expiation has,as it were, the effect of propitiation." /20 'Hilaskesthai' can therefore carry the meaning "to render God favourable." /21. It is probable that in Paul's mind 'expiation' as well as 'propitiation' are linked with the sacrifice of Jesus. As Bultmann suggests, the death of Jesus is " a propitiatory sacrifice by which the forgiveness of sins is brought about." /22 In the Cross

therefore Paul demonstrates the reality of human guilt, the reality of divine wrath, and yet at the same time the overwhelming reality of forgiving love.

The outworking of God's anger within history.

Because Paul sees the resurrection of Jesus as the first act in the drama of the end-time, salvation and judgment are to some extent anticipated in Jesus. Even now men can be on the road to salvation or destruction, depending on their response to the Gospel (1 Cor 1.18; 15.2). The verdict of acquittal usually associated with the day of judgment can even now be pronounced over the man who has placed his trust in God's Son. He need fear neither condemnation nor the wrath to come (Romans 8.1; 1 Thess 1.10)

We have already referred to the reality of divine wrath working itself out in the world of contemporary paganism (Romans 1.18ff), but Paul can also see God's anger manifested in his temporary rejection of Israel (Romans 9-11). As in the past, so now also God is free to demonstrate his mercy or wrath according to his sovereign will, and even in temporarily rejecting Israel his purpose is to bring the nations to himself and ultimately to win Israel back. Throughout this section in Romans 9-11 Paul only makes direct reference to God's anger in chapter nine, 19-22 but he also uses many metaphors such as God 'hardening', 'rejecting', 'breaking off', 'not sparing' which have a long association in the OT with wrath. Beyond this experience of divine wrath, God's purpose is to have mercy on all (11.32).

Paul teaches that God's wrath can be presently experienced through the legal processes of the state (Romans 13. 4-5). He sees the Roman authorities as part of God's purpose in the ordering of society for the welfare of all its citizens. Through the state and the judicial system which it upholds, God's purpose is to keep evil in check and encourage obedience to the law. The state is "God's minister, and

it is the just wrath of God which is acting through it." /23

In all of these ways Paul can detect the righteous anger of God active within the world.

The coming wrath of God at the end of history.

As a Jew Paul shared with Judaism the belief in the coming day of judgment. As a Christian he associates it with the parousia of Christ. The crucified and risen Lord, offered to men in the Gospel will confront them as Judge or Saviour, depending on man's response to him. For the man in Christ there is no longer fear of condemnation or wrath(Romans 8.1; 1 Thess 1.10) but for the man who is not in Christ the judgment is"a day of wrath when God's righteous anger will be revealed."(Romans 2.5). Every person will be judged on the basis of his works that is,the sum total of his life in which the most important ingredient is the decision "for' or 'against' the God revealed in Christ.

But what content does Paul consider the eschatological wrath to have? He never uses the Judaistic concept of Gehenna (Hell) which Jesus expressed perhaps because as apostle to the Gentiles, it was not readily appreciated by his non-Jewish audiences. But he does make it clear that eschatological wrath is the opposite of salvation (1Thess 5.9). In short it is "eternal exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." (2 Thess 1.9)

On other occasions Paul speaks of 'eternal destruction' (Phil 1.28; 3.19),'they shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction.'(2 Thess 1.9) In 2 Thess 1.9 Paul has built up this definition of eschatological wrath from various OT terms,all associated with God's anger (Isaiah 66.15; Jer 10.25; Ps 79.6). What does he mean by'destruction'? He means "the loss of a life of blessedness after death, future misery." /24 It does not mean "the

extinction of physical existence but rather an eternal plunge into Hades and a hopeless destiny of death in the depiction of which such terms as 'wrath', 'fury', 'tribulation' and 'distress' are used." /25

The picture therefore presented by Paul of the wrath to come is quite as awful as that given by Jesus. Paul makes it clear that it is the will of God that men find mercy and grace and so eternal life (Romans 2.4) but where these will not be received there is nothing else but wrath.

Conclusion

To recapture a meaningful understanding of the justice and anger of God when confronted with evil is an essential for the church today. God's love and grace can be so divorced from his wrath that a conception of God can prevail which is "so genially tolerant as to be morally indifferent." /26 The Bible presents us with a different understanding of God as the one who commands the attention of men and presents them with alternatives which cannot be ignored. God's anger is a terrible reality which brings to nought every attempt by man to build his own life and the life of his community on the sand of sin, evil and injustice. God will not allow him to do so unchecked. To this the history of Israel, the depraved condition of Roman society in Paul's time, and the 'troubles' over the last decade in Northern Ireland bear eloquent testimony.

Notes

1. C.H.Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, (London, 1963), p 49
2. op.cit. p 50
3. Gretner/Fichtner, on 'orge', TDNT Vol.V, p 411
4. Stählin/Grundmann, on 'hamartano', TDNT, Vol 1, p 290.

5. D.S.Russell, Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, (London,1964),p 380
6. C.E.B.Cranfield, Mark,(Cambridge,1966) p 121
7. Ps.75.8; Jer 15.15- 51.7; Ezek 23.31; Is 51.17; Zech.12.2; Hab.2.15-16; Obadiah 16.
8. Jer 7.29; Judges 6.13; 2 Kings 21.14; Isaiah 2.6; 49.11; Jer 12.7.
9. A.Richardson, Introduction to the Theology of the NT(London,1958), p 77.
10. M.Kähler, quoted in TDNT Vol.111, p 936.
11. TDNT, Vol 1,p 658.
12. op.cit.p.50
13. ibid,p 49.
14. A.T.Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb(London,1957) p.21
15. TDNT, Vol.V,p.424
16. Karl Barth, Romans(ET,Oxford,1968) p 43.
17. E.Brunner, The Mediator(London,1934) p 449.
18. C.H.Dodd,op.cit.p 78
19. op.cit.p.79
20. C.K.Barrett, Romans, (London, 1962),p 78.
21. D.Hill, Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings (Cambridge,1967),p 25.
22. R.Bultmann, Theology of the NT(London,1965), Vol 1,p 295
23. W.Sanday and A.C.Headlam, Romans,(Edinburgh,1895) p 366
24. J.H.Thayer,Greek-English Lexicon(N.York,1962) p 443
25. TDNT, Vol 1,p.396
26 W.Temple, Nature,Man and God,(London,1964), p 456